

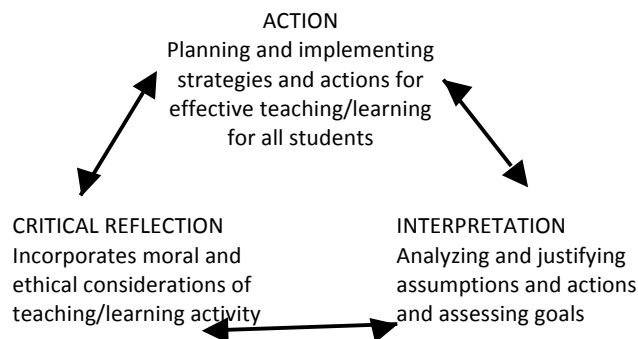
PHILOSOPHY AND THEME OF EDUCATOR PREPARATION AT SHEPHERD UNIVERSITY

TEACHER AS REFLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVER (TARPS), the conceptual framework providing both the philosophical and practical compass for the Teacher Education Program at Shepherd University, embodies our belief that the complexity of teaching and learning precludes a formulaic approach.

Education should empower all students to make informed choices, actively participate in the shaping of one's own life and the shaping of the social, cultural, political, and economic structures of a democratic society. Teachers facilitate this empowerment. Our purpose in providing practicum experiences is to facilitate the development of teacher candidates who demonstrate the willingness and capacity for a pedagogy that truly empowers all students in our diverse classrooms.

To be reflective, teacher candidates need to deeply understand and be able to articulate their own definitions of teaching as well as reflect on their own learning needs. In order to effectively respond to the range of concerns found in the classroom, a teacher needs to be concurrently reflective across three fields of consideration: Action, Interpretation, and Critical Reflection.

The teacher examines her/his Action and is concerned with the effective application of pedagogical knowledge and strategies to achieve stated educational goals for every student. This action is subject to Interpretation. Here the teacher explicates and justifies the assumptions and predispositions that underlie her/his teaching/learning activity. During the process of Critical Reflection, the teacher assesses the adequacy of the educational goals toward which the educational experience leads and incorporates moral and ethical criteria in assessing the objective outcomes of teaching/learning activities.



In the interplay between coursework and practicum experiences, practicum experiences provide teacher candidates with opportunities to approach teaching by identifying problems, framing them in meaningful contexts, considering alternative solutions, choosing and implementing courses of action, and reflectively analyzing evidence collected to improve outcomes in the ongoing cycle of teaching and learning.

Programmatically, this is accomplished by the interplay between coursework and practicum experiences. Most of the courses in our Professional Education sequence are characterized by a cyclic pattern of attendance in campus-based course/experiences and performance in a field-based site. This campus-practicum-campus-practicum pattern ensures that each episode of action is followed by a systematic opportunity to reflect on practical experience and the theoretical frameworks that guide practical activity. Practicums are not just opportunities for application, but are occasions for critical reflection on the connection between practice and theory/research.