

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education: Whose Standards?

J.E. Stone

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is the largest accreditor of teacher training programs in the U.S., and its standards are fast becoming the de facto national norm. In addition to being a time-consuming and expensive process, however, NCATE accreditation reviews seem more concerned with a school's philosophical perspective than with the qualifications of its faculty and the knowledge of its graduates. Moreover, NCATE's standards downplay the role of teaching in producing student achievement and celebrate the learner-centered approach to pedagogy. These stances put NCATE at odds with what many parents and policy-makers want from teachers and the institutions that claim to prepare them.

Introduction

Practically everyone is calling for better-trained teachers.¹ Failure on a state administered literacy exam by 59 percent of Massachusetts teacher education graduates was a key recent factor in drawing attention to the problem.² The 1998 Higher Education Act sent a particularly clear message to the schools of education and state licensing agencies: federal funding in coming years will depend on higher standards for teachers.³

Even the teacher-training community seems to agree that improvements are needed. An organization comprised of education and public representatives—the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (NCTAF)—has been especially energetic in promoting this message. The NCTAF's Executive Director—Stanford education Professor Linda Darling-Hammond—has been making the rounds of state capitals, telling governors and legislators that it's time to “get serious about [teacher-training] standards.”⁴ By standards, however, the NCTAF means teacher-training standards set by NCATE—the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education.⁵

NCATE is the largest accreditor of teacher training programs in the U. S. Its president and others of its leaders are members of NCTAF. NCATE accredits roughly half of America's teacher-training programs and, with notable exceptions—Boston University, for example—all the large ones. Its standards have been adopted in whole or in part by forty-five states. NCATE's standards are fast becoming the de facto national standard. Whether this development favors reform or strengthens the status quo, however, is a question that deserves to be carefully examined.

NCATE's Standards

NCATE was founded in 1954. Its members include all the major organizational stakeholders in teacher training. These include the National Education Association, the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and similar groups representing school personnel. It also includes subject-specific organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association.

NCATE reviews teacher education programs using a process that entails institutional self-study followed by campus visitation. An institution's facilities, personnel, and program are examined every five years. Critics have termed it time consuming and expensive. In a number of states, review by NCATE is, in effect, legally mandated. These are states in which the government agency that regulates teacher training and licensure has adopted NCATE's standards as its own.

***NCATE's
standards are
fast becoming
the de facto
national
standard.***

NCATE's standards are undergoing revision. In fact, they are under continuous revision, as required by the NCATE constitution. The current standards were originally written in 1987, and have since been rewritten and refined several times. They evolved from several older sets of standards that were similarly written and rewritten during the sixties and seventies. Over the past two years, still another rewriting has been underway. This latest round of revisions is due to take effect in 2000.⁶ As explained below, these latest revisions—the so called NCATE 2000 standards—are said to be “groundbreaking” in that they will be “performance-based” instead of “curriculum-based.”

NCATE's current standards (i.e., its 1987 standards as “refined” in 1995) consist of twenty very general requirements having to do with everything from curriculum to students, faculty, and governance (see Table 1).⁷

The twenty “standards” are very general statements, and each is accompanied by one or more “indicators” intended to convey the type of evidence that would demonstrate compliance with the standard. Technically, the indicators are not the standards, but without the indicators and extensive additional guidance, written and unwritten, the standards would be virtually indecipherable.

Table I NCATE's Current Standards⁸

I. Design of Professional Education

Standard I.A Conceptual Framework: The unit [i.e., the university department or college that is responsible for teacher training] has high quality professional education programs that are derived from a conceptual framework(s) that is knowledge-based, articulated, shared, coherent, consistent with the unit and/or institutional mission, and continuously evaluated.

Standard I.B General Studies for Initial Teacher Preparation: The unit ensures that candidates have completed general studies courses and experiences in the liberal arts and sciences and have developed theoretical and practical knowledge.

Standard I.C Content Studies for Initial Teacher Preparation: The unit ensures that teacher candidates attain academic competence in the content that they plan to teach.

Standard I.D Professional and Pedagogical Studies for Initial Teacher Preparation: The unit ensures that teacher candidates acquire and learn to apply the professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills to become competent to work with all students.

Standard I.E Integrative Studies for Initial Teacher Preparation: The unit ensures that teacher candidates can integrate general, content, and professional and pedagogical knowledge to create meaningful learning experiences for all students.

Standard I.F Advanced Professional Studies: The unit ensures that candidates become more competent as teachers or develop competence for other professional roles (e.g., school library media specialist, school psychologist, or principal).

Standard I.G Quality of Instruction: Teaching in the unit is consistent with the conceptual framework(s), reflects knowledge derived from research and sound professional practice, and is of high quality.

Standard I.H Quality of Field Experiences: The unit ensures that field experiences are consistent with the conceptual framework(s), are well-planned and sequenced, and are of high quality.

Standard I.I Professional Community: The unit collaborates with higher education faculty, school personnel and other members of the professional community to design, deliver, and renew effective programs for the preparation of school personnel, and to improve the quality of education in schools.

Continued on next page

II. Candidates in Professional Education

Standard II.A Qualifications of Candidates: The unit recruits, admits, and retains candidates who demonstrate potential for professional success in schools.

Standard II.B Composition of Candidates: The unit recruits, admits, and retains a diverse student body.

Standard II.C Monitoring and Advising the Progress of Candidates: The unit systematically monitors and assesses the progress of candidates and ensures that they receive appropriate academic and professional advisement from admission through completion of their professional education programs.

Standard II.D Ensuring the Competence of Candidates: The unit ensures that a candidate's competency to begin his or her professional role in schools is assessed prior to completion of the program and/or recommendation for licensure.

III. Professional Education Faculty

Standard III.A Professional Education Faculty Qualifications: The unit ensures that the professional education faculty are teacher scholars who are qualified for their assignments and are actively engaged in the professional community.

Standard III.B Composition of Faculty: The unit recruits, hires, and retains a diverse higher education faculty.

Standard III.C Professional Assignments of Faculty: The unit ensures that policies and assignments allow faculty to be involved effectively in teaching, scholarship, and service.

Standard III.D Professional Development of Faculty: The unit ensures that there are systematic and comprehensive activities to enhance the competence and intellectual vitality of the professional education faculty.

IV. The Unit for Professional Education

Standard IV.A Governance and Accountability of the Unit: The unit is clearly identified, operates as a professional community, and has the responsibility, authority, and personnel to develop, administer, evaluate, and revise all professional education programs.

Standard IV.B Resources for Teaching and Scholarship: The unit has adequate resources to support teaching and scholarship by faculty and candidates.

Standard IV.C Resources for Operating the Unit: The unit has sufficient facilities, equipment, and budgetary resources to fulfill its mission and offer quality programs.

For example, “Standard I.A” requires that programs be “derived from a conceptual framework that is knowledge-based, articulated, shared, coherent, and consistent with the unit and/or institutional mission” and indicator “I.A.1” says “The conceptual framework is written, well articulated, and shared among professional education faculty, candidates [i.e., students undergoing teacher training] and other members of the professional community”—still, a rather vague statement.⁹

It isn't until one reads the bullet points under indicator “I.A.1” that the meaning of shared “conceptual framework(s)” begins to emerge: “The framework(s) reflects multicultural and global perspectives which permeate all programs.”¹⁰

However, even this statement is less than transparent. In order to gain a more complete understanding of “multicultural and global perspectives,” the reader must consult the glossary and it is there that the real meaning of “Standard I.A” becomes evident:

Global perspective. The viewpoint that accepts the interdependency of nations and peoples and the interlinkage of political, economic, ecological, and social issues of a transnational and global character.¹¹

Multicultural perspective. (1) The social, political, economic, academic, and historical realities experienced by individuals and groups in complex human encounters; (2) the representation and incorporation of issues related to culture, demographics, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic status, and exceptionalities in the education process; and (3) the inclusion of a cohesive, inclusive curriculum representing the contributions of diverse populations.¹²

An accredited institution's teacher-training curriculum must be infused with a particular sociopolitical perspective.

In other words, NCATE's standard for “high quality professional education programs” turns out to mean, in part, that an accredited institution's teacher-training curriculum must be infused with a particular sociopolitical perspective—a matter well removed from the issue of teacher effectiveness and one that policymakers and the public might well question. Yet, by virtue of NCATE's remarkably circuitous way of spelling out what is actually looked for, “Standard I.A” appears bland and unremarkable.

Determining the true meaning of other NCATE standards requires similar attention to the “fine print” and, in a number of cases, the fine print turns out to be less a matter of pedagogy than one of social and political ideals. For example, “Standard III, A” addresses “Professional

Education Faculty Qualifications”—a seemingly straightforward matter. An examination of the indicators, however, reveals NCATE's attention to social and political issues that seem more than a little tangential to faculty qualifications. For example, Indicator III, A, 2 says “Higher education faculty exhibit intellectual vitality in their sensitivity to critical issues (e.g., how content

studies and pedagogical studies can be more effectively integrated; and the ethics of equity and diversity in the U. S. culture) and in their efforts to address the issues and become proactive in addressing them.”¹³ In other words, as a condition of accreditation, teacher-training faculty are expected to adopt and promote an activist viewpoint with regard to equity and diversity issues. Here again, standards that nominally deal with academic or professional matters turn out to mean something quite different when closely examined.

What is clear from these and similar examples is that NCATE’s standards are anything but self-evident and, in truth, could be termed misleading. They address matters well removed from questions of effective pedagogy and, as a practical matter, they require extensive informal guidance. Because much of this guidance comes in the form of communications from NCATE’s various boards and offices, any true understanding of NCATE’s standards must be based on sources of information beyond the standards themselves.

Happily, for the interested observer, NCATE’s standards make reference to just such a source of guidance.¹⁴ Published by the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, *Capturing the Vision: Reflections on NCATE’s Redesign Five Years After* sets forth the “vision of quality” that guided the development of NCATE’s standards.¹⁵ It was written by the parties who interpret and implement the standards, including representatives of NCATE’s Board of Examiners, its Unit Accreditation Board, and its Executive Committee. *Capturing the Vision* was written to communicate “the larger purposes of accreditation” to “faculty in the institutions that seek accreditation.”¹⁶ It presents what amounts to an ordained interpretation for the NCATE standards that have been in use (in various stages of refinement) from 1987 to the present.

Capturing the Vision’s central message is that teacher-training programs must “first and foremost” be “dedicated” to “equity,” “diversity,” and “social justice”—egalitarian ideals widely approved within the teacher education community.¹⁷ It holds that teachers and administrators are morally obliged to promote social justice, in the same sense that physicians are obliged to promote health and lawyers obliged to seek justice.

Equally noteworthy is what *Capturing the Vision* overlooks. It says nothing about matters that might be thought the core of teaching—namely teaching’s role in producing student achievement. For that matter, the standards themselves do not address the issue either. Rather, what *Capturing the Vision* does make clear is that faculty willingness to accept certain sociopolitical views is critical to an institution’s efforts to become accredited “. . . we are convinced that units living the three themes will not have difficulty in meeting NCATE’s standards.”¹⁸ By implication, programs failing to adopt NCATE’s views may have difficulty. Plainly, *Capturing the*

Capturing the Vision and NCATE’s Standards conceive of teaching as an activity concerned as much or more with social reform than with student achievement.

Vision and NCATE's Standards conceive of teaching as an activity concerned as much or more with social reform than with student achievement.

Proposed NCATE 2000 Standards

Superficially at least, NCATE's newly proposed "performance-based" standards differ from its current curriculum-based standards.¹⁹ Instead of specifying input indicators of quality—conceptual frameworks, faculty attitudes, etc.—the proposed standards set expectations for the competencies to be displayed by newly minted teachers. They also give some attention to the need for teacher knowledge of subject matter and they acknowledge student learning as the ultimate goal of the teaching endeavor.

Like the current standards, however, the new standards are open to widely differing interpretations and, again like the current standards, they contain repeated references

To parents, schooling is about their hopes for their children, not about social engineering.

to sociopolitical attitudes and ideals. The terms "diversity," "cultural diversity," and teaching appropriate to "diverse learners" are sprinkled liberally throughout the new "Program Standards for Elementary Teacher Preparation."²⁰

Whatever their operative meaning (as may be revealed by some new version of *Capturing the Vision*), the new standards in no way suggest a lessened emphasis on social idealism or any departure from the vision of teacher training expressed in *Capturing the Vision*. Presumably, neither will the proposed standards, once enacted, be any less subject to reinterpretation and "refinement" than were the standards enacted in 1987. As matters stand, the only certain difference between the pro-

posed NCATE 2000 standards and the current standards is that the new ones will attempt to assess program effectiveness by measuring that which recent graduates have learned whereas the standards that have been in use since 1987 assess the curriculum and other aspects of the training program itself.

Two Views of Teacher Training Reform

The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future has made headlines with its proposals for reforming teacher training—proposals that feature universal adoption of NCATE's standards for teacher-training programs. What policymakers and the public may not understand, however, is that the NCTAF and NCATE have a very different conception of that which needs reforming than do teacher education's critics. They acknowledge that there are too few well-trained teachers but most critics believe there are too many badly trained ones, i.e., teachers who are ill equipped to produce results.²¹

What Parents and Policymakers Want

Few parents and policymakers are opposed to the teacher-education community's passion for education to improve society; they just want the improvements to take place the old fashioned way, i.e., through the intellectual enhancement of students. Unlike NCATE, they want academic matters, not social reform, to be teaching's top priority. They believe that schooling should, first and foremost, equip students with basics such as a broad fund of knowledge, high aspirations for achievement, and a sense of personal responsibility.²² To parents, schooling is about their hopes for their children, not about social engineering.²³

Teacher concern for equity, diversity, and social justice need not undermine academic aims, yet it tends to do so when teachers are taught that social ideals should take precedence over learning. For example, when teachers choose to promote failing students, they foster a spurious form of equity while undermining academic standards. Much the same holds true when they use teaching strategies such as "cooperative learning" and grading based on group projects.²⁴ These methods lessen individual accountability by blurring observable differences in student performance. In contrast to educators, parents and policymakers are less concerned about minimizing differences and more concerned about each child becoming all he/she can become.

Social promotion policies and cooperative learning are familiar examples of education practices that make academic concessions to social concerns. Many less well-known methodologies called "best practices" are founded on the same priorities.²⁵ They include heterogeneous grouping, multi-age classes, and a variety of other teaching, curricular, and organizational stratagems. All subordinate educational outcomes to social aims.²⁶

Teachers and administrators are not only taught priorities that are at odds with those of the public, they are also given to believe that the public's ideas about education are unenlightened, even harmful. A recent *Education Week* essay by a veteran high-school principal reflected the prevailing view.²⁷ According to Principal Jones, "parents expect that their children will be educated just like they were." In his view, the adoption of traditional education practices—academic retention, for example—is a wrongful concession to the public's ideas. Jones lamented the failure of the 1960s student movement to reshape lastingly the public's thinking and suggested that school administrators push the envelope in a more student-centered direction. A similarly critical *Phi Delta Kappan* article by a much-published critic of results-oriented schooling argued that parents who insist on achievement for their children are selfish and an impediment to the success of other students.²⁸

What Teacher-Educators Want

A 1997 Public Agenda survey found a "staggering disconnect" between the priorities of teacher education professors and those of parents and others concerned with

Learner-centered schooling is at odds with the public's education aims.

schooling.²⁹ It showed that professors want less structured schooling, i.e., schooling that “facilitates inquiry” and stresses “learning how to learn.” It found that professors are chiefly focused on educational process and favor “learner-centered” teaching. By contrast, Public Agenda and other polling organizations have found that parents want orderly schools that emphasize academic fundamentals. Both they and policymakers want improved pupil achievement.

The gulf between the public and the institutions that train and license teachers is little studied and poorly understood but it explains much about why school reform has failed.³⁰ It also explains why teacher training standards developed by NCATE are unlikely to treat student achievement as an unrivaled priority. Repeated efforts to reform the public schools have failed to improve achievement because they are interpreted and implemented by educators who have been taught that other aims come first. However, if, as recommended by the NCTAF, all teacher training is brought under the auspices of NCATE, virtually all teachers will be trained by programs that emphasize the professoriate's aims, not the public's.³¹

The gap between teacher-educators and the public is neither transient nor recent.³² It is a subtle but profound disagreement about the nature and purpose of public education. Although obscured by jargon and mutating methods, the core difference is that the public takes a *learning-centered* or results-oriented view of education while teacher-educators take a learner-centered or process-oriented view.³³

Over the years, learner-centered pedagogy has been reformulated and repackaged many times. Current names include “student-centered,” “developmentally appropriate,” and “constructivist.” In the early part of the twentieth century, similar practices were called “progressive” and “child-centered.” Despite continual relabeling and reinvention, the priorities of learner-centered pedagogy have remained constant. The use of pedagogically correct teaching takes precedence over results.³⁴

Learner-centered instruction is a form of teaching in which classroom activity is built around the learner's aims and inclinations. It idealizes learning as student-directed, discovery-oriented activity in which the teacher acts less as manager or director and more as a facilitator or guide. Learner-centered activities are thought to be especially beneficial because they presume to engage students in higher order intellectual activities—which are considered the epitome of the educational process. Students who are eager, mature, and well behaved are likely to benefit from learner-centered instruction. Students who are less well suited to unstructured and selfdirected activity often founder and learn little in learner-centered classrooms.

Schools attempt to accommodate differences among learners by a variety of means. They include, for example, adaptations of instruction to learning styles and curriculum to student readiness. They include boundless exertions to make learning activities attractive, engaging, and intrinsically motivating. Students who respond poorly to

learner-centered instruction are thought to lack the necessary motivation and maturity by virtue of deficiencies in their social, economic, and cultural backgrounds.³⁵ Although societal change is considered the ultimate corrective, the learner-centered prescription for dealing with such students is to accommodate the school's expectations to the student's current behavior and deportment. In theory, the "right" accommodations make possible—but do not assure—the spontaneous emergence of the good qualities with which learner-centered instruction presumes all students are naturally endowed. For example, if a student seems apathetic about engaging in classroom activity, the teacher might diagnose the deficiency as one stemming from poor self-esteem and a dysfunctional family. The teacher might address the problem by placing the student in a cooperative learning group for the purpose of affording encouragement, participation, and the experience of success. The hoped-for educational outcome would be that the student would come to see himself as capable and would subsequently be more inclined to engage in classroom activities.

A different type of accommodation might be made in the case of students who are believed to be poorly motivated and badly behaved because they have experienced social injustice. The learner-centered prescription might be that teachers should demonstrate greater tolerance of the students' apathetic and, perhaps, angry behavior as a means of showing them that the school is a fair and understanding environment. For example, the school might provide counseling or it might infuse the school curriculum with materials that would emphasize the role and the historic contributions of persons who have the same background. Teachers might undergo sensitivity training. The purpose of these measures would be to assure the students in question that their negative behavior and attitudes were not necessary because the school was sensitive to the circumstances of their lives and sympathetic to their feelings.

These examples illustrate the key reason why learner-centered schooling is at odds with the public's education aims. Whatever the specifics of the accommodations made by the school, their purpose is not the straightforward improvement of achievement but the improvement of conditions congenial to learner-centered instruction. Rather than prescribing a more structured and teacher-directed mode of instruction—one that might be far better suited to students who are not well motivated or well behaved—learner-centered orthodoxy encourages ad hoc intervention for the purpose of facilitating the use of what the teacher-training community believes is an ideal form of teaching. In other words, the learner-centered perspective encourages teachers and schools to concern themselves not with intervening to produce results but with making public-school realities more hospitable to the learner-centered ideal.

***NCATE's
approved
programs lean
heavily toward
indoctrinating
teachers in an
educational
perspective
rather than
training in
effective
pedagogy.***

Teachers may recognize that such accommodations are ineffective but they defend their use because doing otherwise would seem an abandonment of educational ideals, i.e., the ideal of the self-directed learner engaged in higher order thinking. They have been taught that even ineffectual learner-centered teaching is better than non-learner-centered alternatives. For example, if the student who participates in the cooperative learning project fails to reach expected objectives, the teacher may argue that at least the individual's self-esteem was enhanced. If angry and unmotivated students fail to read and write, the teacher may argue that the school's multicultural curriculum and sensitivity training at least succeeded in preventing these individuals from dropping out.

NCATE and Learner-centered Teaching

NCATE's standards do not explicitly call for learner-centered teaching but they plainly adhere to a learner-centered vision of education. In this view, schooling cannot be expected to succeed without greater equity, diversity, and social justice in American society and thus teacher training must be infused with rightminded social and political values. In other words, NCATE and the teacher education programs that follow NCATE's standards infuse teacher training with social and political idealism because their learner-centered pedagogical doctrine requires it.

NCATE and the teacher-education community are the primary keepers of the learner-centered faith. NCATE's leaders are published proponents of learner-centered teaching.³⁶ NCATE's approved programs lean heavily toward indoctrinating teachers in an educational perspective rather than training in effective pedagogy. In short, the teacher-training programs accredited by NCATE teach educators that their time and energy should be dedicated primarily to learner-centered teaching and secondarily to results.

Learner-centered thinking has a virtual stranglehold on the teacher-education community.³⁷ Skeptical academics are suspected of being "in denial" about their own or society's responsibility for reforming adverse social, political, and economic conditions. Proponents of more conventional explanations for academic failure—lack of study, for example—are thought to mistake symptoms for causes and are suspected of blaming the victim. Educational innovations are welcomed but only so long as they fit the learner-centered mold.³⁸ As E. D. Hirsch puts it, alternatives are not "*thinkable*" (italics in the original):

To question progressive doctrine would be to put in doubt the identity of the education profession itself. Its foundational premise is that progressive principles are right. Being right, they cannot possibly be the cause of educational ineffectiveness.³⁹

Tradition, doctrinal zeal, and an absence of competition explains much about the predominance of learner-centered thinking in schools of education. Another factor,

however, may contribute greatly to its popularity among teachers and administrators. A theory that educational effectiveness is limited by factors such as social justice, high self-esteem, and a variety of developmental considerations explains one thing very well: It explains how so many teachers and so many schools could be working so hard and yet producing so little. In other words, it offers a convenient, comfortable, and nearly irrefutable excuse for educational failure.

As most teachers, administrators, and professors see it, the presence of educational failure implies less-than-optimal conditions for students. Moreover, less-than-optimal conditions argue against educational accountability and in favor of ever greater commitments of resources for education. If doubled education expenditures do not succeed, perhaps they need to be doubled again. Who can say what constitutes optimal conditions for learning? If schools aren't succeeding, society must make a greater effort.

According to learner-centered thinking, educational success is restricted not only by social, political, and economic conditions. The developmental version of the learner-centered view adds biological restrictions. The “developmentally appropriate practice” concept featured in NCATE's proposed NCATE 2000 standards holds that the student's maturationally determined stage of intellectual development restricts that which he or she can learn.⁴⁰ In theory, correctly fitted teaching will result in as much learning as current development permits and academic challenges in excess of that level are apt to cause burnout and damaged self-esteem.⁴¹ In other words, if a student fails to learn that which might reasonably be expected and there are no obvious sociocultural impediments, a state of insufficient development is presumed to exist. It is an attractive theory not because it enables teachers to produce results but because it relieves both teachers and students of responsibility for meeting curricular expectations.

Pedagogical concepts such as developmentally appropriate practice are also attractive to students and parents because they relieve anxiety about failure to achieve. According to developmental theory, students should be expected to make an effort only with regard to those activities they find appealing and engaging. Whether those preferred activities result in meaningful academic achievement is considered a secondary issue.

The “developmentally appropriate” viewpoint promises academic success through natural and spontaneous means and it supposes that students will learn all that they need to learn when the time is right.⁴² If curricular expectations say otherwise, it is the expectations that are wrong. In effect, the developmental viewpoint takes the work out of schoolwork.

Developmentally appropriate practice, education for social justice, and the many other variants of learner-centered education undermine educational effectiveness because they encourage teachers to dedicate their time and energies to overcoming

***Expecting
NCATE to reform
teacher training
in a way that
fulfills the public's
hopes is naive.***

social, economic, and developmental impediments and otherwise engaging students in learner-centered instruction. Of necessity, the activities they arrange must be fun and exciting, whether or not they are activities known to enhance academic achievement.⁴³ In effect, student satisfaction with the immediate education experience is given far greater weight than the longer-term satisfactions associated with academic achievement. In theory, learner-centered teachers attempt to produce achievement by accommodating student needs. In practice, they assume that education experiences not well received by students are not well fitted to their needs and thus not conducive to achievement.

In many respects, the flaws in learner-centered thinking parallel those inherent in the “root cause” view of crime—the view that poverty causes misbehavior and thus must be the primary target of social intervention. Both perspectives are loosely grounded in social science, both divert the energies of professional helpers into matters that have little demonstrated relationship to results, and both provide built-in excuses for failure. Not incidentally, both require extensive academic training and thereby assure full employment for training institutions and licensure bureaucracies.

The NCTAF’s Campaign for Teacher Training Reform

The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future is leading a massive effort to encourage the adoption of NCATE’s standards. Originally headed by North Carolina’s Governor Jim Hunt and funded by two major foundations, the NCTAF (1996) urges all states to align their teacher licensure regulations with NCATE’s training standards and with the standards set by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1990)—advanced teacher certification standards that are themselves aligned with NCATE. In effect, the NCTAF is pressing states to enact policy that collides head-on with the public’s desire for stronger pupil achievement.

Expecting NCATE to reform teacher training in a way that fulfills the public’s hopes is naive. NCATE is an organization primarily comprised of teacher-education’s stakeholders, i.e., the very groups that created the standards now said to be in need of reform. Given its history, it may be safely predicted that any NCATE-led reform will be congenial to learner-centered teaching and antagonistic to achievement-oriented alternatives. NCATE’s stakeholders—especially the schools of education—will not have it any other way. If policymakers want teacher training that treats pupil achievement as its top priority, they will have to set standards that are independent of NCATE.

Public Regulation of Teacher Training and Licensure

The teaching profession is regulated by state education agencies and these agencies ostensibly exist to promote the public’s aims. In fact, they are staffed, led, and decisively influenced by the profession that they purport to regulate—a phenomenon that economists call “regulatory capture.”⁴⁴

Instead of ensuring that teaching serves the public's aims, state education agencies collaborate with organizations like NCATE and thereby serve as a conduit through which the teacher-education community's beliefs are injected into the decisions of legislators and boards of education. For example, a group representing the executive leadership of the state departments of education—the Council of Chief State School Officers—is working diligently with NCATE to assure that state licensure requirements are aligned with NCATE standards.⁴⁵ They are also linked by shared leadership. For example, the immediate past chairman of NCATE's Executive Board heads the Kentucky Department of Education and NCATE's current senior vice president is the president-elect of the National Association for Multicultural Education—an advocacy organization bent on infusing multicultural values into teacher training. The effect of these intermingled loyalties is governmental regulation that is supposed to be dedicated to what the public wants but, in fact, enforces what the education community thinks is important.

NCATE and its stakeholders argue that educator control of the regulatory process is proper in that it parallels the professional control of training and licensure in the medical and legal professions. The comparison, however, overlooks a crucial distinction. Consumers can choose among their doctors and lawyers but usually not among their children's teachers. If parents want to make use of the schools they pay for with their taxes, they have few options. Public schools are required to have licensed teachers and nearly all licensed teachers have been trained in the learner-centered mold.

Policy Alternatives

If NCTAF and NCATE succeed, expanded school choice and alternative teacher certification may be the only way parents and policymakers will get teachers who are trained to put achievement first. However, if policymakers are willing to act independently, they can make a vital difference in the kind of skills required of licensed teachers and ultimately in the aims of teacher-training programs.

State requirements for entering the teaching profession vary from state to state but most include a degree from an “approved” teacher training program and successful performance on an exam of pedagogical knowledge. Requirements for subject matter examinations and demonstrations of teaching proficiency have been added or are under consideration in a number of states. The model licensure standards now being collaboratively developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers and NCATE will require teachers to demonstrate knowledge, attitudinal “dispositions,” and approved teaching skills—all consistent with a learner-centered vision of teaching. Licensure based on such standards will most likely insure doctrinal conformity, not effectiveness in producing student achievement.

Until recently, there has been no good alternative to exams of pedagogical knowledge and classroom observations as evidence of a teachers' ability to produce learning. The product of teaching, learning, could not be used as an indicator because

student learning is influenced by pre-existing differences in student knowledge, skills, backgrounds, motivation, and other characteristics. Within the past few years, however, a statistical methodology that corrects for such differences has been used for teacher accountability in Tennessee and Dallas, Texas.⁴⁶ Called value-added assessment, it measures the gains in learning experienced by the students whom a teacher has taught, and is vastly superior to the indirect measures of teacher effectiveness that are now used.

Given that the teaching skills possessed by novice teachers primarily reflect the training they have undergone, the value-added achievement gains of such teachers could be used as reasonably accurate indicators of a training program's quality. In any case, those gains would be a far better indicator of teacher-training program effectiveness than indicators such as test scores and course credits. Moreover, if teachers with a probationary license were required to demonstrate an acceptable level of proficiency in producing value-added achievement gains, teacher training programs would have to become more concerned with whether their graduates were able to produce achievement, not with whether they adhere to learner-centered orthodoxy. In addition, value-added assessment could be used to evaluate teachers for tenure and merit pay decisions.

Over the years, the public has assumed that teachers are trained to produce academic achievement. In fact, most teachers have been trained to use learner-centered instruction. It is a subtle but critical discrepancy. A change to an achievement-oriented indicator of teacher preparedness would stir significant change in most teacher-training programs. They would either have to begin emphasizing skills that enable teachers to be effective or fail to produce licensable graduates. Programs that have traditionally taught result-oriented methods, however, would only have to fine tune their efforts.

Used in conjunction with a well-validated achievement test, value-added assessment can provide officials with an indicator of teacher preparedness that is aligned with the public's priorities and independent of those of the teacher education community. If policymakers want teacher training dedicated to results rather than idealism, a change to value-added teacher assessment might be the single most effective action they could take.

This paper was completed with the support of the Foundation Endowment.

¹ J. L. Sack, "Some Crying Foul Over President's Policy-Making Style," *Education Week*, 10 February 1999.

² E. O'Brien, "Colleges Vow To Retool After Failures on Teacher Tests," *Education Week*, 24 July 1998.

³ J.L. Sandham, "Focus on Teacher Preparation, Not Numbers, Panel Hears," *Education Week*, 4 March 1998; A. McQueen, "Teacher Training Figures Prominently in Higher Education Act," *Education Week*, 7 October 1998.

⁴ National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, *What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future* (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1996).

⁵ J. Ponesse, "Despite Rocky Road, Ed. School Accreditation Effort on a Roll," *Education Week*, 18 June 1997.

⁶ Review and comment edition of National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, *Program Standards for Elementary Teacher Preparation* (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1999).

⁷ National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, *Standards, Procedures, and Policies for Accreditation of Professional Development Education Units* (Washington, DC: Author, 1997)

- ⁸ National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1995, Second Printing 1997.
- ⁹ Ibid, 15.
- ¹⁰ Ibid, 15.
- ¹¹ Ibid, 74.
- ¹² Ibid, 74.
- ¹³ Ibid, 25.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, 11.
- ¹⁵ H.D. Gideonese, E.R. Ducharme, M.K. Ducharme, D. Gollnick, M.S. Lilly, E.L. Shelke, and P. Smith, *Capturing the Vision: Reflections on NCATE's Redesign Five Years After* (Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education, 1993).
- ¹⁶ Ibid, v.
- ¹⁷ Ibid, 5.
- ¹⁸ Ibid, 24.
- ¹⁹ Review and comment edition of National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, *Program Standards for Elementary Teacher Preparation*.
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ C.E. Finn, "The Real Teacher Crisis," *Education Week*, 29 October 1997; J.L. Sandham, "House Plan Demands More Data on Teacher Training," *Education Week*, 6 May 1998.
- ²² J. Johnson and J. Immerwahr, *First Things First: What Americans Expect From Public Education* (New York: Public Agenda, 1994).
- ²³ G. Farkas, J. Johnson, A. Duffett & J. McHugh, *A Lot To Be Thankful For: What Parents Want Children To Learn About America* (New York: Public Agenda, 1998).
- ²⁴ A. Woolfolk, *Education Psychology*, 7th ed. (Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn & Bacon, 1998).
- ²⁵ S. Zenelman, H. Daniels & A. Hyde, *Best Practice* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heineman Publishers, 1993).
- ²⁶ J.E. Stone and A. Clements, "Research and Innovation: Let the Buyer Beware" in R.A. Spillane and P. Regnier, eds., *The Superintendents of the Future: Strategy & Action For Achieving Academic Excellence* (Gaithersburg, Md.: Aspen Publishers, 1998).
- ²⁷ A. Jones, "The Metaphysics of 'Input,'" *Education Week*, 28 October 1998.
- ²⁸ A. Kohn, "Only For My Kid: How Privileged Parents Undermine School Reform," *Phi Delta Kappan* (April 1998).
- ²⁹ G. Farkas, J. Johnson and A. Duffett, *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education* (New York: Public Agenda, 1997).
- ³⁰ J.E. Stone and A. Clements, "Research and Innovation: Let the Buyer Beware."
- ³¹ J.E. Stone, "A Disharmony that Impairs Schooling," *Education Week*, 4 February 1998.
- ³² E.D. Hirsch, *The Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them* (New York: Doubleday, 1996); T. Sowell, *Inside American Education* (New York: Free Press, 1993); C. J. Sykes, *Dumbing Down Our Kids: Why America's Children Feel Good About Themselves But Can't Read, Write, or Add* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995).
- ³³ J.E. Stone, "Developmentalism: An Obscure But Pervasive Restriction on Educational Improvement," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* [on-line serial], 4, no.8, Available at <http://olam.ed.asu.edu/epaa/v4n8.html>; J.E. Stone, "A Disharmony That Impairs Schooling;" J.E. Stone & A.Clements, "Research and Innovation: Let the Buyer beware;" L. Darling-Hammond, G. Griffin and A. Wise, *Excellence in Teacher Education: Helping Teachers Develop Learner-Centered Schools* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1992).
- ³⁴ J.E. Stone, "Developmentalism: An Obscure But Pervasive Restriction on Educational Improvement."
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ L. Darling-Hammond, G. Griffen, & A. Wise, *Excellence in Teacher Education: Helping Teachers Develop Learner-Centered Schools* (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1992).
- ³⁷ Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, *Different Drummers: How Teachers of Teachers View Public Education* (New York: Public Agenda, 1997).
- ³⁸ Stone, "A Disharmony That Impairs Schooling."
- ³⁹ Hirsch, *The Schools We Need*, 69.
- ⁴⁰ For the proposed standards see National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, *Program Standards for Elementary Teacher Preparation*.
- ⁴¹ Hirsch, *The Schools We Need*, and Stone, "Developmentalism: An Obscure But Pervasive Restriction on Educational Improvement."
- ⁴² Stone, "Developmentalism: An Obscure But Pervasive Restriction on Educational Improvement."
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ M. Lieberman, *Public Education: An Autopsy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).
- ⁴⁵ Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, *Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing and Development: A Resource for State Dialogue* (Washington, D.C.: Council of Chief State School Officers, 1992)
- ⁴⁶ J. Millman, ed., *Grading Teachers, Grading Schools: Is Student Achievement a Valid Evaluation Measure?* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press), 1997).