

# **The Conceptual Framework: A Supportive Accreditation Practice for Teacher Education Programs that Could be Used in the Academic Governance of Public School Districts**

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## ***Abstract***

*This paper discusses how the conceptual framework—a tool used by teacher education units to improve post-secondary professional programs—can be used by public school districts instead of or in addition to a mission statement for the development of course syllabi and curriculum in this era of educational reform. It brings to a forefront the reality that public schools do not typically use the syllabus technique but instead use local curriculum guides and lesson plans. However, some districts are beginning to use comprehensive course plans similar to syllabi in higher education. Regardless of the processes being used, a framework, such as the one presented in this paper can serve as a kind of litmus test when teachers and administrators create and evaluate documents associated with curriculum and instruction as part of the school improvement process.*

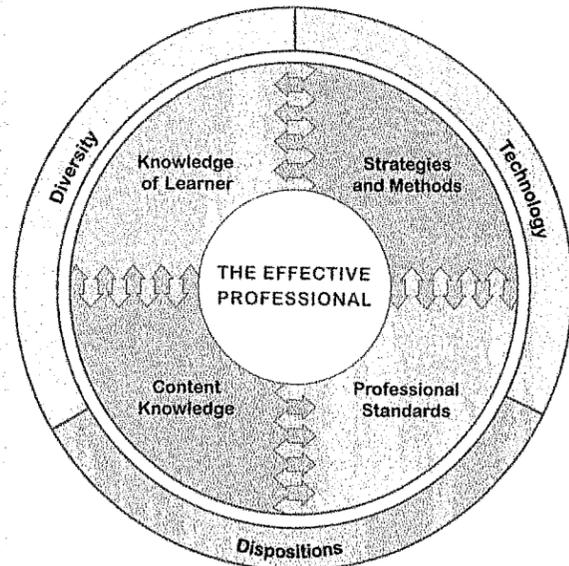
The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has adopted the conceptual framework approach and requires all member teacher education units to develop their own. Typically, such conceptual frameworks use a structure in which there is some kind of easy to read and understand graphic, supported by explanations. Teacher education units are then required to use the framework in guiding and maintaining the development and use of all programs and courses sponsored by the college. It must appear in key publications and course syllabi prepared by professors and instructors, who may be quizzed as to exactly how their programs and courses pertain to the goals shown in the framework. The idea has been proven effective because it is relatively simple, focused, and broad enough to cover all professional and academic objectives relevant to a unit's total operation. In a similar practice, a public school district might consider the use of a conceptual framework instead of or in addition to a lengthy mission statement which gives too much information or a brief slogan that is usually too brief to be meaningful. A conceptual framework usually has one or more of the following characteristics (<http://ncate.org>):

- A set of coherent ideas or concepts organized in a manner that makes them easy to communicate to others.

- An organized way of thinking about a project or program, and about how we understand its activities.
- The basis for thinking about what we do and about what it means, influenced by the ideas and research of others.
- An overview of ideas and practices that shape the way work is done in a project.
- A set of assumptions, values, and definitions under which we all work together.

### ***The Conceptual Framework in Teacher Education***

Below is a conceptual framework used by Southeastern Louisiana University, an institutional member of NCATE. The elements of the program surround a key intention: *the production of an effective professional practitioner*. In the surrounding circles are the pieces that make a professional practitioner competent.



### ***Knowledge of Learner***

**Candidates' understanding of the learner which is necessary to provide effective and equitable instruction**

The educational unit prepares candidates to demonstrate and value sensitivity to the needs of all learners. Candidates acquire an understanding of learners as individuals and incorporate this knowledge as they progress through their educational experiences at Southeastern. As effective professionals, they continue that practice throughout their careers. Diversity and Dispositions are integral parts of the program, and Technology is integrated throughout the program.

### ***Strategies and Methods***

**Strategies and methods appropriate to each program within the educational unit which are necessary to develop effective professionals**

The effective professional demonstrates best practices through inquiry, creativity, and reflective thinking. Constructive and reflective problem-solving processes require the effective professional to consider and integrate complex information. Diversity and Dispositions are integral parts of the program, and Technology is integrated throughout the program.

### ***Content Knowledge***

**Candidates' thorough understanding of the content appropriate to the area of specialization**

Candidates exhibit depth of knowledge in their area of specialization and breadth of understanding of general subjects within the educational unit. Diversity and Dispositions are integral parts of the program, and Technology is integrated throughout the program.

### ***Professional Standards***

**Established criteria that guide effective professionals in each discipline area**

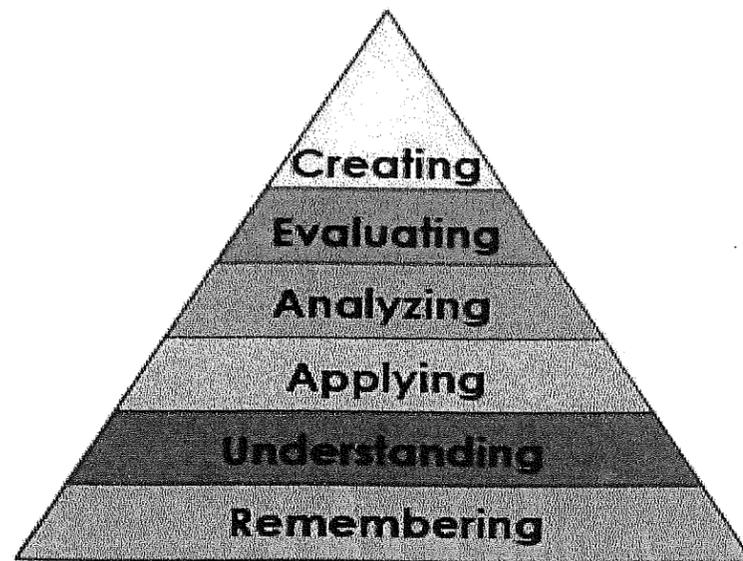
The educational unit is based on professional standards that enable candidates to develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become effective professionals. University course objectives and learner outcomes are aligned with national, state, and institutional standards. Candidates incorporate professional standards as they progress through their educational experiences at Southeastern and continue that practice throughout their careers. Diversity and Dispositions are integral parts of the program, and Technology is integrated throughout the program.

(Retrieved from

[https://www.selu.edu/acad\\_research/colleges/edu\\_hd/about/conceptual\\_framework/index.html](https://www.selu.edu/acad_research/colleges/edu_hd/about/conceptual_framework/index.html))

### The Conceptual Framework in Public Schools

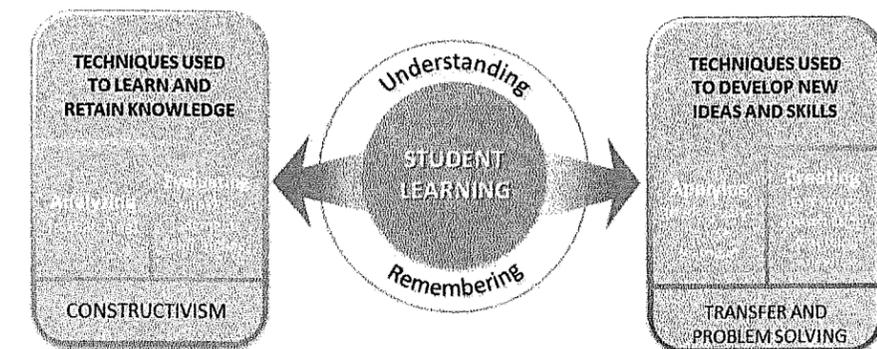
Teacher education units are for preparing competent school teachers and leaders. Public schools are for student learning. The most concrete indicators of student learning can be found in Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, which has recently been modified as shown in the categories shown here (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001):



Using the conceptual framework approach from Bloom's Taxonomy means development of a graphic that somehow puts student learning in the middle, and surrounds it with all six of the types of learning shown in the hierarchy (Bloom, 1956). Since the six learning categories are not of equal importance, their distinctive qualities should be clearly depicted. The challenging part is to provide definitions that are both appropriate to the goals of the school district and to show how a curriculum is to be designed that accomplishes those priorities. For example, if *creating* is a preferred type of student learning sought in the district, then a curriculum should be designed that accomplishes that goal (Roach, 2009).

Currently, it is not uncommon for school districts to function at the lower two rungs of the hierarchical ladder (remembering and understanding), so a graphic would need to make a distinction that shows the need for all six of the categories. In the example illustration shown below, student learning takes its rightful place in the middle of the graphic, with the basic two pillars of remembering and understanding serving as a means of linking the other more significant pieces. The lower elements are techniques for acquiring and retaining knowledge while the upper two elements are what can result from that knowledge.

### The Conceptual Framework



### Conceptual Framework Explanatory Narrative

**Student Learning as a Primary Goal:** In this school district student learning is the only reason for its existence. Student learning must be the sole justification for every subject, course, co-curricular program, activity and function.

**Student Learning Defined:** Student learning is best depicted as resulting in a continuous and positive change in student behavior and perspective, as perceived by teachers, parents, community members, and students themselves. Student learning is not complete if it is measured only in the *remembering* and *understanding* categories. Those categories are just cognitive tools that encourage students to *analyze* and *evaluate* conditions, ideas, functions, processes, and activities found in all human endeavors now and in the past. The ultimate goal of student learning is to *apply* it to vocational, personal or scholastic endeavors, or to use it to *create* something that advances the quality of human life.

**Conceptual Framework's Application to Curriculum / Instruction / Assessment:** In this school district all professional educators can validate their curricular content, instructional planning resource, lesson plan content, instructional activities, and formative and summative assessments in terms of this conceptual framework.

A framework such as the one shown here can strongly support implementation of the Common Core.

### *Ramifications for Teacher Educators*

Teacher educators see the value in using the conceptual framework in their own programs, not simply because NCATE requires them to do so for accreditation purposes. The framework created by a teacher education unit is actually useful for keeping all instructors and program directors focused on why they exist and what they are supposed to do (Helterbran, 2005).

Those within a teacher education unit who prepare teachers, administrators and academic leaders in schools (such as curriculum directors and instructional coaches), must give them the tools to meet current and emerging challenges presented by school reform advocates. It seems appropriate that a tool we use to improve post-secondary professional programs—the conceptual framework—can also be used to guide their work.

### *References*

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