Chapter 15

Using a Multi-Linked Conceptual Framework to Promote Quality Learning in a Teacher Education Program

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Deliberation about worthwhile goals and appropriate means must be an ongoing activity in the teacher education community. These deliberations would be aided by a conceptual framework that identifies central tasks of teacher preparation, those core activities that logically and practically belong to the preservice phase of learning to teach.

(Feiman-Nemser, 1990, p. 227)

The purpose of this final chapter is to bring together ideas from the previous four parts of this book into a complete multi-linked conceptual framework to guide teacher education design. As explained in Chapter 1, a conceptual framework is a vision or plan to guide the content of courses, approaches to teaching and learning, and relationships between schools and universities. It may also describe the type of teacher that the program is trying to develop.

When considering the quality of a teacher education program, a key question to ask is, “Does it have a conceptual framework and, if so, what is the basis of its structure?” In a conventional teacher education design, it is likely that different knowledge bases determine its structure with the intention that students apply these ideas on practicum during their school experiences. This step-by-step approach selects courses to promote different knowledge bases, allocates them in an order, places the practicum, and last of all allocates instructors to the courses. Such mechanistic thinking often produces an incoherent teacher education program with many elements acting in isolation to one other. Moreover, this fragmentation between courses and between university and school experiences inhibits sustained engagement by students and hence the quality of learning. Such an approach is underpinned by an assumption (more fully discussed in Chapter 1) that the nature of teaching is simplistic and that teachers can learn about the profession or be “trained” using a bit-by-bit mechanistic approach. This is like trying to build a fire by putting one stick on at a time; but there is a lack of critical mass to get it started and keep it going.

There are now increasing numbers of different conceptual frameworks to guide teacher education design. A “google search” on the World Wide Web using the term “conceptual framework” identifies over 200 different examples. Many have a clear conceptual framework and are underpinned by current research into teacher education. The components of these frameworks are described using terms such as “themes,” “competencies,” “outcomes,” and “accomplished practices” usually in the form of a list of desirable principles or characteristics of teachers. Some of the principles include terms like “diversity”, “developing in-depth knowledge”, “developing content or pedagogical content knowledge”, “reflective practitioners,” “community of learners”, “cultural diversity”, “nurturing leadership”, “educational leaders”, “competent researchers”, “constructivist”, “culturally sensitive”, “lifelong learners”, “values history”, “collaboration”, “authentic inquiry”, “technology literate”, “knowledgeable”, “nature of knowledge”, “think critically”, “make ethical decisions”, “change agents”, “pedagogy”, “coherence”, “caring”, “communication” and “professionalism”. Many of the explanations of these conceptual frameworks also highlight the importance of “coherence” inferring that the components of the conceptual framework should relate to each other to be synergistic and create a dynamic interplay between them.

The principles or themes used in these conceptual frameworks displayed on the World Wide Web have educational merit, however, most relate to the goals of teacher education in terms of the type of teacher they would like to produce. Although this does provide a guide for teacher education design, it often lacks details about how such a teacher is to be developed. Also, listing these goals of teacher education as independent elements may not be the best way to ensure coherence in the design of a teacher education program. For instance, it is possible that courses are designed to address these principles independently which does not promote coherence and connectedness between them. In some cases, there is even a trap of falling back into conventional mechanistic ways of thinking, particularly if the themes or principles are still treated as a “list” to be addressed one by one.

The conceptual framework promoted in this book is different. In addition to identifying the goals of teacher education in terms of desirable principles or characteristics of a teacher, the multi-linked conceptual framework also identifies structures to develop such a teacher which are the nominated links. These links with ideas distilled from relevant chapters is shown in the complete multi-linked conceptual framework in Figure 15.1.

The conceptual framework in Figure 15.1 includes the desirable characteristics of a beginning teacher and refers to the necessary structures that are likely to develop such characteristics. These structures are embedded in the university courses, the relationship with schools and the identity of teacher