



WESTMINSTER COLLEGE  
TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

*The Teacher as a Reflective Practitioner*  
**Conceptual Framework Theory**

**The Development of Future Teachers**

The process of becoming a teacher is a complex journey through distinct interrelated stages. Along the journey, there are four major overlapping levels or components to the maturing process: (1) observation; (2) demonstration; (3) evaluation; and (4) reflection. Each component is a part of the preservice teacher (PST) education and provides for each student to fully participate in experiences that allow for active meaning seeking for that area. There are four phases of the Westminster College Teacher Education Program (TEP) that account for experiences in each of these four areas.

- Phase One concerns the **observation** of teaching by PSTs **and learning to be a reflective observer**. This first phase begins with field observation in EDU 101, Introduction to Teaching, followed by EDU 291, Practicum One, taken in the first year of the program. It continues throughout the educational coursework in the sophomore and junior years, with most education methods classes including an opportunity to directly see pre-K through high school classrooms in action.
- Phase Two provides many opportunities for PSTs to **demonstrate** developing concepts about human learning and experience curriculum designed to elicit **deeply connected understandings**. The demonstration component is required beginning in 200 level educational coursework, and students continue to prepare, present and connect educational concepts and lesson plans of activities throughout all upper-level educational courses, concluding with student teaching.
- Phase Three, **evaluation**, includes PSTs completing an in-depth **action research** project with a formal reflection conclusion, including a record of PST self-evaluation in EDU 393, Practicum II, taken in the junior year. Phase Three also includes extended opportunities for PSTs to work directly in the classroom, which culminates in the student teaching experience. The PST has opportunities to **evaluate** work from students in their practicum experiences, designing and administering both informal and formal **assessments**. By taking national assessments themselves, such as the College Basic Academic Subjects Exam (C-BASE) and the Praxis II series exams required for certification, the PST experiences directly how evaluation by standardized testing determines and drives current educational reform.
- Phase Four begins with PST presentation of a portfolio in EDU 490, Educational Seminar. This portfolio, containing artifacts from all coursework as well as student teaching experiences provides an evaluation of the TEP as the student also continues to **evaluate** himself or herself through the process of **reflection** on the first three phases of the TEP and his or her beginning year as a professional. Follow-up visits and graduate surveys throughout the PST's first year as a classroom teacher provides additional **reflective** experiences as well as support and professional development opportunities.

The conceptual framework for the Teacher Education Program is based on constructivist and sociocultural learning principles, including opportunities to reflect on the learning that has occurred.

## **Learning How to Learn**

Constructivism is a theory of learning that considers “how learners come to know” (Airasian & Walsh, 1997, p. 445), with an emphasis on the construction of knowledge through an individual’s interactions between existing ideas and new experiences. Considering learning through this lens, the learner is an active participant in the learning process rather than a passive recipient (Au, Mason & Scheu, 1995; Dixon-Krauss, 1996; Steffe & Gale, 1995), tying the new ideas they develop to preexisting ideas they already own (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Westminster College education instructors provide safe spaces within their courses for students to struggle with new ideas, with the instructors serving as facilitators of students’ developing understandings (Fennema & Romberg, 1999; Hiebert, et al, 1997).

Constructivist theory proposes that learning occurs through human activity as people interact with each other and the world around them (Hausfather, 2001; Richardson, 1997; Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989). Similarly, sociocultural theorists posit that learning occurs through some sort of interaction within a social context (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1985, 1991; Cobb, 1994). Through a sociocultural lens, learning occurs on two planes. First, learning occurs as the individual acts within the social context. Secondly, it occurs as the individual internalizes the action (Wertsch, 1985). The activity is the social interactions in which the individual participates (Cobb). Through their actions, individuals develop who they are (Wertsch, 1991) through a process of continual negotiation (Wertsch, 1985).

For an individual to internalize the action involves understanding the signs and symbols used to reconcile the activity in one’s mind (Wertsch, 1991). In sociocultural theory, signs and symbols are viewed as the transporters of socially developed meanings (Cobb, 1994,) which have evolved through time (Cobb, Jaworski, & Presmeg, 1996). Cultural tools such as language are used to mediate the social interactions, and their use is a part of the reflective process (Bodrova & Leong, 1996; Davydov, 1995; Resnick, 1991; Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984; Wertsch, 1985, Wertsch, 1991).

Within the classroom, sociocultural theorists see the relationship between teacher and students as culturally formed, and may “view classroom interactions as an instantiation of the culturally organized practices of schooling” (Cobb, 1994, p. 15). The teacher serves as the purveyor of the cultural discourse necessary to support student learning. By creating the social contexts within which students act, teachers can pass on to them “the norms, values, and discourse practices of the community” (Forman, 1996 p. 118). Due to the social nature of learning, the opportunity for the PST to participate actively in social settings such as real classrooms is integral to the development of Westminster College education majors.

## **The Role of Observation and Demonstration**

The tasks in which PSTs engage have the potential to broaden or limit students learning of subject matter (Chval, Lannin, & Bowzer, 2008). By building their level of engagement as active members of the teaching profession, PSTs develop identities as members of the community of teachers (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). This involves utilization by PSTs of the language and tools they acquire as they progress through the TEP.

During Phase One of the TEP, PSTs enroll in writing-intensive courses, whose instructors provide opportunities for them to record their thoughts and experiences observing teaching in action, discuss these writings with others, and receive feedback from their instructors and peers. In Phase Two, the PST is afforded the opportunity to demonstrate his or her own ability to facilitate learning in an organized social setting (a regular classroom). During this phase, PSTs are given the opportunity to put into practice what they learned during Phase One, using the tools they have acquired to deliver, evaluate and reflect on their teaching performance. Additionally, PSTs receive feedback on their work as facilitators of K-12 student learning from peers and professors.

Through the role of observing cooperating teachers and other student PSTs, all PSTs have a basis to reflect on their own and others’ teaching performances. When PSTs work in collaborative learning experiences, typically found throughout the professional methods courses, they have opportunities

to extend their own knowledge of the teaching practice, with professors providing scaffolding and support for emerging knowledge. Students are also encouraged to participate in demonstration of knowledge beyond the classroom, most often by giving presentations at professional development conferences at the local, state or national level (Hasser & Dorr, 2002). In collaborating and preparing to share their knowledge with others outside the TEP, students refine their own developing constructions and move toward a deeper understanding of their own abilities.

The instructors of TEP courses model instructional practices that PSTs are encouraged to utilize in their own classrooms and that are promoted by a variety of national education organizations (e.g., National Association for the Education of Young Children, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Science Teachers Association). Incorporated into the models of classroom practice PSTs experience through participation in TEP courses are opportunities for them to collaborate and share the ideas they develop, another component of constructivist learning theory (Watson, 1993.) As PSTs enter Phase Two of the TEP, they carry with them the expectation that they, too, will allow and encourage learning to take place among their students through social interaction, group projects, and reflection.

### **Evaluation and Reflective Practice**

PSTs benefit from feedback that allows them to transfer the learning they have constructed in their TEP courses to the classroom teaching environment (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking, 2000). The evaluative process is critical to pedagogical principles. Without this key component of the TEP, which includes self-assessment through active reflection, PSTs would lack a tool necessary to keep the curriculum relevant and fresh for their students (Krajcik, et al., 1994; Black & Amon, 1993; Cobb, et al., 1997; Fosnot, 1996.) Supervisors within the TEP also give evaluative feedback, helping the PSTs to “identify their strengths and weaknesses in a continuous, nonthreatening way” (Tillema, 2008, p. 164), through an informal assessment process, as well as through formal assessment instruments such as the final student teaching performance evaluation.

Throughout the TEP, PSTs are encouraged to reflect on various assignments, teaching performances, and presentations. Education instructors actively demonstrate various methods of documenting reflective practices early in Phase One, emphasizing the importance of how teachers’ own beliefs and knowledge influence future teaching. In Phases Two, Three and Four, students are required to become self-sufficient thinkers, playing an active role in the development of their assignments and formal evaluations and are encouraged and expected to be responsible for their own learning.

### **Westminster Education Departmental Learning Goals**

The following Westminster Education Departmental Learning Goals were developed in 2005 and are used to assess the program annually through surveys and confidential interviews with graduating seniors. These thirteen goals have become a part of the Conceptual Framework and are aligned with Westminster College Learning Goals as well as the Missouri Standards for Teacher Educator Programs (2008).

Upon completion of the Westminster College TEP, PSTs will demonstrate each of the following:

1. understand the central concepts, tools of inquiry and structures of the discipline(s) within the context of a global society and to create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful. (MoStep Standard 1)
2. understand how students learn and develop (MoStep Standard 2.1)

3. develop an ability to provide learning opportunities that support the intellectual, social, and personal development of all students. (MoStep Standards 2.2-2.4)
4. understand how students differ in their approaches to learning (MoStep Standard 3.1)
5. develop an ability to create instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners (MoStep Standards 3.2-3.4)
6. recognize the importance of long-range planning and curriculum development (MoStep Standard 4.3)
7. develop, implement, and evaluate, curriculum based upon student, district, and state performance standards. (MoStep Standards 4.1, 4.2)
8. use a variety of instructional strategies to encourage students' critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills. (MoStep Standard 5)
9. use understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation. (MoStep Standard 6)
10. demonstrate effective verbal, non-verbal, and media communication techniques to foster active inquiry, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom. (MoStep Standards 7 and 11)
11. use formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the learner. (MoStep Standard 8)
12. be a reflective practitioner who continually assesses the effects of choices and actions on others. This reflective practitioner actively seeks out opportunities to grow professionally and utilizes the assessment and professional growth to generate more learning for more students. (MoStep Standard 9)
13. foster relationships with school colleagues, parents, and educational partners in the larger community to support student learning and well-being. (MoStep Standard 10)

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