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Avoiding the Pitfalls: A Comprehensive Approach to Meeting NCATE's Standard 2

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Abstract

The U. S. Department of Education recognizes the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) as an accrediting body for colleges and universities that prepare educators for P-12 schools (Leibbrand, 2006). To receive NCATE accreditation colleges and universities must meet each of NCATE's six standards for high quality educator preparation. Only about 70% of institutions seeking NCATE accreditation are meeting all six standards (Mitchell, 2006). Of those institutions that do not meet all six standards, most of them have difficulty meeting Standard 2 (Mitchell, 2006; Nowinski, 2005). In this article, we discuss our comprehensive approach to developing and documenting our assessment system and how we are avoiding the pitfalls in meeting Standard 2. We present the processes used to (a) document the body of knowledge, skills, and dispositions our candidates should possess upon completion of their educator preparation programs, (b) align assessments and standards, and (c) collect and analyze data in our comprehensive and integrated assessment system.

Avoiding the Pitfalls: A Comprehensive Approach to Meeting NCATE's Standard 2

The U. S. Department of Education recognizes the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) as an accrediting body for colleges and universities that prepare educators for P-12 schools (Leibbrand, 2006). To receive NCATE accreditation colleges and universities must meet each of NCATE's six standards for high quality educator preparation. Standards 1 and 2 encompass candidate performance, with Standard 1 focusing on candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions and Standard 2 focusing on the assessment system and unit evaluation (NCATE, 2002). Standards 3, 4, 5, and 6 encompass unit capacity, with Standard 3 focusing on field experiences and clinical practice; Standard 4 focusing on diversity; Standard 5 focusing on faculty qualifications, performance, and development; and Standard 6 focusing on unit governance and resources (NCATE, 2002).

Only about 70% of institutions seeking NCATE accreditation are meeting all six standards (Mitchell, 2006). Of those institutions that do not meet all six standards, most of them have difficulty meeting Standard 2 (Mitchell, 2006; Nowinski, 2005). Standard 2 states that "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 programs" (NCATE, 2002, p. 10). Mitchell (n.d.) states that "the three most common problems [in meeting Standard 2] are lack of programmatic thinking, lack of alignment between assessments and standards, and lack of data collection and analysis" (para. 1).

This article discusses our comprehensive approach to developing and documenting our assessment system and how we are avoiding the pitfalls in meeting

Standard 2. We present the processes used to (a) document the body of knowledge, skills, and dispositions our candidates should possess upon completion of their educator preparation programs, (b) align assessments and standards, and (c) collect and analyze data in our comprehensive and integrated assessment system.

Programmatic Thinking

To document the body of knowledge, skills, and dispositions our candidates should possess upon completion of our programs, faculty members who teach the core courses in our teacher preparation programs have met for the past 5 years in subgroups to determine the required activities and assessments (Grant & Gillette, 2006; Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). These meetings have allowed the faculty to reflect upon what they have our candidates do and why (Dewey, 1933; Jadallah, 1996; Schon, 1987). Because of our efforts to think programmatically, the activities and assessments across multiple sections of the same course are becoming consistent. In addition, we have enhanced our teacher preparation programs by changing the sequence of courses, adding purposeful field experiences, adjusting comprehensive examinations for the advanced programs, ensuring the use of multiple measures to determine candidates' growth, and improving the quality of our teaching through collective reflections (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Mitchell, Allen, & Ehrenburg, 2006). For example, in one course in the initial Professional Education Sequence all instructors require candidates to prepare and submit lesson plans. Scoring of this assignment varied from using rubrics to checklists. These instructors are working together to develop a template for the lesson plan assignment and a common rubric so that the lesson plans will be structured and scored consistently across all sections of the course.

We ensure that the activities we require our candidates to complete span developmental levels of understanding from awareness to conceptualization to internalization (Edick, Danielson, & Edwards, 2005). For example, we have integrated the teaching and assessment of professional dispositions throughout the courses in our teacher preparation programs so that students gain an awareness of the professional dispositions of effective teachers and are provided with opportunities to conceptualize, demonstrate, and internalize those dispositions.

We measure candidate performance using both formative and summative assessments that allow us to model best practice with our candidates (McTighe & O'Connor, 2005; Shepard et al., 2005) (see Tables 1 and 2). Assessments are authentic and appropriate for the INTASC (1992) principles and professional standards they address (see Tables 1 and 2). Further, the assessments are evaluated to ensure fairness and consistency (Elliott, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2006). Some are included in our candidate electronic portfolio and require our candidates to reflect upon their performance and how what they do impacts P-12 student learning (Dewey, 1933; Jadallah, 1996; Niguidula, 2005; Schon, 1987; Wetig, Topp, & Clark, 2005).

Alignment between Assessments and Standards

We have aligned courses and activities with the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) (1992) principles and state and professional standards noting if the activities assess candidates' knowledge, skills, dispositions, and/or impact on P-12 student learning (Elliott, 2003; Guskey, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2006) (see Table 1). This work is ongoing as faculty members continue to

meet and discuss course activities in methods courses, elementary and secondary undergraduate level courses, and our advanced programs.

From our work aligning course activities with the INTASC (1992) principles we were able to identify 12 key assessments used with all teacher candidates at the various program transition points (see Table 2). These key assessments include candidate admission essays, Field Experience Evaluations, the Human Power Questionnaire (Thompson, 2006), the Teacher Dispositions Index (Schulte, Edick, Edwards, & Mackiel, 2004), Student Teaching Evaluations, the College of Education Follow-Up Survey (Schulte, 2006), grade point average (overall GPA and GPA in the content area), lesson plans, the Teacher Assessment Work Sample, the Elementary Education: Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (EECIA) exam for elementary and special education K-8 candidates, the Educational Benchmarking Incorporated (EBI) survey, and the candidate electronic portfolio. For example, assessments at the *student teaching transition point* include the following: candidates' GPA in the content area; candidates' completion of the EECIA exam; candidates' completion of the Teacher Dispositions Index; candidates', cooperating teachers', and university supervisors' completion of Student Teaching Evaluations; candidates' creation and delivery of a lesson plan as part of the Teacher Assessment Work Sample; and candidates' completion of the EBI survey. As of May 26, 2006, the state of Nebraska has adopted the use of the EECIA exam, which will be used to determine teacher "highly qualified" status under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Center on Education Policy, 2002). In fall 2006, we added the EECIA exam to our list of key assessments.

A next step is to align the assessments with our institutional standards from our conceptual framework. In spring 2006 a committee of faculty members from each department/school in the College of Education worked together and asked for feedback from our candidates, other faculty, and community members as they revised our conceptual framework to capture the essence of who we are and what we do.

Data Collection and Analysis

To ensure that our data are regularly and systematically collected and analyzed we (a) developed a plan for data collection and analysis, (b) appointed an assessment coordinator who analyzes data and coordinates assessment in the College of Education, and (c) created a candidate electronic portfolio (Banister, Vannatta, & Ross, 2006) and College of Education database to collect data electronically. The transition point matrix outlines the key assessments, indicating where data are collected and analyzed in candidates' teacher preparation program (see Table 2). The key assessments include data from candidate assessments each semester and surveys of graduates and their employers every other year. Other measures of program quality are collected and analyzed each year, including information about faculty and staff.

For many of the key assessments, data analysis summary sheets are created that enable faculty and staff to interpret, discuss, and reflect upon the data for program evaluation and improvement (Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2003) (see Table 3). Faculty and staff provide written feedback based upon their discussions of the data analysis summary sheets. Their recommendations are summarized and distributed to faculty, staff, and administrators (see Table 4), which has led to changes in programs and course delivery. For example, based on discussions of the analyses of the data from field

experiences, faculty and staff are working to add field experience components to all methods courses.

Using the results from assessments in individual courses, faculty members are discussing and documenting in writing what they are doing in courses to impact our candidates so dramatically in a relatively short period of time. For example, in one course in the initial Professional Education Sequence instructors are teaching candidates about professional dispositions (Sockett, 2006). Factor analyses conducted on pre and post Teacher Dispositions Index data indicate that at the beginning of the course differences in candidates' perceptions of their dispositions are related to their beliefs and attitudes about interactions with P-12 students. By the end of the semester-long course differences in candidates' perceptions of their dispositions have broadened to include their beliefs and attitudes about professionalism and curriculum issues (Edick, Edwards, Wetig, Schulte, & Danielson, 2006; Kachigan, 1991). In another course on human relations where instructors challenge our candidates to deal with issues related to diversity, data analyses of the Human Power Questionnaire (Thompson, 2006) indicate that our candidates' perceptions about diversity change significantly from the beginning to the end of the semester-long course. The assessment coordinator met with the faculty members who teach the course to discuss the results and encourage them to write a paper about the course activities and assessments they use to help candidates learn about themselves by placing them "face to face with their entering beliefs and assumptions" (Banks et al., 2005, p. 266)

Data are collected electronically via our candidate electronic portfolio and College of Education database in Excel spreadsheets that the assessment coordinator

transfers to statistical software for data analysis. Candidates complete course and program assessments via our candidate electronic portfolio (Wetig et al., 2005). We have developed a website that candidates, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors access to complete Field Experience and Student Teaching Evaluations. These data are collected in our College of Education database. The electronic collection of data has helped us to systematically collect and analyze our assessment data, eliminating paper copies of surveys and time consuming manual data entry, except for our follow-up survey.

Conclusion

Through programmatic thinking, alignment between assessments and standards, and data collection and analysis, we have developed an assessment system that is comprehensive and integrated. This journey has involved our entire professional community, including teacher candidates, faculty members, and administrators from our institution and P-12 practitioners and other community members. Next steps in the collection and analysis of data include the dissemination of results to our community members, using an organized and systematic process.

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Table 1

An Example of Alignment between Assessments and Standards

INTASC Principle	Course	Activity	Knowledge	Skills	Dispositions	Impact on P-12 Student Learning
1. The teacher understands the central concepts, tools of inquiry, and structures of the discipline(s) he or she teaches and can create learning experiences that make these aspects of subject matter meaningful for students.	EDUC 2020	Teacher Interview*	X	X	X	
	EDUC 2520	Unit Plan*	X	X		
	EDUC 2520	Teacher Dispositions Index			X	
	Soc. St. TED 4320	Culminating Project (f)	X	X	X	X
	Science TED 4340	Lesson Plan*	X	X	X	X
	Science TED 4340	Reflection*	X	X	X	X
	TED 4600	Student Teaching	X	X	X	X
2. The teacher understands how children learn and develop and can provide learning opportunities that support their intellectual, social, and personal development.	EDUC 2010	Dev. Scenario/Teaching Stra.*	X	X		
	EDUC 2010	Research Teaching Model*	X	X		
	EDUC 2030	Power Activity*	X		X	
	EDUC 2510/2520	Field Experience (f)*	X	X	X	X
	EDUC 2520	Teacher Dispositions Index			X	
	Science TED 4340	Lesson Plan*	X	X	X	X
	Science TED 4340	Reflection*	X	X	X	X
	TED 4600	Student Teaching	X	X	X	X
3. The teacher understands how students differ in their approaches to learning and creates instructional opportunities that are adapted to diverse learners.	EDUC 2010	Concept Map*	X		X	
	EDUC 2030	Power Activity*	X		X	
	EDUC 2510	Inclusion Survey*	X		X	
	EDUC 2520	Teacher Dispositions Index			X	
	Science TED 4340	Lesson Plan*	X	X	X	X
	Science TED 4340	Reflection*	X	X	X	X
	RD & LA TED 4350	Lesson Plan, Practicum, and Reflection (f)		X	X	X
	TED 4600	Student Teaching	X	X	X	X

Note. * Artifact is on candidates' electronic portfolio; (f) Field Experience; Courses include EDUC 2010 – Human Growth and Learning; EDUC 2020 – Foundations of Education; EDUC 2030 – Human Relations ; EDUC 2510 – Applied Special Education; EDUC 2520 – Instructional Systems; TED 4320 – Teaching Social Studies Elementary; TED 4340 – Teaching Science Elementary; TED 4350 – Teaching Reading & Language Arts Elementary; TED 4600 – Student Teaching

Table 2

Teacher Preparation Program Transition Points with Key Assessments

Program Admission	**Throughout Program**	**Student Teaching**	**After Program Completion**
GPA overall Admission Essay Teacher Dispositions Index	GPA in the content area Field Experience Evaluation Human Power Questionnaire Teacher Dispositions Index Lesson Plans Candidate ePortfolio	GPA in the content area EECIA exam Teacher Dispositions Index Student Teaching Evaluation Lesson Plan/Teacher Assessment Work Sample EBI	Follow-Up Survey for graduates and their employers

Table 3

Example of a Data Analysis Summary Sheet for the Teacher Dispositions Index

Professionalism, Curriculum-Centered Item	Pre *M*	Pre *SD*	Post *M*	Post *SD*
1. I am committed to critical reflection for my professional growth.	4.29	0.71	4.58	0.67
2. I cooperate with colleagues in planning instruction.	4.18	0.79	4.49	0.72
3. I actively seek out professional growth opportunities.	4.02	0.85	4.28	0.74
4. I uphold the laws and ethical codes governing the teaching profession.	4.63	0.57	4.76	0.47
5. I stimulate students' interests.	4.01	0.67	4.39	0.66 *
6. I value both long term and short term planning.	4.44	0.71	4.69	0.55
7. I stay current with the evolving nature of the teaching profession.	3.69	0.78	4.21	0.71 *
8. I select material that is relevant for students.	4.08	0.82	4.54	0.64 *
9. I am successful in facilitating learning for all students.	3.66	0.80	4.04	0.81
10. I demonstrate and encourage democratic interaction in the classroom and school.	3.91	0.87	4.33	0.77 *
11. I accurately read the non-verbal communication of students.	3.74	0.74	4.22	0.76 *
12. I engage in discussions about new ideas in the teaching profession.	3.77	0.94	4.10	0.79
13. I select material that is interesting for students.	4.14	0.77	4.51	0.63 *
14. I provide appropriate feedback to encourage students in their development.	4.03	0.90	4.41	0.70
15. I engage in research-based teaching practices.	3.59	0.91	4.01	0.90
16. I create connections to subject matter that are meaningful to students.	4.03	0.82	4.35	0.71
17. I listen to colleagues' ideas and suggestions to improve instruction.	4.31	0.77	4.56	0.55
18. I take initiative to promote ethical and responsible professional practice.	4.37	0.75	4.51	0.67
19. I communicate effectively with students, parents, and colleagues.	4.08	0.79	4.45	0.67 *
20. I work well with others in implementing a common curriculum.	4.03	0.88	4.39	0.69
Professionalism, Curriculum-Centered Subscale Total	4.05	0.56	4.39	0.50 *

Note. Teacher candidates responded on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 with 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. Teacher candidates' perceptions of their professionalism, curriculum-centered dispositions significantly increased from the beginning to the end of EDUC 2520, $t(106) = -6.852$, $p < .0005$, $d = 0.64$.

* Effect size > .50 (difference between means is greater than 0.50 standard deviations)

Table 4

Summary of Faculty Recommendations Based on Data Analyses

Discuss the data from the Spring 2005 Student Teaching Evaluations
What implications about the program/teacher candidate performance can you derive from the data?

- Almost all the data identify the teacher candidates as proficient or developing.
- There is growth among teacher candidates over the time period (midterm to final evaluations).
- The cooperating teachers are rating our teacher candidates more positively than the teacher candidates are rating themselves.
- The university supervisors are rating the teacher candidates lower than the cooperating teachers.
- A recommendation was made that the data be shared with the cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

What additional information do we need to confirm any concerns about teacher candidate performance?

Recommendations were made about additional information we may need. At this time we can do the following:

- Include all three sources (Teacher Candidate (TC), Cooperating Teacher (CT), and University Supervisor (US)) in the assessment each time.
- Disaggregate the teacher candidates into elementary and secondary.
- Provide narrative comments from cooperating teachers and university supervisors.
- Identify the teacher candidates who are ranked in the "Beginning" category of the rubric for the final evaluation and determine if data are available from the Conference Record Form that would allow us to predict those problems with better accuracy.
- Require a joint conference after the evaluations are completed by all three parties (TC, CT, US).

How might we use these data to improve our program?

Data point to areas where teacher candidates assess themselves as weak. For example:

- Instructional Skills – differentiates instruction to meet individual learning styles/needs; uses technology to support learning
- Assessment and Evaluation – involves students in self-assessment of their own learning
- Classroom Management – effectively manages transitions within and between lessons
- Communication – fosters relationships with parents and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being

(1) Comments were made that we are not modeling enough self-assessment or weaving technology into lessons. All professors need to actively model those areas that are weak on the self-assessment. (2) Technology classes need to be available for undergraduates. (3) In the area of classroom management, faculty felt that the teacher candidates do not know the questions until they work with students. Thus, we need more practicum experiences.