

**MOREHEAD STATE UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

**PROGRAM REVIEW**

**MASTERS OF ARTS IN EDUCATION  
Emphasis in Special Education**

**Dan Branham, Ed.D.  
Dean**

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**Department of Elementary, Reading, and Special Education**

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## **I. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***A. Unit Conceptual framework***

See College's statement of the conceptual framework.

### ***B. Program Relation to Conceptual Framework***

The special education program and Morehead State University sees the conceptual framework as particularly appropriate metaphor for the role of the special education teacher in today's schools. "Educators as architects: designing environments where students construct knowledge and develop skills;" calls on our candidates and faculty to reflect critically on the basic concept of access. Accessibility lies at the heart of special education in the United States. Since 1975, a free appropriate public education has been mandated for all handicapped children. With the 1997 revisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act the intent of this requirement has been underscored by a very explicit emphasis on access to the general curriculum:

...As used in this part, the term special education means specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability...

(3) Specially-designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible child under this part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction--

(i) To address the unique needs of the child that result from the child's disability; and

(ii) To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that he or she can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children. (20 U.S.C. 1401(25))

While some see this as a "new" focus in the 1997 reauthorization, in truth it has been at the foundation of special education since its inception is a federal mandate in 1975. In 1975, the issue for students with disabilities was getting into door -- basic access. Twenty-five plus years of experience has taught us to expect more than that for students with disabilities: The expectation for students with disabilities is the same as the expectation for all students: high achievement.

The research literature in special education has consistently demonstrated that the nature of the learning environment can contribute to the success and the acceptance of students with disabilities. As it says in the conceptual framework document the metaphor of the architect is used because it nicely captures the critical role of the teacher in designing, planning, and constructing environments that focus on fostering optimal student learning. This resonates with those of us in special education who have long struggled with the concept of the least restrictive environment as a hallmark of special education and United States. Indeed, the concept of the least restrictive environment tries to strike a balance between the demands of a regular class

and the unique learning needs of the student with a disability. At its root, the least restrictive environment is defined as the optimal learning environment for each unique individual.

At the dawn of the 21st century, this challenge is one that has become best encapsulated in the concept of inclusion. Inclusion is the idea that all students along and all students are members of the school community. No individual difference should be a basis for differential treatment within this accepting community.

Traditionally special education has been associated with a behaviorist paradigm of teaching. Increasingly forward-looking educators throughout the country have challenged this mechanistic approach to the educational enterprise. In our program, we have adopted a social ecological approach that is exactly congruent with our overriding metaphor of educators as architects. From this perspective, a disability is simply a physical or psychological condition which person has. It becomes a "handicap" only when that person encounter in environment that requires him or her to do something that they are unable to do. Guided by this perspective faculty and candidates together examine the social environment of the school to identify factors that enhance or hamper student acceptance, participation, and success.

Within this framework, there are four critical ideas: **access, participation, inclusion, and preparation for adult life**. The following briefly explores each of these four ideas that flow from our conceptual framework and demonstrates how they are linked with critical outcomes for teachers and students with disabilities.

**Access.** The concept of access simply captures the fact that the student with a disability needs to be able to enter the school and classroom as a first step towards learning. This requires the teacher in training to become adept at analyzing the environment to diagnose both physical and attitudinal barriers to participation. Maslow's hierarchy of need makes it clear that no human being is capable of achieving if they are not accepted as a valued human being. Beyond answering questions about stereotypical attitudes and physical access the teacher also must develop skills related to more subtle aspects of the classroom environment that hamper student learning. Among these are issues such as the form in which information is presented and access to technological supports that will assist students with special needs.

**Participation.** It is one thing to get one's foot or one's wheelchair in the door; it is another thing to engage with others in the educational enterprise. This requires a teacher to be attune to the myriad ways in which students with disabilities are limited in their ability to fully participate in what goes on in the school. If special education becomes the "greenhouse" or "plastic bubble" that encapsulates students with disabilities, they never will be challenged to reach their highest potential nor will they be fully accepted by their peers. This requires the teacher to structure of activities within the classroom and use of resources such as instructional aides in ways that support participation. Two skills critical to achieving participation are **collaboration** and **accommodation**. Developing skills in forming collaborative relationships with colleagues in regular education and related services is central to our special education

program. In a like manner today's teacher in special education has to be skilled at analyzing learning tasks to design the accommodations which will allow the student with special needs to do his or her best.

**Inclusion.** Access, participation, collaboration, and accommodations all lay the groundwork for inclusion. However, this is more than a simple linear equation. Inclusion is more than the sum of its parts. All that discussed about up to this point simply lays the foundation for the possibility of full acceptance and student success. Inclusion is not an educational strategy it is an educational outcome. The teacher strives to create in environment in which all our accepted and all contribute. Within the inclusive school, the numerous factors that defined the human condition such as gender, race, religion, economic background, and differential ability are seen as enhancing not detracting from the learning experience of all.

**Preparation for adult life.** It is critical that all teachers have a sense of direction. All that we do in schools is geared towards preparing our candidates to be valued contributing members of our communities. The academic expectations for all Kentucky students provide us with a compass in setting this direction. The value of an ecological perspective on education is that it requires the teacher to continually ask “why am I doing what I am doing?” The bottom-line answer to this question is “I am engaged in the enterprise of preparing young people for life beyond the classroom.” It is critical for the student with a disability to be prepared to meet the challenges the everyday life will present. Similarly, all candidates must be prepared for the complexities of a world filled with human difference. The special education program at Morehead State University strive to develop the kinds of “architects” who can build the ramps that will lead all of their future students to success.

### ***C. Excerpts from Syllabi Illustrating Conceptual Framework***

- **Conceptual framework.** The education of a teacher should be organized around a central mission which gives direction and coordination to the process. The central theme of the Morehead State University conceptual framework is the role of the teacher in creating an environment that fosters learning. The critical interaction between the characteristics of the students and the environments within which they must function is consistently emphasized under the topic of “accessibility,” which is addressed throughout the course. (EDSP 607)
- The course objectives and competencies for EDSP 604 directly address the three main strands of the unit’s conceptual framework, “Teachers as Architects”. In particular, the course operationalizes the philosophical fundamentals in the selection of collaborative teaching and behavior management methodologies, the acquisition of pedagogical knowledge and skills, and the application of candidates’ collaborative teaching and management skills in clinical and field experiences.

## II. PROGRAM EXPERIENCES

Graduates of this program must demonstrate substantial growth in the skill and knowledge base of the Experienced Teacher Standards for Preparation and (Kentucky State Department of Education, 1994). For the experienced teacher growth in his or her profession is a holistic undertaking that can not be narrowly confined to a single aspect of professional development. Hence, it cannot realistically be said that a single graduate course will lead to mastery of a standard. Nor should an effective graduate course narrowly focus on only one of the Standards. In truth any effective graduate course in education should be continually nurturing critical reflection and growth across the full spectrum of behaviors associated with quality teaching. The program at Morehead State University aims for this comprehensive approach to professional growth for its graduate candidates. That said, it must be noted that each course in a graduate program has a point of emphasis which will enables the candidate to focus a bit more discretely on his or her growth in the skills associated with specific standards. **Table 1** on **page 11** outlines those courses or program components that place a particular emphasis on specific Experienced Teacher Standards. The flexibility associated with certain aspects of graduate education means it is not always feasible to associate a growth on a standard with a particular course. In these cases there are a range of opportunities for professional growth that will be available through a group of possible electives.

Complementing the generic skills outlined in the Experienced Teachers Standards is the *Special Education Content Standards* identified by the Council for Exceptional Children (2001) as critical for a teacher working in special education. Based on review of these guidelines the faculty at Morehead State University has identified the following group of essential competencies for experienced special education teachers in our graduate program.

1. **Foundation of Special Education.** Experienced special educators understand the field as an evolving and changing discipline based on philosophies, evidence-based principles and theories, relevant laws and policies, diverse and historical points of view, and human issues that have historically influenced and continue to influence the field of special education and the education and treatment of individuals with disabilities both in school and society. Experienced special educators understand how these influence professional practice, including assessment, instructional planning, implementation, and program evaluation. Experienced special educators use this knowledge as a ground upon which to construct their own personal understandings and philosophies of special education.
2. **Systems/Legal Mandates.** Experienced special educators understand the major legislation, litigation, regulation, rights, responsibilities, and advocacy which effect practice in special education. Experienced special educators understand the legal policies and ethical principles of measurement and assessment related to referral, eligibility, program planning, instruction, and placement for individuals with disabilities, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Experienced special educators are a resource to their colleagues in understanding

the laws and policies relevant to Individuals with disabilities. They understand the relationships of organizations of special education to the organizations and functions of schools, school systems, and other agencies.

3. **Characteristics of Learners.** Experienced special educators know and demonstrate respect for their students first as unique human beings. Experienced special educators understand the similarities and differences in human development and the characteristics between and among individuals with and without disabilities. Moreover, experienced special educators understand how exceptional conditions can interact with the domains of human development and they use this knowledge to respond to the varying abilities and behaviors of individual's with disabilities.
4. **Individual Learning Differences.** Experienced special educators understand the effects that a disability can have on an individual's learning in school and throughout life. Experienced special educators understand that the beliefs, traditions, and values across and within cultures can affect relationships among and between students, their families, and the school community. Moreover, experienced special educators are active and resourceful in seeking to understand how primary language, culture, and familial backgrounds interact with the individual's exceptional condition to impact the individual's academic and social abilities, attitudes, values, interests, and career options. The understanding of these learning differences and their possible interactions provide the foundation upon which experienced special educators individualize instruction to provide meaningful and challenging learning for individuals with disabilities.
5. **Assessments.** Assessment is integral to the decision-making and teaching of experienced special educators and experienced special educators use multiple types of assessment information for a variety of educational decisions. Experienced special educators use the results of assessments to help identify disabilities and to develop and implement individualized instructional programs, as well as to adjust instruction in response to ongoing learning progress. Experienced special educators understand measurement theory and practices for addressing issues of validity, reliability, norms, bias, and interpretation of assessment results. In addition, experienced special educators understand the appropriate use and limitations of various types of assessments. Experienced special educators collaborate with families and other colleagues to assure non-biased, meaningful assessments and decision-making. Experienced special educators conduct formal and informal assessments of behavior, learning, achievement, and environments to design learning experiences that support the growth and development of individuals with disabilities. Experienced special educators regularly monitor the progress of individuals with disabilities in general and special curricula.
6. **Systematic Instruction.** Experienced special educators possess a repertoire of evidence-based instructional strategies to individualize instruction for individuals with disabilities. Experienced special educators select, adapt, and use these instructional strategies to promote challenging learning results in general and special curricula and to appropriately modify learning environments for individuals with disabilities.

They enhance the learning of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills of individuals with disabilities, and increase their self-awareness, self-management, self-control, self-reliance, and self-esteem. Moreover, experienced special educators emphasize the development, maintenance, and generalization of knowledge and skills across environments, settings, and the lifespan.

7. **Behavior Management.** Experienced special educators have a sophisticated understanding of the dynamic of human behavior which aids them in understanding the form and function of the behavior of individual disabilities especially those with limited communication ability and from cultural diverse or socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. They have the skill needed to design, implement, and evaluation of positive techniques for behavior management that emphasize teaching appropriate behavior and students self-management. When necessary, experienced special educators can safely intervene with individuals with disabilities in crisis.
8. **Instructional Planning.** Individualized decision-making and instruction is at the center of special education practice. Experienced special educators develop long-range individualized instructional plans anchored in both general and special curricula. In addition, experienced special educators systematically translate these individualized plans into carefully selected shorter-range goals and objectives taking into consideration an individual's abilities and needs, the learning environment, and a myriad of cultural and linguistic factors. Individualized instructional plans emphasize explicit modeling and efficient guided practice to assure acquisition and fluency through maintenance and generalization. Understanding of these factors as well as the implications of an individual's exceptional condition, guides the special educator's selection, adaptation, and creation of materials, and the use of powerful instructional variables. Instructional plans are modified based on ongoing analysis of the individual's learning progress. Moreover, experienced special educators facilitate this instructional planning in a collaborative context including the individuals with exceptionalities, families, professional colleagues, and personnel from other agencies as appropriate.
9. **Building a positive learning environment.** Experienced special educators use direct motivational and instructional interventions with individuals with disabilities to teach them to respond effectively to current expectations. Experienced special educators shape environments to encourage the independence, self-motivation, self-direction, personal empowerment, and self-advocacy of individuals with disabilities. Experienced special educators coordinate all these efforts and provide guidance and direction to paraeducators and others, such as classroom volunteers and tutors.
10. **Technology.** Experienced special educators are comfortable using appropriate technologies to support instructional planning and individualized instruction. Experienced special educators use appropriate technologies to support their assessments. They are comfortable using technology as part of their on-going professional development and as an in communication and collaboration with colleagues, parents, and members of the community.

11. **Social integration.** Experienced special educators actively create learning environments for individuals with disabilities that foster cultural understanding, safety and emotional well being, positive social interactions, and active engagement of individuals with disabilities. In addition, experienced special educators foster environments in which diversity is valued and individuals are taught to live harmoniously and productively in a culturally diverse world. Experienced special educators help their general education colleagues integrate individuals with disabilities in regular environments and engage them in meaningful learning activities and interactions. Experienced special educators use assessment information to identify supports and adaptations required for individuals with disabilities to access the general curriculum and to participate in school, system, and statewide assessment programs.
12. **Communication & Language.** Experienced special educators understand typical and atypical language development and the ways in which exceptional conditions can interact with an individual's experience with and use of language. Experienced special educators use individualized strategies to enhance language development and teach communication skills to individuals with disabilities. Experienced special educators are familiar with augmentative, alternative, and assistive technologies to support and enhance communication of individuals with exceptional needs. Experienced special educators match their communication methods to an individual's language proficiency and cultural and linguistic differences. Experienced special educators provide effective language models, and they use communication strategies and resources to facilitate understanding of subject matter for individuals with disabilities whose primary language is not English.
13. **Collaboration.** Experienced special educators routinely and effectively collaborate with families, other educators, related service providers, and personnel from community agencies in culturally responsive ways. This collaboration assures that the needs of individuals with disabilities are addressed throughout schooling. Moreover, experienced special educators embrace their special role as advocate for individuals with disabilities. Experienced special educators promote and advocate the learning and well being of individuals with disabilities across a wide range of settings and a range of different learning experiences. Experienced special educators are viewed as specialists by a myriad of people who actively seek their collaboration to effectively include and teach individuals with disabilities.
14. **Partnership with families.** Experienced special educators understand how issues of human diversity can impact families, cultures, and schools, and how these complex human issues can interact with issues in the delivery of special education services. Experienced special educators understand how the experiences of individuals with disabilities can impact families, as well as the individual's ability to learn, interact socially, and live as fulfilled contributing members of the community. They are skilled at forming an effective partnership with families as active participants in the educational team

15. **Transition/Community-Based Programs.** Experienced special educators develop a variety of individualized transition plans, such as transitions from preschool to elementary school and from secondary settings to a variety of postsecondary work and learning contexts. Experienced special educators use collaboration with family members, students with disabilities, and community members to facilitate the successful transitions of individuals with disabilities across settings and services. They actively support students in the development effective self determination and self advocacy needed in adult life. They explore innovative approached to support the practical skill development of students with disabilities,
16. **Professional & Ethical Practice.** Experienced special educators are guided by the profession’s ethical and professional practice standards. Experienced special educators practice in multiple roles and complex situations across wide age and developmental ranges. Their practice requires ongoing attention to legal matters along with serious professional and ethical considerations. Experienced special educators engage in professional activities and participate in learning communities that benefit individuals with disabilities, their families, colleagues, and their own professional growth. Experienced special educators view themselves as lifelong learners and regularly reflect on and adjust their practice. Experienced special educators are aware of how their own and others attitudes, behaviors, and ways of communicating can influence their practice. Experienced special educators understand that culture and language can interact with exceptionalities, and are sensitive to the many aspects of diversity of individuals with disabilities and their families. Experienced special educators actively plan and engage in activities that foster their professional growth and keep them current with evidence-based best practices. Experienced special educators know their own limits of practice and practice within them.

**Table two** on **page 12** outlines how mastery of this discipline specific knowledge base is integrated into the required course, options and alternatives in this program.

Finally, critical themes for all teachers as articulated by NCATE and major Kentucky specific initiative related to curriculum and assessment are woven into the fabric of our candidate experiences. Literally every course in the graduate special education program make sure that the critical themes are addressed. In a similar vein, a ongoing knowledge of Kentucky program of studies and related curricular documents is structured into the program. **Tables 3** and **4** found on **pages 13 and 14** outline where this information is addressed within this program. The following excerpts from program syllabi give some indication of how instructors address NCATE themes in their course.

### ***Examples of NCATE Themes from Graduate Syllabi***

**Relationship Of EDSP 604 To The National Council For The Accreditation Of Teacher Education (NCATE) Standards And Themes.** Additionally, with reference to NCATE themes, this course addresses 1] diversity, through the unit’s candidates’ exposure to individuals with disabilities, who are their students in the field experience; 2]

technology, through the video recording of lessons co-taught with a regular class teacher, and the use of the Internet in accessing course information and communicating with the course instructor; and 3] evaluates the unit's candidates in their authentic teaching tasks in the field through critiques of the video taped lessons and evaluation of the formative and summative documentation of the collaborative project. (EDSP 604)

**CRITICAL THEMES.** A series of key themes have been identified as essential to the successful preparation of teachers at the dawn of the 21st century. As indicated below this course (EDSP 607) attempts to systematically address these themes.

- **Diversity.** It is critical that all teachers be prepared to work with students who represent the full range of cultural, racial, ethnic, religious, gender, and ability difference found in modern America. The understanding and effective response to diversity of ability is the centerpiece of this entire course. Further, the interaction between disability, other forms of diversity, and social response to difference is highlighted through out the course content.
- **Intellectual vitality.** Today's teachers must be challenged to high achievement and to become a model of life long learner for their future students. The course objectives, activities, and assignments challenge the candidates to think critically about the concepts presented in the courses and see the field as in a constant state of change.
- **Technology.** The effective integration of technology into the instructional process is given in today's world. Technology is used in the delivery of this class by interactive television, use of the internet as a required tool to access course materials, and in assignments which call on the candidates to effectively use computers and related technology. Additionally, an awareness of the growing field of assistive technology is incorporated into course content.
- **Professional community.** A teacher does not work in isolation. The skills of teamwork and collaboration are critical to solving the complex problems we all face. Developing of collaborative working skills and teaming is addressed in course content and projects.
- **Evaluation.** The teacher in preparation should be provided with clear criteria against which to judge his or her performance and progress in developing professional competencies. Candidates are consistently presented with a criteria checklist that outlines the specific expectations of each assignment.
- **Performance assessment.** Candidates knowledge and skills should be authentically assessed in situations that are tied to demands they will face in their future professional life. Candidates are engaged in working as members of a team and conducting assignments in settings beyond the classroom. Additionally the final examination asks candidates to apply knowledge to real world scenarios.