

Optimizing Talent:

Closing Educational and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide



Optimizing Teacher Talent for Student Success: The Role of Quality Assurance for and Accreditation of Teacher Preparation

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Abstract

Optimizing Teacher Talent for Student Success contributes to the Salzburg seminar theme of *Closing Education and Social Mobility Gaps Worldwide: Higher Education and Lifelong Learning*. The goal of the paper is to outline the challenges and opportunities in global efforts at quality assurance and accreditation, as a mechanism for optimizing talent teacher to impact and reduce achievement gaps in student performance. The work of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), a United States –based accreditor of educator preparation, is used as a vehicle for exploring the themes addressed in this paper. Recently NCATE’s national focus expanded to include the accreditation of international institutions that offer teacher preparation programs. This change in NCATE’s mission from US-only accreditation to a more global reach and international involvement in the accreditation of teacher preparation programs broadens and deepens NCATE’s interest in the impact of teacher preparation on student success. This paper explores the challenges and opportunities of accreditation for the optimization of teacher talent in an era of accountability for student learning. The complexity of the following questions guided the concept and content of this paper:

1. What is the relationship of quality assurance and accreditation?
2. What paradigm shifts might be necessary to optimize teacher talent development through quality assurance and accreditation?
3. How does NCATE accreditation of teacher preparation programs optimize teacher talent?

4. Do intended reforms of NCATE accreditation, particularly in relation to evidence of teacher impact on student learning, have global relevance for optimizing student success?

By way of introduction and to set the context for exploring the role of accreditation in optimizing teacher talent nationally and worldwide, a brief history of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is presented. The mission of NCATE is to assure high quality educator preparation programs with the two-fold purpose of providing for public accountability as well as institutional program improvement. NCATE's by-laws include the following mission statements,

1. To *improve* [italics added] educator preparation in the United States and elsewhere..., and
2. The encouragement of member organizations and other groups in the performance of their respective roles in the *improvement of teacher education* [italics added] (NCATE, 2006).

In addition, NCATE literature states that “Accountability and improvement in teacher preparation are central to NCTE’s mission...” and “Providing leadership for reform in teacher education is also central to NCATE’s mission” (2008, p. 1).

NCATE accredited educator preparation entities include 753 public and private sector institutions that offer teacher and educational leader licensing and advanced level programs in the United States and Puerto Rico. Not all of NCATE’s accredited entities are universities and colleges. Recently, NCATE either accredited or is in the process of accrediting for-profit and distance learning institutions and alternative certification programs that cross state lines. In addition, innovative approaches to teacher preparation, such as the American Museum of Natural History that prepares earth science teachers for

middle school classrooms (grades 6 through 9), have initiated conversations with NCATE staff about the process for obtaining accreditation.

Since its founding in 1954 until the launch of its new standards in 2000, NCATE's approach to accreditation was historically compliance based. As such, its focus was on inputs to teacher preparation programs, such as course syllabi. Beginning in 2000 with its new standards, NCATE's focus has shifted from inputs to outcomes with an emphasis on systems for data collection and analysis to drive improvements of institutional and teacher candidate performance. Currently NCATE is engaged in developing new standards as it merges with the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) to form a single accrediting body called the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The new standards are expected to be available for public comment in early February, 2013. With the new standards, NCATE/CAEP's emphasis will be on teacher effectiveness and the quality of the evidence that is used to assess institutional and teacher candidate performance.

On the international front, prior to 2012, NCATE referred all international accreditation inquiries to the US-based Center for Quality Assurance in International Education (CQAIE) which conducted its reviews under a specialized process, called the International Recognition of Teacher Education (IRTE). Throughout the period from 2005 to July 1, 2012 CQAIE used the NCATE standards and processes in its reviews to award "international recognition," but not accreditation, to teacher education programs outside of the United States. There are currently three IRTE-recognized teacher education programs; one each in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates. These institutions have expressed interest in seeking NCATE accreditation as the next

step in their quality assurance efforts, partially because internationally accepted standards in teacher preparation are not on the horizon. In private conversations with the deans of colleges and schools of education outside the continental United States, it appears that NCATE accreditation:

1. attracts a higher-level of faculty to their programs to teach,
2. distinguishes their programs from the "fly by night" university programs that are emerging unregulated in their countries,
3. provides a "global" perspective on their programs that attracts students,
4. lends "leverage" to deans, particularly those educated in the United States, to make systemic changes,
5. establishes programs/schools/colleges as leaders in quality assurance efforts that may be new to their own countries, and
6. grants distinction to teacher preparation programs when no national specialty professional accreditation currently exists.

On July 1, 2012, the recognition process through the Center for Quality Assurance of International Education ceased to exist. NCATE inherited CQAIE's roster of seven institutions and will assist these institutions to complete the IRTE recognition process as a precondition to establish candidacy for accreditation by NCATE. In addition, by late April 2013 NCATE will engage in an accreditation visit of the teacher education programs at a university in the United Arab Emirates. A university in Oman is currently completing a pre-candidacy application for an accreditation visit by Fall 2015.

This change in NCATE's mission from US-only accreditation to a more global reach and international involvement in the accreditation of teacher preparation programs

broadens and deepens NCATE's interest in the impact of teacher preparation on student success. In addition, an increasing number of US-based, NCATE-accredited colleges and universities are expanding to offer teacher preparation programs at international campuses and to utilize international placements for student teaching. These expansions are intended to offer a global perspective and an international internship opportunity to students in US-based teacher preparation programs. Thus, NCATE/CAEP accreditation is also expanding to include national as well as international goals and purposes.

This introduction and brief history of NCATE are intended to provide a context for NCATE's interest in quality assurance globally and to introduce the topics addressed in this paper.

- 1) What is the relationship of quality assurance and accreditation?
- 2) What paradigm shifts might be necessary to optimize teacher talent development through quality assurance and accreditation?
- 3) How does NCATE accreditation of teacher preparation programs optimize teacher talent?
- 4) Do intended reforms of NCATE accreditation, particularly in relation to evidence of teacher impact on student learning, have global relevance for optimizing student success?

The Relationship of Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Writing with an international audience in mind, it seemed prudent to explore the definition of and relationship between accreditation and quality assurance in order to establish a shared foundation for the discussion of optimizing teacher talent, and ultimately student success, through accreditation. Quality assurance (QA) and

accreditation are not interchangeable terms although they are inter-related concepts. However, the nature of the relationship of quality assurance to accreditation is neither widely understood nor commonly shared. As a case in point, Japan's National Institution for Academic Degrees and University Evaluation (NIAD-UE) began its collaboration with the United Kingdom's Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) by creating a bilingual glossary to ensure a clear understanding of Japanese higher education and quality assurance (NIAD-UE, 2012). The bilingual glossary defines quality assurance as inclusive of accreditation:

Quality Assurance: A framework for ensuring the quality of education and research of *higher education institutions*, using schemes stipulated in law. It includes *self-assessment* and *certified evaluation and accreditation* stipulated by the *School Education Law*, *national university corporation evaluation*, and *approval of the establishment of universities* (NIAD-UE, 2007, p. 32).

As defined, Japanese quality assurance is understood to be a framework within which accreditation plays a process role in evaluation. Accreditation is defined as follows:

The process in NIAD-UE's *certified evaluation and accreditation* for examining whether the conditions of law schools meet the standard or not. A certain status is conferred upon the school when approved. NIAD-UE undertakes the accreditation of *professional graduate schools*, especially law schools because of the need to clarify the assured quality of institutions which are closely related to the judicial system (NIAD-UE, 2007, p. 4).

In many countries quality assurance systems are intended to account to the public for the quality of its institutions through compliance with regulations and/or laws. In the Japanese definitions noted above, adherence to “stipulations in law” is prominently featured. As another example, Ewell (2008) describes the quality assurance process in Russia as largely focused on audits of adherence to regulations. In this type of regulatory quality assurance process, accreditation becomes an evaluation tool of compliance.

The American approach is decidedly different, although experts in the United States concur that there is a relationship between quality assurance and accreditation. G. M. Peterson describes accreditation as an outcome of a system of quality assurance and as the basis for continuous improvement (personal communication, April, 24 2012). P. T. Ewell makes this same distinction in the purposes of quality assurance and accreditation but also highlights the role of assessment (personal communication, May 21, 2012). Quality assurance, notes Ewell, is an overarching system of summative and evaluative assessment for the purpose of public accountability. Accreditation, on the other hand, is a more formative mechanism with the purpose of continuous improvement (Ewell, 2008).

These definitional distinctions are central to the issues and challenges in international accreditation of teacher education programs by a United States-based accreditor. First of all, the differences underscore the need for a mutually understood purpose for what accreditation provides. The emphasis of NCATE accreditation is on continuous improvement of teacher preparation programs, not regulatory compliance for public accountability. Secondly, the relationship between quality assurance and accreditation highlight the need for collaboration with a national quality assurance

initiative. Thirdly, the optimization of teacher talent is accelerated when it is responsive to the needs and challenges of a local context. Accreditation's focus on improvement and formative assessment are poised to contribute these localized contexts.

Paradigm Shifts to Optimize Teacher Talent Development

If quality assurance efforts and accreditation are limited to public accountability and compliance, little change in institutional outcomes are likely to result. It is in this distinction between accreditation as an evaluation tool of quality assurance and accreditation as a formative assessment mechanism for continuous improvement that the optimization of teacher talent can be developed and achieved. However, to do so requires two paradigmatic shifts on the part of institutions with post-secondary programs. The first shift is away from the inputs that regulatory compliance dictates and toward defining and assessing the intended outcomes for student learning. The second shift is away from summative evaluations for accountability and compliance purposes and toward formative assessments of the intended learning outcomes for improvement purposes. A discussion of these two paradigm shifts is the focus of this section.

Shifting From Inputs to Outcomes

The inputs of an accountability-focused quality assurance system often take the form of course lists, expectations for faculty qualifications, and the level of institutional resources, such as the quantity of and access to high quality technology resources or the number and currency of the reference materials available in an institutional library. In contrast, the outcomes of an improvement-focused quality assurance system would describe what the students would be expected to know and be able to do as a result of their post-secondary education.

A widely known example of shifting from inputs to outcomes is found in the work of the Bologna Process that began to establish priorities for higher education in the European Higher Education Area. With an emphasis on lifelong learning, widening access, and student mobility, the 47 countries engaged in the Bologna Process were committed to creating national qualifications frameworks that would identify “what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on the basis of a given qualification” (Bologna Process, 2010). The intention of this work was to establish comparability and transparency of qualifications as well as to facilitate a learner’s movement across and within systems of higher education. Thus, a paradigm shift from compliance inputs to performance outcomes, at a minimum, would require university faculties to define and then teach to outcomes beyond the content of their individual courses.

The overarching framework of the Bologna Process, to which national qualifications frameworks must align, contains language akin to an accreditation standard of a specialty professional accreditor, such as NCATE. For example, the Bergen Framework states that in order to be awarded a qualification in the first cycle of study, a student demonstrates that he/she

“... can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competencies typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study...” (EHEA QF-EHEA, 2005).

Increasingly, and possibly inspired by the Bologna Process, quality assurance efforts based in student learning outcomes and program improvements, rather than compliance, are gaining traction. For example, the Higher Education Evaluation and

Accreditation Council of Taiwan (HEEACT) shifted the focus of its institutional and programmatic accreditation to the assessment of student learning outcomes in response to public pressure to ensure quality in higher education (HEEACT, 2012). Taiwanese accreditation efforts, beginning in 2011, require institutions to respond to five major questions about the identification of, curricular alignment with, and assessment of students' core competencies.

A global assessment initiative aimed at evaluating student outcomes was launched in January 2010 by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) under its Directorate of Education. Entitled the Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) project, AHELO attempts to:

test what students in higher education ***know and can do [italics added]*** upon graduation. More than a ranking, AHELO is a direct evaluation of student performance. It will provide data on the relevance and quality of teaching and learning in higher education. The test aims to be global and valid across diverse cultures, languages and different types of institutions (OECD, 2012).

The results of the feasibility study involving 150 Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) from 17 different countries, will be presented at a conference in the Netherlands in March, 2013. In summary, articulating and assessing student learning outcomes are global challenges that are as central to the future of general higher education as they are for the specialized professions, such as teachers.

Shifting from Summative Evaluations to Formative Assessments

It is common for national quality assurance efforts to use summative evaluations to provide the accountability for compliance that is sought by a regulatory agency or the

public at large. However, a shift to outcomes from inputs requires a different kind of assessment process.

Ewell (2009) points out that there are two assessment paradigms that distinguish the accountability function for quality assurance from the improvement function for accreditation. These paradigms differ in two key areas: (1) strategic dimensions and (2) application choices. Strategic dimensions refer to the intent of the assessment as either summative or formative. For post-secondary institutions shifting away from an accountability paradigm in assessment, the strategic implications require thinking in terms of using formative data to drive decisions about programmatic needs and changes in order to improve student outcomes. The second strategic dimension of an improvement paradigm is the stance of the assessment as either externally or internally focused. For post-secondary institutions this strategic implication involves shifting to a formative assessment paradigm with the understanding that the audience for the formative assessment data would be internal to the institution rather than to an external audience of regulators or public opinion. Ewell's third strategic dimension involves the ethos of the assessment as either compliance-driven or engagement-driven. For post-secondary institutions, this entails leaving behind the compliance mentality of inputs and moving toward a culture of engagement in which faculty and administrative collaborations within and across post-secondary institutions take responsibility for improvement of student outcomes.

A paradigmatic shift from summative to formative processes is not so easily achieved. This point was underscored in a recent paper on best practices in quality assurance from Nepal. The University Grants Commission (UGC) of Nepal in shifting to

a formative approach in its quality assurance efforts identified numerous challenges, including a lack of institutional infrastructure and information systems to be able to complete a successful self-assessment as an engagement rather than compliance ethos would require. Furthermore, the criteria and indicators were such that the Nepalese institutions needed to implement widespread reforms and programmatic restructuring to meet the requirements of the more formative, rather than summative, process (UGC, 2012).

In addition to the strategic dimensions involved in an assessment paradigm shift, Ewell (2009) described five application choices that a post-secondary institution would need to make in order to implement a formative, rather than summative, assessment process for programmatic improvements. The first choice involves *instrumentation*. A post-secondary institution engaged in a formative, improvement assessment paradigm would choose multiple assessment measures to triangulate data about student outcomes rather than using single administrations of standardized evaluation tools. In a related choice, *the nature of the evidence* would shift from strictly quantitative measure, such as a teacher licensure examination, to include mixed methodologies, such as quantitative and qualitative data from examinations as well as student work products and employer surveys. The *reference points* in formative assessment would be longitudinal rather than fixed at a particular point in time, such that student outcomes overtime could be compared and decisions could be made about the need for programmatic improvements. Finally, the *uses of assessment* and the *communication of assessment results* in a formative paradigm would involve developing multiple internal channels for information sharing and multiple feedback loops to ensure that improvements are data-based and

shared. A summative assessment paradigm, on the other hand, would communicate results externally and use the results for public accountability. Table 1 compares the strategic dimensions and application choices of the two assessment paradigms, adapted from Ewell (2009, p. 8).

Table 1: Comparison of the Two Assessment Paradigms of Accountability and Improvement

	Accountability Paradigm	Improvement Paradigm
Strategic Dimensions		
• Intent	Summative (Judgment)	Formative (Improvement)
• Stance	External	Internal
• Predominant Ethos	Compliance	Engagement
Application Choices		
• Instrumentation	Standardized	Multiple/Triangulation
• Nature of Evidence	Quantitative	Quantitative and Qualitative
• Reference Points	Comparative or Fixed Standard	Over Time, Comparative, Established Goal
• Communication of Results	Public Communication	Multiple Internal Channels and Media
• Uses of Results	Reporting	Multiple Feedback Loops

Accreditation and an institutional commitment to improvement drive assessment more than any external pressures from government or employers (Ewell, 2010). This assertion highlights the potential of NCATE accreditation to optimize teacher talent and, as a consequence, optimize student success. But the precursors to any such optimization in post-secondary institutions must be grounded in identifying the intended student learning outcomes and then engaging in formative assessment processes. The following section of this paper describes the ways that the accreditation paradigms of outcomes, institutional context, and program improvement optimize teacher talent for student success.

NCATE Accreditation to Optimize Teacher Talent

Although the Bologna Process began to demonstrate that global expectations for student learning outcomes are possible for many areas of qualification in higher education, specialty professional standards for teachers are not currently being formulated. Thus, seeking American accreditation appears to be one way for institutions of higher education to demonstrate the quality of their teacher preparation programs. If a country's quality assurance efforts are firmly established, then United States-based accreditation of specialized professional programs, such as teacher education, can contribute positively to the optimization of talent within a professional specialization. However, for NCATE accreditation to be meaningful, the institutions seeking accreditation must understand the need to define the purpose for which they prepare teachers, clarify the outcomes they want their pre-service teachers to achieve, and then begin the hard work of assessing student outcomes and using data to inform programmatic decision making.

Undergirded as NCATE accreditation is by outcomes articulated in professional standards, it is more likely than accountability-focused quality assurance efforts to impact the optimization of teacher talent and student success. But it is a slow process for institutions of higher education, anywhere, to make a shift to an improvement focus based on assessing student learning outcomes. This section of the paper reviews three components of NCATE accreditation that offer the potential to optimize teacher talent: its standards, the conceptual framework requirement, and the continuous improvement pathway,.

NCATE Professional Standards

In February of 2008 NCATE published its most recent revision of its *Professional Standards for Teacher Preparation Institutions*. The standards include six areas of expectation for accreditation:

Standard 1: Candidate Knowledge, Skills and Professional Dispositions,

Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation,

Standard 3: Field Experiences and Clinical Practice,

Standard 4: Diversity

Standard 5: Faculty Qualifications, Performance, and Development and

Standard 6: Unit Resources and Governance.

Although no single standard can be said to make the greatest contribution to the optimization of teacher talent, standards 1 and 2 are core elements, given their focus on teacher candidate outcomes and the assessments leading to program improvements.

Policy studies on student learning and teacher preparation assert that the single greatest contribution to student achievement is the classroom teacher (Darling-Hammond,

2000). In other words, to assure the optimization of talent among preschool to grade 12 (P-12) students, a well-prepared, highly qualified teacher is needed in every classroom. In the United States the definitions of teacher preparedness and teacher qualifications are widely debated and varied across states and teacher preparation programs. Therefore, NCATE's Standard 1 on Candidate Knowledge, Skills, and Professional Dispositions stands as the benchmark for what any accredited teacher preparation program in the United States must demonstrate.

Standard 1 calls for evidence that the teacher preparation program has, at a minimum, acceptably prepared their teacher candidates in the following areas:

- content knowledge (Floden & Meniketti, 2005) of the disciplines that they are expected to teach to a depth that ensures their ability to pass state licensure examinations at a rate of 80% or higher,
- pedagogical content knowledge and skills (Clift & Brady, 2005) that they can effectively teach the content with instructional strategies appropriate to ensure that all students learn,
- professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills (Shulman, 1987) that they understand and can apply principles of learning and reflect on their instructional practice to improve their skills,
- student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2000) that they are able to assess student needs and adjust instruction appropriately to meet those needs, and
- professional dispositions (Hollins & Guzman, 2005) of fairness and the belief that all students can learn.

Although NCATE standards do not dictate how an institution will meet this standard through coursework and other experiences, these are the key areas of knowledge and skills that a teacher needs in order to be effective. Any institution seeking accreditation must define the outcomes it seeks in each of these broad areas and then demonstrate how its program graduates have achieved those outcomes. For teacher talent to be optimized an institution would need to demonstrate now only how it is meeting these standards, but how it is exceeding them to reach a new level of excellence in candidate performance and a higher level of quality in the teacher preparation programs it provides. A later section describes how institutions can meet this challenge through the continuous improvement process of accreditation review.

NCATE's standard 2 on the assessment system and unit operations is essential to accreditation. It is the basis for providing evidence for meeting each of the standards. An assessment system includes a comprehensive set of measurements to monitor teacher candidate performance as well as assessment measures to improve and manage the operations of the teacher preparation administrative body, called the professional education unit (unit) by NCATE. In addition, an accredited institution must show how it regularly and systematically analyzes data and uses it to improve its programs as well as its operations for administration and student support.

NCATE, again, does not dictate the mechanisms or processes for how an institution gathers evidence of candidate performance or operations. However, it does expect that any accredited institution will have a system in place for doing so. This NCATE standard works hand-in-hand with Standard 1. As discussed earlier in this paper, the paradigm shifts necessary for accreditation to optimize teacher talent are to

move toward outcomes (Standard 1) coupled with formative assessment for improvements (Standard 2). Meeting standard 2 by having a fully functioning assessment system in place facilitates an institution's ability to provide the evidence required to meet all the other standards, most critically standard 1.

These two standards are at the heart of how accreditation can optimize teacher talent and, as a consequence, have a positive impact on P-12 student success. The other four NCATE standards play supporting, but critical, roles in institutional accreditation by demonstrating: attainment of expectations for the quality of hands-on experiences provided during field and clinical practices (Standard 3), the provision of diverse experiences and activities to ensure that its teacher candidates can teach all students (Standard 4), the quality of the faculty who prepare the teacher candidates (Standard 5), and the adequacy of institutional resources to achieve its stated goals and outcomes (Standard 6). All of NCATE's standards are broadly articulated. This intentional breadth allows institutions to define for themselves what their priorities and outcomes will be in the context of their own unique missions and communities of practice, referred to as the Conceptual Framework in the NCATE standards.

A Teacher Preparation Institution's Conceptual Framework

The importance of an institution's conceptual framework as a preamble the NCATE standards cannot be overstated. The conceptual framework is what each institution articulates as its own unique set of outcomes and priorities for its teacher preparation programs. For example, an urban teacher preparation institution might include in its conceptual framework the expectation that its program graduates will be able to effectively teach students who speak languages other than English. This expectation,

in turn, would then be the basis for the expectations of candidate performance in the areas of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and skills, and professional dispositions outlined broadly in NCATE's standard 1. NCATE's professional standards book describes the content of an institution's conceptual framework as follows:

The conceptual framework includes the following aligned structural elements: vision and mission of the institution and unit; philosophy, purposes, goals/institutional standards of the unit; knowledge bases, including theories, research, the wisdom of practice, and educational policies that drive the work of the unit; candidate proficiencies related to expected knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions, including proficiencies associated with diversity and technology, that are aligned with the expectations in professional, state, and institutional standards; and a summarized description of the unit's assessment system (NCATE, 2008, p. 14).

The conceptual framework provides institutions with a degree of autonomy within and across professional standards. It provides a mechanism for self-definition in keeping with an institution's unique context and mission. Additionally, it provides an opportunity for an institution to prioritize its outcomes and develop its own system for assessment of its outcomes.

As an example of the matching accreditation to an institution's local context and mission, when completing its first audit cycle of Australian universities in 2007, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) found that its quality assurance approach, focused on accountability through improvement not improvement through accountability, was widely accepted and considered to be valuable (AUQA, 2009). Their

model emphasized the importance of self-assessment and the “fitness of purpose” by which an institution maintained its mission and reported its outcomes in relation to its specific institutional focus and purpose. The Australian attention to “fitness of purpose” is akin to NCATE’s conceptual framework.

The Continuous Improvement Process in NCATE Accreditation

With a conceptual framework in place and the NCATE standards as a set of overarching expectations, an institution seeking accreditation then engages in a process that includes writing a self-report which is subsequently reviewed and validated in an on-site visit by a Board of Examiners. The most commonly used accreditation process is known as the Continuous Improvement (CI) pathway. As stated earlier, continuous improvement processes provide institutions with a mechanism for exceeding the acceptable level of the standards required for accreditation to be awarded.

For each of the six standards, the NCATE Professional Standards book elaborates the components of each standard and the expectations for meeting each standard.

Each of the six standards contains three components: (1) the language of the standard itself; (2) *rubrics that delineate the elements of each standard and describe three proficiency levels (unacceptable, acceptable, and target)* [italics added] at which each element is being addressed; and (3) a descriptive explanation of the standard. Institutions striving to meet the standards at the target level must meet the expectations at the acceptable level (NCATE, 2008, p. 10). The rubrics, mentioned in item 2 above, outline the range of institutional and candidate performance for each standard from an unacceptable level to the acceptable level that is required in order to meet that standard for accreditation. A third level of performance is

called “target” and describes performance indicators that reach beyond the acceptable level to a higher level of institutional and candidate performance. For example, in Standard 1 in the category of content knowledge an institution must provide evidence that 80% of the teacher candidates pass the state licensure examinations in order to be accredited. Institutions whose teacher candidates score below 80% are deemed to be performing at the unacceptable level and the institution does not meet NCATE Standard 1. In addition to other indicators, target level performance in the category of content knowledge states that all (100%) of an institution’s teacher candidates pass the licensure examinations. Table 2 presents the NCATE rubric used for evaluating an institution’s performance in the area of content knowledge for its teacher candidates (NCATE, 2008, p. 16).

Table 2: Standard 1.a: Content Knowledge for Teacher Candidates

Unacceptable	Acceptable	Target
Teacher candidates have inadequate knowledge of content that they plan to teach and are unable to give examples of important principles and concepts	Teacher candidates know the content that they plan to teach and can explain important principles and concepts delineated in professional,	Teacher candidates have in-depth knowledge of the content that they plan to teach as described in professional, state, and institutional

delineated in professional, state, and institutional standards. <i>Fewer than 80 percent of the unit's program completers pass the content examinations in states that require examinations for licensure...</i> [italics added].	state, and institutional standards. <i>Eighty percent or more of the unit's program completers pass the content examinations in states that require examinations for licensure...</i> [italics added].	standards. They demonstrate their knowledge through inquiry, critical analysis, and synthesis of the subject. <i>All program completers pass the content examinations in states that require examinations for licensure...</i> [italics added].
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Beginning in fall 2013 all institutions seeking NCATE accreditation must declare at least one of the six standards as an area in which the institution is focusing its continuous improvement efforts on moving toward target level performance. This declaration is reported in the institutional self-study and the institution documents the activities, procedures, and reforms it is conducting in order to reach the highest performance level in the self-selected standard. During the accreditation review and visit, the Board of Examiners validates the institution's progress toward target and makes a recommendation to the Unit Accreditation Board in one of three ways: insufficient progress made, progress is being made in moving toward target, or target level performance in the standard and all its areas has been achieved.

The new process of moving toward target within the continuous improvement accreditation pathway is intended to optimize institutional improvements as well as to increase the rigor of the standards and raise the expectations for candidates' performance.

The process has the potential to optimize teacher talent in at three ways:

- 1) Prior to 2013 institutional program improvements were documented in committee meeting minutes or curriculum changes on a haphazard basis that was dependent, in part, upon the leadership within a particular preparation program. However, there was no mechanism in the NCATE process to ensure that improvements were being made systematically and systemically in the area of a chosen NCATE standard. Moving to target ensures that an institution is focused on program improvement in at least one standard.
- 2) Two recent research reports highlighted the importance of clinical and field experiences in teacher preparation (Committee on the Study of Teacher Preparation Programs in the United States, 2010; NCATE, 2010). Consequently, institutions are most commonly selecting NCATE's Standard 3: Field Experiences and Clinical Practice as their target standard, and using the rubrics for target level performance as guidelines for program reform and improvement. Often while in the process of working on the assessment tools that provide evidence of candidate performance, an institution will uncover the need to further align programmatic coursework in order to provide teacher candidates with the requisite content, pedagogical, and pedagogical content knowledge to meet the higher standards expected during clinical practice. Thus, the process of

continuous improvement and moving to target in one standard can be used as a catalyst for improvements in other areas of teacher preparation.

- 3) Institutional and teacher candidate performance will be monitored and evaluated in terms of progressive improvements throughout the lifecycle of accreditation. As institutions seek continuing accreditation in five or seven year cycles, NCATE's intention is to monitor the maintenance of target level performance when achieved and to support institutions in choosing a second, third or fourth standard in which to improve at the time of their subsequent accreditation reviews. Thus, no institution will be allowed to languish after being awarded accreditation and achieving target level performance in all standards will be expected eventually.

In summary, NCATE accreditation has the potential to optimize teacher talent because it sets standards that are derived from the research literature on the features of teacher preparation programs that contribute to the effectiveness of the beginning classroom teacher. The standards are further grounded by an expectation for the use of data derived from the institution's assessment system that provides evidence of institutional and candidate performance and improvements. Lastly, the continuous improvement accreditation pathway contains a mechanism for optimizing talent through the selection of a standard in which to achieve target level performance.

NCATE/CAEP Accreditation Reforms and Relevance

Understanding the importance of continuous improvement, formative assessment, and optimizing teacher talent through accreditation is not sufficient for accreditation to be widely accepted and appreciated for its contribution to the teaching profession.

Currently, there are numerous challenges to accreditation spurring NCATE/CAEP reforms that are likely to have a significant impact on institutions both at home and abroad. Furthering the goal of optimizing teacher talent for p-12 student success may be the single greatest benefit.

Considerable skepticism is currently being expressed about the value of accreditation in the United States. Indicators of a failure in teacher talent are largely based on the enduring achievement gaps amongst students of color in the United States , declining scores and rankings of American students on international achievement tests , and concerns expressed for a perceived lack of competitiveness in the global marketplace. Teachers are under fire for failing to educate the students in their care at a high level of achievement, schools are under fire for systemic low performance, teacher education institutions are under fire for not producing teachers who are effective in the classroom, and teacher accreditation is under fire for being unable to guarantee the quality of the teacher candidates graduating from accredited institutions. These widespread challenges to teachers, teacher education, and the value of accreditation has lead NCATE's President, Dr. James G. Cibulka, to institute a number of reforms.

Critics of accreditation assert that there is a *lack of rigor* in the accreditation process, such that all institutions are accredited and there are few, if any, institutions that do not succeed in being awarded accreditation. As part of the first reform initiative, NCATE's President, James G. Cibulka, challenged the Board of Examiners and the Unit Accreditation Board members to "raise the bar" and increase the rigor of their work in reviewing preparation providers. He underscored his position that not every institution merits accreditation.

Furthermore, since 2009 Cibulka has pledged that accreditation of the preparation of teachers and other educators will have higher, fewer, and more rigorous standards going forward. To that end he appointed a high profile Commission on Standards and Performance Measures to develop these new more rigorous standards for CAEP. The new standards are likely to require a paradigm shift for American teacher preparation providers from an emphasis on data gathering toward an intensified focus on data, particularly as it related to the quality of the evidence that is being gathered on P-12 student learning. If the current NCATE standards and processes necessitate a paradigm shift from compliance toward improvement, then the new standards to be released sometime in 2013 are likely to be even more demanding in the expectation for rigor in evidence gathering to substantiate institutional and candidate performance outcomes.

American critics of teacher education insist that accreditation is *too episodic* because accreditation is granted for a set number of years, either five or seven depending on the state regulations in which an institution is located. The critical comment is that too many years elapse between accreditation visits. The assumption is that much can happen in the intervening years without any guarantee of the maintenance of quality during that period. In addition to its new process requiring institutions to provide evidence of moving to target level performance on the one or more of the standards, NCATE/CAEP additionally requires the submission of an annual report by all accredited institutions. In this report accredited institutions describe progress and significant changes that have occurred in the preceding academic year. Although this is not a fail-safe method for improvement, it does mediate the episodic nature of accreditation with ongoing reports. A reform in NCATE/CAEP's procedures and requirements will be to further strengthen and refine its

annual, on-going monitoring of institutions to achieve the goal of continuous improvement. Annual reporting is also a tool by which institutions can reflect upon their stated learning outcomes to further refine their plans for optimizing their teacher candidate's performance in relation to P-12 student learning.

The third and final challenge to be addressed in this paper is that accreditation *lacks transparency* in its methods and decision-making. Generally, it is assessment evidence that contributes to the validation of a specialized program's intended student learning outcomes. However, without commonly agreed upon and publicly available performance measures institutions vary in the kinds of evidence that they utilize to assess successful preparation of a program's graduates to perform effectively on the job. For the most part, evidence is derived from clinical or internship evaluations as well as employer and/or graduate surveys. However, a recent trend in the United States is to evaluate a teacher's effectiveness at 1, 2 and 3 years after graduation by measuring the teacher's impact on student learning. Simplistically, such data is obtained by testing actual student achievement as compared to predicted gains. A teacher is judged to be effective if students' achievement gains are better than predicted. While this methodology is widely debated in academic circles (Harris, 2011), school districts and states are convinced that such longitudinal data systems linking student achievement to individual teachers and their preparation programs will offer the evidence needed to close down low-performing teacher preparation programs whose graduates are ineffective at raising student achievement. If successful, the methodology offers one way to identify the teacher preparation programs that are, in fact, optimizing teacher talent.

Table 3 provides a summary of the challenges to accreditation of teacher education and the intended reforms by NCATE/CAEP. As these reforms are implemented throughout 2012 and 2013, it remains to be seen if they lead to improved outcomes, optimized teacher talent, and improved P-12 student achievement. To that end, CAEP intends to pursue a longitudinal study of the impact of its reforms on teacher effectiveness as well as other indicators.

Table 3: Challenges to Accreditation and Intended Reforms

Challenges to Accreditation	Intended Reforms
Lack of Rigor	Fewer, Higher, Clearer Standards
Too episodic	Ongoing Monitoring
Obscure Criteria	Greater Transparency and Quality of Evidence

Summary

Accreditation and quality assurance are inter-related but separate concepts. In American terms quality assurance is a system of quality control that is summative and focused on public accountability. Accreditation, on the other hand, is a formative process that is focused on programmatic improvements. For accreditation to be a mechanism for the optimization of teacher talent and, as a result, for raising student achievement, then two paradigm shifts are necessary: (1) away from inputs to outcomes and (2) away from accountability and compliance to formative assessment and institutional and programmatic improvement. NCATE accreditation has the potential to optimize teacher

talent through its standards focusing on teacher candidate's knowledge, skills, and dispositions (outcomes) as well as its standard for a fully functioning assessment system that provides the data used for improvement (formative assessments). In addition, NCATE can "raise the bar" for teacher candidate performance through its continuous improvement accreditation pathway that requires institutions to identify standards on which they will move above the acceptable level of performance needed for accreditation and focus, in addition, on moving toward target level performance.

Challenges to teacher education and accreditation are spurring reforms that are likely to have a significant impact on teacher talent. More rigorous standards for teacher preparation are in progress through 2012 and into 2013. Further reform includes an increasing emphasis on the quality of evidence used to make decisions and to provide data on institutional and teacher candidate performance, including but not limited to longitudinal data systems that link student achievement data to teachers and their preparation programs. As NCATE moves toward its merger with TEAC to become a single American accreditor of teacher education, a unified voice for the profession, and an international accreditor for teacher education, there is growing potential for accreditation to influence and optimize teacher talent and, in turn, to raise the level of student achievement worldwide.

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