Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education

Programme theory, programme documents and state standards in evaluating teacher education

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Available online: 18 Mar 2011

To cite this article: Elena C. Papanastasiou, Maria Teresa Tatto & Lefkios Neophytou (2011): Programme theory, programme documents and state standards in evaluating teacher education, Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education, DOI:10.1080/02602938.2010.534760

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2010.534760

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Programme theory, programme documents and state standards in evaluating teacher education

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Across the USA as well as worldwide, numerous universities offer teacher preparation programmes and award such degrees. However, there are no consistent valid or reliable indicators for determining the coherence and quality of these programmes. An effective way of starting to evaluate these programmes is by looking at their standards and their documents. The combination of both could be considered the basis on which all major decisions about the programme are based. Using the example of a Midwestern university in the USA, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate a method of examining the coherence between the various sets of standards that university programmes have to adhere to (e.g. whether the teacher education standards of the university correspond to the standards for the state that the university is in, as well as to the programme documents). This article ends with some suggestions that could lead to a higher level of coherence within such programmes.

Keywords: standards; teacher education programmes; programme evaluation

Across the USA, hundreds of universities have programmes focused on preparing students to become teachers. Every year, these programmes accept and graduate thousands of individuals. These individuals bring with them many personal traits and characteristics. Such traits include their high school achievements, interests, professional goals and motivation. Once the individuals are selected in the teacher education (TE) programmes, they go through a preparation process that involves taking classes, as well as obtaining some kind of practical training.

However, despite the common nature of TE programmes, no one can guarantee that all graduates will actually acquire what the programme intended them to gain. Many factors and variables affect their overall preparation. Such variables include the students’ instructors, their university’s curriculum, the specific class in which they teach, their supervising teacher as well as their student teaching supervisor. Eventually, many of these students graduate from the programme, and are awarded a Bachelor’s degree and a certificate that enables them to teach. Bearing in mind the vast number of universities across the USA as well as worldwide that offer teacher preparation programmes, no one can guarantee the universal acceptance of the knowledge and competences offered. Moreover, after receiving their initial teacher training qualifications, graduates may pursue a teaching job almost anywhere in the world. Thus, the control of teacher employment lies in the hands of each local educational authority,
which determines specific standards that every candidate needs to fulfill. So one can argue that teacher certification degrees no longer reflect the ‘whole package’ that an individual needs to have in order to be employed as a teacher. Local educational authorities have the upper hand in deciding which degree best fits their purposes. Universities may award titles, but the final judgement lies in the hands of the state. Inevitably institutions are striving to find examples of appropriate, effective and replicable programmes on which to base decisions following the logic of efficiency, economy and effectiveness (Winter 2000). These criteria may or may not derive from educational research but certainly are mandated by the state. It is therefore important to explore the nature of relationships between teacher accreditation bodies and teacher education, and particularly whether the former can add value beyond the mere regulatory.

On one hand, the prime issue in teacher licensure and programme accreditation is to ensure that those to be employed as teachers in schools have the appropriate professional qualifications. Teachers’ qualifications are, however, the result of teacher education. Thus, teacher licensure cannot be isolated from TE programmes. This means that licensure and/or accreditation bodies have a decisive role in determining standards for teacher education. Moreover, the role of teacher licensure bodies is paramount in approving TE programmes.

On the other hand, the policies adopted by states regarding teacher education, licensing, hiring and professional development make an important difference in the qualifications and capacities that teachers bring to their work and are related to student achievement (Darling-Hammond 1999). The state enacts its policies through standards. Standards provide a guide and a checkpoint for curricula in teacher preparation programmes. They describe the extent to which curricula cover the content worth covering, as this is defined by the graduate’s potential employer. Standards reflect specific assets that a teacher needs to have as a result of his exposure to a teacher preparation programme. Thus the acquisition of assets stresses the importance of desired learning outcomes in terms of ‘what is meant to be learned’ by teachers.

However, even though teacher preparation programmes award TE degrees with the successful completion of their programmes, no real measure exists to determine the precise link between the inputs, the processes of each TE programme and their outcomes. In other words, there are no universally accepted quality indicators that can effectively be used to determine the effectiveness of these programmes. These links become even more challenging when one considers that the outcomes and indicators of the ‘quality’ of such programmes are in many cases inappropriate and narrowly conceived (Buchberger and Byrne 1995). This is a general problem in teacher education since ‘no studies in TE literature have included a programme of rigorous systematic long-term self-study of teacher education where the purpose is to test the teacher education programme theory and as such be relevant to policy’ (Tatto and Papanastasiou 2001, 2). Notwithstanding the absence of valid and reliable indicators, a number of states in the USA have begun to assess teacher preparation programmes according to a set of standards based mainly on assumptions about what makes a good quality programme. Similarly, pressed by the so-called ‘standards movement’, teacher preparation programmes have developed ‘programme standards’ which vary in specificity and have been rarely tested for their predictive validity.

In this study we endeavoured to examine both programme and state standards by looking at their level of specificity and their correspondence with one another. This is a first step in our effort to develop a series of standards that can be explicit enough to be used as the basis for an objective, sound and scientific evaluation study of any
An awareness of the consistency of the standards of the TE programme, and of the success of its graduates is important for the programme, both internally and externally. Similarly, in this era of accountability, the programme needs to examine its standards vis-à-vis those of the state. This is essential for linking the programme’s theory to its practices, which eventually could explain how, why, and if the knowledge of what teachers learn has an effect on their teaching practices.

An effective way of starting to evaluate any TE programme is by looking at its documents. These documents could be considered as the basis of the programme, on which all major decisions and activities are based. These documents can also be compared to the standards for beginning teachers that exist in each state or country. This comparison is essential in helping programme faculty and administrators refine the programme with sound justification.

The documents used for the current study are written documents that were created by the TE programme faculty and administrators, and are shared with the students, programme faculty as well as with the collaborating teachers. Examples of these documents include: sample lesson plans and templates for the interns to use in their teaching; guidelines for creating portfolios; course descriptions; methods of establishing and managing professional relationships; programme policies; and guidelines (e.g. for attendance, grading and responsibilities). For the purpose of this study, the documents that were examined did not include materials that were created by faculty for their courses, such as course syllabi or notes.

Based on the comparisons of the sets of standards, and of the programme documents described above, the specific research questions that will be addressed in this paper are:

- How coherent are the documents and standards of the various subdivisions/teams within a TE programme?
- How well do the TE standards of the university correspond with the standards for the state?
- How can the process of creating and using the standards be improved to enable the use of more valid and reliable indicators of the quality and coherence of a TE programme?

**Literature review**

For a number of years there has been a general feeling that some TE institutions not only admit low-quality candidates, but also grant diplomas to teachers who are minimally competent (Mehrens 1991). In addition, the public believes that the state licensing boards for teachers have failed as gatekeepers by allowing incompetent teachers to enter the classrooms. Consequently, the TE degree is not held in high regard (Murray 2002), while there is a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the teaching force in the USA.

This discussion has even intensified further in the last decade, as calls for increased accountability from several fronts, such as the NBPTS (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards), INTASC (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium), and other organisations such as NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education) and TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council) attempt to develop standards and guidelines for assessment and evaluation (Tatto 2001). In turn, TE programmes adopt these standards in an attempt to comply with these organisations.
What do these standards include and what do they refer to? In broad lines, standards encapsulate two major forms of knowledge that a teacher needs to have: subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. **Subject-matter knowledge** refers to the comprehension of the subject per se, the ability to grasp the variety of ways in which the basic concepts and principles of the discipline are organised and the rules that are used for the establishment of validity/invalidity within the specific domain. The second dimension, **pedagogical content knowledge**, has to do with knowledge of how ideas are best presented in order to make them comprehensible to others. Finally, Shulman (1986) also identifies another dimension, **curricular knowledge**. This kind of knowledge is reflected in the two former ones and refers to knowledge of curricular contents and comprehension of interconnected alternative materials for a given subject within a grade level and within various subjects.

Many studies examined the influence that pedagogical knowledge and subject-matter knowledge have on teaching performance (e.g. Ferguson and Womack 1993; Monk 1994) and concluded that the former appears to have stronger effects than the latter. Consequently, research suggests that teachers who have greater knowledge of teaching and learning, thus pedagogical knowledge, are more highly rated and are more effective with students especially at tasks requiring higher order thinking and problem solving (Darling-Hammond 1999). On the other hand, the relationship between subject-matter knowledge and teaching performance is curvilinear: a minimal level of knowledge is necessary for teachers to be effective, but beyond a certain point a negative relation occurs (Monk 1994). Research evidently suggests that it is more important to rely more on pedagogical knowledge rather than subject-matter knowledge. This does not, however, exclude subject-matter knowledge. Both types of knowledge are needed since effective teaching is the result of their interaction and since effective teaching is the successful delivery (thus pedagogical knowledge) of specific content (thus subject knowledge).

One must, however, differentiate standards from their underlying principles and assumptions. Despite the commonalities found in the content and rationale underlying the definition standards, standards as such are not universally accepted and defined. Apparently consensus may be reached in terms of what is good to include in teacher preparation and certification programmes. However, in the process of transforming research findings into standards, multiple, diverse and competing interpretations emerge. Despite this fact, when TE programmes try to align themselves with a set of curriculum standards, there is a general feeling of objectivity that exists in their decision-making since the decisions are based on the standards to which they comply. In some ways, these standards can be considered as a set of indicators of quality of TE programmes, since the qualities of good teachers are not indicators that can universally be accepted and defined (Trube and Madden 2001). However, is this a valid inference, to use standards as indicators of teacher quality? First of all, standards are only decisions that have been made on informed judgement ‘thus, there are no right or wrong standards’ (Pellegrins, Jones, and Mitchell 1999, 173). In addition, there is not even a consensus within the USA about which are the ‘right’ or best-of-breed standards in teacher education (Murray 2002). However, the nature of the process on which standards are generated can be right or wrong (Pellegrins, Jones, and Mitchell 1999). For this reason, it is important to examine how the standards have been developed, and if they are research based before they can actually be adopted. In many cases, however, this information is never provided to the public.
Raths (1999) supports the idea that standards are not always research based, and that they should be adopted very cautiously. The standards usually reflect the consensus of a panel of individuals representing special interests groups in education such as teachers’ associations and school administrators (Roth and Pipho 1990). However, many of the individuals that are selected in such panels are people that are not knowledgeable of the research on teaching and teacher education (Roth and Pipho 1990). Consequently, the linkage of the standards to research in many cases is nonexistent. Murray (2002) admits that only in some cases are standards weighed by research findings. Therefore, practitioners and TE programmes should be critical when using standards as a basis for their decision making.

**Programme theory in context**

Due to the great importance and reliance that is placed on standards, a programme theory was developed in this paper to try to explain the role and relationships that exist in a TE programme, between the college of education standards and the state standards. This theory, in its generic format, can be applied to many colleges and universities across the USA.

First of all, standards are typically prepared by individuals and associations that represent special interest groups in education such as teacher associations, school administrators, ad hoc groups, associations of educators and states (Wise and Leibbrand 2002). Such standards can include the NCATE standards, the TEAC standards, as well as the standards for the various states, such as the standards for beginning teachers for the state. At this point, it is not exactly clear to what extent the special interests groups influence each other, but it is expected that the groups represented in each standard setting committee do influence each other, either directly or indirectly.

Once the state standards are developed and published, most colleges of education try to comply with some of those standards (Trube and Madden 2001; Wise and Leibbrand 2002). The university in this study (a Midwestern university) has chosen to comply with the TEAC standards. However, this university is also obliged to comply with the standards of their state, which are the standards for beginning teachers for the state, which were approved by the state board of education. It is expected that both sets of standards (TEAC and state standards) have had an overall influence on the university’s TE programme. This influence is reflected in the form of changes to the standards of the TE programme, as well as in the documents that are produced in the programme. In turn, it is expected that these standards and documents should influence the rest of the activities that take place in the programme. Eventually, this whole pattern of transformations influences future teachers. Figure 1 describes the programme processes in relation to the programme theory and the programme outcomes.

**Methods**

The analyses performed in this paper are based on a non-frequency content analysis (Fraenkel and Wallen 2000) that compares the standards developed by the teacher preparation programme with the standards for the state that the university is in. The goal of this analysis is to determine whether certain units (which are standards in this case) are present or absent in other sets of standards and documents. The first part of this analysis included looking at the standards of each of the four subdivisions/teams.
that the TE programme of the university is divided into, and comparing them to each other. This is an important process because these standards could be considered as the basic framework for the work and activities that take place within each subdivision. Since each of the four subdivisions in the TE programme has its own standards, each

Figure 1. Teacher education programme processes.

Table 1. Proficiency levels used by the state standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency levels</th>
<th>Descriptions of proficiency levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-awareness</td>
<td>No awareness or exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>The ability to describe, not yet applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Minimal achievement, appropriate to situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient</td>
<td>Consistent, appropriate application, a solid performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Superior performance, consistently applied at all appropriate times</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
subdivision’s standards were compared to each other separately. After that was done, those standards were compared to the standards for the state.

The process of matching up the two sets of standards was a difficult process since only the standards for the state indicate the degree of proficiency that beginning teachers should have. Table 1 describes the levels of proficiency included in the state standards.

So, each of the state standards has an explicitly stated level of proficiency that beginning teachers are required to meet. According to Raths (1999), this degree of proficiency is essential for determining if the criteria for the standards have been met. However, the standards of the TE programme do not clearly indicate the level of proficiency that is required. For example, one university standard states, ‘The intern knows what is likely to be difficult for students and finds ways to address those difficulties.’ However, it is not clear if the verb ‘knows’ indicates that the intern should have a basic, proficient or advanced performance in identifying difficult situations for the students. Consequently, for the purposes of this study, only the content of the standards were compared to each other. If at least half of the contents of a TE standard matched another standard of the state, that TE standard was marked as a matched standard.

For example, one of the university standards is the following: ‘[Interns should] use multiple approaches to appropriately assess student abilities and needs to plan instruction.’ This standard was matched with the TE standard that states, ‘The intern uses formal and informal assessment strategies to evaluate and ensure the continuous intellectual, social, and physical development of the students.’ Even though the university standard mentioned above does not contain specific information about the evaluation of the social and the physical development of the students, it is more general and could encompass the specific areas (intellectual, social and physical development) that are mentioned in this example of a TE standard. So these were considered as matched standards.

Although the standards of the subdivisions that will be discussed in this paper are essential for this analysis, they only summarise the main goals that each subdivision attempts to achieve. Consequently, more information was needed to describe the activities that take place in each subdivision/team in order to meet the state standards. For this reason, the third part of this study included an analysis of the documents that are produced by the four subdivisions. These documents are important because they better elaborate on the activities that take place in the programme and reflect how the state standards are actually applied in practice. The content of these documents was also compared across subdivisions to determine the similarities and differences that might exist between the four subdivisions of the TE programme.

Results

The results of this paper will be discussed first in terms of the coherence between the standards of the four subdivisions of the TE programme, second in terms of comparing the university standards with the standards of the state, and third through a detailed content analysis of the relationship between the teacher preparation programme documents and the standards for the state.

Comparisons of the subdivision/team standards

A comparison of the standards that were created and are used by the four subdivisions have shown that overall, the standards for three of the four subdivisions are identical. These standards are divided into four categories labelled as:
(1) knowing subject matters and how to teach them;
(2) working with students;
(3) creating and managing a classroom learning community; and
(4) working and learning in a school and profession.

Under each category, three or four specific standards that better clarify the general standards are included. An example of a standard that is included in the category labelled as ‘knowing subject matters and how to teach them’ is the following: ‘The intern understands the subject matter(s) as needed to teach it (them) to students.’ In addition, detailed descriptions/examples are provided for each standard. An example of a description that is included under the standard mentioned above is the following: ‘The intern represents subject matter knowledge and ways of knowing accurately and appropriately in teaching.’ These descriptions of the standards are almost identical for all of the subdivisions/teams.

The way in which the standards for these subdivisions are structured reflect the collaborating nature of the teaching profession that is emphasised at this specific university. For example, the third group of standards, which is that of ‘creating and managing a classroom learning community’, shows the emphasis that is placed on student learning communities. The students are encouraged to work collaboratively with each other, in the same way as their instructors/professors work collaboratively with their colleagues. For this reason, the fourth category of standards for the three subdivisions is labelled as ‘working and learning in a school and profession’, where the emphasis of those standards is placed on the collaboration between teachers and other school and university personnel.

However, the standards of the first subdivision/team were very different in format from the standards of the other subdivisions. More specifically, the standards for this subdivision are divided into four categories labelled: planning, instruction, classroom learning community and professional responsibilities. These categories are organisationally different from the ‘standard’ categories provided in the other subdivisions. In addition, this subdivision does not include any detailed descriptions or examples of each standard. These standards are organised in a way that resembles the way that teaching is organised; first, the lessons need to be planned, which is then followed by the instruction. The third category is the learning community standards which deal with the environment that the students work in. Despite their organisational differences, however, the overall objectives of the four subdivisions remain the same.

Comparisons of the university and the state standards

The standards for the state are divided into seven large categories labelled as:

(a) An understanding and appreciation of the liberal arts (humanities, social sciences, mathematical and natural sciences, and the arts)
(b) A commitment to student learning and achievement
(c) Knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy
(d) The ability to manage and monitor student learning
(e) The ability to systematically organise teaching practices and learn from experiences
(f) Commitment and willingness to participate in learning communities
(g) An ability to use information technology to enhance learning as well as enhance personal and professional productivity

Two observations are noticeable from the standards for the state. First of all, Statements (a), (c) and (g) above, are all subject specific. This might reflect the great importance that was placed on subject matter by the panel who created the standards. In addition, the first two of these categories are also covered by the standards of the university. For example, as shown in Table 2, the state standards in Statements (a) and (c) can roughly be encompassed in Statement 1 of the university standards of Subdivisions 2, 3, and 4 (Table 3). This group of standards comes under the heading of ‘knowing subject matters and how to teach them’. Team 1 also has a similar standard that states, ‘interns [should] evaluate their own understanding of subject matter and take appropriate steps to deepen and extend it.’

The second observation that can be made from the state standards is that the last group of standards focuses only on technology issues. These technology standards are the ones that deal with a teacher’s knowledge and use of technology and the internet. However, although technology is a major focus of the college of education today, it is not yet reflected in the standards of each subdivision.

It should be made clear, however, that an ‘omission’ of a state standard from the university standards does not necessarily mean that such a standard is not covered by the four TE subdivisions. For example, although none of the subdivisions included standards that dealt with technology, the overall TE programme requires its students to meet certain technology requirements, which shows that the TE programme does cover these standards to a certain extent. Similarly, this may be the case for other standards where general requirements are an across-team response. The TE department, however, should take care to specify what and how these standards are met.

Table 2 provides a rough comparison of how the standards of the university and the state compare to each other. What is clear from Table 2 is that, with the exception of the technology category (g) from the state standards, the rest of the two groups of

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University standards</th>
<th>State standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Knowing subject matters and how to teach them</td>
<td>a. An understanding and appreciation of the liberal arts (the humanities, the social sciences, the mathematical and natural sciences, and the arts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Working with students</td>
<td>b. A commitment to student learning and achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Knowing subject matters and how to teach them</td>
<td>c. Knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Working with students, creating and managing a classroom learning community</td>
<td>d. The ability to manage and monitor student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Creating and managing a classroom learning community</td>
<td>e. The ability to systematically organise teaching practices and learn from experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Working and learning in a school and profession</td>
<td>f. Commitment and willingness to participate in learning communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. The standard listed to the right is covered by the college but outside the subdivisions.</td>
<td>g. An ability to use information technology to enhance learning as well as enhance personal and professional productivity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Percentage of state standards covered by the university standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards</th>
<th>Subdivision (%)</th>
<th>TE student handbook (%)</th>
<th>Total subcategories of standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. An understanding and appreciation of the liberal arts (the humanities, the social sciences, the mathematical and natural sciences, and the arts)</td>
<td>6.35 26.98 26.98 23.81</td>
<td>92.06</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. A commitment to student learning and achievement</td>
<td>30.95 73.81 73.81 69.05</td>
<td>88.10</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Knowledge of subject matter and pedagogy</td>
<td>42.11 52.63 52.63 52.63</td>
<td>89.47</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. The ability to manage and monitor student learning, including the understanding and ability to:</td>
<td>52.94 64.71 64.71 64.71</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. The ability to systematically organise teaching practices and learn from experiences</td>
<td>59.38 53.13 53.13 53.13</td>
<td>71.88</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Commitment and willingness to participate in learning communities</td>
<td>22.73 40.91 40.91 40.91</td>
<td>100.00</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. An ability to use information technology to enhance learning as well as enhance personal and professional productivity</td>
<td>0.00 2.50 2.50 2.50</td>
<td>72.50</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All standards and sub-standards combined</td>
<td>24.27 40.17 40.17 38.49</td>
<td>85.77</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
standards roughly overlap each other. However, these standards alone do not say much about each subdivision’s theory. The reason is because most of the information included in these standards are summaries of what the programme attempts to achieve. So in order to obtain more detailed information about the programme’s theory, more emphasis should be placed on the documents that are produced by each subdivision, and to their relationship with the state standards. The hypothesis made is that a large amount of state standards that do not clearly match the university standards, are actually covered in the programme, and that this coverage can be reflected in the documents that are produced by the TE programme and the college of education.

The standards of each subdivision were then contrasted to the state standards for beginning teachers (Table 3). When this comparison took place, Team 1 had 58 standards that matched the 239 state standards. Teams 2 and 3 both had 96 out of 239 standards that matched those of the state, while the fourth subdivision had 92 out of 239 standards that matched. Once the state standards were matched to the university standards, the percentage of the state standards included in each of the seven categories that were covered by the university subdivisions was calculated. Table 3 describes the percentage of the university standards that cover the subcategories of the seven standards of the state. According to Table 3, standard (d) is the state standard that has the largest amount of standards that are covered by the university subdivisions and the student handbook. In contrast, state standard (g) that deals with the technology standards has the least amount of sub-standards that are covered by the university subdivisions.

By taking a closer look at the overall picture of the standards of the university and the state, it is noticeable that the standards of the university are more general, and are not subject specific. For example, under the category of ‘knowing subject matter and how to teach them’, a specific university standard states, ‘The intern knows and understands the main goals, core concepts, important information, tools of inquiry, and important practices of the disciplines that s/he teaches.’ This statement is so general that it can encompass any subject matter. This enables the college to cover many of the standards of the state, without having to create a large list of these standards. In contrast, one of the state standard states, ‘a beginning teacher should obtain a basic understanding of global and international perspectives’ (Standard 1e). This is obviously a very specific standard that can easily be encompassed in the university standard mentioned above.

**Document analysis of programme documents and state standards**

The next step that was taken in this study was to relate the state standards (and especially those that had not been met), with the TE student handbook and to the documents that were produced by each subdivision. This was done to determine if the programme documents contained evidence to support the fact that the programme was meeting all of the state standards. When combining the information in the TE student handbook with the standards of each subdivision, it was concluded that nearly all of the state standards were covered by the TE programme as a whole. More specifically, 240 out of the 242 state standards (almost 100% of the standards) are covered by the TE programme overall, when taking into account the subdivision standards, the TE student handbook, and the technology requirements for the college of education. The only state standards that were not covered by the programme were the following:

(1i) an understanding of the Constitutions and histories of the USA and the state; and
(1j) an understanding of the market system for allocating resources.

This, however, is knowledge that could be obtained by the interns in certain general education courses that are required by the university for graduation requirements.

In addition to the student handbook, the content of the documents produced by the subdivisions was examined. Overall, there were 17 areas of commonality in the documents of all four subdivisions. Some of the areas of commonality were the following: (1) overview of university TE programme and course requirements; (2) subdivision teaching standards; (3) assessment and descriptions of assessment procedures; (4) internship policies; (5) faculty and staff directories; and (6) how to communicate with the intern and to resolve problems. These areas of communality reflect the areas in which there is common emphasis and focus. For example, the standards for each subdivision are obviously a major component of the programme, so they are included in the documents of all the subdivisions. Along with the standards come the evaluation procedures on which the interns are evaluated; in most cases, the evaluation procedures and documents are solely based on the subdivision standards. The internship experience is also an area of commonality in the subdivision documents. That is why all subdivisions include their internship policies in their documents, along with ways of communicating with interns whenever problems arise. This is work that has been created based on the accumulation of experience of the specific TE programme.

Discussion

Despite the shortcomings of current TE programmes, reviews of research over the past 30 years have concluded that teachers graduating from TE institutions are generally better rated and more successful with students than teachers lacking this preparation (e.g. Darling-Hammond 1999). Even if many people believe that anyone can teach or that teaching is best learned by trial and error, the evidence strongly suggests otherwise (Darling-Hammond 2000). So the emphasis is not to put an end to these programmes but to find ways that would increase their effectiveness. Thus the discussion is now shifted towards the need for reform and accountability. Due to this process, an attempt was made to determine the coherency of TE programmes, both within the programme as well as in relation to the standards for beginning teachers of the state.

Overall, based on the comparison of the standards and on the document analysis, it can be concluded that the TE programme at the specific university does manage to cover the standards for beginning teachers of the state. Is this a positive or a negative outcome, however? It is difficult to determine how well this university manages to meet its standards since they do not include the level of achievement that should be met when the standards are applied. In addition, the wording and the level of specificity of the two sets of standards are also very different, which makes the comparison of the two sets very difficult. It is also difficult to say which set of standards is more important for the subdivisions to follow since no information is provided on how the sets of standards have been created.

However, the analyses performed for this paper have shown that the TE programme at the university as a whole covers the state standards. This, however, does not necessarily imply that the programme standards as stated have no flaws. According to Raths (1999), ‘When authors claim that their standards are consistent with those of the NBPTS or of INTASC [or with any other standards], congratulate
them but continue to wonder whether the standards “have it right”. In reality, one can never know if ‘standards have it right’. Standards are judgemental, so there is no right way as to how a standard should be set (Mehrens 1994). In addition, the context of the standards matters, so a standard that might be appropriate for teachers in one area might not necessarily be appropriate for teachers in other areas.

For evaluation purposes, however, evaluators need to have a frame of reference. In the case of this university, this reference is difficult to select. Should the college of education base their programme and the standards that they have developed on the state standards or of TEAC for example, that will eventually accredit the programme? This is a very difficult decision to make, especially since no claim is made that either of those standards or even the TE subdivision standards ‘have it right’. What makes this process even more difficult is that the standards of the university do not include indicators of the degree of success that they want for their students. Without this information, any statement made about the coherence of the programme in relation to any sets of standards would be of a purely judgemental and subjective manner.

Consequently, instead of providing conclusions for this paper, we would like to provide some suggestions. The suggestions are made in terms of how can the process of creating and using standards can be improved to enable a more valid and reliable comparison of TE documents and standards for measuring the outcomes and coherence of a programme. These suggestions are presented in the form of steps that could be followed by any TE programme when attempting to evaluate the programme.

The first step that needs to be taken is to reach a decision in terms of which set of standards the programme wants to meet (e.g. the state standards, the NCATE standards, the TEAC standards). The decision of which set of standards to follow would be a judgemental decision. However, it is expected that research studies would be considered as the basis for making this decision. This decision could at least provide some validity to the choice of the standards that would be selected.

The second step that needs to be followed is to tailor the selected set of standards to the purposes and goals of the programme. This would include creating programme standards that could be clearly linked to the selected state standards. However, a necessary component of these programme standards would be to determine the degree of proficiency that the students would be expected to meet. These proficiency levels would make it much easier to develop an assessment of the programme overall (Wise and Leibbrand 2002). The proficiency levels could even be the same as the proficiency levels that the state includes in their standards. So each of the university standards would have to include a proficiency level next to them (e.g. basic, proficient and advanced). This would help the interns and the faculty of the programme to clearly understand what is expected from them.

However, it is advisable that the faculty sets new proficiency levels within the TE programme. These proficiency levels would be tailored to meet the needs and goals of the institution. A variety of standard setting procedures can be obtained from Crocker and Algina (2006). One of the most popular standard/proficiency setting procedures is the iterative structured item judgement process proposed by Jaeger (1982, 1991). According to this method, each faculty member would be asked to judge if every university graduate should be able to meet this standard at the specific proficiency level that was set by the state. The average proportion of students that should meet this standard, as selected by the faculty, would then be compared to the proportion of the graduates from the previous academic year that did meet that standard. In light of this
comparison, the faculty would be able to vote once again whether every university student should meet this standard at the state’s targeted proficiency level or not. This final vote would help determine if the proficiency level that has been set by the state should remain the same, or if it should become higher or lower.

A third step in this process would be to request the faculty to actually link the objectives of each course to the programme standards. This information could be provided on the syllabus of each course. This last piece of information is essential since it would provide information on which standards are rarely covered throughout the students’ coursework, and which standards are being redundantly covered by too many courses.

A fourth and final step which is essential, and which is actually being implemented in the TE programme at this specific university, is for the interns to be evaluated based on the programme standards. This last piece of information would provide a complete picture of the degree to which the standards are actually being applied in the TE programme. This also would enable instructors to determine the degree to which they are successful in meeting the various objectives that they had initially included in the syllabus of each of their courses. This, however, implies that the objectives of each course are based on the programme standards, which in turn are based on the selected standards.

Under all of these conditions, a measure of the coherence of any TE programme could be obtained properly and objectively by basing the evaluation on its documents and standards. Without this information, any measure of the degree of congruence of the programme to an arbitrary set of standards would be very subjective and uninformative.

Standards are definitely a useful tool for enacting policy. However as research suggests (e.g. Anstey and Manitzky 2003; Delandshere and Arens 2001) when teacher educators are forced to follow imposed guidelines, trivial simplicity rules their practice, and the intellectual pursuit of teaching is stifled. Consequently, dispute and challenge of ideas cease to exist leaving its place to mere reproduction and rule following. The steps that we suggest reflect an attempt to transcend the regulatory approach on standard development by enabling teacher educators to participate in the discourse.

In conclusion, standards as evidence of quality are essential in any attempt to enhance learning especially in cases of students at risk (Borman and Kimball 2005; Konstantopoulos 2009; Phillips 2010). Focusing once more on the value of standards we endeavour to maximise their efficiency without, however, deviating from the intellectuality that needs to characterise teacher education and its agents. This quest can only be fulfilled when the process of standard development enables and facilitates dialogue, reflection and discourse. Being a teacher educator and an academic has to do with both deconstruction and reconstruction of knowledge. Therefore, teacher educators should embrace an active role into standard development. This role is aligned with the ability to judge, analyse, reflect and synthesise standards. We hope that the specific steps we suggest can help towards the realisation of this venture.

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References


