M.A.T.
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
BOOKLET

For Graduate Students in the
Master of Arts in Teaching Program
Early Childhood and Elementary Education

Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Literacy Education

Montclair State University
Revised Spring 2016, Effective Spring 2016
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COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
For M.A.T. Students
in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Literacy Education

Purpose

The Comprehensive Exam is designed to ensure that students graduating from the Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) program in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Literacy Education have firmly grasped the foundational knowledge expected of students pursuing mastery in the fields of early childhood education and elementary education. Thus, the comprehensive nature of this exam requires that you demonstrate knowledge and insights you acquired through experiences in coursework, academic and research literature (course texts and readings), field experiences, and your Clinical I classroom.

The Exam

The Comprehensive Exam is to be completed at the end of the Clinical I semester, or the semester prior to student teaching, in-service graduate student teaching, or the last semester of your program. The 3-hour exam is administered on-campus or at a satellite campus as a computer exam. The computer systems used are Microsoft Office Word and Apple Mac Book. You will be asked to take the exam on a PC or on a Mac computer: therefore, be sure to familiarize yourself with both software programs prior to the exam. The exam is offered during once a semester during both the fall and spring semesters. The exact exam date will be announced at the start of the semester. The exam is not offered during the summer. The exam is a mandatory requirement for obtaining the M.A.T. degree in the Department of Early Childhood, Elementary, and Literacy Education (P-3 MAT, K-5 MAT, dual cert P-3/TSD and K-5/TSD).

You must register to take the Comprehensive Exam through the WESS system before the end of the add/drop period. In order to register you must be a fully matriculated student. This requires having registered for the PRAXIS II exam and sent your admissions ticket to Trish Watson in the ECELE department.

The course codes for the Comprehensive Exam are:

- P-3/K-6 MAT (single or dual certification):
  
  GRAD-CMP75

- P-3/K-6 dual degree/dual certification:
  
  GRAD-CMP72

- The exam consists of an over-arching question that asks you to consider three out of the six areas of concentration described on pages 5 and 6. Each student must answer all parts of the question. You are expected to discuss your academic knowledge as it relates to your Clinical I Experience in answering all parts of the question. You should draw multiple examples from your Clinical I or in-service classroom experience to demonstrate how theoretical ideas and beliefs are put into practice in your classroom.

- Exams will be completed on a computer. Answers must be typed using 12 point font, Times New Roman, double spaced. Since the official student identification number will be used
to identify each student, only your student identification number should be inserted into the Header of the document along with page numbers. There is no limit to the number of pages you may use to answer the questions. Please be sure to indicate the question number for each response. You do not need to re-type the question on the exam.

- All references cited in the exam must identify the original author and date of publication. APA format for in-text citations of author and year is expected.

**Notification of Results**

Students will receive their grades through the WESS system at the end of the semester along with their other course grades. Notification of results will be expedited for students expecting to graduate in the same semester as the test administration.

Messages regarding the exam will be posted on the exam CANVAS site so it’s critical that students register for the exam in order to be able to access information and updates. **Students are held responsible for any information related to the exam, thus it is important to check the CANVAS site and your MSU email account regularly and be certain that it is working properly.**

Students who do not pass the exam the first time, are able to re-take the exam the following semester on a department designated date or during the scheduled exam period. Students must meet with the Graduate Programs Coordinator (GPC) in order to review their exam in detail. Students and the GPC will develop an intervention plan to increase each student’s capacity to pass the exam. Students are responsible for completing the intervention plan and preparing thoroughly for the exam re-take. All students must register to re-take the exam through the WESS system by the appropriate deadline.

**Preparing for the Exam**

In order to facilitate exam preparation, an information session focused on faculty’s expectations for responses to exam questions will be held several before the date of the exam.

The comp exam will include questions relevant to your graduate program based on readings and experiences you have gained in and out of the classroom over the course of your studies at Montclair State University. The areas of concentration that will be covered on the exam reflect the major pedagogical beliefs, theories, and practices that have been discussed in your courses. In order to adequately prepare for the exam, we urge you not to study and commit to memory every major article and publication covered in your courses. Rather, review the readings that you have found contribute the most to your understanding of theory and best practice in these areas of concentration. **Most importantly, be sure that you can describe, analyze, critique, and synthesize relevant knowledge in relation to your experiences in classrooms.**

Graduate students are expected to cite references used. You should know the author’s name and the year of publication and/or title of the books, articles or policy documents that best support your beliefs, knowledge and dispositions towards education in the following areas. **Further, we ask you to consider how the core questions in each of these areas of concentration are relevant to your Clinical I or in-service experience.**

Many students have found it helpful to arrange small study groups in order to review for the exam.
Areas of Concentration

1. **Democratic practice in teaching and learning.** According to John Goodlad and the *Portrait of a Teacher*, a shared vision and belief that MSU hopes for its students is to “understand principles of democracy and plan instruction to promote critical reflection on the ideals, values and practices of democratic citizenship.” In an era when the demographic of our student population continues to shift towards increasing heterogeneity, the call for greater consciousness challenges teachers to be open-minded toward diversity and the potential all students demonstrate in and out of school. Thus, students in our programs must be able to examine the meaning of democratic practice and identify the ways in which it can be enacted as a teacher and realized as a student. Students should be able to respond to questions such as: What is democratic practice? What does it look like in the classroom? How is democratic practice fostered through curriculum? How is democratic practice meaningful to diverse educational settings? How is democratic practice reflected in organizing the classroom and classroom management?

2. **Culture in school, classroom and home.** MSU’s Portrait of a Teacher also highlights the value of “culturally responsive instruction” and the centrality of culture in a child’s life at school and home. Students should be well versed in the multiples ways in which “culture” may influence the knowledge, everyday behaviors or practices, and expectations children and families bring to school. They should also be able to identify strategies to support student achievement in culturally responsive ways in subject areas like reading/literacy, math, science, social studies, and the arts. Finally, teachers should understand how culturally responsive practice may help teachers forge effective partnerships with parents to support student success. What is culturally responsive teaching and learning? How is it embedded throughout your classroom curriculum?

3. **Differentiating instruction for students of diverse needs and abilities.** In every classroom, teachers work with students who have a wide range of needs and abilities and must ensure that all children are engaged in meaningful and appropriate learning experiences. For many teachers, this means being cognizant and responsive to the concerns and interests of students with disabilities, who, increasingly, are included in general education classrooms. How do/can teachers differentiate instruction and adapt their lessons to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, have access to an appropriately challenging curriculum? What are the dilemmas that confront students with and without disabilities and teachers in inclusive classrooms? How do teachers adapt their instruction to serve the gifted and talented student population?

4. **Reading and literacy instruction:** Given what you know about social and cultural aspects of literacy learning, as well as the individual accomplishments students make as they become skilled, motivated readers and writers; what are the characteristics of an early childhood or elementary classroom that support high levels of literacy engagement and success for all students? How does the language and literacy environment teachers create contribute to student learning? What specific teaching practices would you hope to see in a “balanced literacy” program? What does “critical literacy” look like in early childhood and elementary classrooms? How can teachers support literacy learning and engagement for ALL students, including struggling readers, English language learners, and students who are less familiar with the types of literacy discourse and practice that are typically rewarded in school?
5. **Curriculum development.** As teachers we must be able to develop or adapt curriculum to meet the needs of our students. Moreover, we are challenged to develop authentic, reliable and valid methods of assessment as well as integrate and meet the goals of state mandated standards. Curriculum development is a formidable task as teachers must take into consideration several elements when planning meaningful and purposeful learning. How is content planned and implemented in your classroom? What is/should be considered in order to develop curriculum? How are instructional goals balanced with individual student needs in your classroom? How are student centered instruction and other pedagogical strategies put into practices with regard to science, math, social studies or other disciplines?

6. **Historical, political and social factors influencing past and current systems of education in the United States.** Throughout the history of education in the U.S., there have been social and political trends, and resulting education policies that have influenced the ways current systems of education are organized. Groundbreaking and controversial movements in education, for example the civil rights movement (Brown versus the Board of Education), bilingual education, *No Child Left Behind*, charter schools and privatization, have each have left an indelible mark on our educational priorities and on what teachers do (or should do) in their classrooms. What historical trends and/or education policies appear to have influenced the current school and classroom practices you’ve observed?

As stated above, the **Reading List** for this exam consists of the texts, articles, and policy papers you have read and discussed in your courses. You should review all course materials, and select sources that are most applicable to the areas of concentration. You should plan to draw on several (approximately 3) educational theorists and researchers in a meaningful way for each question. Below are on-line resources related to the New Jersey Curriculum Content Standards and Standards for Teachers.

**ON-LINE RESOURCES**

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (for Language Arts and Mathematics)

New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS)
[http://www.state.nj.us/njded/cccs/index.html](http://www.state.nj.us/njded/cccs/index.html)

New Jersey Language Arts Literacy Curriculum Framework:
[http://www.state.nj.us/njded/frameworks/lal/index.html](http://www.state.nj.us/njded/frameworks/lal/index.html)

New Jersey Preschool Teaching and Learning Expectations
[http://www.state.nj.us/education/ece/code/expectations/](http://www.state.nj.us/education/ece/code/expectations/)

New Jersey Professional Standards for Teachers (NJPST)
[http://www.state.nj.us/njded/profdev/profstand/standards.pdf](http://www.state.nj.us/njded/profdev/profstand/standards.pdf)

Portrait of a Teacher, Center of Pedagogy, Montclair State University
**Evaluation Criteria**

ECELE Faculty review each exam using the following rubric.

**RUBRIC**

**COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**

Department of Early Childhood, Elementary and Literacy Education

Spring 2016

**Pass:** Satisfactory completion of the culminating graduate comprehensive exam required for the M.A.T. degree.

**Requires 2nd Review:** Concern for and/or minimal response in more than one area.

**Fail:** Based on the answers provided, the student does not demonstrate a mastery of knowledge and understandings of the topics covered in the exam and must therefore re-take the exam in full during the next administration of the comprehensive exam.

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<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Requires 2nd Review</th>
<th>Fail</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Literacy environment and literacy instruction</strong></td>
<td>Student demonstrates depth of understanding of literacy rich environment and effective literacy practices using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are well supported by several examples referenced from relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates partial understanding of literacy rich environment and effective literacy practices using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are minimally supported and/or references cited are not drawn from the academic literature, theories/theorists or best practices relevant to the topic.</td>
<td>Student does not demonstrate depth of understanding of literacy rich environment and effective literacy practices. References offer minimal support for the claims made and/or are not included and/or are not relevant to the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Democratic practice</strong></td>
<td>Student demonstrates depth of understanding of democratic practice using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are well supported by several examples referenced from relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates partial understanding of democratic practice using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are minimally supported and/or references cited are not drawn from the academic literature, theories/theorists or best practices relevant to the topic.</td>
<td>Student does not demonstrate depth of understanding of democratic practice. References to relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices are not included or are not relevant to the topic. In either instance, references included offer minimal support for the claims made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culturally responsive teaching</strong></td>
<td>Student demonstrates depth of understanding of culturally responsive teaching using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are well supported by several</td>
<td>Student demonstrates partial understanding of culturally responsive teaching using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are minimally supported and/or references cited are</td>
<td>Student does not demonstrate depth of understanding of culturally responsive teaching. References to relevant academic literature, educational</td>
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<th></th>
<th>Examples referenced from relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices.</th>
<th>Not drawn from the academic literature, theories/theorists or best practices relevant to the topic.</th>
<th>Theorists/theories, and best practices are not included or are not relevant to the topic. In either instance, references included offer minimal support for the claims made.</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Differentiating instruction to meet the learning needs of individual</strong></td>
<td>Student demonstrates depth of understanding of differentiated instruction using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are well supported by several examples referenced from relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates partial understanding of differentiated instruction using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are minimally supported and/or references cited are not drawn from the academic literature, theories/theorists or best practices relevant to the topic.</td>
<td>Student does not demonstrate depth of understanding of differentiated instruction. References to relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices are not included or are not relevant to the topic. In either instance, references included offer minimal support for the claims made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Curriculum planning and instruction</strong></td>
<td>Student demonstrates depth of understanding of curriculum and instruction using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are well supported by several examples referenced from relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates partial understanding of curriculum planning and instruction using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are minimally supported and/or references cited are not drawn from the academic literature, theories/theorists or best practices relevant to the topic.</td>
<td>Student does not demonstrate depth of understanding of curriculum planning and instruction. References to relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices are not included or are not relevant to the topic. In either instance, references included offer minimal support for the claims made, or examples of practice do not fully support the theoretical frame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Historical and political dimensions of education</strong></td>
<td>Student demonstrates depth of understanding of historical and political dimensions of education using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are well supported by several examples referenced from relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices.</td>
<td>Student demonstrates partial understanding of how historical and political dimensions impact education using appropriate references and terminology. Statements are minimally supported and/or references cited are not drawn from the academic literature, theories/theorists or best practices relevant to the topic.</td>
<td>Student does not demonstrate depth of understanding regarding historical and political dimensions of education. References to relevant academic literature, educational theorists/theories, and best practices are not included or are not relevant to the topic. In either instance, references included offer minimal support for the claims made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical analysis and application</td>
<td>Student forms broad and insightful connections between the educational concepts raised in the question and practices in the clinical classroom. The theoretical frame is clearly linked with specific practices in the classroom. The analysis takes into account both the strengths and shortcomings of the clinical classroom while discussing best practice approaches for each area.</td>
<td>Student forms some strong connections between the educational concepts raised in the question and practices in the clinical classroom. Student does not always link the theoretical frame to specific practices in the classroom. The analysis minimally discusses strengths and shortcomings of the clinical classroom and/or best practice approaches for each area.</td>
<td>Student does not provide insight and/or does not make connections between the educational concepts raised and the clinical classroom. The analysis does not take into account the strengths and shortcomings of the clinical classroom and/or does not include best practice approaches for each area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic writing</td>
<td>Writing is clear and concise. Statements are explained in detail without raising additional questions from the reader. Language usage is appropriate for a professional paper.</td>
<td>Writing is sometimes inconsistent in clarity. Statements would benefit from greater detail. Some statements raise questions from the reader. Connections between theory and practice are sometimes not explicit. Language usage is appropriate for a professional paper.</td>
<td>Writing is variable and inconsistent. Further detail is needed to increase clarity. Essay raises questions as to the level of understanding writer has regarding the areas being addressed in the question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas are presented in a well organized fashion. The essay is easy to read and informative.</td>
<td>Ideas are generally presented in an organized fashion. The essay is easy to read and informative.</td>
<td>Ideas do not flow easily; ideas seem to jump around. Difficult to read for meaning. Not informative.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answers all parts of the question</td>
<td>Responds in full to all parts of the questions.</td>
<td>Omits parts or segments of one question.</td>
<td>Omits parts or segments of the questions. Responses are not fully developed.</td>
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The exam will be graded as “Pass” or “Fail”. Your grade will be submitted through the WESS system.

NOTES

An example of a citation of an author (Last name, year of publication) in text:

Critics of the state standards for science note that the document informs science teachers what they are expected to do in the classroom, but it does not address the realities of teaching all students regardless of their differences (Rodriguez, 1998).

Faculty who evaluate the exams strongly discourage referencing theorists without substantiating and explaining their work. It is strongly suggested that you research
what the theorists have reported and be able to include their beliefs in relation to practices and strategies you have observed or initiated in the classroom or school community.

EXAMPLE with notes

Lucy Calkins (1998) states that students should be given choices when directed to a reading or writing task. [Relates to theorist/author.] Writing and reading about personal interests will spark engagement and investment in their work. [Explains why ‘theory’ is important or what it means – re-states or elaborates on the theory.] In my classroom, students have an opportunity to choose their reading material during Reading Workshop. The classroom is supplied with an abundant library of all different reading levels. Students know their current reading levels, and were able to select a book of interest on their reading level. [Describes the practice in the classroom, and gives enough detail so that reader understands the procedure and context.]

Additional Resources

The following resources provide additional assistance to develop your writing style in preparation for the exam.

The Center for Writing Excellence, Sprague Library, first floor, Reference Area http://www.montclair.edu/cwe/ is available to all university students who are committed to developing and improving as writers. It is designed as a separate, but complementary, experience to that of the classroom. The Center for Writing Excellence offers weekly one-on-one tutoring sessions with trained Graduate Assistants. Tutoring sessions are designed to provide students with immediate help on particular writing assignments and long-term support and feedback that will enable students to improve their writing.

Whether students choose to come to The Center for Writing Excellence on their own, or are encouraged to do so by an instructor, participation is always on a voluntary basis. We encourage writers at all academic and developmental levels to visit, as it is both part of our philosophy and our experience that all writers, from published writers to first year writers, benefit from feedback offered by engaged and dedicated listeners and readers.

The Center for Writing Excellence offers one hour weekly appointments, as well as drop-in appointments. It is located in Sprague Library. All regular appointments must be made online. However, drop-in appointments are available during all hours, so please feel free to stop in for tutoring. Students that drop-in will be treated on a first-come, first-serve basis. We look forward to working with you!

APA/MLA Format

For written work you complete for your courses, you are required to follow APA (American Psychological Association) or MLA (Modern Language Association) guidelines. Ask your professor which format is acceptable for course assignments. You are expected to know how to cite properly, create bibliographies and works cited documents in the proper format, and use appropriate grammar and punctuation. If this seems unfamiliar to you, don’t panic! There are lots of resources available to you, which include:

Sprague Library: The librarians at Sprague can help direct you to resources for writing in several different formats, and you can even send questions online.
**Graduate Workshop:** The Graduate School offers a series of workshops throughout the year for all students. One workshop in the series is focused on writing styles and citation formats. Information regarding the workshops is sent out to students via the graduate student listserv.

**Writing Manuals:** APA and MLA manuals are available for purchase at most major bookstores. Graduate students are well advised to purchase at least the APA manual, since it offers guidelines on all facets of writing that you can use for many of your courses. Online Guides: For online information regarding the mechanics of writing and the various formatting styles in existence please see link: [http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/citex.html](http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/citex.html)