
STANDARDS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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In this issue of *Educational Perspectives*, the contributors explore the theme of standards in education with particular reference to standards for K-12 students and standards for teachers. I'd like to use this space, however, to describe related developments in establishing and maintaining standards in programs of teacher education.

Although states have had teacher education standards for many years, it is only recently that they have begun to establish common sets of standards for all teachers. The standards of each state and the approval or accreditation processes were generally developed by the state education agency under the auspices of the state board of education. Program quality was a matter of periodic state review and accreditation—graduation from a state approved program being a condition of teacher licensure. These standards tended to vary from state to state, in spite of efforts by organizations such as the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC) to establish consistency.

The NASDTEC model, however, has not been the only option for states and colleges to follow. In the early 1950s, five education organizations* collaborated to develop an independent national accreditation system for teacher education programs and, in 1954, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was formed (NCATE 1995).

Initially, NCATE standards were seen by many stakeholders to lack rigor and the process was considered by some to be cumbersome and unnecessarily expensive, but this changed markedly in 1987 with the establishment of new, more rigorous standards and improved procedures. As a result a large percentage of programs (over 30 percent in some years) failed to meet the standards. Thus, NCATE developed greater credibility both inside and outside the profession.

One clear indication of the wider acceptance of the NCATE standards and accreditation processes is the fact that 46 states now have partnership agreements with NCATE whereby NCATE and state accreditation visits are conducted collaboratively or jointly. In some cases, such as in Hawai'i, the state accepts NCATE accreditation in lieu of its own accreditation.

**Organizations involved in creating NCATE include: the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards of the National Education Association, the National Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National School Boards Association.*

Evidence supports a growing acceptance of NCATE among states and colleges. Three states, Arkansas, North Carolina and West Virginia, require all teacher education programs to be NCATE accredited. In 1996, the influential report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future recommended that all teacher education programs be NCATE accredited. The popularity of NCATE by the teacher education community can be measured by the fact that the number of candidates for NCATE accreditation has nearly tripled in the last five years.

In 2001, after many years of following the NASDTEC model, the College of Education (COE) obtained NCATE accreditation for the first time. The faculty of the COE officially decided in 1998 to pursue NCATE accreditation for several reasons. The standards are consensus standards created by the profession. The process provides a useful mechanism and structure for self-assessment and for peer review. Such accreditation improves the College's status in the state and nation and improves the value of the degrees the College awards. The College will undoubtedly benefit. But even if the College does not benefit directly from the process, the participation of the University of Hawai'i and every other teacher education institution in the nation will serve to improve the quality of education.

What makes the NCATE process useful to the College of Education? In addition to the reasons stated above, NCATE accreditation would essentially replace the State Accreditation of Teacher Education process, thus giving the COE greater autonomy and changing the relationship between the COE and the one school district of Hawai'i to one of partnership rather than one of oversight.

The NCATE self-study process was extremely helpful. As most faculty anticipated, several areas were identified as needing improvement. For example, the teacher education curriculum and program offerings needed to be changed to ensure that all teacher education students met the standards in technology, special education and multicultural education. Though all of these elements had been in place in the curriculum, not all students had been required to take the courses that included such content. In addition, the administrative functions of the COE were clarified and streamlined. For example, a policies manual of the COE was developed and placed on the College's website. A long-range plan was developed along with a process for ongoing review and revision of the plan. A clear and comprehensive program assessment system was also established.

But the most significant finding from the self-study was that the COE was actually doing a very good job. The College's programs met NCATE standards. The quality of students and faculty was rated as excellent. The wide

variety of programs offered to meet the needs of the State was exceptional and partnerships with the schools were very strong. All of these self-study findings were confirmed in the NCATE Board of Examiner visit in March, 2001.

Through the NCATE process, faculty developed a better understanding of the standards of the profession and how well they were meeting them. They learned a great deal about themselves and gained a better appreciation of their strengths as well as weaknesses. The process required faculty to take more time to talk with one another and with constituents about quality teacher education and to learn from one another. The process also enabled faculty to communicate more effectively with students, partner schools, policy makers and the community at large about the College's programs, vision and goals.

Why is NCATE accreditation important? One of the great strengths of NCATE is the way it facilitates cooperation among the diverse constituents of the profession and draws on their resources to form consensus standards. This effort to build consensus standards by, and for, the profession stands in stark contrast to the approach of the Teacher Education Accreditation Council, an alternative accreditation agency that allows each applicant institution to determine its own standards.

NCATE membership includes public and student representatives and representatives of teacher education institutions, teachers, policy makers, administrators and specialists, as well as subject-specific associations, child-centered organizations, and technology groups. NCATE is a coalition of 33 constituent members of professional and public policy organizations directly involved in the quality of teacher education programs. Among the members are the two national teacher education associations, two teacher unions, three policymaker organizations, and specialized professional associations (SPAs). The SPAs develop standards for program approval in their respective content areas. For example, the National Council for Teachers of Mathematics has standards for mathematics education programs. All SPA standards must be approved by NCATE.

NCATE has continued to evolve and improve. In 2000, it adopted a new set of performance standards. These improvements were "a direct response to policymaker concerns and a natural outgrowth of the standards movement of the 1980s and 1990s. The system requires change of all involved—institutions, the states, teachers, teacher candidates, and NCATE itself" (NCATE, 2001).

One of the hallmarks of the major professions is that individuals cannot become members of the profession until they have completed a nationally accredited preparation program at a university. Professions are defined by their

unique knowledge base and by consensus standards for conduct. It stands to reason then that professions would require individuals to complete preparation programs that teach these foundations of the profession.

In the teaching profession we now have a respectable knowledge base supported by research and professional practice. Individuals should be expected to possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions reflected by the knowledge base and teacher preparation programs should be expected to teach the knowledge, skills and dispositions.

Teaching is still evolving as a profession. Creating a set of standards and an accreditation process for preparation programs is an essential part of that evolution. Those who view NCATE standards as irrelevant or wrong-headed fail to understand the nature of NCATE and how those standards are developed. They also fail to acknowledge the important role that accreditation plays in building a profession.

REFERENCES

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