

**THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
FOR THE
TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM
OF CALVIN COLLEGE**

Adopted by the Teacher Education Committee: **April, 2002**

The **Conceptual Framework** articulates a shared vision for Calvin College's **Teacher Education Program** in its efforts to prepare educators for PK-12 classrooms. The Conceptual Framework provides direction for the Teacher Education Program's courses, teaching, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and accountability. Included in the Conceptual Framework is an articulation of the Teacher Education Program's particular perspective, which will characterize Calvin's teacher education graduates.

The Conceptual Framework provides a vision for the program. As such, it provides the basis for coherence among the program's curriculum, instruction, field experiences, clinical practices, assessment, and evaluation. It makes explicit the program's professional commitments and the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that support those commitments, providing a context for aligning professional and state standards with the teacher proficiencies expected by the program. The phrase that best sums up the mission of the Teacher Education Program at Calvin College is **Developing Responsive and Transformative Educators**. The liberal arts core, the specialty concentrations, and the professional courses in education each contribute to this mission.

The Conceptual Framework is composed of the following structural elements:

- A. The Mission of the Institution
- B. The Mission and Philosophy of the Teacher Education Program
- C. The Teacher Education Program's Professional Goals
- D. The Teacher Education Program's Knowledge Bases including theories, research, educational policies and wisdom of practice.

A. The Mission of the Institution

The Teacher Education Program's Conceptual Framework is shaped by its institutional context. Calvin College, established in 1876, is institutionally and historically a Christian college in the Reformed tradition. The *Expanded Statement of Mission* (ESM) of Calvin College expresses this Reformed vision of personal and collective life through "four great moments" of history (ESM pp. 15-17). God **created** a good world and continues to uphold the creation through a faithfulness that is sometimes called providence. However, the entire world and all areas of life, because of human disobedience to God, have been affected by the **fall** into sin. Nevertheless, Jesus Christ's work on earth has made possible the **redemption** of the entire world, restoring the natural, social, and cultural worlds to their original destiny. Complete **fulfillment** of that redemptive process will occur only when Jesus Christ again reigns completely over the entire creation. However, Christians living in the here and now are called to do what they can to promote the restoration of life as far as they are able. These four moments set a particular direction for the corporate efforts of Reformed Christians, including educational institutions such as Calvin College and its particular program in teacher education. In short, the Reformed vision is "to hear God's voice and to respond obediently to God's call . . . in a continuing effort to understand God's redeeming purposes towards creation" (ESM, p. 13).

This framework gives a Christian's life a particular calling and task. God's people are to live as a visible embodiment of God's promise of renewal. Through God's people "God declares the restoration and completion of the creation . . . [Therefore] as agents of covenant renewal the people of God work to see God's reign over the whole creation. We are called to correct the exploitation and oppression of people,

to alleviate pain in the world, and expunge evil from ourselves” (ESM, p. 17). This is a vision for thoughtful development and transformation of both individual hearts and social structures, for a flourishing life of joy and liberation from bondage and injustice, both individually and collectively. It is a vision of delighting in life and obeying God in all its areas. Calvin College as an institution views its central mission as a three-part task: providing a liberal arts education, engaging in Christian scholarship, and applying this knowledge in service to the world at large.

The educational mission of Calvin College is expressed as a liberal arts education that gives a context for disciplinary studies. The liberal arts core serves as a window on the world, enabling each student to live a life of Christian service in “the family, the church, the nation, the marketplace, the various venues of the arts, and the like” (*An Engagement with God's World*, p. 15). The disciplinary studies are specialized areas of knowledge. These provide the intellectual tools, knowledge, and perspectives of the various disciplines to bear on the central task of advancing the redemptive purposes of God's reign. Together, liberal arts and disciplinary knowledge constitute the educational mission of the college.

The educational mission of Calvin College is framed by an emphasis on scholarship. This is an engagement in a communal search for knowledge which might be brought “to bear redemptively upon the world” (ESM p. 43). This means not only scholarship enhancing personal knowledge, but also scholarship applied to existing cultural practices and social structures as well as advanced scholarship engaged with conversations that occur within and across disciplines.

The ultimate context of both a liberal arts education and the scholarship that supports it is service to society. As such, the mission of Calvin College involves a vision of humans both as flourishing creatures and as agents of renewal and transformation. Part of this context is a call to celebration, encouraging joyful appreciation of the goodness still evident in the world, and thus the vision also involves reveling in the enjoyment of life. Part of this context also includes preparing students for leadership, service, and renewal in a society that includes diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economics, cognition, sexual orientation and religious tradition. As such, Calvin College seeks to engage in a vigorous education that promotes lives of joy and reflective Christian service in contemporary society.

B. The Mission and Philosophy of the Teacher Education Program

The Teacher Education Program at Calvin College (hereafter “the program”) takes its vision from the mission of the college. The vision of the program is articulated by the expression **Developing Responsive and Transformative Educators**. The mission of the program is to prepare teacher candidates to be responsive and transformative in their teaching. The four key words—**developing, responsive, transformative, and educator**—require unpacking.

By using the word “**developing**” we mean to highlight *four* concepts. *First*, it refers to the teacher candidate’s developing knowledge within the general liberal arts core and the specialized knowledge of education and the other disciplines. *Secondly*, it refers the teacher candidate’s increasing readiness for teaching, a process of developing into responsive and transformative educators in which both teacher candidate and teacher education professor play active roles. *Thirdly*, “developing” also refers to the on-going character of the learning that is part of being a teacher; to be a teacher is to be a life-long learner. *Finally*, “developing” refers to the character of these changes, for it includes the process of maturing from simpler to more complex competencies and understandings.

The term “**responsive**” highlights *four* ideas. *First* and foremost, it refers to being responsive to **learners**: unwrapping their many gifts, encouraging them to share their joys and burdens, and helping them to develop lives of delight and service. *Secondly*, it indicates that candidates must be responsive to the **curriculum**, deepening their understanding of the disciplinary structures and the nature of learning.

Thirdly, being responsive also requires an awareness that teaching and learning always occur in **contexts**, including socio-cultural, historical, institutional, and systemic settings: good teaching includes careful and caring responses to these settings. *Finally*, responsive teachers are able to **integrate** these understandings in a way that allows them to identify inadequate and unjust practices and structures and challenges them to transform these practices and structures so that schools serve all children.

The adjective “**transformative**” highlights *three* important characteristics. *First* of all, it suggests affirmation and development of what is already good in the classroom and in society generally. *Secondly*, it indicates working towards renewal where the status quo is clearly inadequate, both for students as individuals and for social structures, including schools in particular and society more generally. *Thirdly*, it means that candidates in the program are invited to be committed to service in school and society as signs of the gift of redemption of creation to its original destiny.

The term “**educator**” highlights *two* ideas. *First*, it means someone who delights in students and has a contagious zest for life and learning. *Secondly*, it means someone who acts and who has the authority to do so. As such, an educator is someone who engages in action effectively and competently, empowered through acquired knowledge, skills, and dispositions and the authority of God’s call to act for the good of those entrusted in one’s care.

The vision of the Calvin College Teacher Education Program is to develop teachers who will be ready to work in a variety of P-12 venues, including public and non-public schools. Although the program is part of a college associated with a particular religious tradition, its mission is not narrow or sectarian. Instead, the program’s broad emphasis on what it calls “the Kingdom of God” aims to train prospective and practicing teachers in such a way that they will be prepared to work for the public good in many different educational settings.

C. The Teacher Education Program's Professional Goals

The Mission and Philosophy articulated above inform the more specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions that shape the work of the Teacher Education Program. This knowledge and these skills and dispositions can be summarized into twelve broad goal statements:

Candidates **develop** an understanding of:

1. the impact of worldview as it relates to teaching and the ways in which their faith perspective guides the entire teaching process.
2. the developmental, neuropsychological, and sociocultural factors that influence student learning and classroom climate.
3. the central concepts of, tools of inquiry for, structures of, and connections among the fields of knowledge they teach.
4. pedagogical strategies that take into consideration the complex and diverse cognitive processes involved in learning.
5. the design, implementation and assessment of curriculum in conjunction with learners, contexts, and fields of knowledge.
6. the sociocultural, economic, political, and historical contexts in which education takes place as well as the two-way relationship between education and society.

Based upon the above understandings, the candidates **respond** by:

7. creating learning experiences that are meaningful for all students.
8. developing a positive, productive learning community.
9. designing and implementing a variety of appropriate assessment strategies.

10. communicating effectively with students, parents, colleagues, and other members of the community.
11. demonstrating professional behavior and engaging in continual professional growth.
12. reflecting on their own and others' teaching practices and working to make changes in ineffective and unjust practices.

In summary, these broad goals are meant to highlight Calvin College's commitment to developing educators who are knowledgeable in disciplinary and general content; committed to understanding the complex and wonderful learners with whom they work; competent in designing instructional and curricular strategies; responsive to sociocultural issues and contexts; and who act in ways that transform education to promote justice and equity for all. The twelve professional goals are supported by a set of knowledge bases.

D. The Teacher Education Program's Knowledge Bases

Theoretical knowledge bases in a variety of disciplines undergird the Teacher Education Program's Professional Goals. These include theology, philosophy, psychology, curriculum theory and the interconnected group of political theory, sociology, and anthropology.

1. The knowledge base of **theology** supporting the Professional Goals reflects the Reformed tradition's theological understanding of God, people, and the world. This is a broadly Calvinist expression of the Christian tradition.¹

Augustine's famous dictum, "faith seeking understanding," informs the program generally. This expression means that one's knowledge is always framed within a set of foundational religious beliefs. A confessional stance provides a meaningful context within which specific knowledge is situated.

There are several specific aspects to this foundational framework or confessional stance, all of which align with that of Calvin College more generally (see Section A). First of all, there is the confession that reality is a creation, at once good and dependent on God the Creator. Secondly, it is a confession that this creation was marred by human rebelliousness towards God. The last part of this confession is the affirmation that God redeemed this creation through Christ's death and resurrection. This triad—sometimes called Creation, Fall, Redemption—functions as a continuing framework of meaning for the program, including the content of the various disciplines (subjects) and the practices of education.

A second important foundational belief is the conviction that all humans are created in God's image. This means that deep down, despite individual and group differences, all share in a common humanity. Ultimately this translates into the conviction that all humans have intrinsic worth and dignity and that, despite the many differences, they are fundamentally equal.

A third part of the confessional stance is the belief that the entire social and natural world is under God's sovereignty or reign, something often called within the Reformed tradition God's Kingdom. The "creation mandate" in this context translates into the notion that all humans, and especially Christians, are to be co-workers in God's Kingdom charged with the task of transforming the world to reflect God's original intention that life be an experience of celebration and flourishing delight.

¹ In general, our program is built on the theological tradition of Augustine, John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavink. Included also are theologians such as G.C. Berkhouwer, Anthony Hoekema, and Gordon Spykman. Other, more recent thinkers that have informed the theological base include N.H. Beversluis and Thomas Groome.

This theological knowledge base informs the program as a guiding framework that shapes our specific understandings of the twelve goals in Section C (above). In other words, it defines the manner in which we understand our task and purpose of educating prospective and practicing teachers.

2. The knowledge base of **philosophy** supporting the Professional Goals of the Teacher Education Program reflects a variety of sources, both within the Reformed tradition of thinking and more generally.² They deepen the program's confessional stance (outlined in #1 above), explicating an understanding of the world, human nature, social reality, and the nature of knowledge.

A central assumption about the world is to characterize it as a rich unity in diversity. This is a holistic, anti-reductionist view of the world: God's creation is a web of communal relationships and structures. In the program, understanding the creation thus requires both specialized, disciplinary knowledge and an insight into the integrality that interlinks this knowledge.

A traditional assumption about human beings is to talk about "the mind." Here "mind" is taken in two senses. On the one hand it means the individual mind of the student. But on the other hand it means, more broadly, the synthesis of a tradition's thought about—and perspective on—the natural and social worlds. Thus "mind" in this second understanding is a reference to an integrated, coherent, theoretical, disciplinary understanding of the social and natural worlds from a particular perspective. The two notions of mind are related, however. The knowledge that constitutes mind in the broad sense is to inform the individual student's mind. This assumption informs the program's emphasis on academic excellence, including the importance of disciplinary knowledge within a liberal arts framework.

There are three balancing assumptions to the traditional emphasis on mind. First, humans are whole persons constituted by the unity of knowledge, habits, commitments, emotions, drives, and character. This assumption informs the program's focus on educating the whole person, not merely the mind of that person. Second, humans are neither autonomous subjects nor deterministic robots, but are active beings, agents of historical change, responding to the created world. This assumption informs the program's direction of educating for the possibility and the responsibility of responsive, transformative action. Third, humans are created for lives of shalom, a rich flourishing of enjoyment and delight. This assumption informs the importance within the program of including joy, delight, care, and concern between people.

Another philosophical grounding is the conviction that the socio-cultural world is a humanly structured one; society's institutions, structures, and dynamics are responses to God's intent for society. Social institutions, including schools, are corporate human responses to the need for order and organization as well as for freedom of participation. This assumption informs the program's emphasis that social structures and institutions are neither arbitrary nor unchangeable. Instead, social institutions, including schools, are historical responses to a normative call by God to live obediently in the world.

Finally, a particular view of knowledge and its development shapes the program. Knowledge emerges in the interaction between humans and the world, each side contributing something. On the one hand, acquiring knowledge requires taking some distance from that which is known. On the other hand, at a

² Philosophers that have provided a knowledge base for the education program from within the Reformed tradition include William Harry Jellema, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. Others from within the Reformed tradition that have had an intellectual influence include Cornelius Jaarsma, Henry Zylstra, N.H. Beversluis, and Donald Oppewal. More generally, John Dewey's ideas have provided a continuing influence on the education program. Other thinkers include Paulo Freire, Parker Palmer, and Nel Noddings.

deeper level, knowing reality means being in community with it, knowing its coherent, integral character. Created reality is something that refuses to be reduced to our rationally-based conclusions about it. This assumption informs the program's twin emphases on experiential and reflective sides of knowledge acquisition.

3. The knowledge base of **psychology** supporting the Professional Goals of the Teacher Education Program reflects the wide-ranging effect that current educational psychology has upon contemporary educational theory and practice. The program defines educational psychology broadly to include topics related to how people learn from instruction and how they develop educational materials, programs, and techniques that enhance learning. Contemporary theory and practice have particular impact on the program's understanding of the learner and of the instructor.³

The program bases its view of the learner on the idea that students collectively make up the diversity that God has created, each uniquely irreplaceable. The task of teachers is to unwrap gifts and build the skills necessary for students to discern and respond positively to God's call for living rightly. The program recognizes that learning requires complex, challenging environments; social negotiation and shared responsibility; multiple representations of content; an understanding of how knowledge is constructed; and student-centered instruction. The learner is viewed as active in the learning process. As such, the learner makes sense of presented material, using both metacognitive abilities and background knowledge. This informs the program's intent for the candidate to learning how to promote the active participation of students in their own education. Being an active participant, as a candidate, in learning is a necessary component of becoming a reflective and responsive teacher.

In order to design instruction that is accessible to students who vary enormously with respect to characteristics—including attention, memory, language, higher order thinking, visual-spatial perception, temporal-sequential order, social interaction, and motor skills—we believe that teacher candidates need tools to help them understand each student's strengths and weaknesses, affinities, and limits. These include theories and instructional strategies related to learning styles, multiple intelligences, emotional intelligence, and neurodevelopment.

The program is informed by the notion that it is essential to understand that learning—or more broadly, cognitive development—occurs in a social context. It is in the instructor-student and student-student relationships that students learn how to construct knowledge. The assumption is that the teacher plays a formative role in the student's development of knowledge by providing a social context in which the students are actively engaged in the learning situation. The teacher scaffolds learning in such a way that the learners are able to continue the acquisition of knowledge on their own. For that, learners must be engaged in meaningful tasks that are assessed in authentic ways. The program thus sees that it is important for the teacher candidate to enter and spend significant time within the school community to understand the social context of learning.

³ In general, central aspects of learning and development include the foundational work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. More recent thinkers related to learning and intelligence that are of interest to the program include Robert Sternberg, Howard Gardner, Jerome Bruner, and Spencer Kagen. Social adjustment issues include the foundational work of Erik Erickson and Abraham Maslow; however, more recent thinkers such as Daniel Goldman and Robert Selman are also included. Understandings related to neurodevelopment are connected to the work of Robert Sylwester and David Sousa. Lawrence Kohlberg forms the classic background with respect to moral development. However, more recent thinkers such as Carol Gilligan, Robert Coles, William Damon, and Craig Dykstra influence the program in this regard as well. Issues surrounding spiritual development include the foundational work of Stuart Fowler and John Westerhof. Other thinkers that have informed the program in this area especially as it relates to instructional design include Harro Van Brummelen, Gloria Goris Stronks, and Doug Blomberg.

4. The knowledge base of **curriculum theory** supporting the Professional Goals of the Teacher Education Program reflects a variety of approaches. One assumption is that curriculum development is dependent on the developer's worldview and philosophical presuppositions. Thus, existing curriculum packages and textbooks implicitly articulate a worldview and philosophical assumptions which can be brought out explicitly through critique. A second assumption is that a false dichotomy has been created between an exclusive emphasis on the student or on the curriculum; instead, curriculum is informed by teachers helping students make connections between their understandings and experiences and the knowledge structures of the disciplines. These two assumptions inform the program's emphasis on having candidates encounter and deepen their understandings of both the disciplinary structures (including key concepts, connections, and applications or consequences) they will teach and the nature of learning (including the student's background knowledge, contexts, interests, and abilities) in order to develop and use curriculum well.

An important conclusion, therefore, is that curriculum is more than the information found in textbooks. Curriculum involves planning and practice that links content to the experiences of the learners. Thus, curriculum and instruction are overlapping theories and practices. For the program this means that, just as with instruction, to learn about curriculum theory and development requires taking into consideration social forces, human development, the nature of learning, and the nature of knowledge.⁴

5. The interconnected knowledge bases of **political theory, economics, sociology and anthropology** supporting the Professional Goals of the Teacher Education Program provide a particular understanding of the socio-cultural context of education. This includes an understanding of socio-cultural factors that shape identity; the place of institutions in society; and political and economic dynamics.⁵

One assumption is the view that, although each human is an individual with his or her own particular traits and abilities, human identity occurs in the context of groups, including those of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, and disability. This aspect of the knowledge base provides the recognition that inequities in society are at least partly based on group differences, engendering questions of social justice. Informed by this knowledge, the program encourages teacher candidates to grapple with these complex social issues of identity and justice, especially in terms of how they affect the students in classroom. This includes an understanding by the teacher candidate of the diversity of students who populate their classrooms. Furthermore, this knowledge gives recognition that candidates in the program are themselves shaped by particular socio-cultural contexts as they learn. Through these experiences teacher candidates become knowledgeable about educational contexts. They learn to reflect

⁴ Theorists who inform the program in this area include James Banks, Svi Shapiro, David Purpel, Christine Sleeter, and Carl Grant. More specifically, understanding worldviews as well as cultural and anthropological factors of society the program is informed by the work of de La Luz Reyes and Banks, for example, related to ethnic and cultural differences found in the classroom. The program also is shaped about issues related to gender relying upon, for instance, by the work of Maccoby and Jacklin and those that have followed. Finally, the program understands the alternative conceptualizations of disability and alternative models for designing programs and services for exceptional learners by considering the work of thinkers such as Bogdan and Biklen, Wolf, William & Susan Stainback, Hallahan & Kauffman, Wolfensberger, Friend and Bursuck, Renzulli and others. Other theorists in this area include: John Dewey, Pena, Slattery, Wisner, Bruner, Kohlberg, Noddings, Apple, Gardner, Vygotsky, Piaget, Duckworth, Beane, Greene, Giroux, Freire, Shulman, Oakes.

⁵ Theorists who inform this knowledge base include Jurgen Habermas, Jean Cohen, Paulo Freire, David Labaree Christine Sleeter & Carl Grant, Cornel West, Charles Mills, Svi Shapiro & David Purpel, Donna Golnick, and Jonathan Kozol.

upon and respond to the school as social unit embedded in a particular community and in the larger society.

A second part of the knowledge base deals with the place of school as a social institution in society's structures. The particular social theory involves the idea that society is generally structured into separate spheres, where the school as a social institution ought to contribute to the well being or public good of civil society. It also provides a particular perspective on the impact of the dynamics of government and the economy on education as a social force. This aspect of the knowledge base informs the program's focus on the role of school as a social institution and its role in being transformational in the context of a complex (post)modern society, including government bureaucratization and economic globalization. The knowledge base provides background for the overarching goal of the program to prepare teacher candidates to be caring, committed, critical and competent in their participation in one of society's most crucial institutions.

6. The knowledge base of the **liberal arts** support the Professional Goals of the Teacher Education Program by providing broad content of three kinds: knowledge, skills and virtues.⁶

Knowledge: The core knowledge of the liberal arts include three areas. *First*, knowledge of God deals not only with the Christian faith, including its expression in the reformed tradition, but also other religious traditions. *Secondly*, knowledge of the world, including its historical development, takes in a broad-based knowledge of the natural world, human society, and the arts. *Thirdly*, knowledge of ourselves as humans includes an understanding of our identities, bodiliness, emotions, minds, hearts, gifts, and callings.

Skills: The core skills of the liberal arts involve three areas. *First*, the skills of reasoning deals not only with the general art of reasoning, including quantitative or empirical reasoning, but also cultural discernment. *Secondly*, the skills of communication include the written, spoken and visual rhetoric; the disciplines of reading, listening, and seeing; competence in a foreign language; and the art of cross-cultural communication. *Thirdly*, technological skills include research skills and the physical skills of bodily exercise.

Virtues: Finally, the core virtues associated with moral formation component of the liberal arts include diligence, patience, honesty, courage, charity, creativity, empathy, humility, stewardship, compassion, justice, faith, hope and wisdom.

7. The knowledge base of the **specialized disciplines** support the Professional Goals of the Teacher Education Program by providing a wide variety of disciplinary contents. Each of the majors and minors that comprise certification areas within the Program are composed of specialized disciplinary knowledge, particular ways of inquiry, and specific perspectives. The knowledge, inquiry, and perspectives of any particular discipline are informed by the work of a community of scholars, including both its historical fund and its current, cutting-edge research and scholarship.

In **summary**, the theoretical knowledge bases that support the Professional Goals of the Teacher Education Program at Calvin College collectively constitute what at Calvin might be called a Reformed perspective on learning and teaching. It means believing that learning and teaching are socially situated. Thus, participation in society is not only an educational outcome for teacher candidates, but is also an essential part of their instruction and their own context for learning. Furthermore, participation is not

⁶ For details, see the document *An Engagement with God's World: the Core Curriculum of Calvin College*, April 1999.

merely maintaining the status quo or developing the good potentials of creation, including that of humans, but it also means being agents of change and transformation with an eye to service and bringing justice. Finally, a Reformed perspective also reflects that teaching involves the joy associated with flourishing lives of delight. The Teacher Education Program employs these theoretical considerations with a commitment to **Developing Responsive and Transformative Educators**.