Selecting the Qualified: A Standards-Based Teacher Education Admission Process

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Abstract

A standards-based admission process for qualifying caring and competent candidates for teacher preparation is presented. The major elements of the admission process include prerequisite standards that address the knowledge, dispositions, and skills candidates should possess upon entrance to the teacher education program; multiple assessments that evaluate the prerequisite standard; and an admission interview process that involves collaboration of arts and sciences faculty, education faculty, undergraduate students, and professionals from the field. A unique aspect of the admission process is its strong focus on dispositional standards. Emphasis is placed on qualifying future teachers into teacher education programs based upon demonstrated evidence of their meeting defensible and education community supported admission standards.

Surveys of teacher education programs have revealed formal applications, grade point averages, written recommendations, grades in required classes, and standardized test scores are the most commonly used admission criteria (e.g., Laman & Reeves, 1983; Peterson & Speaker, 1996). Our personal experience based on an examination of the criteria of more than 25 teacher education programs posted on the Internet has shown little has changed in recent years. Today, most institutions tend to use these same traditional indicators. The emphasis at admission is on the screening out of candidates based on these general predictors of academic success. At Idaho State University, our focus has recently shifted from screening out candidates to qualifying candidates based on multiple and defensible standards-based criteria. None of the teacher education programs we informally canvassed took a standards-based approach to selecting candidates for teacher education.

Many reform groups (e.g., Holmes Group, 1986; Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986; Center for Educational Renewal, 1990) over the last decade have called for increasing the competence of teachers through the admission of more academically talented candidates. Moreover, there is evidence to support the idea that setting higher admission criteria on traditional indicators leads to teachers who score higher on measures

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of academic achievement and who possess better academic credentials (Freeman et al. 1989; Demetrulias, Chiodo, & Diekman, 1991). Hence, traditional indicators themselves and the criteria applied, such as minimum scores, may have a certain degree of validity for predicting general academic success in teacher education programs. These traditional indicators of academic success also serve an accountability function by providing objective evidence to policy-makers that only academically talented candidates have been admitted. Yet, it is our belief that such traditional indicators lack sufficient validity and effectiveness for qualifying in candidates because they are not generally linked to a conceptual framework for teacher preparation or to program standards. For example, a written recommendation may provide information about a candidate’s past achievements that are predictive of academic success in general, but the contents of the recommendation may tell little about the candidate’s knowledge, skills, or dispositions with respect to a set of clearly articulated standards for what prospective teachers should know and be able to do.

More significantly, the traditional indicators tell little about the affective, moral, or ethical dispositions of the candidates who are admitted. As one of his postulates deemed necessary for an excellent teacher education program, Goodlad (1990) suggests “the responsible group of academic and clinical faculty members must seek out and select . . . those candidates who reveal an initial commitment to the moral, ethical and encouraging responsibilities to be assumed” (pp. 282–283). Few teacher education programs today examine such dispositions (Darling-Hammond, 1994). We believe this is due to the fact that most programs lack admission standards that specifically target dispositions. Lacking such standards, admission requirements become at best procedures for screening out candidates rather than procedures for qualifying them into the program based on their ability to meet program standards. Hence, it is our belief that admission, retention, and graduation criteria must be linked to the mission, conceptual framework, and standards of the teacher education program. We must also recruit candidates who have the capability to meet our dispositional standards.

**Standards-Based Admission**

As our first step in developing our standards-based teacher education admission process, we developed our Core Standards for Beginning Teachers (see Appendix A) that set forth our “vision of what we are about, what we stand for” (Pearson, 1994, p. 38). We also defined more specific indicators for the exit outcomes for our teacher education program in terms of desired knowledge, dispositions, and performances. Similar to the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC, 1992) principles, our standards serve as vision statements about what beginning teachers should know and be able to do (Richardson, 1994). Hence, our standards “represent our priorities and core values” (Pearson, 1994, p. 38). Like INTASC and the new National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2000) standards, our program standards present the teacher as concerned about the learning and welfare of all students, expert in his or her subject matter, inquiry-oriented, reflective, cognizant of cultural diversity, and able to select from