Personal Perspective

What's Good for the Goose . . .
Inconsistency in the NCATE Standards?

By Albert H. Fein

Many schools that prepare teacher candidates for certification are accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), which requires six standards for accreditation based on the following categories: (1) Candidate, Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions; (2) Assessment System and Unit Evaluation; (3) Field Experiences and Clinical Practice; (4) Diversity; (5) Faculty Qualifications, Performances, and Development: and (6) Unit governance and Resources (NCATE, 2002).

This article addresses a possible inconsistency in these standards. To borrow from a well-known bit of folk wisdom, I will address a "what's-good-for-the-goose-is-good-for-the-gander" issue inherent in the standards for students compared with those that apply to faculty. Stated in other terms, I wish to raise an issue of justice and of appropriate modeling.

Teacher candidates, according to Standard 1, must "demonstrate the content, pedagogical, and professional knowledge, skills, and *dispositions* (italics mine) necessary to help students learn" (NCATE, 2002, p. 10). University faculty members, according to Standard 5, are expected to "model best professional practices in scholarship, service, and teaching, including the assessment of their own effectiveness as related to candidate performance (NCATE, 2002, p. 11) — a focus on "dispositions" is lacking for teacher education faculty.

The lack of explicit expectations for faculty "dispositions" is especially problematic in relationship to Standard 4 (diversity), because without explicitly setting expectations for faculty dispositions regarding diversity, realizing the diversity standards may not be truly achievable.

NCATE (2002) ranks the criteria for each standard "Unacceptable," Acceptable," and "Target." If one examines Standard 5 (Faculty Qualifications, Performance, and Development) closely, an argument can be made that dispositions of university faculty are implied. Under the criterion "modeling best professional practices in teaching," the *acceptable* descriptor states that faculty "integrate diversity and technology throughout their teaching."

The *target* descriptor states, "Faculty value candidates' learning and adjust instruction appropriately to enhance candidate learning" (NCATE, 2002, p. 34). Both descriptors imply faculty sensitivity to diversity; however, integrating diversity with passion and depth is different from a passing reference or two to diversity-related topics in a semester-long course. This begs the question regarding how many college professors actually adjust their instructional strategies to accommodate culturally different learners and to what extent they do so.

Further, the *acceptable* descriptor for "modeling best professional practices in service" states that faculty "are actively involved in professional associations" (NCATE, 2002, p. 35). For example, I might be a member of the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) and I might attend its annual conference, but including such information on my vitae may not translate into a commitment to promote diversity in my courses. The intent of the standard seems to stress active involvement, as opposed to mere membership.

Likewise, in the criterion for "unit facilitation of professional development," the *acceptable* descriptor states that the unit "develop new knowledge and skills, especially as they relate to the conceptual framework(s), performance assessment, diversity, technology, and other emerging practices" (NCATE, 2002, p. 36). The unit may be demonstrating the "right" dispositions toward diversity; however, the standard does not hold individual members of the unit accountable for those dispositions.

The supporting explanation of this criterion states, "[Faculty] serve as advocates for high-quality education for all students, public understanding of educational issues, and excellence and diversity in the education professions" (NCATE, 2002, p. 36). This statement does address a disposition — advocacy for diversity. It is the closest statement in the standards that parallels the expectations for teacher candidates, but I question whether it is sufficient.

After returning from the NAME conference in Washington, D.C. — including attendance at a day-long pre-conference workshop on NCATE Standard #4 — I made a presentation about the standard to my colleagues in the School of Education. I used an exercise that borrowed from my days as a Cognitive Coaching trainer which asks participants to rank five statements about the goals of education in order of importance to them:

> 1. To develop students' ability to think clearly, to use intellectual reasoning to solve problems, and to make rational decisions.
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> 2. To nurture the individual child's unique potential to allow full development of his/her creativity and sensitivity, and to encourage personal integrity, love of learning, and self-fulfillment.
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> 3. To diagnose the learner's needs and abilities, to design instructional strategies which develop skills and

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competencies, and to produce trained people who are able to function efficiently in our changing, complex, technological society.

4. To transmit to young people the basic knowledge, skills, traditions, academic concepts, and values necessary to interpret, participate in, and further the heritage and traditions of our country.

5. To create an intense awareness of the critical social and environmental issues, and develop a consciousness of responsibility and reform to ensure the survival of society. (Costa & Garmston, 1993, p. 48)

I collected faculty and staff responses and tallied them while my colleagues worked on a task in small groups. I talked about the relationship between knowledge, skills, and dispositions and shared information I had garnered at the NCATE workshop from Pritchy Smith (1998), author of *Common Sense about Uncommon Knowledge: The Knowledge Bases for Diversity*.

I asked faculty to compare their own courses to NCATE Standard #4, using the 14 knowledge bases described by Smith as one example. I asked the faculty to see if there might be gaps between their current practice (in addressing diversity within their programs and courses) and their own perception of an ideal (very few of us had reached the standard Smith recommended). I hoped that all faculty — despite how they personally defined "the ideal" — would see that there was room for improvement in how we addressed diversity in our various programs.

We then returned to the ranking of the "goals of education" exercise. Before revealing the group ranking of the five statements, I shared a quote from Smith's (1998) work: "Teacher preparation programs must empower new teachers who will, in turn, empower their pupils to create a more fair and just democratic society. This social reconstructionist perspective is an inextricable part of the definition of a culturally responsible and responsive teacher preparation program" (p. 22).

Statement 5 in the exercise, "To create an intense awareness of the critical social and environmental issues, and develop a consciousness of responsibility and reform to ensure the survival of society" (Costa & Garmston, 1993, p. 48) represents the social reconstructionist point of view. According to Smith (1998), and also Gay (2000), culturally responsible and responsive educators highly value and support this perspective.

Highly valuing any worldview is a disposition, but Statement 5 ranked last among the faculty and staff who participated that day. [In fairness to my colleagues, the forced choice exercise does not distinguish the degree of importance of each goal. Theoretically, all five perspectives might be valued equally, but the exercise does not allow that response.] The point of the exercise was that if our students are to be held accountable for certain knowledge, skills, and dispositions, then so should we — the faculty who teach them.

If some faculty do not highly value this social reconstructionist perspective, would their disposition affect their teaching, the emphasis they gave to diversity in their courses, or their students?

I invite all teacher preparation institutions and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education to consider the inconsistency of asking our teacher candidates to be accountable for certain dispositions, while not explicitly holding the faculty who teach them accountable for the same dispositions. Some may cry "Big Brotherism" or "Academic Freedom," but I say, what's good for the goose…

References

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