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Teaching Teachers: A Study of Teacher Educators' Perceptions of the Effect of Meeting Mandated NCATE Standards

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TEACHING TEACHERS: A STUDY OF TEACHER EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS
OF THE EFFECT OF MEETING MANDATED NCATE STANDARDS

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Teacher quality matters when it comes to student achievement. However, the fact that there are no nationally mandated standards as to how teachers should be prepared has led to wide variations in the quality of teacher education programs. It was in response to this situation that the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) was established. The purpose of this qualitative participant observational study was to present how teacher educators perceive the effect of complying with NCATE standards on teacher preparation programs and on their own teaching practices. Eight purposefully selected faculty members of a university-based teacher preparation program participated in the study. The findings are presented in a narrative form using direct quotations of responses the participants gave to questions asked during confidential interviews. Results of the interviews were analyzed and emergent themes were identified. The findings were corroborated through analysis of related documents. Positive effects of having to meet NCATE standards included a belief that the unit's image and reputation were enhanced. Other perceived benefits included improvements in the unit's assessment system and better communications among the faculty. However, several teacher educators felt that the amount of money, time and energy expended on the NCATE process outweighed the benefits. Seven of the eight participants referred to the process as something which had to be done "for NCATE" rather than perceiving the process as a transformative change initiative designed to enhance teacher preparation and thereby improve student learning. One conclusion that can be drawn from this study is that if NCATE fails to be seen as aligning with the personal ethics and belief structure of teacher educators and with those of K-12 teachers, NCATE's effect on teacher education

programs will continue to be seen as “procedural” and not as having a meaningful effect or of creating lasting change. Another conclusion is that teacher educators generally were unlikely to change their own teaching styles or practices in any meaningful way in response to NCATE standards, even in the face of a state mandate to implement those standards.

Dedication

This Dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Betty Hendricks, who supported me in so many ways over so many years, to my children, Maureen Hendricks Fox, JD and David J. Hendricks, MD whose educational success and attainment of higher degrees kept me persevering, and to my grandchildren Munchkin, Rocky, Screech, and Skeeter, the joys of my life.

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To my wife, Betty: thank you for your unconditional love and support; for never complaining even when you had a right to; for picking up the slack, and giving me the time and space I needed. To my children, Maureen and David: thank you for your faith in me; and for never telling me I was too old to do this, and for challenging me by reminding me that you had already received doctoral level degrees of your own, and that I needed to catch up.

To the Chair of the Education Department where this study took place: thank you for allowing me to conduct the study in your institution, and thank you for your support and encouragement in so many ways.

To the teacher educators who agreed to participate in this study: thank you for your help, for your courage to “call it as you see it,” and for your willingness to go out of your way to accommodate my needs.

To all of my colleagues in the Education Department: thank you for being both cheerleaders and task masters as my progress (or lack of progress) on this dissertation dictated.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Acknowledgments..... | v |
| List of Tables..... | ix |
| CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Introduction to the Problem | 1 |
| Background of the Study | 3 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 6 |
| Purpose of the Study | 11 |
| Rationale for the Study | 12 |
| Research Questions..... | 13 |
| Nature of the Study | 14 |
| Significance of the Study | 15 |
| Definition of Terms..... | 16 |
| Assumptions and Limitations | 18 |
| Organization of the Remainder of the Study | 19 |
| CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW | 21 |
| Introduction and Conceptual Framework | 21 |
| The Role of Perception..... | 23 |
| Teacher Education and Preparation..... | 24 |
| Perceptions of and Reactions to Mandated Standards | 31 |
| Change | 35 |
| Chapter Summary | 37 |
| CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY | 39 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Introduction..... | 39 |
| Research Considerations..... | 40 |
| Data Collection..... | 42 |
| Role of the Researcher..... | 47 |
| Data Analysis..... | 49 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 52 |
| CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS..... | 54 |
| Introduction..... | 54 |
| Purpose..... | 54 |
| Presentation of the Findings..... | 56 |
| Data Analysis..... | 56 |
| Analysis of Other Materials..... | 89 |
| Emergent Themes..... | 94 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 101 |
| CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS..... | 103 |
| Introduction..... | 103 |
| Results and Conclusions..... | 103 |
| Recommendations for Further Research..... | 111 |
| Summary..... | 112 |
| REFERENCES..... | 116 |

APPENDIX A. RESEARCHER'S INTERVIEW NOTES FORM.....122

List of Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Relationship of Research Questions to Issues Addressed During Interviews..... | 55 |
|--|----|

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

“Stupid in America” was the provocative title of an ABC News *20/20* television program episode hosted by John Stossel (2006, January 13) about the state of public education in the United States. Stossel’s contention that our public school system is designed in such a way that we “cheat our kids” might be dismissed as tabloid journalism were it not for the 2007 report of the U. S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences National Center for Education Statistics which showed that on comparative tests in mathematics, U.S. students in the fourth grade lagged behind similarly-aged students in Japan, the Russian Federation, and England. Students in the United States fared even worse on test results administered in 2003 by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) among the 30 countries that make up the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. The results of the PISA tests showed that in mathematics, 15-year-olds in the United States posted an average score that was lower than the average in 23 other countries (Lemke et al., 2004).

Numerous reasons for the poor showing by American students have been offered. Stossel (2006) argues that because public education is basically a monopoly, there is no competitive incentive to improve teaching and learning as there is in other countries where public and private schools compete for students, and a student’s education is paid for by public funding regardless of the type of school the student attends. Others claim that high-stakes standardized tests have caused teachers to forego best practices in teaching in order to teach to the test (Hollingworth, 2007). But if teachers are teaching students how to take the tests, why are our students still

failing the tests? Are students in America simply “stupid,” or are there other factors involved? Some educators interviewed by Stossel (2006) contended that the poor showing was the result of the United States not spending enough money on education. However, Darling-Hammond (1999) had previously conducted a study of the spending practices of all 50 states and found “teacher quality variables appear to be more strongly related to student achievement than... overall spending levels” (p. 38). Others claimed that smaller class sizes would solve the problem, but Hoxby (2003) refuted this claim noting that

the *most optimistic* [italics in original] widely accepted estimates of the effect of class size reduction suggest that lowering class size by 10 percent for all the years that a student is in elementary school raises his or her achievement by 0.17 of a standard deviation. (p. 6)

Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) concurred that smaller class size was not the way to improve student achievement, noting that “estimates indicate that even a very costly ten student reduction in class size... produces smaller benefits than a one standard deviation improvement in teacher quality” (p. 419). Still others blamed demographic and environmental issues for the poor performance on standardized tests in American schools. But many countries with higher test scores spend significantly less money per student, many have class sizes larger than those in the United States, and most industrialized nations have diverse populations with parents who work. So where does the problem lie? Many educational researchers would contend that if teacher quality is such an important variable in improving student performance, at least part of the problem may lie in the way we prepare our teachers.

Background of the Study

“Teacher education is the Dodge City of the education world. Like the fabled Wild West town, it is unruly and chaotic. There is no standard approach to where and how teachers should be prepared” (Levine, 2006, p. 110). While Levine’s comments may be among the more graphic, they are by no means unique. The fact that there are no nationally mandated or even commonly accepted standards as to how teachers should be prepared has led to wide variations in the quality of teacher education programs in terms of admissions policies, content knowledge requirements, pedagogical preparation, and other knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for effective teaching (Shulman, cited in Kirby, McCombs, Barney, & Naftel, 2006). These variations in the quality of preparation led to schools of education being labeled “intellectual wastelands,” castigated for being “impractical and irrelevant,” and cited as the cause of bad teaching and poor learning by some educational practitioners (Kirby et al., 2006, p. 1).

Criticism of teacher preparation programs is not a new phenomenon. It has been going on for decades. Darling-Hammond (2006) cited Bestor (1985); Damerell (1985); Goodlad (1990); Herbst (1989); Koerner (1963); Kramer (1991); and Labaree (2004) as but a few examples of those critical of the state of teacher education. In addition, various commissions, foundations and organizations sponsored research projects whose results called for major reforms in teacher education. Examples include the 1983 report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education which promoted changes in teacher preparation, and the 1986 Holmes and Carnegie reports which included calls for more standardization in what would-be teachers should know and be able to do.

The desire to improve the preparation of teachers is hardly surprising since there is little doubt that teacher quality matters when it comes to student achievement. Two decades ago a study funded by the Carnegie Corporation found that, “research based upon thousands of pupil records in many different cities and states establishes beyond doubt that the quality of the teacher is the most important cause of pupil achievement” (cited in Kirby et al., 2006, p. 3). In the intervening years additional research (Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005; Rice, 2003; Wilson, Flodin, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001) corroborated this finding, leading Rice to conclude that teacher quality “is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement” (2003, p. 1).

This perceived correlation between qualified teachers and student performance had previously led to the requirement in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 that there was to be a “highly qualified” teacher in every classroom. However, NCLB failed to identify where these highly qualified teachers would come from. Darling-Hammond contended that, “one of the most damaging myths prevailing in American education is the notion that good teachers are born not made” (2006, p. ix). If, as Darling-Hammond suggested, good teachers are “made,” where does that construction take place? For Darling-Hammond the answer was that teachers were best formed in traditional teacher preparation programs offered through institutions of higher education. But Darling-Hammond was quick to agree that not all teacher preparation programs were created equal. Some, she contended are “powerful” and produced highly qualified and highly competent teachers (2006, p. 5). Others would seem to deserve much of the criticism that had been aimed at them.

Improving the quality of the programs that prepare and educate America's teachers is crucial to the success of America's students. But just what is it that teachers should know and be able to do? The answer would seem to be self-evident: teachers should know the subject matter they teach and be able to teach it. According to Bulger, Mohr, and Walls (1996), "it is impossible to be an effective teacher without being competent in both subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical ability," that is, having the ability to design and implement instructional methods to enhance student learning (p. 2). Summarizing the research and literature on teacher effectiveness, Bulger et al. concluded that most findings were based on "process-product" research. In other words, "when a teacher does this (process), it results in this sort of student achievement (product). When a teacher causes this to happen (process), it results in student learning (product)" (p. 2). However, in reviewing how different researchers described the components in the process-product model that lead to effective teaching, Bulger et al. found that Rosenshine and Furst (1973) had concluded that there were five important teacher-effectiveness variables, while Walls (1994) listed 99 process-product relationships for effective teaching. Achieving concurrence as to what makes a teacher effective remains an elusive goal.

The lack of agreement concerning what should be included in teacher preparation programs and how to measure the effectiveness of teachers is exacerbated, according to Richie (2004), by the reality that teachers do not control entry into their field by setting standards of professional practice as do other professions such as physicians, attorneys, and accountants. In teaching, decisions regarding preparation, entrance requirements, professional practice, assessments, and curricula to be followed are controlled by people who typically are not teachers or even in the field of education. Governors, legislators and even members of local school boards

decide how teachers within that state will achieve certification or licensure and what kind of training or experience those individuals must have prior to entering a classroom as a teacher (Richie, 2004). The result has been that each state has established its own standards of teacher education, and each teacher preparation program, even those within the same state, has interpreted those standards differently.

Statement of the Problem

It is not known how teacher educators perceive the effect of complying with a State Department of Education mandate requiring teacher preparation programs to meet the standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and the actual implementation of those standards within teacher education programs. This issue drove the primary research questions for this study: How do teacher educators perceive the effect of NCATE standards on a teacher preparation program? And, given the state mandate that teacher preparation programs meet NCATE standards, how do teacher educators operationalize this requirement in their own teaching methods and practices?

For teacher educators and a teacher preparation program attempting to meet NCATE standards for the first time, the complexity of the process required by NCATE has the potential to cause the unit and its faculty to engage in what Kirby et al. (2006) described as “fundamentally changing the behaviors and tasks” of the organization (p. 33). The literature contains some examples of research and dissertations that highlight the impact of individual NCATE standards on components of teacher preparation programs such as the use of technology to augment teacher preparation (Gladhart, 2001; Smith, 2002; Thomas, 1999) and preparing

teachers to work in diverse settings (Cooksey, 2002; Jordan, 2007; Kvilvang, 2006). These studies focused on the way teacher preparation programs responded to the specific NCATE standard being studied. But, as pointed out by Loughran (2006), teacher preparation programs do not teach teachers. Teacher educators teach teachers. And, Loughran went on to note that “teacher educators are expected to teach not only how to teach, but also *about* [italics in original] teaching” (p. 13). This means that “teacher educators carry a heavy responsibility in what they do, how they do it and the manner in which they come to know and develop their own professional knowledge and practice” (p. 14). How teacher educators perceive the effect of complying with an externally imposed requirement to meet NCATE standards on what teacher educators do, how they do it, and how they come to know and develop their own professional knowledge and practice had not been sufficiently studied.

Teacher Preparation and the Role of NCATE

According to NCATE’s Mission as found on NCATE’s website, both the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation recognize NCATE as an accrediting body for schools, colleges, and departments of education. NCATE is a non-profit, non-governmental alliance of 33 national professional education and public organizations that support quality teaching. The NCATE accreditation process determines whether schools, colleges, and departments of education, and other organizations preparing educators, meet demanding standards for the preparation of teachers and other professional school personnel. NCATE’s mission as found on NCATE’s website asserts that:

NCATE is the teaching profession’s organization to help establish high quality teacher, specialist, and administrator preparation. Through the process of professional

accreditation of schools, colleges and departments of education, NCATE works to make a difference in the quality of teaching, teachers, school specialists and administrators.

(NCATE Website, 2008).

While five states (Alaska, Arkansas, Maryland, New Jersey and North Carolina) require all teacher preparation programs in those states to hold NCATE accreditation, most states, including the state where this study takes place, allow teacher preparation programs to voluntarily apply for NCATE accreditation. Thus, while all 50 states have adopted all or portions of the NCATE standards as the criterion against which the state's teacher preparation programs are measured, holding NCATE accreditation remains voluntary on the part of the individual programs.

To begin the process of seeking accreditation from NCATE, an institution must meet nine specific preconditions including the development and submission of a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework establishes the shared vision for a unit's efforts in preparing educators to work effectively in P-12 schools. It provides direction for programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability. The conceptual framework is knowledge based, articulated, shared, coherent, consistent with the unit and institutional mission, and continuously evaluated (NCATE, 2008, p. 14).

Once the preconditions are met, the institution must demonstrate its ability to meet six NCATE-established standards which identify the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions expected of educational professionals. The standards, which are articulated in greater detail in the Literature Review, also suggest the organizational structures, policies, and procedures that should be in place to support candidates in meeting these expectations.

After submitting the required documentation to demonstrate the institution's ability to meet the six standards, NCATE schedules an accreditation visit. Three to eight members of the NCATE Board of Examiners visit the institution to interview faculty, candidates for certification, staff, graduates, and employers, and to gather additional data to evaluate the programs. The team reviews all the evidence and writes a report on its findings. The institution may write a follow-up report in response. All material is forwarded to NCATE's Unit Accreditation Board, which reviews the data and makes the final accreditation decision.

For many institutions, trying to meet NCATE standards was a marked departure from the traditional "take whatever courses fit your schedule" approach to curriculum planning prevalent in teacher education programs. As noted by NCATE (2008), "Preparing teachers to teach all students to meet society's demands for high performance has created a new agenda for educators and policymakers. To meet these changing needs, norms in teacher preparation and licensing are changing" (p. 3). While the changes advocated by NCATE may be necessary, "fundamentally changing the behaviors and tasks of an existing organization is one of the most difficult reforms to accomplish" as Kirby et al. (2006, p. 33) observed. Thus the State Department of Education (SDE) in the state where this study was conducted concluded that merely suggesting teacher preparation programs voluntarily adopt the stringent accreditation standards called for by NCATE was not enough. To challenge teacher preparation programs to examine their philosophy, approach, and effectiveness in preparing prospective educators and to require that such programs be rooted in a knowledge base, be designed around a conceptual framework, and exhibit coherence in their curriculum and assessment as called for by NCATE would require more than just encouragement. The State Department of Education decided to make compliance

with NCATE standards mandatory by requiring all teacher preparation programs in the State to demonstrate that they meet NCATE standards if they wished to continue to operate, even if the program was not seeking NCATE accreditation.

State Requirements

In the state where this study took place, teacher preparation programs must be approved by the State Board of Education. As stipulated in state regulation Section 10-145d-9, “No educational preparation program shall publicize, begin to enroll students, or operate without the approval of the Board.” The SDE website indicates that, effective July 1, 2003, the State Board of Education approved the replacement of its educator preparation program approval standards with the standards established by NCATE. This requirement to meet NCATE standards, therefore, applied to the 2008 application for continued approval submitted by the Education Department which is the locus of this study. Prior to its 2008 approval application, the Education Department (also called *the unit* by NCATE) had been approved by the State under the standards and regulations of SDE that had been in place at the time the application was submitted. Since it had last applied for program approval prior to the adoption of NCATE standards by SDE, the unit had not previously been required to meet the NCATE standards.

A critical component of complying with the new regulations required the Education Department to reexamine all aspects of its operations and to develop a conceptual framework that articulated the unit’s fundamental beliefs and approaches to teacher preparation. Regarding the conceptual framework, NCATE stipulates that:

A conceptual framework establishes the shared vision for a unit’s efforts in preparing educators to work in P–12 schools. It provides direction for programs, courses, teaching,

candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability. The conceptual framework is knowledge-based, articulated, shared, coherent, consistent with the unit and/or institutional mission, and continuously evaluated. The conceptual framework provides the bases that describe the unit's intellectual philosophy and institutional standards, which distinguish graduates of one institution from those of another. (NCATE Unit Standards, 2008).

Recognizing the need to enhance the capabilities of teachers led the State Department of Education to make compliance with NCATE standards mandatory. However, recognizing that changes advocated by NCATE might be valuable is not the same as actually implementing those changes. Meeting these standards required the unit to reexamine all aspects of its operations and potentially to make changes to those operations. Loughran (2006) contended that changing the behaviors and tasks of a teacher preparation program would cause not only the unit to assess its operations, but would require teacher educators themselves to reflect on and perhaps change their personal behaviors and tasks. This study described how teacher educators perceived NCATE and the requirement to meet NCATE standards, and whether those perceptions actually had an effect on the way teacher educators go about teaching teachers.

Purpose of the Study

This study focused on the perceptions of selected teacher educators within a specific Education Department who were charged with developing and implementing a process and preparing the materials necessary for the unit to demonstrate that it met NCATE standards. While the literature contains some examples of the impact of individual NCATE standards on

teacher preparation, particularly as they apply to the application of technology and issues of diversity in such programs, the information derived from this study added to the limited available research on the perceptions of teacher educators concerning the effect of NCATE standards and the process of preparing to demonstrate compliance with those standards on the operations and programs of a teacher preparation program as well as on their own teaching practices and methods.

Rationale for the Study

Little was known about how teacher educators perceived the effect of complying with NCATE standards on teacher preparation programs and on the teaching practices of teacher educators. The NCATE requirement that teacher preparation programs develop a conceptual framework challenged the programs to examine their philosophy, approach, and effectiveness in preparing prospective educators. Meeting this requirement also required teacher educators to examine their personal beliefs about what teachers should know and be able to do and how teachers should be prepared. This meant that some teacher educators might have had to change their approach to educating teachers. Whether these changes at the unit level or the personal level were actually implemented by the teacher educators or merely given “lip service” by them to move the process of meeting NCATE requirements forward was not known. There was little current research in this area, and more was needed. This study attempted to add to the limited available research on the topic. The results of the study also hopefully provided insight to administrators of teacher preparation programs as to how to help ensure that the process of

responding to NCATE standards has a positive impact on both the program and the faculty members within that program.

Research Questions

This study addressed the broad goal of exploring how teacher educators experience, describe, and respond to a state mandate that teacher preparation programs must meet NCATE standards as a condition for state approval of the program. As recommended by Patton (2002), the goal was to understand how these educators perceived the requirement, how they described their personal experience with the requirement, how they felt about the requirement and made sense of the impact of the requirement, and how they talked about the phenomena with others. The study also investigated the perceptions of teacher educators about the effect of complying with this requirement on their own teaching practices and processes. Data was gathered from interviews with teacher educators who served on the task force charged with developing the unit's response to the state mandate, from the mining of documents created during the creation of the unit's conceptual framework, and by reviewing course syllabi and other curricular materials prepared by the teacher educators prior to and subsequent to their participation in the development of the conceptual framework. The two following central research questions and five sub-questions were answered by this study

Research Question 1: How do teacher educators perceive an externally imposed mandate that the teacher preparation program in which they teach must meet NCATE standards?

Research Question 2: Given the requirement for teacher preparation programs to meet NCATE standards, how do teacher educators operationalize this requirement in their own courses, curricula, methods, and practices?

Sub-Question 1. How do teacher educators understand NCATE as it relates to teacher preparation?

Sub-Question 2. How do teacher educators perceive the effect of NCATE on the operations of a teacher education program?

Sub-Question 3. How do teacher educators think about NCATE standards with regard to decisions they make about their own curricular, pedagogical, and assessment practices?

Sub-Question 4. To what extent do teacher educators perceive the process of attempting to meet NCATE standards to be worth the time and effort involved?

Sub-Question 5. To what extent do teacher educators perceive the process of attempting to meet NCATE standards would be worth the time and effort involved if the State Department of Education did not require the unit to meet NCATE standards in order to gain program approval?

Nature of the Study

This was a participant observational study. Through the use of interviews, observations, and discussions the study sought to capture in their own words the perceptions of teacher educators of complying with NCATE standards as a condition for teacher preparation programs receiving approval to operate from the State Board of Education. Based on recommendations postulated by Creswell (2003), the researcher attempted to reduce participant bias and “check the

accuracy of the findings” (p. 196) by employing the strategies of triangulation, member-checking, and self-reflection. The research methodologies used in the study as well as the strategies for validating the accuracy of the findings are further discussed in chapter 3.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because, while the literature contained a limited number of examples of studies designed to explore the effect of specific NCATE standards, there was a need for additional study concerning the effect of NCATE standards on teacher preparation programs and on the teacher educators themselves. Without buy-in from the participants, any change effort is doomed to failure. It is important that administrators of teacher preparation programs who elect to apply for NCATE accreditation or who must comply with mandates to meet NCATE requirements understand the perceptions of the faculty members who will be impacted by those requirements, and whether they perceive NCATE as having an effect on the programs and on their own teaching methods and practices. Having a clearer understanding of teacher educators’ perceptions of this process should assist administrators of teacher preparation programs to better prepare their faculty members to work more collaboratively in preparing the unit to meet NCATE accreditation requirements.

As pointed out by Bullough and Gitlin (1995), “teacher educators frequently ignore what they tacitly understand” (p. 40), and what they teach is filtered and made more or less meaningful based on a set of imbedded assumptions. This study sought to identify those assumptions and to determine if the process resulted in actual change in the behavior of the

participants instead of simply resulting in an understanding of a need for change which was then ignored.

Definition of Terms

Accreditation. (a) A process for assessing and enhancing academic and educational quality through voluntary peer review. NCATE accreditation informs the public that an institution has a professional education unit that has met state, professional, and institutional standards of educational quality; (b) The decision rendered by NCATE when an institution's professional education unit meets NCATE's standards and requirements. (NCATE Glossary, 2008).

Alternate Route to Certification. Programs for new teachers which allow them to begin teaching before completing all their certification requirements (Constantine et al., 2009, p. xv).

Assessment. An evaluated activity or task used by a program or unit to determine the extent to which specific learning proficiencies, outcomes, or standards have been mastered by candidates. Assessments usually include an instrument that details the task or activity and a scoring guide used to evaluate the task or activity.

Board of Examiners. On-site evaluators who review institutions based on the NCATE Unit Standards. BOE members are nominated by NCATE-constituent organizations and must successfully complete the NCATE training. (NCATE Glossary, 2008).

Candidates. Individuals admitted to, or enrolled in, programs for the initial or advanced preparation of teachers, teachers continuing their professional development, or other school

professionals. Candidates are distinguished from *students* in P–12 schools. (NCATE Glossary, 2008).

Conceptual Framework. Required by NCATE and SDE of all teacher preparation programs operating in the State. Establishes the shared vision for a unit’s efforts in preparing educators to work effectively in P–12 schools. It provides direction for programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability. (NCATE Glossary, 2008).

Highly Qualified Teacher. To be deemed highly qualified under requirements established by The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), teachers must have: a bachelor's degree, full state certification or licensure, and prove that they know each subject they teach. (U.S. Department of Education)

National Program Review. The process by which NCATE, in collaboration with the specialized professional associations (SPAs), assesses the quality of teacher preparation programs offered by an institution. Institutions are required to submit their programs for review by SPAs as part of the accreditation process, unless otherwise specified by the state partnership agreement with NCATE.

SPAs (Specialized Professional Associations). The national organizations that represent teachers, professional education faculty, and other school professionals who teach a specific subject matter (e.g., mathematics or social studies), teach students at a specific developmental level (i.e., early childhood, elementary, middle level, or secondary), teach students with specific needs (e.g., bilingual education or special education), administer schools (e.g., principals or superintendents), or provide services to students (e.g., school counselors or school

psychologists). Many of these associations are member organizations of NCATE and have standards for both students in schools and candidates preparing to work in schools.

Standards. Written expectations for meeting a specified level of performance.

Students. Children and youth attending P–12 schools as distinguished from teacher candidates. (NCATE Glossary, 2008).

Teacher Educator. A professor of education responsible for preparing teacher candidates.

Teacher Preparation/Teacher Education Program. Any college or graduate school program that prepares teacher candidates.

Traditional Route to Certification. New teachers who typically finish a teacher preparation program through an institution of higher learning, and who complete all teacher certification requirements before beginning to teach (Constantine et al., 2009, p. xv).

Unit. The college, school, department, or other administrative body with the responsibility for managing or coordinating all programs offered for the initial and advanced preparation of teachers and other school personnel, regardless of where these programs are administratively housed. (NCATE Glossary, 2008).

Assumptions and Limitations

An assumption of this study was that while “generalizability of the findings can be problematic in qualitative research” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 466), readers of this study will be able to use what Wilson (cited in Gall et al., p. 466) calls “reader/user generalizability” to determine the applicability of the findings to their own situations concerning faculty involvement in responding to externally-imposed mandates.

As the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the data included in this study, the researcher's interpretations were limited by his own involvement, values, beliefs and reflection. As the researcher reviewed the data collected through interviews with the participating faculty members, he attempted to discover meaning through both reflection and analysis. Thus, while credibility and dependability were key considerations, data collection and interpretation were filtered by the researcher's own judgment, experiences, and beliefs which were unique to the researcher, and which were revealed to the readers of this study. As Creswell contends, qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive, and "one cannot escape the personal interpretation brought to qualitative data analysis" (2003, p. 182).

The scope of the study was limited to a teacher preparation program in an Education Department in a midsized university located in the Eastern part of the United States. The university's Education Department has over three hundred teacher candidates completing the program annually. The teacher educators participating in the study served on a task force charged with ensuring that the unit's teacher preparation programs met NCATE and SDE requirements and standards.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This study is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the introduction and framework of the study, background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and assumptions and limitations. Chapter 2 provides a literature review that places the study in a historical and theoretical context. Chapter 3 includes details about the methodology used in data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents

the data and the findings of the study. Chapter 5 contains results, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

Notwithstanding the significant amount of research that has been done in recent years on the role of the literature review in qualitative studies, this study followed the advice offered more than 30 years ago by Glaser (1978) that the literature review in a qualitative research study should provide the researcher with a broad overview of the general landscape, while permitting the researcher to enter the study with as “few pre-determined ideas as possible” (p. 3). Likewise, the researcher agreed with the suggestion of Strauss and Corbin (1998) that “There is no need to review all of the literature in the field beforehand” because “it is impossible prior to the investigation to know what the salient problems will be or what theoretical concepts will emerge” (p. 49). Thus, throughout this study the literature review was ongoing. From the outset, however, the topics of perception, teacher education and preparation, and change in an educational setting were foreseen as relevant to this research project.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

There are several theories that help in providing a context for addressing the research questions. However, there was no one perspective that can be said to be *the* conceptual framework in which this study was located. In this study the researcher attempted to capture the perceptions of a purposefully selected sample of teacher educators and then analyze, reflect on, and present their stories through the lens of the researcher’s own experience.

One concept which helped provide a framework for this study is Guba and Lincoln’s contention that there is no absolute criterion for judging what constitutes reality because there is

no single “truth” (2005, p. 212), and the criteria for determining reality or validity are “derived from community consensus regarding what is ‘real,’ what is useful, and what has meaning” (p. 197). In addition, parts of the cognitive view of learning and the information processing model of memory as described by Woolfolk (2007) which are predicated on the belief that knowledge is learned and changes in knowledge make changes in behavior possible also provided a framework for this study. According to Woolfolk, “What we already know is the foundation and frame for constructing all future learning” (2007, p. 249), and it is this prior knowledge that “determines to a great extent what we will pay attention to, perceive, learn, remember, and forget” (Alexander; Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, cited in Woolfolk, 2007, p. 249).

The work of Gee (cited in Kornfield, Grady, Marker, & Ruddell, 2007) in the field of discourse analysis also provided a portion of the conceptual and analytical frame for this study. According to Gee, the way we use language “not only represents perspectives, but creates them as well” (cited in Kornfield et al., 2007, p. 4). This study attempted to capture the language of teacher educators as they expressed their perceptions of the impact of state-mandated requirements for teacher education during interviews, in meetings, and in informal conversations. By allowing the participants to describe their experiences in their own words, this study sought to gain an understanding of how the participants interpreted and made sense of the impact of preparing to meet externally imposed standards. Gee also recommended looking at the data in terms of “what situated meanings these words and phrases seem to have ... given what you know about the overall context in which the data occurred” (cited in Kornfield et al., 2007, p. 4). The context of this study was situated in the efforts of a university-based Education Department to meet a state-mandated requirement that the unit had to meet NCATE standards prior to obtaining

approval by the State Department of Education to continue preparing educators to teach in the state's public schools. How these teacher educators described the process of responding to that mandate and their perceptions of the effect of that process on the teacher education program and on their own teaching styles and methods was at the heart of this study.

The Role of Perception

Perception, in the words of Woolfolk (2007), may be defined as “the process of detecting a stimulus and assigning meaning to it” (p. 251). For Woolfolk, the meaning an individual assigns to a stimulus detected in his or her environment “is constructed based on both physical representations from the world and our existing knowledge” (p. 251). The action taken in response to the stimulus, therefore, is driven by the individual's perception and the meaning the individual assigns to the stimulus. Vygotsky (1978) likewise recognized that there was a vital link between belief and action, and Neisser (1976) described the interaction between knowledge, perception, action and the environment as a perceptual cycle. Stanton, Chambers, and Piggott (2001, pp. 189-204) described this perceptual cycle to mean that an individual's “knowledge of how the world works (e.g. mental models) leads to the anticipation of certain kinds of information, which in turn directs behaviour to seek out certain kinds of information and provides a ready means of interpretation.” Thus, rather than accepting the old adage “seeing is believing”, it is more accurate, many cognitive theorists would assert, to say that “believing is seeing” (Greenberg, Westcott, & Bailey, 1998; Horner, Guyer, & Kalter, 1993; Inkpen & Crossan, 2007). And, since it was perception that assigned meaning to events in our life, social psychologists such as O'Brien (2005) contended that individuals create or produce their own

reality. Therefore, one might assume that how teacher educators perceive and understand NCATE would color their reaction to having to meet NCATE requirements in compliance with externally imposed mandates, which in turn influences the actions teacher educators take in response to those requirements. This study attempted to shed light on the validity of this assumption.

Teacher Education and Preparation

Over a century ago, Dewey (1902) argued that education was vital to the continued existence of our country. Without an educated citizenry, he contended, democracy could not function. To provide its citizens with education, schools must be available, and not just to those who could afford private schools and personal tutors, but to all children. “What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child,” Dewey believed, “that must a community want for all its children. Any other idea for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy” (p. 7). What parents want, however, are not schools per se. What they really want is to have their children educated. The emphasis then, is not just to make schooling available, but to make schools effective mechanisms for learning. How to accomplish this goal is the basis for ongoing debate among educational researchers and reformers.

Historically, according to Gibboney (cited in Galluzzo, 1999, p. 1), the educated person in the United States has been subjected to a “quiz show” approach to teaching and learning in which teachers impart information, students “receive” it, and are then tested on how much of the material they can remember. Galluzzo (1999) claims that this method led to the “process-oriented” approach which tends to equate “seat time” with learning (p. 1). Education reformers

argue that this approach is no longer adequate to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in an information-based economy. Policymakers, educators, and parents all agree that students should be getting more from our schools. According to Galluzzo, the search for improvements in student learning led to the standards-based approach to education where the emphasis is on achievement and the use of tests to measure content knowledge. Today, many educators accept standards as a necessary component of our education system. However, results on standardized tests designed to measure students' achievement levels show significant variation. The causes of these variations in test scores and how to improve student performance have been the subjects of considerable research for decades.

“For many years, educators and researchers have debated which school variables influence student achievement” according to Darling-Hammond (1999, p. 5). Some educational researchers believed that a student's ability to learn was primarily a function of native intelligence and socio-economic status. For example, Coleman (1966, cited in Darling-Hammond, 1999, p. 5), suggested that “schools bring little influence to bear upon a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context.” Other research cited by Darling-Hammond (1999, p. 5) postulated that school-related factors such as class size (Glass & Smith, 1978; Mosteller, 1995), and school size (Monk & Haller, 1993) may be important variables in student learning. Darling-Hammond's continued research into “critical components of schools that make a difference in achievement” led her to conclude that “the quality of teachers and teaching” (2006, p. 15) were primary factors in enhancing student performance. If teacher quality and teaching are key components of student achievement, it becomes important to know what knowledge, skills, and dispositions enhance teacher quality.

The characteristics and practices of effective teachers have been topics of ongoing research for more than 50 years according to Darling-Hammond (1999). Reflecting on studies from as long ago as the 1940s as well as more recent research efforts, Darling-Hammond (1999) found that variables which seemed to be related to teachers' competence included teachers' general academic ability and intelligence, subject matter knowledge, knowledge of teaching and learning, teaching experience, certification status, and teachers' behaviors and practices. Her research led Darling-Hammond (1999) to conclude that "differential teacher effectiveness is a strong determinant of differences in student learning" (p. 5). Going even further, Moss, Glenn, and Schwab (2005) asserted that "there is no single element of schooling as important as teachers" (p. xv).

The recognition of a clear relationship between teachers and student achievement resulted in increased efforts to improve teacher quality. As noted by Moss et al. (2005), "since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), a document that challenged many assumptions about the effectiveness of the public schools, states have been upgrading student standards, and a number of efforts have been made to upgrade the teaching profession" (p. 178). The report raised the public's awareness that "all children in America's classrooms deserve nothing less than a well-prepared, and caring professional who has the knowledge base and power to ensure that they reach their full potential" (Moss et al., 2005, p. xv). Likewise, according to Darling-Hammond, Chung, and Frelow, calls for reform from groups like the Carnegie Task Force on the Future of Teaching (1986) and the Holmes Group (1986), "spurred many universities to strengthen teacher preparation" (2002, pp. 286-287). However, the desire to strengthen teacher preparation programs has been counteracted, claimed Darling-Hammond et al. (2002, p. 287), by a growing

demand for teachers in a labor market replete with “funding inequities and distributional problems” that has led many states and districts “to lower standards for entry, admitting many new teachers without preparation.” These competing forces led Cochran-Smith (cited in Jordan, 2007, p. 40) to conclude that these are “dangerous times” for teacher education because of “an intense focus on teacher quality; the emergence of ‘tightly-regulated deregulation’ as a federally mandated reform agenda for teacher education; and the ascendance of science as the solution to educational problems are driving practice, policy, and research in this field.” Cochran-Smith (cited in Jordan, 2007, pp. 40-41) was concerned that the convergence of these three developments was “pushing us dangerously close to a technical view of teaching, a training model of teacher education, the isomorphic equating of learning with testing, and an educational system in which ‘winner takes all’ in terms of opportunities, resources, and outcomes.”

Dangerous times and competing policy agendas notwithstanding, Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) strongly believed that university-based teacher preparation programs were critical to developing teachers who were likely to be more effective in enhancing the learning and performance of the students they taught than were teachers who received little or no pedagogical training or who achieved teacher certification through alternative routes. Darling-Hammond and Bransford noted that advocates of stronger preparation had argued that teachers needed to understand how children learn and how to make material accessible to a wide range of students in order to be successful, and cited numerous studies (e.g., Betts, Rueben, & Dannenberg, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ferguson, 1991; Fetler, 1999; Goe, 2002; Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000) which demonstrated the positive effects of teacher education and certification on student achievement (2005, p. 1).

While Darling-Hammond and Bransford admitted that some researchers (Ballou & Podursky, 2000; Finn, 1999) had argued that teacher effectiveness may be as much a function of general academic ability or subject matter knowledge as it was related to specialized training in how to teach, a series of regression analyses of student achievement gains over a six-year period conducted by a team led by Darling-Hammond found that certified teachers “consistently produce significantly stronger student achievement gains than do uncertified teachers” (Darling-Hammond & Bransford 2005, abstract). The research also demonstrated that “teachers’ effectiveness appears strongly related to the preparation they have received for teaching” (2005, abstract). Other researchers were not as convinced of the necessity of formal teacher preparation programs. For example, Cochran-Smith and Lytle (cited in Jordan, 2007) maintained that “when it comes to teacher preparation, No Child Left Behind rhetoric has consistently challenged schools of education as rightful locations for teacher preparation programs and championed alternate routes into teaching” (p. 39). A report by Constantine et al. (2009) funded by the U.S. Department of Education supported Cochran-Smith and Lytle’s views by noting that “there was no statistically significant difference in performance between students of AC (alternate route to certification) and those of TC (traditional route to certification) teachers” (p. xv). The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) pointed out a number of perceived shortcomings in the research methodology of the study conducted by Constantine et al. Nonetheless, Darling-Hammond was willing to concede that many teacher preparation programs do need to be improved, and that “meeting serious accreditation standards must become mandatory” (2006, p. 19) for institutions that offer teacher education programs in order to improve the overall results of such programs.

The perceived need for accreditation standards was the driving force behind the establishment in 1954 of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). The NCATE accreditation process determines whether schools, colleges, and departments of education, and other organizations preparing educators meet demanding standards for the preparation of teachers and other professional school personnel. According to Kirby et al. (2006), NCATE believes “every student deserves a caring, competent, and highly qualified teacher” (p. 15). To help ensure that teachers are competent and qualified, NCATE has developed six standards that it uses to assess the ability of teacher education departments to create such teachers.

The six NCATE Unit Standards identify the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions expected of educational professionals. The standards also identify the organizational structures, policies, and procedures that should be in place to support candidates in meeting these expectations. The standards as found on the 2009 NCATE website are:

Standard 1. Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions. Candidates preparing to work in schools as teachers or other school professionals know and demonstrate the content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and skills, pedagogical and professional knowledge and skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn.

Assessments indicate that candidates meet professional, state, and institutional standards.

Standard 2. Assessment System and Unit Evaluation. The unit has an assessment system that collects and analyzes data on applicant qualifications, candidate and graduate performance, and unit operations to evaluate and improve the performance of candidates, the unit, and its programs.

Standard 3. Field Experiences and Clinical Practice. The unit and its school partners design, implement, and evaluate field experiences and clinical practice so that teacher candidates and other school professionals develop and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to help all students learn.

Standard 4. Diversity. 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 teacher candidates include working with diverse populations, including higher education and P–12 (pre-kindergarten through high school) school faculty, candidates, and students in P–12 schools.

Standard 5. Faculty Qualifications, Performance, and Development. Faculty are qualified and model best professional practices in scholarship, service, and teaching, including the assessment of their own effectiveness as related to candidate performance. They also collaborate with colleagues in the disciplines and schools. The unit systematically evaluates faculty performance and facilitates professional development.

Standard 6. Unit Governance and Resources. The unit has the leadership, authority, budget, personnel, facilities, and resources, including information technology resources, for the preparation of candidates to meet professional, state, and institutional standards.

Perceptions of and Reactions to Mandated Standards

A review of the literature failed to produce significant numbers of examples of research into the perceptions of teacher educators of the impact of NCATE standards. Of the studies which were available, most found that the standards may not have had the desired effect. In some cases, teacher educators felt that they are not adequately knowledgeable of the requirements imposed by the standard, so the standard had no impact on their teaching practices. A study by Cooksey (2002) of teacher educators' implementation of the NCATE diversity standard suggested that "despite the requirements and programmatic policies spelled out in NCATE standards... implementation of those mandates in a teacher education program can fall far short of the quality inherent in the stated intents of the standard" (p. 285). Cooksey concluded that particularly with regard to the NCATE standard related to multicultural training of teacher candidates, the teacher educators charged with implementing the training were inadequately prepared to do the job. As a result, these teacher educators "do not know the requirements of the standard, and they do not feel obligated to accommodate to those requirements in their existing training programs" (p. 285). In other cases, teacher educators resisted changes brought about by state or national mandates because they were not part of the process of implementing the standards. For example, a study undertaken by Hebert (2007) explored the perceptions of faculty and assessment coordinators at three institutions of higher education as they relate to three different electronic assessment systems (p. xii). NCATE standards require teacher education programs to demonstrate that they have assessment systems in place, and that data collected and analyzed through those systems are used to improve teacher preparation and unit operations. Hebert found that participants used terms like "necessary," "vital," and "required" when

referring to mandated electronic assessment systems (EAS), and that “these comments rarely relate to an EAS outside the context of assessment required for NCATE accreditation” (p. 119). The overall findings of the study led Hebert to conclude “it seems as though EASs referenced in these findings are regarded as requirements of NCATE accreditation but may not hold significance in teacher education programs without the NCATE expectation” (p. 119). Hebert concluded that the introduction of mandated EASs would have been perceived more favorably had the participants who would be responsible for implementing the system been consulted and made to feel as if they were part of the decision making process (p. 127).

While Hebert may have found participants used terms like “necessary”, “vital” and “required” when referring to NCATE’s mandate that teacher preparation programs utilize electronic assessment systems to track candidate progress, other institutions have a quite different view of NCATE. For example, as of 2009, NCATE had all fifty states engaged in various types of partnership arrangements with NCATE, and more than 700 colleges of education had achieved accreditation. However, as impressive as that number may seem, less than 50% of schools of education in the U.S. participate in NCATE accreditation (University of Chicago, 2009), and among those who do participate only 39% chose NCATE accreditation on a voluntary basis as opposed to being required by the state (NCATE, 2009). A 2008 survey of member institutions conducted by NCATE revealed that 66% of survey participants said that the amount of documentation required was excessive, and many cited examples where processes were altered by NCATE without advance notification. Respondents found these changes to be disruptive and even felt that the changes could have jeopardized their success in the accreditation process. The survey also found that all types of institutions expressed a need for the program

review process to be changed to reduce the burden on institutions. Institutions cited a failure to clearly and consistently communicate guidelines, as well as a burdensome, time-consuming process, and questioned the investment of faculty and staff time and dollars in the process. The mean satisfaction for participants who completed the program review process through NCATE was 3.85 on a 7-point scale (7 = *extremely satisfied* and 1 = *not at all satisfied*). 28% of respondents selected a 1 or 2 on the 7-point scale, indicating that they were very dissatisfied with the NCATE program review process. Even the president of NCATE recognized that its process is seen by its member institutions as being “burdensome”, “time-consuming” and “costly” (J. Cibulka, personal communication, February 13, 2009).

The literature also demonstrated that state-mandated testing had negative or unintended consequences on teachers and teacher educators. Fragnoli studied the beliefs, perceptions and practices of classroom teachers to understand the process of “teachers’ negotiations when implementing externally imposed standards and assessments” (2003, p. iii). Fragnoli found that the teachers studied “altered their instructional practices in response to the test” (p. iii). The study’s findings demonstrated that the adage “what is tested will be taught” rings true, and that “not only what is tested will be taught, but also what is taught is dependent on the stakes of the test” (Fragnoli, p. 252). In other words, the teachers “felt compelled to spend additional time on high-stakes areas and to reduce their instructional time in disciplines such as social studies” (p. 253). The teachers studied by Fragnoli were not aware of the changes they initiated in their pedagogy. In fact, Fragnoli claimed that because test scores of students of the teachers studied improved, the “teachers gained an artificial sense of professionalism as they became featured teachers by the district” (p. iii). The result, according to Fragnoli, is that by altering their

teaching practices in response to the test, a “gap” was created between “teachers’ beliefs and enacted practices” (p. iii).

While Fragnoli found that classroom teachers were not necessarily aware of the differences between their beliefs and practices in response to preparing students for standardized tests, teacher educators seemed to be somewhat more aware of the potentially negative impact of externally-imposed mandates on their teaching practices. At least that was one of the findings of a study by Kornfield et al. (2007) among teacher educators at a California State University concerning their compliance with a new state-mandated standardized test of teacher candidates. Kornfield et al. reported that the participants in the study responded that the new system “seems destined to deskill teacher educators in much the same way that, nearly two decades ago, Apple and Teitlebaum (1986, cited in Kornfield et al., 2007) warned that top-down standardization was deskilling teachers” (p. 4). There seemed to be a sense among the respondents according to Kornfield et al. that Nelson (cited in Kornfield et al., 2007, p. 4) was correct in postulating that the ivory tower had been breached and that “the teacher education profession is under siege.” With this siege mentality, it is not surprising that Kornfield, et al. found that “resistance, say critical teacher educators, should be our response to this onslaught” (p. 4).

The extent to which other teacher educators have perceptions and reactions similar to those expressed in this review of the literature regarding mandated standards is not known. This study sought to add to the knowledge base in this area.

Change

As noted by O'Toole (1995), organizations and individuals tend to resist change. Therefore, a catalyst of some sort is typically required to initiate change. NCATE developed its standards to provide that catalyst within teacher education programs by requiring the institutions providing such programs to, in many cases, alter the "processes and tools to which organizations had become accustomed" (Hannan, cited in Hebert, 2007, p. 5). As noted by Galluzzo, most educators and education researchers "accept standards as a necessary condition of renewal in our system of education" (1999, p. 4). But, even if the development of standards was viewed as a good idea or a good policy, as Fullan, Cuttress and Kilcher (2005) noted, "the history of educational reform and innovation is replete with good ideas or policies that fail" (p. 54).

Even the best ideas will fail, claim Fullan et al. in the absence of eight key drivers (p. 58). These eight key drivers to creating effective and lasting change might be paraphrased as

1. Engaging people's moral purposes. In education, moral change is about improving society through improving educational systems and thus the learning of all citizens.
2. Building capacity. Building capacity involves developing new knowledge, skills and competencies; new resources; and new shared identity and motivation to work together for greater change.
3. Understanding the change process. Making change work requires the energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership of all those implementing improvements.
4. Developing cultures for learning. Developing a culture for learning involves a set of strategies designed for people to learn from each other (the knowledge dimension) and to become collectively committed to improvement (the affective dimension).

5. Developing cultures of evaluation. One of the highest yield strategies for educational change is assessment for learning (not just assessment of learning). Assessment for learning incorporates gathering data on student learning, disaggregating that data for more detailed understanding, and developing action plans for improvements based on those data.
6. Focusing on leadership for change. Leadership, to be effective, must be spread throughout the organization. Leadership for change means seeking leaders who represent innovativeness – the capacity to develop leadership in others on an ongoing basis.
7. Fostering coherence making. Change knowledge is not about developing the greatest number of innovations, but rather about achieving new patterns of coherence that enable people to focus more deeply on how strategies for effective learning interconnect.
8. Cultivating trilevel (sic) development. For change to really be effective, we need to change individuals, we need to change the system, and we must provide more “learning in context” – that is, learning in the actual situations we want to change (2005, pp. 54-58).

In the words of Fullan (2001), “Transforming culture – changing what people in the organization value and how they work together to accomplish it – leads to deep, lasting change” (p. 19). Quinn concurred, noting that “deep change differs from incremental change in that it requires new ways of thinking and behaving” (1996, p. 3). To overcome institutional inertia and individual resistance so that innovation can be “diffused” throughout an organization thereby

facilitating deep and lasting change, it is necessary to achieve at least some level of buy-in from the participants (Rogers, 2003). Thus, it is important for administrators of teacher preparation programs to understand the perceptions of the teacher educators who will be impacted by NCATE standards so that these faculty members can be brought more fully into the process, thereby hopefully gaining additional buy-in and commitment to the process.

Chapter Summary

In light of Guba's (1984, p. 70) assertion that the client's point of view is important in determining the effectiveness of a policy or program such as the SDE requirement that teacher preparation programs must meet NCATE standards as part of the state's approval process, literature dealing with the importance of perspective was reviewed. Next, since the study concerned the perceived effect of externally-mandated requirements on teacher education, a review of the literature in that area was undertaken. A review of the NCATE process and standards was included in this section, as was literature pertaining to teacher educators' perceptions of and reactions to NCATE and to mandated standards.

Fullan (2001, p. 1) contended that change is a double-edged sword that has terms like fear, anxiety, loss, danger, and panic associated with it on one hand, while at the same time conveying a sense of exhilaration, excitement, energy, and improvement. For better or worse, said Fullan, "change arouses emotions, and when emotions intensify, leadership is key" (p. 1). However, Heifetz (cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 3) postulated that people often look for the wrong kind of leader when the going gets tough. Heifetz (cited in Fullan, 2001, p. 3) contends that "in a

crisis ... instead of looking for saviors, we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems ... that require us to learn new ways.”

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

“The purpose of qualitative research,” according to Hull (as cited in Imel, Kerka, & Wonacott, 2002, p. 1) “is to understand human experience to reveal both the processes by which people construct meaning about their worlds and to report what those meanings are.” Sanghera (n.d.) defined it as “collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data by observing what people do and say.” In 1998, Creswell (as cited in Imel et al., 2002, p. 1) said qualitative research was “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry” in which the researcher “builds a complex holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.” Creswell later expanded his definition to include a number of methodologies used in a qualitative approach, but the crux of his definition was that the researcher made knowledge claims based on collecting open-ended, emerging data (2003, p. 18).

For Abusabha and Woelfel (2003) the “essence of qualitative research is to capture life as it is lived.” In other words, qualitative research is usually seen as a method for seeking better understanding of some particular phenomenon (Casebeer & Verhoef, 2002). Richards (2006) contended that, “a common feature of qualitative projects is that they aim to create understanding from data as the analysis proceeds,” while Patton (1987) observed that there were no rigid rules for making data collection and methods decisions. Patton (1987, p. 9) further noted that qualitative approaches allowed the researcher to “study selected issues, cases, or events in depth and detail,” and that data collection was “not constrained by predetermined categories of

analysis.” He added that the qualitative approach also had the advantage of using direct quotations and descriptions of people, events, behaviors, situations, and interactions without trying to fit people’s experiences into “predetermined, standardized categories” (pp. 8-10). Since the goal of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teacher educators, a qualitative approach using informal interviews was deemed to be the most appropriate method of obtaining the information sought.

Research Considerations

This was a qualitative participant observer research study using a narrative approach to presenting the findings. Through the use of interviews, observations, and discussions the study sought to capture in their own words teacher educators’ perceptions of the effect of complying with the state-mandated requirement that teacher preparation programs must meet the standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) as a condition for receiving continuing approval to operate from the State Board of Education. The study also sought to provide pertinent insight into the perceptions of teacher educators concerning the impact of complying with NCATE standards on their own teaching methods. While the literature contains some examples of studies designed to explore the results of NCATE standards, there was a need for additional study concerning the perceptions of the impact of meeting these standards on the teacher educators themselves. Each participant was informed of the importance of their perceptions because so little was known about the topic. Participants were ensured that anonymity of respondents would be maintained throughout the study.

The interview method was used to gather data since it “communicates respect to the respondents by making *their ideas and opinions stated in their own terms* [italics in original] the important data source” (Patton, 1987, p. 34). In keeping with recommendations offered by Creswell (2003), the interviews involved a few unstructured and open-ended questions that were “intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 188). In addition, an interview guide was used to “make sure that essentially the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material” (Patton, 1987, p. 111). An observational protocol such as that suggested by Creswell (2003) was used for recording data derived from observations. The protocol permitted the researcher to “separate *descriptive notes* [italics in original] (portraits of the participants, a reconstruction of dialogue, accounts of particular events, or activities) from *reflective notes* [italics in original] (the researcher’s personal thoughts, such as speculation, feelings, problems, ideas, hunches, impressions, and prejudices)” (Creswell, 2003, p. 189). In keeping with Creswell, the researcher used the same form to record “*demographic information* [italics in original] about the time, place and date of the field setting where the observation takes place” (p. 189).

The researcher sought to reduce participant bias and “check the accuracy of the findings” by employing the strategies of triangulation, member-checking, and self-reflection (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Triangulation was accomplished by analyzing and comparing data collected through the interviews, observations, and discussions with a document analysis of minutes of meetings taken during meetings of the task force on which the participants had served, course syllabi prepared by the survey participants, and notes of informal individual and/or group meetings with survey participants compiled by the researcher. Member-checking to determine

the accuracy of the findings was accomplished by providing participants with copies of transcripts and notes of interviews and discussions for their review to determine “whether these participants feel that they are accurate” (Creswell, 2003, p. 196). Self-reflection according to Creswell (2003) helped “clarify the bias the researcher brings to the study”, and “creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (p. 196). “Narrative,” in the words of Pentland, “is especially relevant to the analysis of organizational processes because people do not simply tell stories – they enact them” (1999, abstract). And, according to Patton (1987), combining interviewing and observation provides a “bridge to understanding the major themes involved in qualitative evaluation methods” (p. 13). Patton identified four themes of qualitative research. First, the researcher must have sufficient direct, personal contact with the people and program being studied to understand what is happening in depth and detail. Second, the researcher must be able to provide a meaningful context for what takes place and what people actually say. Third, the researcher reports a pure description of people, activities, and interactions. Fourth, the researcher captures and reports direct quotations from people (p. 13). These themes were integral to this study and confirmed that the results of the study would be best presented through descriptive narrative as a way to communicate a holistic picture of the perceptions of teacher educators concerning the effect of meeting NCATE standards.

Data Collection

The literature review presented in chapter 2 indicated that there was little research about the perceived effect of NCATE standards on teacher educators. This study employed a qualitative research approach to investigate the perceptions of a purposefully-selected sample of

teacher educators in a university-based teacher preparation program which had been mandated by the State Department of Education to comply with the standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education. Data collection methods included face-to-face interviews, informal conversations, document reviews, observation, and reflection.

Participant Selection

Creswell (cited by Jordan, 2007, p. 73), maintained that in qualitative studies, “the intent is not to generalize to a population, but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon.” The faculty members invited to contribute to this research effort were purposefully selected because they were “information rich” (Patton, 1987, p. 169) due to their experience with the phenomenon studied (Creswell, as cited in Penny & Kinslow, 2006, p. 421), and because their involvement illuminated the research questions (Patton, cited in Penny & Kinslow, 2006, p. 421). The eight participants were fulltime faculty members in the Education Department of a mid-size (approximately 6000 students), private university located in the Eastern part of the United States. Each of the participants served as a member of a task force established by the Education Department that was charged with developing a process and preparing the documentation needed to demonstrate compliance with NCATE standards. Those invited to participate were assured of anonymity and were made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Access to Participants and Data

In the researcher’s role as coordinator of the accreditation process, he served as chairperson of a task force comprised of the researcher and eight other full time teacher educators charged with developing a process and preparing materials to enable the educator

preparation programs of the Education Department to demonstrate compliance with NCATE and SDE requirements and standards. As chairperson, the researcher prepared the minutes of each meeting of the task force. Those minutes remained in his possession and were available for use in this study. The researcher also had access to syllabi prepared by individual members of the Education Department faculty, both before and after the process of responding to the NCATE standards. Serving as chair brought the researcher into close contact over an extended period of time with the other members of the task force, both individually and collectively. This resulted in a high level of trust being developed. The researcher personally asked each of the eight other members of the task force if they would be willing to be interviewed as part of the study. They each replied that they were willing to participate. The researcher prepared and disseminated an informed consent form to each of the participants. The study and related forms were approved by the Institutional Review Boards at both the institution where the study was conducted and at Capella University.

Interviews

Each of those invited to take part in this study were asked to participate in an extended interview (60 – 90 minutes) that used an interview guide combined with an informal conversational approach. The participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded by the researcher and transcribed. The participants were also informed that the researcher might engage them individually and/or collectively in informal discussions, and that the researcher would take notes during these discussions.

The major advantage of interviews, according to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) is their adaptability. They allow the interviewer to follow up on a respondent's answers to obtain more

information or to clarify vague or unclear statements. Interviews also permit a sense of trust to be developed between the interviewer and the participant, “thus making it possible to obtain information that the individual probably would not reveal by any other data-collection method” (p. 222). Since the goal of this study was to obtain information about teacher educators’ perceptions, the use of interviews was deemed to be the most appropriate method for doing so. In keeping with recommendations offered by Creswell (2003), the interviews involved a few unstructured and open-ended questions that were “intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants” (p. 188). The interviews were conducted informally to allow for greater spontaneity of answers (Patton, 1987, p. 110), and took place in each participant’s office or another location of their choice.

Interview Guide

An interview guide was used to “make sure that essentially the same information is obtained from a number of people by covering the same material” (Patton, 1987, p. 111). As noted by Patton (1987) the issues in the interview guide were not necessarily taken in order, and additional questions that would “elucidate and illuminate” the subject were added as the interview proceeded (p. 111). The following questions formed the basis of the interview guide:

1. Describe what you knew about NCATE prior to serving on the NCATE Task Force.
2. How important was it for the unit to meet NCATE standards? Why?
3. If SDE did not require the unit to meet NCATE standards, how important would it be for the unit to meet NCATE standards? Why?
4. What was the most positive aspect of or thing that happened during or as a result of the process of preparing to meet NCATE standards?

5. What was the most negative aspect of or thing that happened during or as a result of the process of preparing to meet NCATE standards?
6. Did the NCATE process cause or result in any changes to the unit? Please describe what the biggest impact or change has been, if any.
7. Has your participation in the NCATE process had an impact on your own teaching style, methods, or content? Please describe how and why.

The interview guide elicited responses to issues raised by the research questions. Table 1 demonstrates this connection.

Additional Data Sources

Minutes and notes of meetings of the task force on which the study participants served were taken by, and remained in the possession of, the researcher. The relevance of these notes and minutes as sources of data for this study was enhanced by the fact that in many cases they included comments made by individual members of the task force concerning their perceptions of NCATE and the process the Education Department employed to demonstrate its ability to meet NCATE standards. The researcher's personal reflections and interpretations of the interviews, conversations, meeting minutes and notes, and of the process itself were important components of this study. Finally, course syllabi prepared by the participating faculty members prior to the unit's engagement in the process of attempting to meet NCATE standards were reviewed, as were course syllabi prepared by these same faculty members after participating in the process. Thus, their perceptions regarding changes they believed they made in their teaching could be compared with changes actually made in the syllabi of the courses they taught. Course syllabi are publicly available documents and were available to the researcher.

Role of the Researcher

The basis for this study occurred during a 4-year period between 2005 and 2009 during the time the researcher served as coordinator of the Education Department's accreditation process, and as primary author of its conceptual framework and other accreditation materials. These roles allowed the researcher to participate in and coordinate all phases of knowledge base development and to observe the impact the preparation to adopt NCATE standards had on the Education Department and on the faculty within the department. The study was written from the point of view of a participant-observer. This active participation in the research should not be viewed as a weakness, for as Davies argues, "Researchers are not separate from their data, nor should they be" (2004, p. 5).

Subjectivity

As the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the data included in this study, the researcher's interpretations were limited by the researcher's own involvement, values and reflection. As the researcher reviewed the data collected through interviews, informal conversations, document review, and observation, he attempted to discover meaning through both reflection and analysis. Thus, while credibility and dependability were key considerations, data collection and interpretation were filtered by the researcher's own judgment, experiences, and beliefs, and which were revealed to the readers of this study. As Mertens (cited in Creswell, 2003, p. 182) pointed out, recognizing that the personal-self is inseparable from the researcher-self represents honesty and openness in research since all inquiry is laden with values. This is especially true in qualitative research. Creswell agreed that qualitative research was fundamentally interpretive, and one cannot escape the personal interpretation that qualitative data

analysis brings with it. Indeed, Creswell noted that the researcher engaged in qualitative research must reflect on his or her role in the inquiry as well as being aware of how the researcher's personal biography shapes the study (2003, p. 182). Peshkin (cited in Jordan, 2007, p. 71) further argued that we cannot "exorcise" subjectivity; rather the researcher should seek "to preclude it from becoming unwittingly burdensome." The researcher acknowledges that his past experiences as well as his own perceptions and beliefs influenced every aspect of the research process, from the research questions to the interpretations of the findings. This study sought to ameliorate the burden of excessive subjectivity by collecting data from multiple sources using a variety of data collection techniques.

Ethical Considerations

The Belmont Report was issued in 1979 as a summary of the deliberations of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research during the course of the Commission's attempts to identify basic ethical principles for research. Three principles: respect of persons, beneficence and justice were identified as being "particularly relevant to the ethics of research involving human subjects" (Belmont Report, 1979, Part B). These principles guided the research undertaken during this study.

Respect for the participants was demonstrated by informing them of the purpose of the research, keeping them informed during the research and giving each participant the right to choose whether they wished to be part of the study, as well as the right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequence. The well-being and confidentiality of the participants were protected by using pseudonyms that the participants chose for themselves rather than their names, by having interviews recorded by the researcher, and by storing data in a secure location

to which the researcher had sole access. The participants also were offered the opportunity to review the transcripts of their own interview to ensure that the researcher accurately captured not only their words, but the meaning behind the words. Finally, each of the participants had the opportunity to benefit from the results of the study as they reflected on their own teaching practices.

Data Analysis

The process of data analysis, according to Creswell (2003), “involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analyses, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data” (p. 190). To Creswell (2003) “data analysis is an ongoing process during research” (p. 205) and Patton (1987) added that, “the analysis of qualitative data is a creative process” with “no formulas, as in statistics” (p. 146).

Analyzing Interviews and Conversations

Because of the “creative” nature of data collection and analysis during a qualitative research study, Creswell (2003) offered what he called “generic steps” which could be employed in the data analysis process (pp. 191-195). These steps helped to form the basis for data analysis in this study. They included

1. Organizing and preparing the data for analysis including transcribing interviews, typing up field notes, and so forth.
2. Reading through the data to obtain a general sense of the information and to reflect on its overall meaning.

3. Developing a coding process to organize the material into “chunks” before bringing meaning to those “chunks.”
4. Generating a description or detailed rendering of information about the people and events involved in the study, and then using a coding system to generate themes or categories. And, in keeping with Patton’s (1987) recommendation, a content analysis approach was used to “look for quotations or observations that go together, that are examples of the same underlying idea, issue or concept” (p. 149).
5. Using a narrative approach to convey the findings of the analysis.
6. Interpreting the meaning of the data.

Analyzing Other Data

In addition to the interviews of faculty members, notes and minutes of meetings which occurred during the process of responding to NCATE standards were reviewed. During many of these meetings, comments about NCATE and the NCATE process were made by individual participants and were captured in the notes taken by the researcher during these meetings. By reading through and reflecting on the minutes and the researcher’s personal notes taken during these meetings, the researcher was able to compare comments made by individual participants during these meetings with the responses given by the same participant during the interviews conducted as part of this study. Also, the researcher’s personal reflections and interpretations of the interviews, conversations, notes of meetings, review of NCATE and SDE documents, and the process itself were important components of this study as the researcher sought to express the truths and realities perceived by others as interpreted through the lens of his own experience.

Finally, course syllabi prepared by the participating faculty members prior to the unit's engagement in the process of attempting to meet NCATE standards were reviewed by the researcher, as were course syllabi prepared by these same faculty members after participating in the process. Thus, their perceptions regarding changes they believed they made in their teaching were compared with changes actually made in the syllabi of the courses they taught.

Trustworthiness

By keeping the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice as articulated in The Belmont Report (1979, Part B) in mind throughout the study, the researcher sought to minimize the influence of his own biases, perceptions and subjectivities on the research and the interpretation of the results. While no research is ever completely neutral or unbiased, the researcher tried to be as fair and ethical as possible.

Merriam (cited in Jordan, 2007) suggested that the use of strategies such as triangulation, member checks, peer/colleague reviews, and statement of the researcher's experiences, assumptions, biases, and submersion/engagement in the research initiative can contribute to the trustworthiness of a qualitative research study. Merriam contended that "the question of trustworthiness becomes how well a particular study does what it is designed to do" (cited in Jordan, 2007, p. 98). Since the goal of this study was to capture and relate the perceptions of teacher educators, a variety of strategies were employed to help the study do what it was designed to do. The study utilized triangulation by analyzing and comparing data collected through interviews, informal conversations, and notes taken during meetings of the task force which occurred prior to beginning the study. The study participants were members of this task force and were present at the meetings during which the minutes were taken. In many cases the

minutes and other notes taken by the researcher captured comments made by individual participants during the meetings. Additional sources of triangulation were the informal conversations between the researcher and the participants that occurred as part of the study. Comments made during these informal conversations were compared with the participants' statements made during the interviews. The trustworthiness of the study was further enhanced by providing the participants with the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview for accuracy and to ensure that the intended meaning of their comments was captured. In addition, the researcher asked teacher educators who were not participants in the study to review the data analysis and findings at various points during the study. Transcripts of interviews and handwritten notes were stored in a locked office in a locked file cabinet to which the researcher had the only key. The researcher also relied on the expertise and insights of his Mentor and Dissertation Committee to keep the study on track.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reflected the researcher's use of a qualitative narrative research study using the interview method to capture in their own words the perceptions of teacher educators concerning a mandate from the State Board of Education that teacher preparation programs prepare and submit evidence of meeting NCATE standards if the program wished to continue preparing educators for the state's public schools. While recognizing that subjectivity is inherent in all qualitative studies, the researcher employed a variety of techniques to enhance the trustworthiness of the data including interviews, follow-up conversations, peer review, and triangulation through comparison of participant statements with other existing documents. In

chapter 4 the data and findings of the study are presented, and chapter 5 includes conclusions, implications and recommendations based on those findings.

CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Chapter 4 provides an in-depth look at the perceptions of teacher educators regarding the effect of meeting mandated standards. Eight fulltime faculty members of a university-based teacher preparation program participated in the study. The findings of this qualitative participant observational study were based on the responses the participants gave during individual interviews. The study sought to present in their own words the perceptions of teacher educators of the effect of meeting NCATE standards on the Education Department in which they taught, and on their own teaching practices. As the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing the data included in this study, the researcher's interpretations were limited by his personal involvement, values, beliefs, and reflection. As the researcher reviewed the data collected through interviews with the participating faculty members, he attempted to discover meaning through both reflection and analysis. Thus, while credibility and dependability were key considerations, data collection and interpretation were filtered by the researcher's own judgment, experiences, and beliefs which are unique to the researcher, and which were revealed to the readers of this study when the researcher's personal opinions, beliefs and judgments were being expressed.

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to provide additional insight about how teacher educators perceive the effect of complying with mandated compliance with NCATE standards on

teacher preparation programs and on the teaching practices of teacher educators. An interview guide was used to encourage open dialogue and discussion with the participants. Their candid responses to a set of common questions and issues during the interviews as presented in the next section of this chapter assisted the researcher in answering the two central research questions and five sub-questions addressed by this study. Table 1 demonstrates the relationship of the research questions to the issues and questions raised during the interviews.

Table 1. Relationship of Research Questions to Interview Guide Questions

| Question Number | Research Questions | Interview Questions |
|---------------------|--|---------------------|
| Research Question 1 | How do teacher educators perceive an externally imposed mandate that requires the teacher preparation program in which they teach to meet NCATE standards? | |
| Research Question 2 | Given the requirement for teacher preparation programs to meet NCATE standards, how do teacher educators operationalize this requirement in their own courses, curricula, methods and practices? | |
| Sub-Question 1 | How do teacher educators understand NCATE as it relates to teacher preparation? | 1, 2, 3 |
| Sub-Question 2 | How do teacher educators perceive the effect of NCATE on the operations of a teacher education program? | 4, 5, 6 |
| Sub-Question 3 | How do teacher educators think about NCATE standards with regard to decisions they make about their own curricular, pedagogical and assessment practices? | 7 |
| Sub-Question 4 | To what extent do teacher educators perceive the process of attempting to meet NCATE standards to be worth the time and effort involved? | 2, 3 |
| Sub-Question 5 | To what extent do teacher educators perceive the process of attempting to meet NCATE standards to be worth the time and effort involved if SDE did not require the unit to meet NCATE standards in order to gain program approval? | 3 |

Presentation of the Findings

Data for this study was obtained by interviewing eight purposefully selected teacher educators who had served on a task force established by the Education Department in which they taught which was charged with developing a process and preparing the materials required to demonstrate that the Education Department was able to meet the standards for teacher preparation as established by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). By using direct quotations of the participants, this section presents the perceptions of teacher educators concerning the effect of complying with mandated standards on a teacher preparation program and on their own teaching methods and styles.

The participants gave their consent to be interviewed. They were interviewed and audio recorded. Each participant was asked to select a pseudonym by which they would be referred to in the study to protect their identity. The gender associated with the name selected by the participant may or may not be the same as the gender of the participant. The pronouns used by the researcher in presenting the responses matched the gender of the pseudonym, not necessarily the gender of the respondent. When an individual's response identified the state or the specific institution where the research was conducted, the name of the state and the institution were not included in the quoted response to help maintain the anonymity of the respondents.

Data Analysis

Reflective data analysis was used in this qualitative research, and was ongoing throughout the study. According to Gall et al. (2003, p. 459) reflective analysis “involves a

decision by the researcher to rely on (his) own intuition and judgment to analyze the data rather than on technical procedures involving an explicit category classification system.”

During the interviews the researcher made notes of his own perceptions and reactions to the replies the participant being interviewed gave to each of the interview guide questions. Following each interview, the researcher listened to the recordings and transcribed the entire interview. The researcher then reviewed relevant written data from his notes and the transcript of each interview, and using his knowledge of and sensitivity to the issues being studied, selected and included in this section those portions of the participant’s response which most directly replied to the issues raised during the interview and which helped to answer the research questions. A copy of the form used by the researcher to take notes and record observations during the interviews is attached as Appendix A.

The researcher sought to triangulate the data gleaned from the reflective data analysis of the interview responses by conducting a document analysis of minutes of meetings taken during meetings of the task force on which the participants had served, course syllabi prepared by the survey participants, and notes of informal individual and/or group meetings with survey participants compiled by the researcher. The results of this effort were included following the responses to the interview questions and issues.

Responses to Interview Questions and Issues

Interview Question 1. Describe what you knew about NCATE prior to serving on the Task Force.

Despite the fact that most of the participants in this study joined the faculty of the Education Department after many years of service in various capacities in K-12 public schools,

many of them reported having little or no knowledge of NCATE prior to serving on the unit's Task Force as can be seen from the following responses.

Ernie

Ernie said that he really knew nothing about NCATE prior to his being asked to serve on the task force “other than the fact that it was an organization that looked at excellence in teacher preparation.”

Ann

Ann replied that she “knew they were an accrediting agency. That was about it.”

Bianca

Bianca claimed that when it came to NCATE, she knew “Nothing.” However, having come from a public school setting, as had most of the participants in the study, Bianca was aware that at the K-12 level there was an accreditation process for public schools, but she “had no idea whatever as to what higher ed [education] might do” with regard to accreditation.

Betty

“I really knew very little about NCATE. I knew about other accrediting agencies and their purpose and their goals, but I really did not know much about NCATE,” was Betty's response to the question.

Other participants learned about NCATE prior to serving on the Task Force because they had attended various workshops at which NCATE was addressed.

Rick

Rick first heard about NCATE when he attended a conference of the American Academy of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) at which he became “aware of NCATE in terms of

the national level. I got a flavor of what service they provide universities in terms of accreditation and support. So I did know something about them.” Rick had joined the university’s faculty after a career in K-12 education during which he said he had “heard the name, but I had no idea what NCATE was. In the back of my mind I thought it was something similar to an accreditation process that the high schools went through, but I really didn’t know.”

At least one participant who had learned about NCATE at a conference observed that learning about NCATE was not the same as understanding NCATE.

Michael

Michael reported that he had “been involved with NCATE” for many years because he had attended several conferences and workshops at which NCATE was mentioned, including participating in an official NCATE orientation session. However, he said it was only over “the last three or four years, where the work has become more intensive, once we started forming committees to address some of the major issues raised by NCATE” that he began to develop a fuller appreciation for NCATE. In his words,

I can say that I became more familiar with NCATE the more I got involved in it. I found it to be a complex system that, until you have a felt need that you actually have to understand it to perform functions that are assigned to you such as committees – assessment committees, conceptual framework committees – then of course the NCATE process became clearer and clearer as you addressed these issues from a needs aspect.”

He cautioned that simply knowing about NCATE was not enough. As he put it,

I think you can read anything and understand it, but if you don’t apply it, it loses significance over time. The moment that it turned into action, that we had to have

committees, then it became really a major goal of the department to meet NCATE standards, and we started to take measures within the department to address them, then of course, what NCATE promotes became more relevant and became more understandable. For Michael, “understanding NCATE in its full complexity for me involved actually getting involved in the process. It was just an intellectual exercise to understand NCATE from outside, you had to actually get involved in the process itself” to really know it.

Some participants had served as adjunct faculty members before coming on board fulltime and had learned about NCATE as part of their introduction to the Education Department.

Emily

Emily said she first became aware of NCATE while serving as an adjunct professor, and it was talked about at a meeting to which all the adjuncts were invited. Prior to attending the meeting she remembered that

I went on line and read what I could, became completely confused by it all, and I thought, this is a process that I’m never going to master. Then I thought, oh, well, it’s the university’s responsibility, I’m just teaching this course. I just have to infuse the NCATE standards into my course, and that’s what I did. I looked at the standards and said, okay, these apply. I’m going to put them into my syllabus so that if anybody asks me I can say I’m ascribing to these standards.

Shortly thereafter, according to Emily, she was asked to join the fulltime faculty and recalls that, The second I came on board I was handed all of these documents and said now you need to align your course and program standards with NCATE standards, and so another

colleague who had come board at that time, the two of us just delved into this feet first, and within two months were able to align our standards and became “NCATEable.”

To Emily this meant that “within a few months we developed rubrics, they got sent back to us and we had to revise and revise. And the next thing I knew this task force assignment descended upon me.” In her estimation, “it’s just been a rushed process, the whole thing.”

At least one participant said his involvement with NCATE came about as a result of the University’s “on and off” prior relationship with NCATE.

Bill

Bill became aware of NCATE some years ago when other departments in the University began to seek national accreditation. Specifically, he recalled that “the business department at the time was looking into AACSB [American Academy of Colleges and Schools of Business] accreditation, and therefore, other academic units were also being asked to consider national accreditation.” However, the Education Department decided at that time not to pursue NCATE accreditation “for a number of reasons, many of which had to do with the perceived costs compared to benefit. It was perceived at that time to be expensive with relatively little benefit.” Bill feels that the chair of the Education Department at the time “was not particularly in favor of seeking NCATE accreditation, and his cost estimates were very high.” According to Bill, however, speaking on recent efforts to comply with the mandate to meet NCATE standards, “we’ve spent more money than the former chair imagined. In the long run it would have been less expensive to have done it then.”

The current effort to meet NCATE standards and to apply for NCATE accreditation has been driven by two factors according to Bill. First, the University “identified education as a

flagship program without defining what that meant, but for strategic planning purposes that indicated that the University would, in the long-term, be prepared to invest in the development of the education program” more than it had previously. Additionally, “in 2002 the State Department of Education had begun its process of changing its state level process of program approval to converge with NCATE standards.” This convergence eventually became a mandate that all teacher preparation programs in the state had to meet NCATE standards.

Interview Question 2. How important was it for the unit to meet NCATE standards?

The perceived importance of meeting NCATE standards varied considerably among the participants. For some, meeting NCATE standards was viewed as a competitive issue for the University and the Education Department.

Ernie

Ernie felt that meeting NCATE standards was important “because it speaks well of us as an institution when we meet certain standards that an organization like NCATE has stressed. I think it is a feather in our cap and strengthens our program or how people perceive our program,” but then he added “perhaps”.

Emily

Emily also believed that holding NCATE accreditation was important “because right now our programs are competing with other programs in the area that are established, well-known and have great reputations.” She said she also “knew that there was a big population that would come here if they had a choice, and I really wanted us to be accredited. So it was important.” As a newer member of the faculty, Emily said “It was also important to establish myself as a newbie, so I had both a personal and a professional interest” in achieving accreditation.

Bill

For Bill, the fact that “it was identified as a strategic initiative” meant that meeting NCATE standards was a very important goal for the University and therefore for the Education Department as well. When asked by the researcher why it was important to the University, Bill responded that having a nationally accredited education department was “part of the branding or positioning of the University” in support of “our becoming a leader in the State, to our becoming a leader in the region, and to being described as a great university.” Bill went on to note that,

in market positioning, as other competing institutions within the State achieve national accreditation in education, it’s strategically important for us to achieve national accreditation. From the University’s point of view, for us to be among the teacher preparation programs who are not nationally accredited would be a challenge. So, strategically, there was no question that that was the path we were set on.

According to Bill, achieving NCATE accreditation was important from a number of points. For example, “it would be a less desirable market position for us to have to say that we are among the largest producers of initial educators in the state, and yet we are among the few that are not nationally accredited.” Bill believed “that we produce many [teachers] does not speak to quality. National accreditation does.” He also felt that the environment of the Education Department provided opportunity for a quantifiable measure of quality since “teacher prep is one place in which it is possible to demonstrate a quality end product -- successful teachers.” As Bill pointed out, “you can measure through quantitative measurements how many teachers obtain certification. And, additionally, aspiring to meet national standards becomes part of that” measurement of quality.

Some participants perceived NCATE as having an intrinsic value to the Education Department.

Bianca

Bianca saw the NCATE process as providing a common direction and coherence for the unit's teacher preparation programs. As she put it,

I do think it's important. Why? Because there needs to be some common understanding, and I think goals and expectations, that should be clear and should be focused on throughout our program. Otherwise I think that we would have everyone going off in different directions and doing their own shtick and some will have high standards on something, but that something may not be what is important in our field or in our profession or even closely related to the standards. So let's assume that the standards identified are good ones. And are they? I think basically they are.

Betty

According to Betty, the very process of preparing to meet NCATE standards was worthwhile because,

the process tends to bring people together to identify some common values. I think to be involved together is a critical thing because I think that people need to be on the same wavelength in terms of what they think is important for their students and how they want to direct them. So I think it's a very important thing process-wise.

She also felt that meeting the standards was critical because "the outcome establishes who you are to the outside world, and it also establishes who you are to yourself because it feeds back to you – it says, this is who we are, this is what we believe in."

Rick

“I think all the self-evaluations and accreditation processes are important”, said Rick, because they help the unit to focus on “what it should be and where you should be going.” For Rick, the process of preparing to meet the standards is “like a self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-improvement plan” that should be engaged in “not so much to satisfy NCATE, but to improve our situation here.” Rick felt that “to an extent I think that has started to happen because we’ve been asking better questions in terms of getting things ready to meet certain standards that maybe we never had even addressed before.”

One participant perceived the mandate to adhere to NCATE standards as integral to the Department’s efforts to enact change.

Bill

Bill said he “came to firmly believe that the process of external accreditation creates an invaluable opportunity for the Institution to be reflective in a productive way. And because it is externally applied, it is difficult to put off.” He recalled how over the years he had

seen the University’s development in terms of how it has struggled to become better.

Sometimes it would be led by a key administrator, and sometimes by a group of faculty, and sometimes by another internal force. But those attempts were not well focused, not coordinated, and very difficult to follow through on.

According to Bill an outside force is often required to keep change efforts on track. He contended that,

advocacy internally is less sustainable than advocacy with the imposition of enforcement from outside. So once the institution makes a commitment to say we will submit to

accreditation from this external agency, the external agency then keeps us on task and provides us with a structure for accomplishing change.

Bill said that early on he “had embraced the idea that the reflective process of responding to external accreditation was a benefit to the unit because it became focused and sustainable, and a more reliable way to approach improvement.” Because, “once you are on the path of saying, ‘I am going to commit to following this reflective self-improvement,’ then you’re committed to generate the resources to enable it.”

Bill recognized that some people might be upset by an outside entity providing a structure and keeping them on task. He cautioned that “while some people look at external accreditors as being leverage to make things happen at the Institution,” for others, “it [the accrediting body] becomes the outside enemy” that you “mobilize the troops to fight.” He commented “that’s one way of looking at it.” But he sees it in a more positive and a more functional way. That is, “if you take the process seriously and commit to it, then you have an internally generated rationale that says we commit to this principal of quality, and here’s a path to get to that quality.” And while that path has a cost, the Institution’s choice is not driven by

whether we’re going to be dinged by those evil external accreditors, but whether we’re going to commit to the value of excellence. A commitment to the value of excellence forces us to gather and organize data that supports the argument that we need these resources.

And Bill believes that “we’ve been successful” in demonstrating a commitment to excellence and subsequently receiving the resources needed to support that commitment.

Two participants questioned whether NCATE really added anything to the unit or to the State's process of approving teacher preparation programs.

Michael

Michael questioned whether NCATE would improve the quality of the programs offered by the Education Department. As he observed,

I think our whole department felt from the very beginning that we really had a quality program. I don't think there was anybody who felt that we didn't. Professors individually felt they were doing a good job, everybody understood the coherence of the program, the needs. We felt we were getting very good feedback from outside the University about our candidates in the job market, field experience and student teaching. I think that all of us felt that we were doing a very good job. The question, therefore, of how important was NCATE for us in terms of changing the purview or the quality of our program, I really don't know. I have my own personal doubts. I think we have an excellent program regardless of whether we did NCATE or not.

Rather than seeing NCATE as adding quality to the unit's programs, Michael thinks that its value lies in "the fact that it forced a lot of us – it should have forced all of us, but it didn't – it forced a lot of us to think top down" or from the program level down, instead of thinking from the bottom or course level up. To Michael,

that was a major paradigm shift which was really tough for a lot us on our faculty, and I'm sure not everyone still has grasped the notion that our program is built from the top down, from a conception on how we see the program, how that flows into proficiencies and competencies, and how are they to be assessed.

Therefore, Michael believed that “quality wise, I think we would still have the same program, but program-wise, I think it’s forced us to rethink our program and to take some measures to evaluate and look at our program from the top down, especially in terms of assessment.”

Ann

Ann said “It’s hard to judge” the importance of meeting NCATE standards “because we are gauged by NCATE standards and with the State requirements”, the bulk of which are the same as NCATE requirements. “So it seems to me” said Ann,

that in effect we have quote unquote NCATE certification without actually having NCATE certification. I mean, I think we can easily say that we have met all the accrediting requirements for our State. If a person came from another state they might look with some curiosity as to how our process works. But as far as most of the people, including teacher candidates that we work with, it doesn’t seem to be an issue.

Ann went on to explain that in her career at the university, “I’ve had one person, one candidate, ask if we had NCATE accreditation.” For Ann, having the State’s approval is more important than holding NCATE accreditation.

Interview Question 3. If the State Department of Education did not require the unit to meet NCATE standards, how important would it be for the unit to meet NCATE standards?

The participants perceived that meeting NCATE standards would have been important to the Education Department for a variety of reasons even if the State Department of Education did not require the unit to do so as expressed in the following statements by the study participants.

Bill

Bill commented that the department should have met NCATE standards “even if the SDE had not gone on the parallel route. SDE choosing to embrace NCATE standards essentially made it efficient for us to also do that because we didn’t have to do it twice in two different ways.”

Ernie

Ernie expressed his belief that “it’s very important for us to meet the standards because it makes a statement to prospective students and to prospective employers of our students that we’re a first-class teacher preparation program.”

Emily

Emily expressed the opinion that prior to adopting NCATE standards as the basis for approving teacher preparation programs, “the State established minimal expectations” which in effect was a list of “this is what you need to do in order to have certification in certain areas.” As teacher educators, Emily feels “it’s incumbent on us as professionals to exceed minimal expectations” since “we’re sending people out into the world with our stamp on their degree, and I want to make them a hot commodity.” Emily felt that having graduates of the Education Department say that their preparation program had provided them with the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to succeed as K-12 educators was important to both the graduates and to the program.

Ann

Ann said meeting accreditation standards was important because, it means that we have conducted our own self study. It means that we have theoretically

made improvements based on what we have discovered. It means that there are disinterested third parties who have looked at our program and judged it to be effective.

Bianca

Bianca said that meeting standards is important. She admitted that she likes “the State standards a little better because they are more clearly defined. But, whether it’s state or national, I think standards are relevant, good, and they serve as a framework for us to build our program upon.”

Betty

Betty said that it would be important for the unit to meet NCATE standards even if it were not required to do so. Betty expressed her opinion as,

I’m not into doing a lot of Mickey Mouse stuff and dancing around, but I think there have to be standards. And I think there has to be agreement on what is appropriate and what quality is and what our expectations are of our graduates. I am definitely into standards.

Rick

Rick expressed his view as “I think if you want to be a quality program, you should meet the quality standard. Whether it was mandatory or not, I think it would be something that would be worthwhile.”

Michael

In responding to this question, Michael reiterated his belief that “the way the department operates, I think it would have been fine” if the unit had to meet only the State’s standards. In fact, he expressed the opinion that NCATE “is something which has been forced on us”, and that “NCATE standards or concerns never bubbled out of our conversations here.” He perceived

NCATE standards as coming “from the top down” and that they had been “imposed” on the department and “suddenly they became issues and points of discussion here in the department.” To Michael this was not entirely negative, however, since it allowed the department “to discuss issues that had never come up before.” Michael also said that he agreed “in principle” with the need for a conceptual framework for the Education Department, but he “did not think that there was a felt need or a common perception among all our people” about the importance of developing a conceptual framework just because NCATE required one.

Interview Question 4. What was the most positive aspect of or thing that happened during or as a result of the process of preparing to meet NCATE standards?

Many of the participants in the study believed that the process the Education Department went through in preparing to meet NCATE standards had a positive effect on the unit’s faculty.

Ernie

For Ernie, “getting the faculty to talk about what’s required, thinking about those standards and how those standards are reflected in our teaching program” were positive effects of the process of preparing to meet NCATE standards.

Ann

Ann identified “more consistency among faculty and adjunct faculty so there is a set of standards to focus on” as being a positive result of the unit’s preparations to meet NCATE standards. In addition, Ann felt that the process had brought the faculty together and “demonstrated that we were a cohesive group as we worked together on different projects.”

Michael

Michael said that he thought “the NCATE process allowed all of us who had individual concerns about our department to get together and discuss those concerns within a framework.” He said that other positive aspects of the process of meeting NCATE standards were that “it gave us a forum in which to discuss issues, it gave us a reason to get together to focus our concerns within the context of the NCATE requirements, and it also caused us to have a paradigm shift in terms of looking at our work from the top down instead of from the bottom up.”

Bill

Bill said the best thing that happened within the Education Department was that there had been “a cultural shift, and the cultural shift had a number of dimensions.” Bill believed that “part of the cultural shift was a change of attitude toward the process of accreditation or program approval, which previously, and for some decades, had been adversarial.” He said that in the past, “it would be the institution versus the accreditor.” According to Bill that mentality bred a sense of “we need to hide, mislead or deflect attention from some of the things that they are going to find deficient because they are unreasonable” and “they must be wrong.” The response from the department was “anger and frustration and how dare they do this to us.” Bill said that one way the Department has been changing is that the culture has “become one of more willing collaboration with the process, and the most important thing has to do with the faculty and staff of this unit coming together to agree that this [achieving accreditation] is an important thing to do.” Bill sees the change as having

a lot of secondary gains, among them being that the faculty, which had always perceived themselves as being a group of people who worked well together, really does work well

together now. There is much less insularity, there's a much greater level of sharing and awareness of global issues within the Institution. All of that comes from cultural shift.

Bianca

Bianca felt that NCATE "forced" the faculty to become more cohesive and collaborative.

She reported,

I was coming out of public education into higher ed, and was acutely aware that there wasn't a lot of communication among the faculty about our courses and what we expected of our students. So I think that the process forced us – I hate to say that word, but a lot of times change is brought about because it's dictated from on high – and so it did force us to get together and say, 'on high said . . . we need a common assessment for every course'. So folks, let's start to dialog.

Bianca was aware that there was "some superficial tension" caused by change being "forced" on the faculty. She said that the tension is

still going on, but at least now we have common assessments, and we have starting points to say, okay, our students are supposed to be having these types of experiences – where is it documented that they are doing that in this course? And so we're getting there. I think the process has forced us to talk about what we're teaching, how we're teaching and how we're assessing. I don't think that was coming out in our previous faculty meetings or experiences in our communication with adjuncts or our full-time people.

Bianca saw improved communications as a good thing which "brought the adjuncts and the full-time people together for common purposes." That, she believes, "has another value in and of itself." So, to Bianca, the process has been "important."

Other participants saw the process of preparing for NCATE as having a positive impact on the Department's candidates, or in helping the unit to bring more standardization to its assessment system. One respondent felt that the process may have been too procedural, leading to NCATE being less effective than it could have been.

Emily

Emily felt that the process had a positive impact on the candidates within the Education Department. She observed that "when I approached some of my students because the visitation team wanted to hear about our program from students, everyone I asked to come said, 'oh yeah, I'd be glad to.'"

Rick

Rick believed that the State process was useful for "standardizing our assessments, and standardizing syllabi in terms of consistency in delivering courses." He expressed concern about the potential for too much standardization under NCATE. In his opinion, "the core concepts have to be consistently delivered and assessed the same way in each course, with some flexibility given to the faculty to deliver the material in a way that they are comfortable with." But according to Rick, "the main thing is using the data that we have to make improvements within our own department."

Betty

Betty admitted to having had a hard time identifying positive aspects of the NCATE process, particularly

in terms of some of the nitty-gritty stuff that we're doing, I'm not sure it's always valid.

And because we go through a lot of motions that you hope will accomplish what we want to accomplish as well as what they want to accomplish, a lot of it is quite procedural."

Betty went on to say, "I don't know if it has the same impact as NCATE might believe it does in terms of accomplishing our purposes." When she was asked again by the researcher if she could think of any positive outcomes, she replied,

I think we've begun to talk together about things. I'm not sure that we're there yet.

Simply establishing a conceptual framework, for example, while it can be an overall organizing principle or way of operating, I'm not sure that there's an ownership of the all words and all that stuff. So it's in process, we're not there yet.

Interview Question 5. What was the most negative aspect of or thing that happened during or as a result of the process of preparing to meet NCATE standards?

Many of the participants felt that the process of trying to meet NCATE standards took a lot of work, time and energy which kept the faculty from focusing on other activities and opportunities. There was a sense of frustration expressed over the Department having to meet NCATE standards for the State Department of Education, and then going ahead immediately with the process of trying to achieve NCATE accreditation which meant that basically the same process had to be duplicated.

Ernie

Ernie answered that it had taken "a tremendous amount of work." Part of that, he felt, had to do with "doing the State accreditation and then jumping into this [NCATE accreditation] is

almost overwhelming. I guess very simply, just an incredible amount of work, paper work, data collection, analyzing of that data.”

Ann

Ann also felt that that the process “took so much time and energy” that might have been better spent “on projects that would have been really great projects or other kinds of things that we were just not able to do because our time was really so taken up with accreditation.”

Bianca

Bianca’s reaction was, “We have to stop doing the same old thing over and over.” When asked for clarification, she replied,

I don’t know if this is related to it or not, but the fact that we are doing NCATE now after doing the State one is probably negative. Having to repeat it, to me, is a waste of time.

That’s a negative impact, and I can hear the grumblings. I think it’s absurd, and I told the State Department that. I feel like we’re just spinning our wheels again. We should be moving forward from what we already know.

Bianca said she was aware of the timing difference between when the state’s approval of the teacher preparation program had to be renewed and the additional data that had to be collected before the unit could apply for NCATE accreditation. She went on to say, “I know we’re trying to get the timing more in sync, but this is stupid! It’s a waste of time repeating a lot of what we’ve done. That to me is a real negative.”

Bill

Bill responded to this question with “I think we lost some good people.” He said that “there were a number of faculty members that for a variety of reasons, no longer saw this place

as an effective place for them to work. That was regretful.” When asked about other negatives, Bill replied,

the work has been arduous and sustained. The [state’s] on-site visit drained a lot of the faculty who were meeting weekly. Everybody was working very hard. And I think they were already hard-working people. There were benefits from that, but it was a cost in terms of human energy. Aside from that, I don’t think there were negatives.

Betty

Betty admitted that she could see the process as having both positive and negative aspects. On the negative side, she said one problem is that “it takes a lot of time. It takes people away from other things that they might be doing.” She also felt that “there might be some better processes for getting at what they [NCATE] want to get at.” For example, she felt NCATE was “heavy, heavy on assessment” but the question remained, “is it the right assessment? I don’t know.” She continued,

I would like to be positive about this, not because I feel it’s always necessary to be positive, and I can see some really positive aspects to having a standards-based kind of process. But I’m not sure that some of it isn’t treading water. Overall, how do I feel about it? I think it’s a good idea, but are all the specifics of it good – I don’t know. I’m not so sure.

Michael

“I think that the process was driven by a few individuals, and they carried the rest of the individuals along. And I think that was a negative,” said Michael. He went on to say that in his opinion, “We didn’t have enough infrastructure for all the different groups that were working to

be able to communicate the results to the department as a whole. I think there was a lot of work which was done in isolation” and that “there probably wasn’t enough discussion at the larger group level or the department level of what the individual groups had worked through.” Michael said that because “a lot of the work was done in committee; by a few individuals” and therefore, he did not think that we had achieved the “ideal of NCATE to have the whole faculty collaborate with everyone understanding our whole program, understanding our assessment system, et cetera.” Michael said that in his opinion, “I think people understand bits and pieces and we move along as a group in lock step, but, I just don’t think everybody gets the whole deal.”

Rick

In Rick’s opinion,

in some ways, by some people it was perceived of as just a procedure. I think the only negative so far is that people have not seen the results in terms of using data to improve our courses and those kind of things.

Rick thinks that “when people start seeing that kind of payout based on this process, it will be a little more positive.”

Interview Question 6. Did the NCATE process cause or result in any changes to the unit?

Some participants were not sure if any real changes had taken place. Others felt that engaging in the process resulted in improved consistency in the unit’s programs.

Michael

Michael responded by asking, “If we were to take the NCATE report and make it just disappear, what would change”? He then answered the question by stating,

Well, we've instituted instruments. We've done some mechanical things. We have some instruments, we have assessment instruments, and we have assessment reports, so we have made some material changes in the way we operate as professors in terms of assessment. So, if you were to ask me at the individual level what change the professor would make in his course, I really doubt that there's been much change in that regard. And fundamentally, that's because our work has not yet been done completely with respect to NCATE.

Betty

Betty said that from her position with the program it was hard to see any real differences. She cited the following as changes which may or may not have taken place. "For example, field experiences. I'm not sure it's happening in a systematic way. In terms of the way a variety of people who are teaching a course address the syllabi, I don't know that everyone is getting the same experience." She feels that "there's a level of supervision, perhaps, that's needed or a level of collaborative team effort where people talk to one another about what they're doing. I don't think there's as much opportunity for that as there ought to be" especially for the adjuncts.

Ann

Ann reported that she believes the biggest changes have been in the "consistency of the program and assessment of the candidates."

Rick

Rick responded that changes he had seen included "consistency in terms of assessments and people recording the assessments." He also commented that he was aware of "a different kind of communication or language at the faculty meeting in terms of how we talk about things,"

and that “we’re speaking a more common language now.” Rick then said that one of the problems he feels the NCATE process has caused or contributed to in the Education Department is that “organizationally we haven’t been set up to be a real change agent in terms of making decisions and moving on things other than NCATE stuff.”

Ernie

“Well, I think trying to get everyone on the same page, commonality of syllabi, what’s required, rubrics that include NCATE standards, and trying to standardize things so that we’ve got everybody on the same page” was Ernie’s response.

Emily

Emily said that she felt that

we no sooner received approval [from the State], than we embarked on this mission to go national. So I think that all of our efforts have been directed towards that end. So if there is a difference, maybe it’s a sense of purpose and a sense of urgency to fulfill everything that needed to be done in our quest to attain national accreditation.

In Emily’s opinion,

NCATE has been in direct response to teacher quality, and the perception out there that the universities have not been doing their job. So NCATE has become one way that we’re responding to that criticism of teacher quality. NCATE is one way that we are trying to prove that we are on a mission to turn out the best quality professionals.

Interview Question 7. Has your participation in the NCATE process had an impact on your own teaching style, methods, or content?

Ernie

Ernie said,

I don't know that it's changed the way I teach. The rubrics certainly have been an addition. I do spend more time talking about the NCATE standards as they pertain to my courses. I do that, of course, with the [State Standards], but I've added the NCATE standards as well, because it's important to let my students know what the standards are, and how to incorporate them in what they are doing. I try to reflect that in my course assignments.

Emily

Emily responded that she had made changes in her courses since she had joined the faculty. In her words,

when I first came on board we looked at all the NCATE standards, we looked at all the standards of the SPA (Specialty Practice Areas), we thought about the course descriptions and the existing syllabi, and we really tried do a mapping of how those standards played out in what we were teaching in the course. And in some cases we had to tweak, and we had to change. We included lesson plans in certain courses where there may not have been a requirement to do a lesson plan previously. We included a field experience in courses that previously didn't require field experience.

Ann

Ann commented, "I've used more rubrics for evaluations than I might have. I think that I probably have collaborated with other faculty in greater depth. I think that I'm more sensitive to using data to improve the operation of the department."

Michael

Michael did not believe that he had changed his technique of teaching since the nature of his classes primarily involved candidate-led discussions. With regard to the faculty as a whole, he believed that, “we just artistically inserted what we do into the NCATE jargon to demonstrate that we are meeting NCATE requirements. We already were. We had pretty much classified what they were looking for, and that was due to our previous work with the State.” Michael went on to state,

I would say that we really didn’t need NCATE. I think we would have achieved the same end which would be to take a look at our program to make sure we all understand it and are in agreement that our programs are quality. I think NCATE just forces us into a different concept of standards and how we need to approach them. It forces us to address questions that weren’t raised by us but were raised by NCATE in their reports, and so we addressed them as a task.

Rick

Rick answered that from his perspective as a course coordinator,

NCATE has really impacted the way that I handle the other people that teach that course. We meet much more regularly, I keep in contact with them almost week to week, assessment to assessment, finding out where they are, if we have speakers, if we have messages or information to get out. It’s much more coordinated, and I think we feel a sense that we’re on the same page in terms of outcomes, in terms of what our students should be getting. We feel that any student that takes that particular class should get the same experience, the same information, no matter who the instructor is.

Betty

For Betty the change has been “mostly in recording assessments,” and in trying to establish “the big picture of the conceptual framework, hoping that people will understand these are the things that we’re after.” She said that she is “not sure how much meaning it has to them [the candidates], but you’re trying to say, ‘This is who we are.’” Betty believes that she sees “how it all fits together”, but she is not sure how much it means to the candidates. Describing herself as being into “big picture stuff,” Betty said she really likes the idea of saying, “okay, let’s look at who we are, this is where we’re going, this is why we do these things, these are all related to what the research says is best practice. That’s a good beginning. Now where do we go from there?” From Betty’s perspective “it’s helpful to have a conceptual framework, it’s helpful to set the stage for what you do to tie it all together and hope that it brings everything together.”

Closing Comments or Issues. Are there any other comments you would care to make about NCATE, the standards or the process?

Bill

Bill responded that,

I think that a very interesting thing that’s happened to us by pursuing NCATE is that our own reputation within the state has improved, our regional reputation has improved.

People at are beginning to recognize our name and are identifying us as a group of people who are quality oriented and committed to the quality of education.

He cited the following as examples of ancillary benefits to the Education Department from participating in the NCATE process

our faculty has grown, our physical plant has improved, our budget has increased, and our success in achieving grants has increased. The resources that we have to spend on faculty development and equipment and other resources have increased. The University's expectation that we will continue to develop efficient, productive and high quality graduates has improved, and our systems and processes have also improved.

Bill also felt that the assessment system developed by the unit in response to NCATE was a significant achievement. In Bill's opinion the changes in the unit's assessment system

effected changes in our admissions process, effected changes in our process of qualifying candidates for clinical placement, and we've improved the clinical assessment instrument. Are these assessment systems perfect or finished? No. But we have an infrastructure for assessment which now allows us to look carefully and be able to more easily make modifications. We've created data which makes certain decisions easier to make now. We can make decisions about candidates progressing through our program before they get to the final lap.

In conclusion, Bill stated, "Yeah, it's been a good run as a result of this long-range goal to seek and maintain accreditation."

Ernie

In contrast to Michael, Ernie said that his feelings about the NCATE process were "positive in the sense that everybody was involved in it, at least from my perspective." He felt that there had been "a lot of input by the entire faculty," and that "we were able to meet with adjunct faculty and bring them up to speed with what was going on with NCATE." Ernie felt that "it was a real team effort as much as anything. I think it got us all speaking the same language

looking for improvements in what we did and how we did it. So I think it was positive.” Also, on the positive side for Ernie is his belief that, “our students are much more aware of what it’s [NCATE] all about.” He went on to observe, “I think from that perspective, students are more in tune to the expectation that we have higher standards.” On the other hand, Ernie felt a negative aspect of the process was that “the timing could have been a little bit better,” because in his words, “you were exhausted to go into this right after the State accreditation.” In addition, Ernie pointed out that it seemed like NCATE had made the process unnecessarily burdensome, partly because NCATE was in the process of revising its accreditation system and

requirements might have changed as we got into the process, and we had to go back and relook at what we had done to make some adjustments, and I don’t think we had a lot of control over that, and that might be a criticism I have of NCATE.

Emily

Emily said it was “an intimidating process.” She explained why she felt that way by saying, “it’s almost a redundant process where you have to align your standards, your assessments and your courses six ways to Sunday. And I’m not always sure I’m doing it right.” To Emily, the process was “sort of a baptism by fire, that’s exactly what it felt like. And in some cases I didn’t know I was making mistakes until I was in deep.” Rather than feeling like NCATE was there to help by providing models of the process the Department was being told to use, it was as though NCATE was saying “no, this isn’t done right, you need to change it” without providing adequate guidance as to just what was expected. Nor, said Emily, were other institutions that were going through the same process much help because, “they were told to hold things close to the chest. So it was perceived as a competitive process.” In closing, Emily said

she wanted to comment on the fact that as of the time of this interview, NCATE was continuing to undergo internal and process revisions. The result said Emily, was that even after being involved in the Department's efforts to meet NCATE standards, "I still am not certain of this whole process. I'm not sure what it needs to look like. And I think that is the part that is making it very difficult to answer all the questions" called for in the NCATE materials.

Ann

Ann said she could see both positives and negatives to NCATE and the NCATE process. Specifically she commented, "It's time-consuming." "It's prescriptive." But it also "focuses on factors in teacher education that, for educational leaders, are considered critical in this day and age." According to Ann, the process also "demands accountability on the part of the Education Department" and "helps to answer criticism of teacher education" by helping to show that teacher preparation "is in fact worthwhile, it helps to provide evidence of results, and it helps to give candidates a security that they in fact have a profession behind them." With regard to the process employed by the Education Department, Ann commented that

it's been crucial to have a person dedicated to be the focal person other than the department chair or director. That's been critical, to have a point person to keep up with new regulations and guidelines. It appears to me that the NCATE process has come under criticism in and of itself, and that that's caused it to scurry around to make changes that it might not otherwise have made.

Ann concluded that with the changes taking place within NCATE, "it seems to be hard to follow the guidelines because they are constantly in motion." The standards are "a moving target," which makes NCATE's "credibility a bit suspect at the present time."

Michael

Michael asked “I was wondering if the process of top-down, NCATE Pavlovian imposition is too much on us”? He went on to muse, “I’m wondering if the process of going through NCATE could have been conducted differently. We’re talking about the issue of process, of informing and involving all faculty members in NCATE. I don’t know if what we have done has been successful in that regard.” He went on to say,

I think what makes the NCATE experience successful or unsuccessful is the process that is put into place to get there; and if that process is flawed, and we don’t have the kind of communication, or agreement, or participation that we should have, then the process isn’t operating the way it should. And so I question if getting to where we wanted to get with NCATE might have involved a different process which was more elucidating, more collaborative, more informative, more motivational.

At this point, the researcher interjected that it seemed as though Michael was saying that “the process might have been more important than the end result.” Michael responded to the researcher’s prompt by stating that he believed “the process had the effect of making our program more data dependent and based on data analysis” and that the department had done so because “NCATE has asked us to go that way.” However, Michael expressed some concern about the importance of being so data driven as he asked, “Having that data in hand -- will that enhance our program? I just don’t know. If we didn’t work the data that we collected, I presume that nothing would change, and we would still have a good program.”

Betty

Betty replied “what I like most about doing something like this is that it becomes part of the history of the staff, causing them to work together, and to sometimes argue and to come to conclusions that unite them and hopefully improve things.” She also felt that, “there are some Mickey Mouse things I have to do,” and that while

the overall idea is a good one; the nitty-gritty procedural stuff I don’t think is helpful. I think it’s tedious, and it forces you to think on the level of how many angels fit on the head of a pin as opposed to what are you hoping is going to happen.

She said that to her, a lot of the NCATE process is “pure malarkey.” Betty admits that her opinion may be based on the fact that she believes the process of complying with NCATE should focus on the Education Department’s response to the questions, “What are the outcomes you’re looking for?” and “What results do you want to see because of all of this?” In Betty’s opinion, these questions have not yet been adequately answered.

Rick

Rick stated that in his opinion, “we’ve done a good job because we did the State [approval process], and we’ve gotten through that.” Therefore, “the stage is set to jump to NCATE now because it’s not that much different. We have the foundation set, we have the conceptual framework, and we have everything in place.” In terms of the process the department engaged in, Rick felt “it’s been a healthy exercise for our department,” because it provided an opportunity for “looking at ourselves, self-evaluating, looking at where to go.” In effect, Rick said “what it does is help us to look at the strengths and weaknesses in our program to help us make better decisions about our direction.” Rick felt that this self-analysis might not have

happened if it had not been for NCATE. In Rick's opinion, "I think one of the problems that we have is that we have a healthy program, and sometimes if you don't get that nudge to do this, you might just pat yourself on the back and go on." In Rick's words,

I think we have to look at everything. Are we doing the best that we can with the staff we have and with the resources that we have? Not just the number of students that we have. Are we delivering a really quality program? I think any process that will help you get there is important to engage in.

Analysis of Other Materials

Minutes of Meetings

Records in the researcher's possession indicate that as early as 2001 the unit had begun work on preparing a conceptual framework in response to an advance notice that beginning July 1, 2003, the State Department of Education planned to adopt evidence of meeting NCATE standards as the basis for granting approval to teacher preparation programs to operate within the State. However, the development of a conceptual framework as a precondition for meeting NCATE standards was not seen as a high priority for the unit at the time because the new SDE rules would not go into effect until after the unit had completed its program approval visit by SDE in spring 2003, and its next visit by SDE would not take place until 2008. In September 2005 the researcher was asked to assume responsibility for chairing a Task Force charged with completing the preparation of the unit's conceptual framework as part of the 2008 SDE approval process. As chair of the Task Force, the researcher took and maintained the minutes of meetings of the Task Force, and often made personal notes during these meetings as well as during

informal meetings with individual members of the Task Force. The researcher conducted a document analysis of these materials.

At the first meeting of the Task Force in September 2005, the Task Force reviewed the five components of a conceptual framework as identified by NCATE. These are

1. The vision and mission of the institution and unit.
2. The unit's philosophy, purposes, and goals.
3. Knowledge bases in which the philosophy, purposes and goals are grounded.
4. Candidate proficiencies aligned with national, state and institutional standards.
5. A description of the system by which the candidate proficiencies are regularly assessed.

In October 2005 a representative of the State Department of Education visited with the members of the Task Force and informed the group that institutions that failed to meet NCATE standards usually did so because of insufficient assessment data or inadequate assessment systems. The Task Force and the rest of the unit's faculty and staff spent much of the following three years developing its conceptual framework, and implementing a new assessment and data system.

The vision and mission of the University and the unit had previously been promulgated, so the Task Force was able to use them as they appeared in the University's catalog. However, the unit's philosophy, purposes, and goals had never been fully articulated. At a meeting in December 2005, Michael asked the question, "If we start from the standpoint that our candidates enter our program with no knowledge of teaching, what do we want them to know and be able to do by the time they leave our program?" Responding to this question was at the heart of a

workshop for all fulltime and adjunct faculty held in January 2006. The question was also addressed to P-12 administrators of public schools in the form of “what do you expect new teachers you hire to know and be able to do, and what dispositions do you look for when you are interviewing candidates for teaching positions?” Gaining consensus around these points led to the unit being able to articulate its Philosophy and Guiding Principles, as well as identifying the knowledge, skills and dispositions candidates should be expected to possess and demonstrate by the time they completed their course of study. As the unit began to frame its own beliefs about teaching, the Task Force had been researching the literature to identify the relevant knowledge bases in which to ground its beliefs. Concurrently, the unit had been soliciting and evaluating proposals to develop a customized data collection system to help the unit assess its candidates and the unit’s operations. A faculty retreat was held in April 2006 to solicit additional input regarding the conceptual framework from the faculty, and to introduce to the faculty the assessment system the Department had selected. An additional three day retreat for the faculty was held in May to gain consensus on the areas or “domains” in which the unit’s candidates were expected to demonstrate proficiency at various points or gateways throughout their formation. During the retreat the faculty worked on aligning these domains with national, state and institutional standards as called for by NCATE.

In June 2006, a representative of SDE again met with the Task Force and stressed the importance of assessments and assessment systems to the State and to NCATE. During this meeting the SDE representative said that the unit would need two years of data to qualify for State approval, but three years of data were necessary to apply for NCATE accreditation. Since the unit was slated for a continuing approval visit by the State in 2008, and it was now 2006, the

unit would have time to collect two years worth of data for the State prior to the date of the required visit. The SDE had previously decided that institutions within the State which achieved accreditation by NCATE would be deemed to have met the State requirements for continuing program approval. Unfortunately, as pointed out by the SDE representative, the unit's approval by the State would expire in less than three years; therefore the unit did not have time to collect three years worth of data required for NCATE accreditation. Thus, the unit would first have to apply for State approval and meet the State requirements, which included meeting NCATE standards. And then, should the unit decide to do so, it could voluntarily apply for NCATE accreditation. This would mean having to demonstrate its ability to meet NCATE standards once again, while also providing an additional year's worth of assessment data. The unit would also have to comply with the NCATE requirement that the unit submit all of its programs for National Program Reviews by the appropriate Specialized Professional Associations (SPA). This was the path the unit decided to follow.

The Task Force met six times during the first two weeks and nearly a dozen times in the two months following the visit with the SDE representative. By November 2006 the scope of the Task Force's assignment had expanded from just preparing the unit's conceptual framework, to preparing and submitting all materials associated with the state approval process. During these meetings there was significant discussion among the members of the Task Force concerning what should be assessed, how it should be assessed, and when or at what points to do the assessments. Many of the comments recorded during these meetings were repeated three years later during the interviews by the same participants. For example, Michael frequently stated his belief that the unit already had good programs, and expressed concern that NCATE was "forcing

us to do things their way” which he felt might not be the best way for the Department or its candidates. Ann had said that she believed in assessments and the use of data to make improvements, but was not sure that the assessments NCATE asked for were necessarily the right assessments. Ann was also quoted as saying “we need to keep our eye on the big picture” and not get caught up in minutia, while Betty was recorded as saying “we need to stop reinventing the wheel.” The similarity between these statements made by participants in 2006 and their comments recorded during the interviews three years later reinforce the reliability of the study.

The Task Force continued to meet on a regular basis until March 2008 when the unit submitted its application for continuing approval from the State Department of Education. The site visit was conducted by the state in April, and in June 2008 the unit received unanimous approval for the continued operation of all of its programs. The Task Force was then directed to immediately begin the process of applying for NCATE accreditation. In January 2009 the unit submitted the required preconditions materials to NCATE, and in October 2009 the unit submitted its Program Reports to the SPAs.

Course Syllabi

The researcher also reviewed copies of the syllabi of courses taught by the participants in 2005 and in 2009. In 2005 none of the syllabi had any reference to NCATE. Four years later every syllabus reviewed by the researcher had at least some reference to NCATE and NCATE standards, and most contained an overview of the unit’s conceptual framework. It would appear that Ernie’s statement “I’ve added the NCATE standards as well [as the State Standards] because it’s important to let my students know what the standards are and how to incorporate them in

what they are doing” might reflect how most teacher educators had changed their teaching practices.

Emergent Themes

As the researcher continued to reflect on and analyze the participants’ responses to the interview questions and issues, certain common themes began to emerge. The researcher observed that these themes closely corresponded to the eight key drivers to creating effective and lasting change identified by Fullan et al. (2005, pp. 54-58). These eight drivers as paraphrased by the researcher in the Literature Review of this study were subsequently used as the framework for synthesizing and evaluating the data derived from the interviews.

Emergent Theme/Key Driver 1 Engaging people’s moral purposes

According to Fullan et al., in education, moral purpose is about improving society through improving educational systems and thus the learning of all citizens. Certainly student learning should be at the heart of teacher preparation programs. And yet only one participant, Bill, said meeting NCATE standards was important because doing so reflected his “personal ethics and belief structure.” Some of the participating teacher educators said it was important to meet NCATE standards to help the department with competitive positioning or branding, while others perceived the process as creating opportunities for, or even “forcing” the faculty to communicate with each other. Two participants questioned whether NCATE actually added anything of value to the unit or to the state’s process of approving teacher preparation programs.

If the Education Department, or if NCATE itself, does not position NCATE accreditation as something that engages teachers’ and teacher educators’ moral purposes (i.e.

improving student learning), then it should come as no surprise that teacher educators such as Betty perceive NCATE accreditation as being “procedural” and something that makes teacher preparation programs “go through a lot of motions.” Seven of the participants in this study referred to the process the Education Department was engaged in as something which had to be done “for NCATE” rather than seeing the process as a transformative change initiative designed to enhance teacher preparation and ultimately to help teachers improve student learning. Without a sense of engagement, and if they do not perceive achieving NCATE accreditation as having a higher moral purpose, teacher educators will agree with Betty when she said, “I don’t know if it [accreditation] has the same impact as NCATE might believe it does in terms of accomplishing our purposes.”

Emergent Theme/Key Driver 2 Building capacity

Building capacity involves developing new knowledge, skills and competencies; new resources; and new shared identity and motivation to work together for greater change, according to Fullan et al. According to the teacher educators participating in this study, the process of preparing to meet NCATE standards had a positive impact on bringing the faculty together by providing a forum for more open communication, as well as causing the Department to articulate its purposes and clarify its identity. The requirement that the unit develop a conceptual framework that provides direction for programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance, scholarship, service, and unit accountability; and which is knowledge based, articulated, shared, coherent, consistent with the unit and institutional mission, and continuously evaluated (NCATE, 2008, p. 14) was seen as being critical by Betty, “because the outcome establishes who you are to

the outside world, and it also establishes who you are to yourself because it feeds back to you – it says, this is who we are; this is what we believe in.”

Emergent Theme/Key Driver 3 Understanding the change process

Fullan et al. believed that making change work requires the energy, ideas, commitment, and ownership of all those implementing improvements. Among the study participants there was general agreement that serving on the Task Force made NCATE more “relevant and understandable” which was important because just knowing *about* NCATE was not enough to make teacher educators become actively involved in the process. As Michael observed, “It was just an intellectual exercise to understand NCATE from outside, you had to actually get involved in the process itself” to really know it and appreciate it. From the researcher’s perspective, it was important to include an “NCATE Update” as part of each of the Department’s bi-weekly faculty meetings as well as soliciting input from the faculty to the unit’s conceptual framework and having the faculty vote to accept the final version prior to submitting it to the State. For at least one of the study participants, however, there could have been more involvement on the part of the entire faculty. Michael felt that “the process was driven by a few individuals, and they carried the rest of the individuals along.” However, as Fullan et al. pointed out, “shared vision and ownership are more the outcome of a quality change process than they are a precondition.” Agreeing with Fullan, it was Rick’s opinion that the Department would see more commitment and involvement over time as the unit began to implement improvements to its programs that were based on an analysis of the data collected during the process. “We’re not there yet,” said Rick, but he feels that as a unit we are working toward it.

Emergent Theme/Key Driver 4 Developing cultures for learning

Developing a culture for learning, in the words of Fullan et al., (2005) involved a set of strategies designed for people to learn from each other (the knowledge dimension) and to become collectively committed to improvement (the affective dimension). The study participant identified as Bianca stated that NCATE provided a common understanding as well as setting goals and expectations for the program which kept the faculty focused so they could learn from each other rather than “going off in different directions.” Ernie concurred that learning from each other had been enhanced, saying, “getting the faculty to talk about what’s required, thinking about those standards and how those standards are reflected in our teaching program” were positive effects of the process of preparing to meet NCATE standards. As data generated from the assessment system developed by the Department in response to the NCATE standards continues to be analyzed, and changes to the unit’s teacher preparation program are made in response to those data, teacher educators feel that they will become more collectively committed to making continuous improvements that will benefit the candidates in the program. Fullan et al. believed that “Knowledge sharing and collective identity are powerful forces for positive change, and they form the core component of our change knowledge” (2005, p. 57). Fullan et al. also contended that “Change knowledge has a bias for action. Developing a climate where people learn from each other within and across units, and being preoccupied with turning good knowledge into action, is essential” (p. 57). It is important to realize that there can be casualties when an organization undergoes transformative change. As Bill noted when asked about negative aspects of the unit’s preparations to meet the new standards, “I think we lost some good people.” He said that “there were a number of faculty members that for a variety of reasons, no

longer saw this place as an effective place for them to work.” As institutions prepare to meet NCATE standards they must decide how they will respond to faculty members who feel they cannot or will not contribute to, or benefit from, the process.

Emergent Theme/Key Driver 5 Developing cultures of evaluation

Fullan et al. (2005) said that one of the highest yield strategies for educational change is assessment for learning (not just assessment of learning). Assessment for learning, they believed, incorporated gathering data on student learning, disaggregating that data for more detailed understanding, and developing action plans for improvements based on those data. It is in the area of assessment that teacher educators perceived NCATE as having had the most significant effect on teacher preparation programs and on teacher educators’ own teaching. It was in response to NCATE that the Education Department obtained and implemented a computer-based assessment system for tracking candidate knowledge, skills and dispositions, and progress through the program. The data generated by the electronic assessment system was also used by the Department to evaluate and make improvements to its own programs and operations. By reinforcing the notion of assessment for learning and not just assessment of learning, the Department leadership obtained general compliance (if not full commitment) from the fulltime and adjunct faculty to use the assessment system thereby helping to establish what Collins (cited in Fullan et al., 2005, p. 56) described as a “culture of disciplined inquiry.”

Emergent Theme/Key Driver 6 Focusing on leadership for change

Fullan et al. stated that to be effective, leadership must be spread throughout the organization. Leadership for change means seeking leaders who represent innovativeness – the capacity to develop leadership in others on an ongoing basis. By establishing the Task Force and

charging it with developing the process and materials necessary to demonstrate compliance with NCATE standards, the Department was able to “enhance decision-making capabilities of others” (Mintzberg, 2004, cited in Fullan et al., 2005, p. 57). As observed by Rogers (2003), before innovation can be “diffused” throughout an organization thereby facilitating deep and lasting change, it is necessary to achieve at least some level of buy-in from the participants. While other participants may have felt there could have been more faculty participation in the process, Ernie seemed to sum up the perceptions of most of the teacher educators when he said his feelings about the process were positive because “everybody was involved in it,” that there had been “a lot of input by the entire faculty, and that it had been “a real team effort.” In the researcher’s opinion had the Dean or Department Chair attempted to impose the process rather than having it led by faculty members, there most likely would have been considerable resistance and inertia that would have been difficult, if not impossible, to overcome.

Emergent Theme/Key Driver 7 Fostering coherence making

Change knowledge is not about developing the greatest number of innovations, but rather about achieving new patterns of coherence that enable people to focus more deeply on how strategies for effective learning interconnect, contended Fullan et al. In fact, the authors noted, “When innovation runs amok, even if driven by moral purpose, the result is overload and fragmentation” (2005, p. 57). While meeting NCATE standards may not be innovation run amok, the fact that the State and NCATE required similar materials and data, coupled with the Department’s trying to obtain NCATE accreditation immediately after achieving State approval was said by Bianca to be “a waste of time repeating a lot of what we’ve done” for the State in an attempt to comply with NCATE. Additionally, the fact that NCATE itself was undergoing

significant changes in its operations and expectations at the time this study was conducted contributed to what Bianca called a sense of “spinning our wheels.” This reorganization within NCATE led Ann to describe NCATE as a “moving target” which in turn made her call NCATE’s standards and credibility “a bit suspect.” This lack of stability within NCATE undoubtedly contributed to the faculty members’ expressing a sense of overload and fragmentation rather than feeling that coherence had been fostered.

Emergent Theme/Key Driver 8 Cultivating trilevel development

Fullan et al. (2005, p. 58) believed that for change to really be effective, we needed to change individuals, we needed to change the system, and we must provide more “learning in context” – that is, learning in the actual situations we want to change. They cautioned that organizations must “beware of the individualistic bias,” that is, “where the tacit assumption is that if we change enough individuals, then the system will change.” This is an area where the Department still has work to do. While most teacher educators perceive NCATE as having effected change within the unit, there were some who felt that the change has not necessarily been positive or even needed. As for changing individuals, most respondents reported having made only minor changes in their own teaching methods and styles, which one teacher educator described as little more than “artistically inserting” something about NCATE into their course syllabi. Others said that they had made changes to the assessments they used in their courses, but otherwise they had made no changes. With regard to “learning in context,” neither NCATE nor the unit had been able to provide what Mintzberg (2004, cited in Fullan et al., 2005, p. 58) called “programs designed to educate practicing managers in context.” After reflecting on the responses to the interviews, holding informal conversations with the participants, and reviewing related

documents, it appeared that achieving NCATE accreditation remained the ultimate goal and an end unto itself, rather than being perceived of as a means for enhancing student learning.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed data analysis for the responses made by each participant to the questions and issues raised during the interviews conducted by the researcher. During each interview the teacher educators openly shared their perceptions of NCATE, the impact on the Education Department of complying with the state's mandate to meet NCATE standards, and the effect of meeting those standards on the teacher educators' own teaching styles and methods. The teacher educators were asked a series of similar questions during the interviews in order to make a comparison of the information obtained from the interviews, and to identify common themes among the responses. The interviews were recorded and transcribed by the researcher, and each participant was provided the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview to ensure that the meaning of their comments was captured as well as the words.

A document analysis of the minutes of meetings of the Task Force on which all of the study participants served was also conducted. Additionally, syllabi for courses taught by the participants were analyzed as further means of triangulating the data to enhance the reliability of the study.

Based on an analysis of the data, and the experience and self-reflection of the researcher a series of themes emerged which the researcher saw as closely corresponding to the eight key drivers to creating effective and lasting change identified by Fullan et al. (2005, pp. 54-58). These eight drivers were used as a framework for synthesizing and evaluating the data. Chapter

5 discusses the results and conclusions that the researcher derived from an analysis of the data, provides answers to the research questions, and makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study was designed to provide a better understanding of how teacher educators perceive the effect of complying with a mandate requiring teacher preparation programs to meet the standards of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Data was collected through comprehensive interviews with teacher educators during which each participant candidly discussed his/her perceptions of NCATE, of the process the Education Department went through in preparing to meet the mandated standards, and the effect of those standards on the teacher educator's own teaching methods and practices. The study should also provide insight to administrators of teacher preparation programs to assist them in better preparing their faculty members to work more collaboratively to meet NCATE accreditation requirements. Following the results and conclusions, recommendations are provided for future research and additional studies.

Results and Conclusions

The study examined two central research questions and five sub-questions. The answers to these questions are presented as results and conclusions. The results were derived from the researcher's analysis of the transcripts of interviews conducted during the study, and the conclusions are the researcher's interpretations of the data collected.

Results and Conclusions for Research Question 1. How do teacher educators perceive an externally imposed mandate that requires the teacher preparation program in which they teach to meet NCATE standards?

Results from Interviews.

The use of terms such as “forced” “Pavlovian” and “lock-step” in describing their reactions to NCATE standards indicates that there were underlying negative reactions by teacher educators to the state’s mandate of adherence to those standards. And, while several participants spoke of the mandate as causing the Education Department to implement a better assessment system, the most frequently mentioned benefit of NCATE accreditation by the teacher educators was that achieving accreditation would contribute to the branding and competitive positioning of the unit’s programs.

Conclusions.

As noted in the Literature Review, organizations and individuals tend to resist change (O’Toole, 1995). This may be especially true among teacher educators according to a study of teacher educators’ responses to new mandates in the State of California conducted by Kornfield et al. (2007). Citing Apple and Teitlebaum who believed that “top-down standardization was deskilling teachers,” and Nelson who warned that “the teacher education profession is under siege,” Kornfield et al. reported that their study revealed that “resistance, say critical teacher educators, should be our response to this onslaught” of state mandates (p. 4). While the teacher educators participating in the current study did not overtly resist the state mandate that teacher preparation programs meet NCATE standards, there were significant questions raised as to the value of NCATE accreditation compared to the time, cost and energy expended on the process.

Additionally, the fact that NCATE itself was undergoing a major transformation at the time the study was conducted cast doubt on the efficacy of NCATE standards and whether they were an improvement over the state's standards that had previously been in place. There was a perception that the unit already had a good teacher preparation program in place. It was also interesting to note that there was virtually no mention of a perception that the mandated standards had any impact on student learning. This led the researcher to conclude that teacher educators viewed NCATE as a series of finite steps teacher preparation programs have to take because the state says they have to, rather than being perceived of as an ongoing process of continuous improvement with an ultimate goal of improving student learning

Results and Conclusions for Research Question 2. Given the requirement for teacher preparation programs to meet NCATE standards, how do teacher educators operationalize this requirement in their own courses, curricula, methods, and practices?

Results from Interviews.

Most of the participants in this study joined the faculty of the Education Department after long careers as administrators in PK-12 schools. They had interviewed, hired and supervised dozens of teachers. They all believed that they knew what went into producing a good teacher. They also felt that they, as teacher educators, and the Department had been producing highly qualified education professionals in accordance with state standards. As indicated by their comments during the interviews, the teacher educators agreed on the importance of standards for teacher preparation programs. However, they expressed mixed and predominantly negative perceptions about NCATE and the process of accreditation. The combination of these factors led

teacher educators to see little reason to change their teaching methods and practices. For the most part, any changes they did make were made “for NCATE.”

Conclusions.

This study tended to corroborate the findings of a study by Cooksey (2002) of teacher educators’ implementation of NCATE standards which suggested that “despite the requirements and programmatic policies spelled out in NCATE standards... implementation of those mandates in a teacher education program can fall far short of the quality inherent in the stated intents of the standard” (p. 285). While all teacher educators in the current study reported that they recognized that standards are important in teacher preparation, for most teacher educators operationalizing that belief meant little more than including a reference to NCATE standards in the syllabi of the courses they taught. Some indicated that they had made changes to the rubrics and assessments they used to evaluate candidates, but most teacher educators in the current study candidly responded that meeting NCATE standards had no effect on their own teaching methods. This led the researcher to conclude that his assumption presented in chapter 2 was valid. That is, how teacher educators perceive and understand NCATE would color their reaction to having to meet NCATE requirements in compliance with externally imposed mandates. This reaction would in turn influence the actions teacher educators take in response to those requirements. Since meeting NCATE standards was perceived as something which the unit had to do, and because the standards failed to engage the moral purposes of the teacher educators or their candidates, the mandates failed to produce the level of action and implementation inherent in the stated intents of NCATE and the State Department of Education.

Results and Conclusions for Sub-Question 1. How do teacher educators understand NCATE as it relates to teacher preparation?

Results from Interviews.

Teacher educators generally were not aware of NCATE prior to joining the faculty of the Education Department despite the fact that most of them had previously been employed as teachers, administrators and other education professionals in PK-12 public schools.

Conclusions.

Despite having been in existence for more than 50 years, NCATE has made little, if any, in-roads into elementary and secondary school classrooms. As one respondent noted, in over twenty years experience as a teacher educator, only one prospective candidate had asked if the unit's teacher preparation program was NCATE accredited. Thus, while teacher educators know about NCATE, and most share their understanding of NCATE with the candidates in the classes they teach, the knowledge and appreciation of NCATE ends when the candidates complete the teacher preparation program. There do not seem to be many advocates or "cheerleaders" for NCATE in America's PK-12 classrooms.

Results and Conclusions for Sub-Question 2. How do teacher educators perceive the effect of NCATE on the operations of a teacher education program?

Results from Interviews.

There are mixed feelings about NCATE's effects on teacher education programs among teacher educators. Some participants questioned whether NCATE standards actually improved the unit's programs, others felt the state's standards were equivalent to or better than NCATE's standards, and most felt that the unit's programs were already good and would be good with or

without NCATE accreditation. On the other hand, a number of positive aspects were identified as having come about as a result of the unit's process for meeting NCATE standards. These included enhanced communication among the faculty, improved assessments of candidate performance, and the potential to use NCATE accreditation as a marketing tool for the Department.

Conclusions.

As noted in the Emergent Themes section of chapter 4, seven of the participants in this study referred to the process the Education Department was engaged in as something which had to be done "for NCATE" rather than seeing the process as a transformative change initiative designed to enhance teacher preparation, and ultimately to help teachers improve student learning. As long as NCATE fails to be seen as fulfilling a "moral purpose" (Fullan, et al. 2005), or does not align with the "personal ethics and belief structure" of teacher educators, NCATE's effect on the operations of teacher education programs will continue to be seen as "procedural" and not as having a meaningful effect or of creating lasting change.

Results and Conclusions for Sub-Question 3. How do teacher educators think about NCATE standards with regard to decisions they make about their own curricular, pedagogical, and assessment practices?

Results from Interviews.

Teacher educators perceive NCATE standards as having had minimal effect on their own teaching methods and practices. The effect was more pronounced in the area of candidate assessment than in pedagogical practices. Many respondents had done little more than change their course syllabi to include information about NCATE standards.

Conclusions.

Upon reflection, the researcher came to understand the responses of teacher educators to this question as indicating that they perceived NCATE as having had some effect on their assessments of candidates. The replies also indicated that teacher educators viewed NCATE as helping somewhat to change their views and methods from assessment *of* learning to assessment *for* learning which Fullan et al. (2005) called a key driver for change. However, there did not appear to be any stated perceptions that implementing NCATE standards would make teacher educators better teachers. The feeling that NCATE would not improve their teaching styles and methods, coupled with the sense that the PK-12 administrators hiring the unit's graduates were not strong supporters of, or perhaps not even aware of NCATE provided the teacher educators with no compelling reason to make substantive changes to the way they had been teaching prior to the State's decision to implement NCATE standards.

Results and Conclusions for Sub-Question 4. To what extent do teacher educators perceive the process of attempting to meet NCATE standards to be worth the time and effort involved?

Results from Interviews.

One respondent said that he "came to firmly believe that the process of external accreditation creates an invaluable opportunity for the Institution to be reflective in a productive way. And because it is externally applied, it is difficult to put off." The same respondent observed that "an outside force is often required to keep change efforts on track" because "the external agency then keeps us on task and provides us with a structure" for accomplishing change. While most teacher educators agreed that NCATE had the effects of enhancing self-reflection within the unit, of improving communication among the faculty, and of creating

assessments and standards for the unit to follow, there remained a sense that the work of preparing for NCATE took time away from other worthwhile initiatives that the unit and faculty might otherwise have engaged in and benefited from. Also, the fact that the unit moved immediately from meeting state standards to trying to achieve NCATE accreditation made the process seem “rushed” and a “lot of work.” The unit was not alone in this perception. As noted in the Literature Review, a 2008 survey of member institutions conducted by NCATE (2009) revealed that 66% of survey participants said that the amount of documentation required is excessive. Another significant problem with NCATE had to do with NCATE’s own reorganization and revision of its standards during the timeframe in which this study took place. As noted by one respondent, “it seems to be hard to follow the guidelines because they are constantly in motion.” This makes NCATE’s “credibility a bit suspect.” This was also reinforced in NCATE’s aforementioned 2008 self-study in which many NCATE member institutions cited examples where “processes were altered by NCATE without advance notification.”

Conclusions.

It would appear that administrators of institutions might view NCATE as providing a competitive advantage for their teacher preparation programs over institutions that do not hold NCATE accreditation. However, many teacher educators tended to view NCATE as overly “procedural” and “Mickey Mouse” with little, if any, direct benefit to the candidates or to graduates of the unit’s programs. In addition, the fact that NCATE itself was undergoing a transformation at the time of this study, led to a great deal of frustration and a sense that NCATE did not “have its act together” which caused the unit to “spin its wheels” while trying to “hit a moving target.” Thus, the benefits that the unit derived from NCATE were, to a large extent,

outweighed by the time and effort the teacher educators felt they had to expend on the process of complying with NCATE standards.

Results and Conclusions for Sub-Question 5. To what extent do teacher educators perceive the process of attempting to meet NCATE standards would be worth the time and effort involved if SDE did not require the unit to meet NCATE standards in order to gain program approval?

Results from Interviews.

The teacher educators participating in the current study generally felt that meeting NCATE standards was important for the unit even if the State did not require compliance. However, the reasons given for this perception were expressed as having more to do with using NCATE accreditation as a marketing or branding tool than as a way to make improvements in the unit's programs in ways that would redound to the benefit of PK-12 students.

Conclusions.

In chapter 2 it was noted that research conducted by NCATE (2009) found that “among those [institutions] who do participate, only 39% choose NCATE accreditation on a voluntary basis as opposed to being required by the state.” More institutions would probably be willing to participate in NCATE without being “forced” to do so, if they were able to perceive more personal intrinsic and extrinsic value from doing so, as well as clearly seeing that NCATE is something teachers, administrators and students in PK-12 schools know and care about.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study can be expanded by including more participants, particularly faculty who were not as involved with the process of preparing the materials for state program approval and

NCATE accreditation. While they might not be as familiar with NCATE and the process, they would also be less impacted by the amount of work and time expended by the members of the Task Force. The study can be replicated by studying other teacher preparation programs facing mandated compliance with NCATE standards for the first time. An expansion of the study would include teacher educator perceptions of NCATE at institutions that had already been accredited for some time. For future research, conduct a comparison study of teacher educators' perceptions of NCATE standards and state mandates among teacher educators in institutions in different states that were applying for NCATE accreditation for the first time.

This study can be replicated using a quantitative or mixed methods study. The study can be replicated using a survey instead of or in addition to interviews of teacher educators. To expand upon this study conduct a longitudinal study of the achievement of students taught by teachers who graduated from the teacher preparation program prior to NCATE accreditation and those taught by teachers who graduated after accreditation. Also for future research, a study of graduates of the teacher preparation program before the unit was NCATE accredited and graduates of the program after it had achieved accreditation of their perceptions of how well they had been prepared to teach by the program. A similar study could be conducted of employers of program graduates as to how they perceived the performance of program graduates hired before and after the program achieved NCATE accreditation.

Summary

This study revealed that teacher educators have mixed perceptions of the effect of meeting mandated NCATE standards. While all teacher educators recognized the need for

standards in teacher preparation programs, some expressed concern that the NCATE standards might not be the best or the right standards. For some, mandated compliance with NCATE standards was seen as helping a teacher preparation program to implement change, because having an external force behind the change initiative made it “more difficult not to follow through” on the unit’s plans for improving its operations. Others felt that the state mandate and NCATE’s procedures “forced” teacher preparation programs to walk in “lock-step” with little room for creativity, and to react in a “Pavlovian” manner to imposed procedures and standards.

Among those teacher educators who identified positive effects resulting from having to meet NCATE standards, both extrinsic and intrinsic benefits were reported. Commonly reported extrinsic benefits included a belief that the unit’s image and reputation were enhanced, and that meeting NCATE standards provided the Education Department with a competitive positioning proposition. Frequently noted intrinsic benefits included improvements in the unit’s assessment system, as well as a belief that the process of preparing to meet the standards had improved communications among the faculty. On the other hand, several teacher educators felt that the amount of money, time and energy expended on the NCATE process outweighed the benefits. These educators tended to view NCATE as something the Education Department “had to do,” and in which they participated only out of a sense of compliance. At least part of these negative feelings may be attributed to, or were exacerbated by, the perception that the unit was “spinning its wheels” and engaging in “Mickey Mouse” activities because of having to engage in a process to seek NCATE accreditation immediately after having completed a very similar process for obtaining state program approval which included having to meet NCATE standards. These negative opinions were further fueled by changes taking place within NCATE leading to the

perception that NCATE was a “moving target,” whose standards were “suspect” because they were being revised frequently.

Another finding was that teacher educators became aware of NCATE only after they became members of the faculty of a teacher preparation program. This was true even though most of the teacher educators joined the faculty after many years of service as PK-12 teachers or administrators. In addition, only one teacher educator reported having only one candidate for admission ever ask if the teacher preparation program was NCATE accredited. This begs the question, if NCATE has been in existence for over 50 years, and if the goal of NCATE is to improve teaching as a means of improving student learning in America’s classrooms, why aren’t the teachers in America’s classrooms aware of NCATE, and why aren’t the administrators of America’s schools insistent that the teachers they hire be graduates of NCATE accredited preparation programs? It would seem to the researcher that NCATE might be well served by engaging in an awareness campaign focusing on the importance of teachers who complete NCATE accredited preparation programs in increasing student learning.

Also, as noted in chapter 2 of this study, since it is perception that assigns meaning to events in our life, many social psychologists such as O’Brien (2005) contend that individuals create or produce their own reality. Therefore, how teacher educators perceive and understand NCATE colors their reaction to having to meet NCATE standards in compliance with externally imposed mandates, which in turn influences the actions teacher educators take in response to those requirements. Thus, teacher educators who perceive NCATE standards in a negative way, or of having an effect only at the unit level, were unlikely to engage in actions to change their own teaching styles or practices in response to those standards.

In conclusion, teacher educators' perceptions of the effect of meeting mandated NCATE standards might best be summed up by study participant Ann who said the process of meeting the standards: "focuses on factors in teacher education that, for educational leaders, are considered critical in this day and age," it "demands accountability on the part of the Education Department," and "it helps to answer criticism of teacher education" by demonstrating that teacher preparation "is in fact worthwhile, helps provide evidence of results, and helps to give candidates security that they in fact have a profession behind them."

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APPENDIX A. Researcher's Interview Notes Form

Researcher's Interview Notes

Pseudonym of Interviewee _____ Date of Interview _____

Location of Interview _____ Start Time _____ End Time _____

| Question # | Researcher's Notes During Interview | Researcher's Observations/Perceptions |
|------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |
| 3 | | |
| 4 | | |
| 5 | | |
| 6 | | |
| 7 | | |
| Comments | | |