

NCATE

The Standard of Excellence in Teacher Preparation

QUALITY

teaching

Establishing New Professional Benchmarks for Licensing

*Arthur E. Wise*

NCATE and ETS have expanded an ongoing collaboration to develop professional “benchmark” scores on the most widely used Praxis II teacher licensure exams. A national professional benchmark is a professional judgment of the knowledge to be expected of a beginning teacher as measured by a licensure test. ETS president Kurt Landgraf announced the new venture at the NCATE Executive Board meeting in May 2003.

The project is a natural outgrowth of ongoing NCATE-ETS joint work to align ETS tests used for licensure purposes with professional standards. The new benchmarks will provide a basis for more consistent information about teacher candidates across states. After the benchmarks are set, NCATE will determine how they will be used in the accreditation process.

The collaboration between the two groups in no way interferes with a state’s licensure decisions. States have the legal authority to set cut scores for candidates. These benchmarks, which represent the judgment of the profession, will be used by NCATE to make accreditation decisions more consistent nationally.

NCATE and ETS staff have already begun implementing the initiative. ETS will provide technical assistance to the professionals NCATE assembles to determine the benchmarks. The first phase will involve a “test review.” In this phase specialized professional association standards will be used to evaluate the content and design of each test. Representatives of

*continued on page 3**Arthur E. Wise is president of NCATE.*

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Quality Teacher Education Improves Teacher Performance

According to a new report, teachers who are prepared in high quality reading preparation programs are more successful, more effective, and more confident than other beginning teachers in making the transition into the teaching profession. The National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction recently released the results of a three-year study, "Prepared to Make a Difference: Research Evidence on How Some of America's Best College Programs Prepare Teachers of Reading." The Commission was convened by the International Reading Association and directed by Cathy Roller, Director of Research and Policy. IRA claims that the study is the most comprehensive longitudinal research effort on teacher preparation in reading conducted to date.

The study results show that student achievement in reading is higher for students who are engaged in the kinds of literacy activities that teachers from high quality reading teacher preparation programs provide.

The IRA commission convened in 1999 to: (1) conduct a national survey of nearly 950 reading teacher educators in colleges and universities to gauge current practices in reading teacher education. The results were published in 2001 in "Learning to Teach Reading: Setting the Research Agenda" (2) identify the common characteristics of excellent reading teacher preparation programs so that other colleges and universities can improve their own programs, and (3) conduct a major, comparative study of the effectiveness of the graduates of excellent reading teacher preparation programs

in terms of classroom practices and student achievement.

First, an independent panel of reading experts selected eight U.S. institutions out of 28 colleges and universities that competed to participate in the study. The eight institutions selected represent a wide range of programs, with varied school sizes, missions, and geographic regions. Their programs provided a basis from which the IRA Commission drew their conclusions.

Next, the study followed 101 recent graduates for three years in the classroom, tracking the attitudes and effectiveness of teachers from programs with a reading specialty that had been identified as exemplary. The study compared these graduates from a wide range of programs to other teachers who also were fully certified.

The report identified the following eight critical features of high quality four-year baccalaureate programs in the teaching of reading:

1. Content: Teacher educators engage preservice teachers with a comprehensive curriculum and guide them toward the development of a cohesive knowledge base for effective teacher decision making.

2. Apprenticeship: Teacher educators engage their preservice teachers in a variety of course-related field experiences where they have opportunities to interact with excellent models and mentors.

3. Vision: Teacher educators center their program around a vision of literacy, quality teaching, and quality teacher education.

4. Resources and mission: The teacher education program has sufficient resources (intellectual, financial, and professional)



Alan Farstrup



Cathy Roller

to support the mission for quality teacher preparation.

5. Personalized teaching: Teacher educators value diversity and are prepared to offer their preservice students responsive teaching and an adapted curriculum.

6. Autonomy: Teacher educators are active in adapting and negotiating with their institutions to make sure their students receive the most effective preparation possible.

7. Community: Teacher educators work to create an active learning community that includes the faculty, their students, and mentor teachers.

8. Assessment: Teacher educators continually assess their students, their programs, their graduates, and themselves to guide instructional decision making and program development.

The Commission found that all eight institutions emphasize specific, research-based content about reading—and, notably, they give students many opportunities to apply this knowledge.

All the sites give prominent, extensive coverage to these key topics:

- Early literacy, including oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, and word identification
- Fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension
- Assessing all aspects of literacy learning;
- Organizing and managing literacy instruction across grade levels.

The findings provide research evidence identifying critical features of teacher preparation programs that produce excellent reading teachers.

Order “Prepared to Make a Difference” at: www.ira.org, or download the executive summary from: www.reading.org/advocacy/commission_prepared.html

Alan Farstrup is executive director of the International Reading Association and Cathy Roller is director of research and policy.

New Professional Benchmarks for Licensing

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each association will prepare an analysis of related information such as: what parts of the professional association's standards are covered; views about ETS's selection of areas that are sampled for testing; the parts of standards not covered in the test; and the parts of standards (especially classroom teaching) that can best be evaluated through other instruments.



The second phase will establish “professional benchmarks.” In this phase the actual test items will be reviewed by a committee comprised primarily of teachers, with some teacher educators who have participated in the “test review” stage and in professional association standards development. NCATE and each participating professional association will receive each group’s recommendation.

The content areas being considered for the initial round of the project include elementary, secondary math, secondary social studies, secondary English and secondary biology. The project will be completed during the 2003-2004 fiscal year.

NCATE expects testing companies with which it collaborates to operate in accordance with the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing of the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education.

Measuring Content Knowledge



Donna Gollnick

There must be an assurance that teacher education programs value content knowledge. NCATE's performance-based accreditation system does that.

NCATE's performance-based accreditation system now explicitly incorporates state licensing exam scores into the accreditation process. Internal and external forces led NCATE to re-examine the use of testing in the accreditation process. As a result of that review, policies toward testing have changed in three areas. First, Precondition #7 has been expanded. Not only does this precondition require that states approve all programs being offered by an institution, but it now also requires that institutions meet state-required pass rates for institutions in states that have set required pass rates. The new precondition went into effect in spring 2003. Second, NCATE has re-written the rubrics for the first two elements in Standard One of the NCATE Unit Standards. The rubrics now indicate that 80 percent of the candidates in the unit must pass the state licensing exams in the content area. Effective fall 2003, the 80 percent pass rate is a necessary but not sufficient condition for meeting Standard One. And third, also effective in fall 2003, 80 percent of the candidates in a given program must pass the licensing exam in states where such exams exist as a condition for national recognition of a program. For more details on testing in the accreditation process, see http://www.ncate.org/newsbrfs/use_of_test_scores0603.pdf.

As a result of these changes, the general expectation is that NCATE institutions are preparing candidates, who at a minimum, can pass content area exams in their chosen fields, as mandated by state licensing requirements. While legitimate arguments can be made about the quality of some exams and their alignment with state standards, the exams provide information about candidate knowledge of content and they represent the most public aspect of teacher preparation.

NCATE institutions will produce candidates who can pass the exams. Ironically, the institutions that struggle to meet the 80 percent mark provide the most value-added education because they admit the most vulnerable students. Rather than simply restricting entry and exit, we hope that these institutions, as well as others, will engage in the type of instruction that will help more candidates pass the exams. Based on the experiences of institutions that have already raised their pass rates, we know that this includes increasing faculty familiarity with the areas tested, reviewing and aligning curriculum, adjusting instruction, putting formative and summative assessment procedures in place that track candidate learning, and engaging candidates in test-preparation activities.

The exam scores are one important means of determining content knowledge. However, NCATE is dedicated to multiple means of assessment and therefore requires institutions to present additional data that suggest that candidates have a strong grasp of content knowledge. These additional data might include:

1. Comprehensive exams, perhaps administered by different departments on campus and given as a requirement for a major
2. Exams developed by and/or for the unit related to content knowledge
3. Essays that require candidates to demonstrate an understanding of relationships among elements of knowledge
4. Oral exams related to content knowledge
5. Semester projects

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Using State Licensing Exams

6. Ratings by cooperating teachers
7. Major or GPA in the subject area

The unit must make the case that (1) the assessments are sufficiently aligned with the professional standards on content knowledge; (2) the assessments are broad enough in scope to sample mastery of the domain of knowledge being assessed; (3) the criteria for success are clearly specified; and (4) most of the candidates have completed the assessments successfully. The professional judgment of the Board of Examiners and Unit Accreditation Board will be used to determine if the institution has successfully demonstrated alignment, accuracy, and candidate success.

The use of a major or GPA in the subject area is a common source of evidence related to content knowledge. However, for this evidence to be useful, the unit must make the case that (1) the curriculum in the major is aligned with the professional standards on content knowledge; (2) candidates are assessed using aligned instruments; (3) grading standards are clearly specified; and (4) grading is consistent across multiple sections of the same course. What is important is that institutions have a systematic means of assessing content knowledge that includes and goes beyond the 80 percent rule.

Use of Test Data

The use of test scores in accreditation is a signal to the public that schools of education are serious about the importance of content knowledge. In this sense, the public includes (1) the general public, which trusts the states to determine licensing requirements; (2) teacher education critics who mistakenly think that content knowledge is not high on the teacher education agenda; and (3) persons interested in teaching who are looking for high quality teacher education programs.

There must be an assurance that teacher education programs value content knowledge. NCATE's performance-based accreditation system does that. The 80 percent rule makes attention to content knowledge explicit.

In an effort to lessen the reporting burdens on institutions, NCATE decided to make use of the Title II website, a public repository of licensing exam scores listed by state and institution. In addition, NCATE adopted many if not most of the Title II terms, definitions, and reporting procedures. This will enable institutions to provide Board of Examiners members with their Title II reports to demonstrate that 80 percent or more of their candidates pass the content area exams at the initial level. At the advanced level, institutions will have to summarize data from different sources to demonstrate that across advanced-level programs, 80 percent of the candidates pass the licensing exams in states that have such exams.

NCATE is working with ETS and others to develop exams that are aligned with the standards of the specialized professional associations. While states may or may not use the national cut scores in their licensing procedures, the profession will be better able to define and test the content knowledge needed to develop educators who can have a positive impact on P-12 student learning. As stronger and more reliable measures of content knowledge are combined with the other measures used to demonstrate candidate attainment of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions outlined in Unit Standard One, NCATE's performance-based accreditation system will be firmly in place.



Antoinette Mitchell

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Increasing Student Achievement in Urban Schools



Marsha Levine

The partnerships' work will serve as a model for other cities and states as they recruit and prepare teachers to work effectively in urban environments.

NCATE is working with districts and universities in four cities—Denver, Colorado; Waco, Texas; Columbus, Ohio; and Jacksonville, Florida—on a project designed to help close the achievement gap in urban schools. The project, entitled, “Helping Urban Districts Boost Achievement in Low-Performing Schools: Going to Scale with Professional Development Schools,” is supported by a grant from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation.

The professional development school (PDS) is analogous to the teaching hospital model in medicine. PDS partners—universities and P–12 schools—blend their resources, knowledge and expertise and share responsibility for teacher candidate outcomes and P–12 student learning. Initial research indicates that P–12 student performance improves in PDSs. Research also indicates that teachers who are prepared in PDSs are better prepared to teach and that retention is higher among these teachers.

The project is designed to boost the visibility, presence and impact of PDSs in the cities involved in the effort and to bring the fledgling concept to scale. Can district and university level support ensure the rigor of the model and increase the number of PDSs, so that eventually all candidates and new teachers and the most challenging P–12 students in those cities would have the benefits of a PDS experience? Policymakers and professional development school program participants from these urban school districts and their university partners, together with a team of consultants knowledgeable about PDSs, state/local education policy, and finance, are collaborating in the project to address this question.



The first task of the year-long project was to identify urban districts with the potential to support PDS partnerships as a strategy to address teacher quality, student achievement, and teacher shortages. Next, the group will pursue the following goals:

1. Identifying criteria for “scaling up” PDSs at the district level;
2. Developing strategies and models for policy and funding to support PDS development at the district level; and
3. Designing an assessment process for examining impact of PDSs grounded in the NCATE PDS Standards, and on teacher quality, student learning, recruitment and retention.

The teams of district and university partners are spending twelve months strategizing ways that they and other district partnerships can extend the reach of PDSs to more candidates, teachers, and students. The project will be completed in four phases. Each of the four districts is exploring the contexts for PDS partnerships being brought to scale, building on existing programs where possible. Participating school districts and universities are (1) focusing on the key features of PDSs most relevant to teacher

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NCATE Accreditation Information: An Influential Tool

Education and teacher quality were a major focus of the public policymakers' annual meetings this past summer (Education Commission of the States (ECS), National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), National Governor's Association (NGA), Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)). Public officials and key opinion leaders repeatedly emphasized the need for proof, data, and information—in short, anything quantifiable—to create and build support for budgets and appropriations sufficient to sustain high quality, effective teacher preparation programs.

The legislators respond more favorably to funding initiatives when they are supported by data from the local level—especially information about their particular district.

NCATE supplies colleges of education with a ready-made lobbying tool—its standard on assessment and data collection, Standard Two: “The unit has an assessment system that collects and analyzes data on the applicant qualifications, candidate and graduate performance, and unit operations to evaluate and improve the unit and its program.” The comprehensive assessment system at NCATE accredited institutions can provide data on program quality, unit operations, and candidate performance—including the first years of practice.

During the recent meetings, state lawmakers discussed the two types of information they most frequently look for: employer satisfaction data (the administrators' opinion of how well the new teacher performed in the classroom) and candidate satisfaction data (the candidates' opinion of how well the institution prepared them to teach). NCATE accredited institutions have compiled this data in follow-up studies of graduates and their employers to help meet NCATE's Standard Two.

In addition to statistics, trend data, and analysis, anecdotal information about a specific institution in a lawmaker's district can create a compelling case for increased support of teacher education institutions. As former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill said, “all politics are local.” Teacher educators should coordinate with organizations that traditionally lobby on behalf of higher education to provide local information so that every member of the state legislature has an understanding of what it takes to prepare high quality teachers from a local perspective. This way, teacher educators can supply state lawmakers with the information that they are specifically requesting, while assuring the quality of their teacher preparation programs.



Shari Francis

Did You Know....

NCATE Offers Online Training Modules

NCATE's online training modules were designed primarily for Board of Examiner (BOE) members. However, institutions preparing for an NCATE visit may find them helpful in understanding the NCATE standards and the process by which BOE teams conduct visits and make decisions.

The modules will orient institutional representatives as they plan and prepare for an NCATE visit. The modules provide an overview of the purpose of the accreditation process, and suggest how a professional education unit might approach the process. The modules also provide an overview of the institutional report, previsit, and on-site visit. They are an easy way to learn about the procedures and timelines to be followed by institutions.

Each module is organized into small sections to allow members to move quickly between and within sections. Each module takes approximately one to two hours to complete.

Register at: www.ncate.org/boetraining/

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Increasing Student Achievement in Urban Schools

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quality, retention, and student achievement; (2) convening with consultants with expertise in financing, policy, and PDS partnerships; (3) conducting feasibility studies which consider the costs and benefits associated with the model, and; (4) sharing the models and their feasibility studies. Products will include models and strategies for bringing PDSs to scale in districts, including funding approaches; alternative models for staffing and school restructuring; self-assessment tools for examining policy context and capacity for extending PDS model in districts; and assessment designs for evaluating implementation of the strategies.

The teams are addressing questions such as the following:

- How do PDSs address teacher shortages, teacher quality, and student achievement?
- What strategies and models can be useful for scaling up commitment to PDSs at the district level?
- What changes will need to be made in district policy, instructional practice, allocation of funds, staffing, etc?
- Are there implications for state and federal education policy and funding?
- What are the criteria and prerequisites for such scaling-up? and
- What should an assessment process look like to determine the impact of PDSs on teacher quality, recruitment, retention, and student performance?

The partnerships' work will help serve as a model for other cities as they recruit and prepare teachers to work effectively in urban environments.

A coalition of over 30 organizations of teachers, teacher educators, policymakers and school specialists committed to quality teaching

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