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# English Education Program Assessment: Creating Standards and Guidelines to Advance English Teacher Preparation

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# English Education Program Assessment: Creating Standards and Guidelines to Advance English Teacher Preparation

Don Zancanella and Janet Alsup

One of us recently found the following entry in a journal kept during the late 1980s and early 1990s: “These days, everyone seems to be talking about standards. State standards, national standards, NCTE/IRA standards. Is this just a passing fad or will it last?” As of 2010, it appears it’s going to last.

When someone uses the term standards, we tend to assume the topic under discussion is K–12 education, but standards for teacher preparation have their own parallel history. In English teacher education, that history has two strands: the NCTE Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts, which predate the “standards movement” (and which, as their title states, are guidelines rather than standards); and the NCTE/NCATE Standards for Initial Preparation of Teachers of Secondary English Language Arts, Grades 7–12 (sometimes known as “SPA” [Specialty Professional Association] standards), which were developed for use in NCATE accreditation. During the past 2 years, however, what might be described as a merging of these two strands has been underway. It is an administratively complex process that may be of real interest only to those who are directly involved. However, given the importance of standards and accreditation in today’s world, we believe that CEE members should have access to information about the making of standards and the ongoing evolution of the accrediting process. Therefore we offer this account of CEE’s activities in these areas.

## Changes in Governance

First, it’s important to know that three actions related to NCTE and CEE governance undergird the creation of the NCTE/NCATE Standards:

1. In 2003, then–NCTE President Patti Stock began the process of shifting the locus of NCTE’s relationship with NCATE from the NCTE Executive Committee to the CEE Executive Committee. While the contractual arrangements between NCTE and NCATE continue to be maintained at the top level of the organization (the NCTE Executive Committee, or NCTE-EC), much of the practical, day-to-day work related to NCATE within NCTE is now channeled through CEE. A related change was the phasing out of the NCTE Standing Committee on Teacher Preparation, which was separate from CEE and reported directly to the NCTE-EC.
2. In 2006, the CEE Executive Committee voted to empanel a Committee on Standards and Accreditation. This committee was created so there would be a group within CEE that had as its primary charge the oversight and maintenance of the Council’s NCATE relationship. Members of this committee are Janet Alsup, Sheridan Blau, Leni Cook, Steve Koziol, Kenneth Lindblom, James Marshall, Michael Moore, Penny Pence, Lisa Scherff, Patricia Stock, and Don Zancanella.
3. In 2007, the new CEE Committee on Standards and Accreditation recommended that the upcoming required revision of the NCTE/NCATE standards (the “SPA Standards”) should begin with the writing of a set of standards that would be independent of the NCTE/NCATE relationship. After these NCTE/CEE standards for teacher preparation were written, the NCATE-specific SPA standards would be derived. To write the new standards (the independent NCTE/CEE standards as well as the SPA standards), a task force was formed. Members of this task force are Lil Brannon, Les Burns, Bonnie Ericson, David Kirkland, Nancy Patterson, Penny Pence, Louann Reid, Lisa Scherff, Freddy Thomas, and Don Zancanella, as well as resource members Janet Alsup, Barbara Cambridge, Leni Cook, Charlie Duke, and Patti Stock.

### Why This Matters

Creating new committees and revising the charges of old committees may appear to be simply an acronym-ridden bureaucratic exercise. However, the hope of the CEE Executive Committee is that these changes are moving us toward having more control over our own profession. Within the Council, giving CEE more responsibility for matters related to teacher preparation has

made sense. Most members of CEE work in teacher preparation on a daily basis and know the issues involved. At the same time, connections have been maintained with other parts of the Council, particularly the Secondary Section and Middle Section because they are also affected by teacher preparation.

The concept of creating an independent set of teacher preparation standards, “owned” by NCTE/CEE, developed for several reasons. First, accreditation is changing. The structure that has been with us for the past couple of decades, involving a relatively uniform NCATE process that included the evaluation of various parts of a school or college of education by professional organizations (English education by NCTE, math education the NCTM, etc.), is no longer the only possible route to accreditation. The NCATE process is evolving (see the NCATE website, [www.ncate.org](http://www.ncate.org), for a description) and a competing accreditation process (TEAC) is also in play. NCTE, as a member of NCATE and TEAC, serves as a professional liaison between English educators and both professional accrediting bodies. Consequently, the CEE Executive Committee determined it would be wise for the Council’s standards for teacher preparation not to be strictly a function of NCATE. Instead, they should be available for use by the English education community more broadly: for accreditation by NCATE; for accreditation by other entities (including state governments); or even for institutions to use internally, for their own purposes. Furthermore, some have argued that the structure of standards imposed by NCATE (limitations on the total number of standards, for instance) inhibits the ability of the Council to accurately portray the characteristics of good English education programs. Having our own standards will allow us to put forth our vision and then develop from that vision NCATE standards that will be more clearly marked as a specific derivation, developed for a specific purpose.

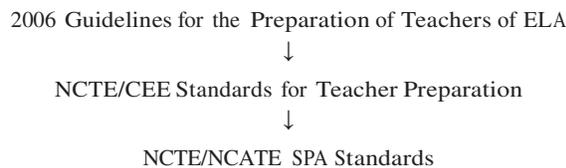
Working mostly online, the task force hopes to have a draft ready to share with interested Council members by the 2010 NCTE Annual Convention. A set of revised standards was originally due to NCATE in 2010, but we received an extension until 2011. A timeline of the standards-creation process appears below in Table 1.

### On the Difference between Standards and Guidelines

One possible point of confusion in this process is the tendency to conflate NCTE’s Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts with the standards currently under development. As in the past, the

November 2007	CEE Committee on Standards and Accreditation created by CEE Executive Committee (members nominated and approved by CEE EC)
March 2009	Standards Task Force created by CEE Committee on Standards and Accreditation (members nominated and approved by Committee on Standards and Accreditation; recommendations from NCTE-EC)
April 2009	Standards Task Force begins work
November 2010	Draft to be shared at NCTE Annual Convention in Orlando
2011	Completed standards to be adopted by CEE Executive Committee and NCTE Executive Committee

Guidelines are serving as the foundation of the standards. What is different this time is that the standards being developed will exist independently of NCATE, and the NCATE SPA standards will be based on the new NCTE standards for teacher preparation.



It should be noted here that the process for the development of the next iteration of the Guidelines, which are scheduled to appear in 2016, will take a different form than in the past. Since the Standing Committee on Teacher Preparation no longer exists, a new structure for overseeing the production of the Guidelines will need to be determined.

### Implications and Possibilities

The changes in NCTE/CEE governance and the writing of the new standards are taking place against a background of broad shifts in the evaluation and licensing of teachers and the accreditation of teacher education programs. As described previously, the process of evaluating or “accrediting” English education programs in the United States is complex and often confusing—particularly for those who work within these programs. Faculty members often struggle with identifying a small number of assessments that will demonstrate, through data aggregated from scoring rubrics, the success of their programs. Faculty in small colleges face writing detailed reports about programs that might enroll only a handful of students; those working in larger universities are challenged with the bureaucratic realities of trying to force collaborations between colleges of education and colleges of arts

and sciences. Additionally, faculty in English education often struggle with the current NCTE/NCATE standards themselves, which are many, covering pedagogical knowledge, content knowledge, classroom performance, and institutional structures and assessment systems (for a total of four main standards, seven sub-standards, and a whopping 45 indicators) and therefore difficult to demonstrate within NCATE's required six to eight discreet assessments. The new set of NCTE/NCATE standards created by the task force will be fewer in number (no more than seven, with each having no more than four indicators) due to revised NCATE guidelines. Therefore, one of the eventual goals of the Task Force on Standards and Accreditation will be to create standards consistent with NCTE beliefs and philosophies while not exceeding these new NCATE limits.

According to the NCATE website, there are currently 50 "NCATE-State partnerships" in the United States, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico (<http://www.ncate.org/>). In these states, all or most of the teacher education institutions are NCATE accredited. Also according to their website, 39 states have "adopted or adapted NCATE unit standards as their own and apply them" when evaluating education programs. These numbers indicate what many of us already know—NCATE has a tremendous amount of influence on which programs continue to educate and graduate licensed teachers. However, as described above, NCATE does not work in a vacuum; national professional organizations, such as NCTE, cooperate with NCATE in developing standards and identifying and training reviewers who actually conduct the program evaluations under the auspices of NCATE policies and guidelines. While dialogues are ongoing between NCATE and the other federally approved teacher education accreditation organization, TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council), concerning increased collaboration and a unification of approaches, it is unclear how much change will occur within either organization in the future. Perhaps as a harbinger of positive change, NCATE has recently revised its evaluation system to include opportunities for previously accredited programs to opt for a "continuous improvement" model of program assessment whereby program faculty write a self-study and then make a plan for researching and improving areas of concern related to one or more standards.

CEE and NCTE will continue to assist programs and program faculty nationwide as they strive to educate well-prepared English language arts teachers (most of us would agree this is the most important goal) and simultaneously meet the criteria for accreditation as stated by NCATE or another accreditation system mandated by the home state of the teacher education institution. We welcome the responsibility to provide support, information,

and a framework of standards and guidelines that allow for the success of effective programs. NCTE and CEE are currently providing much useful support to programs undergoing evaluation, ranging from webinars about writing NCATE reports, to examples of successful reports posted online, to connecting programs with knowledgeable consultants for one-on-one problem solving.

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However, there is more work to do. For example, some states continue to mandate fast-track, alternative teacher licensure programs, many of which are ironically devised by law to be virtually unable to meet NCTE/NCATE standards due to limits set on number of credit hours taken and types of courses required. Other states continue to consider licensing teachers with undergraduate content degrees after only passing an exam or taking a summer workshop; such teacher education “programs” may unavoidably fail the rigorous NCATE, TEAC, or state-determined assessments for accreditation. As their professional organizational home, CEE should find a way to assist faculty members trapped between such competing bureaucracies—if in no other way than to help them voice their concerns and frustrations to policymakers and state legislators.

NCTE has a history of asking knowledgeable and well-prepared individuals to serve as liaisons and in administrative and advisory roles with NCATE and TEAC. NCATE program evaluators are all CEE members, trained and supervised by an NCTE affiliated coordinator. We must continue to do this work if we hope to make a difference. While we currently have many qualified and dedicated reviewers volunteer annually, we must continue to have knowledgeable and experienced English educators become program reviewers. Ideally, these reviewers could effect positive change within the system as they consistently recognize programs that value the pedagogical philosophies and scholarly research on which our discipline is built.

We are currently experiencing a watershed moment in terms of English teacher education standards and program assessment. Teacher education in the United States continues to be under fire. In the last two decades in particular, policymakers have increasingly critiqued the methods of preparing teachers for effective classroom practice, claiming that the so-called failures of American students can be linked to the lack of knowledge and preparation of their teachers. In more recent years, former Teachers College president Arthur Levine and current U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have both criticized teacher education programs and called for their reform—or even elimination. Complicating matters further are the still-evolving Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards, which while written

for K–12 students are likely to influence teacher education programs in the future. While it may not be a new thing that those in power wish to revise teacher education programs, it may be that we are experiencing a unique opportunity to have our voices heard, as a new presidential administration settles in and we move closer to the reauthorization of the elementary and secondary education act.

CEE has the expertise and the opportunity to address problems posed by the current assessment environment and meet the many challenges faced by English teacher educators at local and national levels. In the past, CEE has called on its members to take on vigorous leadership roles in the design, implementation, and assessment of standards, policy, and accountability for teaching and teacher education in our field (e.g., the CEE Task Force for Political Action in Education Reform, 2007). We continue to invite our members to assume such roles, as evidenced by the current work of both the CEE Committee on Standards and Accreditation and the standards-writing task force, and we are excited and hopeful about how their work will affect English educators and their programs. We encourage CEE and NCTE members to attend the planned session at the 2010 Orlando NCTE Annual Convention, where the draft standards will be shared and participants will be asked to provide feedback. As we stated at the beginning of this article, the standards movement, whether it be realized through program standards, common national K–12 standards, or standards for assessing teachers, is not going away anytime soon. Therefore, our work continues.

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