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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes the major points in a workshop that focused specifically on the challenges of transforming the teacher education program at Idaho State University to a standards-driven, assessment-informed, collaborative model. The program goal was that prospective teachers develop the knowledge, dispositions, and skills deemed essential for the beginning professional. After reviewing the context for reform, each of the four major initiatives undertaken towards systemic transformation of the program was discussed. These include: (1) development of a conceptual model; (2) core standards for beginning teachers; (3) a learner-centered professional development process; and (4) standards-based assessment. The transformation of the program resulted in opportunities to identify professional beliefs of "best practice" and to use those beliefs for the ongoing development and improvement of teacher education. (Contains 11 references.) (ND)

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Creating the Vision: Using Best Practice Standards to Transform Teacher Education

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This paper summarizes major points presented in a workshop addressing the NRMERA conference strand, "reflective wisdom of practice as futuristic linkage." The workshop focused specifically on the challenges of transforming the teacher education program at Idaho State University to a standards-driven, assessment-informed, collaborative model through which prospective teachers develop the knowledge, dispositions, and skills deemed essential for the beginning professional. Over the course of five years, College of Education faculty, in partnership with our stakeholders, completed four major initiatives towards systemic transformation of our teacher education program: (1) creation of a conceptual model that makes connections between program standards, assessment, and learning processes; (2) development of core standards for beginning teachers that address what the beginning teacher should know and be able to do; (3) initiation of a learner-centered professional development process that articulates a do-reflect-modify-evaluate continuum through which teacher education students construct meaning; and (4) and development of an assessment system by which both students and faculty evaluate progress towards achieving the standards.

The Context for Reform

Our transformation of teacher education has been, in part, a response to initiatives for teacher education standards promulgated by the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC, 1992), the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1993), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 1992), and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 1992). These initiatives reflect the search for strong measures ". . . to establish high and rigorous standards for what teachers should know and be able to do . . . to advance related education reforms for the purpose of improving student learning in American schools" (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1991).

One of the most critical elements in the implementation of these initiatives is the framing of standards-based educational reform within the context of systemic reform defined by Al Shanker (1993) as "figuring out what we want students to know and be able to do and making sure that all parts of the education system--standards, curriculum, textbooks, assessments, teacher training--move simultaneously toward the achievement of agreed-upon goals." Teacher education

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institutions engaged in the transformation to standards-based programs, therefore, are faced with the challenge of clearly articulating and interconnecting the knowledge base of the content of the standards, the processes through which students acquire beginning competency in the standards, and the assessment approaches though which achievement and progress are judged. Moreover, if beginning teachers are to create classroom communities in which students learn through active, collaborative inquiry, they must have similar learning opportunities themselves (Wells, 1989). These learning opportunities must begin with rethinking of the process of teacher education, making it a process in which prospective teachers construct their own learning.

Transformation of teacher education demands a vision of teacher preparation as a "career continuum" (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996) by which teachers progress through a continuum of professional development opportunities from pre-service preparation to state licensure to continuing professional development. As noted by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (1995), the key element in the continuum of teacher preparation is a set of serious standards that hold teachers responsible for demonstrating performance relative to subject matter knowledge, teaching knowledge, and teaching skills.

Conceptual Framework

We began our reconceptualization of teacher education with the development of a new conceptual framework, *By Teaching We Learn*, that represents our beliefs about the complex processes of learning and teaching. The generation of our framework was based on statements of philosophy, involved widespread discussion with opportunities for input from diverse groups of our stakeholders, and culminated in institutional decisions to support the framework. Our discussions with our stakeholders revealed that our framework must reflect both content, a description of the kind of educational practice teachers prepared at Idaho State University are expected to develop, and process, a representation of the method by which beginning teachers develop the expected educational practice. As such, our framework highlights the dynamic interaction between **standards** (the *what* of the teacher education program), **learning processes** (the *how* of the teacher education program), **assessment** (the *when* and *how well* of the teacher education program), and **learning community** (the *context* of the teacher education program) with each element informing and defining the others.

Core Standards for Beginning Teachers

Our standards present the teacher as reflective, inquiry-oriented, cognizant of cultural diversity, expert in his or her subject matter, and able to select from a wealth of instructional strategies the one best suited to the students and the educational context. As we worked on the standards, they became, as Darling-Hammond (1994) envisions, learning tools for all of us, a powerful way for teachers to take charge of their own development and reflection on their own practice, and for

teacher educators to do the same. With our stakeholders, we developed a vision of teaching that inspires ongoing learning and refection, and we acquired a collective knowledge base, along with ownership and participation in creating a set of shared understandings about practice that we will continually use as a frame for our practice. Moreover, we found that the standards frame our responses to the question of what experiences we can provide for students that will create opportunities for them to become accomplished practitioners.

Learner-Centered Professional Development Process

As we formulated our Core Standards for Beginning Teachers, a vision for the process of professional development emerged--a process that reflects the complexity and intensity of the act of teaching and takes into account the constant decisions that teachers must make. Our learner-centered professional development process is predicated on the assumption that practice must be continually refined through doing, reflecting, modifying, and evaluating. Borrowing from Tom Peters (1993), we endeavored to create an environment and process that "make every day for everyone an adventure in the pursuit of improvement." Through the teacher education program, the student develops an increasingly sophisticated repertoire of professional knowledge, dispositions, and skills which move him or her toward effective professional practice.

Standards-Based Assessment

We based our assessment system on the concept of *assessment-as-learning* (Alverno College Faculty, 1994) envisioning assessment as a process integral to learning that involves observing performances of the student in context, judging those performances on the basis of our Core Standards for Beginning Teachers, and then providing the resulting feedback to the student. Our gradual development of the meaning of assessment was part of designing a process that would assure students of direction, resources, and coherence of instruction. Important elements at the heart of our assessment system include explicit standards, assessment for the sake of learning, and engagement in an interactive process through which assessment is tied to the ongoing revision of both the teacher education program and the Core Standards for Beginning Teachers.

The complex nature of our Core Standards for Beginning Teachers and professional development process demand an assessment approach that is multiple in mode and context. As such, our assessment system incorporates traditional forms of testing as well as performance tasks and self-assessments that are completed in both simulated and authentic contexts through the coursework and field experience components of the teacher education program. The cornerstone of our assessment system involves students in collecting artifacts of their work and demonstrating their abilities relative to the core standards by assembling evidence in a portfolio that they develop over the course of the teacher education program.

Conclusions

Proclaiming that every child has a "right to a caring and competent teacher" the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future in its report, *What Matters Most: Teaching and America's Future,* charges that quality teaching is the most critical and yet most frequently overlooked ingredient in education reform. The Commission cites the reinvention of teacher preparation and professional development as a crucial element in helping achieve its vision for accomplished teachers for all children. Through the transformation of our teacher education program, we have gained opportunities to identify our professional beliefs of "best practice" and to use those beliefs for the ongoing development and improvement of teacher education.

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