

College of Education Conceptual Framework

Grounded in collaboration and connectedness to students, schools, communities, and society, the College of Education vision is to inspire lifelong learning and professional engagement through racial consciousness, social justice, and inclusion within a global context. Its mission is to prepare professionals through research and evidence-based practices who demonstrate excellence in their profession.

The College of Education seeks to graduate individuals with passion for and proficiency in content, with thoughtful and principled pedagogy, and a strong sense of educational purpose. Graduates possess the attributes, knowledge, and skills to promote the success of students, families, and schools. They see their own learning and the learning of others as occurring in a cycle of experience, reflection, and re-conceptualization. This learning occurs through a process of seeking new knowledge that fits into and changes existing understanding. Graduates understand that individuals are embedded in family, school, community, and society systems, and they seek to grow as individuals and foster changes to these systems to address injustices.

Graduates are anti-racist practitioners who value diverse perspectives and aim to teach against injustices as critically thinking citizens in a complex society. They work to form inclusive learning communities through evidence-based practices and seek generative pedagogical responses to student differences and divergences from the mainstream (Adams et al. 2016). Graduates use culturally sustaining teaching strategies that actively engage student and community funds of knowledge (González et al., 2006). They guide and nurture individuals with whom they work to live and thrive in a racially and linguistically diverse global society.

Racial consciousness and anti-racist pedagogies are exemplified by the ability to identify how race and intersecting systems of oppression are differentiating factors in educational outcomes for students (Sleeter, 2017). Critical Race Theory (CRT) is used as a framework to prepare professionals to become more racially conscious. It can be used to analyze systems, structures, and outcomes at multiple levels through a racial lens (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Graham et al., 2019) that can foster educators' capacity to practice social justice. The application of a racial equity lens as educators are developing knowledge and expertise in their fields of study (e.g., Hattie, 2012) prepares them to succeed in an increasingly racially complex society. For example, educational institutions benefit from understanding academic achievement disparities disaggregated by race to prioritize racial equity and implement strategies such as those in the Courageous Conversations about Race protocol (Singleton, 2014). Additionally, using CRT to frame organizational direction and positive change can communicate the beliefs and values of an institution (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Our Legacy and Vision

Our college vision and grounding in Critical Race Theory comprise an evidence-based response to racial injustices that undergird our nation's educational legacy. This story includes our institution's founding in 1868 as one of dozens of U.S. normal schools designed to spread white Anglo-Christian values along with teaching "norms" across the North American continent (Goldstein, 2015; Kumashiro, 2020). Often deemed a great "good" by whites who benefitted from this movement (Ogren, 2005), the proliferation of normal schools and the common-school system they supported was nevertheless integral to a larger colonizing project (Stratton, 2016) that violently segregated blacks, other people of color, and led to the ethnic cleansing of Native peoples, including the attempted eradication of their cultures (Reyhner & Eder, 2017). An enormous and perhaps unpayable education debt has accrued over the course of this history (Ladson-Billings, 2006), lending strong warrant for our current efforts to make education more inclusive, racially equitable, and socially just for all our students, families, and communities.

Our particular story begins with the Mankato Normal School's founding on Native land within a decade of devastating conflict with the Dakota people, a history interpreted by influential whites of the time as an "intellectual and moral war" between the races (Bryant & Murch, 1864). Symbolic of the region's powerful anti-Indian sentiment were time-capsule artifacts buried beneath the cornerstone of the Mankato Normal School's Old Main building in 1869, including ritual documents from a local fraternal order whose "chief object" was "to prevent the permanent location of any tribe of Indians in this State" (Coats, 2017). This foundational attitude forged starkly unequal material legacies for the descendant groups affected (Waziyatawin, 2008), including in K-12 education. An important study into the persistent racial disparities that plague Minnesota students' academic achievement shows that "the gap between whites and American Indians has increased by about 19 percent" since 2002 alone (Grunewald & Nath, 2019). Related to such findings, it is not uncommon to see regional school data reporting Native students and other students of color suspended at highly disproportionate rates than white students, as well as excluded from gifted-and-talented and college preparatory curricula (USDE-OCR, 2009-2015). These and many other recent data routinely affirm our commitment to racial consciousness, social justice, and inclusion both in a global context and regional contexts of education.

A great deal of positive publicity surrounded our University's recent sesquicentennial (Lass, 2018). Throughout our institution's growth from a normal school to a modern university, the College of Education has sought to offer the highest quality professional-education programs based on the most up-to-date research and best teaching practices of the times. Yet, the record reveals this legacy working mainly in fulfillment of the normal school's historic purpose preparing teachers who would serve the "common" or public schools of overwhelmingly majority-white communities. Accordingly, archival research reveals the Mankato Normal School to have never graduated a student of color. Not until 64 years after its founding did the Mankato State Teacher's College see its first black graduate, Vanie Belle Belton Carroll, in 1932 ("First students of color, n.d.). Only in its final year as a teacher's college (1956) did the institution graduate a black male, Bruce Williams, who could be openly recognized as the "first" ("First students of color," n.d.). Combined with a wealth of supporting data — e.g., College demographics, MNSU Campus Climate Study (2017), challenges facing students of color at historically white institutions (Matias et al., 2017; Sleeter, 2017; Graham et al., 2019) — this legacy moves us to center racial consciousness in all aspects of our work including the recruitment and retention of students and faculty of color and the reframing of our curriculum to better meet the educative needs of our increasingly diverse, democratic society (Cochran-Smith et al., 2018).

Teacher Preparation

As further response to this legacy, our programs offer teacher candidates opportunities to identify their own racial identities and reflect on how their racialized experiences have shaped their beliefs about students, families, communities, and education itself. Showing sensitivity for their various starting points, we invite teacher candidates to recognize Whiteness as a decisive factor in educational structures including policies, discipline-specific academic practices, and curricula (Jupp et al., 2016; Leonardo, 2009; Picower, 2021). Our candidates explore tenets of Critical Race Theory in education (Graham et al., 2019), including awareness of racism's social normativity, the need to consider K-12 students' intersectional identities, and the urgent importance of valuing the voices of people of color in classrooms. We challenge candidates to critically analyze teaching-and-learning practices they observe and carry out in field placements; in the process, we strive to guide them in taking up asset orientations toward students, planning and delivering anti-racist instruction that is identity-affirming for all. We seek to prepare teachers who are strong advocates for their students and who can model how to speak out and take effective action against injustices in school and society (Scharf, 2016).

In addition to the general education literature, the Special Education program coursework is designed to address the complexity required to produce teachers prepared to work with students with academic and behavioral challenges in the P-12 setting. Following the guidelines set forth by the Council for Exceptional Children (McLesky et al., 2017), the coursework has been aligned with high leverage practices in four key areas: collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral practices, and instruction. Coursework is also paired with focused field experiences designed to allow the practical application of course content (Leko & Brownell, 2011).

Educational Leadership

The graduate-level Educational Leadership programs requires individuals to become proficient across a range of content areas: (a) leadership theory, (b) research methods, (c) systems and structures, and (d) ethics. The programs seek to build transformational leaders (Bass, 1985) capable of leading change through vision and relationship. The programs require individuals to become familiar with the research methods most appropriate to their programs of study, including quantitative (Cozby & Bates, 2015) and qualitative (Creswell, 2013) methods of inquiry. The programs work to ensure graduates possess a broad awareness of the systems and structures inherent to modern education. This requires a leader to consider situations from multiple frames of reference (Bolman & Deal, 2013) before acting on policy or procedure. The programs extend this analytic approach toward ethics with an intentional focus on promoting equity within all levels of education (Singleton, 2014). The programs are committed to developing educators with strong skills in racial equity leadership, instructional leadership, and experiential learning to advance the capacity of leaders who will eliminate predictable racial disparities through project based learning and learner-centered programming.

School Counseling

The graduate-level Professional School Counseling Program is designed to prepare the individual for Minnesota state licensure as a K-12 professional school counselor in an appropriate school setting. Emphasis is placed upon the counselor's role as a counselor and consultant to children, teachers, and parents; as a human development and behavior specialist (Curtis, Van Horne, Robertston, P. & Karvonen, 2010), as a front-line mental health referral agent (Collins, 2014); and as a vital component in enhancing the academic success of all students through the maintenance and improvement of the learning climate in the school (Hernandez & Seem, 2004). The counselor learns appropriate use of appraisal and research instruments to supplement the counselor-consultant role.

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