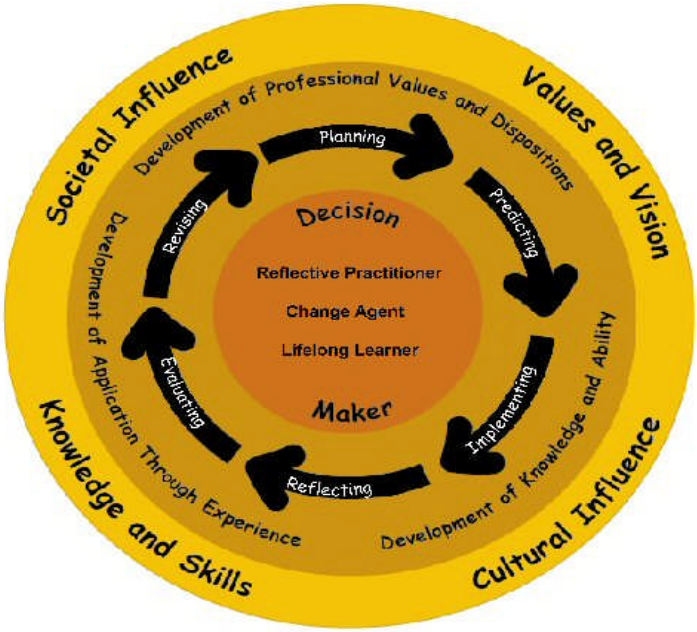
ALABAMA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

Conceptual Framework



Educator as Decision Maker

2007

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THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

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SHARED VISION

The conceptual framework for the College of Education (COE) describes the shared vision which provides coherence for both the initial and advanced programs for the preparation of teachers and other professional school personnel. Focusing on the theme "Educator as Decision Maker," the unit seeks to prepare professional educators who will be capable of applying knowledge and skills, reflecting on and refining practices, and identifying and solving problems in an increasingly diverse, complex, and dynamic technological society. The "Educator as Decision Maker" must be a reflective practitioner, a change agent, and a lifelong learner. This organizing theme reflects the assumption that effective educators must make reasonable judgments, careful and conscientious decisions and choices with the intent of optimizing student learning outcomes; it emphasizes the view of decision making as an ongoing, interactive, and empowering process.

The shared nature of the vision is evident in presentations and discussions at unit and university-wide faculty and committee meetings; at orientations for candidates, part-time faculty, cooperating teachers, site supervisors, and university supervisors; at collaborative sessions with community, school, and alumni groups. It is integrated into undergraduate and graduate course syllabi, assessments, and program handbooks; it is publicized in brochures, newsletters, and other campus publications.

Development of the Conceptual Framework

The COE's conceptual framework with the theme "Educator as Decision Maker" dates back to the early 1990s. It was refined and adopted for the NCATE review in 1998 and again for the review in 2003. Each time, the unit faculty--along with representatives from other academic units on campus, from P-12 schools, and from community professionals and stakeholders--met in collaborative sessions to review the various components and aspects of the conceptual framework and to discuss and debate changes. These sessions included meetings, conferences, and retreats.

Each time, the unit faculty, external advisory groups, and other participants agreed to keep and to update the conceptual framework that had guided the unit for a number of years. Over time, the conceptual framework has been modified for the following reasons:

- To construct a model that presents a more precise graphic illustration of the dynamic nature of the decision making cycle.
- To restructure and revise the model to reflect a clearer representation and description of the components and processes in the development of the educator as a decision maker.
- To assure incorporation of the most recent state and NCATE standards and requirements.
- To specify more precise outcomes for candidate proficiencies and to assure proper alignment of candidate proficiencies with state and professional standards.
- To update the knowledge base with the most current theories, research, and best practices.
- To address recent trends, issues, and developments in education.
- To ensure the continued consistency of the conceptual framework with the university and unit missions and goals.

In response to perceived social and economic challenges, the unit faculty and stakeholders began to seriously consider a major modification in the conceptual framework during 2005--the inclusion of the "educator as entrepreneur" as another characteristic or attribute of the "Educator as Decision Maker." Embracing the idea that candidates would benefit as decision makers by cultivating and displaying an "entrepreneurial spirit," the faculty began researching and exploring this concept as it relates to education and the preparation of teachers and instructional support personnel. Several meetings and a retreat have been devoted to the topic. A consultant was brought in to assist in the exploration of the idea. Appendix A presents a summary of some topics and points regarding the entrepreneur concept and a list of references.

Currently, the outcomes of the "Educator as Decision Maker" conceptual framework remain "Reflective Practitioner, Change Agent, and Lifelong Learner." "Entrepreneur" is still under consideration. Research into the concept is ongoing in order to arrive at decisions about such matters as the following: the knowledge base and underlying theories as related to education; relationship to and alignment with institutional missions and unit, state, and professional standards; means of identifying and assessing proficiencies and dispositions; relevance for across-program inclusion in courses and other instructional activities and experiences.

To ensure the currency of the conceptual framework theme, commitments, and outcomes and to update and ensure the continued viability of the knowledge base supporting the philosophy and theories underlying the conceptual framework, the unit faculty continuously read, research, and share findings with each other and with advisory groups. These efforts are led by the unit's conceptual framework committee. Recent sources of reading, research, and discussion have not disclosed the need to make changes but have confirmed the relevance and utility of the current conceptual framework. Some sources consulted are included in the list of selected references at the end of this document. The complete original listing of references for the conceptual framework is available in the Exhibit Room documents.

Consistency of the Conceptual Framework with Institutional and Unit Missions

The conceptual framework clearly reflects the mission and goals of the university, as stated in the undergraduate and graduate catalogs, in the university's "Fact Book," and in the "Strategic Plan and Vision" document. The mission and goals include the provision of "quality programs of undergraduate and graduate instruction," "public service," and "research." Through these programs, "the university provides learning experiences designed to develop students' intellectual abilities, as well as their social, moral, cultural and ethical values." Further, the university encourages its students to "cultivate abilities such as critical inquiry, creativity and reflectiveness," to "remain active lifetime learners," to "interpret developments in science and technology," and to develop "those skills, insights, attitudes and practical experiences which will enable them to become well-rounded, responsible and discerning citizens, fully qualified for service" in a "complex technological society."

The mission and goals also reflect the university's commitment to diversity. In carrying out its mission, the university recognizes the "diversity of its student body" and provides "an educational and intellectual environment in which all students may thrive, learn and develop their highest potentialities for professional careers and leadership regardless of socio-economic status" and "without regard to age, sex, race, color, cultural background, national origin, or disability."

In keeping with the university's mission, the College of Education offers undergraduate and graduate programs of instruction and promotes research and public service. Through these programs, the college aims "to produce highly qualified graduates who will become leading professionals in their respective fields of teaching, administration, counseling, instructional supervision and library services." The general objectives of the unit's programs are the following:

- To prepare prospective teachers for meeting the educational needs of ***all*** children, youth and adults.
- To prepare support personnel for meeting the educational needs of the schools.
- To assist schools with the improvement of instructional programs.
- To conduct research to expand, enhance and evaluate instructional programs and personnel.
- To offer professional preparation in areas other than teaching that combine theoretical studies and practical experiences to prepare graduates for both immediate employment and advanced study.
- To give all possible service to the communities of Alabama through assistance to their educational programs and related activities.

The above objectives are woven together by the mission of the College of Education which is stated as follows:

> The College of Education seeks to prepare teachers, instructional support personnel, and other professionals to be decision makers who are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to ethically and effectively integrate theory and practice in carrying out their professions. These professionals will possess the understanding of our diverse culture, the technological capabilities, the intellectual rigor, and the critical thinking and problem solving skills required to make informed and responsible decisions, to engage in reflective assessment, to implement positive change, and to pursue learning as a lifetime endeavor.

Both the initial and advanced programs for the preparation of education professionals are designed to ensure that prospective educators matriculating through the college acquire the necessary content, pedagogical and professional knowledge, that they develop the requisite skills, abilities, attitudes, and dispositions to be highly qualified professional educators who can assist ***all*** P-12 students in meeting society's demand for high performance.

The College of Education carries out its mission through four departments which offer undergraduate and graduate degree programs for teachers and instructional support personnel in P-12 schools. The mission and goals of each department are carefully aligned with the mission and goals of the college. The Department of Curriculum and Instruction offers programs in early childhood education, elementary education, reading, business education, secondary education, and special education-collaborative teacher. The Department of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation offers teacher education programs in health education and physical education and non-teaching programs in recreation management and recreational therapy. The Department of Foundations and Psychology offers educational foundations courses for teacher candidates and non-teaching programs in psychology. The Department of Instructional Support Programs offers graduate programs in education administration, library media, general and school counseling, and a doctoral program in educational leadership, policy, and law. Teaching field majors in secondary education are offered in the College of Arts and Sciences, and undergraduate programs in music are offered in the Department of Music (College of Visual and Performing Arts).

The conceptual framework grows out of and advances the unit's mission which is consistent and compatible with the university's mission and goals. The conceptual framework expresses the shared vision which unites the efforts of all members of the professional community in achieving the mission, goals, and purposes of the unit and, therefore, of the university. The members of the professional community include all faculty and personnel responsible for the education of teacher candidates and other professional educators. They are tenured and non-tenured faculty from other academic units within the university as well as from the COE, part-time faculty, clinical faculty who are university supervisors**,** clinical faculty who are cooperating teachers, and administrators and staff in the P-12 schools where teacher candidates do their field experiences and internships. These professionals and other community stakeholders are represented in the ongoing development and revision of the conceptual framework. The college's Teacher Education Advisory Council, Challenge Advisory Committee, and the departmental program advisory councils are drawn from this community of professionals. The shared nature of the

vision is evident in discussions at general faculty and committee meetings; orientations for part-time faculty; undergraduate and graduate course syllabi; candidate orientations; program reports; resource materials; collaborative sessions with and presentations for community, school, and alumni groups; assessments; brochures; newsletters, and other campus publications.

Knowledge Bases: Philosophy, Theories, Research, and the Wisdom of Practice

The conceptual framework is based on sound knowledge, theory, and research. It derives from a consensus of beliefs about the philosophy, values, and dispositions that shape effective educators. Members of the unit envision candidates growing into professionals capable of making informed and responsible decisions both in structured settings for routine and recurring issues, similar to what Glaserfeld (1999) calls conventional issues, and in multi-alternative, unstructured, innovative settings where no guidance is available (Hoy and Tarter, 1995; Ubben and Hughes, 1987). This is a dynamic and empowering process which involves critical thinking and problem solving guided by the belief that empowered educators become designers of education rather than mere consumers of education, that they actively participate in the decision making process rather than simply implement decisions made by others (Barbour, 1986). The designer of education has the ability and the opportunity to plan, implement, and evaluate instructional programs to match the needs, abilities, interests, and prior knowledge of students and to revise plans in response to student performance and feedback (Klecker and Loadman, 1996; Sparks-Langer, 1991). Furthermore, empowered educators are expected to empower their students (Duhon-Haynes, 1996; Callahan, 2002).

The agreed upon views undergirding the theme and related processes embodied in the conceptual framework are informed by both historical and contemporary theory and research. The unit faculty believes that the complex nature of the decisions educators have to make requires more than one philosophical perspective or approach. In view of this belief, the faculty examined and debated the merits of different educational theories in an attempt to formulate the philosophical underpinnings of a conceptual framework that best reflects our collective thinking. The first concern to be addressed in our investigation of the research was the theories underlying the decision making concept and process when applied in education.

The notion of decision making in education extends as far back as John Dewey who stated in 1933 that teachers act in a “deliberate and intentional fashion” rather than in a “blind and impulsive manner.” More recently, theoretical foundations for the theme are evident in the works of educators and researchers like Shulman (1987); Shavelson (1976, 1978, 1981); Shavelson, Atwood, and Borko (1979); Cooper (1999); Ubben and Hughes (1987); Bozik (1990); Brubaker and Simon (1993); Hoy and Tarter (1995); Glickman (2002); Kauchak and Eggen (2003), Marsh and Willis (2003), Callahan (2002), Kellough and Kellough (2003), Marsh (2006), and Klein (2007).

Smith (1992) perhaps offers the clearest definition of a decision maker. He defines a decision maker as one who regularly selects from among alternatives before taking actions that impact

persons' lives. Marsh and Willis (2003) specify who the educators that make decisions are. They are teachers, principals, superintendents, all individuals or groups who, because of their professional status or positions of authority, have a voice in determining the courses of action to be followed in schools. This description clearly applies to all candidates matriculating in the College of Education programs which prepare teachers, counselors, administrators, and other school support personnel for professional positions in P-12 schools.

Increasingly, teachers, as well as other education professionals, are assuming some responsibility in the leadership and management of their schools (Lytle, 2000). Schools are being restructured in ways that enable more professional school personnel to take responsibility for decisions about students' learning. Recent trends toward site-based management and shared decision making require participation and collaboration in making decisions about every aspect of education from curriculum to scheduling, to budget, to teaching methodology. The College of Education is preparing its candidates to respond to these challenges by ensuring that they not only acquire knowledge and develop skills and dispositions but that they also experience a structured decision making process.

Shavelson (1981) was among the first to theorize a decision making model to improve teaching. His decision making model grew out of research on human decision making. He developed a cognitive model of teachers' judgments and pedagogical decisions as a heuristic for organizing and conducting research on teaching. The unit's approach shares some common elements with Shavelson's model; however, it is different from Shavelson's in its view of decision making as a problem solving process rather than simply as a final, visible act or product.

Decision making as a problem solving process is described in Smith's Rational Decision Model (1992) which consists of four steps: (1) formulating the decision question, (2) collecting/considering information that reveals available alternatives, (3) selecting criteria through which alternatives are sifted, and (4) making a choice regarding the decision question. The unit faculty agrees with Smith that decision making should be based on a rational sequence of steps to arrive at a rational choice from among competing alternatives. However, the faculty also believes that value judgments play an important role in decision making.

Brubaker and Simon (1993) indicate that values are at the core of the decision making process. Consequently, the unit's decision making process is also influenced by the seven-step approach described by Armstrong and Savage (2002) which, while similar to Smith's model, includes a clearer focus on values: (1) describe the basic issue or problem, (2) point out alternative responses, (3) identify evidence supporting each alternative, (4) identify values reflected in each alternative, (5) point out possible consequences of each alternative, (6) make a choice from among available alternatives, (7) identify evidence and values considered in making this choice. Drawing upon these two approaches to decision making, we developed the following structured approach to guide the faculty and the candidates through decision making tasks: (1) define the basic question or problem, (2) identify available alternatives to be considered, (3) point out the values and possible consequences reflected in each alternative, (4) establish the criteria that will influence the selection of alternatives, (5) make a choice from the alternatives.

Using the unit's approach, candidates learn and practice decision making in areas that Smith (1992) and Cooper (1999) summarize as planning, implementing, and evaluating. In somewhat similar fashion, Callahan (2002) and Kellough and Kellough (2003) describe the phases in the decision making process: (1) the planning, or *preactive*, phase; (2) the teaching, or *interactive*, phase; (3) the analyzing and evaluating, or *reflective*, phase; and (4) the application, or *projective*, phase. In refining the unit's approach, the faculty sought to define a process that incorporates ideas from both of these descriptions and to add insights gained from our own practices as teachers and other professional educators. Like Smith and Cooper (1999), the faculty views planning, implementing, and evaluating as essential decision making areas and actions. However, like Kellough and Kellough (2003), we also believe reflection to be critical in examining alternatives and making choices.

According to Armstrong and Savage (2002), reflection occurs after decisions are implemented. It involves self-evaluation through a critical analysis of the decisions and their outcomes. More importantly, reflection must involve not only technical and content-related considerations but moral and ethical issues as well. Handal and Lauvas (1987) have identified a level of ethical consideration in educational practice. At this level, they assert, educators "reflect about the moral and ethical basis of their actions and raise questions about how or if their actions contribute to a caring classroom environment or to the enhancement of equity and justice." Reflection, therefore, is crucial to assuring that decisions are in the best interest of the students. In addition, planning either involves or is usually followed by predicting outcomes, and evaluating generally yields results that are used in revising the plan. Therefore, the decision making process conceptualized by the unit faculty follows a cycle of **planning, predicting, implementing, reflecting, evaluating, and revising.** The unit's structured approach to decision making described above may be applied to the process as a whole or within each area or phase of the process.

As we examined further the educational assumptions and beliefs that serve as the foundation for the unit's "Educator as Decision Maker" theme and processes, we discovered that the unit faculty's views about education are rooted in two apparently contradictory philosophies—**behaviorism and constructivism.** Through an extensive literature search, we also discovered the possibility that these two seemingly opposing philosophies could be combined and blended. This possibility was suggested by scholars from different camps, for example, Dick (1996) from a systems design approach to learning and Hager and Beckett (1995) from the constructivist view of learning. Dick, after comparing and contrasting the systems approach with constructivism, concluded that the two could be blended such that the "best and strongest points of each . . . survive." Hager and Beckett reached a similar conclusion in their finding that "plausible professional competency standards will need to be holistic in some aspects and atomistic in others." Interestingly, these scholars conceded the incompleteness of the philosophies when applied separately in education. They concluded that neither could be epistemologically complete without the other. Thus, when the two viewpoints complement each other, the assumptions underlying the theories and practices in education emerge as more complete and workable.

Instructional design theorists whose area of interest has always been associated with behaviorism are advocates of such a position. Wilson (1997), for example, sees no contradiction between having instructional goals and strategies that impose structure on the learner (behaviorism) and using teaching materials and methods which enable learners to construct their own understanding (constructivism). This kind of integration of the two philosophies, as suggested by the research, has given the unit faculty the basis for selecting, for our instructional purposes, what we consider to be the best ideas and practices of the two views to serve as the theoretical foundation for the conceptual framework. Guided by the literature, we chose some distinctive characteristics of the two philosophies as the best ones to guide the development and delivery of our professional education curricula.

Behaviorist perspectives in education are grounded in the works of Pavlov (1902), Thorndike (1943), Watson (1948), and Skinner (1953, 1971). To behaviorists, "education is the establishment of behavior which will be of advantage to the individual and to others at some future time" (Skinner, 1953). Their goal is to determine how external instructional manipulations affect changes in student behavior. The focus is on "teacher-centered" approaches, "the importance of observable, external events on learning," and the "role of reinforcers in influencing those events" (Kauchak and Eggen, 2003). From this perspective, behaviorism provides precise measures for organizing curricula and teaching. Thus, the unit faculty has adopted behaviorist principles as a means of planning and structuring curricula.

Behaviorism stresses the attainment of specific objectives through carefully sequenced learning experiences and matching assessments. Consequently, syllabi for all courses in the unit follow a similar format, starting with precise objectives. Course objectives are stated in terms of observable behaviors. These objectives serve as clear guides for learning activities and for standards by which the teaching-learning processes can be evaluated (Martin and Pear, 1996; Miltenberger, 1997). Starting the process of curriculum design with precise objectives (Tyler, 1950), using the taxonomies of education as guides in curriculum planning (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, 1956); planning appropriate activities to achieve the objectives, monitoring performance through assessment, emphasizing some degree of quality control (Dick, 1993, 1996)—these are all some of the concepts originating in behaviorism that have been operationalized in structuring the unit's curricula.

The unit faculty agrees that borrowings from behaviorism, which emphasizes external influences on learning, help to provide the overarching structure of the curricula. However, the active internal processes that students use to organize, store, and retrieve information are not accounted for in the behaviorist perspective. As a group, the faculty does not view behaviorist practices as flexible enough to allow the delivery of instruction in the most meaningful ways. It does not provide the desired latitude for more learner-centered education, for emphasizing the crucial role that learners, themselves, play in their own learning, and for the internal shaping of values and dispositions.

The knowledge base for the unit's decision making model, as discussed above, requires active involvement and inquiry, problem solving and reflection, interaction and collaboration on the part of the teacher and the learner. The faculty believes in the centrality of the learner to the

learning process. We believe that the learners' background knowledge, development, and motivation must be key considerations when planning for instruction. We further believe that we must actively encourage learners to think about their own learning, that we must make our classrooms and schools comfortable and stimulating places to learn—places where the learner feels part of a community of learners (Kauchak and Eggen, 2003). Consequently, the faculty agrees that the constructivist view of learning offers a more compatible philosophical base for the theories, practices, materials, and resources that must inform and guide instruction which prepares educators to be decision makers.

We, as a faculty, seek to teach and to model the best practices of constructivist pedagogy, as defined and demonstrated in educational research. We also exhibit, by using some behaviorist principles (behavioral objectives for courses, for example), the need and a means to avoid what researchers have identified as misconceptions or misinterpretations about applications of constructivism—that clear goals and careful preparation are not necessary, that learning automatically takes place through social interaction, and that the teacher's role is less important. As we plan and model good instructional design and delivery, our candidates, in turn, learn and use the knowledge, skills, and strategies experienced in our professional preparation programs in their own professional practice.

Rooted in the work of John Dewey (1916), Jean Piaget (1952), and Lev Vygotsky (1978), constructivist theory asserts that learning is an active, problem solving process in which learners build upon prior understandings to construct new knowledge through interaction with their environment (Edwards, 1996; Resnick, 1987; Yackel, Cobb, Wood, and Merkel, 1990). Constructivist practitioners view autonomy, or the ability to govern oneself and take responsibility for one's own decisions, as the aim of education (Burk and Dunn, 1996; DeVries and Kohlberg, 1987; Kamii and Livingston, 1994). "Learners use their own experiences to create understanding that makes sense to them rather than having understanding delivered to them in already organized forms" (Kauchak and Eggen , 2003). Further, constructivism is "the belief that learning occurs only when the learner ties newly acquired information to previously gained understanding" (Henson, 2001). Constructivist learning theory emphasizes the enhancement of learning through social interaction and the use of authentic learning tasks to promote meaningful learning (Kauchak and Eggen, 2003; Mahoney (2004), Stein (2004).

The constructivist view of learning is clearly compatible with the concepts underlying our theme "Educator as Decision Maker." Constructivism promotes individual empowerment for students and teachers through involvement in educational decision making. According to Henson (2001),

> Teachers are being empowered by the late twentieth century invention of site-based school councils, which are often given power to make all types of important decisions, including major decisions about curriculum matters. Students, too, are being *empowered*. A major source of student empowerment is the constructivist belief that the only way to really understand is through solving problems, thereby

creating new understanding. Thus, the realization that teachers cannot give understanding to passive students has also been a strong factor in efforts to purposely empower students.

Implicit in this concept of empowerment is a quality that makes constructivism suitable and effective for diverse student populations—the belief that ***all*** students can and will learn. This belief is essential to the success of educators in today's schools where students with many differences in background, potential, and challenges must learn to work together and to appreciate their uniqueness (Henson).

Moreover, constructivist perspectives on teaching and learning have been presented as guidelines for teachers and administrators working to reshape education in the nation's schools. For example, the American Psychological Association summarized the views in its publication *Learner-Centered Psychological Principles: Guidelines for School Redesign and Reform* (Presidential Task Force on Psychology in Education, 1993). In addition, constructivist pedagogy is now essential to the development of standards-based curricula and instruction. Content-specific standards—in mathematics, science, and language arts, for example—as well as general professional standards (INTASC, NBPTS) and local state standards are calling for more thoughtful and intensive study, more critical thinking and problem solving, and more active student involvement in learning.

Ideas and models of decision making, behaviorist principles of structuring curricula, and constructivist views of teaching and learning—all suggested from research and the wisdom of practice—form the theoretical and philosophical knowledge bases for the unit's conceptual framework. Other references to the research which clarify and support the knowledge bases are presented in discussions throughout this document and in an attached list of selected references at the end.

COHERENCE

The Conceptual Framework Model

The conceptual framework serves to organize and articulate the various components of the college's program of education for both undergraduate and graduate candidates. It guides the coherent and systematic design and delivery of curriculum, instruction, field experiences, clinical practice, assessment, and evaluation. It provides the basis for the interaction of these multiple components as they contribute to the development of empowered professionals with growing expertise in making effective decisions—educators who know what information to use in making professional decisions, how to integrate this information to reach decisions, and how to navigate successfully through institutional constraints and individual differences which may positively or negatively affect these decisions (Shavelson, 1981; Brubaker and Simon, 1993).

The conceptual framework model provides a graphic illustration of the relationships among these multiple dimensions of the college's program for the preparation of teachers and other

professional educators at both the initial and advanced levels. Further, it offers a visual explanation of what the unit seeks to do in regard to candidate learning and its effect on student learning. It thus clarifies the unit's commitments to knowledge, teaching competence, and student learning.

The model consists of four interdependent, interrelated, and interacting components which the college faculty views as essential contexts for the shaping of informed, skilled, and responsible decision makers dedicated to making a positive impact on P-12 student learning. The **first component**, the outer circle, represents the assumption that prospective candidates bring to the university a **prior context** consisting of their own **values and vision**, **knowledge and skills**, **cultural and societal influences**. This assumption is consistent with the constructivist view of learning in which learners become "actively engaged in constructing meaning" by bringing their own "prior knowledge to bear on new situations" and "adapting those new knowledge structures" (Steffe and Gale 1995). Constructivists see new learning as interpreted *within the context of* prior experience and understanding, not "as isolated information that is later related to existing knowledge" (Kauchak and Eggen (2003). What the aspiring teacher candidates bring with them to the university serves as the foundation for knowledge construction, for the learning that takes place in the university's and the college's educational programs (the second component of the model).

The nature of this already existing foundation demands a commitment to diversity. Thus, this component of the conceptual model embraces the college's initial commitment to the preparation of educators who help ***all*** students learn, another idea that is consistent with constructivism. Constructivist practitioners believe that all students can and will learn; therefore, they create and adapt instruction that best meets the needs of all students (Kauchak and Eggen, 2003). The candidates reflect a diversity of intelligence, ability, and learning styles; of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds. They come from a variety of socio-economic levels and geographic areas. Through the full range of the curriculum and other programs and activities, the unit's diverse faculty seeks to teach to the diversity in the candidates as well as equip them with the tools for addressing the diversity in their own classrooms and other professional activities.

The **second component** of the model, the large inner circle, represents the setting in which the college provides the education and training of prospective teachers and other professional educators at both the initial and advanced levels. This setting is the **interactive context.** What the candidates bring to the university and what exists at the university are useful in providing the context in which interaction takes place (Tomlinson, 1995). This context encompasses the general areas in which the development of competence is necessary for informed and effective decision making. These areas are **knowledge and ability**, **application through experience**, and **professional values and dispositions**. This component provides opportunities for the candidates to weave new learning into their existing knowledge base and thereby to broaden and deepen their understanding and experience.

In the interactive context, the candidates become solidly grounded in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for becoming expert professional educators and for implementing the unit's decision making process. Shulman (1987) has identified distinct categories of knowledge

essential for the effectiveness of a professional educator. These include content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of learners and their characteristics. These categories are represented in the following domains of the knowledge base required in the unit's professional preparation programs:

- General education skills and knowledge (the core curriculum requirements)
- Subject content knowledge (knowledge of subject matter and of the structure of the teaching discipline)
- Pedagogical content knowledge (knowledge of how to translate the subject content into understandable forms)
- Knowledge of teaching and learning and of the principles of effective practice (knowledge of learning development, human exceptionalities, instructional technologies, motivational strategies, management techniques, and assessment techniques)
- Knowledge of professional values and dispositions (knowledge and practice of the law, professional codes of conduct, ethics, and personal and professional values)

Field experiences and clinical practice provide controlled opportunities for candidates to gain practice in integrating these dimensions of their knowledge base into effective decision making as they create and implement meaningful learning experiences designed for all students. It is here that theory and practical application are blended, and candidates are able to strengthen their confidence and sharpen their expertise as emerging professionals. Emphases on diversity, on professional values and dispositions, and on the uses of technology are infused throughout all areas of study in this context.

The **third component** of the conceptual framework model, indicated by the rotating arrows within the large inner circle, represents the **decision making context** which, in simplified terms, embraces a **continuous cycle of planning, predicting, implementing, reflecting, evaluating, and revising** within the above described **interactive context.** In the foregoing component, candidates are immersed in knowledge and experiences, skills and values as they become astute decision makers. Defining questions and problems, identifying alternatives, examining values and consequences, establishing criteria for choices, and making choices—these are all required actions in the process.

Planning, the beginning point, moves through problem identification and analysis to generation and selection of alternatives. It is followed by predicting the results prior to implementation of the plan. Prediction requires the generation of "if-then" scenarios and probable outcomes. Implementation involves putting the plan into effect in a systematic way, after which reflection occurs. Reflection is an ongoing process of looking back, identifying that which needs modification, alteration, or change in both processes and outcomes. This kind of reflection leads to the development of new knowledge and insights and results in professional growth. With reflection, evaluation begins. Evaluating requires both formative and summative evaluation of outcomes stemming from the objectives of the plan. Evaluation provides a measure of the success or failure of the plan. It yields results that are used in revising the plan, and the process begins all over again. This decision making cycle is guided by moral and ethical imperatives which seek to ensure responsible choices. Responsibility also means assuming ownership for the

outcomes of decisions whether positive or negative. Thus, the process seeks to prepare candidates to be morally and ethically responsible, as well as rational and informed, decision makers.

In actual practice, the decision making sequence may not be as clear cut as described above. As the process proceeds, the whole is continuously evaluated, replanned, and redirected as necessary. Thus, the steps in the decision making process cannot be mechanically applied; obviously, the same order may not work successfully in all situations. Yet, knowledge of the process is important. The unit faculty believes that educators who have a clear understanding of the decision making process increasingly make better choices. They become more competent at systematically and critically identifying problems, selecting alternatives, and reflecting on and evaluating the choices they make. Moreover, effective educators recognize that, while there is not always "one right" solution to a problem, the decisions they make help shape students' values and dispositions and create positive (or negative) environments for learning.

The candidates develop and refine their decision making ability within the context of their interactions with faculty and curricula. Integrating the elements within this learning environment with their prior knowledge and experience, candidates acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that prepare them for the multiple and complex decision making tasks in the education arena. Importantly, courses in the College of Education are taught by a mixture of university faculty with experience in P-12 settings and professional teachers and administrators who hold graduate degrees and work in P-12 schools. This affords the candidates the opportunity for in-depth study and for occasions to associate with and learn from current practitioners who are routinely making day-to-day decisions in their practice.

The decision making process is therefore a dynamic and interactive activity, a constant interplay of thought and action that is learned and refined within the interactive context. This continuous, cyclical motion is represented by the rotating arrows which display the phases in the process of decision making circulating around the center circle--the goal of the first three components of the model: the "Educator as Decision Maker."

The **fourth component** of the model, the center circle, represents the **outcomes context**. All of the other components of the model lead to the achievement of this one goal--the development of the educator who is an informed and responsible decision maker. This decision maker is characterized as a **reflective practitioner**, a **change agent**, and a **lifelong learner.**

Reflective practitioners understand their disciplines and how learners learn. This understanding enables them to make judgments about the knowledge level of students and to make decisions about representing the content in ways that facilitate the students' intellectual growth. Reflective practitioners use content, pedagogical and professional knowledge to guide instructional decisions. As they implement instruction, they monitor and evaluate their impact on student learning by gathering data from multiple sources of information and using a variety of assessment techniques. They also evaluate their own teaching and use professional resources and reflection in order to improve their teaching practice. Reflective practitioners exhibit a spirit of inquiry and

reflection into their own and others' pedagogical practice and generate alternative possible solutions to specific problems in teaching and learning.

Responsible, informed, and rational decisions made by educators impact educational policies, theories, and practices and create change which reform education and enhance curricular experiences for diverse student populations. This is the role of the decision maker as a change agent. Candidates are expected to become catalysts for change in educational settings, to anticipate and manage change, to foster and encourage change that results in improved educational practice. Change agents collaborate with other members of the professional community and take responsibility for school, curricular, and instructional decisions which help create student-centered learning communities. They reflect on the decisions that they have made in the past and thereby improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their present and future decisions. Reflective educators become lifelong learners when they continue to expand their repertoire of knowledge and experience, update their skills, evaluate and enhance their dispositions, and further their ability to refine and adapt their decision making process to more diverse and continuously changing educational settings. Lifelong learners make continued learning and professional growth priorities throughout their careers.

As decision makers, candidates completing our programs are expected to be reflective practitioners, change agents, and lifelong learners who exhibit competence in the knowledge, skills, and dispositions reflected in the outcomes described below. These outcomes are incorporated into all of the unit's programs, and they are integrated into the planning, delivering, and assessing of instruction.

Conceptual Framework Outcomes (Expected Candidate Proficiencies)

The outcomes which follow apply to programs at the initial and advanced levels. They are incorporated into the course syllabi of all the unit's programs. The outcomes identify the proficiencies expected of candidates completing the unit's professional education programs. They provide a basis for evaluating the competence of the candidates and the quality of the educator preparation program as a whole. The outcomes thus represent the standards adopted for the professional education unit, and they are aligned with the standards established by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE), NCATE, INTASC, and NBPTS.

NCATE "has aligned its unit and program standards with the principles of INTASC" (*Professional Standards,* p.17). The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) has aligned its teacher education standards with INTASC and NCATE ("Alabama Quality Teaching Standards," *Alabama Code for Teacher Education*, Chapter 290-3-3-.04). The ALSDE standards outline professional studies requirements across all programs. Specific requirements for individual programs (elementary education, early childhood education, etc.) are included in the *Alabama Code* as well. The unit's programs/courses are aligned with the standards and rules designated for all programs. Syllabi for specific program areas also incorporate the standards for that area. The alignment matrix in Table 1 illustrates the correlation between the unit's standards, the national standards, and the ALSDE across program standards (290-3-3-.04). The conceptual framework outcomes coincide with the main topics of the ALSDE standards/rules and

encompass the key indicators listed for each topic. Assessments in courses and at critical points throughout the candidates' program of study are designed to target these outcomes and provide ongoing evaluation of candidates' performance and of the effectiveness of the instructional programs and the unit.

Outcome 1: Reflective Practitioners
Reflective Practitioners must demonstrate:
Content Knowledge
1.1 Knowledge of the structure, important facts, central concepts, tools of inquiry, and theories associated with the teaching discipline or professional field as delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards.

1.2 Knowledge of the interaction of subject matter and effective teaching strategies to make learning understandable and meaningful to all students at particular instructional levels. (pedagogical content knowledge)

1.3 Knowledge of how to explain and present content in multiple ways that motivate and challenge all students. (pedagogical content knowledge)

1.4 Understanding of subject content and standards through inquiry, analysis, and synthesis.

1.5 Ability to use knowledge and reflection to select content and design instruction which meets the needs of individual learners and addresses the scope and sequence of the curriculum.
Knowledge of Teaching and Learning
1.6 Knowledge of the foundations of education, of how children learn and develop, and of how families and communities impact student learning.

1.7 Knowledge of ways to develop meaningful learning experiences and manage student-centered learning environments that encourage critical thinking, problem solving, and effectively facilitate learning for all students.

1.8 Knowledge of ways to design and use formal, informal, and research-based assessment strategies that maximize the learning of all students.

1.9 Ability to use continuous reflection to examine, adjust, and refine instructional practices and decisions to enhance student learning.

1.10 Knowledge of how student differences impact learning and academic performance--differences in culture, ethnicity, social and economic background, special needs, second language learning, exceptionalities, gender, and learning styles (diversity).

1.11 Ability to create learning communities that encourage respect for students' individual differences and promote awareness, acceptance, and appreciation of the broad range of diversity in the classroom (diversity).

1.12 Ability to create interdisciplinary or cross-curricular learning activities that address students' prior knowledge and experience and that connect content to other subjects and to the real-world.

Skills in Communications, Mathematics, Technology

1.13 Ability to use effective oral and written communications, reading, and mathematics to foster supportive interaction and promote critical thinking, active inquiry, and problem solving in the learning experiences of each individual learner.

1.14 Ability to use and to teach the fundamentals of reading, writing, and oral communications across all content areas.

1.15 Ability to integrate appropriate instructional technology into the teaching of subject content to facilitate optimal learning for all students.

1.16 Ability to use technology for classroom management and research to support and enhance student learning.

1.17 Ability to use communication, mathematics, and technology skills to collect, analyze, and summarize data related to their work, reflect on and use the results to enhance learning for all students.

Outcome 2: Change Agents
Change Agents must demonstrate:
Collaboration for Improvement in Education

2.1 Collaboration with students (and parents/guardians if necessary), following assessment formal and informal and analysis of their learning, to adjust strategies and monitor performance in an effort to bring about positive change in learning as needed.

2.2 Continuous collaboration with colleagues, other professionals, parents, guardians, and community persons to create and maintain learning environments that assure academic development, that are safe and caring and that advocate justice and wellness for all students.

2.3 Continuous collaboration with colleagues to create and adopt research-based best practices to achieve ongoing classroom and school improvement.

2.4 Ability to engage productively in a variety of teamwork scenarios to support and improve education for all students.

2.5 Commitment to educational reform through the use of research-based strategies and data-driven program evaluation to support and influence educational change.

2.6 Ability to recognize when their dispositions may need adjusting and to make appropriate changes in their attitude and behavior.

Outcome 3: Lifelong Learners
Lifelong Learners must demonstrate:
Professionalism

3.1 Active involvement in continuous professional research, learning, and self-improvement at all stages of their careers.

3.2 Appropriate professional dispositions as delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards while working with students, colleagues, families, and communities.

3.3 Knowledge of and adherence to the roles and responsibilities of the profession, to the Alabama Educator Code of Ethics, to federal, state, and local laws and policies, and to

professional ethics in general.

3.4 Knowledge and use of the current theories, resources, and emerging technologies in their field and in education generally.

5.5 Knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of the profession, of general legal and policy issues, of national and Alabama-specific initiatives for improving education.

CANDIDATE PROFICIENCIES ALIGNED WITH STANDARDS

As explained above, the college's programs are guided by state, national, and professional standards. These include ALSDE, NCATE, INTASC, and NBPTS. In Table 1 below, these standards have been aligned with the outcomes in the conceptual framework. Conceptual framework outcomes and the standards have been aligned with course objectives, activities, and assessments in the course syllabi to ensure that candidates gain the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of effective professional educators.

The quality assurance procedure enforced by the college and the university ensures that syllabi reflect these alignments. It includes a system for reviewing and approving course syllabi to verify that objectives, assessments, criteria for passing the course, and grading practices match. Candidates are evaluated in each course based on their mastery of the stated measurable learning objectives, and they must meet stated mastery criteria related to course objectives and requirements to pass the course.

In COE courses, objectives and other criteria clearly delineate proficiency expectations for candidates. These objectives are aligned with standards. Thus, when the objectives are achieved, the standards are met. In addition to course alignments and evaluations, performance-based assessments at critical points in the candidates' program are aligned with expected outcomes and standards. These assessments are being systematically used to measure candidate performance.

Table 1: ALIGNMENT OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES WITH PROFESSIONAL AND STATE STANDARDS

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OUTCOMES (Expected Candidate Proficiencies)	**NCATE Standard 1**	**INTASC Principles**	**NBPTS Core Propositions**	**ALSDE Standard/ Rule 290-3-3-.04**
1 Content Knowledge **Reflective Practitioners**	**Element 1, 2**	**1, 4, 7**	**2**	**1 (1)(c)1. (1)(c)2.**
2 Knowledge of Teaching and Learning **Reflective Practitioners**	**Element 3, 4, 5**	**2, 3,4, 5,7, 8**	**1, 3, 4**	**2, 4 (2)(c)1. (2)(c)2. (2)(c)3. (2)(c)4. (2)(c)5. (4)(c)1. (4)(c)2. (4)(c)3. (4)(c)4. (4)(c)5.**
3 Skills in Communications, Mathematics, Technology **Reflective Practitioners**	**Element 3, 5**	**6**	**2, 3**	**3 (3)(c)1. (3)(c)2. (3)(c)3. (3)(c)4.**
4 Collaboration for Improvement in Education **Change Agents**	**Element 6, 7**	**8, 9, 10**	**4**	**5 (5)(c)1.**
5 Professionalism **Lifelong Learners**	**Element 5, 6, 7**	**9, 10**	**4, 5**	**5 (5)(c)2. (5)(c)3. (5)(c)4. (5)(c)5. (5)(c)6.**

PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENTS AND DISPOSITIONS

Commitments

The outcomes listed and described above embrace the college's professional commitments to knowledge, teaching competence, and student learning. These commitments are expressed throughout the conceptual framework document and are summarized below. Each candidate is expected to embrace and uphold the following professional commitments:

1. A commitment to teaching and instructional support as professions and to the demonstration of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that characterize competent professionals.
2. A commitment to acquire in-depth knowledge of content and pedagogy and to use this knowledge to make subject matter meaningful for students.
3. A commitment to acquire knowledge of learners and the learning process and to use this knowledge to design and implement effective learning experiences for all students.
4. A commitment to understand and respect diversity--ability, learning styles, gender, racial, ethnic, socio-economic, language, cultural, special needs--and to develop fair and unbiased approaches to educating all students.
5. A commitment to teaching/learning as a decision making process which requires active inquiry, critical thinking, and problem solving.
6. A commitment to being effective communicators and to promoting the development of effective communication skills in students.
7. A commitment to teaching and other professional educator roles as reflective practice.
8. A commitment to using knowledge, reflections, and assessments to promote positive educational change.
9. A commitment to lifelong learning.

Dispositions

In keeping with the college's conceptual framework, the faculty identified the following dispositions that they value and that teacher candidates are expected to exhibit. The dispositions are categorized under the three major outcomes of the conceptual framework, and they incorporate characteristics identified by INTASC and NCATE as desirable in professional educators. The unit's dispositions are assessed in courses and at transition points through portfolio checks, interviews, field experience and clinical practice evaluations.

As Reflective Practitioners, COE professional education candidates should:

1. Believe that all children can learn at high levels and persist in helping all children achieve success.
2. Reflect on teaching practices in the pursuit of excellence.
3. Use ongoing assessment to identify P-12 students' strengths and challenges.

As Change Agents, COE professional education candidates should:

4. Take pride in their work and work environment.
5. Meet ethical standards of practice.
6. Be voices for educational and social justice.
7. Value human diversity and help students learn to value one another.

As Lifelong Learners, COE professional education candidates should:

8. Join and participate in professional and educational organizations.
9. Keep abreast of new ideas in the field.
10. Value the use of educational technology in the teaching/learning process.

COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

The mission and goals of the university clearly express a strong commitment to diversity. The university recognizes the "diversity of its student body" and provides "an educational and intellectual environment in which all students may thrive, learn and develop their highest potentialities. . . ." The College of Education is dedicated to uphold and to carry out this commitment. A particular focus of the unit's conceptual framework is the preparation of education professionals who respect and appreciate human differences, who believe in justice and fairness for all people, who support and advance learning for *all* students, and who are prepared to work with *all* students in an equitable and caring manner. For the College of Education, diversity includes race, socio-economic status, gender, culture, ethnicity, ability/disability, learning styles, and other exceptionalities.

Goals and objectives to cultivate diversity and to address diversity issues and concerns are evident throughout the unit's programs, courses, and activities. Diversity is an important consideration in the recruitment of faculty, staff, and candidates. From the moment the prospective candidates enter the university as freshmen to the point of graduation into the world of professionals, diversity is a major focus. It is evident in the courses required of the candidates in the general and professional studies curricula, in the subject field areas, and in placements for field and clinical experiences. It is evident as well in the composition of the faculty and the student body, in unit and campus lyceum features and workshops, and in the research and professional development activities of faculty.

Throughout the conceptual framework document, the unit's commitment to diversity is expressed in the discussions of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that form the foundation of the preparation programs for candidates at both the initial and advanced levels. It is specifically stated in the outcomes/desired proficiencies expected of all candidates. The unit's diversity committee, in preparing the report for Standard 4, has presented detailed information and data which show aspects of diversity at work within the college and the university. The committee has also refined and included in its report a diversity plan which delineates the goals, implementation and assessment strategies for the unit's diversity activities and experiences.

COMMITMENT TO TECHNOLOGY

The university and the college are aware of the significance of technology and have expressed specific commitments to the inclusion of educational and information technology in academic programs and activities. Technology is a tool for constructing and communicating information. It is an integral part of the administration and delivery of institutional functions. The university's published "Academic Computing Strategic Plan" (2007) expresses the institution's overall commitments to the use of technology in academics and outlines the mission, vision, goals, objectives, and strategies for upholding and carrying out these commitments. Unit faculty are members of the university-wide Academic Computing Advisory Committee which is composed of representatives from P-12 schools and agencies and from other colleges and departments within the university.

The College of Education (COE) has a technology committee that is responsible for the unit's technology plan, specifically for updating the plan in accordance with needs arising from review and analysis of assessments and resources. The technology plan is closely linked with the university and COE vision and mission; the goals described in the plan reflect the conceptual framework outcomes and NCATE and International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)/National Education Technology Standards(NETS) standards. The plan promotes the integration of technology throughout all candidate preparation programs and unit operations.

Faculty in the College of Education integrate technology into their teaching, assessment, and instructional management activities. And faculty are committed to preparing P-12 teachers who can do the same with great skill. Faculty, academic support staff, and students have access to the Blackboard course management software program. A key teaching/learning and assessment tool is the candidates' development of artifacts and the electronic portfolio using the LiveText software. In addition, information technology is central to the management and maintenance of the unit's overall advisement and assessment system through the Advisement Certification Evaluation (ACE) Database.

In the College of Education, some courses are delivered online, and distance learning opportunities are offered. Courses in the use of technology are required in all programs of study. The college has computer centers for teaching, learning, and research. The NASA and Technology in Motion projects in the Regional Inservice Center have provided a variety of training opportunities for the infusion of technology into classroom teaching. Unit faculty in the Department of Instructional Support conduct faculty training and development workshops in the use of technology for COE faculty candidates and for faculty university-wide. In addition, faculty serve as course facilitators and course developers with eLearning Alabama, Alabama's implementation of the federally funded E-Learning for Educators Initiative. eLearning Alabama uses a web-based model to provide effective professional development that leads to gains in teacher's content knowledge, improvements in their teaching practices, and increases in the achievement of their students. The technology committee is exploring the feasibility of Elluminate *Live!*, for interactive web-conferencing and tutoring between faculty and candidates in classes.

THE SYSTEM FOR ASSESSING CANDIDATE PERFORMANCE

The system for assessing candidate performance is clearly described in a separate document, *Educator As Decision Maker Performance-Based Assessment System*. This document explains the relationship of the assessment system to the conceptual framework. It identifies and discusses the transition points for assessing candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions. It identifies the key unit assessments used at the stated transition points and details a timeline for the development and implementation of the key assessments. It identifies the design for collecting, analyzing, summarizing, and using data, and it explains how technology is used in the maintenance of the system. The document is available as an exhibit and can also be accessed online.

An assessment director is responsible for managing the implementation of the assessment system. The director handles the collecting, analyzing, summarizing, and disseminating of data on candidate performance. The data management function and the tracking and monitoring of candidate performance are greatly facilitated by the Advisement Certification Evaluation (ACE) Database, which is managed by a faculty member skilled in the use of computer technology. ACE may be accessed online with the appropriate code provided by the unit's database manager.

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APPENDIX A

Modification under Consideration for the Conceptual Framework

Periodically the College of Education faculty, candidates, and stakeholders from the professional community examine the conceptual framework to update its knowledge base and to ensure the continued viability of its theories, commitments, and outcomes.

In response to perceived social and economic challenges, the unit faculty and stakeholders began to seriously consider another major modification in the conceptual framework during 2005-- the inclusion of the "educator as entrepreneur" as another characteristic or attribute of the "Educator as Decision Maker." Embracing the idea that candidates would benefit as decision makers by cultivating and displaying an "entrepreneurial spirit," the faculty began researching and exploring this concept as it relates to education and the preparation of teachers and instructional support personnel. Several meetings and a retreat have been devoted to the topic. A consultant was brought in to assist in the exploration of the idea. The following concepts emerged as the unit explored literature and discussed ideas pertaining to entrepreneurship in general and in education in particular.

- Faculty and candidates need to display the spirit of entrepreneurship.
- An entrepreneur is defined as one who takes advantage of knowledge and resources to identify and pursue opportunities that initiate changes and create values in one's life and those of others.
- The idea of the entrepreneur is not a great departure from the original theme, "Educator as Decision Maker." Entrepreneurs are decision makers, but their decisions are more strategic than assumed in the original theme and model.
- State colleges and universities are faced with increasing financial constraints and large corporations are moving their production plants overseas. The American public has started to become increasingly more entrepreneurial.
- The problem of the achievement gap is a constant, continuous one particularly in the counties from which the university enrolls a large percentage of COE candidates. Moreover, the history of Alabama State University represents the work of entrepreneurs. The COE has to respond to these facts and challenges by working to be entrepreneurial itself and to prepare its candidates for an entrepreneurial approach to challenges and opportunities in the educational and global community.
- Incorporating the idea of an entrepreneurial spirit into the conceptual framework theme, commitments, and outcomes seems like a good fit for providing a new outlook to the concept of "Educator as Decision Maker."
- Characteristics of an entrepreneurial spirit: (1) Willing to ask questions (2) Open to new information and others' points of view (3) Eager to gather data with which to make connections and draw conclusions (4) Critical thinkers (5) See the big picture (6) think outside the box (7) Perceive issues and find creative ways to deal with them (8) Espouse the value of freedom.

Currently, the attributes and outcomes of the "Educator as Decision Maker" conceptual framework remain "Reflective Practitioner, Change Agent, and Lifelong Learner." "Entrepreneur" is still under consideration. Research into the concept is ongoing in order to arrive at decisions about such matters as the following: the knowledge base and underlying theories as related to education; relationship to and alignment with institutional missions and unit, state, and professional standards; means of identifying and assessing proficiencies and dispositions; relevance for across-program inclusion in courses and other instructional activities and experiences.

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