

Department of Education

*Conceptual Framework*

## Elements of the Learning Environment

Personal

Educational Beliefs

Collaborative

Practice

Assessment

Stakeholders

Discipline

Knowledge

Instructional

Strategies

Diversity of

Student Needs

Classroom

Structures

### **Learner**

International

## Influences on the Learning Environment

Personal

Educational Beliefs

Diversity of

Student Needs

Classroom

Structures

Collaborative

Practice

Assessment

Stakeholders

Discipline

Knowledge

Instructional

Strategies

Learner

Community

Nation

School

District/State

*Reflective*

Practitioner

# Philosophical Mode

***Why*** are things the way they are, and what ought to be?

# Interpretative Mode

***How*** is it understood by all stakeholders?

# Descriptive Mode

***What*** happens? What could happen?

**Philosophical**

*Is this the “best” solution and for whom (the teacher? the learner?)? Why is it “good” or “not good”? Is it ethical? Is it just? Does it have merit, value? By whose criteria or philosophy?*

**Interpretive**

*What message was sent by this decision? How are events experienced by individuals and groups?*

**Descriptive**

*What exactly is going on? What actions and behaviors are involved? What techniques are used? What techniques could have also been used? What external pressures are shaping classroom actions?*

## Components of the Decision Making Process:

In, on and for Reflective Practice

**Educational Dilemmas**

Control

Societal

Curriculum

#### Learner

What can you do?

##### Discuss your educational philosophy with your professors, supervisors, cooperating teachers, peers, and other colleagues.

*When you are frustrated by inattentive, off-task, and/or disruptive student behavior, think beyond classroom management and consider instructional and other variables*

*Ask the “why” questions:*

Why do you (or others) teach *this* material in *this* order?

Why did you (or others) choose that particular technique?

Why would someone else do it different?

Why might students/parents/administrators

misunderstand your actions?

Why do *these* students need what you are teaching and doing?

Why do we do things *this* way?

Educational Dilemmas

Dilemma: a situation demanding a choice between equally undesirable outcomes that arises when values are in conflict. Dilemmas in education come about daily, and often because a teacher has to decide between equally desirable ends due to a lack of time (Music or art? Literature or creative writing?) Within the teacher education program at CUA the issue of “dilemma” is key. We strive to help our students to understand the types of dilemmas that can come about, as well as to systematically analyze both the source and possible reactions to various dilemmas in both theory and in practice.

Berlak (1981) used the word dilemma in conjunction with education to describe neutral views or perspectives that are held by teachers on educational issues. Based on the teacher’s knowledge and beliefs about children learning and teaching, teacher actions in the classroom might be plotted on continuums bounded at the extremes by opposing ideas or views about control, curriculum and societal issues. In an absolute sense, these views cannot be regarded as right or wrong, rather these ideas simply represent different, but legitimate, perspectives on an issue. Where a teacher is found on each continuum will determine how the teacher will decide how to act in a situation. The teacher who employs the components of decision making to examine the issues will be aided in making informed, principled choices. In all cases, the teacher’s personal experiences, philosophy of education, and knowledge of educational theory and practice will influence which perspective the teacher will demonstrate in the classroom.

Educational dilemmas are found in the tension in the competing needs and desires among and within the elements of the learning environment. In the section below, specific examples of such dilemmas are given, but Berlak (1981) summarized educational dilemmas through the use of the issues mentioned above: control, curriculum and society. Within each broad area are a series of possible areas of conflict.

* ***Control dilemmas*** address perspectives on the sharing of power in the schools and the type of responsibility the school takes for its children. Examples of this type of dilemma include:
  + Whole child vs. child as student: Is the school responsible for meeting a wide range of needs and developing a wide range of skills or only for intellectual and cognitive areas?
  + Teacher vs. child control of time: Should teachers or students control when activities are begun and how long they take?
  + Teacher vs. child control of operations: Should teachers or students control the behavior in various curricular domains?
  + Teacher vs. child control of standards: Should teachers or students act, maintain and/or monitor standards of performance
  + Administration vs. teacher control of classroom: Should administrators (or other external agents) or teachers have final decisions about the day-to-day management of classroom activities?
  + Teacher’s role in curricular decisions (bureaucratic, functional, or independent): Should the teacher follow a prescribed curriculum, adapt and interpret content to fit the situation, or construct and create new curricular content?
  + Teacher’s role in instructional strategy decisions (bureaucratic, functional, or independent): Should the teacher conduct instruction according to some outside standard, adapt the ideas imposed from without to suit the situation, or choose lesson process independently?
* ***Curriculum Dilemmas*** focus on the perspectives on knowledge itself, its worth, creation, and purpose for the individual. Examples of this type of dilemma include:
  + Knowledge is public vs. personal: Should schools emphasize a set body of facts and skills that can be demonstrated or experiential knowledge that is useful to the learner?
  + Knowledge is product vs. product: Should the curriculum be organized around content or desirable skills and processes?
  + Knowledge as given vs. problematical: Should knowledge be given by the teacher or discovered by the learner?
  + Intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation: Should the motivation to learn come from within the student or result from teacher action?
  + Learning is holistic vs. molecular: Is learning better presented in an integrated way or in pieces until the whole is known?
  + Each child is unique vs. member of a category: In selecting knowledge and organizing for instruction, should the focus be on differences or shared characteristics?
  + Learning is social vs. individual: Should there be interactions between persons who are learning or should the interactions be limited to the student and the material or the student and the teacher?
  + Learner as person vs. client: Should the teacher relate to the student in an informal and personal manner or maintain a formal and detached relationship?
* ***Societal Dilemmas*** address both the role of education in larger society, as an instrument for the transmission of culture and as an agent for change, and the role of the educational setting as an intact community with questions of justice and governance comparable to that of the larger world. Examples of this type of dilemma include:
  + Childhood continuous vs. unique and separate: Is childhood a time to prepare for adulthood or a time to treasure and set aside?
  + Equal vs. differential allocation of time, materials and resources: Should time, materials and resources be distributed equally or differentially among learners?
  + Equal justice under the law vs. ad hoc application of the rules: Should there be equal and uniform sanctions for transgressions from the rules or should sanctions be determined individually?
  + Common culture or sub-group consciousness: Should schools encourage the development of a shared culture or develop the cultures of sub-groups among individuals?

Normally educators fall somewhere in the middle of the extremes listed above, shifting toward one end or the other depending on the situation, but are expected to maintain a fairly consistent approach to each type of problem based on experience and personal educational philosophy. It should be made clear that the Education Department at CUA, both as a unit and as individual faculty members, is not neutral. The courses and required elements for graduation emphasize social justice and student-centered learning. Teacher candidates are actively encouraged to see students as individuals who construct their own knowledge through all the experiences they have in and out of school. Teacher candidates are expected to address issues of control, curriculum and culture at all levels of the program, and are pushed to compare their own experiences with those of students in struggling inner city public schools. It would be disingenuous to suggest that we as a department do not have strong opinions on where educators should fall on the continuums described above, but we hope that even teacher candidates who hold differing views complete our program stronger by struggling with these issues.