



TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

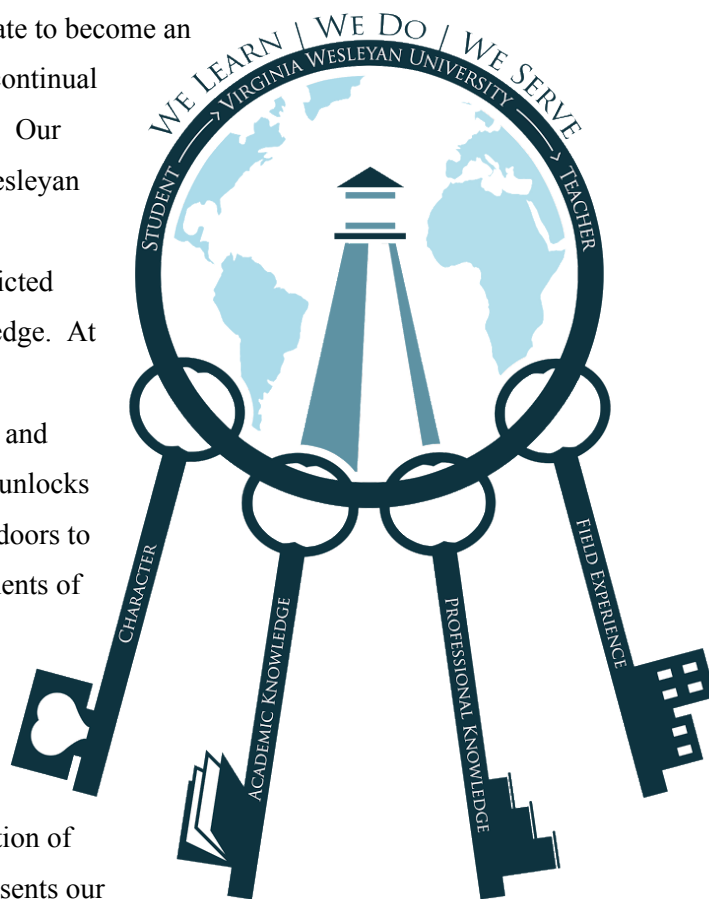
### **Conceptual Framework For the Virginia Wesleyan University Teacher Education Program**

Guided by the La Sallian motto, “Enter to learn, leave to serve,” and John Dewey’s belief that “we learn what we do,” the faculty of the Teacher Education Program at Virginia Wesleyan University (VWU) seek to inspire and prepare teachers to become champions of all students’ hearts and minds (Dewey, 1916). The education faculty embrace and advocate a perspective that values lifelong learning and continuous improvement of the individual that is best captured by six words:

WE learn. WE do. WE serve.

This philosophical statement expresses our commitment to an understanding that teaching is a vocation to which one is especially drawn, and for which one can be uniquely prepared. With the support of the liberal arts faculty, we prepare and guide each candidate to become an education professional – a teacher – dedicated to the continual improvement of all students’ educational experiences. Our beliefs are in keeping with the mission of Virginia Wesleyan University and its United Methodist heritage.

For years, the field of education has been depicted visually by a set of keys that represent keys of knowledge. At VWU, we incorporate four keys into the visual representation of our conceptual framework as a clear and present reminder that teachers impart knowledge that unlocks the doors of their students’ hearts and minds, and the doors to a better life. The four keys represent the four components of Program emphasis: Character, Academic Knowledge, Professional Knowledge, and Field Experience. The ring symbolizes the ongoing and interconnected challenges inherent in helping teacher candidates move from a perception of self-as-student to a perception of self-as-teacher and life-long learner. The globe represents our awareness of and willingness to respond to the international influences and growing diversity in the Hampton Roads region. We understand the connectedness of the global community and the unity that education can bring to that global community. Today’s educators need to be aware of the impact of their vocation on the educational experiences of their own students and communities, as well as the global impact of their vocation on the improvement of all students’ educational experiences. The lighthouse



completes the metaphor that education is a beacon of knowledge and wisdom that lights the way to a hope-filled life and a better world.

Each key in the graphic represents a component that constitutes the educative process that VWU education faculty, with the input of public and private school partners, have identified as essential for the development of education professionals:

- 1) **Character** consists of the dispositions, behaviors, and ethical values identified by our partners and in the literature on teaching and teacher education, as necessary to be successful, effective teachers. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote of the importance of inquiry, reflection, and communication as prerequisites to being a good educator (in Hansen, p. 7, 2008). The development of ethical behavior, a spirit of inquiry, a need for professional reflection, and the ability to communicate effectively are reinforced throughout a candidate's course of study at VWU;
- 2) **Academic Knowledge** encompasses VWU's General Studies and Frames of Reference courses that assist our candidates in understanding themselves and the world around them, and that allow them to gain a more integrated view of knowledge. Courses in majors enhance and build upon the General Studies and Frames of Reference courses, providing candidates the opportunity to learn how to think about the knowledge in their disciplines, and how this knowledge can contribute to becoming effective, successful teachers;
- 3) **Professional Knowledge** evolves through carefully thought-out courses of study that are combined with multiple site-based experiences starting with the first course students take in both our undergraduate and newly approved Master of Arts in Education (M.A. Ed.) programs. Throughout their professional studies coursework, candidates are encouraged to be responsive to learners' diverse needs, gifts, and talents as they connect their endorsement area knowledge to an understanding and eventual application of effective pedagogy through observation and participation in diverse classrooms to see how preK-12 students learn and think at various stages in their development;
- 4) **Field Experience** opportunities help candidates develop further the practical knowledge that pre-service teachers need to connect academic and professional studies coursework to professional practice. Early site-based experiences that begin in the pre-admission courses and continue throughout the program, lead to formal practicum experiences and student teaching. These experiences provide candidates with extensive opportunities to explore diverse educational settings and develop specific competencies and desired dispositions through observation, participation in

professional learning communities, peer collaboration, guided practice, direct instruction, and reflection that leads to personal growth and elevates the status of the profession.

### **Character**

Character speaks to the “inner landscape of teaching” and the need to “cherish – and challenge – the human heart that is the source of good teaching” (Palmer, 2007, p. 4). The challenge of which Palmer (2007) writes is best described by Covey (2004) as the crucial challenge: to find our own voice and inspire others to find theirs. Over the past two decades, great attention has been focused on the importance of identifying and cultivating appropriate dispositions, or character strengths, for candidates in teacher education programs (Pang, Nichols, Terwilliger, & Walsh, 2014).

At Virginia Wesleyan, we see dispositions as qualities that are necessary to possess good character, and they are a vital part of the expressed mission of our Teacher Education Program. Within teacher education, dispositions have been defined as “patterns of behavior exhibited frequently, consciously and voluntarily by educators (Katz, 1993) and often demonstrated through a positive attitude, engagement, a value of diversity, and commitment to effective communication” (Baum & Swick, cited in Pang, et al., 2014). Both Maslow (1954) and Covey (2004) felt it necessary to address social and emotional needs – Palmer’s “inner landscape” – as powerful motivators, and speak of “the heart” in terms of having relationships which are satisfying interactions with students in the classroom, and with other teachers, administrators, parents, and community stakeholders. As such, character plays a significant role in a teacher’s success both in and out of the classroom. Thus, the cultivation of good character and the dispositions associated with good character seems in keeping with states’ guidelines and professional education organizations’ (e.g. Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation). These organizations call for teacher education programs to cultivate positive dispositions and assess these dispositions as one part of continual program improvement. Based on the research and established guidelines, the potential conclusion is that the more of the critical character traits that are possessed by teachers in terms of dispositions, the more likely those teachers are to persist in the profession and to have a positive impact on the learning of all students.

In VWU’s programs, we identify good character as part of our mission. We include as part of the needed dispositions, the goals and learning outcomes of evaluative and reflective practice (InTASC 9), knowledge of education trends and issues (InTASC 10), as well as additional behaviors and dispositions needed to become successful, reflective educators. The dispositions are cultivated and developed through coursework across the curriculum, but primarily through the professional studies courses and through interactions with education faculty and education professionals, both in university classrooms and during site-based and formal field experiences. It is our firm desire to communicate these dispositions to candidates, faculty, and school partners to ensure that all parties are contributing to and reinforcing the development of qualities and traits that empower teachers and define good character.

**Academic Knowledge**

Academic knowledge encompasses VWU's General Studies and Frames of Reference courses that assist our candidates in understanding themselves and the world around them, and that allow them to gain a more integrated view of knowledge. The disciplinary content courses enhance and build upon the General Studies and Frames courses, providing candidates the opportunity to learn how to think about the knowledge in their disciplines and endorsement areas, and how this knowledge can contribute to becoming effective, successful teachers. Candidates fulfill General Studies and Frames of Reference requirements and specially designed endorsement area programs. The General Studies Program rests upon seven epistemological approaches identified as the Frames of Reference, and is designed to instruct students how to think in integrative ways. VWU students are exposed to broad patterns of thought about how people perceive and seek to understand their world, their society, and themselves. Graduates are able to demonstrate proficiency in writing, competency in a language other than English, as well as demonstrate Aesthetic Understanding, knowledge of Historical Perspectives, the ability to employ the scientific method, the ability to analyze data and models from a Quantitative Perspective, a critical understanding of Institutional and Cultural Systems in human society, the ability to engage in Literary Textual Analysis, and an understanding of how Ethical Values and Faith Perspectives shape worldviews (*VWU Catalog 17/18*, pp. 42-44).

Candidates moving through the current undergraduate elementary preK-6 and special education general curriculum K-12 programs gain the content needed to be successful teachers through satisfactory completion of coursework needed to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Comprehensive Liberal Studies. Candidates in the undergraduate secondary 6-12 and preK-12 programs gain their teaching endorsement by successful completion of content, earning them a Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Sciences degree in the appropriate academic major. Candidates in the new graduate Master of Arts in Education (MAEd) secondary 6-12 and preK-12 programs will earn a BA or BS in the appropriate approved academic major and transition to an intensive fifth year of professional studies coursework coupled with multiple supervised field-based experiences in various educational settings. All program candidates are assessed on the pedagogical and endorsement competencies specified in guiding documents identified as the *Regulations Governing the Review and Approval of Education Programs in Virginia* and the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) Standards (2011). These guiding documents form the basis of assessment instruments, including rubrics, examinations, and practica, pre-service and student teaching observation forms that are used in our Teacher Education Program. Endorsement area courses of study are typically co-constructed by education faculty and content area faculty to fulfill the required teaching competencies identified in the *Regulations Governing the Review and Approval of Education Programs in Virginia* (2011). New programs added over the last five years have also been vetted by our partners in prek-12 education through direct contact or membership on advisory boards. Courses of study in the academic disciplines are dynamic and continually reviewed and adjusted based on

emerging knowledge of best practices in the academic field, updates to the Virginia Standards of Learning, and feedback from partners, advisory boards, and alumni in the field.

### **Professional Knowledge**

Professional and pedagogical knowledge evolve in the undergraduate programs through a carefully planned course of study that includes both pre-admission and professional studies courses and early site-based experiences. The faculty agree with Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2007) that knowledge about the teaching profession and the issues that surround the field of teaching are best acquired by pairing coursework with exposure to real school settings, with real students and real teachers. In the new M.A.Ed. Programs, professional and pedagogical knowledge is imparted through a purposeful progression of professional studies courses combined with multiple site-based experiences and supervised internships that will begin concurrently with the first course taken by M.A.Ed. candidates.

Throughout their tenure in the Teacher Education Program, all candidates are encouraged to connect their content area knowledge to the understanding and eventual application of effective pedagogy as they observe and participate in diverse classrooms to see how students learn and think at various stages in their development. Realization of this nexus is crucial for candidates to develop an understanding the disposition of reflection, and of praxis, “the process of taking action in practice whilst acting within a theoretical framework of thought” (Quinlan, 2012). Our interpretation of this notion is that through the process of reflection and field experiences (action), our candidates will evolve from students of teaching into teachers of students, capable of transforming the lives of all students. We integrate research on professional and pedagogical preparation (Danielson, 2007 & 2014; Marzano, 2017) and culturally responsive teaching (Hammond, 2015; Gay, 2010) with research conducted by education faculty, information contained in state guidelines, and feedback from our school partners and alumni into our program structure. These tools are used deliberately and thoughtfully to prepare our candidates with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions identified in both the InTASC Standards (2011) and Virginia’s teacher competencies. Our Program Goals, Learning Outcomes (see Table 1), field observation instruments, and our syllabi serve as evidence of this preparation perspective. The learning outcomes are aligned with our program goals and contribute to our annual and long-term assessment audits and our reflection on program effectiveness, candidate development, assessment practices, and growth.

**Field Experience**

Field Experience opportunities help candidates develop the practical knowledge that pre-service teachers need to connect academic and professional studies coursework to professional practice. Early site-based experiences begin in the pre-admission courses, continue throughout the program, and lead to formal practicum experiences and student teaching. Providing early, frequent, and essential field experiences in multiple geographic areas exposes VWU candidates to the increasing diversity of the region's schools and the students who attend them. Candidates gain extensive opportunities to explore diverse education settings and develop specific competencies and desired dispositions through observation, participation in professional learning communities, peer collaboration, guided practice, and direct instruction. As a result of collaborations and/or partnerships with local school divisions, and even before formal admission to the Teacher Education Program, undergraduate students will have had two or three meaningful opportunities to observe school culture and classroom routines, and participate in education activities with school-aged children and education professionals, in the formal education settings of schools and in the less-formal settings of public libraries and other site-based programs. These early experiences provide students a chance to determine if teaching is the vocation to which they are called, or if their hearts and minds are drawn to other careers.

Once admitted to the Teacher Education Program, both undergraduate and graduate candidates are exposed to additional site-based experiences carefully coordinated with their professional studies courses. In the undergraduate programs, these experiences occur before formal practica and student teaching, allowing candidates to begin the process of observing and translating theory into practice under the watchful guidance of VWU faculty and committed education partners. Practicum experiences during methods coursework allow undergraduate and graduate candidates to reinforce their development of praxis as they apply their pedagogical knowledge in diverse, formal school settings appropriate for their endorsement areas. During these experiences, candidates are typically supervised by their methods course instructors, who can provide near-immediate feedback and fine-tune or re-emphasize course content based on multiple classroom observations of the candidates. Upon successful completion of practicum experiences and the recommendations of faculty teaching the methods courses, candidates proceed to student teaching. Student teaching at VWU is a performance-based demonstration of curriculum implementation and teaching procedures and competencies at acceptable levels for the areas and learning outcomes described in this conceptual framework. Student teachers are also expected to demonstrate developing knowledge and awareness of the *Virginia Standards for the Professional Practice of Teachers*. All of this is accomplished with the support of the Coordinator of Clinical Experiences and Partnerships, cooperating teachers, university supervisors, and education and content area faculty. We believe that it is in this environment of multi-faceted support VWU candidates emerge as highly desirable professional educators who exhibit good character; understand the importance of communicating clearly and coherently; demonstrate effective instructional planning and behavior

management practices; demonstrate effective instructional and assessment practices; and demonstrate the ability to reflect on and evaluate their practices and engage in identified professional behaviors that lead to lifelong personal growth, continual improvement, and a commitment to the growth and status of the profession.

### **Conclusion**

We have identified four components (Character, Academic Knowledge, Professional Knowledge, Field Experience) and seven goals (expressed below) that are annually assessed. The outcomes reflect alignment with Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) Standards as well as those of InTASC, and reflect evolving program emphases over the past seven years. These Learning Outcomes are annually considered and reviewed by the Director of the Education Program in consultation with the Coordinator of Clinical Experiences and Partnerships, the Coordinator of Accreditation, Data Collection, and Reporting, along with Program faculty who are able to supply formal and informal stakeholder input from the field.

### **Goals of the Teacher Education Program**

1. Develop candidates who know their endorsement area content and are able to employ best practices in instruction of that content to all students.
2. Develop candidates who are knowledgeable, reflective, and able to plan, provide, and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all learners, to include culturally responsive teaching.
3. Develop candidates who are knowledgeable, reflective, and able to employ effective behavior management strategies in the classroom and beyond.
4. Develop candidates who are able to evaluate and reflect on professional responsibilities, enhance the profession, and are knowledgeable of current trends and issues in education.
5. Develop candidates who are knowledgeable, reflective, and able to use instructional media and technology to enhance student learning.
6. Develop candidates who are knowledgeable, reflective, and able to employ assessment strategies to collect and evaluate data to increase student learning.
7. Develop candidates who possess good character and the dispositions to be successful, reflective teachers.



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