INTEGRATING EDUCATIONAL THEORY INTO UNIVERSITY CURRICULA THROUGH AN EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This article was prepared by

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Introduction: The inspiration for an Educational Conceptual Framework

Educational conceptual frameworks (ECFs) are used by academic programs to provide direction for curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation, and to explicate learning paradigms and teaching approaches (Hean, Craddock, & O'Halloran, 2009). ECFs identify the guiding values, philosophies, theories, and processes for implementing specific educational programs, and can provide a reference point for professional reflexivity. Despite widespread acceptance of their value and increasing requirements by accreditation bodies for their use (e.g. Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2011), the scholarship of curricular frameworks in relation to higher education is in its infancy (Lee, Steketee, Moran, & Rogers, 2013), and there are few papers describing their development (Payler, Meyer, & Humphris, 2007; Pearson & Hubball, 2012).

Without an established ECF, educators may have difficulty identifying the educational theories and philosophies that underpin their teaching. Lee and colleagues’ review of health professional education literature revealed that little attention has been paid to the broad or comprehensive theoretical underpinnings associated with curricula (Lee et al., 2013). An exploratory study of interprofessional curriculum development found that instructors tended to focus on instructional structures and methods, rather than underlying educational theory (Hean et al., 2009). The investigators suggested that programs would benefit if instructors had better familiarity with key learning theories.

This paper uses a descriptive, reflective case study approach (Pearson, Albon, and Hubball, 2015; Stake, 1995) to report on how one program developed and is using a specific ECF. In the first part of the paper, we describe the steps taken to develop, disseminate, and encourage uptake of the ECF across our community of educators. In the latter part of the paper,
we reflect on our learning throughout the process, including discussion of productive tensions that we experienced as we tested out the development process.

**Developing the case**

Providing a description of a specific case can be useful in answering “how” and “why” questions about contemporary events (Pearson, Albon & Hubball, 2015, p. 1). We decided to frame our experience as both an instrumental case (Stake, 1995), to provide an illustration of how an ECF can be developed, and as descriptive case (Yin, 2009) to provide details about our experience in a specific context. We were guided by Stake’s approach to case study research, which supports the use of a variety of data collection approaches.

We chose a case study approach because we wanted to explore and describe how we engaged in the process of ECF development, as we had not seen these kinds of descriptions in the literature. The questions we used to guide the writing of the case study (Stake, 1995) included: What process was used in constructing and developing the ECF? What were the facilitators and barriers to creating the ECF? How did it evolve and where was it used?

To write the case study, we used document review from meeting minutes and other documents produced through the course of the ECF development, and observations from being part of the process, including notes taken by several of the research team. Documents included written feedback from users of the ECF who discussed it in workshops and departmental meetings. While we cannot claim that all of our notes are as “meticulous” as Pearson, Albon and Hubball (2015) encourage those involved in case study research in STOL to keep, we did have many notes individually and collectively, which we analyzed in writing this case description.
As Pearson, Albon & Hubball (2015) point out, ethical issues and confidentiality can be challenging issues in this kind of writing project. Our project was for quality improvement which did not require ethics review from the Office of Ethics Review of our institution. We recognize that our conclusions and learnings were reached through this quality improvement project carried out in our local context, not through a formal research process. As part of this quality improvement process, we are writing collectively about how we ourselves developed an innovation within our department. Nevertheless, we considered ethical practice in constructing the case study. For example, to maintain confidentiality, we have not attributed specific quotes or other information to individuals involved either from the writing team or from others who provided feedback.

The authors are researchers who brought a range of research experiences and skills to this reflective process. In some ways, we were participant-observers (Angrosino, 2005; Stake, 1995). The writing of the ECF document, of this paper, and of other papers and presentations on the ECF generated considerable information about the experience. While we did not have external researchers working with us, we did have a variety of roles taken up by members of the writing team - four of us were involved in the writing of the first drafts of the ECF, and others came in later and for the writing of this paper. All of us contributed to fleshing out the case study description.

**Introduction of the Case**

We developed a specific ECF for a Canadian Masters level entry-to-practice professional program. A general overview of the process is represented in Figure 1. This figure identifies four stages in an overlapping, iterative, and non-linear process: forming a development committee,
drafting the ECF document, finalizing the document, and sharing and disseminating the ECF with a range of audiences.

Figure 1: The Iterative, Non-Linear process of developing an ECF

ECF development takes place in a particular context that is influenced by many factors – e.g. political, institutional, social, economic, and historical. Although the process appears linear, it is not as linear as the diagram suggests with iterations between and within each stage.

The authors of this paper are faculty members who came together to develop and disseminate the ECF. An initial ad hoc subcommittee (of the department’s Curriculum Committee) was made up of four faculty members (Dawson, Trentham, Cockburn, Teachman), with the department chair (Rappolt) acting as a consultant. As the ECF took shape, other members of the curriculum committee became involved in dissemination to the department as a whole, to students, and to the clinical community. In this
paper, “we” and “our” refers primarily to the group of authors involved in this development and dissemination process.

We are among the increasing number of educators and researchers in higher education – professors and classroom instructors, clinical preceptors, administrators, curriculum developers, and evaluators – who are focusing on educational scholarship and who seek to ground discipline-specific knowledge and teaching with educational and professional development theory. Over the past few decades, many educational theories have been reviewed and deemed valuable for framing higher education programs (e.g. (Kaufman, 2003; Mattick, Barnes, & Dieppe, 2013; Thomas, Saroyan, & Dauphinee, 2011); this paper contributes to the growing conversation about how theoretical perspectives can be applied in higher education.

**Forming the ECF committee and beginning the work**

The ad-hoc sub-committee was mandated to develop an explicit ECF document to support program accreditation by a national professional association that required a well-articulated relationship between interrelated educational and professional conceptual frameworks. As a national professional conceptual framework had been clearly established (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2012), our first task was to adopt a guiding definition for an educational conceptual framework.

Table 1 outlines the few references to educational conceptual frameworks found in the literature, as well as other related terms. In some papers, the descriptions were very brief or not defined, and in other papers, the description spanned several pages and included complex graphical representations. For example, Metcalfe and colleagues (Metcalfe, McInally, Strickland, Adamson, & Tittanen, 2012) used the term ECF interchangeably with pedagogical framework, but did not explicitly define an ECF. Lee and colleagues (Lee et al., 2013) described the rationale for developing a
“conceptual framework for curriculum development” and provided guidance on how to develop a tool for a specific program. In summary, there appeared to be a range of terms used to describe the frameworks used in higher education, each providing some potential direction for understandings of how ECFs are conceptualized and implemented.

Based on this review of terminology in the literature, the subcommittee created the following working definition of an educational conceptual framework: “An ECF is an explicit representation of a program’s educational philosophy, including the concepts, constructs, principles, values, beliefs, and theories that inform approaches to teaching, learning, curriculum development, curriculum renewal, and the relationships between these” (Dawson, et al., 2012). Working forward from this definition, we took the position that to be beneficial, each of our ECF documents would need to be curriculum and context specific. A program’s organizational, political, and social environments, as well as its vision, mission and values influence the ways in which faculty understand teaching and learning, and how an ECF is developed (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011). Accordingly, an ECF should be seen as a dynamic document to be revisited and updated in response to shifts in the broader contexts in which programs are immersed.
### Table 1: Examples of terms and definitions found in the health sciences education literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Term</strong> (alphabetical)</th>
<th><strong>Examples of definitions and usage</strong></th>
<th><strong>Focus of Term</strong></th>
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</table>
| Conceptual Framework    | “... an encompassing conceptual framework for educational research would need to be capable of taking into account such elements in a coherent way, providing a means of exploring relationships between them and offering clarity while still capturing the complexity.” (Paylor, et al., 2007, p. 160)  
- Used to refer to methodological processes and results in human resources in health care planning and curriculum design (Parent et al., 2011).  
- “Theoretical underpinnings associated with curriculum in the broad or comprehensive sense of the term” (Sketetee et al., 2013, p. 65). | • Evaluation of an Inter-professional educational program at a large university  
• Course or program  
• Theoretical; not applied; appears to be program |
| Curricular Alignment    | “Ensures that material taught...meets the requirements of national and international accreditation and professional bodies”; horizontal alignment is within semester and years; vertical alignment is across years of the program to prevent re-teaching (Brown, Bourke-Taylor and Williams, 2012) that supports Constructive Alignment (Biggs and Tang, 2007) | Program |
| Curricular Integration  | term used in different ways (Pearson and Hubball, 2012)  
- horizontal integration is connection between disciplines, and vertical integration is “(1) the progression of the curriculum over time, where content unfolds in a logical order and prior learning is accounted for and used to advantage; and (2) the connection to real world contexts where learning is applied.” (Pearson and Hubball, 2012)  
- “intentional uniting or meshing of discrete elements or features [of a planned educational experience].” (Case, 1991 as cited by Pearson and Hubball, 2012, p. 2) | Program |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Curriculum Maps</th>
<th>“Curriculum maps are graphic portrayals of the relationship between program elements—usually courses—and program goals and outcomes. Curriculum maps are helpful sources of information about an existing program and helpful organizers of information when planning a new program.” (McNay, 2009)</th>
<th>Program</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Educational Conceptual Framework (ECF)</td>
<td>Metcalfe et al (2012) use the term ECF interchangeably with pedagogical framework, but do not define an ECF</td>
<td>In this article, used in the context of one course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrative teaching</td>
<td>“teaching and learning processes intentionally designed for connection-making among these phenomena: the perspective and habits of mind of the profession, abstract knowledge, responsible application of concrete skills, the subjective experiences and objective needs of service recipients, germane evidence, professional reasoning, relevant features of the practice situation, and the identity of the practitioner.” (Hooper, et al., 2014, p. 470)</td>
<td>Course or program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Framework</td>
<td>used to refer more to professional content than educational philosophy (Hooper et al., 2014, p. 470)</td>
<td>Program and discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program philosophy</td>
<td>term not defined and state: “Every education program is expected to define a program philosophy and design a curricular plan that is consistent with that philosophy” (Hinman and Darden, 2005, p.17)</td>
<td>Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synoptic capacity</td>
<td>The broad sources, content knowledge of a discipline (Rice as cited by Hinman and Darden, 2005)</td>
<td>Discipline, program</td>
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<td>Teaching philosophy</td>
<td>A short, one- to two-page reflective document that describes an individual’s personal approach to teaching in a systematic and critical manner, with regard to a specific discipline and/or institutional context. (CTSI, U of Toronto, 2012).</td>
<td>Individual instructor/educator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whole Systems learning</td>
<td>Use of themes and curricular threads in addition to other teaching approaches throughout a program (Huber et al, 2007 as cited by Hopper et al 2014)</td>
<td>Program</td>
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Drafting the ECF document

After agreement on the working ECF definition and decisions about how the development process would function, the committee undertook to write a document that would describe why and how the curriculum educates students to become professionals, specifically occupational therapists. In addition to undertaking an extensive review of educational literature, we held a series of consultations with other core and adjunct faculty members to identify educational theories and philosophies used in their pedagogical practice.

In keeping with the ECF definition and the departmental values of diversity and inclusion, the belief that the curriculum needed to be flexible and student-centred (see Table 2 for Departmental Philosophy and Values), the subcommittee aimed to create a document that would address overarching educational philosophy and theory, as opposed to one with a focus on specific professional or occupational theories and competencies. The document was also created to guide for curriculum renewal, for instructors in developing and modifying course content (classroom, clinic, and field based), and for instructors to reflect on their own teaching philosophies and processes, for example, when preparing teaching dossiers.
<table>
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<th>Philosophy &amp; Values</th>
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<td><strong>We believe that:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning is a lifelong, interactive and transformative process. Flexible, student-centred pedagogies are critical for developing and fostering leaders.</td>
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<tr>
<th>And that the role of an educator is to:</th>
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<td>➢ inspire</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ inform</td>
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<tr>
<td>➢ challenge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ stimulate problem solving, reflexivity, and critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>➢ collaboratively discover new knowledge with students</td>
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<tr>
<th>In educating occupational therapists we value:</th>
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<tr>
<td>life-long learning, critical inquiry, and professionalism</td>
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<th>Our purpose is to:</th>
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<tr>
<td>prepare leaders in occupational therapy practice, research and scholarship to improve the health and well-being of individuals and communities, locally and globally ensure that occupational therapy graduates have the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to enable the occupational engagement of all citizens.</td>
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We included a range of educational philosophies and theories. Philosophies are foundational collections of beliefs and assumptions. Philosophies can assist educators to “select actions when theory, evidence and experience are insufficient to fully guide practice” (Hooper & Wood, 2013). Theories explain relationships and provide systematic ways of understanding events or situations by linking two or more concepts, definitions, and propositions that explain or predict these events or situations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005). In the remainder of this paper, we focus on educational theories and theoretically driven approaches.

Selecting the theoretical approaches to include in an ECF was a crucial part of the process and one that shaped our constellation of professional program and faculty characteristics. As we progressed, we drafted summaries of each approach, determined which ones were currently shaping the curriculum, returning to the literature to understand each more deeply. We gradually identified the theories and philosophies we wanted to emphasize in our ECF, winnowing out those that were less salient for our department. We operationalized (through general and specific statements) how the included theories had already shaped our curriculum in terms of teaching and evaluation methods as well as the overall curriculum structure. The subcommittee requested direction from faculty colleagues on which theories should have prominence, and looked for information from individual faculty members on how the theories and perspectives had already been applied in their own teaching and across the program.

Based on the findings from this process, the committee identified six primary theoretical approaches for inclusion in the articulation of the ECF. The approaches are transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 2000), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), social constructivism (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999), critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2009; Giroux,
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2010), cognitive neuroscience (Mergel, 1998), and taxonomies of learning (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Through our process, we recognized that transformative learning theory played an overarching role in our pedagogy. We elected to recognize transformative learning theory in our ECF by noting that this theory frames our curriculum. In this paper, we explain how transformative learning theory describes and informs our curriculum.

In our ECF, there is a discussion about theoretical approaches to skill building and competencies (Dawson et al., 2012). This discussion recognizes the contributions of early behaviourist theorists such as Pavlov (2014/1904) and Skinner (Skinner, 1938), who emphasized skill building through systems of rewards and feedback, as well as cognitivist theorists, for example, Bandura (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986), who sought to explain the internal cognitive learning processes. Links are then made to Mergel’s work (1998) which explored how learning tasks can be broken into smaller components with the subsequent identification of clear objectives. Examples of behaviourist, constructivist, and cognitive/neurological theories used by educators are provided, including reinforcing students’ contributions during class and providing grades. By identifying and explaining more than one theory in relation to working with adult students, instructors are provided with opportunities to consider and choose teaching and learning approaches.

Transformative learning theory

Through our investigations and analysis, we realized that transformative learning was foundational to our curriculum and teaching methods, as it was most coherent with our educational mission, vision, and programmatic values. Transformative learning theory focuses on the learning that occurs as students establish new meanings of their lived experiences, shift and change their insights on themselves and the world around them, engage in
embodied and experiential learning, connect their experiences to broader social influences, and learn to be active change agents. It promotes the idea that learning is a process of meaning-making, and that interrogating and re-establishing meaning often leads to increased knowledge, as well as compassion and understanding about how to live ethically in this complex world (Bierema, 2010; Mezirow, 2000).

This statement extracted from our ECF summarizes the transformative perspective:

“The transformative learning lens we have adopted as a faculty means that we understand that our students enter the University of Toronto program with knowledge that stems from their particular cultural, religious, educational and social experiences and their individual personal attributes. Our curriculum is designed to move our students to a broader understanding of how the world works, to understanding the value of occupation in that world, and to seeing themselves as occupational therapists. This is achieved by actively engaging the students in queries regarding how we know what we know, and explicit questioning of accepted views of power and authority. Fundamental shifts in their consciousness may occur resulting in new views of family, work, society and the world at large. Theorists of transformative learning suggest that the learner’s capacity for compassion, understanding, tolerance and acceptance is greatly expanded using this approach, leading to new ways of interacting with family, work and society (Mezirow, 2000). We strive to ensure our curriculum is truly transformative, and that these changes in consciousness lead to significant changes in our graduating students’ actions.” (Dawson et al., 2012).

**Finalizing the ECF document**

The committee aimed to develop a written document that would clearly and succinctly integrate valuable and relevant education theories within the overarching transformative learning approach, and that would explicitly illustrate how collectively these theories guide the ongoing development and implementation of the curriculum. For each included approach, the ECF
document provides specific examples to show how an educator in the classroom or in fieldwork could use the theory, how that theory influences the curriculum as a whole, and how it influences student assessment. Examples of the influence of Transformative Learning Theory in our curriculum include opportunities for students to identify changes in their clinical reasoning during case-based discussions, expecting them to document changes in their reasoning in their professional portfolios, and the development of guidelines for transcultural dialogue, completed at the beginning of the program with the aim to develop a transculturally safe and challenging learning environment.

The ECF sub-committee discussed draft versions of the ECF document with the full Professional Curriculum Committee, core faculty, students, and community faculty representatives. Literature was reviewed and new evidence sought as questions arose. The final draft was taken to an all-faculty retreat for final affirmation. The final document was submitted to, and accepted by, our national Academic Credentialing Council. The department’s ECF document is available at ().

**Use and dissemination of the ECF**

The third phase of the process, which continues, has involved implementation and dissemination of the ECF. The department has implemented the ECF in five ways.

*Orienting and guiding academic instruction*: New faculty members and sessional instructors are provided with an orientation to the ECF through our onboarding program, our curriculum policy manual, and our mentorship program for new instructors provided by by term coordinators and senior faculty members.
Student orientation to the curriculum: Like other Masters level entry professional programs, our MScOT is intensive and highly integrated. Students are provided with explicit instruction in the ECF as a guide to the curriculum during their orientation in first term of the program. All students also receive a copy of the ECF in the Graduate Student Handbook.

Fieldwork educators’ orientation to and use of the ECF: Each student in the program must complete a minimum of 1000 hours of fieldwork supervised by an occupational therapist. The ECF is disseminated to status only and adjunct faculty and other clinical partners who serve as fieldwork preceptors through our original all-faculty assembly, and through educational seminars for new fieldwork preceptors. The ECF is on our website for easy access and continued reference. As needed or requested,

The ECF is foundational to educational scholarship: The ECF informs faculty members’ teaching dossiers for promotion and tenure reviews, and provides a foundational for its growing body of educational research and scholarship. Educational scholarship encourages instructors and educators to be reflective and critical as they select, analyse, and integrate educational theories and methods into their work, and to articulate theoretical understandings of their work in individual statements of teaching philosophy (Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation, 2012; Medina & Draugalis, 2013). The underlying assumption here is that educational outcomes will improve when educators understand how theories strengthen their teaching by guiding deliberate strategies in planning and delivering material in the classroom.

The ECF forms the basis of curriculum evaluation: The ECF has informed the Professional Curriculum Committee’s development of a program logic model (Rush & Ogborne, 1991) that maps the goals, process and outcomes of teaching and learning in the department.
ECF Evaluation

The implementation of the ECF across the Department has had several outcomes to date. It has formed the base of a program logic model designed as a template for continuous curricular evaluation. Faculty members have used the ECF as a structure or reference point for statements of their personal teaching philosophies in their teaching dossiers and have provided examples of how the ECF has grounded their classroom practices with a stronger theoretical rationale. The ECF has informed faculty meetings, academic term coordination meetings, and preceptor education programming. The ECF is available on our website, and is referred to by prospective students and other members of the public. We look forward to ongoing discussions and more formalized research to further explore the ECF’s impact in our program.

Lessons learned

**Strategic application of diverse learning theories:** Our ECF demonstrates that separate and potentially antithetical learning approaches can be integrated within a framework that specifies when they are most suitably applied. Disparate learning theories and methods are not only relevant but may be critically important for the inclusion and integration of diverse of curriculum content in complex learning environments. The process we used to select the most relevant theories for our program was a series of discussions on the types of learning opportunities our students needed to achieve our educational mission while adhering to our philosophy and values.

The six learning theories included in our ECF are consistent with the academic and fieldwork learning our student need to become competent in occupational therapy practice. These theories are not designated for particular content prescriptively, but articulated within the ECF to guide
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faculty with examples in order to facilitate reflection on, and explicit expression of, the theoretical approaches used within specific courses. The over-arching transformative learning theory provides a structure from which individual faculty members select additional theories most relevant to their course content and skill development strategies. The ECF does not limit faculty from using other educational philosophies or approaches, but serves to signal explicitly our commitment to incorporate, intentionally and strategically, education theory in teaching practice.

**Integrating content in an intensive entry-level professional program:** A professional program necessitates the integration of complex theoretical, scientific, age and diagnostic specific foundational content with programming for professional and clinical skill development and reflexive learning. The statement of an ECF explicitly recognizes that more than one theoretical perspective is required in complex programs, and provides opportunities for different kinds of learning objectives, multiple understandings of how students learn, and validates a range of teaching approaches. Creating and using an ECF can assist programs and individual faculty members in developing more cohesive and effective curricula, and to provide a way to constructively address tensions about the selection, prioritization and integration of curricular content and methods as they arise.

**Adult learners in higher education:** Higher education programs of study are aimed at enabling learning with adult students; these programs span a range of characteristics. An ECF can assist a program in conceptualizing how it aspires to teach adult learners.

Professional programs are a specific form of higher education that require that faculty members invest significant effort in curricular integration to ensure that the content that “needs to be taught” is included in the program and that students are provided with the necessary opportunities to develop required competencies. The adult students in entry-level
professional programs have, relative to non-professional programs, little choice in their coursework and assignments, and must meet explicit requirements to develop specific and predetermined competencies and roles.

Given the complexity in higher education programs of study, these are entities that need to be well conceptualized, implemented, and studied (Fortune, Ryan, & Adamson, 2013; Mattick et al., 2013; Mennin, 2010). The types of questions that are emerging in the literature address the impact of educational philosophy on student outcomes, faculty development, and on social outcomes such as client care (D'Eon, Overgaard, & Harding, 2000; Frenk et al., 2010). For example, some of the questions that our committee grappled with included: How do educators work together in a program to make their philosophical perspectives and assumptions visible to colleagues and to adult students? How do we recognize adult learning principles in this program? How do similarities and differences in teaching approaches affect educational outcomes? How are differences in opinion managed and negotiated? Does congruence among faculty actually lead to better learning outcomes, and when/how is diversity beneficial? Having a variety of institutional spaces available for faculty in higher education to discuss teaching, including questions like these, has been shown to be important for learning about becoming a better educator (e.g. Carter and Brockerhoff-Macdonald, 2011).

A common issue in higher education programs, including professional curricula, is determining the balance between ‘teaching’ theory and enabling practical skill development. Academic faculty typically emphasize theory, while practice-based faculty stress skill development. While these two can co-exist comfortably, the discourse can often reflect tensions. An ECF can assist in mediating these tensions by providing a theoretical bridge. Educators could reflect on their perspectives on skill building by referring to
an ECF, which can assist them to consider when to make the underlying theory explicit to students.

**The relationship of an ECF to individual statements of teaching philosophy:** As many higher education academics come to their teaching roles in higher education without having prior preparation specifically about educational theory and may have limited awareness about the teaching philosophies that they are employing in their teaching, an ECF can provide an important foundation and resource to develop and adapt their courses, and to explicate their individual statements of teaching philosophy. An ECF has the potential to guide faculty in their selection of course content and methods for instruction. It also serves as a vehicle through which faculty members can collaborate in ensuring that the overall curriculum and methods of evaluation are comprehensive, fair, and efficient. The ECF can enrich and improve individual statements of teaching philosophy for annual reviews, promotion and tenure.

**Conclusion**

This paper provides a definition of an educational conceptual framework, and described the process that one Masters entry-level professional educational program undertook to develop and implement an ECF. The framework is situated in, and was influenced by, particular professional, institutional, and social contexts. The challenges and tensions that emerged during this process were described. Our experience is an illustration of how the development and use of an ECF in an academic setting can guide curriculum renewal (program level), as well as classroom teaching and faculty development (instructor level). Educators who aim to instil in their students the importance of reflective and reflexive practice can model these practices by clearly identifying the theories that guide their
educational processes and be transparent about their theoretical grounding with students.

An ECF provides an overarching framework that articulates relationships between the why, what, how, when, and who of a higher education program. An ECF allows individual instructors to greater more clarity about their roles in a larger curricular system, and provides a common language as these roles are enacted and negotiated. Faculty may draw on components of the ECF for their teaching philosophy and the ECF more broadly serves as a mechanism for collaborative faculty development (Lee et al., 2013). Research on the impact of ECFs on curricular effectiveness, student learning and faculty development is warranted.

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