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Does national accreditation of education schools improve teacher and education leadership programs?

POINT: Katharine Rasch, *Maryville University*

COUNTERPOINT: David Reinking and Jamie Colwell, *Clemson University*

OVERVIEW

As detailed in the chapter of this volume on standardized assessments (Chapter 4), standards involve measurement and value. Salient in discussions of standards in U.S. education are concepts of accountability, achievement, teacher quality, and so-called standards-based assessment (SBA) systems. In mainstream media and local conversations, these topics are usually associated with PK–12 public schooling, and although praised by some stakeholders, serious concerns have been expressed by teachers and school administrators that these top-down practices and policies have led to a narrowing of the curriculum and have reduced morale among teachers and other school personnel (Hamilton et al., 2007).

Less known to the general public is that over the past decade matters related to curriculum standards and SBAs have been introduced into higher education under the auspice of national accreditation of teacher education agencies and state departments of education—a focus of the present chapter. More than half of the

in allegiance with domain-specific, specialized professional associations, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), to standardize curriculum, oversee what they deem as teacher education program improvement, and to evaluate the SBAs developed by university and college programs.

With slogans of "no child left behind" and "evidence-based curriculum," a growing "what works clearinghouse of best practices," and so forth, at first blush it might seem there would be little disagreement among education researchers, scholars, and teacher educators about the merits of accreditation and its promises of program improvement. After all, why would any educator not want to employ the best possible teaching practices, improve their certification programs, or allow any child to fall behind other ones academically?

However, accreditation is one of the most contentious topics in many higher education institutions. In part, this contention parallels similar difficulties voiced by PK–12 educators: Professors and other seasoned professionals in higher education are reluctant to relinquish freedom to design and implement curriculum that they believe is important, especially to those who might have agendas that are not aligned with ideas that many education scholars value. Further, the perception of a loss of academic freedom to a top-down bureaucratic system is unsettling for many university and college professors—especially those who take pride in having built expertise in education theory and practice and as a result established internationally acclaimed reputations in education leadership—just as it is troubling for educators in public schools.

Other concerns of educators in teacher preparation and leadership programs mirror those of public school administrators and teachers. Accreditation as it presently stands is perceived as time consuming. Committee work, report preparation, unit-level data collection and comparisons, exhibit production, and site visits by outside overseers are only a few of the matters associated with accreditation that are sometimes perceived as taking time away from traditionally valued practices, such as advising teacher candidates, mentoring doctoral students, and teaching.

Alongside the time spent on accreditation are the costs associated with it. Faculty time devoted to accreditation translates to costs. Further, in some cases additional faculty and staff need to be hired to guide the departments and the overall unit through accreditation procedures. As well, and especially in larger teacher education institutions, elaborate and costly data collection systems are needed to organize, sift through, and analyze compliance data. In addition, noncompliance or nonparticipation in these procedures can lead to [illegible], which, in turn, can affect overall student

enrollment in a school and its revenue because potential applicants cannot receive the necessary teaching credentials to be employed in a state's public schools. As with public schools, accreditation is a high-stakes matter that can affect multiple aspects of teacher education programs.

On the other hand, education reformists place some of the blame of failing public schools, high dropout rates, and persisting achievement gaps on teacher preparation programs. Perhaps this perspective is best illustrated by the latest theme of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2010), the principal accreditation agency of U.S. schools, which is captured by the opening words of a recently released panel report:

> *The education of teachers in the United States needs to be turned upside down* [italics added]. To prepare effective teachers for 21st century classrooms, teacher education must shift away from a norm which emphasizes academic preparation and course work loosely linked to school-based experiences. (p. ii)

Not surprisingly, the NCATE panel was principally composed of administrators and not university faculty, and it was guided, in part, by entrepreneurs and politicians. In short, the panel passionately argues that radical changes must be made in teacher education that require a shift away from what they believe to be antiquated ivory towers of academe.

The following essays address matters of national accreditation with an eye on whether the significant resources devoted to and the efforts made by state departments and other governmental bodies, accrediting agencies, and education administrators and faculty over the years have improved teacher education and leadership programs.

In the point essay, Katharine Rasch (Maryville University) argues that recent accreditation and education reform efforts have great potential in developing reflective practitioners. Although she does not take the stronger position of accreditation agencies that the teacher education system needs to be entirely "turned upside down," as they suggest it, she recounts how various members of the education system can collaborate to produce stronger and more cohesive programs of study. In part, Rasch argues, this enhancement is because accreditation standards and oversight allow for stronger connections among the content, skills, and dispositions expected of teachers and greater possibilities of bringing these qualities to schools.

In the counterpoint essay, David Reinking and Jamie Colwell (Clemson University) argue that present accreditation processes and requirements may actually have the opposite effect to the stated purposes of accreditation

agencies to help improve teacher education programs. In part, they believe that national accreditation can, and often does, create a repressive environment characterized by narrow attitudes that diminish the creative potential that is needed for developing quality teachers and education leaders. Reinking and Colwell conclude the counterpoint essay with a careful analysis wherein they attempt to show that there are no strong reasons to associate program improvement with present accreditation practices.

As shown in the subsequent essays, the direction in which the accreditation of teacher education programs evolves over coming years will certainly have enormous effects on teaching and learning in higher education and beyond.

A. Jonathan Eakle
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POINT: Katharine Rasch

Maryville University

With the myriad of organizations and individuals who are concerned about who is teaching in America's classrooms and leading America's schools, there has also been an almost constant discussion and analysis about how, and if, teachers and education leaders are making a difference in classrooms and schools. Yet, throughout most of the 20th century, the requirements to license teachers and the programs that have prepared those teachers were quite variable, and, until the late 1970s, largely this licensure was unregulated beyond the academic credentials and programs of typical schools and universities (Darling-Hammond, Pacheco, Nichelli, LePage, & Kammerness, 2005). While national accreditation of teachers began in the early 1950s, it followed the path set by regional accreditation procedures that were used throughout the early and mid-19th centuries. Regional accreditation procedures existed namely to set standards and provide a system of accountability for colleges and universities only in their respective areas.

This manner of accreditation was voluntary and provided self-regulation of institutions through private associations, of which the education institutions were a part, rather than through government regulation. In the case of professional accreditation for teachers, increased scrutiny of PK–12 education and the beginning of the development of curriculum standards in the 1970s began a trend toward more regulatory and externally governed accountability procedures for university-based teacher education programs and a cycle of quality improvement. Criticisms arising from publications such as *A Nation at Risk* and *A Place Called School* focused on the irregularities and problems with teacher performance. These criticisms caused further scrutiny of teacher and educational leadership preparation. Thus, the NCATE began to provide oversight for teacher preparation.

The NCATE process was completely redesigned in the mid-1980s to focus on elements of professional accountability. Emphasis moved away from inputs and focused on curriculum coherence, research-based teacher preparation practices, better connections to the field of education, and adequate resources and responsibility for coherent professional preparation. From 1985 to 2000, state licensure standards, national learned society standards (e.g., National Science Teachers Association, Educational Leadership Constituent Council), and authority for state teacher education program approval for colleges and universities became more intertwined and

but directly tied to state program approval. A second accrediting organization (Teacher Education Accreditation Council [TEAC], 2010) was established in 1997. "TEAC's entire accreditation process is built around the program's case that it prepares competent, caring, and qualified professional educators. TEAC requires the program to have evidence to support its case, and the accreditation process examines and verifies the evidence" (TEAC, 2010).

In 2000, the NCATE standards were further amended to be more focused on the outcomes of teacher and educational leader performance as a result of the programs and the use of performance data for systematic program improvement. Like institutional accreditation, the specialized accreditation of programs for teachers and educational leaders provides both oversight and incredible opportunities for institutions to study and challenge the status quo, to respond to the public, and to examine the results of programs in which candidates are prepared.

OPPORTUNITIES

The current accreditation and teacher program approval processes have provided an extraordinary opportunity for each school, college, and department of education to focus on its programs, its assumptions, its expectations and outcomes for its candidates, and its obligations to the professional community. As Linda Darling-Hammond et al. (2005) and others have reported, several important elements have made a difference in the design of teacher education programs: content learning process and learning context.

In *Educating School Leaders*, Arthur Levine (2005) likewise suggested the importance of purpose, curricular coherence, curricular balance, and assessment in his study and criticism of educational leadership programs. He also emphasized the importance of faculty composition and research. The accreditation process requires institutions to scrutinize and examine each of these in the process of self-study and program development and improvement. This process has improved teacher education and educational leadership programs in the following ways: Accreditation has required each institution to carefully consider the institutional context in which programs are offered as well as the important research and wisdom of practice that guide the institution. In this process, groups of faculty must engage in substantive dialog and collectively endorse the mission, vision, and outcomes of the programs.

The explicit review of the conceptual and research literature in teacher education assists faculty in examining current leaders in their field and the [illegible] inform the outcomes established for each

perceived purposes of individual faculty member's work and has altered the direction of many programs. In this process, consideration of national, state, and institutional standards must provide explicit program outcomes related to this examination. They must also systematically promote opportunities to engage practitioners in the analysis and endorsement of the institution's outcomes and provide further context for outcomes and standards to which the institution will be held. Over the continuous accreditation process, the outcomes for institutions have become increasingly explicit and transparent to the candidates in the programs.

The process of faculty deliberation and consensus around context and focus of programs has required institutions to reaffirm the commitment to teacher education on campus. Collaborative ventures with faculty in arts and sciences have been enhanced through the emphasis on program assessment. While not all faculty members have participated willingly initially, programs emerge from the process with a stronger sense of identity and assurance that candidates who are becoming teachers and school leaders will participate in programs that have been reexamined, refocused, and carefully assessed. Faculty ownership of these programs has increased; responsibility for the accountability for candidate performance is shared more broadly through the processes of accreditation.

RESULTS OF EMPHASIS ON ASSESSMENT

Assessment drives the accreditation process and has produced extensive improvement in program approval in two important ways. Faculty members have collectively worked to ensure that assessments actually measure candidate performance on the specific program outcomes. The process necessitates faculty involvement and ownership in ways that older, input-driven processes did not require. The move from attention to objectives and curriculum alignment to assessment of candidates' professional knowledge and skills has been difficult; institutions continue to refine assessments, but the discussion and self-study has shifted dramatically.

In addition, the entire faculty must come to consensus and common expectations for candidates in collective, deliberative, and extensive assessment. This emphasis on assessment has provided new assurance for candidates that expectations are clearly outlined throughout the programs and tied to their individual performance. The process of outlining key assessments throughout the program has also resulted in more cohesive and sequential programs. As assessments are used at key transition points throughout the program, candidates must provide evidence of their knowledge and skills not just in courses [illegible]

explicitly the formative and summative points at which candidates are held responsible for demonstration of program outcomes. This process also ensures that each candidate is responsible to demonstrate knowledge and skills throughout the program in much more explicit ways.

The second result of the emphasis on assessment is that it has improved teacher education and educational leadership programs through the ways in which assessment data are tightly controlled, analyzed, and used for program improvement. Accreditation has assisted units in emphasizing how data are used in increasingly systematic and sophisticated ways. Schools, colleges, and departments of education not only are examining assessment data for individual candidates but also are aggregating data over time to examine their own integrity of assessments and assurances of quality control in programs. This process has ensured that program and unit faculty members are responsive to the data presented and committed to the improvement of the quality of instrumentation. As each program delineates transition points from admission to program exit, faculty are also better able to evaluate the effectiveness of key experiences and assessments.

There is emerging professional consensus that the clinical aspects of preparation for both teachers and educational leaders are extremely important not just in quantity but in quality and focus (Boyle-Base & McIntyre, 2008; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Accreditation has suggested very careful structure and expectations of knowledge and skills necessary for both teachers and educational leaders. Accreditation standards have assisted faculty in delineating a sequence of experiences that is explicit and, in most cases, closely tied to coursework in teaching methods and educational leadership responsibilities. Current standards for both TEAC and NCATE, as well as the program standards for educational leadership, rely heavily on the evidence presented by departments of education with regard to candidate performance in the field. These standards (as part of the overall assessment system) have enhanced and accentuated the importance of attention to the authentic performance, veracity of assessment, and responsibility for the growth and development of PK–12 students during the field/clinical experiences. For teacher candidates, the range of professional responsibilities that are demonstrated include attention to the diverse needs of learners, support for families, and outreach to the broader community. School leaders must focus on every aspect of instructional leadership and the use of data for school improvement. Schools, colleges, and departments of education have had to collaborate with PK–12 partners with very specific criteria, rather than the assumptions that time in the field will automatically imply a certain set of skills for each

emphasis must be explicit; it must be pervasive in the curriculum and the assessments used by the institution. While there remains great variability in the extent to which institutions embrace diversity as a strength of program candidates, every institution has had to attend directly to helping candidates prepare themselves and enhance their skills working with students of different ethnicities, English language learners, and students with exceptionalities.

There have been long-held assumptions that teacher education would include rich preparation in content and a certain set of pedagogical skills that would be gleaned through coursework and some field experience. There is also a perception by the public that conformity to the public education system and commitment to the ideals of public education are necessary for a competent, caring professional. The current accreditation processes require that the broader professional community collaborate in the design and development of curricula, field experiences, and assessments. This has required that schools, colleges, and departments of education find more explicit structures for outreach. In addition, through this process, the schools, colleges, and departments of education assume responsibility for oversight of their programs in relationship to the needs of the community. Education schools have been widely criticized for being out of touch and removed from the public schools. The accreditation process has provided structure and standards to address what has been a valid criticism for some institutions.

POLICY QUESTIONS

There are critical policy questions being raised with regard to teacher reward systems and tenure as the consequences of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001) reach more school districts and require reconstitution of schools. Experiments with charter schools and schools of emphasis are butting up against traditions of tenure and job seniority for teachers and principals. In the process, salary structures that reward teachers based on advanced degrees and years of service are being scrutinized and criticized. NCATE processes require state departments of education to provide evidence of the enhanced skills of teachers pursuing master's degrees and doctoral programs leading to additional licensure. These programs have received little attention in the past and did not necessarily focus on demonstration of knowledge and skills directly related to practice. Current standards have made expectations for these programs more explicit and delineate a higher set of skills for these professionals.

Throughout this process, leaders in individual states have played a critical role in setting policy and dictating the relationship bet

provided support for institutions to look carefully at the success of programs. In other instances, competing agendas and regulations have encumbered institutions and made the processes more bureaucratic or conflicted. This dichotomy has led to confounding and confusing situations, especially given how variable the state regulations and processes are.

While reflecting on the improvement of teacher education and educational leadership throughout the accreditation processes in the past 20 years, this does not intend to imply that their processes are perfected. Ongoing research and development are critical, as the nation's teachers and leaders continue to struggle with the challenges of providing excellent and equitable education for all students. The accreditation agencies' work has suggested that there are many more questions and issues to be examined. Critics of accreditation continue to question the relative emphasis on content knowledge, pedagogy, and clinical competence.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the institutional foci on accreditation range from begrudging compliance to rapt attention to continuous improvement. The scope and effectiveness of program responsibility varies based on the attitudes of leadership and faculty members who engage, or not, in the accreditation process. The tension between regulation and accreditation is ongoing in the professional teacher education community. In the ongoing discussions and merger of TEAC and NCATE to form the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), the discussion of the adequacy of evidence and attention to accountability will continue to change. Nonetheless, teacher education has undergone intense internal scrutiny that has required reexamination of programs and serious study of the effectiveness of current practices.

COUNTERPOINT: David Reinking and Jamie Colwell

Clemson University

education and leadership programs. In fact, this essay argues that accreditation today can, and often does, inspire superficial responses that are sometimes detrimental to programs. Such responses are derived from a posture of compliance that can stifle innovation and a genuine commitment to programmatic improvement. Further, this essay takes the stance that whatever accreditation may contribute to programmatic improvement may be offset by potentially negative outcomes that rarely enter discussions about accreditation. Finally, this essay argues there are no strong warrants that accreditation leads to improvements in education programs.

BACKGROUND

Accreditation was not originally framed as a means to directly improve education programs. Prior to the late 1990s, accreditation of education programs, like accreditation of programs in law and medicine, were conceptualized and implemented primarily to assure the public that programs met a minimal threshold of professional legitimacy. The focus was on dimensions such as adequate resources, qualifications of faculty, and the reasonableness of a program's curriculum. As in other fields, the role of education accreditation in promoting improvement was typically a by-product attained by weeding out weak programs or by leveraging additional resources needed to bolster programs with marginal capacity.

In the late 1990s, the NCATE took a distinctly different approach. Although not deserting entirely the goal of warranting that programs have adequate capacity, the predominant focus became more transformational, basing accreditation on evidence that programs were actively and explicitly engaged in meeting standards as evidenced by measurable indicators of performance. In short, accreditation was conceptualized and implemented as an engine for education reform by standardizing professional preparation one program at a time, with the implicit goal of enhancing the relatively poor public image of education as a profession.

Nevertheless, the transformative intent of accreditation to reinforce professionalism through standards and accountability is fraught with challenges, difficulties, and ambiguity. For example, the appearance of the TEAC as an alternative accreditation organization was due at least in part to dissatisfaction with NCATE's prescriptive stance and inflexible requirements and the belief among institutions and influential educators that NCATE was counter to authentic improvement. Or the TEAC alternative suggested that any possible benefits of NCATE accreditation were outweighed by costs in

appearance of TEAC at least tacitly suggests that the dominant NCATE approach to accreditation has not been widely accepted as a clear force for program improvement.

In our view, although TEAC mitigates some concerns by permitting more conceptual and logistical flexibility and by being less prescriptive than NCATE, many other problems remain. Like NCATE, for example, TEAC also views accreditation as an active means to implement education reform through professionalization by insisting that programs address broad consensual standards and quality principles, all of which must be documented by ongoing, rigorous collection of valid and reliable (i.e., measurable) outcomes from multiple sources. Thus, we believe that both accrediting organizations are, to varying extents, subject to the fundamental limitations that we discuss subsequently in the present essay. That TEAC and NCATE share similar goals, albeit with somewhat different approaches, was validated by the merger of the two organizations as we wrote the present essay.

FUNDAMENTAL LIMITATIONS OF ACCREDITATION

Accreditation has been criticized for its potential negative effects on professional programs when compared to alternatives such as free market approaches used elsewhere in the world, where respected programs thrive and weaker programs wither. Further, accreditation has been criticized as "'dumbing down' teacher education through a narrow emphasis upon technical pedagogical knowledge and performance outcomes" (Carlson, 2008, p. 97). Certainly, the current focus of accreditation privileges easily quantifiable aspects of future teachers' performance and thus encourages education programs, for better or worse, to be driven mainly by quantifiable data. In fact, NCATE has had to back away from its original inclusion of teacher candidates' dispositions in their accreditation standards, in part because those dimensions were difficult to measure. Thus, accreditation standards and requirements do relatively little to inspire programmatic innovation or excellence aimed at promoting difficult-to-measure abilities and dispositions and may actually inhibit such efforts by moving energies and resources toward more mundane, though quantifiable, aspects of teaching.

Another relevant dimension of the current accreditation climate is highlighted in Patricia Graham, Richard Lyman, and Martin Trow's (1995) argument that education accreditation is fundamentally flawed because it attempts [illegible] inherently conflicting goals: (a) ongoing assessment and evalu-

program meets minimal standards. In commenting on those conflicting goals, Frank B. Murray (2001) stated the following:

> The second function invariably overwhelms the first because the incentives favor the production of a public relations document that magnifies the institution's strengths and hides its weaknesses. This is precisely the opposite of what is needed if the first function is to be served. (p. 50)

In fact, he later reported "despite TEAC's repeated assurance that only unaddressed weaknesses, not weaknesses themselves, were problematic, [programs] decided to bury . . . perceived shortcomings and not speak to them at all" (Murray, 2009, p. 64). That statement is particularly poignant because Murray was TEAC's president at the time it was written.

Accreditation in education today also leaves little time for thought, reflection, or innovation outside the boundaries defined by the accreditation process. That is, accreditation is no longer a relatively straightforward, concentrated effort every few years to document a reasonable and coherent program that has adequate capacity. Instead, it is an ongoing, all-encompassing, labor- and resource-intensive effort requiring every accredited program to document continuously that it is engaged in gathering and reflecting on evidence of increasing improvement toward achieving accreditation standards.

Engaging in ongoing accreditation activities creates tremendous challenges for individual programs to meet an ambitious agenda for improvement, standardization, and legitimacy in the eyes of accreditation organizations. Notably, it demands incredible time and resources including the direct, ongoing participation of almost all education faculty as well as administrative coordination and staff support. For example, to maintain accreditation, programs must continuously collect and analyze prodigious data verifying, even at the level of individual courses, that preservice teachers are being explicitly exposed to and evaluated on the content and experiences dictated by accreditation standards. In at least some cases, the demands of providing the ongoing data and documentation for accreditation become de facto the education program, again suggesting the importance of knowing whether that condition is an improvement or a liability.

Accreditation in teacher education also faces a unique challenge when compared to other professions. Education programs typically depend to some extent on the involvement and cooperation of faculty in other disciplines located in other administrative units such as depart[illegible]

of accreditation in another field. Further, it can create friction between academic units and individual faculty that is not conducive to positive mutual efforts to discuss and implement constructive improvements in programs (Huang & Barrea-Marlys, 2008).

This dynamic of university life, especially when coupled with the ongoing, resource-intensive, and difficult demands of accreditation, invite superficial, sometimes subversive, responses for the sake of giving the impression that accreditation requirements are being met. Such a response is particularly likely when the stakes for accreditation are high, such as when the loss of national accreditation also means, for example, the loss of state accreditation. Gamesmanship, either programmatically or individually, is not uncommon to minimize intrusions, to maintain public appearances, or to accommodate the differing philosophical positions and multiple agendas of individual faculty without jeopardizing the more standardizing forces of accreditation.

More importantly, innovative ideas that do not mesh well with accreditation frameworks may be dismissed outright because they complicate or are at odds with the demands of templates for accreditation. An example of the former is Bullough, Clark, and Patterson's (2003) account of how a rigorous, theory-grounded internal process of programmatic improvement created serious threats to accreditation because it did not fit NCATE's templates and technocratic approach to evaluation. The latter is illustrated by the first author's (David Reinking) experience of when a program's faculty ultimately rejected an initially well-received suggestion for a programmatic change when someone pointed out that it did not fit into the NCATE conceptual framework. Likewise, the second author, Jamie Colwell, was required to include several assignments in a course she was teaching simply for the sake of satisfying NCATE requirements, although the assignments were ill suited to the course goals and the students who were taking it.

As these examples illustrate, accreditation can encroach on academic freedom. Indeed, one supporter of accreditation lamented that program auditors have found that systemic efforts at quality control were undermined by faculty members' idiosyncratic preferences and styles (Murray, 2009). Faculty can be formally or informally pressured administratively to adapt the content and structure of their programs or courses to accommodate the vicissitudes of accreditation. Even relatively innocuous and historically sacrosanct expressions of a faculty member's expert interpretations of a course, such as a syllabus, are now accreditation artifacts that must follow prescribed frameworks. The prescriptive stance of education accreditation today feeds faculty mem-

addressed directly by accreditation organizations or within the literature on accreditation. In our experience, they are also often ignored by institutional administrative leadership and individuals invested in public relations who are not willing, or qualified, to look beneath the surface to assess the full range of accreditation's consequences.

Further, accreditation organizations do not explicitly acknowledge or accommodate cultural differences created by the respective missions of distinctly different institutions, such as large research-oriented universities and smaller, local, or regional institutions. For example, NCATE requires programs to establish and describe a unifying conceptual framework that undergirds all aspects of all programs. Because of the various expert perspectives found in large schools of education, such a singular view is, from our experiences, not likely or even advisable. Thus, in the end, the framework that is developed is simply a way to satisfy accreditation requirements and not an authentic artifact aimed at providing substantive guidance for programmatic improvement.

That problem is exacerbated by the common practice of putting individuals who work at smaller institutions in charge of evaluating how programs at large universities have—or have not—addressed accreditation requirements (see Bullough, 2002). The influence of a conceptual framework is also substantially mitigated when many of the education programs at the largest research institutions are arguably regarded as among the best programs by virtue of the quality of their students and faculty. We argue that authentic improvement is less likely when such differences in academic culture are not acknowledged and accommodated, as currently they are not.

Finally, the effects of the current approach to national accreditation on programmatic improvement are inherently limited by the fact that accreditation in education plays a more limited role than in other professions. For example, to practice law, an individual must pass the bar exam, and one cannot stand for the bar exam without having a degree from at least a provisionally accredited institution. On the other hand, to become a certified teacher in many states, it is not necessary to have a degree from an institution that is accredited. Ironically, often the same individuals arguing for tighter control of the traditional professional preparation of teachers also argue for shortcuts to certification, for example, by allowing people in business or the military to enter the education profession without meeting the same standards. Further, of the approximately 1,300 programs preparing teachers and education leaders, only slightly more than half have sought accreditation. In fact, several of the largest and most highly regarded education programs such as the University of Wisconsin and Harvard University have disregarded

fostering programmatic quality. Such cases highlight not only that the opportunities for programmatic improvement through accreditation are limited nationally but also underscore the fundamental ambivalence in the field of education to the benefits of accreditation as it is currently conceptualized and implemented.

WEAK WARRANTS FOR PROGRAMMATIC IMPROVEMENT

The activist and often prescriptive role of accreditation today, its extensive, ongoing demands on education programs, and the potentially negative effects of those demands suggest that strong warrants are necessary to support any claims of programmatic improvement. We find no such warrants and believe those invested in current approaches to accreditation should be held accountable for offering such evidence. In this section, we address possible warrants that, at present, are unsatisfactorily weak or unachieved, and we suggest some stronger warrants that might be considered.

The benefits of national accreditation for program improvement are self-evident. This warrant is represented by the TEAC president's statement: "No one has ever doubted that TEAC's system would benefit a program. Having solid evidence for claims, verified by an audit, is simply good in and of itself" (Murray, 2005, p. 314). In light of the numerous potential limitations we have cited earlier in the present essay, we find such a position to be disingenuous and an unconvincing non sequitur. It assumes that simply holding a program accountable, leveraged by accreditation, will inevitably lead to genuine improvement. That warrant is also curiously inconsistent with accrediting organizations' demands on programs for valid and reliable evidence to support adherence to standards or other claims. Is it equally plausible to argue that the high quality of some programs is self-evident?

The data gathered during accreditation demonstrates that programs are improving. This warrant is clearly a self-fulfilling prophecy and can immediately be discounted. The data demanded to support compliance cannot logically be used as evidence of improvement. Further, it privileges quantitative data over the deeper qualitative analyses that may be necessary to reveal negative, collateral, offsetting effects, or only superficial compliance rather than genuine improvement. High-stakes assessments also have inherently weaker validity (Nichols & Berliner, 2007).

Some programs improve as a result of accreditation. Some programs certainly improve. However, such improvement would be expected under virtu- [illegible] model of accreditation, including a simpler, less intrusive

Most programs on average improve when they are accredited. There have been relatively few systematic attempts to substantiate this warrant, and the results are decidedly equivocal or difficult to interpret precisely. For example, using in-depth qualitative methods, Jingzi Huang and Mirta Barrea-Marlys (2008) reported some benefits as well as detrimental effects from one institution's experience with accreditation. An analysis sponsored by Educational Testing Service (ETS) (Wenglinsky, 2001) explored the link between program characteristics and scores on teacher licensing exams. Accreditation was not among the five factors related to those scores, and the study concluded that teacher preparation programs are typically not uniformly successful or unsuccessful. One study (Gitomer, Latham, & Ziomek, 1999) did show that graduates of NCATE institutions were more likely to pass licensing exams, but a stronger, more valid comparison would be between programs that were granted accreditation and those who sought accreditation but failed or were given provisional accreditation. Even if data supporting this warrant existed, it could not be assumed that the widespread benefits were achieved at acceptable costs or could not have been accomplished more efficiently.

Accreditation fosters improvement by ensuring that a program is explicitly addressing consensual standards of the field. This warrant might have merit if there was clear consensus in the field of education about what overall standards are foundational and if there was strong evidence that conformance to those standards was a critical component of effective programs. There is neither, especially at the programmatic level. For example, TEAC claims that its approach to standards is more valid than that of NCATE because its standards are generated by leaders of the field independent of the agendas of NCATE's constituent professional organizations. Unlike NCATE, TEAC also does not impose state or specialty area standards on its members, because it believes that there is too much variance in these standards, and there is little evidence that the standards are valid, or that strict adherence to standards leads to improvement. Neither do accreditation organizations lay claim to any evidence to support that adherence to standards is a key ingredient to improving programs. For example, NCATE's executive director recently stated that there needs to be a stronger scientific knowledge base about effective programs.

Much stronger warrants would be necessary to support claims that accreditation produces programmatic improvement. Interestingly, stronger warrants would be available if accreditation organizations were held to requirements that parallel their expectations of education programs. For example, what conceptual framework guides the belief that accreditation leads to programmatic improvement? From what theoretical or empirical

evidence related to institutional change)? What is the value added by accreditation? What exactly is programmatic improvement, and what would be valid and reliable evidence of it? What standards represent a professionally grounded and legitimate process of accreditation (e.g., do no harm; implement accreditation that is sensitive to the realities of those who work on the frontlines of teacher education)?

CONCLUSION

Enhancing the quality of teacher education and leadership programs, as well as bolstering public confidence in teaching as a profession, can occur on multiple fronts and through many means. National accreditation may play a role in addressing both goals, but we do not believe that there are convincing arguments, let alone evidence, that it directly contributes to programmatic improvement. In fact, there are many reasons to worry that education accreditation may be having a detrimental effect on program improvement, while consuming an inordinate amount of time, energy, and resources. It has, in our opinion, unrealistically and unreasonably far overreached its potential influence on programmatic improvement, and it has produced too many instances of undermining innovative, meaningful, and authentic improvements in programs of teacher education and leadership. A productive future direction, we believe, would be to seek a more effective and realistic balance between the external accountability and leverage of accreditation and more authentic internal processes associated with meaningful reform. That alignment will be achieved, we argue, only when it is acknowledged that genuine programmatic improvement cannot be legislated or dictated by externally imposed technocratic approaches to accreditation such as those currently in place.

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Court Cases and Statutes

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C.A. §§ 6301 *et seq.*

4

Should standardized student assessments guide curriculum and instruction in schools?

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OVERVIEW

Without a doubt, the evaluation of products completed by various workers such as those in the manufacturing industry and students has been a critical part of cultures since antiquity. During modern times, many products became increasingly governed by laws and standards. A standard is part and parcel of two related dimensions: value and measurement. In the past, for example, the U.S. economy was set to a gold standard and commodities and exchanges were measured against the value of that metal. Further, standard scientific measurements allow comparisons, or assessments, to be made between aspects of subjects and objects, such as their height, mass, and volume. For instance, the value of an ounce of gold can be assessed in comparison to an ounce of lead. Since at least as early as the cognitive scientific revolution of the 1980s, standards of value and measurement have also been a prevailing, often debated, and polarizing education topic.

On one side of the debate, advocates of the standardization of curriculum and instruction have loosely amalgamated to form what has come to be known as the standards movement, which over the past two decades has touched nearly every corner of curriculum and instruction in the United States. In part, this recent movement was a reaction to progressive notions in education that