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United Tribes Technical College Teacher Education Unit Knowledge Base

The Teacher Education program views itself as a professional program. Our obligation is to help our candidates “to both understand and move beyond their own personal knowledge and experiences to bring to bear a wider set of understandings on the problems of helping others learn” (Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage, 2005. p. 12). In addition to the three general knowledge areas beginning teachers must acquire – 1) knowledge of learners; 2) knowledge of subject matter and curriculum goals; and 3) knowledge of teaching (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005) - our students must also have knowledge in areas specific to the populations that they will be prepared to teach.

The unifying concept on which the institution and unit bases teacher preparation is the competent, caring educator with the skills, knowledge, and disposition to empower their communities by teaching the children in these communities. In striving to name the qualities we believe are apparent in great teachers and great pre-service teachers, we arrived at the words *competent* and *caring*.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) defines *competent* teacher candidates as those who can 1) demonstrate that they can teach all children--including students of diverse backgrounds; 2) use technology effectively to help students learn; and 3) reflect on their practice, and change what does not work. The concept of *caring* in this framework is equated to that of the *warm demander*. Kleinfeld (1975) first used this phrase to describe the type of teacher who was effective in teaching Athabaskan Indian and Eskimo ninth graders in Alaska schools. *Warm demander* is a teacher stance that communicates both warmth and a nonnegotiable demand for student effort and mutual respect.

In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future summarized its challenge to the American public in stating that “...by the year 2006, America will provide all students with what should be their educational birthright: access to competent, caring, and qualified teachers.” The UTTC Teacher Education Division accepted this challenge and identified it as the theme for our conceptual framework.

The teacher education program at United Tribes Technical College views itself as a professional program. One of the defining characteristics of a profession is a scholarly knowledge base (Shulman, 1998). The obligation of the program is to help candidates “to both understand and move beyond their own personal knowledge and experiences to bring to bear a wider set of understandings on the problems of helping others learn” (Bransford, Darling-Hammond & LePage, 2005. p. 12). In addition to the three general knowledge areas beginning teachers must acquire – 1) knowledge of learners; 2) knowledge of subject matter and curriculum

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goals; and 3) knowledge of teaching (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005) – the UTTC students must also have knowledge in areas specific to the populations that they will be prepared to teach.

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Content Knowledge (Core Belief 1)

Ball, Thames, & Phelps (2008) identified one of the most important aspects of teachers' content knowledge as that it may predict student achievement. The Teacher Education department, as well as the institution, considers the mastery of content knowledge essential to the development of an effective educator as well as a life-long learner. Content knowledge is acquired as the teacher candidate progresses through a sequence of courses specifically designed so that content knowledge courses are taken first in the program of study, teaching pedagogy courses follow shortly thereafter, and then pedagogical content knowledge courses are integrated throughout. In most of the content knowledge courses, pedagogical content knowledge is integrated. This allows the teacher candidates to develop their content knowledge simultaneously with their teaching pedagogy courses.

Technology content knowledge has been recently identified as a fourth category of knowledge in the relationship with content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge (Mishra, P. & Koehler, M. J., 2006). Technological content knowledge is knowledge of the reciprocal relationship between technology and content and requires the

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teacher has a foundation in technology applications used for instructional purposes. According to Mishra & Koehler (2006), “Teachers need to know not just the subject matter they teach but also the manner in which the subject matter can be changed by the application of technology” (p. 1028).

Pedagogy (Core Beliefs 2 and 3)

The competent educator must have highly refined pedagogical skills; content mastery alone is not sufficient for the competent educator. These refined skills include effective communication; understanding that how children learn informs how they should be taught; appreciation of diverse learning styles exhibited by diverse populations of children; the use of innovative methods, such as technology; and very important, being able to select the appropriate strategies to use for different children from different cultures with different learning styles. To become proficient with these skills, the competent educator realizes the value of grounding practice in theory and research.

Our constructivist view makes us aware that what students know is their own best understanding of their particular experiences and that understanding is influenced by cultural context (Gordon, 2009). This constructed knowledge will affect both their learning context and their learning style. In order to address the variability that students bring to the task of learning, the competent educator must be able to develop a variety of strategies to provide appropriate instruction.

There is considerable literature regarding learning theories. Based on extensive readings, there seems to be consensus that the constructivist view of learning is based on the theory that all human beings construct knowledge through discover and problem-solving. According to Gordon (2009), constructivism was not initially intended for the field of education; therefore, Gordon advocates for what is referred to as “pragmatic constructivism”, defined as “a way of knowing that comes out of purposefully changing the environment and then reflecting on this change” (p. 49). To address the issue of accountability, Gordon reports pragmatic constructivism offers educators answers to questions such as: “What does it mean to demonstrate genuine understanding of the subject matter? How do teachers manage a classroom in which students are talking to one another rather than just to the teacher? What types of skills do teachers need to become good facilitators of learning? And what type of assessments will evaluate the deep learning for understanding that we wish to foster?” (p. 54). These guiding questions are the foundation for pedagogical knowledge and practice.

Brain research and work in brain compatible learning is also consistent with the constructivist approach. Jensen (2005), and Caine, Caine, McClintic, & Klimek (2008), pioneers in research and conceptualizers in brain compatible teaching and learning, emphasize the importance of active engagement, emotion, context, and relevance to the meaning-making

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process. Gunzelmann (2009) recommends teacher education programs interface coursework such as psychology, biology and neuroscience as the foundation for teacher preparation. Research on learning and the brain, according to Gunzelmann, is briefly mentioned in some teacher education courses by faculty who have limited knowledge of the field. By integrating research from experts in the field of neuroscience, teachers can develop the skills needed to make students “world class learners” (p. 24).

The competent educator understands that “technologies are not the deliverers of content, but tools that educators and students use to construct knowledge and share meaning” (Vrasidas & McIsaac, 2001, p. 129); as such, technology supports constructivist learning. The competent educator utilizes technology as an innovative tool to meet the diverse needs of students, particularly those students with special needs (Stanford, Crowe & Flice, 2010).

The teacher education program at United Tribes Technical College guides future educators in developing their expertise with various forms of technologies. Technology education as practiced in education programs involves more than just learning how to use computers - it includes a wide range of instructional support tools, materials, and processes. In professional education courses, candidates demonstrate competence in a wide range of technologies and demonstrate their abilities to use those technologies in instructional design and in teaching, as well as for personal and professional use.

Teacher candidates who are competent, dedicated educators wishing to improve their teaching skills or to become educational leaders, must study theory. They must also observe the theories in practice and practice them themselves with students and teachers to achieve mastery. Candidates will spend approximately 200 hours in the classroom prior to student teaching. These pre-student teaching hours involve field experiences incorporated into various education classes. During these field experiences, candidates observe and teach under master teachers in classroom settings. Then, during student teaching, candidates spend 14 weeks of student teaching for each major. Authentic situations, where children from diverse groups are included and where a variety of technology-infused experiences are available, are imperative to the development of the competent educator.

Building a Community of Diverse Learners (Core Belief 4)

McCormick (2008) advocates for creating communities of learners in teacher education courses to give all candidates an opportunity to share their ideas, take risks and challenge each other’s thoughts and ideas. By allowing the teacher candidates to form their own groups, and create their own norms of behavior, the candidates not only benefit from the community of learners themselves, but they will learn how to create these communities in their future classrooms (p. 4).

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Building community begins with an ethic of caring (Noddings, 1992). Creating a caring and supportive classroom and school environment is essential if academic objectives are to be met (Noddings, 1984, 1992). Noddings discusses the importance of inclusion and dialogue in creating and nurturing a caring community of learners. Wentzel (1997) reports significant results from a longitudinal study of "perceived pedagogical caring." She found that students' perceptions that their teachers cared led to greater efforts to achieve positive social and academic outcomes. Students in the study characterized caring teachers as those "demonstrating democratic interaction styles, developing expectations in light of individual differences, modeling a 'caring' attitude toward their own work, and providing constructive feedback" (Wentzel, 1997, p. 418).

Cultural competence and culturally responsive teaching are also central to any vision of developing a diverse community of learners. Culturally competent teachers are expected to demonstrate the ability to develop curriculum that is representative of all individuals in our global communities; select materials that are inclusive of the contributions and perspectives of multiple groups (Ladson-Billings, 2002); and develop an awareness and responsiveness to the particular cultural context within which they live and teach (Irvine & Armento, 2001; Banks et al., 2005).

Gay (2000) identifies five key characteristics of culturally responsive teaching:

1. It acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, both as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning and as worthy content to be taught in the formal curriculum.
2. It builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences as well as between academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities.
3. It uses a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles.
4. It teaches students to know and praise their own and each other's' cultural heritages.
5. It incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools (p. 29).

Villegas & Lucas (2002) identify the importance of culturally responsive teaching in the preparation of educators. According to their research, "culturally responsive teachers (a) are socio-culturally conscious, (b) have affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds, (c) see themselves as responsible for and capable of bringing about change to make schools more equitable, (d) understand how learners construct knowledge and are capable of promoting knowledge construction, (e) know about the lives of their students, and (f) design instruction that builds on what their students already know while stretching them beyond the familiar." Gay (2000) emphasizes "teachers need to understand that culturally responsive caring is *action oriented* in that it demonstrates high expectations and uses imaginative strategies to ensure academic success for ethnically diverse students. The teacher candidates at this tribal college experience how communication styles of different ethnic groups reflect cultural values and shape learning behaviors and ways to use this information to modify classroom interactions to better accommodate all students.

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Critical Reflection (Core Belief 5)

The body of literature demonstrating the importance of reflection and self-assessment in learning to teach is considerable. Korthagen, Loughran & Russell (2006) advocate for implementing a framework of fundamental principles, including providing teacher candidates opportunities for researching and reflecting on their own practice to “gain insights into how they might come to better understand the situation and act within it” (p. 1030). This is a change from the past when a situation was identified for a student teacher and they were told what they should know or learn from the situation. The teacher education program is attempting to implement this framework in an effort to graduate teachers who are reflective, responsive practitioners who are able to reflect on their actions as they impact student learning. It is particularly important in creating culturally relevant and responsive practices (Howard, 2003). Reflection takes place before, during, and after teaching and is focused and stimulated by analysis of critical incidents (Griffin, 2003).

Bergsma (2004) advocates for empowerment-oriented education interventions focusing on “enhancing wellness as well as improving problems, providing opportunities for participants to develop knowledge and skills, and engaging professionals as collaborators instead of authoritative experts” (p. 154). According to Mezirow (1990), transformative reflection leads to emancipatory learning. This vision of individual and social transformation calls for including issues of knowledge, power and social change in the curriculum. Vavrus (2002) makes clear the importance of transformative academic knowledge for teaching and for teacher education and Marri's (2005) research highlights a role for educational technology in developing such knowledge.

Critical reflection has been recommended as a means of incorporating issues of equity and social justice into teaching thinking and practice (Howard, 2003). It is a personal and challenging look at one's identity as an individual person and as an active professional. According to Howard (2003), “The purpose of critical reflection should not be to indict teachers for what they believe and why it does not work for students. It is a process of improving practice, rethinking philosophies, and becoming effective teachers for today's ever changing student population” (p. 17).

Community and Collaboration (Core Belief 6)

The competent, caring educator creates an empowering school climate through the development of a community of learners. A community of learners is a group of partners in conversations who seek to construct knowledge through negotiation and through sharing of individual areas of expertise (Pringle, 2002). Building on the concept of empowerment, a

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community of learners is developed by weaving the common threads of communication, collaboration, service and leadership.

School-community collaboration is essential for promoting the concept of a community of learners. The competent educator invites members of the community to share expert knowledge and forges partnerships with community resources to support the learning process and to serve the needs of families.

Service learning reflects the belief that teacher education programs should provide students opportunities to be involved in thoughtfully organized service experiences that fulfill a need in a community (Buchanan, Baldwin, & Rudisill, 2002). Marchel, Shields, & Winter (2011) advocate for service learning as a pedagogy that combines increased field experiences with the opportunity for teacher candidates to develop professional dispositions reflected in the belief that all children can learn. Service learning opportunities as a means for developing these dispositions is a key outcome of the teacher education program at the tribal college in this case study.

Service learning involves a blending of service activities with the academic curriculum in order to address real community needs which students learn through active engagement (Anderson, 1998). The competent, caring educator arranges opportunities for the provision of direct or indirect services to individuals or organizations in ways that will benefit the community.

The competent, caring educator is committed to taking a leadership role. Effective leaders are successful in forming partnerships that encourage active school and community participation. Effective leaders have the ability to articulate a shared purpose and make it visible to others. The competent, caring educator exhibits leadership qualities that influence others to reflect on and to solve problems collaboratively. This is particularly true in tribal communities. Rightfully so, a person with an education degree is considered to have the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions commensurate to a leadership role in the community.

Dedicated, competent educators are characterized by many attributes. By focusing on the future educators' mastery of content knowledge, refinement of pedagogical skills, ability to critically reflect, and realization of community importance, we can best prepare them to educate *all* children, including those who are culturally, linguistically and ability diverse. In summary, the teacher education program at this tribal college strives to prepare competent, caring educators by addressing the essential dimensions of the program and supporting the vision, mission, philosophy, purposes, and goals of the conceptual framework for the program. These essential elements are supported by classic and current research, developed to meet community and global needs, and designed to evolve as necessary.

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