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Vision Statement:
Initial Teacher Preparation Programs

What is a vision statement?

In contrast to a "mission" statement, our vision statement focuses concretely on the ideal outcomes of our program, as these outcomes are embodied in the classroom behavior of a typical graduate. That is, we are using the notion of the "apt beginner" to organize our statement. As distinct from either the "novice" or the "expert," the apt beginner is nearing the end of the pre-service program. Having a relatively small situational and contextual base, his/her frame of reference for applying theory to practice would be relatively narrow.

The statement itself includes three elements:

♦ A set of principles: a general statement of principles that formed the basis for early planning;
♦ A scenario: a description of the apt beginner in action;
♦ A stamp: within the scenario, attributes of the beginner's actions that mark him/her as a product of our program.

The significance of the statement is the implications it has for the sequence and structure of the educational experiences we create to lead students to this place.

Initial Preparation

Statement of Principles

Our teacher education program is founded on the following principles:

♦ **Diversity.** With appropriate support, all children can learn in heterogeneous classrooms. In the classroom, as in society, diversity is a resource for learning, not an obstacle to be overcome. Effective teaching is both culturally responsible and responsive. In addressing student diversity, effective teachers create pedagogical strategies that are founded on principles of social, cognitive, emotional, and intellectual development.

♦ **Democracy.** The same principles that regulate the ways that citizens relate to each other and their institutions in the larger society should operate in all classrooms. Teachers do not abdicate authority, nor do they invoke that authority in an arbitrary and authoritarian manner. Effective teachers equip students to operate effectively and productively as citizens, workers, and intellectuals, able to define problems and propose solutions independently. Effective teachers know and use those resources available to citizens in a democratic society to improve learning conditions for all students.

- ♦ **Authenticity.** Learning is best facilitated through well-structured activities that challenge learners intellectually, academically, socially, and effectively. Effective teachers pose real-i.e., substantive-problems for learners and set explicit expectations for learning. Sequences of activities articulate a coherent curricular whole. Effective teachers make use of their thorough knowledge of pedagogical content to construct and sequence curricular activities.

- ♦ **Academic Rigor**. Given well-structured activities, all children can engage difficult material successfully. At all levels of schooling, effective teachers ground learning in thorough knowledge of subject matter and in the ways of knowing that characterize academic disciplines. Effective teachers connect subject matter and ways of knowing the authentic learning activities constructed in the classroom.

- ♦ **Accountability.** Effective teaching is demonstrated through successful learning. To ensure that learning, effective teachers make use of a wide variety of demonstrably effective teaching strategies. In particular, effective teachers know and use current instructional and assistive technologies.

- ♦ **Reflective Practice.** Effective teachers are life-long learners. They connect their day-to-day activities to a coherent social, philosophical, and political framework. They research their own practice. They participate in the professional and academic activities of their academic and professional communities. They are aware of the social and institutional contexts that constrain their practice and work with those institutions to alter those constraints.

Scenario and Stamp

When we observe an undergraduate nearing the end of student teaching, we are immediately impressed by the "busyness" of the classroom. A closer look reveals that the activity is purposeful. It is obvious that careful planning is present. Our candidate has created an environment where students are sometimes discovering relationships and building knowledge bases, and, at other times, applying knowledge in ways appropriate and meaningful to their personal or career lives. The teacher candidate demonstrates a contagious joy of life-long learning and teaching.

The structuring of the activities creates a physical, psychological, and social environment that is safe and accessible to all students, providing supports appropriate to the needs of students and the curriculum. For instance, the learning environment may be orchestrated so that peers, teacher aides, teacher aides and classroom volunteers, as well as other professional resource people are helping students. Instructional and assistive technologies are in use. There is clear evidence that the candidate is able to monitor each student's progress and provide necessary correctives. Assessment practices are varied and include authentic assessments such as portfolios of student's work. Success is evident when it is expected and when it is least expected. Our candidate is aware that the filters that he/she and students use to process their teaching and learning are a function of their diversity and that effective instruction is a function (in part) of understanding that diversity.

The structuring of the activities engages all students in challenging material. The activity clearly connects subject matter, ways of making sense of that subject matter, and real-world issues. The

teacher would have structured the activity so that the expectations and parameters are clearly defined. Students know the ground rules of classroom behavior, the kind of product expected from them, and the time limits they have to produce it. Within those parameters, however, students are taking responsibility for generating/gathering "data," posing a problem, generating possible explanations, and proposing methods for evaluating the best explanation.

And finally, when given the opportunity, the candidate "talks like a teacher." He/she is able to engage in a discussion with colleagues and supervisors, a discussion designed to describe why the particular skills and activities were chosen for that group of students. The teacher can connect the activities of the day to larger goals and can articulate coherently their connection to a philosophy of teaching. While the discussion may be tentative and naive, it is obvious that our candidate is developing those reflective skills that sustain one for a professional lifetime.

Programmatic Implication

Though not part of the vision statement proper, certain program implications emerge from it. That is, the vision statement defines the kinds of activities that a program must include. This vision of outcomes has at least the following implications for the sequencing and structuring of experiences for students in our program:

- ♦ At all levels, our candidates must have thorough knowledge of the pedagogical, intellectual, academic bases of the subject matter they teach.

- ♦ All candidates must have practical experiences working with diverse student populations in urban and suburban settings.
  - o Practicum sites must offer candidates opportunities to observe effective teaching practices in heterogeneous classrooms. Student teaching must offer opportunities for candidates to implement effective teaching strategies with heterogeneous populations.
  - o Our own teaching and assessment strategies in the classroom must reflect those we expect our candidates to adopt.

- ♦ Admission of students to the program must make explicit the principles that form the basis for our curriculum and evaluation of candidates. Programmatic assessment of candidates must be performance-based[1].

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[1] Six standards for skillful teaching and their associated scoring rubrics are used as the basis for the performance assessment system developed by the teacher education faculty. Candidates are assessed at the beginning, middle, and end of the teacher certification program. The standards and rubrics are used both for candidate and program evaluation. The six standards are as follows: *Teaching for all students that…. facilitates active learning, exhibits coherence and continuity, promotes critical/creative thinking, enhances real-world connections, involves reflective thinking, and fosters understanding of content.*