



Using a Monitoring Process to Effectively Assist Struggling Pre-Service Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

A critical issue in teacher preparation today is that some candidates meet the criteria for admission to teacher education programs yet they struggle or fail to develop the levels of knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions required to complete the program. This article offers three different case studies to examine the monitoring process developed by one teacher preparation program to identify such students and provide effective interventions.

Keywords: *teacher candidates, dispositions, monitoring, assessment, remediation, teacher education*

Introduction

Those of us who have been involved for any length of time in preparing teachers are likely to have experienced the feeling that something is not going well with one or more candidates. There are candidates who struggle while moving through the program, often grappling with the same issue(s) in multiple classes and field experiences until the problem(s) becomes glaringly apparent and failure becomes imminent.

Nearly every seasoned professor in teacher education programs would admit to a time when he or she breathed a sigh of relief that a certain candidate actually made it through student teaching. And most professors would also admit to not being surprised that a certain candidate was not successful in student teaching or that the candidate who made it through on a wing and a prayer was unable to find employment in the teaching field after graduation.

We all intuitively knew that it was not appropriate to get such candidates through student teaching nor was it right to allow those candidates lacking knowledge and/or skills to move along in the program. Unfortunately, our policies, like those of many teacher education programs, did little to help us as our admission and retention policies relied for the most part on grade point average (GPA) and successful completion of state exams (Desjean-Perotta, 2006). In response to this problem, the Department of Education at North Central College (NCC), like other teacher education programs, examined its policies and increased the rigor of its admission standards and competencies required in order to increase the likelihood of having candidates who could successfully complete the program. Increased rigor (admission tests, GPA, evaluations of dispositions, etc.) are necessary measures, although they alone will not eliminate the fact that

some candidates will meet the admission criteria but still struggle to complete program requirements.

It has been a popular trend to blame teacher preparation programs for the problems associated with public schools and American education in general. In the past ten years or so, publications such as the National Council on Teacher Quality reports have caught the attention of the public and fueled the argument that someone (i.e., teacher preparation programs) must be held accountable for the poor student performance in public schools. Using research methodology that would never receive approval from any higher education research committee, and appearing to cherry-pick information from websites as their main mode of data collection, these reports have nonetheless created significant public attention. Even teacher preparation programs long known for their rigorous standards and high expectations have found themselves in a defensive mode. And life under the microscope has made teacher preparation programs reluctant to take chances on candidates who might not be successful.

Teacher preparation programs have long recognized that candidates who lack content knowledge need to acquire it before they progress in the program. The problem of candidates possessing a lack of content can most easily be remedied by having them take additional coursework in the particular subject area. Teacher preparation programs have also long recognized that those who lack pedagogical skills need more practice before they progress through the program. While not as simple a solution as taking a course, it has not been particularly difficult to arrange for remedial field experience opportunities for candidates to try to gain the skills they lacked. It is certainly more challenging to address remediation when candidates lack professional dispositions. Even though dispositions have long been valued and are widely accepted as an integral part of any quality teacher preparation program, it is only recently that *teaching* candidates about dispositions has become more formal than informal (Shively and Misco, 2010).

In 2000, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) stipulated that teacher preparation programs assess dispositions. But as Koeppen and Davison-Jenkins (2006) point out, NCATE required *only* that dispositions be assessed. A typical example of this type of assessment occurs when an applicant completes a dispositions assessment as part of a screening tool prior to admission to a teacher education program. While this is a good starting place, more is needed than to simply assess dispositions for program admission. For example, some candidates respond to items on dispositions surveys based on what they *think* they should say, rather than what they truly believe and only later does the teacher education program become aware that the candidate lacks professional dispositions. While assessing a candidate's dispositions in a variety of environments and across various personnel helps construct a more complete picture of each candidate's dispositions, this, too, falls short. Having data on candidates who lack dispositions should not limit us to taking one of two responses: exclude the individual from the teacher preparation program or look the other way. Data should be used to help candidates who have deficits in the assessed areas (Desjean-Perotta, 2006). Powers (1999) emphasizes that we can teach dispositions to candidates and monitor their development. It is not a forgone conclusion that the outcome of a candidate's dispositions assessment has to remain as a fixed point. Rather, teacher education programs can provide candidates guidance on developing the necessary dispositions before dismissing them or letting them slip through the cracks.

What is Meant by “Monitoring?”

The Teacher Education Program at North Central College has very high standards and recognizes that not every student who wants to become a teacher will actually be able to realize that dream. It also recognizes that some students who have the potential to become excellent teachers might need support to develop the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions to complete the program. The monitoring program in the NCC’s Department of Education (which will be explained in greater depth in a subsequent section) involves identification of the problems, communication with the candidate about the problems, an explanation of why the problem is considered a concern in the teaching profession, and the provision of support to help the candidate succeed. It does not operate solely as a screening mechanism to eliminate candidates who do not seem likely to make it through the program. Monitoring varies in the ways supports are delivered, based on the different needs of candidates. It is not intended to be punitive, but rather a support system that starts from the assumption that candidates can change and develop.

It should be pointed out that monitoring is not limited to candidates to who lack dispositions. Some candidates who have been involved in the monitoring process lack content knowledge, some lack pedagogical skills, some lack professional dispositions, and some are lacking in more than one of these three areas. The process and types of possible supports that might be recommended for a candidate lacking content knowledge or teaching skills are more obvious than are the process and types of supports for a candidate lacking professional dispositions. Having a clearly defined monitoring process is particularly helpful to faculty to know when and how to address situations where professional dispositions are not evident (Brewer, Lindquist, and Altemueller, 2011).

How Do Other Teacher Preparation Programs Address Disposition Issues and/or Carry Out a Monitoring Process?

There are many similarities in the ways different teacher preparation programs deal with candidates who struggle. There are also some unique components and approaches. Brewer, et al (2011) described aspects of the approaches used by several programs. Following is a brief overview, highlighting one or more aspects of each program that appears to be particularly supportive to struggling candidates.

Eastern Michigan University (EMU) developed a self-evaluation of professional behaviors survey, which candidates complete on Livetext as part of the application to the teacher education program (EMU, 2012). The survey items require candidates to select a response most fitting of their own behavior, on a 5-point scale. Some of the topics addressed on the survey include attendance, timeliness, independence and initiative, handling frustration, responsiveness to constructive suggestions, communication skills, and clarity and coherency in oral presentations. In this survey candidates are also given the opportunity to write reflections and elaborations on each item beyond simply ticking the box.

Brewer et al (2011) describe a process developed by the Metropolitan State College in Denver to communicate concerns to candidates. When it is apparent that a candidate lacks a particular disposition, a meeting is arranged with the candidate, the advisor, the professor, the program coordinator, and department chair to discuss ideas for improvement. A hold is placed on the candidate’s file if a third issue occurs and at that point, the candidate is advised to seek other career options. One highlighted aspect of the process is that the communication method involves

a team of professionals. It is unlikely that the candidate would leave the meeting thinking that the problem was a result of a personality conflict with one individual, which sometimes happens when addressing dispositional issues. Also, this team approach is likely to afford the candidate with multiple perspectives during the discussion of ideas for improvement. The process also includes consequences (to seek other career options if a third issue occurs).

Northwest Missouri State University (NMSU) developed a Teacher Education Guidance Committee, the role of which is to meet with a candidate who has been admitted to the teacher education program and his/her advisor after the issuance of the third low disposition rating (Brewer et al, 2011). A highlighted aspect of the process is that a specific committee is charged with the task of determining one of four possible outcomes: no action (candidate continues); remediation followed by further screening; remediation, and suspension until the remedial requirements have been met; or termination from the program (NMSU Professional Education Handbook, 2012). The process, including the opportunity for appeal, is clearly written in the handbook and makes it apparent to the candidate that one of a range of consequences will result if change does not occur.

St. Norbert College also utilizes a panel approach when change does not occur or when additional concerns arise (Brewer et al, 2011). The process contains a clear explanation that the assessment of a candidate's dispositions is not based on a single event or piece of evidence but instead involves the collection of evidence throughout the candidate's college experience representing a pattern established over time (St. Norbert College website, 2012). Faculty and field supervisors complete dispositions reviews on teach candidate at the end of every course. A highlighted aspect of the St. Norbert College process is the ongoing assessment of dispositions, which is likely to provide more accurate data on an individual's current dispositions than would an assessment of dispositions performed only upon admission to the teacher education program. For example, some candidates do not exhibit the necessary professional dispositions early in the program yet they make substantial growth as they proceed through the program. However, some candidates do not consistently exhibit these dispositions. A one-time assessment performed early in the program that does not reveal problems with professional dispositions is not necessarily an accurate accounting of the candidate's dispositions over time.

The University of Nevada-Reno includes a list of twenty-two dispositions with accompanying professional behaviors as part of the application packet for admission to the teacher education program. There are two highlighted aspects of this program's process. First, the format of dispositions followed by professional behaviors increases the likelihood of candidates' understanding of the disposition. For example, the meaning of the disposition "professional feedback" is made clear when accompanied by the behavior, e.g., "The candidate is receptive and responsive to professional feedback incorporating suggestions into practice." The second highlighted aspect of this process is that it includes a signature line stating:

I have read the dispositions and professional behaviors above and I understand they describe a set of expectations for candidates enrolled in teacher education programs in the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Reno. I further understand that as a teacher education candidate if I do not exhibit these behaviors based on the professional judgment of program faculty, I may be asked to leave the program. (p 12)

The use of a signature line communicates to candidates that the assessment of dispositions is a serious consideration and that there are serious consequences for not making changes.

Brewer et al. (2011) described the PDQ-PREP process at Metropolitan State College of Denver and at Murray State College in Kentucky. The researchers sought to develop a positive, non-punitive approach. One highlighted aspect of this process is that the candidate is advised to engage in self-reflection and to take an active role in drafting his or her improvement goals. This is likely to foster a sense of ownership in the candidate since s/he is involved in the development of the goals. The second highlighted aspect of this approach involves the way the candidate's progress in achieving the goals is monitored. There is clear communication to the candidate of expectations and consequences. Brewer et al. (2011) noted that if the candidate

is making good faith effort to improve, the PDQ-PREP will be updated, and continued, or closed. If little or no progress has been made, or the concerns have continued, other career options may be discussed or the teacher candidate may be dismissed from the licensure program. (p. 56)

Desjean-Perotta (2006) chronicled the development of the Fitness to Teach policy at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), beginning with an informal exploration of other institutions' policies, through the examination of standards from professional agencies, and ending with approval from the University of Texas attorneys. The highlighted aspect of the UTSA process is the emphasis on the critical need for all members of the teacher preparation faculty, including part-time faculty, to consistently uphold the policies.

Although highly competent in their roles, part-time faculty may not be as highly vested in the department's mission of inducting only quality teachers into the teaching profession. Therefore, as a result, weak or incompetent candidates may end up being recommended for a certificate despite their apparent weaknesses, because some faculty may believe that it causes less trouble to do so than to deal with complicated due process rights and grievances. Our experience, however, shows that an FTT policy helps alleviate many of these concerns for part-time faculty because the policy provides them with the support they need to make confident high-stakes judgment calls about teacher candidates. (p. 26)

Teaching and Assessing Dispositions at North Central College

As mentioned previously, the monitoring process at North Central College (NCC) is not limited to dispositions. A candidate can be identified for monitoring if deficits are noted in knowledge, skills, or dispositions, or a combination of the three areas. The Department of Education at NCC kept a record of reasons why struggling candidates received monitoring reports during the four academic years from fall 2008 through spring 2012. Following are broad categories that show ways in which candidates struggled, listed in order of those occurring most frequently to less frequently.

- Candidates lack the professional dispositions that are needed by the profession (organization, communication, responsibility, punctuality, follow-through, commitment, etc.).
- Candidates lack proper depth of the content that they are responsible for teaching.
- Candidates lack skills in lesson planning.
- Candidates have temporary, acute issues that prohibit them from completing their work or from producing quality work.

- Candidates have ongoing chronic issues that prohibit them from completing their work or from producing quality work.

Issues involving dispositions occur most frequently, emphasizing the importance of teaching about dispositions and addressing the issue when candidates have deficits in professional dispositions. Like Powers (1999), the NCC's Department of Education believes dispositions *can* be taught to candidates. But it is also understood that before candidates can be expected to develop new beliefs and behaviors, they have to understand the beliefs, how they manifest themselves as behaviors, and why they are important to the profession. Thus, we concur with Taylor and Wasiesko (2000) who pointed out Powers' suggestion that candidates need to be made more aware of appropriate dispositions. Beginning in the first education course, NCC candidates receive information on dispositions and take part in assignments where dispositions of the teaching profession are examined. The attention placed on teaching about dispositions early in the program and continuing throughout the program, helps candidates understand the expectations that will be placed upon them to demonstrate these dispositions as candidates and later as teachers in the field. Candidates who do not demonstrate professional dispositions, along with candidates who do not demonstrate proper content knowledge or teaching skills, will take part in the monitoring process.

Koeppen and Davison-Jenkins (2006) note that it is better to make explicit the dispositions we want our teacher candidates to exhibit rather than to make assumptions about what they know and believe. Thus, in order to accentuate the importance of dispositions and to emphasize opportunities to exhibit them, NCC Education faculty members include in their syllabi lists of both basic and advanced dispositions, and professors typically point out the specific dispositions that are emphasized in each course.

Like the program at St. Norbert College, NCC's program assesses candidates' dispositions at multiple times throughout the program and a variety of professionals are involved in the assessment. One of the first assessments of dispositions occurs as part of the application process to be admitted to the Teacher Education Program. The candidate completes a Self-Evaluation of Professional Dispositions and a faculty member in the candidate's major (who has had the student for at least one course) also completes an Assessment of Professional Dispositions. This is not a "secret" evaluation. Candidates are expected to read the evaluation from the faculty member to help them understand how their dispositions are perceived by professionals. Candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions are assessed throughout each field experience by cooperating teachers and by supervisors. Candidates' knowledge, skills, and dispositions are also assessed by college professors at the end of each Education course. The important aspect is what happens with the disposition information gained from the assessments. Rather than limit disposition assessment data only for use in screening or for collective analysis of the candidates as a whole, the data is issued to identify candidates who need support if they lack certain dispositions and to assist the candidate in developing a growth plan.

As mentioned previously, NCC takes a strong stance on the importance of teaching about dispositions. The department believes that by making candidates aware of the importance of these dispositions, and by supporting candidates to acquire them, there will be an increased likelihood that candidates will successfully complete the program and be prepared for the teaching profession. Part of teaching dispositions involves assessing candidates' dispositions and we concur with Brewer et al (2011) who stress that "the responsibility of teacher educators is to begin

the process of assessing dispositions early in a teacher candidate's education so that the teacher candidate can continue to grow and develop all skills, including dispositions," (p. 65).

The Department of Education at NCC has found candidates have an understanding of dispositions. Candidates can verbally state them, but they view their own circumstances as different. That is, they believe they have reasons why the behavior occurred or failed to occur, and they often believe they are "exempt." It behooves us to inform candidates about how their actions are perceived by others. This allows candidates who lack skills the opportunity to grow and change. It also allows the department to operate in a consistent and fair manner with all students. One of the NCC teacher candidates used an expression recently that applies to this situation. The candidate, who had just completed the student teaching term, was an invited speaker at a workshop for candidates about to begin student teaching. The particularly apt example he chose to share from his student teaching arose from his experiences with classroom management, but clearly the message applies to those of us in teacher preparation. His message was "That which you tolerate, you encourage." If we don't take the time to clearly inform candidates about their own dispositions as evidenced by their behaviors, we can only expect to see more of it.

Informing Candidates about Monitoring

Candidates at North Central College are informed about the monitoring process early and often in courses and at information meetings, as well as by various personnel (course professors, academic advisors, field experience coordinators, and supervisors). It is explained to candidates that monitoring involves an array of supports to help them succeed; it is not intended to be a "gotcha" or demerit program. Candidates are provided with examples of monitoring services (e.g., help with organization, help with written communication, personal counseling, lesson plan tutoring, additional opportunities for field experience, etc.) although it is emphasized that each candidate has unique needs so the strategies are individualized.

Logistics of Monitoring Process

NCC's monitoring process was developed around the same time as many of the aforementioned programs and it includes many of the same components. The process has evolved over time, and some of the particular ways in which it has been modified are discussed in the following section.

A candidate can be identified for monitoring in a number of ways. First, if a professor notes a problem in one area (absences, late work, low quality work, difficulty with oral or written communication, etc.), the professor completes a Level One Monitoring Report and meets with the candidate to explain the concern and, usually, alternatives and solutions are discussed at this meeting. The candidate keeps a copy of the report, which is also forwarded to the Coordinator of Teacher Education, who keeps a record of candidates who have been issued monitoring reports. One way that this process has evolved over time is that the Coordinator of Teacher Education no longer simply keeps a record of Level One monitoring reports, but in nearly all situations, the coordinator contacts the candidate by email and extends an offer for help. Two benefits arise from this practice. First, some candidates actually follow up on the offer for assistance and receive suggestions and/or recommendations for services. The larger benefit is that candidates receive communication that emphasizes that the problem is "real." Similar to the Metropolitan State process, this modification of the team approach when communicating the problem rein

forces the idea that the problem is not just a personality issue with one professor and that change is expected.

It has been noted that a number of first-time offenses at NCC occur when candidates fail to attend mandatory field experience meetings the first time they take a course with a field experience. Even though they receive email notices, and we can affirm that the emails are actually opened, several candidates each term fail to grasp the seriousness of the word “mandatory” and do not attend the meetings. These candidates are issued a monitoring report and meet individually with the Field Placement Coordinator. They are also contacted via email by the Coordinator of Teacher Education. Data over time indicates that the majority of these candidates have no additional incidences requiring monitoring, suggesting that the majority of these candidates have no additional incidences requiring monitoring, suggesting that the time taken to communicate expectations to candidates early in their program is time well spent.

A field experience supervisor or placement coordinator can also present a candidate with a monitoring report if a problem is noted in the field experience setting. Because of the fact that P-12 students can be potentially affected, any concerns with candidate performance in the field are automatically elevated to Level Two monitoring, even if it is a first-time occurrence. The supervisor and placement coordinator, and sometimes the Department Chairperson, meet with the candidate to talk about the problem and to determine a plan of action to address the concern. The Coordinator of Teacher Education is also given a copy of the monitoring report and follows up with the candidate.

Other serious problems outside of the field experience setting result in a Level Two Monitoring Report. Generally, in this situation, patterns of behavior have been observed. An example is the student who is habitually tardy for class and/or who has failed to submit several assignments on time or the student who fails the first exam/quiz in nearly every course, then has to play catch up the rest of the term. Because all monitoring reports go to the Coordinator of Teacher Education, that person keeps track of behaviors that might seem minor when viewed individually, but show a clear pattern when they are repeated across multiple professors and multiple terms. Case Study 1 illustrates this type of situation.

Issuing multiple monitoring reports each time an incident occurs is an example of how the monitoring process at NCC has evolved over time. Some professors/supervisors would not issue a second monitoring report, believing that there was no need since the candidate was already on monitoring. The problem was that unless the candidate self-reported continued issues, the Coordinator of Teacher Education had no way to know of additional incidences. There were instances where the candidate reported that everything was going fine and it was only at the end of a course, when it was too late to provide supports, that the scope of the problem became apparent. Thus, like the University of Nevada-Reno program, the Coordinator of Teacher Education emphatically stresses the importance for all monitoring matters to be reported, included those noted by part-time Education faculty and supervisors.

As is done with Level One monitoring issues, the candidate receiving a Level Two Monitoring Report first meets with the professor or supervisor who issued the report. They discuss the problem and typically, suggestions/alternatives are discussed. All candidates receiving a Level Two report also meet with the Coordinator of Teacher Education (or a designee) to discuss the problem, develop a plan of strategies, and then continue to meet with the coordinator on a regular basis to monitor progress (Keiser, Kincaid, and Servais, 2011). Like the PDQ-PREP program at the University of Texas at San Antonio, candidates assist in drafting their own improvement plans. Originally, candidates were asked to come up with a list of goals, and then to develop one

or more accompanying strategies for each goal. A candidate with a problem turning in work on time might have a goal to submit all assignments on time for the rest of the term. One strategy to actualize this goal would be to record all assignments in a planner so as to be certain of the date each is due. A second strategy would be to start working on an assignment at least five days before it is due so as to not procrastinate and have the pressure of having to do the entire assignment the night before the due date.

While some candidates were able to develop honest goals and logical accompanying strategies, others had difficulty with the process. Some candidates developed goals that were not directly related to the problem or that were unrealistic. For example, using the previous scenario of having a problem turning in work on time, a candidate might develop a loosely related, unrealistic goal of “getting a grade of 100 percent on all assignments the rest of the term.” Or a candidate struggling with generating actual strategies might only restate the goal, for example “turning in work when it is due,” rather than coming up with one or more appropriate strategies.

As an alternative to the goal/strategy process, most candidates are now asked to think of the issue in a problem/solution format. For example, a candidate receiving a monitoring report from a college supervisor for having submitted and taught two poorly developed elementary math lesson plans (lacking critical content, lacking ways of engaging students with the content, and lacking variety in instructional strategies.) For the problem of inadequate content, the candidate developed a solution by inserting a content outline in the plan. For the problem of lack of student involvement, the candidate developed one solution by inserting a list of questions into the content outline and another solution by developing interactive white board activities or the use of individual handheld wipe-off boards for a portion of each lesson. For the problem of lacking variety in instructional strategies, the candidate developed a solution to select at least two different instructional strategies (from an approved list) for each lesson. Lastly, the candidate developed a solution to submit all remaining math lesson plans well in advance for the supervisor to review prior to an observation. Granted, the process often takes coaching from the Coordinator of Teacher Education but overall, candidates seem to generate more practical plans using the problem/solution format than they did with the goal/strategy format.

The benefit of having candidates develop their own strategies/solutions is that they development a commitment to it—it is *their* plan. Additionally, it teaches candidates a way of thinking that will hopefully result in independent problem solving when they encounter future issues. It is explained to candidates that what they do becomes what is considered their evidence of demonstrating that they are making progress. They need to be able to show that the solution was implemented so they can document that they have made gains. Candidates have ownership of the outcome since they have a great deal of input into the plan.

One important change in NCC’s monitoring process was the insertion of the “monitoring clause” into the application for admission to the Teacher Education Program. In the early years of implementing the monitoring process, there were several instances where candidates claimed that they had never been informed of the process and they simply refused to take part in remediation. Thus, similar to the practice used at the University of Nevada-Reno, a statement is now included in the application which requires the candidate’s signature to attest that s/he will actively take part in the monitoring process should the need arise. The monitoring clause informs the candidate that failure to actively participate in monitoring will lead to dismissal from the Teacher Education Program. Some candidates are defensive about taking part in monitoring but since the addition of the monitoring clause on the application, there have been no instances of refusal.

As mentioned previously, candidates can also be identified for monitoring by the college supervisor and/or through the evaluation from the cooperating teacher when enrolled in a field experience. At the end of every field experience, the cooperating teacher and the supervisor (independent of each other) complete an evaluation of the candidate, which includes a section in which they must indicate if the candidate is recommended, recommended with reservations, or not recommended to continue in the Teacher Education Program. Faculty members who teach courses with field experiences also provide a similar type of evaluation of every student. A candidate who receives a “recommended with reservation” or a “do not recommend” is placed on Level Two monitoring. These candidates meet individually with the Coordinator of Teacher Education (and often simultaneously with the Department Chair or the Placement Coordinator) to talk about the concerns and to develop an action plan (problems and solutions to be addressed in the next field experience).

In the past, the candidate who received a “recommendation with reservations” often moved on to the next scheduled field experience and worked on the problems in that setting. If the candidate did not have any more methods courses/field experiences left to complete, s/he would work on the problems while student teaching. All too often, the candidate continued to display the same problems in the next field or student teaching experience. Increased skills are expected at each level, thus candidates who have not taken part in remediation are far more likely to experience problems again at the next level than to perform at the expected levels. As the monitoring process has developed, most candidates who struggle in the field are now required to take part in a remedial field experience before moving on to the next methods/field experience or on to student teaching. The department developed a course number for this experience to ensure that the student was assigned a field supervisor. Receiving a rating of “recommend with reservations” does not automatically mean move on to the next level, rather it means that the candidate can continue to participate in the Teacher Education Program under a remediation plan. To move to the next level (the next field experience course or on to student teaching) the candidate must produce evidence of forward steady progress and the acquisition of necessary skills.

One benefit of the remedial field experience requirement is that more candidates are gaining the knowledge and skills they need and are completing student teaching, often with higher grades than those that were earned in the past by struggling candidates. Another benefit is that partner schools have expressed that they are aware of and support the high expectations NCC has for its candidates and that they appreciate that NCC candidates come to field and student teaching experiences with the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions already in place. Additionally, whenever possible, the remedial field experience takes place in the same classroom where the candidate will student teach. This helps the candidate build familiarity, comfort, and confidence while gaining the necessary skills and it allows the cooperating teacher to indicate if the student is not ready to enter the student teaching experience upon completion of the field experience. In these instances, the cooperating teacher is not notified that the candidate is completing a remedial field experience in order to respect the privacy of the candidate and to avoid tainting the cooperating teacher’s view of the candidate.

Level Three issues are very serious monitoring concerns. Often, these result from situations where candidates previously on Level Two monitoring failed to make progress and their continued participation in the Teacher Education Program is in question. Case Study 1 describes this type of scenario. Most often, candidates in these more serious situations are required to take part in a hearing with the Teacher Education Committee, which is composed of the Education Department Chair, the Coordinator of Teacher Education, one other faculty member from the

Department of Education, one Field Experience Coordinator, and three full-time faculty members from departments outside of Education. After hearing the candidate's presentation of the case and after reviewing the evidence from participating in monitoring, the Teacher Education Committee has three options: 1) allow the candidate to continue in the program with no conditions, 2) allow the candidate to continue with conditions (typically, involving participating in the monitoring process), or 3) dismiss the candidate from the Teacher Education Program. The actions of the Teacher Education Committee are final. Candidates are also permitted to request a hearing with the committee if they wish to appeal an outcome of the monitoring process or of an Education Department policy.

The End-of-Course Evaluation Process and Monitoring

At the end of every Education course, professors (and field supervisors and cooperating teachers for relevant courses) complete an evaluation on each candidate and indicate one of three possible ratings regarding the candidate's participation in the Teacher Education Program: a "recommendation" to continue, a "recommendation with reservations" to continue, or a "do not recommend" to continue. Each candidate who receives a rating other than a recommendation to continue meets with the Coordinator of Teacher Education and the Education Department Chair, who explain the concern, and discuss and initiate the candidate into the monitoring process. This end-of-course evaluation was a modification made to address the fact that issues inevitably arise at the end of the term, and the monitoring report system did not seem to be an appropriate vehicle to address those issues. For example, professors noted that some candidates made it through the term yet performed very poorly on the final or failed to turn in required paperwork. Often, the professor had no further contact with the candidate since the term had ended. Even when the professor completed a monitoring report and contacted a candidate to arrange a meeting, the candidate simply did not show up. The department recognized that candidates who needed help were falling through the cracks. Some candidates' issues were so chronic in that they would crash at the end of the term in each course. They were not being identified for monitoring, but the problem would become apparent at the point where the candidate's application for student teaching was reviewed by the department and the candidate could not be recommended to move forward. Thus, the end-of-course evaluation was developed to help identify candidates in need of support, using an evaluation tool that was more appropriate than the monitoring report.

Recommendation for Student Teaching

Candidates submit an application to student teaching one full year (three academic terms) before the term targeted for student teaching. Each applicant must receive a consensus rating of recommend from the Department of Education and also from the academic content department for candidates in secondary education or K-12 programs. This rating of "recommend" is the signal needed by the Placement Office to begin seeking a student teaching placement. A candidate who receives a "recommend with reservation" or "do not recommend" rating meets with the Coordinator of Teacher Education and the Department Chair to discuss the problem(s) resulting in the particular rating. The coordinator and department chair inform the candidate of the hold that has been placed on a student teaching placement and provide information about the monitoring process if needed. Typically, candidates receiving a "recommend with reservations" or "do not recommend" rating have already been involved in the monitoring process and are actively work-

ing on strategies and solutions. If a candidate has not previously been involved in monitoring, s/he enters the process at this time. It is made clear at this time that in order to receive a recommendation for student teaching, the candidate needs to provide evidence that previously noted problems are no longer an issue and that s/he has the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required to be successful in student teaching. The evidence, which could include anything from evaluations from supervisors and cooperating teachers to weekly attendance/assignment sheets from course professors to documentation of continued participation and progress in counseling, is provided by the candidate to the Coordinator of Teacher Education. The coordinator in turn informs the Placement Office to begin seeking student teaching placement when satisfactory evidence is in place indicating that progress is being made toward addressing the concerns.

Two changes have taken place with the process described above. The placement process for student teaching begins a full year before the targeted term and cases arose where some candidates demonstrated the types of problems that clearly would have resulted in a “recommendation with reservations” or “do not recommend” rating after their placements had already been made. Some candidates who already had their student teaching placements seemed dismissive of the monitoring process, perhaps assuming that since they had received a “recommendation” early on and already had a placement, there was nothing to stop them from going on. Part of the problem was a flaw in the process—candidates clearly needed to continue to demonstrate proper knowledge, skills, and dispositions throughout the program. Another part of the problem was that departments were asked to provide ratings on candidates they did not know well, particularly in the case of transfer students. With the revised process, candidates’ names are first presented to departments for recommendation a full year in advance and if a “recommend” rating is provided, the placement process is initiated. However, it is made clear to candidates that their names will be resubmitted to the departments every term before they student teach, and if a “recommend with reservation” or “do not recommend” rating occurs, the placement will be frozen until proper evidence has been provided via the monitoring process. Additionally, departments have been given the opportunity to delay their responses until the end of the term in cases where a candidate is enrolled in courses but there is insufficient evidence to make a clear recommendation.

Admittedly, the downside of this change means that the Placement Office has less time to make placements for some candidates. However, to keep this in perspective, the number of candidates who do not receive a recommendation is quite small. The Department of Education believes that the benefits of taking time to get to know candidates before rating them and re-examining candidates each term before student teaching, has outweighed the problems associated with less time available to make student teaching placements.

Case Studies

The following case studies demonstrate how NCC’s monitoring process was implemented to provide support to candidates in three very different scenarios. All three of these cases were considered “serious” situations. One should keep in mind that the majority of monitoring cases are minor and do not involve this level of intervention.

Case Study 1—Allison

Allison’s major was Elementary Education. She produced high quality work although she was very quiet in class and rarely interacted with other students. At the point where her applica-

tion for student teaching was reviewed (a year in advance), it was discovered that she reported some kind of “major catastrophe” or life crisis about three weeks before the end of every term in most of her courses. She would meet individually with each professor, describe the life crisis, state that she was able to keep up in all her other courses, and then ask each professor if she could have an extension on major assignments in that course. It is unknown whether or not she asked for similar extensions from her cooperating teachers. It was not noted on evaluations, but given her style of communication, it could have happened.

As a result she received a “recommend with reservations” for student teaching and the Coordinator of Teacher Education and Department Chair met with her to discuss the concerns and to emphasize how important stamina and stress management are for teachers. It appeared she did not recognize this pattern of behavior. While some of her life crisis issues were genuine, others could not be verified and she was unable to recall details on problems that had occurred only six months earlier. Following is a discussion of strategies that were identified to help Allison become aware of her pattern of behavior and develop positive stress-management skills, along with a summary of her participating in the monitoring process.

- One strategy employed was to have Allison and her professors complete weekly attendance/assignment sheets. These forms are used by other organizations on campus (athletics, etc.) and their use does not negatively stigmatize the student. The form is filled out at the last class meeting each week by both the student and the professor to document that week’s attendance, tardies, prompt submission of assignments, and projected grade in the course at the time in which the form is being completed. The purpose of using this form was to have Allison recognize when she was having problems and to develop skills to cope with and get through stressful situations without asking for extensions. Allison’s behavior did not change significantly as a result of completing the forms, as she continued to experience some kind of catastrophe near the end of each term. Although the quality of her work was outstanding, she had problems getting work accomplished without extensions.
- When Allison reached the final set of methods/practicum courses, it became clear that she could not keep up with the lesson-planning demands. In one course, she needed to plan and teach four language arts lessons spread out over a six-week period, but she simply could not get the lessons done in advance in order to get them to her cooperating teacher and supervisor for review. She stated that she would begin to do research for her lesson and that she couldn’t seem to stop gathering lesson ideas. When she finally did try and develop a lesson plan from all the content and lesson ideas she had researched, she was so overwhelmed that she could not complete the plan. At this point, we simply could not let her go on to student teaching without some evidence that she could successfully complete it. Because she had not made continued forward progress in meeting her goals and because we lacked evidence that she could complete student teaching requirements, her situation was considered at Level Three in the monitoring process. Allison was scheduled for a hearing with the Teacher Education Committee, whose role it was to determine if she could continue without conditions, continue with conditions, or be dismissed from the Teacher Education Program.
- The determination was made that she would be allowed to continue for one more term with conditions. She was informed that if she failed to meet her goals at the end of the upcoming term, she would be dismissed from the Teacher Education Program. Allison

reported during the hearing that she had been taking part in counseling for a number of years with a private therapist. The Teacher Education Committee required that she provide ongoing documentation that she was continuing to take part in counseling on a regular basis and that she was making satisfactory progress (the committee did NOT request that the therapist provide specific details, just documentation that she was participating in counseling and making progress).

- Allison was also required to enroll in an additional field experience to build skills in timely lesson planning. This field experience was approximately twenty hours a week—with the intent that she would build stamina along with experience. One of the parameters established for her was that she needed to stop after she researched four ideas and to write her lesson plan, using no more than those four ideas. Allison spent half days at the school.
- The expectations for the additional field experience were clearly lined out, stating that she needed to submit lesson plans in advance, that she needed to take on increasingly more responsibilities and exhibit greater independence, while maintaining her composure and completing tasks on time. By the end of the experience she was expected to have taken over full responsibility for all planning, teaching, and grading for half of the school day. At the end of the additional field experience, it was determined that Allison had demonstrated the skills needed to move on to student teaching.
- The cooperating teacher from the additional field experience agreed to let Allison return the next term for her student teaching experience. Allison completed student teaching with a grade of A and is now working as a teaching assistant.

Case Study 2—Melanie

Melanie's major was Elementary Education. Melanie's grades were acceptable but not exceptional. She was immature in her interactions with peers, but able to work with them to complete in-class assignments without problems. Her interactions with professors were markedly different. She appeared uncomfortable, defensive, and dismissive. For example, when a professor asked to meet with her to give feedback on a low-quality assignment, Melanie declined to sit down and stood during the meeting. In meetings with various professors, her comments were abrupt and dismissive and ranged from "Yes," "OK," to "Of course." She did not ask questions during meetings and she consistently replied "No" when asked if she had any questions. Following is a discussion of strategies identified to help Melanie gain the knowledge and skills she lacked and a summary of her participation in the monitoring process.

- One of the strategies that Melanie took part in was to meet with campus resource personnel to work on communication skills. While it was documented that she did attend these meetings, there were no noticeable changes in her communication skills with Education faculty.
- Melanie's skills in lesson planning were very weak. Her plans contained little in terms of either pedagogy or content. One simply could not tell *what* she was teaching or *how* she was teaching it from reading her plans. A part of Melanie's plan of strategies was to meet with the methods professor and/or the field experience supervisor during the planning of each of four lessons to be taught at her field experience school. Typically, at this point in the candidate's program, it is assumed that the candidate would meet with the cooperat-

ing teacher to get input on the lesson and would be able to independently develop a lesson plan to be submitted for review. In Melanie's case, additional support was provided while the lesson plan was developed. Even with this level of support, Melanie continued to struggle to create lessons with adequate depth of content and pedagogy. The professor and supervisor showed her examples of lessons developed by other students, but Melanie dismissed the need for depth with comments such as, "My co-op doesn't want me to do that," even though the cooperating teacher shared similar concerns regarding inadequate depth and clarity of the lesson plans.

- It was apparent when Melanie taught her lessons that she did not have a strong understanding of the content she was teaching, nor was she able to provide examples or re-explain concepts when students asked for clarification. Eventually, she admitted that she did not have a firm understanding of some of the content she was trying to teach.
- It had been stipulated in Melanie's monitoring plan that continuation in the Teacher Education Program was contingent upon continued forward progress in the goals and strategies on her monitoring plan. Also, she was supposed to have signed up to take part in a summer program with children on campus to gain more experience and she was to have registered for an additional field experience for the upcoming fall term so we could re-evaluate her readiness for student teaching.
- Melanie did not meet these requirements and while she did not speak directly with Education professors, she informed others on campus that she had changed her major. Because the conditions surrounding her continued participation in the program were not met, she received written notice that she was dismissed from the Teacher Education Program. This was done in an amicable manner, making note of the fact that she had not fulfilled the requirements of her monitoring plan, but also emphasizing that we were aware that she had made plans to pursue another line of study at NCC.

While it might seem unnecessary, or perhaps even punitive, to provide written notice of dismissal in a situation in which the student changed major, we found it necessary to do so. We have had several instances of students who were involved in monitoring, left the college for a period of time or changed his/her major, graduated with a non-education degree, and then returned to the Education program fully expecting to be reinstated to the program with a clean slate. Thus, we stand by our policy to provide written notification, informing students of the dismissal and of the steps that would be required should they wish to return. Typically, a student wishing to return would request a hearing with the Teacher Education Committee and as part of the hearing, s/he would need to provide sufficient evidence that the previous problems had been properly addressed and no longer pose a concern for the student's successful completion of the program requirements.

Melanie was what we would call a reluctant participant in the monitoring process. The specificity and depth of her problems were not really known to those who worked with her, but it was pretty obvious that she did not want to take part. The application for admission to the Teacher Education Program includes a clause indicating that the candidate must take part in monitoring if the need is identified and the candidate must sign that clause in order to be admitted to the Teacher Education Program. Without that clause, one can surmise that Melanie would not have taken part in any level of the monitoring process.

Case Study 3—Brian

Brian's major was K-12 Health and Physical Education. Brian was not a particularly strong student. He was somewhat less mature than peers and was inclined to let others do the work on group projects. But he was a very likable young man and his potential as a future teacher was apparent.

During the winter holiday, with one term of coursework remaining before student teaching, Brian was involved in a car accident. The other driver was intoxicated. Physical injuries were minor although the damage to the vehicles was quite extensive. Over the next few weeks, Brian had recurring dreams about the accident. The quality of his coursework declined considerably, he did not turn in assignments, and could not keep up. Professors became aware of the depth of the problem when Brian did not turn in any of the field experience forms by the due date at the end of the third week of the term. It was also discovered that Brian had not completed any hours and had failed to make contact with his cooperating teacher. Following is a discussion of strategies that were identified to support Brian and a summary of his participation in the monitoring process.

- Brian willingly met with Education faculty and he volunteered information about the accident, which was not known to faculty as it occurred over the holiday break. He stated that he could not sleep; he was visibly agitated, frazzled, and cried throughout much of the meeting. The Campus Wellness Center was contacted and it was arranged for Brian to go there at the conclusion of the Monitoring meeting to arrange for counseling to deal with his anxiety.
- Brian was scheduled to take a heavy load of courses in his final term before student teaching and it was likely he would have failed most of the courses and/or dropped out. We convinced him to slow down his program so that he could focus on fewer courses at a time, even though this meant delaying the student teaching term.
- Brian had lost all semblance of a daily routine. He revealed that some nights he would go to bed at 5 a.m. only to end up napping through most of the afternoon. Then he would not be tired enough to sleep for more than a couple of hours at night. His eating habits were also erratic. One strategy was to help him figure out how to establish a normal routine prior to student teaching. This included a 90-minute exercise program from 6:30 to 8 a.m. daily; no naps during the day and in bed by midnight; and an improved diet with three regular meals a day.

Brian had not developed strong organizational skills before his accident, so this was not an area where he simply re-established prior habits. To foster the development of such skills he would need during student teaching, he began to use a weekly planner and wrote out daily to-do lists. He set up and began using a file box with folders for his teaching materials. He also began using a binder with dividers and pockets to keep his materials organized when he carried them back and forth from home to college and to his field experience school.

Brian responded well to the structure and strategies that were part of his monitoring program. He struggled at times, but demonstrated proper communication and coping during these few low spots. His progress throughout the term was steady and Brian went on to student teach the next fall, earning a grade of “A.” Brian was selected as the “mentor” guest speaker to present at the Student Teaching Workshop the next term where he spoke openly about his experiences and proudly shared student teaching tips and organizational strategies with the participants.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It seems likely that without the monitoring process, Allison and Brian would not have made it through student teaching. In fact, neither one may not have made it through college. Both of them had problems of a serious enough nature that they could have been removed from the teacher education program if assessments were designed only to *screen* rather than also *support*. On the other hand, without the monitoring process, Melanie (with her mediocre grades) might have been passed along from course to course and could have ended up in student teaching where her problems would have become glaringly apparent, creating an uncomfortable situation for Melanie, the college, her cooperating teacher, the host school, and potentially a harmful situation for the elementary students who would have lost valuable instructional time. Worse, if an effort was made to just get Melanie through student teaching, she could have ended up certified to teach though clearly unqualified.

The North Central College Department of Education acknowledges that many teacher preparation programs have established equally effective ways to identify and assist struggling candidates. For programs interested in developing or revising their process, the following recommendations from this study are offered:

- Establish a method for early and ongoing identification of candidate who struggle with knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for the teaching profession.
- Clearly communicate with the candidate, describing both what constitutes the area of concern and why it presents a problem for successful completion of the program and success in the field of teaching.
- Provide support, but also establish the expectation that responsibility rests with the candidate to provide evidence of forward steady progress without plateaus or backslides.

This means some candidates may have to delay graduation in order to remediate deficits in knowledge, skills, and/or dispositions. It also means that some candidates will not continue on in the Teacher Education Program if evidence of steady forward progress does not occur.

The data on NCC candidates who received monitoring reports during the 2011–12 academic year shows that one-third of the candidates received more than one report. Often, the candidate exhibited the same issue across several courses/situations (e.g., problems turning in work on time). Often, more than one problem was noted on each report (e.g., the same student would have problems with content knowledge and problems in implementing instruction).

However, we believe that the critical piece of data is that two-thirds of the candidates who received a notice were issued only one report. This means that the majority of candidates successfully addressed the concern upon first notice. The department admits that it takes time for faculty members to write up monitoring reports and to meet with candidates. In addition, it takes time for the Coordinator of Teacher Education to meet with candidates and coordinate/provide

supports. But the results have proven effective interventions. When candidates are informed of concerns (the earlier the better), and they are provided with supports, the outcomes include the retention of college students, an increase in the number of candidates who successfully complete the program, and the department's maintaining its reputation for high standards. True, not every student who enters North Central College with a desire to become a teacher makes it through the program, but those who do not succeed are identified early and are supported to find other majors that will help them reach their goals. We owe it to our teacher candidates to support them so they can develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions we know they need. We owe it to current and future students in K-12 classrooms to prepare competent and highly qualified teachers.

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