Being “on the road” is one of the world’s most dynamic metaphors. Writers as
diverse as Geoffrey Chaucer, Mark Twain and John Steinbeck have used pilgrimage
or journey to discuss the issues of life and the culture of their times. No book,
however, is as replete with the imagery of paths and roads as the Bible. Both
testaments describe paths using such terms as straight and crooked, good and bad,
right and wrong, level and slippery. Paths can be peaceful and well lit as well as
dangerous and filled with snares. Paths can lead upward to life and immortality, or
they can trail downward to a destination of ruin. Choosing which paths to follow is a
daily challenge for each of us.

The good news is that help is readily available for our life decisions! Listen to the
following prayerful declarations of one individual talking with his God in Psalm 119:
(The Message, Eugene H. Peterson)

Oh, that my steps might be steady, keeping to the course.
How can a young person live a clean life?
By carefully reading the map of your Word.
I’m single-minded in pursuit of you; don’t let me miss the road
sign you’ve posted.
Barricade the road that goes nowhere; grace me with clear
revelation.
I choose the true road to somewhere.
God, teach me lessons for living so I can stay on course.
Guide me down the road of your commandments; I love traveling
this freeway!
I never make detours from the route you laid out; you gave me
such good directions.

While we believe that Jesus Christ is the ultimate Partner on our pathway, the School
of Education is committed to partnering with the students to provide the information,
counsel and assistance needed to make good personal and professional decisions.
Because we are Christian educators, we teach within the framework of God’s Word,
as we best understand it. Our passion is to prepare teachers who will strive for
professional excellence in all that they do.
Judson University
School of Education

Conceptual Framework: Research Basis

The conceptual framework which structures teacher education at Judson University, as exemplified in our department logo, is unique to us, yet firmly grounded on widely recognized research. The following paragraphs will delineate our rationale for the selection of Partners, Pathfinding, Professional and Excellence as the key descriptors of the division’s pre-service program.

Partners

“The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ…. God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be.” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 18)

Partnerships are vital to the School of Education at Judson University. “Some would go so far to assert that no teacher education program can succeed without the involvement of all of these: education faculty, arts and science faculty, faculty in K-12 schools, and parents and other community members” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005, p. 456). In light of this, members of the School of Education work closely and effectively in partnership with students, other academic departments within the university, our administration, with professional colleagues in a variety of settings, and with community organizations. The school of education has a well established Teacher Education Committee, designed to bring professionals together from both inside and outside the Judson community in order to provide insight and guidance to the direction of our teacher education programs. “The idea that learning is, in fact, comprehensive and all encompassing should give each of us reason to intentionally seek avenues for partnership with one another in ways that are worth the extra time associated with collaborative work” (Beers, 2008, p. 119).

We concur that innovation flourishes in team-oriented cooperative environments (Kanter, 1983, p. 28). Faculty members in the School of Education work closely and personally with individual candidates in the role of advisor, university professor and field supervisor. When students and faculty interact in environments that stress challenge and support, learning is enhanced (Beers, 2008). During the course of a candidate’s education at Judson University, the students and faculty members truly become partners in the journey toward teacher certification.

The School of Education acknowledges that “there is a ceiling effect to how much we can learn if we keep to ourselves” and that “the ability to collaborate – on both a small and large scale – is becoming one of the core requisites for postmodern society” (Fullan, 1993, p. 17). Therefore, candidates throughout their educational coursework at Judson University are presented with opportunities to form partnerships with their peers in their pursuit of academic endeavors, curriculum development, and teaching experiences. The relationships candidates form with others are often among the fondest memories they take with them after leaving the university. What is more, the opportunity to
fine-tune their collaborative skills when developing thematic units and team teaching provides our students with a rich landscape for learning in an authentic, meaningful way.

An additional partnership, which is critical to the pre-service experience of education majors, is the relationship between Judson University and the surrounding school districts and their personnel which provide crucial experiences for our candidates. As university and K-12 faculty work together in mentoring candidates, their collaborative efforts do a better job of improving and renewing both teacher education programs and the K-12 schools than either could do alone (Stephens & Boldt, 2004). We believe this exemplifies the type of bond between universities and schools necessary to create fine schools for children (The Holmes Group, 1990), and to create an authentic learning environment. Therefore, formal practicum experiences occur early and often in the program.

Finally, because we are a Christian university, of utmost importance is our partnership with Christ. We acknowledge that all things — including our knowledge and abilities — were created by Him and for Him (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16), and that only through Him are all things possible (Mark 10:27). It is our desire that each of our students enter into the ultimate partnership with Christ by acknowledging Him as their personal Savior and Lord (Judson University Mission Statement).

**Pathfinding**

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”

*(Proverbs 3:5-6)*

While “pathfinding” is a term coined for our purposes, the images that it connotes are familiar in education and supported in the professional literature. Howard Gardner (in Siegel & Shaughnessy, 1994) states that “the biggest mistake of past centuries in teaching has been to treat all children as if they were variants of the same individual, and thus to feel justified in teaching them the same subjects in the same way” (p. 564). Gardner seems to be echoing a desire of Dewey (1938) that the education of each student should meet specific and individual needs, capacities, and interests. The Judson program recognizes and prepares candidates for the reality that the students they teach will be diverse in terms of prior experiences, interests, learning styles, and goals, and will have different talents and difficulties. As Knapp (2005) states, “To teach well, they will need to know, value, and ‘make room’ in their classrooms for all these differences” (p. 203), in effect creating multiple pathways to facilitate student learning.

Just as Judson University School of Education expects its candidates to provide multiple paths to learning for their students, so we attempt to provide a differentiated education for candidates as discussed by Tomlinson (1999): We strive to attend to candidate differences through individual program planning (whenever possible) and alternative learning experiences. We expect candidates to participate in activities and relationships that are respectful to them and others, both inside the classroom and out.

Professors and candidates collaborate in learning and work together flexibly. In short, we intend to find “specific ways for each individual to learn deeply and efficiently without assuming one student's road map for learning is identical to anyone else's” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 2).

One way to differentiate learning experiences is to incorporate the use of technology, although doing so requires candidates to discern which teaching method (either with or without technology) best fits
the learning objectives. No one approach is beneficial for every task, and candidates need to enable their students to become comfortable with a variety of approaches to solve problems (University of California – Los Angeles, 2009). Despite the fact that today’s candidates have grown up in a digital world, “being comfortable with technology is not adequate preparation for understanding to meaningfully integrate technology” (Dutt-Doner, Allen & Corcoran, 2005, p. 63). Candidates must be able to differentiate between “Type I” technologies (those that “make it faster, easier, or otherwise more convenient to continue teaching in traditional ways,” [Maddux & Johnson, 2006, p. 1]) that improve teaching and “Type II” technologies (those which “make new and better ways of teaching available, ways not possible without the use of information technology” [Maddux & Johnson, 2006, p. 1]) that facilitate student learning (Dutt-Doner, Allen & Corcoran, 2005; see also Lowery, 2005 and Schaffhauser, 2008 who describes how technology can be used to increase classroom learning exponentially).

This focus on student learning is the crux of education, enabling our candidates to be effective instructors of the students which have been entrusted to them. This is a responsibility that is not taken lightly; the effective use of technology is simply one contemporary example of where teacher education needs to be responsive to the challenges teachers face in the increasingly complex context of schools as well as the way in which these challenges are being addressed (Winn & Blanton, 2005). We agree with Eisner (1994) that “education is not a field that will yield to simple prescriptions or recipes” (p. 125), and we expect our candidates to become responsible decision-makers and pathmakers for the students they teach. Candidates need to recognize that each situation in which educational decisions are made is significantly unique, not simply unique in the sense of time and place, but unique in the sense that the goals, methods, people, and context differ from each other in important ways. Each situation must be treated with respect to those differences if decision making (that is, finding the best path for students) is to be effective.

We recognize that our teacher education program needs to equip teachers to meet the educational needs of the diverse learners of today’s classrooms. Marbley, Bonner, McKisick, Henfield, and Watts (2007) write that, “The future welfare and the national security of our country depends not only on how well we educate our children, but also on how well we prepare teachers for working with racially and culturally diverse learners” (p. 8). Villegas (2007) asserts that teachers need an understanding of how children and youth learn and develop in different cultural contexts. To that end, we require all candidates to complete a diversity practicum early in their training. This involves understanding cultural differences, being able to respond in culturally appropriate ways, and knowing how to communicate effectively with a wide range of learners (Simonds, Lippert, Hunt, Angell, & Moore, 2008) Therefore, a thorough knowledge of curriculum planning and assessment is necessary, not because these ideas “provide formulas, but that they sophisticate our deliberations in planning programs and, hence, contribute to educationally richer programs than might otherwise be provided” (Sparks-Langer et al., 2000 p. 125)

As we continue to reflect with our candidates, we will continue to learn how differences in and identity of the students with whom they work might be explored and utilized in providing more meaningful paths to learning experiences for all (Allard & Santoro, 2006).

Professional

“Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the Gospel of Christ.” (Phil. 1:27)
While there are many facets to professional growth which are integral to the pre-service preparation of our candidates, we echo Darling-Hammond and Goodwin (1993) that “(p)rofessionalism starts from the proposition that knowledge must inform practice” (p. 31). This knowledge has several components of which the development of content knowledge ranks first (Darling-Hammond & Goodwin), including a degree of both breadth and depth with the facility to link concepts and relationships together (The Holmes Group, 1990). This development of candidates’ content knowledge is assessed through our four “Gates,” which are entry and exit points throughout the teacher preparation program. These require candidates to demonstrate the attainment of both specified grade point averages and passing scores on state examinations as evidence of the acquisition of appropriate content knowledge.

Of equal importance are the development of pedagogical knowledge and the understanding of education as a moral endeavor (Fullan, 1993; Cremin, 1957), a component of crucial importance to us as a Christian institution that “represents the Church at work in higher education” (Judson University Mission Statement). This “head knowledge” must be balanced with the “heart knowledge” and the belief that each student can learn, with “high expectations and strong support for all students” (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000, p. 11).

Teachers need a set of dispositions about teaching, children and the role of the teacher (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, et al., in Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Faculty who teach the candidates must make them “aware of the key dispositions, and then model them for the entire duration of the program” (Helm, 2006, p. 118). At Judson, we strive to display the appropriate dispositions for our candidates.

At Judson we are also concerned that candidates demonstrate professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Dispositions are described as “tendencies for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances, based on their beliefs. A tendency implies a pattern of behavior that is predictive of future actions” (Villegas, 2007, p. 37). In view of this, we in the School of Education have created a set of dispositions on which all of our teacher education candidates are assessed at several points along their teacher preparation route. These include a candidate’s evidence of being personal (communicating and collaborating with others), of maintaining personal integrity, of displaying professionalism (including physical appearance/attire, punctuality, confidentiality, and professional growth), and of ensuring equity for each student (respect for diversity, differentiation of instruction, and belief in and care for each student). Assessment of these dispositions focuses on candidates’ actions, which can be specified, rather than on their attributes.

We acknowledge the importance of reflective practice in the profession of education (Dewey, 1938), and we encourage our students in every course we teach to “look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with future experiences” (Dewey, 1938, p. 87). One of the top trends in teacher preparation is documenting practice, including evidence gathering on candidates’ content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and skills, and classroom performance (Cochran-Smith, 2006). These aspects are paramount in Judson’s teacher preparation program and are thoroughly assessed through the School of Education key assessments, including state exam test scores, portfolio scores, grade and grade point checks, and a project through which candidates provide evidence that their teaching has impacted student learning.
Finally, we agree with Darling-Hammond and Goodwin (1993; see also Dewey, 1938 and The Holmes Group, 1990) that “(p)rofessionalism is not an end state for an occupation; rather, it is a continual process of reaching for . . . goals” (p. 21), and we therefore impress upon our students the need to become life-long learners, not only for the purpose of remaining current in the profession, but also as role models for their students. Faculty in the School of Education model life-long learning through attending and presenting at conferences, teaching workshops, and writing articles. We encourage candidates to join professional organizations and attend and/or present at the conferences of these organizations.

**Excellence**

“**So . . . whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.”** *(1 Corinthians 10:31)*

We believe that teachers are called to be excellent in all that they do. To ensure quality of teacher education candidates at Judson University, the four “Gates” (exemplified by the road signs along the path in the School of Education logo) provide opportunities to check the progress of candidates as they move through the program. Themes contained within these gates include an application process, an academic component, an interview component, clinical experiences, a portfolio component, and state exams.

We strive to ensure that we prepare candidates to view teaching as building on the current knowledge base of their students and to consistently assess students’ progress toward the goal of understanding (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). Our teacher education program enables candidates to develop a deep understanding of their content, as well as strategies to foster students’ transfer of knowledge. We encourage candidates to teach metacognitive skills to their students and to be reflective, conveying a model of teacher as learner (Bransford, et al.).

Excellence in Teacher Education at Judson University is an umbrella covering all facets of the three preceding sections and is a pervasive expectation we have for all our candidates in all they do. We expect our candidates to be exemplary in all their partnerships in the educational endeavor, particularly as caring and emerging professionals who encourage the development of competence and compassion in their students (Noddings, 1992). Regardless of the diverse paths that candidates may take to pursue their education credentials, we expect them to do so with integrity and diligence. Academic achievements and character references are in place and reviewed at regular checkpoints to ensure that all teacher candidates meet the high standards we have in place. As a faculty we hold ourselves accountable to model what we mandate of those in our tutelage: “...to promote the growth of students as healthy, competent, moral people” (Noddings, 1992, p. 19).

Our conceptual framework is articulated and shared in many ways. It is printed in the Teacher Education Handbook and the logo graces our syllabi and professional correspondence. Our partners are familiar with our logo and see that Judson are unique, and well prepared to plan and deliver instruction. Our conceptual framework supports the Judson University Teacher Education Mission Statement as well as the mission of Judson University.
References


