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Setting the Record Straight

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Setting the Record Straight

Arthur E. Wise

President, National Council of Accreditation of Teachers Education (NCATE)

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education sets performance-based standards for the preparation of P-12 teachers and other professional school personnel. The standards require that candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn in our increasingly diverse schools. Essentially NCATE requires that accredited institutions ensure that candidates have content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, and the ability to apply these types of knowledge in school settings.

NCATE recognizes that there are significant disparities in the academic achievement of American students and that these differences are often correlated with socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and exceptionalities. The No Child Left Behind Act is designed to highlight and ameliorate these disparities. NCATE seeks to ameliorate the achievement gap by ensuring that its institutions are preparing teachers who will be able to help all students learn, regardless of their socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and exceptionalities. The next generation of teachers must master multiple teaching strategies and must be able to adapt instruction to the students they serve. NCATE expects the institution to provide candidates with opportunities to work with diverse higher education and school faculty, candidates, and students in P-12 schools so that the candidates are ready to help all children learn. In this context, diversity is defined according to U.S. Census categories (gender; racial/ethnic background; socioeconomic status and exceptionalities). NCATE expects institutions to ensure that candidates "demonstrate dispositions that value fairness and learning by all students." See NCATE Unit Standard 4 at www.ncate.org.

In addition to these common sense expectations, institutions may develop additional professional dispositions that fit their mission. NCATE refers institutions to licensing standards for professional educators adopted or adapted by most of the states. Institutions often identify professional dispositions that encourage pre-service educators to be caring teachers, collaborative partners, life-long learners, and reflective practitioners. NCATE expects institutions to assess teacher candidate dispositions based on observable behavior in the classroom. NCATE does not recommend that attitudes be evaluated. The caring teacher creates a classroom in which children respect each other. The collaborative practitioner works with parents and other teachers to help students learn. The life-long learner reads education literature and the reflective practitioner re-thinks how she teaches the unit on geometric shapes.

What parent does not want teachers who exhibit these strengths? NCATE believes that the development of professional dispositions is an important component of pre-service education. NCATE does not expect or require institutions to inculcate candidates with any particular social or political ideology; NCATE respects the unique missions of the institutions it accredits.

NCATE's 2001 Unit Standards-- with their emphasis on candidate outcomes rather than curriculum-- represented a dramatic departure from past accreditation activities. As we began our periodic review of the Unit Standards, we promised that the only changes would be to clarify expectations, to remove ambiguity, and to promote consistency.

Quite a few individuals and organizations responded to our invitation to review and comment on the first draft of the revised standards. The Standards Committee of the Unit Accreditation Board carefully analyzed and considered each comment, and made a number of changes based on the comments received. These changes were then reviewed by the Unit Accreditation Board.

A number of comments concerned the important ideal of "social justice." NCATE Standards, particularly its Diversity Standard, contain elements of "social justice." NCATE Standards also require that teacher candidates teach consistently with the ideals of fairness and the belief that all children can learn. NCATE's performance -based approach requires that its expectations be measurable in the context of candidates' clinical experiences such as student teaching and internships. The Committee and the Board reaffirmed these long-standing expectations, making a small number of wording changes to clarify the definition of "professional dispositions." At present, the definition with proposed changes is as follows: Professional Dispositions: *The professional behaviors educators are expected to demonstrate in their interactions with students, families, colleagues and communities. Such behaviors support student learning and development and are consistent with ideas of fairness and the belief that all students can learn. Based on their mission, professional education units may determine additional professional dispositions they want candidates to develop. Institutions assess professional dispositions based on observable behavior in educational settings.*

The Committee added dispositions on fairness and the belief that all students can learn (now in Standard 4) to Standard 1, and adding a definition of fairness to the glossary: *'Fairness (professional disposition): The commitment demonstrated in striving to meet the educational needs of all students in a caring, non-discriminatory, and equitable manner.'*

NCATE's Standard 4 on Diversity, with the proposed edits as made during the revision period, is as follows: *The unit designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and provides experiences for candidates to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn. Assessments indicate that candidates can demonstrate and apply proficiencies related to diversity. Experiences provided for candidates include working with diverse populations, including higher education and P-12 school faculty, candidates, and students in P-12 schools.*

Diversity: Differences among groups of people and individuals based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area. The types of diversity necessary for addressing the elements on candidate interactions with diverse faculty, candidates, and P-12 students are stated in the rubrics for those elements.

Language has been added to make this standard stronger, in that candidates must demonstrate and apply proficiencies related to diversity.

The following language applies to Standard 4 on Diversity, under the rubric for the **Design, Implementation, and Evaluation of Curriculum and Experiences:**

The unit clearly articulates proficiencies related to diversity identified in the unit's conceptual framework that candidates are expected to develop during their professional programs. Curriculum and field experiences provide a well-grounded framework for understanding diversity, including English language learners and students with exceptionalities. Candidates are aware of different learning styles and adapt instruction or services appropriately for all students, including linguistically and culturally diverse students and students with exceptionalities. Candidates connect lessons, instruction, or services to students' experiences and cultures. They communicate with students and families in ways that demonstrate sensitivity to cultural and gender differences. Candidates incorporate multiple perspectives in the subject matter being taught or services being provided. They develop a classroom and school climate that values diversity. Candidates demonstrate classroom behaviors that are consistent with the ideas of fairness and the belief that all students can learn. Candidate proficiencies related to diversity are assessed and the data are used to provide feedback to candidates for improving their knowledge,

skills, and professional dispositions for helping students from diverse populations learn.

NCATE remains committed to ensuring that teachers who graduate from professionally accredited institutions are able to help all children learn. We hope that the record has been set straight so that we continue the important job of preparing the next generation of highly qualified educators who can work successfully with all students.