

How important are curriculum and instruction to a prospective teacher?

The curriculum and instruction course is a required course in the professional preparation program of prospective teachers. In this course, I facilitate the process in which prospective teachers acquire knowledge about the curriculum and various teaching methods that are used in kindergarten through eighth grade level in California schools. I help prospective teachers develop skills in preparation of subject content, as well as planning lessons and evaluating student progress. For many prospective teachers, the teaching-learning process is often viewed as both a science and an art. The Multiple-Subject Credential candidate must take the curriculum and instruction course in education. This course is helpful because it gives students the necessary background to identify their own views about teaching and putting curriculum and instruction into practice in the classroom. The course provides prospective teachers with basic educational theory that is reinforced in the curriculum and instruction coursework as they become acquainted with transferring learning theory into practice.

Do your students become teachers directly after taking your classes?

Not necessarily. The elementary curriculum course is one of the final courses that prospective teachers take prior to their student teaching practicum. When students leave this course, they are prepared to provide small group and large group instruction in schools under the direct supervision of a master teacher with the cooperative assistance of a university supervisor.

What are some of the problems that these young prospective teachers face?

Prospective teachers often have difficulty with managing a classroom, relating to parents, and keeping informed about educational changes. In classroom management, prospective teachers in their first-year teaching are trying out many strategies. Prospective teachers must practice and be consistent in developing an effective classroom management plan that stimulates a positive learning environment. I believe this type of management plan needs to be closely related to their own belief system on handling major disruption in the classroom or modifying student behavior. Relating to parents, prospective teachers as well as first-year teachers often confront parents who are from a different language and cultural background than their own. Therefore, a first-year teacher must be sensitive and cognizant of what to say and basically know how to relate to various people.

There is a dire need in teacher education to prepare our prospective teachers in the area of cross-cultural awareness and empowering them with the confidence, knowledge, and sensitivity to cope with the multi-ethnic school environment. For example, an awareness might be in acquiring knowledge of the variations in lifestyles, socioeconomics and belief systems of particular ethnic groups. With respect to staying current professionally, first-year teachers are often so committed to the teaching profession during the first few years of their employment that professional development becomes obsolete. They are so busy organizing their classrooms, teaching, and understanding the school organizational plan that the current changes in education are not addressed.

How can you get more culturally diverse students into the Teacher Education Program?

I believe that we need to move forward and move aggressively in our recruitment efforts. That is, begin a recruitment effort by targeting elementary-level students of

different cultures in terms of career preparation programs available at CSU, Fresno. Using graduate students who represent the culturally diverse population as liaisons would be a possible way to begin the recruitment process. Current teachers who also represent diverse cultures at the elementary school sites would make excellent recruitment personnel. Role modeling, encouragement, and support are critical to elementary- and secondary-level students who may wish to attend CSU, Fresno. I view parental involvement in the early stages of recruitment efforts as critical. Often, parents are uninformed of the potential educational opportunities that the university has to offer their children. If we are to sincerely prepare young people who will cope with our pluralistic society, then we must not be complacent in our recruitment efforts.

Do you ever hear from former students?

After 18 years in the teaching profession, I have a large extended family of former students across the country and abroad that I have stayed in touch with over the years. These people often remind me of the reality of my years in the profession because many of them are now in leadership positions. I am glad to say many of my former students are now in the teaching profession and our conversations often focus on classroom experiences.

What do you do when you are not teaching?

I really enjoy time alone or with a few friends or family members. I love to read fiction, biographies, and books on cultural history. I enjoy the outdoors very much and make every effort to spend time in the mountains or on the coast. I also enjoy traveling, so I spend much of my time traveling nationally and internationally. I find that traveling and taking pictures in the back roads of California is a real joy to me when I am not teaching at the university.