

## **Lake Forest College Education Department**

### **Conceptual Framework: Social Reconstructionist & Culturally Responsive**

The Education Department is committed to preparing our students for careers as knowledgeable, responsive, caring, and respected professional teachers and educators in various fields. Our goal is to prepare teachers who are resourceful and highly motivated, dedicated to responding to students' needs, and who believe passionately in their own power as teachers to make positive contributions to the lives of children and their families. Lake Forest College prepares teachers who use well-developed analytic skills to practice critical self-assessment, thereby fostering a lifetime of personal and professional growth.

The program is driven by a commitment to a series of Identifying Dispositions that distinguish a Lake Forest Educated Teacher. These include: pre-professional characteristics; resourcefulness; responsiveness; teacher efficacy; and reflective self-assessment. Guided by faculty and cooperating education professionals who provide individualized advising, mentorship, and assessment, our students learn to become confident in their classrooms, responsive to their students, deeply knowledgeable about subject matter, effective in contributing to educational development outside the classroom, and committed to their own growth as lifelong learners.

The Department draws from the Social Reconstructionist tradition in teacher education. Our aim is to prepare critical, analytical, reflective teachers, who view themselves as agents of change in schools and who see teaching as a rigorous intellectual and serious moral endeavor. A Social Reconstructionist approach directly challenges students to become social reformers and commit to the reconstruction of society through the redistribution of power and other resources (Grant & Sleeter, 1997). The curriculum teaches social action skills, promotes cultural pluralism, and has students analyze oppression with the intent of taking action to work for a more democratic society. Social Reconstructionism focuses on how groups can change structures, and in this regard, community action projects are important, and active learning takes center stage (Jenks, Lee & Kanpol, 2001).

The underlying rationale for the curriculum for the major draws from the Social Reconstructionist tradition in teacher education, as well as our developmental perspective on teacher preparation. Our aim is to prepare critical, analytical, reflective teachers, who view themselves as agents of change in schools and who see teaching as a rigorous intellectual and serious moral endeavor. Our curriculum and course sequence is organized to prepare teachers through the appropriate series of developmentally appropriate experiences that build upon each other in a logical sequence to prepare candidates to be reflective practitioners. All programs begin with foundational courses in psychology, educational foundations, and instructional communication. Education courses are a blend of theory and practice which we know from research is the best way to prepare lifelong teachers whose practice is reflective and built on content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986). Candidates are prepared to apply theory to classroom practice in a logical sequence of experiences.

In addition to the focus on the Social Reconstructionist tradition, our curriculum focuses on a theme of culturally responsive pedagogy. This guiding principle of our program design emphasizes the centrality of culturally responsive pedagogy, equity of access to knowledge, and the importance of addressing the local needs of schools and communities. The term culturally responsive refers to a more dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/community culture and school culture (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 467). The premise behind culturally responsive pedagogy reflects the idea that if teachers are able to make connections between the cultural knowledge, beliefs, and practices that students bring from home, as well as the content and pedagogy that teachers use in their respective classrooms, this combination may have the potential to enhance the academic performance and overall schooling experiences of culturally diverse learners (Howard & Terry, 2011, p. 347). 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 (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 21).

Banks' (1994) transformative approach to multicultural education requires that the internal structure of the curriculum incorporate the fabric of the racial, ethnic, and social experiences of different minority groups. Merging culture and pedagogy represents a complex and intricate set of processes that many practitioners and researchers have suggested may improve student learning and engage students who are often disengaged from teaching and learning (Nasir, McLaughlin, & Jones, 2009). "The fundamental aim of culturally responsive pedagogy is to empower ethnically diverse students through academic success, cultural affiliation, and personal efficacy" (Gay, 2000, p. 111). Culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes the uniqueness of student culture by using "the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective for them. It teaches to and through strengths of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming" (p. 29). Ladson-Billings (1995) describes this teaching, that she calls "culturally relevant", as one that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 18).

Culturally responsive pedagogy embodies "a set of professional, political, cultural, ethical, and ideological disposition that supersedes mundane teaching acts, but is centered in fundamental beliefs about teaching, learning, students, their families, their communities, and an unyielding commitment to see student success become less rhetorical and more of a reality" (Howard & Terry, 2011, p. 346). Culturally responsive pedagogy is situated in a framework that recognizes the rich and varied cultural wealth, knowledge, and skills that diverse students bring to schools, and seeks to develop dynamic teaching practices, multicultural content, multiple means of assessment, and a philosophical view of teaching that is dedicated to nurturing students' academic, social, emotional, cultural, psychological, and physiological well-being.

Pre-service teachers with little multicultural experience need to acquire the appropriate knowledge and skills, but they also must reconceive their role as teachers by recognizing the primary importance of diversity in all of their educational decision making, from determining student readiness for learning, to designing curricula, selecting instructional materials, assessing performance, and developing appropriate programs and teaching techniques (Jenks, Lee & Kanpol, 2001). It is an approach that is very much

grounded in Banks's (1994) transformative models and Grant and Sleeter's (1997) cultural pluralism. To prepare prospective teachers to overcome possible barriers, teacher educators must take steps to "deliberately socialize" them into the change agent role (Cochran-Smith, 1991, p. 285). "Knowledge of the community in which schools reside and in which our students will work is an obviously important element in the success of pre-service teachers" (Koerner & Abdul-Tawwar, 2006, p. 38). Putting our students directly into our diverse partner districts allows our teacher candidates to see the assets, not the deficits, of their student population. They come to understand that all students bring cultural values and experiences to their education, even though schools and teachers who are unfamiliar with their students' cultures may frequently disregard them. Multicultural teaching affirms diversity and its value for what it adds to the classroom and the importance of understanding the context of the community in which you are teaching.

We integrate community-based education projects and a focus on culturally responsive teaching throughout the program's curriculum. Students move back and forth between the academic and the experiential, with the work of Banks (1994), Grant and Sleeter (1997), Ladson-Billings (1997), Nieto (2000) and others providing interpretive value systems with which to develop cross-cultural competency and a personal pedagogy committed to equity and excellence for all students. Students are assessed on their ability to demonstrate concepts such as: respecting and being interested in students' experiences and cultural backgrounds; supporting higher-order learning (complex problem solving while developing basic skills at the same time); building on students' prior knowledge, values and experiences; avoiding stereotyping of students; respecting and integrating instruction to students' semantics, accents, dialects and language ability; applying rules relating to behavior fairly and sensitively; engaging families directly in their children's learning; and legitimizing students' real-life experience as they become part of the "official" curriculum.

Students completing their initial clinical practicum do so in one of our partner districts – Waukegan, IL. Public Schools. The diversity of the Waukegan district's population allows our interns to gain valuable experience while their K-12 students learn too. It gives our students authentic experience with the framework for multicultural education infused throughout our program, in line with the goals of Waukegan and other local districts. Based on research on culturally-responsive pedagogy, this framework includes concepts such as: the focus of the classroom must be instructional; having high expectations for all students; when students are treated as competent, they are likely to demonstrate competence; when teachers provide instructional "scaffolding" students can move from what they know to what they need to know; real education is about extending students' thinking and abilities; importing students' culture and experiences legitimizes them as part of the curriculum; and understanding how ethnicity affects teaching and learning is crucial.

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