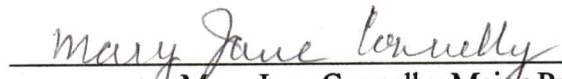
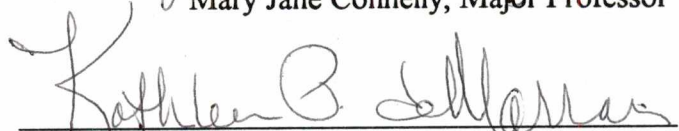


To the Graduate Council:

We are submitting herewith a dissertation written by Li Jun entitled "In Pursuit of Consistency: BOE Chairs' Experiences in Conducting NCATE Accreditation On-Site Visits." We have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Leadership Studies in Education.



Mary Jane Connelly, Major Professor

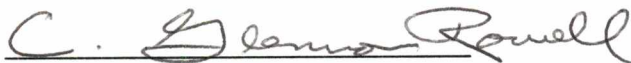


Kathleen P. deMarrais, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Richard Wisniewski



C. Dennis Powell

Accepted for the Council



Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

IN PURSUIT OF CONSISTENCY
BOE CHAIRS' EXPERIENCES IN CONDUCTING NCATE ACCREDITATION
ON-SITE VISITS

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy Degree

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jun Li

December 1996

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DEDICATION

To the men and women who have served unselfishly as members of the Board of Examiners of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education since 1987.

and

To my wife, Fan Xinrong, and my children, Anqi and Andi, for your continuing inspiration.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Appalachian College Association supported the completion of this study with a generous fellowship which enabled me to take one year's leave of absence from teaching. Without ACA's financial support, completing this study in such a timely manner would have been inconceivable.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore BOE chairs' experiences with NCATE so that the level of consistency in the NCATE accreditation process could be ascertained. The researcher interviewed a sample of seventeen members of the Board of Examiners, appointed and trained by NCATE, who had chaired BOE team for conducting the NCATE review. Interview questions were used as a guide, but no control was exercised in sequencing the topics of interviews. Staff at NCATE headquarters also provided additional background data.

Inductive analysis of interview transcripts produced themes within the three categories of questions asked. **(1) BOE Training:** Moving toward maturity, from relying on outside experts to homegrown trainers, from emphasis on theory to focus on practical skills, from lectures and question-and-answer to hands-on activities, and concerns with the screening mechanism. **(2) NCATE/State Partnerships:** Myriad forms of "joint visits," benefits of and concerns with joint visits, and effects of joint visits. **(3) Chairing On-site Visits:** The importance of the pre-visit, building relationship with the institution, building the team, building the case, and BOE team's role.

While a few themes identify areas for improvement, most of the themes found in this study support the assertion that the redesigned NCATE, especially the use of BOE teams, has resulted in a significantly high level of consistency in conducting the on-site reviews. Consistent with the tenets of symbolic interactionism, BOE members' application of the standards, especially their interpretations of the institutional data, are influenced by their individual experiences, causing potential threats to consistency. But

such threats are significantly reduced by the consensus approach characteristic of the on-site visit process.

Transcript analyses suggest that the chairs who participated in this study are both strong advocates for and articulate critics of NCATE. While sharing their concerns and frustrations with certain aspects of the process, most of them also expressed strong confidence in NCATE's future and the benefits institutions could reap from their active participation in the NCATE accreditation. A major implication from this study is the need for more teacher education programs to support national accreditation for teacher education.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction to the Problem

Known as NCATE, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education can trace its inception to a committee forty five years ago under the nation's largest teacher organization. Since its operation, NCATE has undergone four major redesigns (Christensen, 1987; Cruickshank, 1991). The latest redesign spanned a period of ten years and was completed in 1986 (Gollnick & Kunkel, 1986). Jones (1991) highlighted the new design with the following words:

Included in the redesign were changes in the composition of the council, in the actual accreditation Standards and Criteria for Compliance, in the composition, training, and operation of the accreditation teams, in the operational structure of the accreditation boards, and in continuing relationships with state departments of education and professional associations. (p. 48)

NCATE's redesign and its new standards reflected the organization's desire to ensure that high, professional standards were met by teacher education programs that volunteered to subject themselves to NCATE's accreditation standards (NCATE 1995; NCATE, 1992). It was suggested that the new standards adopted by NCATE in 1986 would make decisions on accreditation more consistent between one review and the next (Gollnick & Kunkel, 1986).

Statement of the Problem

With the initial implementation of the new NCATE standards in 1987, expectations were high that the resulting systemic changes would strengthen the total accreditation process. Has the new NCATE process met the expectations?

While a respectful body of scholarly work could be found in professional journals, only a handful empirical studies focused on some aspects of the new NCATE process (Gardner, Scanell and Wisniewski, 1996; Demetrulias, 1993; Jones, 1993; Jones, 1991; Sparapani & Nelson, 1990; Roth, 1989). Furthermore, all six studies turned to teacher education institutions for the source of their data collection. While teacher education programs are the most affected by the accreditation decisions, several other parties also play important roles in the whole process. "Members of the NCATE Board of Examiners (BOE) perform the most essential component of the NCATE process-the voluntary peer review of the professional education unit at a college or university" (NCATE, 1994; p. 1). Consequently, how they interpret the NCATE standards and teacher education programs' data for compliance would speak directly to the quality, and consistency in particular, of NCATE's accreditation process. Yet, study of the BOE members' perceptions of the accreditation process under the new NCATE standards did not exist.

Purpose of the Study

This study, through in-depths interviews, explored seventeen Board of Examiners'

perceptions of the training they had received from NCATE and their experiences in conducting the on-site visits under the redesigned NCATE accreditation standards. The purpose was to develop detailed descriptions, from the chairs' perspective, of the on-site visitation process so as to ascertain the level of consistency in the NCATE accreditation process. The following questions guided the conceptualization of this research:

1. How adequate do the BOE members view the training they received from NCATE for conducting the on-site visit?
2. What is the on-site process like from the BOE members' perspective?
3. What is the BOE members' view on consistency?
4. How effective do the BOE members see NCATE's new accreditation process?

Significance of the Study

Scholarly responses to NCATE redesign over the past decade have been tremendous (Moore, 1994; Moore, 1993; Parker, 1994; Coombs & Allred, 1993; Warner, 1993). Various professional associations have watched the redesigning process, studied the new standards and criteria for compliance and made subsequent revisions to the instructional requirements in their respective fields (Gilbert, 1994; Majsterek, 1994; Thomas, 1994; Hanclosky, 1992; Park, 1991; ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, 1986). In addition to its Handbooks and Annual guides, NCATE has continuously sent out materials to BOE members and NCATE-affiliated institutions in its effort to update and clarify the meanings of its new standards (NCATE 1995; NCATE, 1993; McCarthy &

Wise, 1992; Gollnick, 1992). NCATE and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) have sponsored seminars where teacher educators deliberated on how to interpret and proceed with the new standards (Gideonse, 1988).

The new NCATE standards have also prompted teacher education units to develop models to guide their efforts to comply with the new requirements (Clarcken, 1994; Ishler, 1994; Rath, 1993; Wilkerson, 1993; McCready & Hearn, 1991; Mann, 1989; Roach, 1989; Peseau, 1988; Bermingham, Sia, and Sydnor, 1986). Typically, these writings reported the process which their respective units had taken in interpreting the new standards and constructing programs which they believed would measure up to the NCATE requirements. Added to this body of literature are the exchange of ideas among some leaders of teacher education (Gideonse, 1993; Sanders, 1993; Sutton, 1993; Watts, 1986) and reports of interviews with past and present NCATE chief officers (Smith, 1991; Hodge, 1991).

NCATE has the potential for significantly affecting the quality of professionals who enter our school systems. Substantial changes in its complex procedure provide ample justification for studies of their effects (Wheeler, 1980). In a review of NCATE history and current debates on NCATE, Moore (1982) pointed out that "a major concern in the accreditation should be the *process* (italic original), that the way in which ... [the] review is conducted is as important as why it is conducted" (28). Olsen (1979) noticed the same phenomenon and pointed out that "...the concept and process of accreditation are areas about which few people in teacher education know very much" (Cited in Moore, 1982, 4). Yet, a decade after their observations, studies designed to examine the

accreditation process as practiced by NCATE through its trained BOE members were still absent in the literature. According to Roth and Pipho (1990), only scant scholarly attention had been given to any or all of NCATE standards.

In the only longitudinal and comprehensive study conducted since NCATE's redesign, Jones (1993) recommended:

Formative and summative evaluations of the several parts of national accreditation as practiced by NCATE must be conducted on a regular and continuing basis. Creative attempts to assess the quality and the accuracy of BOE team decisions should be encouraged.... (p. 195)

This study was an attempt to respond to the above perceived need. Because this study focused on the experiences of BOE members in conducting NCATE accreditation visits and the interpretive process they engaged in those experiences, the findings of this study complemented earlier studies by assessing the quality and accuracy of BOE team decisions.

Furthermore, the findings of this study should benefit NCATE. This study offers the organization a pair of lens through which it can see its policies enforced in operation and assess the effectiveness of that operation. BOE members benefited since the research process served as a sounding board by which they could relive their experiences, reflect on their own experiences and compare those with their colleagues'. The general public, especially those involved in teacher education could benefit from this study by gaining insights into the NCATE accreditation process and the various dynamics which influence and shape the accreditation status of their institution.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the terms used were defined as follow

Initial Accreditation Review process requires that all institutions, including those that have programs accredited by NCATE under its pre-1987 system of program accreditation, must undergo an initial accreditation review under the redesigned NCATE accreditation process. It is the focus of this study.

Continuing Accreditation Review refers to subsequent accreditation review process institutions undergo once they have successfully obtained the initial accreditation from NCATE. It takes place in a five-year cycle and requires the education unit to demonstrate that it continues to meet NCATE standards and to provide documentation that weaknesses or unmet standards cited in the previous review have been addressed. The unit is also expected to demonstrate that changes and improvements have taken place during the five-year period.

Unit Accreditation Board is composed of no more than thirty two members, representing all NCATE constituents in proportion. It is the governing board that determines the accreditation status of the education units. Known as the UAB among BOE members, it is responsible, among other things, for developing standards and procedures for the accreditation of professional education units, oversees on-site visits to institutions and the training of the Board of Examiners.

The institution is the institution, college, school, department, or other administrative body within the institution that is primarily responsible for the initial and advanced

preparation of teachers and other professional school personnel. NCATE's term is "the professional education unit."

NCATE coordinator refers to the person at the institution in charge of coordinating the activities for NCATE accreditation. It usually is NOT the dean, or the person in charge, of the professional education unit.

The team refers to the BOE team NCATE sends out to conduct the on-site visit resulting in producing a BOE report on which the Unit Accreditation Board makes the decision concerning the institution's NCATE accreditation status.

On-site refers to the period from Saturday to Wednesday noon during which time the BOE team conducts the actual on-site visit.

The chair(s) refers to the BOE member chairing an NCATE on-site team.

The BOE report refers to the final, written document produced by the team. The content of the report is shared with the institution at the Exit Conference with the institution. The report is submitted by the chair to the Unit Accreditation Board.

The standards refers to the 1992 NCATE Standards by which institutions seeking the NCATE accreditation were evaluated. A refined set of standards has been adopted in early 1995.

Assumptions

Assumptions for this study included:

1. Participants would be capable of reflecting on their previous experience chairing a

BOE team to review a professional unit for the purpose of NCATE accreditation.

2. Participants would be truthful in their response to interview questions.
3. Participants would answer questions in the presence of an audio tape recorder in the same manner as they would without its presence.
4. Participants' role as the team chair qualified them as the best spokesperson for the team about its experience.

Limitations

Participants for this study were limited to selected BOE members who had chaired the teams for on-site visits. The chairs were selected because they were the contact persons on a BOE team with NCATE, the Board of Examiners and the professional unit under review. They made all arrangements for the team with the professional unit, provided the leadership for the BOE team during the campus visit, and crafted the BOE report on behalf of the team. These responsibilities made them the most knowledgeable persons among the BOE team members about the entire accreditation process.

It should be noted that, as important as the BOE members' perspectives were to a fuller understanding of the NCATE accreditation process, their perspectives constituted only one piece of a complex puzzle. Other key pieces include the folio review process and the dynamics of the Unit Accreditation Board. As the first study of this kind, this study was exploratory. The findings should be interpreted accordingly. Nevertheless, a survey of the existing literature on NCATE had led the researcher to conclude that studies such

as this one were long overdue.

The study focused on chairs' experiences with conducting on-site visits for initial accreditation. Although several chairs touched on issues concerning the Continuing Accreditation, this researcher deliberately chose not to address the Continuing Accreditation process. One reason for such exclusion was that the continuing accreditation called for a holistic approach to conducting the on-site visit and, consequently, made it impossible for the chairs to reconstruct their on-site visitation process by standards.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Chapter 2 will review the literature relating to the evolution of NCATE. Presentation of NCATE's current governance structure and evaluative procedures will be followed with a review of empirical studies of the current NCATE evaluative process.

Chapter 3 explains the research methods and procedures used for this study along with the theoretical underpinnings of the methods used.

Chapters 4 & 5 present the data and findings for this study.

Chapter 6 summarizes the findings and discusses the implications for future research and practice.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Much of past research on NCATE discussed the role and function and reviewed the development of the organization. Another component of the existing literature consisted of debates on the accomplishments made by NCATE and perceived problems affecting the effectiveness of the NCATE accreditation process. This review of literature presents a synthesis of these studies, culminating in a presentation of the current NCATE governance structure, its new accreditation standards and criteria for compliance and the on-site visitation process.

National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education

The History

Several dates appeared in the literature to note the beginning of NCATE, ranging from 1952 (Roames, 1989; Wheeler, 1980) to 1954 (Gardner, et al., 1996; Doran, 1985) and 1957 (Hodge, 1991). Cruickshank (1991) offered the most comprehensive account of NCATE's origin. In 1946, according to Cruickshank, the National Education Association (NEA) created the National Commission on Teacher Education (NCTE) and charged it to establish minimum standards for the preparation of teachers. The NCTE brought teachers together with other stakeholders including representatives of the American Association of

Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), The National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification, and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

NCATE was the result of NCTE's work. The first set of NCATE Standards "seems to have been issued in 1957" (Cruickshank, 1991; 3). However, NCATE's own publication established 1954 as its beginning (NCATE, 1995).

As the dates of NCATE's inception varied, different dates for the major changes in NCATE's brief history were reported in the literature. One general agreement, however, did exist. That is, NCATE has undergone four major redesigns of its governance and evaluation criteria since its inception. Table 1 summarizes these major changes and the primary driving forces behind the changes. Only general timelines are used in the table due to differing dates reported in the literature for their occurrences.

In fact, calls for another reform of NCATE were heard no later than the completion of its third redesign. Gollnick and Kunkel (1986) singled out three studies which gave the greatest impetus to NCATE's 1986 redesign. The first one alluded to in the Gollnick and Kunkel article was a report released in 1978 by a committee appointed by the Association of Colleges and Schools of Education in State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (ACSESULGC). Based on that report, ACSESULGC declared that it would remain within NCATE for another five years. In the event that NCATE failed to effect significant changes, ACSESULGC member institutions would seek to form another peer accreditation organization. Had that happened, ACSESULGC would have potentially taken away from NCATE eighty-five colleges and schools of education most of which were large and/or research institutions (Roames, 1989; Scannell, 1983).

Table 1¹

Major Redesigns of NCATE Governance and Evaluation Criteria

<i>Time</i>	<i>Reason(s)</i>	<i>Major Outcomes</i>
1954-1957	The National Commission on Accreditation denied NCATE as the only accrediting agency due to an overrepresentation of the state legal agencies in NCATE governance.	NCATE adjusted its membership and increased higher education's representation and included representation from various learned societies.
1963-1965	Criticism from AACTE concerning inconsistency by NCATE in the accrediting process.	AACTE's representation increased; criteria revised.
1972-1977	NEA sought parity with AACTE in NCATE governance.	Representation from more specialty associations included; provisions for multicultural education introduced for the first time into the evaluative criteria.
1983-1985	Criticism from various constituent members calling for drastic redesign of NCATE to, among other things, ensure uniform and consistent application of the criteria and to reflect in the criteria and governance the changing demography in American society.	More constituents represented in the governance structure; program accreditation abandoned for unit accreditation; criteria redesigned in response to the criticism.

The second report that led to NCATE's redesign, according to Kunkel and Gollnick, was commissioned by NCATE and conducted by the Institute for Research on Teaching (IRT) under the auspices of Michigan State University. The IRT report was

¹ From Cruickshank (1991), Roames (1989) and Doran (1985)

commonly referred to as the Wheeler Report in recognition of its principal writer, Chris Wheeler. While recognizing the strengths of the NCATE accreditation process, the Wheeler Report also pointed out "some critical weaknesses in the NCATE accreditation process" (Wheeler, 1980; 2).

Shortly after the release of the Wheeler Report, AACTE appointed the Committee on Accreditation Alternatives (1981). This committee was charged by the AACTE president and its Board of Directors to develop a proposal "which would include a rationale and design for the new system, a process for the adoption and implementation of the new system" (Scannell, et al, 1983, 2). The end product was a report entitled "A proposed accreditation system: An alternative to the current NCATE system" (Scannell, et al, 1983), also referred to as the AACTE Report. Table 2 presents a summary of the major points of these two studies. Responding to its charge, the AACTE Report synthesized major concerns with NCATE and proposed six principles for a new system (see Table 3). This proposal became the blueprint for the NCATE redesign.

NCATE responded quickly to these studies. At a meeting in June 1983, it adopted plans to guide its redesign. Development of new standards was completed in 1985. The new standards were ratified on October 12 in the same year (NCATE 1992; Tom, 1987). By the fall of 1995, over five hundred professional units have been reviewed by NCATE with 74% of the units receiving accreditation (Gardner, Scannell and Wisniewski, 1996; Bodner, 1995).

Table 2

Major Weaknesses of NCATE's Criteria Identified by

AACTE and The Wheeler Report

<i>The Wheeler Report (1980)</i>	<i>The AACTE Study (1983)</i>
Vagueness in NCATE's Standards and their general organization impede attempts to judge program quality.	Ambiguous standards that could not be applied uniformly;
Explanatory materials developed by NCATE neither define key terms nor suggest what evidence is sufficient to demonstrate that Standards have been met.	Standards in use ignored factors essential to the quality of teacher education programs;
Training sessions for prospective team members and team chairpersons provide only a cursory discussion of the Standards.	Evaluation teams that were too large and too expensive;
Work conditions constrain the ability of NCATE participants to evaluate program compliance.	Failure to apply standards consistently, which caused judgments to lack reliability;
Inappropriate institutional influence over composition of evaluation teams, information available to Visiting Teams and the Council, and future participation of team members affects the ability of the Council to evaluate full program compliance with NCATE Standards.	Inability of NCATE to rate importance of different standards in making accreditation decisions;
Certain dynamics in team visits and Council meetings virtually preclude a thorough and complete examination of programs.	Accreditation of program categories often masked the health of the total education unit;
	Redundancy in program reviews for national accreditation and for state approval;
	Uneven application of standards.

Table 3

AACTE's Synthesis of Concerns and Proposal Elements

Addressing Concerns

Concerns	Proposal Elements
Clarity of standards	Unit standards; data bank; identification of quantifiable indicators of quality.
Appropriateness of standards	Expanded pre-conditions; identification of, and process for determining, quantifiable indicators of quality; focus on professional education unit in place of category by degree level.
Visiting team composition and size	Board of examiners; selection and in-depth training for visiting team; reduced size.
Redundancy of program and institutional reviewing	Accreditation focus on professional education unit.
Categorical review weakness	Unit standards; focus on professional education unit.
Excessive cost	Reduction in team size; continuing accreditation.
Distinction between initial and re-accreditation	Accreditation and continuing accreditation; annual monitoring and review.

NCATE Governance Structure

The redesigned NCATE governance is shared by four constituent groups: (1) teacher education, (2) teachers, (3) state and local policymakers, and (4) professional specialty areas (NCATE, 1992). In addition, the public and student are also represented (See Appendix A). Figure 1 on the following page illustrates the NCATE governance and organizational structure.

As a mechanism for voluntary peer regulation of teacher education, NCATE professes as its missions to: (1) require a level of quality in professional education that fosters competent practice of graduates, and (2) encourage institutions to meet rigorous academic standards of excellence in professional education (NCATE, 1995; NCATE, 1992; NCATE, 1990).

To accomplish its missions, NCATE establishes standards and procedures to carry out the accreditation process, provides training for those who conduct unit reviews, determines the accreditation status of institutions, and publishes an annual guide to accredited institutions (NCATE, 1995; NCATE, 1992).

Board of Examiners and the BOE training

Establishing the Board of Examiners in 1987 was one of NCATE's major efforts to respond to earlier criticism that the old NCATE accreditation process lacked rigor and consistency. BOE members were drawn from an equal number of representatives of the

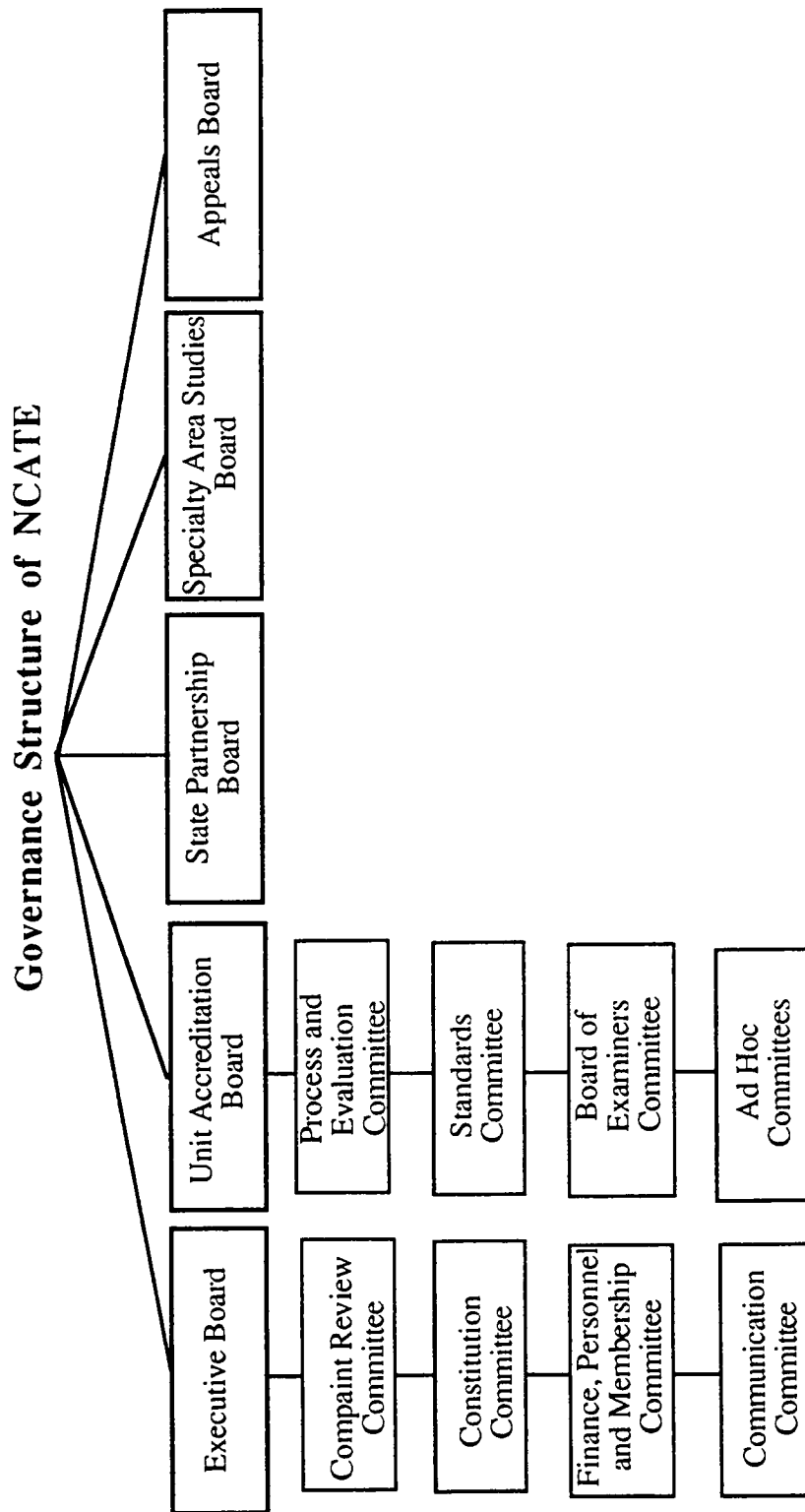


Figure 1. Governance Structure of the Redigned NCATE

four constituency groups: teacher educators, teachers, state and local policymakers and specialty groups. Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of the BOE composition by organizational representation.

The BOE members were nominated by their membership organizations based on their demonstrated expertise in using evaluation techniques. These techniques included the interpretation of quantified data, the use of rating scales and questionnaires, reading and analyzing narrative information, writing observations and evaluations (NCATE, 1994; p. 3). Most importantly, these BOE members were selected for their expertise in "making qualified judgments about professional education units" (NCATE, 1995, p. 64).

All BOE nominees were required to participate in a week-long training session designed to help the nominees to "develop skills for making professional judgments about the application of NCATE standards to education units" (NCATE, 1994; p. 4). Prior to the training, they were asked to read selected materials on knowledge bases for professional education and become familiar with NCATE standards, policies and procedures. During the training, the participants engaged in role plays, simulation activities of an on-site visit using actual institutional settings and materials. Other training activities included discussions of differing institutional characteristics due to different types and sizes of institutions and team building activities (NCATE, 1994).

Although a training session might include as many as 70 participants, nominees were assigned to a cadre consisting of 19 to 25 members who worked together throughout the training. Each cadre was led by a current BOE members with successful experiences in chairing BOE teams for NCATE. Aside from sharing their BOE

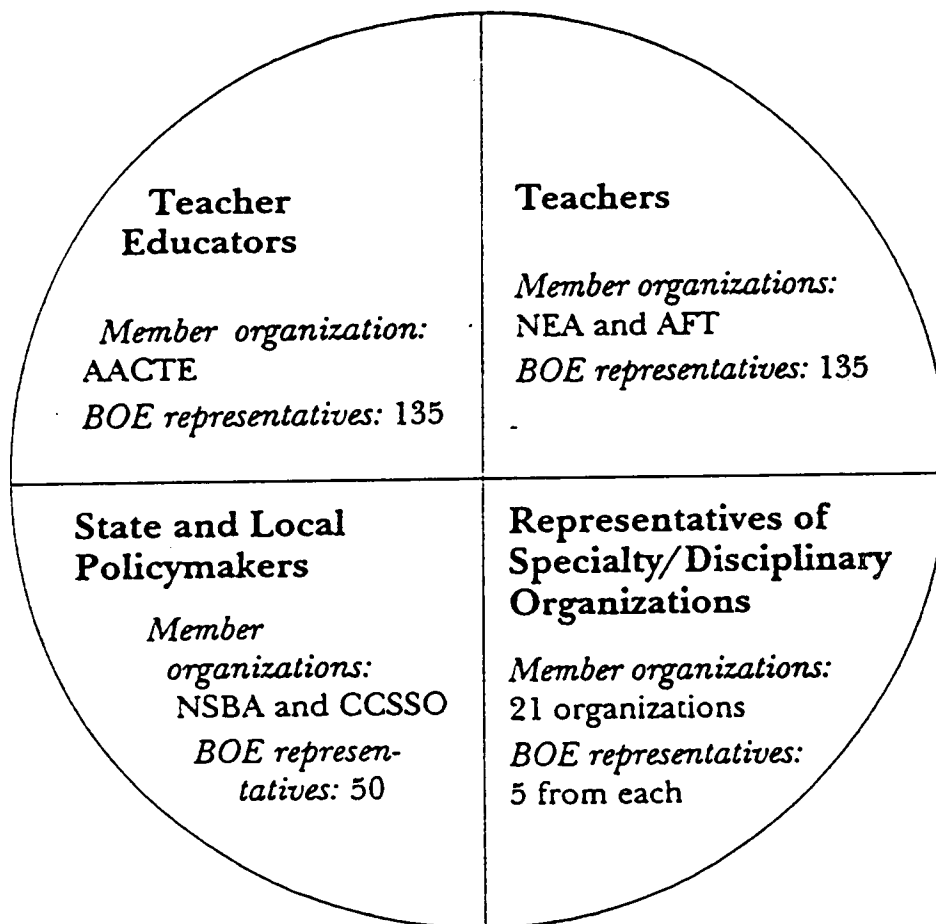


Figure 2. Composition of the Board of Examiners

experiences, the cadre leaders also evaluated each participant's performances during the training and made recommendations as to the nominee's qualification as a BOE member. Those who did not receive favorable evaluations from the cadre leaders, and from other nominees, would not be recommended to NCATE for appointment to the Board of Examiners. Otherwise, the nominee would begin his or her three-year term as a BOE member and agree to serve on a BOE team once each semester. Reappointment of a second three-year term would be requested by NCATE if the BOE member performed adequately on teams. Although their expenses incurred during the initial training and the conduct of an on-site evaluation were reimbursed, BOE members did not receive monetary compensation for their work (NCATE, 1994).

The Evaluation Process

The NCATE evaluation process begins when an institution applies for accreditation for its teacher education unit and declares its eligibility for accreditation to NCATE. The institution's eligibility is established by showing that (a) it offers the preparation of teachers and/or other professional school personnel and (b) it meets the ten preconditions which are included in the application forms supplied by NCATE (NCATE, 1995, NCATE, 1992. See Appendix B for a list of the preconditions).

Once the institution's eligibility is determined by NCATE, a BOE team will be constructed and a visiting schedule will be negotiated between NCATE and the institution. The visiting team for initial accreditation is composed of five members for units that offer

only baccalaureate degrees (basic programs) and six members for institutions that offer post-baccalaureate programs (advanced programs). It includes at least one representative from (a) teacher education, (b) teachers, and (c) other constituencies. In constructing the BOE team, NCATE also ensures that representation of male, female, and minorities will be balanced. Furthermore, at least one team member will be from an institution "similar in size and type to the institution being visited" (NCATE, 1994; p. 8).

Meanwhile, the institution begins a self-study process following NCATE evaluation criteria which include five areas² as follows: (1) knowledge base for professional education, (2) relationship to the world of practice, (3) students, (4) faculty, and (5) governance and resources. The institutional report (IR) is submitted to each member of the BOE visiting team at least 60 days prior to the on-site visit (NCATE, 1995; NCATE, 1992; ERIC Digest, 1986).

During the on-site visit to an institution, which is a pre-negotiated three-day procedure, the five or six members seek evidences to verify all statements in the IR submitted by the institution. Based on the contents of the IR and the evidence collected during the on-site visit, the BOE team makes "*judgments* (italic added) about whether the [18 NCATE] standards are met at the basic level, and whether they are met at the advanced level" (NCATE, 1992, p. 46). The BOE team's on-site visitation process is summarized in the Handbook for Board of Examiners Teams (NCATE, 1994) and quoted below:

Prior to the initial visit, BOE team members read the institutional report.
During the visit, team members review documentation in the exhibit room

²The NCATE Standards underwent a refinement in May 1995. The refined Standards are grouped into four categories and a total of 20 standards. See Appendix D for the refined Standards.

and interview numerous individuals who are involved with the professional education programs to help determine whether the NCATE standards are met. The findings of a team are reported in a *Board of Examiners Report* that is shared with the institution and NCATE's Unit Accreditation Board. (p. 1)

The on-site visit ends with a brief oral report to the institution and then a written report is submitted by the BOE team to the Unit Accreditation Board. But the accreditation process has several more steps before it ends. The institution can "file supplemental materials pertinent to the facts and conclusions found in the written report" of the BOE visiting team (NCATE, 1992, p.39). The Unit Accreditation Board then votes on the accreditation decision. The entire accreditation process usually takes two to two and one half years to complete, starting with the professional unit's preparing for the institutional report and ending with an official decision from the NCATE Headquarter in the form of a letter to the institution's president. Should an adverse decision occur, the institution may appeal to a Review Panel formed by NCATE, in which case the final decision on the professional unit's accreditation status might not come until the following year (ERIC Digest, 1986). Criteria for compliance with each standard are developed to guide professional education units in designing programs and BOE teams in assessing professional education units' degree of compliance with each standard. Appendix C lists all 94 criteria accompanying the standards. Figure 3 lists NCATE standards by category.

Category I: Knowledge Bases for Professional Education

- I.A. Design of Curriculum
- I.B. Delivery of the Curriculum
- I.C. Content of the Curriculum - General Education
- I.D. Content of the Curriculum - Specialty Education
- I.E. Content of the Curriculum - Professional Education

Category II: Relationship to the World of Practice

- II.A. Clinical and Field-Based Experiences
- II.B. Relationships with Graduates
- II.C. Relationships with Schools

Category III: Students

- III.A. Admission
- III.B. Monitoring Progress
- III.C. Advisory Services
- III.E. Completion of Program

Category IV: Faculty

- IV.A. Faculty Qualifications and Assignments
- IV.B. Faculty Load
- IV.C. Faculty Development
- IV.D. Faculty Evaluation

Category V: Governance and Resources

- V.A. Governance
- V.B. Resources

Figure 3. 1992 NCATE Accreditation Standards³

³ From NCATE: Standards, Procedures, Policy for the Accreditation of Professional Education Units. 1992. p. 46

Empirical studies of NCATE

Empirical studies to evaluate NCATE's redesigned accreditation process over the last five years were surprisingly few. The first such study that could be located was a survey report published in Action in Teacher Education (Roth, 1989). Roth surveyed fourteen professional units which participated in a series of pilot accreditation visits by NCATE BOE teams during Spring and Fall of 1987 and Spring of 1988. In his article, Roth stated that the purpose of his study was to "identify the outcomes (benefits/problems) resulting from the process of preparing for an NCATE review, as well as outcomes resulting from NCATE's recommendations" to the units (Roth, 1989, 34). Analyses of the data collected led Roth to suggest that "early experiences with the redesigned NCATE are very positive" (38).

Sparapani and Nelson (1990) surveyed member institutions of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities with regard to their compliance with selected NCATE criteria in categories II, III, and IV (World of Practice, Students, and Faculty). Their results showed that few institutions had first-year assistance programs in place at master's level, many institutions did nothing at master's level to attract minority candidates, and institutions with student populations of less than 10,000 appeared to have a serious faculty load problem. They concluded that several of the NCATE criteria applied more appropriately to basic than to advanced programs. As was suggested by Roth (1990), Sparapani and Nelson suggested that many had problems meeting the NCATE requirements related to diversity.

Jones' "A longitudinal study of the impact of NCATE accreditation" (1993) was the only comprehensive study to date of the redesigned NCATE process. Supported by various professional organizations including the National Education Association and NCATE, the Jones study addressed the performance of the new NCATE process as well as the impact of this process on professional education units seeking NCATE accreditation (Jones, 1991). Of the 184 professional units which sought NCATE accreditation between Fall 1988 and Spring 1991, one hundred and thirty-one (71%) participated in the study. The campus coordinators of these 131 professional units provided information in five areas: (1) Impact Upon Program, (2) Personnel Matters, (3) Costs of Accreditation, (4) The Actual Process, and (5) The Importance of NCATE. Also examined in the study was the relationship between several variables (such as campus size, accreditation status, levels of program, time of campus visit, etc.) and the responses provided by campus coordinators who had been responsible for the NCATE review on their respective campuses (Jones, 1991, 1993). Of special relevance to this study were findings on the Board of Examiners' performances.

The 131 campus coordinators participated in Jones' study were asked to judge BOE members' performance during campus visits on seven items by using a three-level, Likert type scale. These seven items are reproduced below (Jones, 1993):

24. Will you please evaluate the Board of Examiners Team which visited your campus by assigning a value to each of the following statements?

1-very strong 2-acceptable 3-a weakness 4-very poor

- The necessary advanced preparation was completed.
- The composition of the team was appropriate.
- The team was well informed about our school.
- The conduct of the visit was well planned and carried out.
- The judgments of the team were accurate.
- The decisions of the team have been generally accepted on our campus.
- The professional practice and demeanor of the team members reflected their expert knowledge of the standards and of accreditation procedures. (p. 124)

The data generated by the above question suggested that the new BOE teams, "using new standards and new procedures (bold original) were rated quite positively" (Jones, 1991, 51). The same conclusion was reached by the follow-up study (Jones, 1993). It was noted that 83% of the failed schools seemed to hold negative opinions about BOE teams' performances.

Several conclusions were drawn based on the participants' responses to the above question. It was found that most changes in all four areas (i.e. Professional Studies Courses, Clinical/Field Experiences, Recruitment and Retention of Students, and Faculty Selection and Assignment) occurred at the basic level. Jones noted that the greatest number and percentage of changes were made during the Spring semester of 1991, which was the final group included in his study. Another interesting finding was that notable differences in the focus of the reported changes positively correlate with accreditation status. More changes were reported by the campus coordinators whose programs received "Pass" (as opposed to "Fail"). The level at which the reported changes occurred

also seemed to vary according to the size of the teacher education program. According to Jones, both small and large schools reported more changes at the basic level. The medium sized schools, however, reported equal numbers of changes at both the basic and advanced level (See Jones, 1993, 183-84 for a more detailed discussion).

In its "General Conclusions" section, Jones reported six areas having some degree of concern. Three of the six areas had to do with (a) the composition of BOE teams, (b) the quality of written BOE reports, and (f) value judgments (professional) made by members of the BOE team who did not have the preparation nor experience necessary for such significant decisions (Jones, 1993, 194). Although Jones stated that "qualitative data were also desired" (Jones, 1993, 3), the entire 200-page report, except the Conclusion and Recommendation section, was heavily loaded with tables and numbers.

The most up-to-date research report appeared in a recent issue of Phi Delta Kappan (Gardner, Scannell & Wisniewski, 1996). Noting that the redesigned NCATE accreditation process, in spite of the substantive improvements, had generated the same kinds of criticism heard before the redesign, the authors found the perennial criticism curious and mysterious. To unravel the mystery, they interviewed thirty two well-informed teacher educators. Fourteen of them were AACTE presidents during the period of the NCATE redesign. The other eighteen interviewees were individuals "who had played significant roles in the redesign effort" by serving as NCATE officers and staff or chairing AACTE committees dealing with accreditation issues (Gardner, et. al., 1996; 625).

Data collected from these interviews enabled the authors to develop three

composites which represented "the very positive," "the positive but also critical," and "the radical" views of the new NCATE process. The majority of the interviewees, reported the authors, found themselves in the very positive category. Even those extremely critical of the redesigned NCATE, according to the authors, agreed that the BOE teams were generally more competent than the visiting teams of the past and, consequently, had improved the reliability of judgments.

In the final analysis, the authors posited three sets of answers to the question, "why NCATE faces essentially the same criticisms as it did" before the redesign (p. 628). These were: (1) the redesign had failed to address the essential nature of the problems surrounding the NCATE accreditation process; (2) the criticisms were "smokescreens" from those institutions which were unwilling to commit seriously to strong national standards for accreditation; and (3) the institutions engaged in teacher education were so diverse that no one set of standards of quality were acceptable to all. The authors clearly left the impression that the second answer accounted for most of the criticisms of NCATE.

The Gardner study raised a number of policy issues, such as the folio review process, the continuing accreditation procedure and the demanding task for institutions to prepare for the on-site visit and for BOE teams to complete the on-site visit. They suggested that NCATE should attend to these issues seriously and with great care so that continuous improvements could be made without losing its broad constituency. And the authors appeared optimistic about NCATE's ability to address these issues well.

The fact that all the thirty two interviewees for their study were "key participants

of the NCATE redesign" would command much attention to what the authors had to say. Added to this was the fact that the three authors themselves were seasoned and active participants in NCATE. Naturally, one finds that the authors' analysis was poignant and perceptive; their assertions forceful. Still, a huge void seemed to remain between the question the three authors had raised (i.e. Why does NCATE still face the same criticisms as it did before the redesign?) and their conclusion that much of the criticisms were smokescreens of those institutions unwilling to make serious commitment to quality teacher education.

Given the very limited body of literature addressing the question raised in the Gardner article, studies designed to assess and illuminate the accreditation process were much needed. This was especially true with studies addressing affective issues "since professional perceptions of those directly involved and responsible were deemed important in gaining a complete understanding and appreciation" (Jones, 1993, 3) of a large and complex organization such as NCATE.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the theoretical orientation and methodology used in collecting and analyzing the data. The purposes of this study were to seek the chairs' (a) perceptions of the adequacy of their NCATE training, (b) experience with the on-site process, and (c) perceptions of the effectiveness of the new NCATE process. The Initial Accreditation process in contrast to the Continuing Accreditation process was chosen as the focus of the study. Two factors influenced this choice. At the inception of this study, most institutions had only gone through Initial Accreditation under the 1986 redesign. Much of the debate surrounding NCATE revolved around the Initial Accreditation process. Secondly, the holistic approach to Continuing Accreditation required the team to appraise the institution's overall health. In contrast, Initial Accreditation required a standard by standard approach, permitting a closer examination of the process.

Whether the findings reported here apply to the full population of BOE members is not a question this study attempted to answer and they should not be generalized beyond the population studied. However, findings from this study should suggest what might be found in the larger population and can be used as a basis for further research on the NCATE process.

Theoretical Orientation

An interpretive approach underlied this study. The research questions required the chairs to reconstruct their experiences using the new NCATE Standards in conducting the on-site visits. Interviews were used as the primary data gathering tool (Erickson, 1986). It was anticipated that the analysis of the chairs' reconstructed experiences would gauge the level of consistency in the NCATE process.

My focus on the construction and interpretation of meaning and how meaning prompts action was informed by the theory of symbolic interactionism. The premises and principles of symbolic interactionism as a research methodology were best articulated by Blumer (1969). Meaning occupied a central role in Blumer's perception of how human beings interact with each other, as was attested to in the three premises laid out by Blumer (1969):

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them;
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows;
3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he encounters. (p. 3)

Most significant of these premises is not the recognition of meaning as the prompt of human action (a point accepted by many other social theories), but rather the source of meaning. Contrary to traditional realism, which espouses that meaning is inherent in the thing that has it, and to the traditional idealism, which regards meaning as a result and an

expression of a person's psyche, symbolic interactionism sees meanings as social products. Meanings are "creations that are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (Blumer, 1969; p. 5).

Another position held by Blumer is that an object⁴ may have a different meaning for different individuals as the meaning of objects for a person "arises fundamentally out of the way they are defined to him by others with whom he interacts" (Blumer, 1969; p. 11). Framed in slightly different words, the meaning of objects for a person depends to a great extent upon the immediate environment in which the person lives and experiences with the objects. "People may be living side by side yet be living in different worlds" (Blumer, 1969; p. 11).

Why then might different people derive different meanings from the same object? Symbolic interactionists believe that the answer lies in how people use meaning. While the meaning of things is formed in the context of social interaction and is derived by the person from that interaction, the use of that meaning by a person requires interpretation by that person. First, the person becomes aware of the things toward which he or she is acting; he or she has to point out to him- or herself the things that have meaning. Interacting with oneself or communicating with oneself is an internalized social process through which objects are brought to one's conscious level. Second, by virtue of this process of communicating with oneself, interpretation becomes a matter of handling meanings.

The actor selects, checks, suspends, regroupes, and transforms the meanings

⁴ An object defined by Blumer is anything that can be indicated, pointed to, or referred to. For convenience, objects can be categorized into (a) physical objects; (b) social objects; and (c) abstract objects.

in light of the situation in which he is placed and the direction of his action. Accordingly, interpretation should be regarded ... as a formative process in which meanings are used and revised as instruments for the guidance and formation of action. (Blumer, 1969; p. 5)

The special role played by interpretation in meaning construction is recognized by many (Denzin, 1979; Burgess, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Goetz & LeCompte, 1991). As early as 1914, the German historian and social philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey (1914/1976) argued that the methods of the human sciences should be *hermeneutical* (italics original), or interpretive, with the aim of discovering and communicating the meaning-perspectives of the people studied....

Erickson (1986) believes that assumptions about the nature of cause in human social relations is the fundamental difference between the traditional and interpretive approaches to research on teaching. Instead of seeing the physical and behavioral objects as the cause of action, interpretive perspective asserts that humans "create meaningful interpretations of the physical and behavioral objects that surround them in the environment" (p. 126). Concluding that meaning interpretations are what prompts social actions and reactions, Erickson further argues that causal explanation in the domain of human social life cannot rest simply upon observed similarities between behaviors or objects, but rather, identification of meaning interpretation must be included.

The tenets of symbolic interactionism, as discussed above, form the basis for this study. The theory suggests that the NCATE Standards may be interpreted in different ways by different examiners as the examiners interact with other team members and as they interact with faculty and students in the institution under review. They also suggest

that the examiners, by virtue of their different backgrounds and experiences, may attach different meaning to their interpretation to begin with.

The position held by symbolic interactionists suggests that the meanings of the NCATE Standards may not be as clear and fixed as some people would like to believe. It further suggests that the BOE team members' interpretation of the NCATE Standards and, more importantly, their evaluation of the unit's compliance with the Standards may undergo revision and change as they engage themselves in dynamic interactions with their peers and colleagues.

In order to get an inside view of the BOE on-site visitation process, the interpretive perspective suggests that the team's decision-making process during an on-site visit should be recapitulated and examined. In other words, BOE team members' accounts of the process must be sought in order to arrive at a better, empirical understanding of the NCATE accreditation process of a professional unit,. As Spradley (1979) argues: "Any explanation of behavior which excludes what the actors themselves know, how they define their actions, remains a partial explanation that distorts the human situation" (p. 13).

The notion that the meaning of the same concept may change in different time and spatial frame influenced the formulation of this research. As the literature review suggests, NCATE continues to clarify what it looks for in determining the unit's compliance with the standards (Gardner, Scannell, & Wisniewski; 1996). One example of this process is the evolution of the multicultural/global/diversity component of the standards. In the 1986 Redesign, the diversity concept could be seen in four standards (the curriculum, the field experience, the student composition, and the faculty qualification).

The wording was such that it generated heated debate among team members in respect to the proper interpretation of the standards. In response, NCATE enumerated the indicators the team must examine in order to determine if an institution had made conscientious efforts to promote diversity in its teacher preparation programs (Gollnick, Oct. 8, 1992). As more attention was given to the institutional context, NCATE devised what was to be known as "the plan, the effort, and the result" to help the team in ascertaining the institution's effort with diversity issues. By 1993, the diversity issues became "indicators" separated from such concepts as "faculty qualifications" in a draft of the refined standards which was circulated among BOE members and other NCATE constituent groups for comments (Wise, June 1993). Eventually, this draft became the 1995 Refined Standards with few changes (NCATE, 1995).

One major reason for the continued refinement of the NCATE accreditation is to update and clarify meanings of the standards (Wise, June 1993). However, the meanings of the standards will only be as clear as the BOE team members make them in conducting the accreditation evaluation. The level of consistency in the NCATE's accreditation decisions will, to a great extent, be as good as the consistency exercised by the BOE team members during the on-site visits. Therefore, the individual examiners' experiences with the on-site visits and their perceptions of the effectiveness of the new NCATE process were of crucial importance to this study. The validity of the standards, while a related topic, was not the focus of this study.

"A conceptual framework explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main dimensions to be studied" (Miles and Huberman, 1984, p. 28). These dimensions include

the key factors or variables and the presumed relationships among them. Figure 4 on the following page illustrates the conceptual framework of this study.

Development of the Interview Schedule

An interview schedule was developed to guide the participants in discussing their experiences with the NCATE accreditation process. Based on the literature on NCATE's new standards and the evaluation process, several significant topics were identified and a series of open-ended questions were developed. These questions form the bases on which a general interview schedule was developed.

Patton (1980) identified six types of questions that would aide the interviewer in obtaining more information from respondents. Of these six types, four were relevant to the current study and, consequently, informed the development of the interview schedule. The other two types of questions listed by Patton were "feeling questions," "aimed at understanding the emotional response of people to their experiences and thoughts" (p. 207) and "background/demographic questions" which "locate the respondent in relation to other people..." (p. 209). Special care was exercised in wording the interview schedule so as to ensure that "what is being asked is clear to the person being interviewed" (Merriam, 1988, p. 79; Patton, 1980, pp. 211-12).

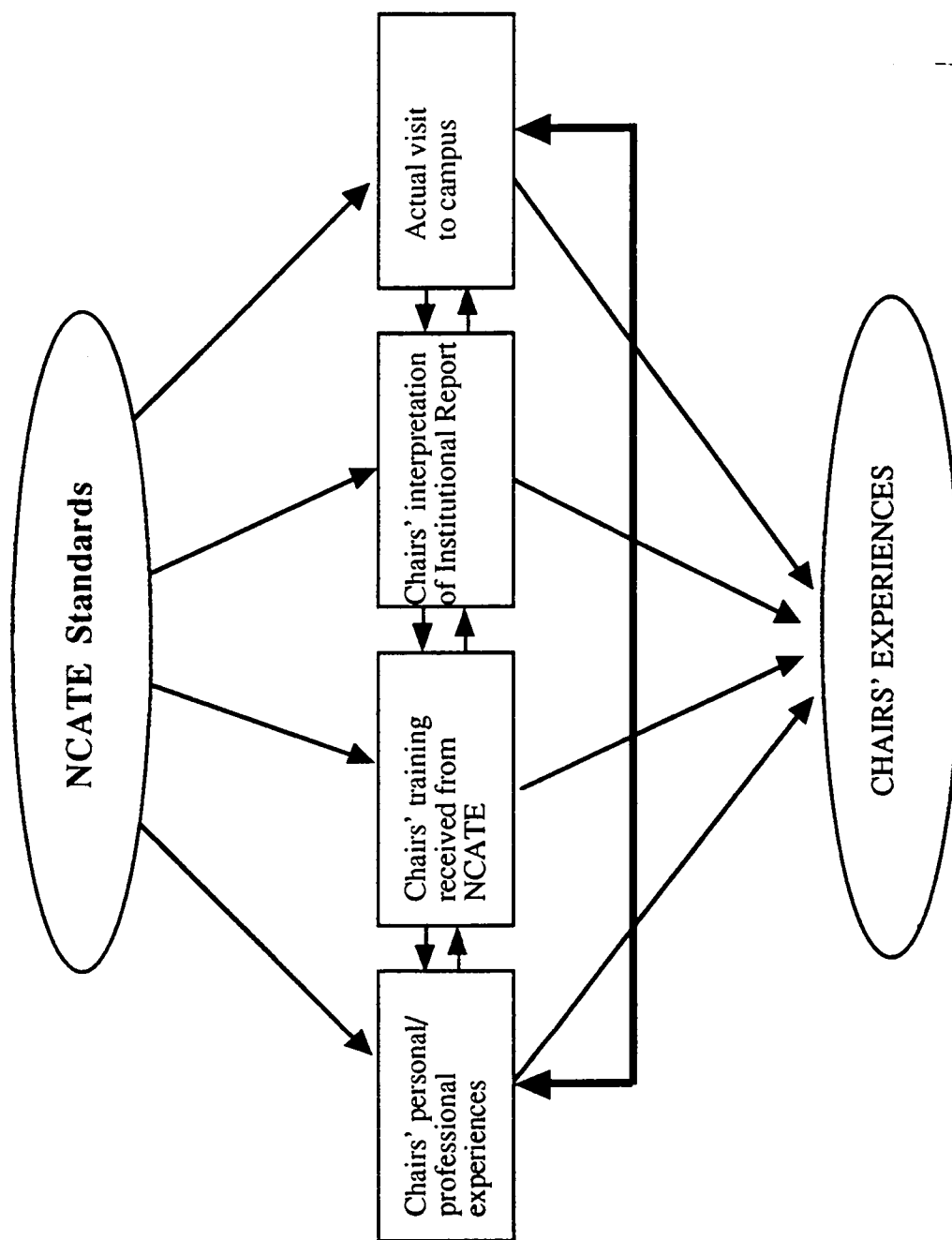


Figure 4. Conceptual Framework

According to Patton, "experience/behavior questions" should be phrased to elicit "descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities that would have been observable had the observer been present" (p. 207); "opinion/value questions" would get at "what people think about the world or about a specific program...tell us people's goals, intentions, desires, and values" (p. 207); while "knowledge questions" would find out what a respondent considered to be factual information regarding the research topic. The purpose of the interview schedule was to help keep the interviews focused and to ensure that the topics of interest would be covered with all participants. The order of the questions was not preset but rather was determined by the natural flow of each interview. Probes, some of which resulted from participants' responses, were used to explore meanings attached to events or situations. This flexibility allowed the researcher the freedom "to build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style--but with the focus on the topics significant to the current study" (Patton, 1980, p. 200).

The interview questions were given to members of a University of Tennessee College of Education Qualitative Research Group. This group of approximately twelve members met weekly at the University to discuss and help members with their research projects. Most members of the group had studied qualitative methodology and were currently engaged in qualitative research. The researcher discussed the purpose of the study with the group and the group discussed the interview guide and probes. Changes in the wording of some of the questions were made and incorporated into the final guide. A number of probes were added as a result of this discussion. Appendix E contains a copy

of the interview schedule used for this study, along with a copy of the consent form and a letter from Dr. Art Wise, the current president of NCATE.

Selection of Participants

The primary tool used for participant selection was what Goetz & LeCompte (1984) identified as "criterion-based sampling." Merriam summarized this method well:

Criterion-based sampling requires that one establish the criteria, bases, or standards necessary for units to be included in the investigation; one then finds a sample that matches these criteria (Merriam, 1988, p. 48).

Several criteria for selecting the participants were identified in the original proposal of the study. However, communication with the NCATE Headquarters and preliminary analysis of the first few interview transcripts necessitated modifications in the selection criteria.

One of the original criteria was that the participants would represent the various constituent groups of NCATE. A typical BOE team for an initial visit consists of five or six BOE members representing (a) a teacher education institution, (b) a teacher's organization, and (c) other constituent members of NCATE. It appeared that the overwhelming majority of the chairs were representatives of teacher education institutions. The chairs themselves were not surprised when this observation was made. They speculated that resources such as time and secretarial assistance might be factors making it less likely that BOE members representing K-12 would chair an NCATE team. Another factor might be the level of personal comfort in assuming a leadership role, although those chairs who had had teacher practitioners on their BOE teams generally made positive

comments on their performance. Therefore, it was decided that representation of teacher practitioners in the study would not be sought. The third NCATE constituency group was represented by two chairs affiliated with state department of education (SDOE). In addition, two other chairs also had worked for SDOEs prior to their current affiliation with teacher education institutions.

Another originally proposed criterion was that the chair must have chaired at least one NCATE team during the 1994-95 year. It was assumed that a recent NCATE experience would ensure best reconstruction of the NCATE process. Reflections on the early interviews suggested that the chairs could recall their experiences in detail as long as they had been actively involved in the NCATE process. This finding allowed me to expand the pool of potential interviewees to include those who might have not chaired a team during the 94-95 year but who had been intimately involved with NCATE in other professional roles. These roles might include officers of NCATE and/or chairs of AACTE committees on accreditation. Still, all interviewees must have chaired BOE teams. This combined experiences of persons having chaired BOE teams and others who served on NCATE committees or participated in training new BOE members presented more comprehensive perspectives on issues.

A third modification to the original selection criteria resulted from the early interviewees' suggestions. Rather than limiting the interviews to chairs residing in the Southeastern United States, several interviews were secured at the 1996 AACTE annual conference in Chicago which many BOE chairs attended.

Thus, the final criteria for participant selection were:

1. Experience as a BOE chair;
2. Institutional Affiliation;
3. Serving on NCATE Committees or as consultant to the BOE training sessions; and
4. Ability to share chairing experiences in detail.

After approval of the research proposal, contacts were made with the NCATE Headquarter in Washington, D.C. explaining the purpose and design of the proposed study and requesting NCATE's assistance in obtaining a name list of chairs⁵. NCATE responded with a list of twelve chairs' names and a letter from Dr. Art Wise (NCATE's current president) in support of this research effort.

Seventeen interviews were conducted using the sources provided by NCATE and through "networking" at the AACTE annual conference. Three interviewees could only talk about their experiences in rather general terms. The final "usable" materials were from the remaining fourteen transcribed interviews. However, it should be pointed out that audio review of the three chairs' accounts were comparable experiences with those quoted in the study. Table 4 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants.

Data Collection Strategies

Telephone contacts were made with each chair. The purpose and design of the study was briefly described and their participation sought. All agreed to participate in the

⁵ The communication with the NCATE Headquarter throughout the entire study could be characterized as "cordial but very slow." A typical response from the NCATE staff would be weeks, and sometimes, months after an initial request was made. This observation, however, is not indicative of NCATE's lack of responsiveness, but rather, a recognition that the organization's Headquarter may be understaffed.

Table 4

Demographics of the Participants

Gender/Ethnicity	Dean	Professor/Field	CSSO ⁶	%
Male	3	1/Teacher Ed.	1	29
Female	6	5/Tch. Ed., Maths	1	71
Total	9	6	2	100
Caucasian	8	5	1	82
Afri-American.	0	1	1	12
Asian-American.	1	0	0	6
Total	9	6	2	100

study and a tentative interview date was set. This was followed by a letter confirming the interview date with each of the chairs. Also included in the letter were copies of the consent form, the interview schedule and the letter from Dr. Art Wise, the president of NCATE (see Appendix D). Eleven interviews were conducted in the chair's office at his/her home institution; five were done at the AACTE conference; one was conducted on the telephone. In all cases, the chair chose where the interview would take place. Interviewing participants in a setting decided by the interviewee would allow the interviewee to feel more at ease and enhance the external validity of the study (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). In a couple of cases, electronic mail proved to be a good vehicle to

⁶ CSSO in the table stands for "Chief State School Officers."

communicate with the participants. The interviews were conducted during the months of October and November of 1995 and in February of 1996. The shortest interview lasted forty five minutes and the longest lasted 150 minutes. The other interviews usually lasted about ninety minutes each, as had been expected.

With one exception, all interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by a professional transcriber within 10 days after the interview. Field notes were kept to record observations of interviewees and reflections on the process as each interview took place. Preliminary analyses of the transcripts followed after each transcript was made available. Both were used as the bases on which future interviews were modified and refocused.

Seidman (1991) discussed a "three-interview approach" that was originally designed by Dolbeare and Schuman (Schuman, 1982). The first interview of the series would focus on the participant's life history in light of the topic up to the present time. The second in the series would concentrate on the participant's present experience with the topic of study. The participant would be asked to reconstruct the details of such experiences. The last interview in the series would ask the participant to reflect on the meaning of the experience reconstructed during the second interview.

In her study of successful college freshman female students' experience with mathematics, Venters (1992) adapted the three-interview-series approach and condensed it into one interview to fit her timeframe. She used the first half of her interviews for factual reconstruction and the second half for the participant to reflect on the meanings they attached to their experiences. Venters reported that the format yielded successful

results. This study adhered to a similar format adopted in the Venters study. Each interview began with an informal conversation during which time the signed consent form was collected from the chair and the issue of confidentiality of their responses and use of pseudonyms were reiterated. When necessary, it was made clear to the participants that there was no predetermined set of answers to the questions and that they should feel free to discuss whatever incidents or people that questions would call to their mind. A microcassette tape recorder was placed at a place close to the chair. One chair asked that the interview not be recorded; another chair asked that the recorder be turned off briefly while a particular incident was related. In all other cases, the recorder was on throughout the interview.

During the interviewing process, the researcher made written notes of gestures or any physical change of the participant that seemed significant. Written notes also included further probes derived from the participant's remarks. These probes were made later so that the participant's responses were not interrupted (Patton, 1980; Merriam, 1988). Throughout the interview, care was taken not to make any comments or facial expressions revealing any particular attitude toward a response. The only responses from the researcher were limited to smiles, nods of the head, and pauses. Aside from avoiding leading the participant's responses, this restraint from excessive participation in the conversation also allowed the researcher optimal time to concentrate on listening and forming meaningful probes (Seidman, 1991).

The interview returned to a more informal conversation at the end of the interview. Each chair was asked to give permission to be contacted for necessary follow-up

questions. Upon completing the interview, the researcher recorded oral comments about the overall impression of the interview onto the same tape as the interview (Venters, 1992; Briggs, 1986).

Although the number of participants was preset to be around twelve to fifteen, the actual number could only be determined by the adequacy of information obtained from the actual interviews. The criteria of adequate information, as many qualitative researchers had discussed, was the saturation of information (Seidman, 1991; Merriam, 1988; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The subsequent analysis indicated that a sense of the saturation of information from the fourteen interviews had been achieved.

Strategies for Data Analyses

Data analysis started as each interview took place. This preliminary analysis included the researcher's early impressions of significant statements made by the participants. The subsequent interviews incorporated the information already obtained in earlier interviews. This mode of collecting and analyzing data simultaneously had been well established in the literature for conducting qualitative research in educational settings (Seidman, 1991; Merriam, 1988; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Spradley, 1979; Dexter, 1970).

After the tapes and field notes were transcribed, each transcript was read by the researcher and marginal notes made to identify significant remarks related to the research questions. A second reading of the transcripts was accompanied by color-coding

emerging categories and "memoing" (Miles & Huberman, 1984; p. 69). Memoing forced the researcher to go beyond sorting the raw data to think and theorize the relationship among pieces of data and tie them into clusters. Through this total immersion into the transcripts, the researcher identified and formulated tentative categories of concepts. The research questions were frequently reviewed to aide the coding process (Seidman, 1991).

Drafts of the identified categories and themes were given to several teacher educators including members of the Dissertation Committee and two other BOE members for questions and comments. This served as a peer checking mechanism for enhanced reliability of the categories (Lincoln, 1993; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Similar categories with their corroborating raw data were collapsed under common themes (Tesch, 1990; Spradley, 1979). This process proved to be the most demanding part of the data analysis phase as the categories were so intertwined with each other. Often times, the researcher struggled with stories which could be placed under multiple categories which, in turn, could be part of any one of the themes. The final treatment of the data was based partly on reasoning and partly on the researcher's personal judgment at the time of the writing.

The entire data analyses process is illustrated in Figure 5 on the following page.

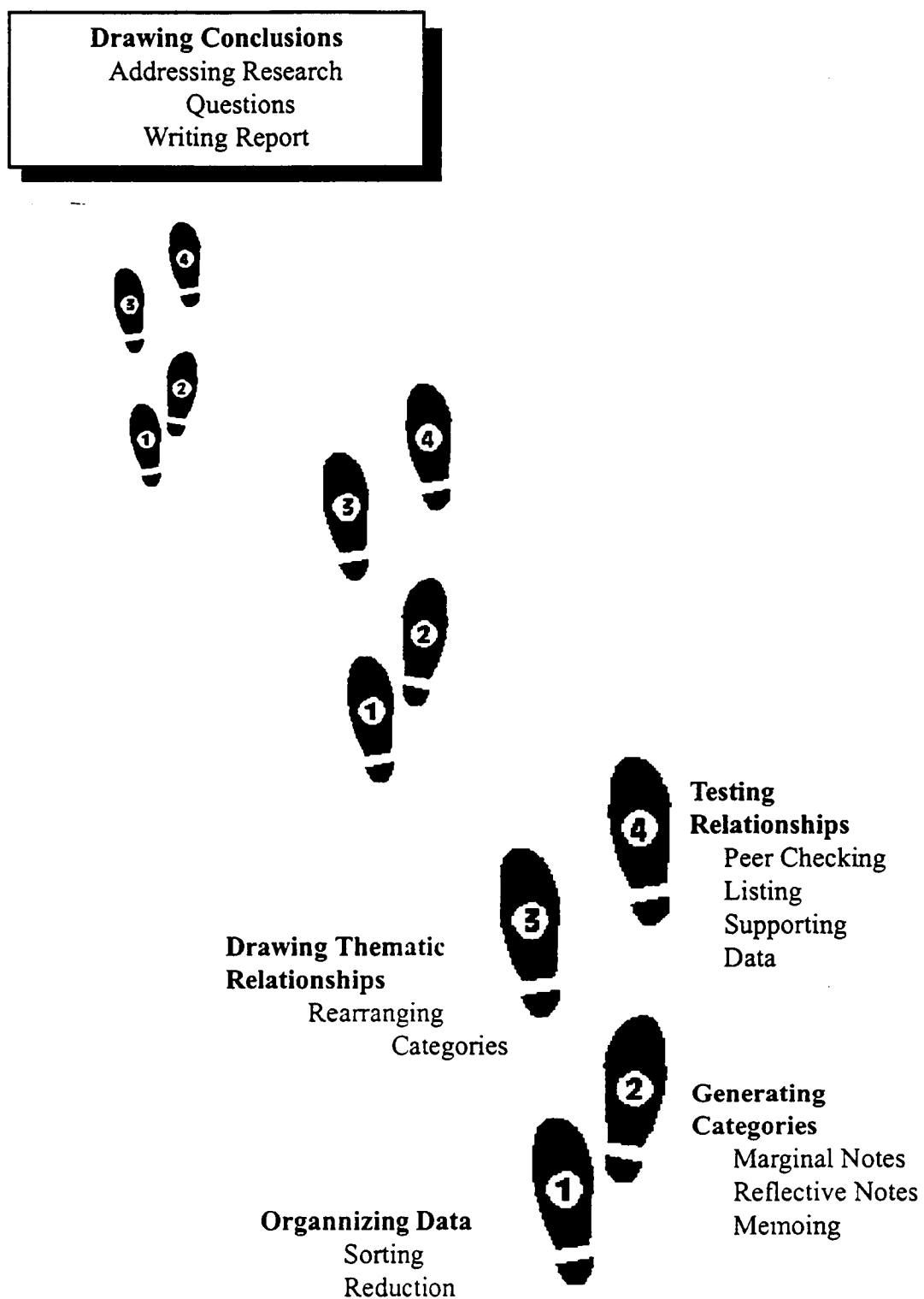


Figure 5. Procedures for Data Analysis: A Recursive Process

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND FINDINGS: THE CONTEXT OF ON-SITE VISIT

This chapter presents findings pertaining to the chairs' perceptions of the adequacy of training they received from NCATE and their experiences with various forms of NCATE/state partnerships (often referred to as the "joint visit" by the chairs). Annah's story of an on-site visit help set the stage for the data presentation.

One research question in this study sought the chairs' perceptions of the adequacy of the training provided to the Board of Examiner members. The findings presented here suggest that the chairs are, in the main, positive about the training they received from NCATE. They believe BOE training system has improved over time and has a number of strengths. The improvements notwithstanding, a number of the chairs expressed concerns in the training system which might lead to problems in assessing the quality of work performed by BOE members.

The chairs' experiences with NCATE/State Partnerships are presented in this chapter as well. While not a part of the original design, this topic received frequent reference by all the BOE chairs. The partnership issue appeared to demand the special attention of the chairs as they prepared for and conducted the on-site visits. Three questions were addressed in the analysis of the chairs' experiences with the NCATE/State Partnership Program. First, was the NCATE on-site visit process affected by the presence of a state team? Second, was the outcome of the on-site visit significantly affected by the

presence or absence of a state team? Third, did the variation in the joint visit result in inconsistency in the outcome of BOE teams' on-site visits? The analyses of the interview transcripts yielded some interesting answers.

Annah's account of an on-site visit sets a framework for analyzing BOE training and the NCATE/State Partnership Program.

An On-Site Visit⁷--Annah's Story

Although each BOE chair was asked to describe his/her most recent team chair experiences, all but one chair⁸ "walked me through" the on-site visit process in general terms. This was clearly evidenced by using the present tense in describing the sequence of events and by using phrases denoting habitual behaviors. The following examples illustrate the use of the present tense by the chairs:

Once I know that I'm chairing a team, within the week of my notification generally I make contact with the institution just to introduce myself and begin to have [a] dialogue on when a pre-visit will occur because I think it's real important for me to feel comfortable with the area and for them [the institution] to feel comfortable with me.... (Margaret, p. 4)

So I try to work with the institution, so the visit, while it sticks to all the things on the template, that it works for them. (Annah, p)

On Monday night now we really get down to that schedule again to be sure that we're covering everything, to be sure that classes have been observed and we've put someone in between interviews and reviewed the documents. (Wilma, p. 13)

⁷. The entire NCATE process embodies several other phases and has been reviewed in Chapter Two. Supporting materials are included in the Appendices. The BOE on-site process is the focus of this study and presented here.

⁸. This BOE chair had chaired only one team at the time of the interview.

The use of the present tense suggests two things. First, it suggests that BOE members draw from all their BOE experiences in reconstructing their experiences as chairs. This finding led to the decision to revise the participant selection criteria to include all active BOE chairs instead of those who chaired in 1994-95. Second, it suggests that a high degree of consistency exists in how a particular chair conducts his/her NCATE on-site visits.

The story presented here is based on seventeen interviews. Annah's story was chosen as the initial presentation because more information was collected from female BOE chairs, a finding that reflects the make-up of NCATE BOE members. Annah's views, in general, also represent the experiences of male BOE chairs.

Before the Team Arrives

The Pre-visit.

When Annah receives notification from NCATE that she is scheduled to chair a team, she usually lets the matter rest for a week lest there might be a claim by the institution that she might have a "fundamental conflict of interest." Once confirmed by NCATE that the visit will take place, Annah contacts the NCATE coordinator at the institution. Before they start making specific arrangements, Annah gives the institution an opportunity to ask her what she will want; she also tries to "ferret out" if the institution

has any concerns. About four to five weeks prior to the on-site visit, Annah does her pre-visit which is usually a one day event, but one which Annah feels must happen.

I think I did one [on-site visit] without [a pre-visit], and I will never do another [visit] without [a pre-visit]. It's just too frustrating....[E]ven if it's just having two hours to talk with the person face to face, you really do need it [the pre-visit].

She tries to accomplish three things during the pre-visit: (1) Meeting with the president or the provost; (2) Meeting with the NCATE coordinator and the Dean or the person in charge of the unit to explain what the visit will be like; and (3) Working out the NCATE template for on-site visits including the facilities for the BOE team, interview schedules, materials in the document room, and logistics such as transportation for the team between the institution and the hotel. In accomplishing these tasks, Annah tries to be flexible and give the institution "as much feeling of some control of the process" as she can without compromising the integrity of the process. She also has it set up so that she can meet with the NCATE coordinator twice daily during the on-site visit, at the end of each day and the first thing in the morning.

Communicating with the Team Members.

As soon as she receives the team list, Annah writes a letter to all members introducing herself, welcoming them to the team, and letting them know if it is a joint visit. The team list tends to arrive late and the team members keep changing, events that frustrate her. She also asks the team members for their preference regarding the NCATE

standards on which each will focus and about the usage of computers. Annah likes to break down the standards by 1a, 1b, 1c, etc. so that a team member might be assigned, for example, to "1a, b, c and 2d, e." She ensures that each member will have assignments from at least two standards because "that helps generate more ownership in the report." She tries to let the team members know their assignments as quickly as possible. The fact that some BOE members do not use computers annoys Annah. She hates retyping people's reports but does not feel she can ask her secretary to do so. Thus she does the retyping herself. "The day I will know I've gone to heaven is when everybody on my team will use a computer."

Annah prefers that her team members notify the institution if they plan to arrive at the institution on Saturday or Sunday. The institution then will pass this information on to her so that she can decide when to hold the team's first meeting. Once the on-site visit begins, Annah sees her role as that of a "ringmaster." She appeared to be amused by her choice of the metaphor and then followed with the following explanation:

No. I think quite seriously [about] my job....I think the job of the chair is to insure that the tasks that need to be done get done. That all the pieces come together and then to allow the team to develop the synthesis, not to impose it.

After the Team Arrives

Activities on Sunday.

Annah prefers that her team members arrive at the institution by Saturday

afternoon, as she does, ready to start work on Sunday morning. She recognizes that the team members are not obligated to starting the on-site work until Sunday afternoon, however.

"It's [team members' arriving on Saturday] getting better because NCATE's really encouraging this but you still have no real authority to make someone do it.... There's no way you can hold a gun to someone's head and force them to do it."

Nevertheless, Annah's personal bias taints her perceptions of the team members.

"I'm embarrassed to realize this... I make a lot of judgment about how someone is going to operate by whether they will go over on Sunday morning...."

When they arrive on campus, each team member comes with a preliminary rating of the institution's compliance with each standard based on their reading of the Institutional Report (IR). Along with the preliminary rating are questions which will be addressed during the on-site visit.

Around 1:30 pm Sunday afternoon, the team holds its first meeting. Team members become acquainted with each other and begin to plan how to proceed. Some of the afternoon is spent in the document room. The evening includes an "official dinner" with the institution's officials, usually around 6:00 pm. By 8:00 pm, the team is back at work, each team member presenting individual ratings and rationale using an NCATE produced chart and transparencies as a guide. The objective is "to identify areas where more information is needed than what we already have." Before the meeting is over, Annah makes sure that team members know their assignments for Monday and that each person signs up for two or three class observations. Annah does not think that observing

classes adds much to the process. Nonetheless, she ensures that classes are observed to maintain consistency with NCATE's guidelines for the on-site visit. She explains:

For one thing, I'm not sure what it [observing classes] adds, but NCATE has told institutions that we're going to see classes, and that means if we don't see classes there are going to be really bent out of shape people....I tell people [team members] it's everybody's obligation to visit at least a couple, three [classes].

Activities on Monday.

During the morning hours, Annah and the assistant chair make a formal visit to the president's office and to various deans while other team members work in the document room. In the afternoon, she expects team members to begin interviewing groups and committees related to the operation of the professional education unit. These include the curriculum committee, advisory committees, alumni, student teachers, coordinating teachers and principals, etc., depending on which groups are available. Ideally, some committees will hold a working session so that the team may observe how they operate. Scheduling interviews with these groups is where Annah exercise flexibility with the institution during her pre-visit to the campus.

For Annah, Monday night is the most critical part of the entire on-site visit: "You really begin to hone in on what you need to know." The evening begins with a social dinner which is attended by all team members. Annah believes that a relaxed atmosphere helps cultivate the team spirit which is crucial for team members to feel comfortable with

each other once they begin to make judgments at the evening meeting.

In contrast to Sunday night's objective which is to identify areas where more information is needed, Annah sees the objective for Monday night as identifying problem areas and areas of disagreement. Where disagreement occurs, team members need to present their rationales for the positions taken. If a consensus cannot be reached, Annah pairs the two parties and asks them to re-evaluate the evidence for the standard(s) in question on Tuesday. This approach to resolving disagreement among team members has worked well for her.

Annah prefers that the assistant chair lead the Monday night meeting so she can focus on observing, listening and taking notes. She also hopes that most of the team have begun to write their evaluative comments. During the pre-visit, she requests that computers be set up in the hotel rooms to encourage team members to write early.

Believing that NCATE reviews tend to focus on the basic programs and ignore the advanced programs, Annah admittedly pushes the team to pay attention to the advanced programs as well. During the Monday night meeting, she reminds the team the need to review **basic AND advanced** [emphasis original] programs. She feels that her teams have been good about giving adequate attention to the advanced programs.

Activities on Tuesday.

In addition to completing scheduled interviews and visiting schools to ascertain student teachers' field experience, Tuesday's schedule is also dictated by the results of

Monday night's meeting. The team focuses on any "problem areas" identified on Monday night. Where the team have reached consensus on standards perceived as "not met" or "weaknesses," efforts are made to exhaust all evidences to see if the team consensus is warranted. Where disagreement exist among team members, additional information as well as re-evaluation of old data are sought in attempting to reach a consensus.

The meeting on Tuesday night can be either easy or hard, depending on how things have been going. "If I've done my job well, we already know where the areas of weakness are and we've reached some agreement that we all see them as problems." Using the "adequacy of meeting standards instrument" (see Appendix F), the team reviews standards and spends most of its time on standards which are either "met with weakness" or "not met" until a consensus is reached by the team.

A consensus is what Annah prefers for her team decisions. Consensus, however, is not always achieved. Annah recalls a visit she chaired where she had to resort to a team vote. She explains how she decides if a vote is needed:

[T]here just comes a point where you know there's no point in continuing. I try not to cut it [the discussion] off too soon, but I also refuse to let people be driven into the ground by debate, so it's a balancing process.... [W]hen I start hearing people say the same thing over and over again and you look and those two are involved and the others are going... disengaged. Then you know.

The Tuesday night meeting ends when a team decision is reached on all standards. It is then each team member's responsibility to write on their own assigned standards.

Activities on Wednesday.

The team meets and everybody reads their report to the rest of the team. Annah demands that all team members is present at the meeting and does not leave until she get their full written report. The report is a team report; she feels it is critical that all team members participate. "[T]he least you can do is pretend to listen." At 11:00 am, Annah and the assistant chair hold the exit conference with representatives of the institution. She welcomes any team members who want to attend the exit conference.

Sending the Report to the Unit Accreditation Board.

After the on-site visit, Annah has one month to craft the individual team members' reports into one team report. She sends a copy to every team member for their comments, asking for comments and final changes. She then sends the final report to the Unit Accreditation Board .

Annah feels that this is the worst part of the process for her as a BOE chair. So bad that she will probably not remain as a BOE member when her term expires. Several factors contribute to her thinking not to continue as a BOE member, as she explains:

[A]s a dean I can't always guarantee that I will meet [the deadline] to the day and that's not fair to the institution. And I just know that's my weakest point. Also I want everybody to have a chance to say something about [the report]. So it's hard....And then later, I get an evaluation of the team report that usually at this point makes me very angry because I know how hard the team and I have worked where frequently the comments [from the UAB] are snotty.

The Importance of the Pre-visit

Annah's story represents, by and large, the general practice described by the seventeen BOE chairs interviewed for this study. Yvona's words captures the similarities among the chairs in how they experience the on-site visits:

I've been on teams where everybody will, if you go into the dining room, you will find they kind of cluster together. I've been on teams where the team doesn't function together much. I've been on teams where the afternoon when we came back from campus before we sequestered for the evening, groups of us would go for walks. I've been on teams where that didn't happen. It's interesting. (pp.9-10)

Albeit in different words, all chairs regard the pre-visit as a vital part of the on-site visit, though it is only a prelude to the actual visit. Taken together, the chairs identified two functions the pre-visit served: (1) logistical and (2) psychological. Myra explains:

I found [the pre-visit] to be very worthwhile. I got to know the folks at the institution, see where things were, met the head of the department, worked out a very detailed schedule of which team member was going to be interviewing which faculty member or administrator at what time, where, so on. I think that's an extremely important task for the chair to accomplish. The time is short during a visit, and I believe you're better off to go in with preliminary appointments made, not that that can't be added to or mended or whatever. (p.12)

Margaret fleshes out the kind of "detailed schedule" to which Myra refers:

[W]e in that pre-visit set up what's going to happen with facilities, where the team's going to be staying, what the work room is like, what the work area on campus is, what interview agenda, what are the details and the work through, what are the logistics, rest room accommodations, people, what's the plan for transportation from the hotel to the university, all those kinds of details that the local person can then get the full logistics of the interview schedule worked out. When I leave, there is a general one that's

done and then they will verify. If it's a joint state NCATE visit, the state person visits at the same time that I visit as an NCATE person, so that we indeed are able to work through and know which meetings there's going to be a state and an NCATE person attending and which is only going to be a state and which is only going to be an NCATE along the way so those are the details that are done and that usually takes all morning and then we do some additional verification after lunch and get ready to leave at 2, 3, 4 in the afternoon.... [T]hen I come back and I communicate back with the team as to what they need to plan, where they need to fly into, what the accommodations will be, where they'll be staying, what it appears the weather's going to be, any special considerations along the way and that sort of thing. (pp.4-5)

Often, the pre-visit effects changes in the plan the institution might have made in setting up document room(s) or meeting rooms as Dee Dee shares one of her recent experiences.

[T]he hotel had set aside a fairly small room for the team [meeting] room. While the NCATE team with the observer would be four and could probably have been okay. The state team had seven or eight people and they said "oh no, this won't do. So we went down and we looked at another set of rooms and they were able to put those aside. So in some ways, making sure the arrangements are right. (p.18)

For Kim, the changes may be more than a different set of rooms. They may include what should be in the document room and how they should be organized:

I usually get there in the afternoon and spend that afternoon and the next 1/2 a day looking at the facilities, the team room, and going over all the logistical things, documents, look at the team room, give them a list of what I need in my team room both at the hotel and at the institution. I look at the exhibits and see how they're organized. If they're missing things, then I point out what's missing. And I may even suggest that they change certain ways of organizing their exhibits. (p.11)

The BOE Training

Aside from the quality of the standards themselves, the effectiveness of NCATE's

function of quality assurance for teacher education is only as good as the effective application of the standards (Al, 1996). Since the application of NCATE standards are carried out by NCATE teams made up of members of the Board of Examiners (the BOE members), it follows that rigorous application of the standards depends largely on the quality of the BOE members. In the "Guidelines for Board of Examiner Members," NCATE enumerates qualities which BOE nominees should possess (NCATE, 1994; see Appendix H). In essence, it stipulates that the nominee should demonstrate (1) expertise in the field of professional education, (2) skills in use of evaluation techniques, (3) good writing skills, (4) ability to make unbiased professional judgments based on NCATE standards and (5) good interpersonal skills.

A key component of the 1986 NCATE redesign is the intensified training programs for the BOE members (Jones, 1991; Gollnick & Kunkel, 1986). How adequate do the BOE members view the training?

BOE Training for Conducting the Initial Accreditation

Since the first group of BOE members was trained in 1986, NCATE has provided one training session on Initial Accreditation for BOE members. In 1992, NCATE started providing training twice a year for those BOE members who had assumed or would assume the role of BOE team chairs. The seventeen chairs interviewed in this study received training in different cadres. Some were trained in the late 80s, while the majority received their initial BOE training in the early 90s. Many of them had received their

second training which was for conducting Continuing Accreditation.

The training system for BOE members since its implementation in 1986 may be best characterized as evolutionary, with both the organization and content of the training being improved over time. The BOE chairs interviewed are not only aware of this evolutionary process but also seem to be very sympathetic with NCATE when they do identify weaknesses in the early training sessions.

I think the training sessions have improved because we've had more experiences of meeting with various aspects of the visit. (Kim, p. 3)

I've been through four training sessions. The first one was probably most chaotic, simply because everything was so new. So I can't...it's not fair to judge anything on the basis of that. [I]t's kind of like playing a game that you invent rules as you go along because we really didn't know how we were supposed to operate. ... By the time I went through the team training, that was pretty well organized. (Annah, p. 14)

I've been to three training sessions. One back in the fall of 89, the initial training for BOE members, and that was kind of a lukewarm experience.... I know that given the fact that I was one of the first ones through and they're [sic] still finding their way. That's probably part of the reason why we didn't get [what we'd expected out of the training]. (Carol, p. 9)

That particular training was not nearly as well done as this last one appeared to be. ... There were a lot of people disgruntled in [the first] training. [T]his last training I was at was much better. There was just a different tone about the way in which they were conducting the training. I think this might be sort of maturity. (Terrie, p. 8, p. 12)

An interesting deviation from such "evolutionary" descriptions of the quality of the training sessions occurred when two chairs started talking about their recent experiences with the training.

I guess I was a little bit disappointed with the last one I attended because it appeared... it seemed to me that NCATE still was not certain about some of the interpretations, and I can understand you know they probably weren't because these new standards were just going into effect. (Carol, p.

10)

I didn't think that it was as well-conceived or as clear. ... It wasn't well-organized. Really. They had some people from the big board [UAB] that were there and I to this day don't know what they were talking about.... It wasn't as good as the first one and so I didn't feel as comfortable when I left and I know many of my colleagues felt less comfortable with this training. (Yvona, pp. 17-18)

What might explain these perplexing deviations? Could it be that the characterization of the BOE training as an evolutionary process simply does not hold? But then, what about the preponderance of evidence supporting the evolutionary characterization? Or should the deviation be viewed as "incidental" and be ignored? An "incidental" interpretation does not describe my overall experience with either Carol or Yvona.

Upon repeated reading of the transcripts and much struggle with the meanings of their comments, I realized that the key to understanding this deviation from the pattern lied in the timing of the training Carol and Yvona had experienced. As Carol pointed out, the training session she attended took place in 1994, the period during which the NCATE 1995 Standards were formulated and finalized. The training of which Donna spoke took place in the early cycle of the Continuing Accreditation change. Common to both training sessions was the fact that they dealt with elements and concepts differing from the emphasis of the training sessions focused on Initial Accreditation. In other words, the content of both training sessions was at earlier developmental stages.

Having resolved this issue, I became more confident with the evolutionary theory in describing the NCATE training of BOE members on Initial Accreditation. How, then,

had the training sessions evolved over the last ten years? Several themes emerged from the transcript analyses which illustrated the improvements in the process. It should be noted that, while improvements had evolved over the past ten years, they did not occur sequentially within neatly defined time frames. No specific time was identified, nor should be, in the breakdown of the presentation. While thematic improvements were clearly discernible, the evidence supporting the themes was closely intertwined making the breakdown of the themes appear artificial at times and the presentation of evidence redundant in certain places.

Theme 1. Trainers--from Reliance on Outsiders to Homegrown

A basic objective of the training is to ensure that the would-be BOE members would properly interpret the NCATE standards. The earlier training sessions tended to rely on experts in the field of education who were brought in to explain the theoretical underpinnings of the various standards. While a basic understanding of the theory undergirding the standards is necessary, the presentation of theories proved of little utilitarian value to BOE members in conducting actual on-site visits. This was attested to by those who participated in the early training sessions and those who experienced later training alike:

[W]e had in dealing with, for example, understanding the standards, we had you might call them outside experts who would come and give lectures on certain aspects of a particular standard. ...[S]o you have the major presentation and you had discussions about the various aspects of the lecture. (Kim, p.3)

[T]ypically what they've done in the past for NCATE BOE training is to bring in trainers to be sort of the content trainer. Now they identified certain key people who were experienced BOE members to lead certain parts of the training so it seemed sort of more of a home-grown kind of

training rather than bring in the experts and tell them [trainees] how it should be. (Terrie, p. 11)

I think NCATE is doing a more hands-on approach to training BOE members, less theoretical applications of standards and more practice in using the standards. (Myra, p. 8)

[I]n the first training we spent a lot of time having some people from a research-based institution that understood accreditation very well, giving us a lot of philosophical discussions about knowledge base and while I think that was great discussion, I think for a fairly high percentage of the group it was pretty much wasted. ...I didn't say wasted, I didn't say wasted. It was college people, researchers, with a research orientation and while I sort of enjoyed the discussion and it was excellent presentations I'm not sure people ... gained very much from that deep philosophical discussion of knowledge bases and models of teacher preparation. (Don, pp. 3-4)

I was trained in the summer of 91 or 92. It wasn't a real good training program. I mean the trainers are highly professionals. But the training was too academic. We were given lots of readings which were their research findings. It's not that research findings are not important. But if they want us to learn about those [findings], send it to us ahead of time. The training should be more about practical things.... (Dawn, p. 2)

Theme 2. Content--from Heavily Theoretical to Focusing on Practical Issues

The shift in BOE training from theory to practicality would seem to be a natural outcome of the introduction of more homegrown trainers, i.e. experienced BOE members. But the transcript analyses seemed to suggest that such a shift of emphasis was NCATE's conscientious effort to improve the quality of the BOE training. Two pieces of evidence found in the transcripts supported this interpretation.

First, the shift of emphasis from theory to practicality appeared to have resulted from NCATE's response to BOE members' feedback on the quality of the training sessions. Two chairs' comments best represented this perception:

One thing that I've been really impressed with NCATE about is that I think that they do try to listen to what people tell them.... I think they heard

what people were saying about the training and I think that they have tried to modify the training to incorporate more of people's suggestions from previous training sessions.... (Terrie, p. 19)

I think NCATE is doing a commendable job on trying to improve on not only the standards but the whole process. They seem, over the last few years, to be much more receptive to suggestions, comments, and criticisms than what they were in the past. (Carol, p. 20)

Second, with more experienced BOE members involved in planning the BOE training sessions, the training became more detailed in how to conduct the actual on-site visit; simulations became more authentic. Armed with real experiences in conducting on-site visits, the more recent trainers could even help would-be BOE members to anticipate the kinds of problems they might encounter when serving on BOE teams. Kim's following observation was succinctly to the point:

Now I think the tendency is not to use outside experts to come and talk about the standards but use experienced team chairs come and talk about the standards as well as the visitation process. So you not only have knowledge about the standards but you also have the experience of dealing with the dynamics of what happens on an actual visit. And so there are a lot of very practical pointers that you can give to trainees. You can anticipate the kind of problems that they might run into. (p.3)

Myra compared what she heard from other BOE members about their experiences with earlier BOE training sessions with that of her own:

I had heard from folks who had been trained before that there was a lot of theory, sitting and listening, especially about the knowledge base. The training had changed dramatically. There would be presentations and then there would be time to apply what we had learned and it was an informal setting. It was just altogether a good process. It was well laid out, we knew what was coming, what we were going to be expected to do. Didn't feel like we were wasting time. (p. 13)

Don's observation summarized these changes well: "The training team comes in

with a plan in mind and a process they go through; and they refine that into a process over time" (p. 2).

Theme 3. Training Format--from Preaching What They Do to Doing What They Preach

The NCATE accreditation process is essentially an evaluative process predicated upon the effectiveness of the on-site visitation conducted by a BOE team. The primary concern of the BOE on-site visit, as many of the BOE chairs explicitly identified, is to verify the authenticity of the claims made by the institution under review in its institutional report. This verification of institutional claims on the soundness of its teacher education programs is accomplished through review of institutional documents, observations and interviews, all of which is done in two and a half days. The success of this snap shot approach depends greatly, among other things, on the BOE members' ability to collaborate with one another in collecting data and constructing the BOE report which should serve the institution's interests as well as the purposes of the NCATE review.

This collaborative process and constructive perspective in conducting the on-site process were advocated to BOE trainees from the inception of the BOE training sessions. But little of what had been preached by NCATE was modeled in the training process characterizing the early BOE training sessions. Instead, much of the early training sessions adopted, as some of the stories presented under themes one and two suggest, a lecture format.

As the changes in the training personnel and training emphases took place, so did changes in how the BOE training was conducted. This was discernible in the evidence

presented above. The chairs' remarks, below, provided a fuller account of how differently the training approach had changed:

[T]he first thing we did this time was to compare the old standards and the [95] refined standards. Well, now I think that if this had been done the way it was done three years ago, they would have stood up there with everything on transparencies organized and told us this is what was in the old one and this is what is in the new one. But instead, we were divided into groups and we were asked to look for ourselves...come up with what we thought were the differences, what were our questions about it and concerns and then that was brought back to a large group for discussion. So that was just one example. And they tended to do that kind of thing throughout the training to get people more actively involved rather than passively presenting information in sort of a passive process mode. (Terrie, p. 10)

There were a lot of activities that had to do with team building because once you serve on a BOE team...you became very close to the people who served on your teams. ...[W]e worked in our small teams where each person had an assignment to work out. And so we came back [from the simulation site visit] and we had a consensus session where the small group went through the standards to see whether you know the institution met the standards.... (Kim, p. 3)

I think it's helpful that they divide you into smaller groups...rather than having everything be in the large group format. (Don, p. 2)

Theme 4.NCATE--toward Maturity

If the 1986 NCATE redesign is likened to the re-birth of the organization and the accreditation process for which it stands, then it can be said that the organization, at least its BOE training system, has struggled through its "teen" years, figuratively as well as literally. It is on its way toward maturity. Although only Terrie used "maturity" in describing the improvements in NCATE's BOE training system, most other BOE chairs' comments seemed to affirm this description.

In Dee Dee's remarks, the names of the places where the BOE training took place

are omitted to maintain confidentiality. It is important to point out that the three training sessions of which Dee Dee speaks represent, respectively, the very first, the early 90s and the most recent BOE training sessions. The sense of the NCATE training system progressing toward maturity was apparent in Dee Dee's reflection:

During the pilots [very first BOE training], we had a disadvantage because there wasn't any actual example of materials, there wasn't IR [institutional report] to look at. By the time we got to [], there were pieces of IRs that could be used in the simulation. By the time we went to [], they had their whole exhibit room intact and the IR for everybody to look at. So I think looking at materials and being able to ask people questions is a pretty close approximation of what you're actually going to do on a visit. If you can have people engaged in success of approximations of what you want them to do or what you're preparing them for, then that's a kind of, of education you can have. They're not just learning about something, but they're actually learning to do it. (p. 6)

Another piece of evidence for a toward-maturity conception was NCATE's willingness and ability to provide specific answers to BOE members' questions on key issues. A case in point was the issue of making a professional judgment. NCATE accreditation process is ultimately one based on the professional judgments of BOE teams and of UAB (NCATE 1994; NCATE 1992). Thus, the basis on which professional judgments are made is crucial to the integrity of the judgments made and, consequently, they should be clearly defined for BOE members. Terrie offered her perceptions of how NCATE has approached the issue in its BOE training sessions over the years:

I was stunned by the number of times questions were asked for definitive answers and people were told by the people in NCATE and by the trainers that were there: "Well, it's a matter of professional judgment." That so much of it relied on your own professional judgment and that wouldn't have bothered me so much except that it was clear to me that a lot of the people at the training session lacked what I would consider good professional judgment.... (p. 8)

Although that [making professional judgment] is actually true and NCATE says that, there was less emphasis on that this last time. There was more emphasis on collecting data and making your decisions based on data that's available rather than sort of just wrote it off as professional judgment instead of something that you've really investigated. Good professional judgment would imply collecting data, and I think they were a lot more clear about the importance of collecting data. (p. 20)

Dee Dee spoke of NCATE's improvement in providing feedbacks to BOE trainees in training sessions:

I think NCATE itself has gotten better about being willing to say to people, "No, you've gone too far here in giving people [institutions under review] feedback. I think early on, because it was fairly unclear that feedback wasn't as good about what you did on the training, and so you went not knowing for sure, not having as much confidence in your own skill level, whereas now I think they have people [trainees] write; they give them feedback; they have them refine. So it's a little tighter.

The improvements in the NCATE standards themselves have also made the more recent BOE training easier. Frequently used examples by the interviewees were the evolution of "conceptual framework" from "model" to "knowledge base." Another example was the separation of the "diversity" requirement from the qualification of teacher education candidate and faculty. While NCATE's expectation of teacher education programs having a diverse student body and faculty was desirable, the participants believed that mixing the diversity requirement with the qualification of faculty and teacher candidates (the qualification standards) created an undue dilemma to BOE teams in their deliberations of an institution's compliance with the standards. Separating the two, on the other hand, allowed the teams to address both instead of being forced to choose between valuing diversity and valuing other indicators of candidates' and faculty's qualifications. The previous qualification standards caused much debate, hence, confusion among BOE

teams on their proper application. The surrounding controversy was a constant source of irritation, drawing criticism of the NCATE process from both friends and. NCATE's clarification of how diversity should be interpreted (i.e., the plan, the effort, and the result) further enhanced consistent application. While discussions on proper emphasis one should assign to the plan, the effort and the result continued, what diversity meant in the NCATE context was no longer subject to differing interpretation.

While most BOE chairs were positive about their BOE training experiences and, especially, about the improvements they had witnessed, many of them expressed concerns about certain aspects of the system. Such expressions suggested a respectful degree of impartiality toward NCATE on the part of the BOE chairs in sharing their experiences. This fact also supported the trustworthiness of the information they provided.

Although pseudonyms are used throughout the data presentation, the relatively small number of BOE chairs interviewed makes it difficult to conceal their real identity to those closely involved in the NCATE process. Recognizing the real person behind the pseudonym becomes even easier when their stories involved the professional roles they might have assumed either on various NCATE boards or in other professional organizations. In order to ensure the speakers' complete anonymity, no names were used in presenting evidence in the following section.

Theme 5. Concerns with the BOE Training System

The most vocal concern has to do with the rigor of the screening mechanism which ensures the quality of would-be BOE members. The following passages represent

individual voices reflecting this concern:

We had been there since Sunday. On Thursday we were talking about how the training was going one of the men stood up...[W]ell, he just thought that NCATE needed to make its terminology much more clear because it was just today that he realized that "cooperating teachers" was an actual term that was used in a specific way. He just thought up until this day that they were talking about nice people. And I thought, this was a guy who ... doesn't have any training in education or anything.

I have two problems with the training. The first is that it does not seem to have a good way to ensure consistent understanding at the end of the training. My second is, however you do that, that if somebody does not perform well, that they not be used. And that's true after the visits as well. It's been done; but it's very minimal at this point.

Although they [NCATE] do have the mechanism that eliminate those not qualified. But unless you are blatantly horrible, you will be called on to participate.... There should be some standards for team members. They should reach a certain level of consistency before going out on a team.... They should demonstrate a certain level of consistency as a result of coming out of the training.

I think you should err on the side of not using people if they aren't and I really ... I guess that's one of the disappointments I have with the system, is I really don't see the system screening out team members as rigorously as they should.

On the other hand, three chairs contended that a screening mechanism does operate during the training sessions and after BOE members have actually served on BOE teams. These three chairs described the screening measures which are paraphrased as follows:

1. Trainees' behaviors in interacting with each other are closely monitored by the training personnel.
2. Trainees are asked to identify, among those with whom they have interacted during the training, top three trainees with whom they would prefer to work on future BOE teams.

3. BOE members who demonstrated acceptable performances but received questionable evaluations during the training would be assigned to BOE teams with highly qualified chairs so that further observations could be made regarding their actual performances.
4. Each BOE member, including the chair, is evaluated for his/her performances by each other as well as by the institution visited by the BOE team (see Appendix I). NCATE collects these evaluations, the results of which are incorporated in future assignments of BOE members. Those BOE members who receive consistent poor evaluations are not used any more and are likely to be put on the "inactive" list.

Should NCATE be given the benefit of the doubt, i.e., that the screening system is in place? How should one account for the concerns raised by some of the BOE chairs? Their views cannot be ignored, for stories about "unqualified" BOE members were heard from all the participating BOE chairs. Aside from the persons quoted above, similar stories are recounted in Chapter Five.

One approach to accounting for unqualified BOE members, despite the seemingly rigorous screening mechanism, might be the fact that it is simply difficult for NCATE to "kick out" someone who is regarded by his/her nominating organization as a competent professional. Doing so would be tantamount to a slap in the face of the nominating agent by NCATE. This sentiment could be sensed in the following remarks:

I've had some team members who are just nice people. I don't want to hurt their feelings either. But it's a little like my letting somebody go through a teacher ed. program because I don't want to hurt their feelings, and I know they're going to be lousy teachers.

Now I wouldn't want to have to be the NCATE person. It's one thing to talk to an undergraduate in a formative way, counseling them out [of the teacher ed. program]. It's another to have somebody who's a colleague who has been recommended by some association and you're going to get some flack from somebody for saying no. But for the integrity of the system, it has to happen.

Another approach to accounting for unqualified BOE members might have to do with the nature of any human organization. The BOE training system, like other phases of the NCATE process, is a human effort involving large numbers of people with all types of background and personalities. No human effort is perfect and, consequently, we must accept the imperfection while continuously seeking improvement. Would NCATE accept such a justification for concerns expressed? Should NCATE accept such a justification? At what level can and should the imperfection be deemed acceptable?

A third possibility might be that those who raised these concerns regarding NCATE's quality control mechanisms simply did not have the benefit of having all the pieces of the puzzle. That is, they were not fully aware of the screening measures in operation; nor were they privy to statistics pertaining to the number of BOE nominees who did not progress to becoming BOE members. Neither were they aware of the number of BOE members who were "weeded out" due to their consistently less than satisfactory performance. Both scenarios, I should point out, were suggested to be true by several chairs. Should they have the knowledge of these statistics, one might add, they might have a different sentiment about NCATE's quality control mechanism. What would NCATE do, then, to demonstrate the effectiveness of its quality control mechanisms? Closely related to the issue of NCATE's quality control was the concern with drastically different levels of sophistication in teacher education with which BOE nominees brought to the BOE training, i.e., their ability to properly interpret and apply NCATE standards. The "cooperating teacher" incidence Terrie reported earlier speaks to this concern. Other BOE chairs made similar observations as well:

Some were professional educators, some were state people, and some were public school teachers. Much of the information provided at the training was really basic. But this may be really necessary information for the state and public school people. So I think there should be different training sessions for different people. (Dawn, p. 3)

It's hard when you've got people as the BOE cadre groups are, who are from one end of the spectrum to the other in terms of the level of understanding of teacher education, the level of understanding of the knowledge base or conceptual framework. We have people [from] who have never thought about it all the way to people who are far more experienced and more in-depth in their theoretical analysis than I am. And you get to bring them together and you got a week to somehow bring them all to some similar level. (Annah, p. 15)

It is a concern. But I don't want to generalize too much. Let me use myself as an example. That'll be safe. I've taught over ten years in the secondary classroom. Always involved in professional organizations. ...directed teacher ed. programs, gone through the training to do visits to institutions of higher education in the state as part of the state approval process. I'd written for the state and the institutional report. Had I not had all these experiences and gone directly into the NCATE BOE training, I would have been at a much different place in my preparation at the end of that week than I was.... (Don, p. 15)

It's a concern but I don't mean to imply that there are people from higher ed. that don't have trouble with that learning curve.... We need to work on tailoring the process a little more to providing some of the special needs of those people. (Don, p. 16)

I think it [the concern] has been off and on. I remember that they talked about perhaps having an early day or an extra day early for people from [] (Dee Dee, p.5)

Having the trainees engaged in intensive simulation activities including using actual institutional reports and conducting mock interviews during the BOE training helped in bringing about some consistent understanding of the NCATE on-site process. So did a carefully constructed BOE team with special attention given to selecting a strong team chair. The concern appeared serious enough to warrant more actions for improvement.

A third concern was expressed more as an observation by two chairs. Given the evolving nature of the NCATE standards and the fact that the BOE members received only one formal training in the process, inconsistency in interpreting the standards might result from the BOE members' having received the training at different times.

I think what causes different interpretation of a certain standard is maybe the periods at which you may be trained. For example, when I was trained in [place and time], I have never been to another training of initial, so everything that has changed in terms of the initial visit where they reworked the standards and whatever changes they've made, I haven't had an opportunity to sit with NCATE again and even talk about those changes and what impact those changes would have on the work that I do on BOE. It seems to me that you would need some kind of updating or whatever session.... You need something to kind of update you and bring you up to par. (Wilma, pp. 30-31)

[I]f you're on NCATE BOE and you only go out once a semester..., you can sort of become stale unless you're thinking about it all the time.... [Y]ou could get kind of a lapse in what you know. Now at AACTE, there are always sessions designed for NCATE people who are involved in NCATE or who want to know more about NCATE.... Of course, there's BOE Reporter that are designed to keep people up to speed. (Sharon, pp. 7-8)

What about BOE members who for various reasons do not go to AACTE? Can reading about the changes in NCATE standards yield the same benefits as attending an update session? The answer for Wilma was "No."

The initial training for BOE members was a key component of the 1986 redesign. Training sessions for BOE chairs, however, was not in place until 1992 (See Appendix ? for a list of BOE/chair training sessions provided by NCATE). The major difference between the BOE training and the chair training, reported by those chairs who had participated in both, was that the chair training focused primarily on how to manage the

team and how to write the BOE report.

The chairs reported two major benefits of having participated in the chair training. First, it provided an opportunity to share with other chairs common problems encountered during an on-site visit and specific techniques effective in addressing the problems. Second, knowing that other chairs had similar experiences with teams and addressed similar problems in similar ways added much to their own confidence in leading future teams. In essence, the chair training session provided a support system in which the chairs learned from and counseled each other.

An interesting finding with regard to chair training was that six of the seventeen participants never participated in a chair training session. They wished that they had.

Various Forms of Joint Visits

Background

Unlike the more established accreditation associations in law or medicine which accredit law schools or medical schools and confer licenses to practitioners, the power of granting license to aspiring teachers rests with each state. In other words, teacher education programs must seek legitimacy from a state governmental branch and turn to the professional organization should it desire national recognition. But to obtain both, the program has to subject itself to two similar review processes. This accounted for much of the criticism that the NCATE process was too cumbersome and redundant with the state

program approval process.

In response, NCATE has developed articulation programs with individual state authorities. Namely, the State Partnership Program (the partnership). Three partnership options are available to states which wish to join NCATE in conducting program approval. Figure 6⁹ provides a brief synopsis of the partnership options. It is NCATE's expectation that the partnerships with states will save time and resources, reduce duplication of effort of all involved in the process, and use national standards. In doing so, NCATE hopes that the partnership will serve as linkages for quality control in teacher education¹⁰.

As of December 1995, thirty nine states had voluntarily established an articulation agreement with NCATE under the auspices of the partnership program. Several points are worth noting in better understanding the partnership practices. A partnership agreement with a state is not required for an institution to seek national accreditation. Nor does a partnership require that all institutions in a state be reviewed by NCATE, with Arkansas being the only exception.

In the vast majority of partnership states, NCATE accreditation remains voluntary for institutions. In a few partnership states, state authorities have directed that all institutions be reviewed by NCATE. In a number of states, authorities responsible for public higher education have directed that all public universities and colleges be reviewed by NCATE. (NCATE, 1995; p. 57)

⁹ From "State Approved Teacher Education Institutions & NCATE," dated December 1995.

¹⁰ Source: *ibid*

TEAM COMPOSITION



Two Separate Teams

The states and NCATE choose a concurrent visit. States apply state program standards and NCATE reviews the unit using NCATE standards. Teams share their findings with each other.



One Joint NCATE / State Team

NCATE examiners and state representatives work together to determine whether NCATE's standards, and state program guidelines are met.



NCATE Team Only

NCATE examiners determine whether NCATE standards are met.

STANDARDS



NCATE Standards / Folios

Institutions respond to NCATE standards and NCATE-approved curriculum folios of national specialty organization.



NCATE Standards / State Standards Folios Optional

NCATE standards are applied to the school of education, and state standards are applied to program areas. Institutions that want national recognition for programs must respond to folios of national specialty organizations if their state standards have not been approved by the professional associations.



NCATE Standards/ Performance-Based Licensing

NCATE standards are applied to the school of education. In lieu of program standards, the state implements a performance-based licensing system that tests teaching knowledge and assesses teaching skill. folios are optional for those institutions which seek national recognition for their programs.

REPORT FORMATS



Two Reports

Institutions prepare two separate reports; one for NCATE and one for the state.



One Report / State Supplement

Institutions prepare one report in NCATE format. A supplement is prepared for any additional state requirements.



One Report

Institutions prepare one report in NCATE format.

Figure 6. NCATE / State Partnership Options

Consequently, institutions which have sought and maintained the NCATE accreditation can be found in all states including the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Alaska, with the only exception being Arizona. Of the 1315 teacher education programs recognized by their respective state authorities, five hundred and eleven, or 46 percent, have sought and are maintaining their national accreditation status¹¹.

The Partnership Program in Operation

Commonly referred to by BOE chairs as the "joint visit," the partnership received little attention in the initial design of this study. I did not realize how differently the joint visits could be from each other. Nor did I give much thought to how the various forms of the joint visit might affect the NCATE on-site process and, consequently, the results. As the interviews proceeded, the effects of the partnership on the on-site process became apparent:

It [the actual process] depends a lot on what kind of format it is, whether it's a visit where there's only an NCATE team on campus or whether there's a state team on campus or whether it's a joint team of NCATE and state people. (Terrie, p.)

When you go to the pre-visit and particularly when it's a joint visit, you sit down and you really negotiate out what does the state team need to do and what's the relationship between the state team and NCATE and that varies from state to state. (Dee Dee, p.15)

I think there are as many different partnerships and protocols as there are states. They are all different. (Annah, p. 3)

¹¹. From "State Approved Teacher Education Institutions & NCATE." A data sheet produced by NCATE dated December 1995.

How could there be so many different types of "joint visits" if NCATE had spelled out only three protocols under the partnership options? Further, how could so many of the BOE chairs interviewed talked about these various forms of "joint" visits so casually? With these questions, I decided to revisit NCATE's descriptions of the partnership. In the same pamphlet from which Figure 6 was reproduced, the following statement was found:

State/NCATE partnerships offer *flexible* processes for conducting joint state program and NCATE accreditation reviews. *States design a system which best suits their needs, and may revise that system as necessary.*
(italics added)

This statement which had previously escaped my attention became significant.

How "joint" is the joint visit?

Clearly, the partnerships are flexible. This flexibility requires that BOE chairs must consider a host of issues in setting up and managing the on-site visit. Since each state has "some individualizing piece" (Dee Dee, p.20) to its partnership agreement with NCATE, the chair must be familiar with what the state has negotiated with NCATE. During the pre-visit, the BOE chair then will negotiate with the state team chair on details concerning the format of the joint visit. Don explains:

[U]sually I'll meet them [the state team chair] at the pre-visit, because it's important they're a part of that. [If] I've not quite figured out what the relationship is between the teams at the visit and I'll try to find that out before I go [to the pre-visit], and then I'll really want to nail it down while I'm there. I'll want to know who's running the meeting. [If] it's a combined team, then you know how is that going to work with a co-chair from the state and the NCATE chair, what decisions are you responsible for; what decisions are we responsible for? Who does the writing? Is your team [the state team] going to be NCATE trained or does the state have another

process? All those things I need to find out. ...I want to find out from the [state] team chair how many of those interviews are going to have state team members in them as well as national team members. That's important, because if you have two teams there, then you probably want to have little longer time with them than if you have just one. ...I mean both teams need to get a certain amount of data, especially if it's two separate teams rather than a combined team. (pp. 33-34)

The variation in the format of the joint visit is not limited solely to what the state and NCATE have agreed upon. It seems also to be the result of the negotiation between the NCATE and state team chairs. Speaking of the extent to which the NCATE and the state teams collaborate, Margaret made the observation that Option Two states had a lot of different definitions of what Option Two meant as to the format of the joint visit. "But how joint is it?" asked Margaret. "There are different negotiations" (p. 13).

If the importance of negotiation was only suggested in Don's account, Wilma readily recognized it.

If there's a state team there with us, we also discuss with the state people, and of course we attend the meeting together, where there may be visits or interviews or whatever that we can conduct together. Or where there may be exhibits that we may need to share. If they have a sharing or if it's necessary for them to be sharing. ...When we talk to the state people we decide if we're going to share a meeting for exchange of ideas and whatever. (Willie, p. 6)

Dee Dee's remarks further highlighted the use of negotiation between the state and NCATE teams. With reference to whether or not the BOE chair had the choice of deciding the extent of the joint visit, Dee Dee explains:

You never have no choice if you take the choice. ...You may have to negotiate, and negotiation means you may have to give in on some things. But what you [the researcher] asked me was "Do you have the power to negotiate?" And yes, you do. (p. 20)

I don't think I would impose [my preference of the "joint" format]. But I

would certainly talk through and make clear what the NCATE team's needs would be *vis a vis* state's needs. And I'm a pretty good talker. I can get people around to saying "Oh, then it wouldn't make sense for us to be together. I wouldn't go in and say "No, you can't, we're going to do this." That's inappropriate. It's not civil. ... You have to be really clear about what you're after. They have to be clear what they're after. And you have to go through a few of them. I think you need to be persuasive and then you get what you need generally. (p. 21)

These comments, especially Dee Dee's, suggested that the variation in the format of the joint visit was influenced as much by the chairs' own judgment of what would work under the circumstances as by the agreement between states and NCATE. Jerry's and Yvona's stories add further evidence to this observation:

[O]f the partnership states, I think I've been in about two-thirds of them, either as a consultant or a team member or chair. And in every case there is a significant variation, regardless of what they think they are doing from whatever the [partnership] model was. In some cases the teams are merged [joint]. And other cases the teams aren't merged, but they are. I was chairing a state visit about two years ago where the teams weren't merged, but they were. We worked together, the NCATE chair and I read the protocol and basically, regardless of the fact that it said they weren't one of the merged teams, they were. (Jerry, p.19)

The visit, the one I just mentioned, that was supposedly a joint visit. But it just so happened that the state liaison [chair] wanted their own room. (Yvona, p. 3)

Given the myriad forms of the joint visit, three questions need to be addressed.

First, is the NCATE on-site visit process affected by the presence of a state team?

Second, is the outcome of the on-site visit significantly affected by the presence or absence of a state team? Third, does the variation in the joint visit result in inconsistency in the outcome of BOE teams' on-site visits? The analyses of the interview transcripts yielded some interesting answers.

For most BOE chairs, the answer to the first question raised above was a resounding "yes." An apparent effect of having a state team at the on-site visit is the amount of attention BOE chairs must give to the issue in question and the subsequent efforts made during the pre-visit in order to ensure a well coordinated joint visit. This was well-illustrated by the stories presented earlier in this section, and especially by Don's story.

The analyses of the transcripts revealed both positive and negative effects of having a state team on the NCATE process¹². On the positive side, a joint state/NCATE team means more human resources in collecting evidences and writing the final report, as reflected in the following stories:

The other thing is you've got more people to collect data and you've got more people to write. So you have less work to do in terms of actual writing assignments.... (Terrie, p. 27)

The difference a joint visit makes is how much additional assistance you get at doing the validation of information. ...If you have an NCATE team of 5 or 6 people and you're to validate everything and get no information or no input from the state [team], then you may be looking at the same thing two or three times...to get that information. ...On the other hand, if you're sharing information, then you get to dig a lot deeper and find out and validate because you're sharing the information with the state. (Margaret, p. 10)

[I]n the deliberations in the evening, both teams spent time together so they shared information. We for instance as an NCATE team would sit down and say we didn't find this, so we need to find this tomorrow, and very often someone from the state team would say well we found it, so you really have that many more people who have gone in different directions. (Yvona, p. 3)

[It] gives more people power to check files or to review syllabi or to interview and it's not that they are involved in decision-making but

¹² The same effects described here also apply to having a state observer on the NCATE team.

sometimes they can help with some of the work that needs to be done.
(Myra, p.12)

Aside from adding more people to collecting evidence and deliberating the finding, the state team also provides insights into the uniqueness of the state's teacher education programs, thus enabling the NCATE team to interpret its findings with more accuracy.

Examples of this enabling role played by the state people are:

[W]hen you sit around with colleagues and you're looking for an explanation of something and very often the state team will have insight into that state and what's required in that state that you probably wouldn't have coming from out of state to do that. (Yvona, p. 3)

The state people are often called on to explain some particular aspect of state rules that impact on programs and because they're knowledgeable about state rules and that kind of thing they can answer that. Here we have a requirement that teachers prepare in two areas at the secondary level unless they do a comprehensive area. Well, sometimes that's confusing to [NCATE] team members who are looking for a major and a minor or something of that nature. (Myra, pp. 12-13)

On the other hand, many BOE chairs identified problems presented by the collaboration with state teams. As was well illustrated by Don's story, BOE chairs must take the time to communicate with the state team chair before and during the pre-visit in setting up the on-site visit. Experiences and management skills were necessities for the collaboration to reap the kinds of benefits discussed in the above section. "It presents some dilemmas.... One is that it's a larger team so whenever you have a discussion, it takes longer in some way because you've got more people to contribute ideas" (Terrie, p. 28). Aside from recognizing this as a fact, however, none of the chairs seemed to see it as a serious concern. Nor did anyone complain about the fact that he or she had to spend extra time and energy to ensure the healthy collaboration.

From the chairs' perspectives, a more serious concern in collaborating with state teams had much to do with the quality of some state team members. In a few cases reported by the chairs, the quality was in question because certain state team members simply did not demonstrate an adequate working knowledge of teacher education. Dee shared one of her experiences with a state team as follows:

In [state's name], for instance, they had a very large team and they had a citizen member of their team, and when we were in groups together, the citizen member was somebody who talked a lot and who asked questions that didn't help us gather our data and that was frustrating. (p. 21)

More often, though, certain state team members' quality was of the BOE chair's concern when they sensed that some state team members' vested interests in the institution distort the information they collected. Margaret explained what some of the vested interests might be:

Now I think you get into another dialogue when you talk about people who are either graduates of an institution or teacher part-time for the institution or have a spouse employed by the institution or who wish to seek employment at the institution. You know you've got all those kinds of things that fly into it and some of that no one knows. (p. 10)

She then went on to explain what the vested interests may bring to the on-site review process:

One time I was chairing the [NCATE] team and it was a joint visit. We had a real strange state team that in retrospect I learned that several members of the state team had a vested interest in that university. I went on a gut-level hunch that we double-check everything because it didn't add up to what it should. They were feeding us this information that would benefit the institution.... (p. 11)

Jerry experienced a similar scenario of a joint visit at which he chaired an NCATE team. During this particular joint on-site visit, the joint team had the impression that the

institution seemed aware of what the team discussed at the team meetings. Some investigation revealed that one of the state team members was a graduate of the institution and had "leaked" information to the institution. The "leak" continued after the state team chair met with "the graduate." After further consultation with the state team chair, Jerry, as the chair of the NCATE on-site visit, asked "the graduate" not to participate in the team discussions any more.

One chair related a personal story which pointed to yet another source of concern with some state teams' ability to maintain objectivity in the evaluation process. The case concerned with a joint visit conducted at a historically black institution. The sensitive nature of the subject was such that the chair requested that I turn off the tape recorder during our interview. Instead of presenting the story in the chair's words, I can only share the experience based on my field notes. At the time when the joint visit took place, certain discrimination charges had been raised at the institution. "The atmosphere on the campus was so charged that some state team members were not voting based on the evidence but on their perceptions of what was happening as they perceived."

Certain types of agreement between the state and NCATE itself may cause difficulty to the joint visit, to which Margaret's following story attests:

I'll say that I was in one other state in which their agreement with NCATE was the NCATE team and the state team work jointly at state standards and NCATE standards and the state people looked jointly at state standards and NCATE standards. Like, wait a minute, we're not trained to look at your state standards and you had only a four-hour training session on how to look at NCATE standards. And rather than that working to be of greater assistance, that was like an albatross because you know I really didn't know what their state standards were in health education and frankly, during that time, I didn't care to learn. So it was a matter that we had a lengthy discussion related to why should an NCATE team come in that

spends two hours on Sunday afternoon of their training time to be trained on their state standards when in the course of the next two days we don't really have time to look at them. Why don't you look at your state standards and let us look at NCATE standards and, you know, we can share information back and forth. It was an OK visit but it was not one in which you felt that you were able to have...and they had a large state team, very large state team. (pp. 12-13)

In all fairness, the concerns with state team members' quality presented here also apply to BOE team members, as will be seen in Chapter Five. Further, most chairs pointed out that, overall, they were pleased or impressed with the calibre of state team members. Nonetheless, this view does not diminish the potential threats to the trustworthiness and the credibility of the NCATE accreditation process.

One chair tended to express views that, compared to all others', leaned to a negative assessment of NCATE. The current level of consistency in the NCATE accreditation process, in the chair's words, was "horrible." To this chair, the horrible level of consistency was an inevitable consequence of the many weaknesses characterizing every phase of the NCATE accreditation process, including the BOE training, the partnership, and the on-site visitation process. With respect to the partnerships, the chair commented:

Options for states contribute to inconsistency. You have people on the state team that might be the graduates of the institution, or has competing interests since there are competitions among the institutions in the state. Then you might have an articulate and persuasive individual [on the state team] who might bring about a completely decision as the NCATE team might have come to. There are state teams in some cases and not in other cases depending on the specific agreement between NCATE and the state. ...So I've watched many visits and worked with different types of protocols. Now I cannot say for sure that these are problems, but they are definitely potential problems. Over time, I can't help but asking questions about this process. ...With all these variances, how can you make the leap saying the variances do not affect the consistency?

It should be noted that none of the concerns expressed by this chair was not said by others. What distinguished this chair's remarks from those of others was that nothing positive toward NCATE was heard throughout the interview.

Many first-hand stories shared by the chairs suggested that questions about the NCATE process, like the one raised in the above quote, were not entirely unfounded. Set against such questions, one gets the impression that the outcome of the NCATE on-site visit must be significantly affected by the presence or the absence of a state team.

Further probing during the interviews and the final analyses of the interview transcripts, however, suggest that the chairs did not believe that the outcome of the NCATE on-site visit was significantly affected by the presence or absence of a state team. Annah's and Margaret's remarks reflect the BOE chairs' level of confidence in this regard:

[A]s far as NCATE is concerned, I don't think it affects the consistency of judgement about the NCATE standards. I would be considerably less comfortable saying that there was a consistency in terms of program evaluation because NCATE doesn't look at programs; NCATE looks at the institution. ...I don't think the protocols have as much an impact on the NCATE evaluation as they do on the state evaluation. (Annah, p. 20)

My observation, having worked on NCATE teams, is NCATE BOE members are very flexible in trying to work with others. They really do try. The teams I've been involved with have really tried depending upon what your agreement is with NCATE. So I don't think in the final decision that it swings it one way or the other. I think that decision was going to be there within from what we had picked up. (Margaret, p. 13)

Having concluded that the chairs did not believe that state team's presence would affect the NCATE team's decisions, one could deduct safely that the chair did not believe that the myriad variations of the partnerships would result in significant inconsistency in

NCATE BOE teams' decisions across board.

To a degree, the chairs' confidence in the consistency level of the NCATE on-site visit process is a reflection of their assessment of most state teams' quality. Terrie and Dee Dee each provided a specific scenario as did several other BOE chairs:

I've been on two teams in [state's name] where NCATE and state members function as one team. The state teams members seem to be as well trained as NCATE team members, professionally objective, and they're very balanced. (Terrie, p.28)

I was on a joint visit in [state's name]. It was a very, very good experience. The state did a good job of training the people on the state team so that we really could work together. We voted on all things together. It really depends on the level of training the people who are on the state team have had. (Dee Dee, p.20)

To a greater degree, their confidence in the quality of the process reflected the self-confidence in their individual and collective ability to conduct the NCATE process with professional integrity. Some of this high level of self-confidence may be attributed to the fact that all seventeen interviewees are accomplished scholars in their respective disciplines (see the Participants section in Chapter 3 for a more detailed description of the background of the interviewees). It is my contention, however, that much of the high level of confidence may also be attributed to two other factors which are at the core of this study. One of these factors are their perceptions of the BOE training which are rather positive. The other factor is the experiences the chairs have accumulated in conducting the on-site visits which is the focus of Chapter Five.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION: THE ON-SITE VISIT

The team does two things. One is officially they validate the information in a self-study [the IR]. That is an explicated statement of purpose in the initial visit. They also gather data that may be beyond the self-study, put all of that together and try to synthesize it in such a way that they can make a qualitative judgment about whether a standard is met or not met. And if it is met or not met, what are the areas of weakness that may exist in that standard. High level of judgment [is] called for, both in terms of what data to gather and what judgment to make about it.

-----Annah

This chapter continues the presentation of data. It begins with a description of how the chairs perceive the BOE team's role in the larger context of teacher education accreditation. The chairs' experiences with on-site visits to institutions are presented under the themes of "Building relationship with the institution," "Building the team," and "Building the case." The last section of the chapter is devoted to the chairs' perceptions of consistency in the current NCATE process.

The BOE Team's Dual Roles: Representative of the NCATE and of Teacher Education Profession

Although the accreditation decisions are made by the Unit Accreditation Board, the BOE report resulted from the on-site visit is the most important evidence on which the

accreditation decision is made. The vital role played by BOE teams is evidenced further by the fact that it is the main point of contact between NCATE and the institution under review. Insofar as the NCATE standards reflect the quality of teacher education at the national level, the BOE team's work is a reflection of the teacher education profession. The chairs perceived the BOE team's on-site activities as serving two roles. The BOE team is NCATE to the teacher education profession at large. At the same time, it represents the profession of teacher education! Dee Dee's remarks best capture the dual roles of the BOE team:

I think [the team] sees itself as, or at least I do when I'm on them and I think the people I've worked with [do], the representative of the profession, coming to get a sense of an institution both in order to validate that institution's sense of itself as it's presented in its IR and to give it a sense of how that set of practices and procedures and activities and conceptual framework stacks up against a national standard. So it provides a feedback to that institution, not feedback in all the details of what you might do to make yourself better but feedback in the sense of where do you stand right now in relationship to the standards that have been identified. When the BOE is out there, it IS NCATE because it's the only concrete experience that an institution has. They don't see the big monolith of NCATE with all the associations. They see these five people. And they are the representatives of the profession. I mean, you are a college professor, a high school teacher, a counselor, whatever it is you are, but you really set that aside and become a member of the team...because you represent all these different associations or groups. When you're working together you really are NCATE and the team working together really does take on an identity as this common, this group that represents the profession and the national standards. (pp. 11-12)

Dee Dee was not alone in her perception of the BOE team's roles as the representative of NCATE and of the profession at the same time. This perception was echoed by other chairs as well:

The team chair represents NCATE because institutions shape their view of

NCATE a lot on not only how the team behaves but how the team chair behaves toward the institution. I think the integrity of the NCATE process depends a lot on how the team chair handles the team and the relationship within the team and between the team and the institution. (Kim, pp. 6-7)

And that does a lot for the Education Department on campus; and it also does a lot for NCATE. When I go out as a BOE member I think, you know, I'm really going out as an NCATE representative and if we do not do a good job of making ourselves look like we know what we're doing and being gracious to the host institution, then the institution comes away with a negative view of NCATE. (Terrie, p. 2)

I think that the responsibility of the chair also involves a lot of PR work on behalf of NCATE and the credibility of the review process. And the team members represent that credibility, too, because when we're out there the team is in essence NCATE. I mean, what we do, what a team does reflects on NCATE. (Myra, p. 19)

I always tell the people when I go in that the BOE people are really just the eyes and ears for NCATE. We go in and we look for all the facts that we'll document what they're doing or what they say they have been doing, what they told NCATE they had been doing for the period between assessments. So we're just really the eyes and ears for NCATE. We provide the information and we take that information to the UAB. We don't make any decision as to whether a program should be accredited or not be accredited. Our decision is just to let NCATE know that we have found sufficient documentation to verify that the university has or has not satisfied the body of standards that [NCATE] has set forth. (Wilma, p.3)

There's no real reason to go in and just be rude or be arrogant or just insult people. I don't think that's good for the profession. I know it isn't good for NCATE because what people are going to remember is how they're treated. (Don, p. 25)

Suffice to say that the chairs shared this perception of the BOE team's roles during the on-site visitation process. So well was this perception articulated and so widely shared by virtually all the chairs that it served as the philosophy undergirding the tasks the BOE team performed during the on-site visit.

Annah's story presented in Chapter Four gave a glimpse of how these tasks were

accomplished and how intertwined they were during an on-site visit. They are presented here in more detail.

Building the Relationship with the Institution

To a great extent, the BOE on-site visit is similar to conducting qualitative research. Through interviews, observations and document analysis, the BOE team endeavors to develop insights into the "culture of evidence" to describe the effectiveness of the teacher education programs under review. As is true with any qualitative research endeavor, developing and maintaining a trusting relationship with those being studied is essential to obtaining accurate and trustworthy information. The chairs recognized the importance of building a level of trust with the institution from the very beginning of the process. The quality of the communication between the BOE team and the institution depended on a sense of trust.

I think the chair plays a key role in building the kind of rapport with the institution so that there aren't any surprises that occur.... You've got to build a trust with the institution and that starts in the first contact that's made. (Myra, pp. 19-20)

The team chair's role is really to make sure everything is carried out according to the processes that have been laid out. But that requires a number of things. It requires setting up the visit through the pre-visit in such a way that the lines of communication are set very well. (Dee Dee, p. 8)

I think the team chair has to have a good working relationship with the institution, and by that I mean, not that the chair has to bow down to the NCATE coordinator.... (Carol, p. 3)

Recognizing the Voluntary Nature and the Institution's Hard Work

The chairs achieved this goal by recognizing the institution's hard work, by commending the institution on its willingness to voluntarily participate in the NCATE accreditation, and by maintaining and conveying to the institution a professional attitude. But the chairs were not doing these things merely to establish the trust. As the following remarks demonstrate, they believe what they say to the institution:

[A]n institution that has gotten to this point [the on-site visit] has done an enormous amount of work. Wherever you go on campus, you need to emphasize that. You don't have to say "Oh, you have a wonderful program." But you can comment on the fact that this is a voluntary process, that the unit has invested an enormous amount of energy and work in this and that they could be commended for the effort. And that does a lot for the education department on campus, and it also does a lot for NCATE. (Terrie, p. 1)

I think the unit has to realize and NCATE members have to realize that you are invited to the campus. You don't just appear. (Margaret, p. 13)

[E]ven though NCATE is voluntary, it's an intense time for institution personnel. They've worked hard to get ready and then, all of a sudden, it's time for someone to come in and look at them. (Myra, p. 19)

The voluntary nature of the NCATE process, although an arguable point, was demonstrated in Chapter Four by the distribution pattern of the institutions maintaining the NCATE accreditation status. Few would argue that seeking NCATE accreditation is an easy task. What, then, would the BOE team say to the institution in this regard?

Conveying the Right Attitude

Recognizing the voluntary nature of the NCATE process and the institution's hard work in preparing itself for the process is part of the attitude. The chairs articulated additional elements of the "right" attitude to convey:

[I]n your contact with the institution, you can help them understand that you're not coming from a posture that there's got to be something wrong here and we're going to find out what it is. I think you approach it from the idea that we're pleased you volunteered to be involved in this process; that we want to learn about your programs; that the more you share with us the better we'll be able to do our job and accurately reflect the quality of your programs. You convey a positive attitude by not referring to the way things are done in another state or in another institution. But make it very clear that you value what they're doing and that you're pleased that you've been selected to learn more about it. And then, you make sure that the [BOE] team members talk to all the folks they need to on campus [so] that people aren't left out. (Myra, p. 19)

Having the "right attitude" does not stop at interacting with the institution. It needs to be acted out by the chair throughout the on-site visit, an important resolution to which many chairs spoke:

You should go in try not to have a judgment until you've really had a chance to gather data. I read the materials that are sent to me and I expect all the team members, whether I'm chairing or not, to have done that. You should come in with questions but not with prejudice, no prejudgment. (Annah, p. 10)

A good chair first of all has a very positive attitude about a visit, has left the home baggage behind, is there to facilitate an evaluation in which all team members are involved.... You assist in portraying the institution as positive a manner as the institution will allow themselves to be portrayed. (Margaret, p. 13)

The [team] I think has got to be very open and go into the visit with the idea that you're going to learn everything you can with those three or four days you're there. I think the team chair needs to make sure the team just

isn't out to get the institution. (Carol, p. 5)

I think the attitude is a series of things. One, that the business they're about is important, that the accreditation process is important to the profession and to that institution. You have to convey that as a BOE member. (Myra, p. 22)

To some the chairs, seeking the right attitude went even further. It meant that the BOE team should have the institution's best interest in mind when collecting and analyzing data during the on-site visit. At the same time, the chairs emphasized that having the institution's best interest in mind did not necessarily mean that the integrity of the process was compromised. Rather, it suggested that the team must exhaust all sources of information when a weakness or a "not met" was to be reported in the BOE report. The chairs' remarks reflected their sensitivity to this issue. To a certain extent, their remarks hinted at the dilemma with which the chairs struggled in balancing the interests of NCATE and those of the teacher education profession, both of which they claimed to represent:

You always have the best interest of the institution in mind. I guess I have one bottom-line definition of what I look for in an institution. That is, is this the program that I think will produce teachers that will go into a classroom that I want my child to be in? That's my bottom-line question. And I think you can answer this positively looking at a program. Or you can go in not having such a positive attitude and you probably won't find it either. Or you may find it but you may trip over it. (Margaret, p. 14)

[B]ut you also know that those people [at the institution] are as nervous as they can be and they've been digging around doing this stuff for a couple of years. So I think most [BOE] people really feel a compassion for the institution and feel also that your own professionalism is at state. (Yvona, p. 14)

And a lot of times it may be that you really want it to be there and it's just not there. ... It's when you get to one that's not been met. Then you start beating yourself over the head because when you say they have strong weaknesses in a particular area the institution has to respond to those weaknesses. And you want to make sure that there's nothing that you have

left unturned to finally say "No, it's just not there. It's just not there."
(Wilma, pp. 17-18)

I think a BOE member should have the attitude that what the institution is doing is right unless there's compelling evidence that there are problems. And that is not to say that the accreditation is a giveaway. But most folks who are doing things are trying to do it the best they know how to do it. That seems to conflict with what NCATE says, that unless there's compelling evidence the standard is met, vote "NO," that it's unmet. (Myra, p. 22)

From NCATE's perspective, it is possible Myra might have gone too far in advocating the institution's best interest. Other chairs might challenge her position as well, as Jerry's comments suggested:

If the evidence does not compel you to judge that a standard is met, say it is not met. It is the institution's responsibility to convince the BOE members that a standard is met. (p. 4)

Myra also recognized that her stance conflicted with the NCATE policy. However, it would not be entirely fair to say that Myra knowingly violated NCATE's policy with regard to the "compelling evidence" admonition. Her subsequent remarks substantiated her statement that the NCATE accreditation was not a "giveaway":

If you become aware that there are problems and you investigate and there is a problem. Then you have to say there's a problem here. That is what it is and, because this problem's so serious, this is the decision you have to make. But I think a positive attitude is important and an open attitude, that there are lots of different ways to do something. Yeah, attitude's important. (p. 23)

To the extent that Myra's inclination to give the institution the benefit of doubt was indicative of a similar attitude among many other BOE chairs, a potential threat to the level of consistency in applying the NCATE standards might result. The analysis of the transcripts in this study, however, does not support this speculation.

Myra's assertion that there are many ways institutions can meet the NCATE standards was reiterated by other chairs throughout the interviews. It will be revisited later in this chapter. Her belief that the team should be sympathetic with the institution was shared also by Don:

I'm a teacher educator and I'm an administrator; but I'm a teacher first. You don't want to come in and be the bad guy because, I mean I didn't wish those dear people [at the institution] any ill will in the process. There's nothing I'd like better than for them to have had an exemplary program in every way. In fact, you want to, generally, you really want to see institutions do well. It's kind of like when you teach, you oftentimes want your students to do well on the test almost worse than they do or it seems that way. You don't want them to do badly. One of the things that upsets me so much is to go into an institution and have [see] the institution do things that can just make the team angry. I mean they shoot themselves in the foot. (Don, p. 8)

Managing the Human Conditions

What are some of the ways that institutions "shoot themselves in the foot?" The transcripts suggested that three types of stories provided insights into this phenomenon. They can be described as (a) "poor IR/poor organization of documents," (b) "institutional hostility toward the BOE team," and (c) "an institution's failure to take care the BOE team members' creature comfort." Yvona's comments reflected how these variables might affect the BOE team's attitude and on-site experiences. She also suggested that these variables might correlate with each other.

I think the IR, I know the IR sets the tone for the team. First of all, this big thing comes and you have to sit down and read and analyze it before you go. Now, we all do this for professional reasons. We certainly don't get

paid for doing this stuff. So if you are going to sit down and spend a couple evenings of your life reading a piece of crap, you probably do not think kindly of that institution before you go. And so then you go there and the chair is ticked off and everybody on the committee [BOE team] is ticked off and nobody then stops and says "let's back up now." So the first meeting you have as a team you're grouching about the IR. That I think sets things off on the wrong foot.

I think the other thing that happens is it depends on not that the institution needs to fall all over themselves and spend a lot of money but how are you received as a team. When you go out across the country and you have got to get out of here on a Saturday, so you're giving up that weekend and going and do all this good stuff in the name of professionalism. And then you go over there and people kind of half meet you or half extend courtesies, which doesn't happen very often, I mean next to no time, but it tends to happen at those institutions whose stuff is not as strong as those institutions whose stuff is strong. Now that's why I think there's some kind of interesting correlation maybe, I don't know. So you're there to do a job and you go ahead and do it. But you don't do it with the same kind of spirit or caring maybe, I think, as a team.

Or if you run into a hostile dean who gets impatient if...the team comes in and asks you the same question as they do six times, you need to answer those question. Then is not the time to be getting impatient or treating team members roughly.

So I think those are things, I think there is a human condition. There is a process that involves this stuff but these are people with all the foibles of people that are participating in this process. (p. 13)

Yvona's words vividly captured the dynamics of human interactions at work in the NCATE accreditation process. Other chairs were aware of these factors affecting the BOE team's on-site experience. Virtually all of them shared at least one personal story where they had encountered one or more of the situations identified by Yvona. But they at the same time asserted that such a negative encounter had little bearing on the BOE team's performance in carrying out the on-site process. When asked to explain the seemingly obvious contradiction, the chairs invariably claimed that such occurrences would

make a particular on-site visit more difficult and less enjoyable. Margaret's words represented the chairs' overall perception in this regard. Her views also reflected the chairs' awareness of the BOE team's roles as the representative of both the teacher education profession and NCATE:

You have some institutions that, as a chair going in, that no matter what I did to be positive and keep the team together, they were so up tight about the visit, so concerned, and feeling so hostile about the visit--the faculty not being involved and all those different kinds of elements that can occur, you can't break away that ice. But it's the chair's responsibility to try and to have a positive, professional manner that serves to bridge the team and the unit together. To relate the specifics of why we are there, what we're doing, what we're about and that we're just not a bunch of people out snooping for everything in the unknown.... (p.13)

Their [the institution's] attitude and their caring or not caring, if they have a super program and they have all the components in place, it's fine. Then the best thing I can do for that institution is if they have everything, is to approve them and approve them with positive statements to try to help them work on their attitude of feeling positive about NCATE because for some reason they have that negative perception. (p.15)

Individual concerns regarding negative attitudes prior to the on-site visit were discernable in the interviews, however. Yvona's remarks quoted earlier indicated how a poorly written institutional report might "sets things off on the wrong foot." In that particular case, Yvona added that the team eventually discussed its negative attitude toward the institution and modified that attitude:

[The IR] was terribly written and probably the visit should have been called off. And the tone of the [BOE team] chair was sarcastic. What really bothered me was that it seemed to me that this team had a mindset before we ever went on campus and had already in their minds condemned [the institution]. Now, it did turn out to be extremely difficult and it was not a good situation but, by that time, the only thing that brought [the BOE team members] together was that "we're going to nail them." We discussed it a little bit further and it did turn around.

But I would hope that the chair would have kind of not been a part of that sarcastic [attitude during the first few meetings after we got there.] The institution did not fare very well. I don't think they would have fared well with another team either. (p. 11).

Carol related a similar incidence of a BOE team on which she served as a state liaison. Different from Yvona's story, the BOE team chair's negative attitude, according to Carol, infected other team members and resulted in biased findings against the institution:

I think that overall negative attitude of the team really came through in terms of their findings. I got the impression that the team chair as well as the team members was really out to get the institution. That always turns me off, whenever I'm on a team where the team members seem to enjoy uncovering all the dirty laundry, so to speak. Team members have to investigate and that kind of thing. But if their main goal is to try to see how much bad stuff they can find, I mean that's not the right attitude. And that was the attitude of this particular chair, I thought, and the team members as a result had a bad attitude as well. (p. 5)

These stories add substance to the "human conditions" to which Yvona had referred earlier. Terrie's observation captured the subtlety of the "human condition" that might influence the on-site process. So subtle was it that Terrie's words must be quoted at length in order to grasp the dynamics involved:

What I'm really interested in, just as a curious person not so much as BOE member, is the process that happens within those discussions... even though the BOE team knows that it doesn't accredit, I mean you don't accredit anything. But there gets to be a spirit I think somewhere along the way ...a sense of whether or not this place is going to get accredited or not. And there begins to be sort of some calculation, I think, nobody ever talks about this. But I think that there begins to be a calculation of what standards we're going to say "met" and what are going to be "not met" because if we have a strong sense that this is a really good program, we don't want something to go through and cause them not to be accredited. Now, I think that happened. One woman I know...one team I was on, this one person said, "I want this place to be accredited, and if we write this like this it's going to hurt them." And that's the most overt. I mean very

few people actually come out and say that. But I think that you get sort of a sense of there's just sort of a flow that starts going and you kind of have a sense of the way things are going. What concerns me a lot of times is that sometimes if the flow gets to going, that may not actually be the right thing to happen. And in one case, one team I was on, we had a lot of new BOE members and they were out for their first time out, and they were really really hard on this institution. Granted the institution was very disorganized, they weren't well-prepared. We should not have been on their campus at the time we were because they really weren't well...they weren't prepared for us to be there. But they had a lot of stuff in place on the way. There were several things we said "not met" or "met with weaknesses" and, if the Unit Accreditation Board had accepted what we said without turning over some of the things on the institution, it would not have been accredited. But it was accredited, and our report was not well received by the UAB. And part of it I think was that we got so frustrated in the process of not being able to get information, not being able to, you know, actually stonewalled by some of the upper-level administration in terms of providing information. One of the big issues that came out was the "Governance" issue. And they had everything really messed up. I mean, nothing worked according to the way they said it worked. There were organizational charts that we would ask them about, and they'd say "We've never seen that before. That isn't the way it works." But if you actually observe what happened, I mean, they did follow a regular pattern, it just was that it didn't work according to the way they had it on paper. That happened to be a standard that I was on. I wasn't good enough at articulating that "The process works, it just isn't written right." So we went with "not met." That was one that was turned over with a weakness I think, and I always felt sort of bad about not being able to have articulated that. It turned out it was alright for the institution. (pp. 18-19)

Other chairs recognized the "human conditions" factor as well, their reluctance to attribute consequential effects it might bear upon the outcome of the on-site visit notwithstanding. Dee Dee's admonition to her faculty testified to the importance of making the BOE team feel welcome and comfortable:

What I said to our faculty was you don't want your team to feel cranky. You don't want them to feel uncomfortable and pressed upon because they are human. A team ideally should come in and be totally objective in looking at an institution. It helps if they're also comfortable because then there aren't things distracting them from being objective. But if they're uncomfortable, some people's minds don't work as well when they're

uncomfortable. If they're too cold or too hot or too hungry, they might not work as well. I don't think you should make things too luxurious. I think you should not give them presents and, you know, various things. But you don't want them to have any reason to think that you don't respect them. So I think it's partly a matter of creating an atmosphere for who they [the institution] are and their work. (p. 19)

The last statement in Dee Dee's quote suggested that the manner with which an institution received the BOE team was indicative of the institutional health, an indication Annah readily embraced.

In Annah's view, the institutional attitude toward the on-site visit would affect the BOE report, and rightly so. "The tone of the [BOE] report is reflective of the tone of the institution," says Annah (p. 8). Emphasizing that she would not reveal any institutional identities, Annah shared her experiences with three different types of institutions as reflected by the tones of their BOE reports. Along with the story was evidence which had led her to conclude that an institution's attitude in many cases reflected its academic quality:

We were at one institution, for example, this would have been two years ago. They welcomed us with open arms. They were completely honest with us, warts and all, you know, problems, pluses. They wanted us to celebrate with them their successes and mourn over the failures. It was the most open and honest visit I've ever had. The same year I went to another institution considerably bigger and that institution was extremely businesslike. I don't mean they weren't honest, but they were extremely business-like. I've never had a visit go as smoothly as that one did because everyone at that institution knew when the appointments were, knew exactly what was to be covered in an appointment. You know, they really helped the team. It was a positive visit. I think they were also honest, but a completely different environment. In one case, it was a matter of sharing and visiting and another was interviewing. I've gone on visits where the institution is hostile. And you may still abide by the template, and you will use the same interpretation. But the process of being a BOE member, because it involves judgment, is affected by all those things. (pp. 6-7)

I think the final report in cases when there is an openness on the part of the institution, the final report's better because it is more accurate. It is more reflective of the institution and its strengths and weaknesses; and the report then becomes more useful. In the more businesslike places, the reports will be very brief. They will say the standard is met and they do these things. Or the standard is not met. Those reports, you can almost always tell those institutions because those reports are very brief. There is little or no flavor to them. And it almost loses the qualitative aspect, not completely, but the qualitative aspect drops down. In places that are hostile, what I've found is that you have to work hard to not have a hostile report. Again, the judgment will be the same but the report is different, the nature of the report and the information that's in it. (pp. 7-8)

And that affects the Unit Accreditation Board decision. The BOE makes recommendation on each of the standards and that is definitely, I would say, is probably the most interesting combination in most cases of very heavy, very clear indication on what is out there. This is based on [having] been on the UAB but also then looking at what's happened to reports that I've written since then. What happens is that the tone of the report affects the UAB decision. (p. 8)

I know of at least one case where the institution was extremely disorganized, relatively hostile. No matter how much I tried not to do this, the team members' reports to me were almost chiding, because the institution wasn't a bad place but they had done a poor job preparing. They were kind of hostile and negative when we got there; and the end result of the report was a report that was "This is a negative and hostile institution." Although they had met most of the standards, when I got the report back from the UAB, they'd taken some of the "met" standards and made them "unmet." (p. 8)

I don't know that anyone has actually sat down and analyzed it, but both in the three years I was on and the times that I've served as a substitute, I have no discomfort saying that. And I'm not sure there's anything wrong with that, by the way, because the tone is very reflective of the institution. (p. 9)

We're back to qualitative judgment. If an institution is a negative place and people are negative and they are ugly to one another, then they are not going to be able to come together on the kinds of collaboration, communication that are necessary. Both from outside and from inside, my feeling is that the affective tone [of the BOE report] had made the [accreditation] decisions more accurate. So I don't see that as an inconsistency. (p. 12)

Clearly, how an institution presented its information in the institutional report and the documents room might greatly impact the BOE team's perceptions of the institution's program quality. This finding raised a question about the relationship between the organization of the program information and the quality of the program. While no causal relationship was implied, the transcripts revealed a consensus view among the chairs, namely, that the quality of IR and/or document organization did correlate positively with the quality of a program.

Two different but coexisting views influenced how the BOE team handled the poor organization of the information presented by the institution in its IR and documents room. On one hand, the chairs expressed sympathy with the institution. They said that team members were willing to "over-extend" themselves to help the institution in making the case. On the other hand, some chairs viewed the poor organization and presentation of information on the institution's part as a weakness in its program articulation.

Some of my experiences really make me feel more like that these schools were like a student who's not quite ready for the exam and is very afraid. And then part of your role as a team is also to help them look at themselves in a way that will be constructive as opposed to just defensive. (Dee Dee, p. 15)

Don related one on-site visit which illustrated how poorly the information was organized and the BOE team members' attitude to it:

I went on a visit not too long ago. They had four big boxes or maybe five I think they had two for one category--and there was no order to the way the exhibits were organized in those boxes. I mean there were just folders with names on them and they did have little tags saying something about what was in there but they weren't in alphabetical order or anything. They were just by category and so there would be 50 files dealing with category one, all in this box. So if you wanted to find anything you just had to dig

through the box. Well, we looked at everything in the box but I mean it was still frustrating if you needed to go back and find something. Our team went through and alphabetized them. Fortunately, I've never worked with any team members that were really kind of prima donna types, you know, I mean they were all willing to get in and work. But we even had a secretary, the assistant [chair] come down to the team room that Sunday afternoon saying "What is the organization of this?" I mean we just can't figure it out. And the response was, "Well, there isn't any. We just put them in there and figured you'd mess them up anyway." You know, the team operated fine with that, but I was really worried that they would just get angry and shut down. On the alphabetized list they gave us, they had one of the files, I don't think I'll ever forget it, was titled "various documents submitted to the State Department [of Education], and it was alphabetized under V for "various!" Well now, when a school does that to you, if you don't have a team that will just laugh about it, you know, they could just get angry.

They didn't. I was amazed. I was amazed. They laughed about it and they were, oh, rather irritated as I'm expressing this to you, that the school either didn't know any better or didn't care anymore to try to make that process as easy as possible for the team. But they didn't get mad. I mean nobody said "Well, I'm not going to look at this blankety blank blank" and go over in the corner and sit down. I mean they just dug through it. I even had one team ember. I think it was one of the observers either from the state department or from NEA, they just took it on themselves and they spent half an hour or so alphabetizing those dumb boxes. (pp. 8-9)

The BOE team's sympathy with the institution was best articulated by Kim as he reflected on experiences where the institution failed to present the information in an organized manner:

My approach is that even if the organization is poor, it is my job, and the job of the team, to dig up all the pertinent data you can get. And I have on certain visits actually found, for example, records or data contained in survey of graduates that the institution didn't know they had. But by probing, by asking questions and talking to people about what they have done, you can often uncover things that they didn't know that they had. So I don't take this attitude that "OK, if you don't have it organized right here, then that's tough luck." And it turns out that the institution did a fine job. (p. 12)

That's understandable because if you have not served on teams, and many

institutions may not have anybody who's had the NCATE experience, you don't always know just exactly what piece fits where. I mean you have a pretty good idea in general. They don't know all the subtleties of the visiting process. They don't always know what documents ought to be placed where.

But where is the line drawn between the institution unwittingly or innocently misorganized information and having just simply done a poor job? Kim gave the following response which represented another common approach to dealing with an institution's poor presentation of its information. It also pointed to the importance of the pre-visit during which time the chair could help the institution to organize its information:

If they in fact had the evidence and they were unable to produce it at the time of the visit, they can certainly use that as a part of their rejoinder later on. Or they might even be able to appeal the case if the situation was very negative. But I don't know if there's any sure way of guaranteeing that every institution knows exactly how to organize their data. And that's where I think team chair can help. I mean, pre-visit is very important in that sense. (p. 13)

Kim's above response was the rationale for Margaret and Jerry and several other chairs to say "When in doubt, vote 'No'."

You begin to look at the weaknesses and they're this long and the recently "met" is this long. Is that really a "weakness" or a "not met?" When you have that kind of dialogue, I encourage teams to go "not met" because that institution can always provide you with additional data to convince the Unit Accreditation Board that indeed they meet it but they've got some problems or that they meet it and they didn't have any problems and that the [BOE] didn't find the information. But those are ways that I think have to be played out. (Margaret, p. 14)

The admonition during the initial training was "If the evidence does not compel you to judge that a standard is met, say it is not met." It is the institution's responsibility to convince the BOE members that a standard is met. (Jerry, p. 4)

To Dee Dee, though, poor organization and presentation of the information on the

institution's part was more often an indication of weak program articulation. She explained her view eloquently in the following remarks:

A lot of programs say "Well, we produce really good students and the schools that hire them are very satisfied." Then my question would be "Is that because you screen your students so carefully that your input made very little difference but they are still good? What value is added by your program?" I think we really do have to document. If you've got a black box, a student comes in here and comes out here and you're only judging that these are good, you don't know what got them there and, therefore, if something changes and they start coming out not good, you don't know what to fix. In order to be able to have integrity in your process, you've got to be able to lay it open where you can examine it first and then others can also examine it. (pp. 28-29)

I wouldn't necessarily say there's a causal relationship. But there is a positive correlation between the organization of information and the soundness of the program. Because if you're a little sloppy in one area, you're likely to be a little sloppy in another. In some, I think it's very much like teaching, an individual classroom teacher may be a very good teacher, may not necessarily be somebody you want to put a student teacher with unless they can talk about what goes on in their heads. But that's an individual teacher. Teacher education is a collaborative [effort] in action. So it's unlikely that a whole group of us that are going to intuitively create something good together that we never talked to each other about and be able to maintain that quality. The weakness would be in the articulation of the program. (p. 29)

Despite different perceptions of the effects of the human conditions, the chairs believed that establishing a positive relationship with the institution was very important. A positive and trusting relationship with the institution, they said, would open communication between the institution and the BOE team which, in turn, would allow the BOE team to portray the institution's teacher education program accurately and fairly. The chairs' reflections also demonstrated that a positive relationship with the institution would best serve NCATE and the teacher education profession.

Building the Team

Characteristics of a Team

Realizing the high stakes for the institution in the NCATE accreditation process and their significant roles as representatives of the profession and NCATE, the chairs took quite seriously their responsibilities during the on-site visit. This attitude prevailed even in adversarial situations, as Margaret's earlier words demonstrated. To meet their responsibilities require that every BOE member on the team "pull their own weight." This means that each BOE member should arrive at the institution having already read the IR with special attention given to their respective assignments. It means that each member, once on-site, fully participates in collecting information, team discussions and writing the BOE report. It further means that the team members conduct themselves in ways that best represent the teacher education profession and NCATE. Above all, it means that the BOE members must function as a real team in order to best meet their obligations. The chairs recognize the role they play in ensuring a successful on-site visit, including a quality BOE report.

Captain of the ship. It's the person who's in charge of the team effort. It can't be a person who could do the task alone because you can't, but the person who has to orchestrate the work of other people, and both direct it and support it. (Dee Dee, p. 10)

Ringmaster at a circus (laugh). No, I think quite seriously of my job. I think the job of the chair is to ensure that the tasks that need to be done get done; that all the pieces come together and then to allow the team to develop the synthesis, not to impose it. (Annah, p. 10)

BOE members are trained. But how they come together as a team to get the task done, how they feel about themselves in the process, whether or not they feel welcome on campus has a lot to do with the schedule that's been worked out by the chair and the rapport that's been established by the chair. The chair has to have enough people sense to say "We've got to have a break." (Myra, p. 21)

One of the five criteria for selecting BOE members is that they "should have good interpersonal skills; ability to interact with team members and institutional personnel in a courteous and collegial manner" (Magasich, 1996). During their initial training, BOE nominees' behaviors toward others were closely monitored by the trainers. The importance of the BOE members function as a real team was reiterated by The chairs throughout the interviews. Key to the team concept, as the chairs pointed out, are (1) a high level of trust developed among the team members, (2) full participation of all the team members and (3) sharing in decision-making.

Collectively, the chairs pointed to the reason why the team concept was extremely important to a successful on-site visit, i.e., the quality of communication among the team members. The amount of work the BOE team must accomplish during the two-and-one-half-day on-site visit requires a high level of collaboration. This was noted in Chapter Four by the chairs' unanimous recognition of having benefited from having more human resources available when the visit included a state team. Collaboration was viewed as crucial and even more so when the visit is independent of a state team:

[I]f I'm doing that particular category, I may not be able to interview all of the groups that would address that particular category. So someone else may be doing that. So, if for example, you are on my team and you conducted the interview session with the graduate students, then what did you get from them? What were they saying about that particular standard? So we will share all of that across the table. (Wilma, p. 17)

A better team is one that works together; that is able to reach consensus; that is able to plan each day's activities together, share information. I've been on teams where you would come and say "I know you're working on this. Here's something I found you might be interested in." So it becomes a real team. They interact like a team. (Yvona, p. 10)

While most chairs talked about the importance of the BOE team functioning as a real team from a positive perspective, Carol shared an experience which illustrated the negative consequence of not having a real team.

But in this particular case, the team I think ended up just a group of individuals rather than a team. They were very individualistic. So the discussions a lot of the time were irrelevant and team members were really on opposite sides a lot of the time. They all seem to have different agendas, interpreting standards unevenly, differently and it just made team meetings really not a pleasant experience. (Carol, p. 8)

The majority of the negative accounts of not having a real team usually concerned with a single BOE team member not pulling his or her weight. Although this might cause some difficulty for the team, the chairs' experiences suggested that these individuals' less-than-satisfactory performance did not seriously undermine the team's overall performance.

Almost all the teams that I've been on as a BOE member I consider very polished and experienced. There may have been one or two that were difficult. I've completed 13 now, so you know one or two out of 13 I think is good. (Carol, p. 9)

I would say fewer than five percent [of BOE members] have trouble doing their job. Despite these not-so-professional behaviors on certain individuals, the overall results are always professional. And there are very few incidences where there's a problem such as the person who's not where he was supposed to be at a given time or the chair who ignored the recommendations about how to make assignments and so on. That does not happen very often. (Myra, p. 17)

I just have really been impressed with the commitment and sincerity of the team members I have worked with. (Terrie, p. 35)

To undergird the importance of having a real team, Yvona made it clear up front with the BOE teams she chaired that "we would not do a 'three to two vote' or a 'two to four' vote, and would strive for consensus" (p. 5). Other chairs agreed:

It is absolutely crucial that you get the team working together and that you have some techniques, if they're not together, to pull them to some sort of consensus decision around some important points. How effectively a team chair can do that is critical to the success of the visit. The decisions are just too important to have it go by a vote of three to two in terms of whether a standard is met or not. (Don, p. 4)

I think it's crucial for the team to gel early on and I think that if the team chair does not provide that leadership, the team probably will not come together. Consequently, it's going to be much more difficult to reach a consensus, to agree on things, to perhaps even interpret the standards in the same way. (Carol, p. 7)

You have to remember that the [BOE] report is based on team consensus. So what goes on is the team's decision. "The consensus meaning" is that, generally, the team as a whole agrees. It's a decision you can live with. It doesn't mean that everybody's perfectly happy, but it is different from voting. You don't have "three to four" or "two to three" or something like that. (Kim, p. 20)

So often did the chairs talk about reaching team consensus that "consensus building" emerged as one of the most striking characteristics of the redesigned NCATE on-site visitation process. More will be said about the consensus approach in the "Building the Case" section. Before identifying the major elements of an internally successful on-site visit, another factor contributing to reaching consensus needs to be discussed.

Working with People One Knows

When speaking of reaching team consensus and ensuring higher consistency in team decisions, most chairs contended that it would help to work with BOE members whom they already knew. Going through the initial BOE training in the same cadre and serving together on previous NCATE teams were the most valuable context in which the "knowing each other" took place and became meaningful. The initial BOE training provided the same framework for interpreting the standards; working together on previous BOE assignments enables the BOE members to better understand each others' perspectives and, thus, know how to work with each other.

I think serving on teams with people you know helps you to be able to apply consistency because you've been trained together, you know each other personally. And we've run into fewer problems where team [members] know each other ahead of time. (Carol, p. 1)

[W]e know each other's backgrounds and experiences, and we can understand why each person feels the way he or she does. That often helps in terms of reaching consensus. (Carol, p. 2)

If you've worked with them before, you may know where they are strong. For example, if you've worked with a person before on a team and you know that person is strong in working with "field experiences" and things like that, so you may want that person to kind of zero in on that for you.... But when you don't know them, you just take a gamble. (Wilma, p. 8)

... be able to make a judgment about how you would interact with people, with data, with procedure. That's something you learn by seeing how someone does something. The training being done in cadres and then those cadres being maintained meant that I had seen you and I got to know how you functioned and then the way you did things and the kinds of judgments that you'd bring to bear and it lets you build a trust. I might not agree with you. I might even think the way you operate is stupid, but nonetheless, if I see it and get to know it, I might not operate that way but I can appreciate that you do. (Annah, p. 29)

In the early days you knew everybody who was going to be on that visit because you were in cadres. If you know who the people are, then you can also sort of draw on your prior knowledge of their strengths and who would be good partners to work together on gathering data and writing it up eventually. That was a wonderful idea. It's not been able to be maintained in quite the same way. (Dee Dee, p.16)

As has already been pointed out, increasingly more BOE teams are arriving at the institution on Saturday. The chairs reported that a major objective for this early arrival was for the team members to have a headstart on the "getting to know you" process.

Myra's following remarks were echoed by all other chairs:

[A] good way to do that is to get folks together for a Saturday night dinner, just informal, just the team, and get into that "getting to know you" business, either to re-establish contacts among folks who've worked together before or to bring in the new people, new team members or new state liaison or something of that nature because they'll be living together very closely and working very hard together. And they need to, you know, know each other. (p. 10)

[T]here's more open dialogue when you've had a chance to interact informally with people. It makes [the on-site visit] in a way less intense. It opens up communication in sharing of ideas. (p. 11)

It makes you work so much easier if you have established a rapport with each other. So you kind of know where you're coming from, how you view things, and that sort of thing. I think it relaxes you. (Wilma, p. 11)

While recognizing the value of "working with people one knows" in aiding the BOE team to "gel" faster, the chairs quickly pointed out that the absence of such a condition did not necessarily compromise the quality of team work. Rather, knowing other BOE members on the team is more a matter of effective and efficient use of time. It was not so much a shared interpretation [of the standards] that gets weakened with the breakdown of the cadre system. Dee Dee's comments summarize the advantages and, at

the same time, put the issue in the proper perspective:

You start at a different place in sort of calibrating yourself to a common understanding of the standards. If you have worked through some of the "I know how to work with you as a person" stuff, then you can get more quickly into the "let's look at the standards and how we see those." [Otherwise,] in four days' time, you could spend two full days trying to figure out who the other people are and where they're coming from. And it wastes a lot of otherwise necessary time for making the judgment and working through the process. You're also forewarned about where people's weaknesses might be, which I think is another critical piece. But I don't think it means it's impossible to have a good visit if you have some people who don't know each other. But all the more important then is Sunday for the talking through "How do we understand this?". "Let's talk through the meaning of these standards." (p. 25)

Wilma offered a similar account on the benefit of "having already established the rapport among the team members" beforehand:

We spent the morning in the exhibit room. At two o'clock when we got back together, we had already met each other, so we didn't have to go through those formal introductions. We were ready to kind of zero in on what we were finding.... (p.11)

Building the Case

At the core of the on-site visit, the BOE team must make a qualitative judgment as to whether or not a particular NCATE standard is met by the institution under review. At stake was not only the academic reputation of the institution but also the credibility of the NCATE process. To ensure the process' integrity, the BOE members must demonstrate several important qualities. These qualities include "coming to the institution prepared," "able to pull their own weight in collecting data and writing the report on their respective

assignments," "flexibility," "knowledgeable of the standards," "being a good listener," and "being gracious" to others. The chairs saw their role as "vital" to ensuring that these qualities would be magnified through their team work. Good chairs, in their opinion, would demonstrate a number of qualities including: knowledge of the standards; knowledge of the process; being organized; ability to make professional judgments; and ability to write good team reports. Through their expertise in the NCATE process, their abilities to inspire, facilitate and manage, the chairs would strive to foster consensus in the on-site process through which the consistency in both applying and interpreting the NCATE standards was ensured. The chairs' reflections of their experiences spoke well to this point.

Knowledge of the Standards

Handling Home Baggage.

From the outset, this quality might appear too rudimentary an expectation of all BOE members to be mentioned as an important characteristic of the chair. Indeed, the chairs' observations of the BOE members in general supported this assumption. But their stories revealed that knowledge of the standards could be defined at two different levels, i.e., the letter of the standards and the spirit of the standards. It was the knowledge of the spirit of the standards that called for interpretation by BOE members. The chairs believed that their leadership was critical.

On the team itself, you often run into situations where team members disagree about either the interpretation of a particular standard or the evaluation of a particular piece of evidence. You need to be able to not only understand the letter of the standards but understand the standard in the context of the whole accreditation process so that you're not guided by simply a word or two but you have an overall understanding of the standards and what they are seeking. (Kim, p. 7)

[S]ome people are being very literal about particularly the specific indicators, when in fact, all the way back to my first training, the point was you always go back to the standards and the indicators are just that. They're possible ways that one could see, but there might be multiple ways of achieving something. ...there's a big tendency in a lot of folks...that want to see all these little pieces when in fact the big question is "Have you met the standard?" (Dee Dee, p. 3)

To Jerry, interpretation could become problematic when some people "want NCATE to say something and the NCATE standards don't say 'that something'." He shared the following experience to illustrate what he meant:

When I went for the pre-visit, I met [the state chair] the evening before the pre-visit and we were having a cup of coffee. She said, "You know the Dean is not an educator." And I said "I beg your pardon?" And she told me the details. [The institution] had restructured the college or school and it was more than education and included some other areas. The Dean who was just appointed happened to have her doctorate in the other area. There was, Compliance criterion 74 under Standard 5a says "an officially designated professional educator administers the professional education unit."

Well, it turned out this state chair wasn't really nuts about this institution in the state. So we had a little game being run. I do remember that evening saying "I don't believe that is a standard. I think you're thinking of compliance criterion that talks about that." "Oh, it's an NCATE requirement." The pre-visit went well; the visit went well. This person had not been trained in BOE procedures; she had received some training through the state about NCATE and she was working on some misinformation. She tried, when the team started talking about Standard 5a, to really emphasize that the Dean of the unit was not a professional educator and the team listened. I could see it was having no effect. It finally got to the point where one team member said, "You know, we look at the compliance criterion as indicators, as some things to consider; but

we're focusing on the standard. And if you look at the standard, it doesn't say that." (Jerry, p.13)

Other chairs frequently used "home baggage" to describe what Jerry called "mis-reading" of the NCATE standards. Transcript analyses identified two types of situations that fell in the home baggage category. One was what Dee Dee had called "being literal" about certain indicators (previously known as "criteria"). Some BOE members, including some chairs, insisted that a certain way of organizing was the best way to structure programs. The other type of home baggage was described as "We got burned at our institution, therefore, we're going to burn everybody else" (Margaret, p. 17). The following stories show how both types of home baggage found their ways in the team deliberation process:

I had a person on a team who was questioning how the technology of an institution or the audio-visual stuff was spread out all over the institution and wanted to say it's a weakness because they didn't have it all in one place. And I said, "I don't care if it's in one place. I care when I'm teaching and I want audio-visuals that they're there; but I don't care how anybody organizes that if I have what I need.

It shows up more often in governance than anywhere else. And it's very hard for people who've only lived at one kind of institution to see another kind of institutional governance. It's important that a teacher ed. program can initiate and work through the system whatever it is they see as their vision being carried out in programs. It doesn't have to float through the same specific committees on every campus. So it's usually some way of doing something that is what I would call a "back-home standards". (Dee Dee, p. 4)

The standards, for example, require that faculty members in various parts of the university collaborate in teacher education, you know, general education requirements or whatever. A collaboration in a small liberal arts college is quite idfferent than collaboration on a huge university campus. Collaboration at one place means really working very closely together. On a larger campus, collaboration may mean necessarily on a committee together where you discuss whatever, general education requirements and

so on. So there are different senses of what collaboration means. (Kim, p. 9)

Another example is that "All committees must have students on them." Well, what do we want by putting students on committees? We want to make sure we have student input; we want student involvement; we want to make sure we're reflecting what the student needs are. There are probably 10 ways to get that, one of which is having students on the committees themselves. But there are other ways to do that. (Dee Dee, p. 5)

One team I was on quite a while ago, one weaker team, the chair just seemed to primarily be focusing on the multicultural issue and I felt [he] interpreted that particular issue very narrowly. He demanded 10% or 15% minority ratio. I've been on other teams where we've accepted five percent if the institution is making efforts and on this particular team, the institution had one of the larger minority populations that I'd ever visited. But the team chair was a minority and didn't think it was enough. (Carol, p. 7)

Some team members, in spite of warnings against doing so, view an institution in terms of the way whatever is done at their home institution, and you have to get beyond that. And sometimes team members have to police each other about that kind of thing. (Myra, p. 7)

We were at an institution that was OK with its formula in calculating faculty load with student teachers and other kinds of loads. But one team member's stance was "Well, we used a formula on ours but the BOE team said it wasn't okay." It wasn't the same formula at all but this team member's summary was "they are using a formula and just because they just use it for student teachers and we used it for everything doesn't matter. You can't use it for anything. Therefore.... Those are the kinds of baggage that people bring to the team. We got burned at our institution, therefore, we're going to burn everybody else. (Margaret, p. 17)

The stories included here are representative of both types of home baggage identified above. They were chosen also to show that home baggage was found in BOE members' interpreting all five (four in the 95 refined) NCATE standards. These stories pointed to the importance in being able to understand the spirit of standards in contrast to knowing merely the letters of the standards.

The chairs reported several ways of minimizing home baggage's negative impact on their deliberations of the on-site evaluation. One way was trying to detect individual team members' personal biases at the earliest time possible. Knowing the BOE members on the team beforehand was especially advantageous in this regard. Having detected the individual biases, the chair would closely monitor the individual member's subsequent performances and intervene as necessary. Margaret explained how it worked with her:

We try to get those things out and talk about on Saturday night. I know by Saturday night after dinner who may have brought what personal baggage with them. And then you work on making sure that that personal baggage doesn't reappear in discussions and, if it does, you stop it. I make a mental note to bring it up in some way on Sunday, by Sunday evening to see where that person stands with it. (p. 18)

Another way to minimize the effect of individual members' home baggage was for the chair to emphasize at the Sunday meeting the importance of focusing on the standards rather than on the indicators. A corollary of such an emphasis was to remind the team members of the institution's right to meet the standards in different ways. Often, the chairs would reiterate similar admonitions they received at their BOE training sessions. Dee Dee, in particular, pointed out the need to "calibrate" the team members' interpretation of standards at the Sunday meeting:

You start at a different place in sort of calibrating yourself to a common understanding of the standards. If you have worked through some of the "I know how to work with you as a person" stuff, then you can get more quickly into the "let's look at the standards and how we see those." ... But all the more important then is Sunday for the talking through "How do we understand this?". "Let's talk through the meaning of these standards." (p. 25)

When personal biases found their ways into the team's final deliberation, the chairs

expressed confidence in resolving the issue, as a rule of thumb, by resorting to seeking a team consensus. "Having a longer discussion," "giving the process a little more time," and "letting the team members work it out" were some of the expressions the chairs used to describe the consensus-building process. Terrie provided a specific example:

One guy on this team just had this particular view about student quality. One indicator under there said that students had to have a 2.5 GPA and all those things. Well, this guy kept saying that this institution did not meet this standard and we said, "Well, what is your rationale for that?" He said, "The students weren't of high quality." And we said, "What do you base that on?" "Well, they only require a 2.5." "That's what NCATE standard says!" We can't expect that they establish a 3.5, you know. ... Just through some questioning and some reflecting back on what I heard them say, he was able to re-evaluate his position and turned around. (Terrie, p. 36)

Diversity Issue and Minority BOE members.

One area prone to generating lengthy discussions resulted from team members' home baggages was the issue of race and ethnicity. Four chairs shared their experiences where a team member seemed to care only about this issue. Two other chairs recalled cases during the initial training where a BOE nominee seemed to take "race and ethnicity" as their only concern. In all six cases, that member was reportedly a member of minority groups.

Dee Dee and Terrie noted that a good way to help keep a particular member's baggage under control was to make the team assignments wisely, as Dee Dee explained:

One of the things I did on one of the visits in [state] where I had a person for whom [diversity] was a really strong issue. [sic] I think I have some of the same beliefs as she does but may come at it a little more objectively in terms of gathering that data. As we were talking about what we were going to address, I very explicitly said to her, well, actually we had an

Asian American on our team as well, I said to them "I'd like to take on this issue and ask these questions because I think they [the institution] have to know that this is a full NCATE issue. It's not just a minority issue." They both acknowledged that that was a good idea and that it would be stronger in terms of our questioning this institution if I did it. (p. 24)

Having concluded that the minority team member might appear too offensive in reviewing the institution's compliance with NCATE's diversity requirements motivated Dee Dee to take on the assignment herself. Trying to keep the minority member's personal bias toward the diversity issue under control, however, was not Dee Dee's only motivation in making the assignment as she did. It reflected her belief that the institution would treat the issue of diversity more seriously than it would if a minority BOE member asked the question. The decision to address the diversity issue herself also was a manifestation of Dee Dee's personal philosophy on how institutions should approach the diversity issue in its daily operation. Dee Dee's subsequent reflection supported such an interpretation:

I thought she [the minority BOE member] might be offensive in how she did it and they [the institution] wouldn't hear it. If I did it, they would hear it. And it would also give more credibility to the issue in their minds. They might work on it at their institution and not just write it off as "Well, those minority people just want what they want, it isn't anything I really have to think about." But if those in the majority culture are also saying "Look, this is something we all have to deal with." And we do! It's what I also believe about institutions, is that, when you hire minority faculty, you don't say "Ok. Now it's your job to take care of the diversity issues in the curriculum." It's everybody's job. And I see that too often that people hire a diverse person and then say "Okay, we don't have to think about that anymore, she'll take care of it." (p. 25)

Wilma's story of one minority BOE member's experience, however, suggests how team assignments might have contributed to the impression that minority BOE members tend to take the diversity issue as their only concern. The story might also reflect how the

diversity is addressed in teacher education in general:

...[E]very team he serves on, they want him to write on the diversity issue, and he was offended by it. I'm back again to "We're all trained [as BOE members]." You should be able to write diversity just like I can write it, so why would you automatically want to give that to the person who is minority? And it does offend minorities. It really does. But then it offends the ones who are the non-minorities when the minority goes in there. So this is why I say "Leave your baggage at home and go and do what you're supposed to be doing!" (p. 39)

One wonders to what extent Wilma's story, and the question she raised in particular, represents the voices of other minority BOE members who might be thrust into writing on the diversity. How often might the team assignments made by the team chair have resulted in a minority team member being perceived as the "one issue person" on the team?

Knowledge of the Process

An equally critical quality of successful chairs, identified by the participants, was their knowledge of the NCATE process. To a great extent, the chair's ability to build a team is a function of his/her knowledge of the process, as are the qualities of being a good organizer and time manager. These abilities all have direct influence on a team's spirit. All the qualities identified in this chapter are manifestations of the chair's knowledge of the process, from the first contact made by the chair with the institution and with other team members to the final submission of the team report to the Unit Accreditation Board. Myra succinctly depicted the interwoven nature of these qualities:

BOE members are trained. But how they come together as a group to get

the task done, how they feel about themselves in the process, the pace of the schedule, whether or not they really feel welcome on campus has a lot to do with the schedule that's been worked out by the chair and the rapport that's been established by the chair, by the chair's sense of when it's time to say "Let's stop and take a break." ... I mean the chair has to have enough people sense to say "Let's stop for a few minutes." Or "Let's keep on." Or "We're kind of off track. Let's come back to the track." (p. 21)

Making Team Assignments.

One manifestation of the chairs knowledge of the processd is their skills in making team assignments. Dee Dee and Wilma already spoke to the importance of making good team assignments. The transcript analyses revealed a very similar practice the chairs observed in making the assignments. Exept for one chair who did not make team assignments until Sunday, the chairs reported that, in their initial contact with the team members, they would ask for preferences in working on specific standards. Preliminary assignments would be made, usually before the pre-visit, with the individual preference(s) incorporated. The assignments, according to the chairs, were open to re-negotiation and were finalized once the team arrived on site. With no exceptions, the chairs reported the same considerations in making thees assignments:

- (1) Every team member would have a primary assignment for which one would have writing responsibility and a secondary assignment for which one would have data-collecting responsibility;
- (2) All assignments would be made in such a way that every member would be involved in every area of the standards;
- (3) Each member would have a similar work load in collecting data and writing for their respective assignments;
- (4) All assignments would be made based on the chair's judgment of the individual's

strengths as well as his/her preferences; and

- (5) Making sure at the end of each evening that every one knew their respective assignments for the following day.

Annah's story, as reported in Chapter Four, offered a narrative of this pattern in action.

Not observing this pattern would mean chaos. Jerry found it "does not make any sense" (p. 12). The chair's not making team assignments did happen, however, as Terrie and Myra reported based on their early experiences with the redesigned NCATE system.

I worked with one group as a state liaison. The chair had not made any assignments before the [on-site] review. It bordered on chaos. The Tuesday night session went all night long. I mean we started at like seven o'clock and we were still looking at each other at five o'clock the next morning. Impossible situation. (Myra, p. 8)

[The chair] did not make any assignments; he did not tell us which standards we would write on until I think Monday night and so... I guess it had to have been Monday night...and so everybody was just sort of going and talking. He said he wanted [us] to have broad familiarity with everything, and so there was no focus about who was going to go interview folks here and there. And as a new person who didn't have any experience, I mean, I was just wandering around thinking "What should I be doing here?" ... So I just spent a lot of time in the document room and went along with people who were doing other interviews so I could learn some of the strategies that they were using. But that was very poor use of time.... (Terrie, p. 24)

Kim gave the only other reported incidence deviating from the generally observed pattern of making team assignments:

I've experienced at least a couple of visits where a team chair forgot to assign a particular standard to a team member, so that went without their careful review. In fact, one time I pointed out to the team chair "You forgot to assign this to somebody." So I think the team chair's job is important in the sense that the whole visiting process doesn't leave something out. (p. 6)

To a number of chairs, making sure that nothing was left out by the process was not so

much a concern as not obtaining adequate data. This view reflected their conscientious effort to protect NCATE's reputation from unnecessary compromise. Annah made it very explicit when she talked about making sure that classes were observed inspite of her personal doubt of its value.

For one thing, I'm not sure what it [observing classes] adds, but NCATE has told institutions that we're going to see classes, and that means if we don't see classes there are going to be really bent out of shape people....I tell people [team members] it's everybody's obligation to visit at least a couple, three [classes]. (p. 31)

Several other chairs echoed Annah's sentiment:

You also have to make sure that you visit deans of other units, arts and sciences, and so on. I ask them about the administrators who could be visited by an NCATE team member or team chair. Even if it's not helpful, I still do that. Some people say, "They were here on our campus; [but] they never visited me. So, to avoid anything like that, I ask the institution who wants to be visited. (Kim, pp. 14-15)

It's important, I think, that we meet all of the interviews that we have scheduled. If we're going to be late, we need to be able to call someone and say "We're running a little late but we'll be so and so and just go over the logistics of that. (Jerry, p. 10)

On Sunday night after dinner, we go through the schedule in detail, making sure that everyone who's on that interviewed list is going to be visited or interviewed by someone on the team. Because those people have already been notified that we are coming to see them, so we do that. Even if you don't want anything from them, you may not need anything from them, you still go by and say "hello" and still ask them one or two questions in general about the school. (Wilma, p. 12)

One element that I think is real important for any visit is that a member of the team touch every faculty in the unit, you know, that you come in contact with them and we check on Monday night "Who haven't we seen?" So that we make sure we can contact them, because I don't like that statement that follows many NCATE visits that says, "Well, somebody said they were on campus, but I never saw them." I think that's been very negative to the whole accreditation process.... (Margaret, p.15)

Another expression of knowledge of the process was found in the chairs' ability to communicate, with the team members and with the institution as well. The data presented in "Building the Team" and "Building the Relationship" already touched on the topic. Additional evidence demonstrating the importance of effective communication is given below.

"Because the [NCATE] system is designed to be built on trust and qualitative judgment" (Annah, p. 10), the manner with which the chair communicates with other team members has direct bearings on how well the team would "gel" early on. Yvona reflected on her team experiences which were shared by other chairs:

I've been on teams where everybody will, if you go into the dining room, you'll find they kind of cluster together. I've been on teams where the team doesn't function together much. I've been on teams where the afternoon, when we came back from campus and before we sequestered for the evening, groups of us would go for walks. I've been on teams where that didn't happen. It's interesting, the group interaction. I don't think it's completely the chair but in some way it is. (pp. 9-10)

Emphasizing that she had no proof for it, Yvona proceeded with her observation of different chairs' communication styles and her "hypothesis" of their impact:

Very often you will get a call from the chair because the chair always gets a list of whoever is on the committee [team]. That is probably going to be a closer knit group than the chair who sends a letter and you never hear their voice before you see them there. ... That doesn't necessarily mean that is not going to be a good team; but it seems to me that the chairs who make the personal contact first, it's a better team and people will work harder and longer. (p. 10)

The fact that some BOE members arrive on site knowing each other while other members came to the team as strangers further highlights the need for the chair to be an effective communicator. Yvona shared one experience where the chair had failed to do

so:

I'm thinking of one team that I was on. There were two men; the chair was a woman. These three had obviously worked together before, obviously knew each other, probably saw each other at conferences. These three monopolized a great deal of [the process]. One person really took on the role as expert who knew everything. The chair depended on that person a good deal. It's the only team that I've ever been on where the other team members began to resent this. (p. 9)

Yvona was not alone. All the chairs spoke about the importance treating all the members the same and to make every member an equal partner of the team. Terrie and Myra added their voices to the issue:

Because of just personalities and so forth, it might be easy for a team chair to appear to be more attentive to one team member than another and, therefore, give more weight to what that person says. So it's real important that the chair makes sure that he or she is treating all the team members fairly and with respect. (Terrie, p. 1)

I think that, now, as teams are more mixed from different cadres, you're likely to have worked with somebody on the group before or maybe a couple of people. But it's important to begin at the base level for folks who have not served with those people before and for the state person and the professional organization representative. (Myra, p. 10)

Treating all the members the same is not defined merely by what the chair communicates.

The members' perception of whether they are treated fairly may be influenced by how the chair communicates. Wilma shared an experience which spoke to the importance of the chair's skillful communication "in a way that people can do their best work" (Terrie, p. 2).

On one of the teams that I was not the chair, no one would volunteer for that area. And I said "I'll handle it." It turned out that particular category was a very very weak one for the school. And that's even more difficult when you have to say "no" than when you have to say "yes." When you say "yes," you can just write all kinds of pretty things to say "yes;" but when you say "no," that's a different story because you really have to document why you're saying "no." So he came back and said "Do you

think you can handle it?" I said "Sure I can." So when I finished and we went back and shared our writing, he said "Gosh, that really sounds good." You know, like "I'm surprised." ...[P]eople make decisions as to what you can or cannot do on a team. Again, I'm back to everybody has been trained to do whatever needs to be done. If I say I can do it, then, I can do it. Now if I tell you "Please don't give me category Four because I just cannot deal with that governance and whatever, I don't want to deal with it." Well, that's different. But if I say I'll do it, don't look at me as if to say "Are you sure you can handle that?" Sure I can! I wouldn't say I could if I didn't.... I think that it may cause some people to have feelings about the process in terms of the people relationship. And when you hear people talk about those things, they may not want to tell you why they have those feelings, but they have those feelings. (pp. 38-39)

Equally important was communication with the institution under review. This begins with the first contact the chair made with the institution and followed with the pre-visit by the chair. How the chair communicates with the institution prior to the team's arrival sets the tone for the interaction between the team and the institution. An open and honest atmosphere, as the chairs frequently asserted, greatly enhances the team's effectiveness in fulfilling its roles. "There shouldn't be any surprises during the review either for the institutions or for the team," said Myra. "And I think the chair plays a key role in building the kind of rapport with the institution so that there aren't any surprises that occur." (p. 19) She explained how the chair ensures that no surprises would occur:

I think the chair can communicate with the unit head during a review if information seems not to be available. That's not something that should be kept secret from the institution. As soon as the chair becomes aware that some piece of information is missing or that answers aren't matching or whatever, you can share that with the institution and say "We're having trouble finding this or that or the other." Or "We seem to be getting conflicting information. Is there someone else who could help us with this standard and the information we need?" Just facilitate communication (pp. 19-20)

Annah set up the schedule so as to allow her to meet with the NCATE coordinator twice daily (see Annah's story in Chapter Four). Other chairs' reflections revealed similar approaches to maintaining open communication with the institution:

I think the team chair needs to be very open with the institution. One of the things I've always done when I chair a team is to sit down with the Dean and the NCATE coordinator on Monday morning and Tuesday morning and let them know any concerns or problems that we're having to give them a chance to give information so they don't have any surprises at the end of the visit. (Carol, p. 4)

...So first thing you do is talk with the NCATE coordinator Monday morning and Tuesday morning and let them know what you need, and so there's really never a problem with keeping in contact. (Kim, p. 18)

Another aspect of the effective communication with the institution concerned with the tone of the communication. In Dee Dee's words, there has to be "a certain level of civility" (p. 10). More will be said about the tone of communication in "Writing BOE report" section.

Managing the Visit.

One of the most important roles the chair must assume during an on-site visit was to "manage the visit" (Annah, p. 23). Dee Dee provided a comprehensive definition of the role:

The team chair's role is really to make sure everything is carried out according to the processes that have been laid out, and the assistant team chair helps with that. But that requires setting up the visit through the pre-visit in such a way that the lines of communication are set very well. It means assuring that the team members are prepared so that the Sunday afternoon team meeting where you really look at what people have done with their initial material [sic]. ... In the pacing of the visit, particularly in

the pacing of the work in the evenings, making sure that you're getting out all the information, organizing what's not yet clear so that you can on Tuesday really see if what you gathered on Monday is a true indication or if you missed some stuff that you really have to look at. Not the assumption that they don't have something, but we've got to really dig in and find whatever the piece is that you're looking for. And then, as you move toward coming to some consensus around standards met or not met and strengths and weaknesses, to really guard those points that I called back-home standards, you know, listen to what people's reasoning is and see if the reasoning is consistent with what the standard says or if it's over here someplace.... In the writing, I think the team chair's role is to again look at the team and figure out what's the best procedure. (p. 8)

Given this definition of the chair as manager, all the components of a successful on-site visit could be seen as demonstrable ways of the chair's managing skills. An important area where the chairs demonstrated their skills to manage was what Dee Dee called "the pacing of the work in the evenings." The chairs' remarks were remarkably similar as the following statements illustrate:

The chair needs to be in control, not domineering or dictatorial, but to keep the meetings in hand. The chair needs to be very efficient in how he or she runs the meeting, move things at a nice pace; but yet not too rapidly where not enough discussion is allowed. On the other hand, not too slowly where everybody just loses interest.... (Carol, p. 3)

A good chair makes sure that they are in charge of the schedule, and who has made good arrangements before the team comes in, so you're not flopping all over the place looking for stuff. Otherwise, you spend twice as much time doing your work as you need to. (Yvona, p. 19)

I'm real concerned about the kind of judgement people exercise when they are not having very much sleep and so forth. So the team chair needs to be a good manager of time and needs to make sure everything is being voiced but not dragged on and on and on. (Terrie, p. 2)

If you set some time limits, you work toward those time limits because all work is going to expand to the amount of time you give it. I don't think the quality of the work increases, but I think it decreases the longer you have people staying up. A good team takes care of its physical resources. The chair has to be willing to say when enough talking has happened, if

there's an impasse, to say "This is the way it's going to be." (Dee Dee, p.)

What I regard as my job as a chair is to keep things moving fast enough and carefully enough to balance those two so that you don't ever reach the point, or you don't very often reach the point, where you're just so tired you can't cope. You can't guarantee that you won't get to that exhaustion point, but I would regard myself as a failure if, as a chair, we got to the point where somebody actually said, "Annah, we've got to make a decision so let's just say it's met and we'll get out of here." I would regard that as a failure on my part. (Annah, p. 11)

Using Multiple Sources of Information.

The on-site visit process is an intense time for the team because of its short duration. In about three days (from Sunday afternoon through Wednesday noon), the team must verify all the information contained in the institutional report by examining pertinent documents, interviewing scores of people ranging from administrators at various level, the faculty and staff, students and alumni, and observing classes. It must come to a team consensus as to the institution's level of compliance with the NCATE standards. Before leaving the campus on Wednesday, the team must have drafted the Board of Examiner Report reflecting the team consensus. Hence, a "snapshot approach" is sometimes used in describing the NCATE accreditation process. NCATE appears to have accepted such a characterization in the following statement: "The professional education unit is expected to meet these standards at a level judged acceptable at the time of its on-site visit" (Standards, Procedures & Policies, 1995; p. 12). So did the chairs, as Margaret's response suggested:

It's a snapshot. But it's probably a pretty good snapshot if (emphasis

original) you touch a lot of different segments. But if you don't, it's a blurry picture at best. So again, that's the team responsibility to get out and touch all those different elements that relate to any given category and to look at the documentation, look at the evaluation, ... but know it's a cross sampling (p. 12).

Margaret offered the following example to illustrate her statement:

It's imperative that the team keep in mind that they're there not just to see it one time, but to see it in repeated kinds of instances. For example, what are the responses of the students related to their field experiences? You want just not to hear from the field experience director, but you're wanting to talk to a large cross-sample of students, you're wanting to talk to faculty, you're wanting to talk to cooperating teachers so that you're able to see what kind of consistency is there. (p. 12)

To ascertain the use of multiple sources of information in judging the institution's compliance with a given category of the NCATE standards, the chairs were asked to describe how the team would evaluate the institution's compliance with the "conceptual framework" standard. Their responses revealed several common elements. Kim called them "the three Ps--Paper, Places, and People" (p. 5). Translated into questions to which the team sought answers, the following questions were raised: Was the conceptual framework:

- Written out in a proper format (usually in a graphic format)?
- Reflected in course syllabi and course evaluation?
- Consulted when curricula changes took place?
- Understood by students, faculty, and cooperating teachers?
- Explained to governing bodies such as the Curriculum Committee and Teacher Education Council?

- Incorporated into the planning of evaluation of student performance?

Wilma's and Annah's accounts cited below demonstrate how the chairs operationalized these questions:

I guess one of the main issues is whether that conceptual framework is really being articulated through the school of education in terms of the faculty, whether they bought into it and it's not just some catchy title that one person has zeroed in on and decided that "this is what we want our program to do. So be sure that you include those two or three words in your course syllabus." If this is your conceptual framework, have you even articulated that to those persons who are working with your pre-service teachers in all areas. For example, if you say that you are trying to produce a student who is creative, how does the cooperating teacher know that and what is the cooperating teacher doing to see that the student teacher is involved in activities that will do just that. ... when you interview an individual faculty member, and you ask "What exactly do you do in your classes with your students to develop a student that is creative?" If they've never heard of it or say "Yes, I think I did hear of that at a meeting or I think I saw some pictures on the board of our conceptual framework...." Those are not the kinds of things that I'm looking for. I'm looking for some kind of articulation, some kind of integration of that conceptual framework woven throughout the program. It doesn't have to be in every course. But at least your faculty should know that you're all about. I want to see if the program as a whole is attuned to whatever that conceptual framework is and whether it does in fact undergird all of the experiences, whether it be content, whether it be their field experiences, or practicums or whatever, instead of just little pieces and pockets of it. (Wilma, p. 16)

What I ask, first of all, is there's a statement, you know, some document that says "Here's what we see as our conceptual framework. Secondly, how is it used? Does the curriculum committee have a copy of it? When they get a proposal [of new course offering], do they have to look at that conceptual framework and say "How does this proposal fit?" When they planned evaluation of teaching for the faculty, did they think about the conceptual framework? Is that part of the discussion? If there are major change kinds of things going on, was the conceptual framework used as part of that? How does the field experience relate to it? Do you see evidence of the conceptual framework in syllabi, in handbooks? When you talk to students, do you get some sense--not that they can parrot it back--can they talk about the concepts that are contained in that phrase of that document? I always like to go out and see if the [cooperating] teachers have some sense of what the conceptual framework is. And then, at the

exit from the program, I would expect to see that the conceptual framework plays some role in determining how you evaluate people when they finish. I also expect to see it at the graduate level all the way through. (Annah, pp. 32-33).

Kim saw his "three Ps" (people, places and papers) as a triangulation mechanism in the verifying process. His account of how he would verify an institution's compliance with the "conceptual framework" standard provided another illustration for seeking multiple sources of information:

You verify by first looking at the written stuff. You talk to the faculty about what they have done, what kind of discussions they had. You look at the minutes and see if they appear in their minutes. Then the last step is to talk with students and see if they are aware of the conceptual framework or the model. So by the time you put together the stuff, the information from interviews, you get a pretty good picture of either having a consistent pattern or things are missing in certain spots. ... You need what I call triangulation--people, places, and papers. Not just any one thing, but all three things kind of converging together to support the claim that the institution is making. So what you have is a process of emerging evidence and picture of what the institution looks like, and it doesn't come from any single source but three different sources.

If Margaret's criteria for attaining a good "snapshot" of the institution's compliance with the NCATE standards hold, the overwhelming evidence in the chairs' responses suggest that: (1) the chairs were consistent in drawing multiple sources of information in reviewing the institution's compliance to the NCATE standards and (2) that the quality of the "snapshot" is rather high.

Another source of the multiple sources of information was found in the team's composition. The chairs repeatedly commended NCATE for its ability to compose balanced teams, though many chairs admitted that they had no idea how the balance was

achieved. Terrie's remarks represent the chairs' view:

NCATE does an absolutely splendid job of making sure that every team that goes out is diverse. I have no idea how they are able to do that. I have always been on a team that has somebody of ethnic minority group and it always has a balance of men and women...so you do have different viewpoints just by virtue of the makeup of the team. And that ensures that the school gets looked at in sort of a very balanced way. (p. 15)

Writing the BOE report

The team's deliberations on the institution's compliance with the NCATE standards found their ultimate expressions in the BOE report. The chairs agreed that, besides managing the various aspects of the visit, ensuring that the report was of high quality was the chair's most important task. Of what elements should a high quality report be consisted?

One element is that the team has examined the data presented in the institutional report and collected throughout the on-site visit in making a qualitative judgment about the institution's compliance with the NCATE standards; that the team's judgment was built upon a thorough and fair evaluation of such data. Annah's words quoted at the beginning of Chapter Five spoke to this element. The evidence presented in the "Building the Case" section suggested that the team, overall, had demonstrated their ability to make professional judgments based on thorough and fair evaluation.

The chairs' reflections of their experiences revealed two other elements of a high quality report. One is concerned with the "flow" and the other the wording of the report:

It [the report] has to flow. ... When I say "the quality of the report, I'm not

saying that we have not addressed the standards properly. I'm talking in terms of how it was written, whether there is sufficient information there. So the chair should make sure that it does flow and that sufficient information is there before you leave the site. (Wilma, p. 25)

Granted, the report is written by individuals but there needs to be enough consistency in the final report that it looks like one person [has] put the whole report together (Carol, p. 4)

The report is a public document and a PR [public relations] piece. It should be crystal clear what the team did to make their determination. (Myra, p. 20)

The chair really is responsible for making that report one that will hold up in front of UAB's examination. And there's so many subtle things about the way a report is written. I mean you can say that there are problems without making the institution feel like they're the dumbest people in the world. (Terri, p. 2)

If it's a bad report, they're [the institution] going to feel bad and, to some extent, they may be angry. But I could do the report in such a way that they would be angry even if it was a good report. There's just no reason to do that. And NCATE is the one that's really going to get ripped on that. (Don, p. 26)

The importance of team consensus was encapsuled with several quotes in the "Building the Team" section. The chairs' frequent reference to a consensus approach in rendering judgments suggests that team consensus is one of the key characteristics of on-site visitation process. The data presentation in this chapter sought to illustrate the complex and intricate nature of this process. Yet, the team consensus approach might be best described with Wilma's simple words:

Whatever the group has said, that's what I say to the people in the exit interview; and that's what goes in the report. If the group didn't say it, I don't write it [into the report]. (p. 26)

From the chairs' reflections emerged a pattern of practice that was observed, with

few variations, by all the chairs in "constructing the report and making it a team document" (Annah, p. 8):

- Helping the team members realize the significance of their responsibility and how critical it is for the institution to be treated fairly at the first team meeting.
- Having facilities set up in ways to encourage early writing on categories of standards that seemed non-contraversial among the team members.
- Having an agreed-upon draft of the report before the members' leaving the campus on Wednesday.
- Finishing editing the draft report and sending it to the members for comments as soon as possible.
- Submitting the final report to UAB within 30 days of completing the on-site visit.

A high quality BOE report defined by the chairs, then, would be one reflecting team consensus, high coherence in style and cogency in presenting the supporting evidence, and one reporting the weakness(es) in program(s) without denegrating the institution.

The chairs' view of the team's role and their reconstructed experiences of their on-site visits may be represented in Figure 7 on the following page. Their shared philosophy of the BOE team's dual role, their recognition of the importance of "team" and their emphasis on "consensus building" may be the most significant characteristics of the redesigned NCATE accreditation process.

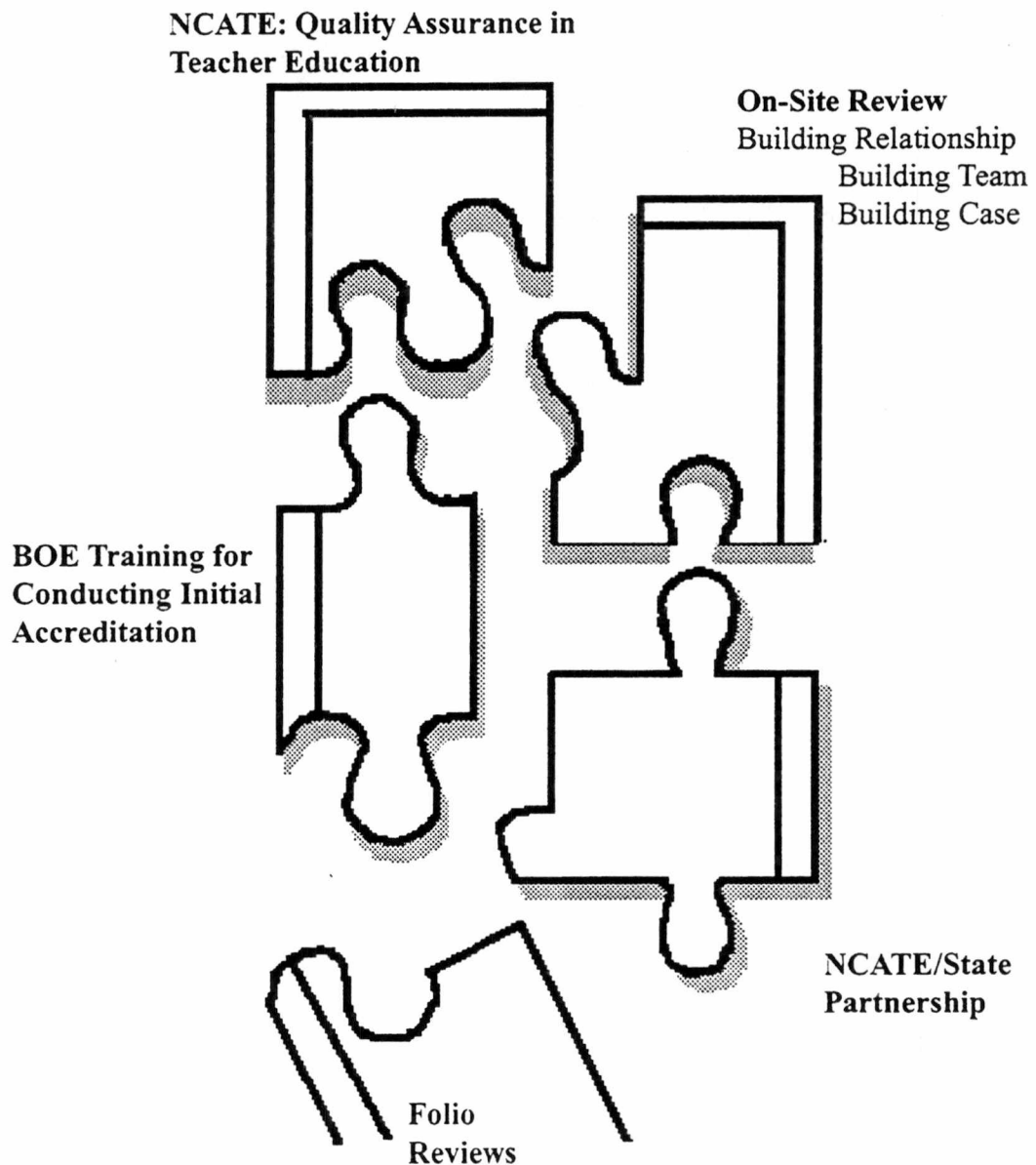


Figure 7. Chairs' Perceptions of On-Site Visit Process in the Context of Teacher Education Accreditation

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to ascertain the level of consistency in the NCATE on-site review process concerning initial accreditation since the 1986 redesign. The population for this study were the BOE members who had chaired NCATE on-site teams. Seventeen chairs across the United States participated in individual interviews during which they reflected on their BOE experiences. The shortest interview lasted forty five minutes; the longest 150 minutes. The average interview time was about ninety minutes.

The interviews, except for one, were recorded on audio tapes and later transcribed by a professional transcriber. The transcripts were individually analyzed for thematic patterns. The participants' curricular vita provided background information to help in the analysis of the interviews. NCATE provided additional information at the researcher's request.

Demographic data indicated that most chairs were teacher educators; most of them had previously worked either for state departments of education or in K-12 education.

Two chairs were state education policymakers and one a mathematics professor. Together, they represented three of the four NCATE constituency groups, i.e., teacher educator, the learned societies and state policy makers. In addition to the chair experiences, several chairs had served either on the NCATE Executive Board and Unit Accreditation Board or as trainers to the NCATE BOE training sessions.

The major findings from the analysis of interview transcripts were discussed within the framework of two broad topics: the perceived adequacy of NCATE training and the experiences chairing NCATE on-site review teams. A third category resulted from the data analysis: NCATE/State partnerships. Themes emerged within the three topics. Table 5 presents the major themes under each topic.

Summary of Findings

Findings Related to BOE Training

The participants' assessment of the training process was, in the main, very positive. Their favorable assessment seemed to positively correlate with their extent of involvement with the NCATE process. Five themes emerged within the category of initial training for BOE members.

Table 5
Summary of Major Findings

Topics	Themes
Initial BOE Training	An evolution process toward maturity • Training personnel from outside experts to experienced BOE chairs • From emphasis on theory to focus on practical skills • From relying on lecturing to using more hands-on, simulation activities
Concern	• Screening at the end of the training could be more rigorous
NCATE/State Partnership	There were as many forms of partnerships as the number of institutions sought NCATE accreditation • The NCATE on-site visit process greatly affected by the form of partnership • The outcome of the visit not significantly affected by the form of partnership • Various forms of partnership not significantly affect the out-come of the on-site visits
On-site Visit Process	The pre-visit plays a vital role in ensuring a successful visit • Building the relationship with the institution • Recognize the voluntary nature of the process and commend the institution for subjecting itself to peer review • Respect the institution's right to approach teacher education in different ways • Convey the right attitude • Building the team to foster openness and trust and to encourage collaboration and consensus building • Building the case • Knowing the spirit/intent of the standards • Knowing the process • Writing the BOE report
BOE Team's Role	• Ears and eyes for NCATE • Representatives of the teacher education profession
Consistency	• Defined as "consistently using the best judgment one can make on the basis of available evidence".

Initial Training for BOE Members

The overarching theme was that the BOE training had progressed toward maturity. This maturing process was facilitated, partly, by the continuing refinement of the accreditation standards. Examples frequently used by the participants included the adoption of "conceptual framework" in place of, first, "models" and, later, "knowledge base." With the exception of two chairs, the participants tended to agree that "conceptual framework" was more parsimonious in describing the knowledge base undergirding a teacher education program. In contrast, models and knowledge base tended to convey too narrow a meaning for a sound foundation for teacher education programs. Another example was the separation of the "diversity" requirement from the qualification of teacher education candidate and faculty. While NCATE's expectation of teacher education programs having a diverse student body and faculty was desirable, the participants believed that mixing the diversity requirement with the qualification of faculty and teacher candidates (the qualification standards) created an undue dilemma to BOE teams in their deliberations of an institution's compliance with the standards. Separating the two, on the other hand, allowed the teams to address both instead of being forced to choose between valuing diversity and valuing other indicators of candidates' and faculty's qualifications. The previous qualification standards caused much debate, hence, confusion among BOE teams on their proper application. The surrounding controversy was a constant source of irritation, drawing criticism of the NCATE process from both friends and. NCATE's

clarification of how diversity should be interpreted (i.e., the plan, the effort, and the result) further enhanced consistent application. While discussions on proper emphasis one should assign to the plan, the effort and the result continued, what diversity meant in the NCATE context was no longer subject to differing interpretation. In both cases, BOE chairs seemed to agree that the evolution had resulted in a better understanding of the standards and less ambiguity.

Three other themes provided further evidence to the chairs' assertion of NCATE's continuing progress toward maturity. The first theme focused on training personnel for initial BOE training sessions. The participants unanimously praised Donna Gullnick, Vice President of NCATE, for having provided a level of consistency in masterminding the training sessions. The praise notwithstanding, some chairs pointed out that the trainers for the early training sessions were mostly teacher education experts with heavy emphasis on theory and research. The later training sessions, in contrast, utilized experienced BOE chairs as trainers and actual institutional data as training materials.

The second theme supporting the maturity assertion was the shift in content of the training sessions, i.e., from emphasis on theory to focus on practical skills. Analysis of the transcript suggested that the shift in content reflected NCATE's openness to suggestions for improvement as well as a result of the changing training personnel. Two basic objectives of the training was to ensure that prospective BOE members would properly construe NCATE standards and have the skills to conduct satisfactory on-site reviews. While the theory and research presented by the experts in the early training sessions provided interesting discussions, it offered inadequate assistance in light of the

aforementioned objectives. The discussions, consequently, were "a waste of time" to many trainees. The later training sessions led by the "homegrown" trainers, in contrast, devoted significantly more time to activities on team building, interviewing skills, analyzing institutional data and writing on standards. Actual institutional materials were used in simulations to give the trainees a real sense of conducting future on-site visits.

The third theme reflecting the system's progress toward maturity emerged from the participants' descriptions of how the training format had evolved. The earlier training sessions relied primarily on lecture and question-and-answer sessions. This style, as the participants reported, did not resonate well with teamwork encouraged by NCATE and necessary for successful on-site reviews. In contrast, substantially more activities in later training sessions were completed in smaller groups of trainees with hands-on activities, focusing on collaboration among group members.

While positive remarks pervaded the chairs' assessment of the BOE training system as it had evolved, concerns were expressed by the participants. Some chairs questioned the rigor of the screening mechanism which ensures the quality of would-be BOE members. Noting that some screening was exercised at the end of training, these chairs felt that such exercise was minimal. Set against this concern, the chairs made two specific suggestions for improvement. First, an effective method should be devised so that the trainees would demonstrate a certain level of consistency in their understanding of the standards and the process as a result of the training. Second, those who demonstrated questionable performance during the training should not be used. "You should err on the side of not using people if their performance is questionable." Given the fact that BOE

trainees came with significantly varying levels of sophistication in teacher education, the chairs appeared to be doubtful of the practicality of trying to bring all the trainees' understanding to a desirable level of consistency in one week.

Some chairs noted possible lapses in some BOE members' knowledge of the standards as they were currently defined. BOE members received only one formal training, yet the standards had undergone constant fine-tuning since the 1986 redesign. Although NCATE regularly sent out materials updating BOE members on new developments regarding the standards and provided information sessions at professional conferences, keeping up with the new interpretations of the standards was left to BOE members' own initiatives. The chairs pointed out that such lapses were usually remedied in the team discussions during an on-site review and did not pose a real threat to the team's effectiveness and productivity.

Findings Related to the Partnership Program

At the end of 1995, thirty-nine states as well as the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and Alaska had entered into a partnership agreement with NCATE in conducting their program reviews¹³. While NCATE had prescribed three partnership options from which a state would choose one¹⁴, it at the same time granted the states much flexibility to design a system which would best suit their needs. Transcript analysis suggested that the actual partnership process was as much determined by the negotiations

¹³ The chairs referred to such partnerships as "joint visit."

¹⁴ See Figure 6 in Chapter Four for more information on partnership options

between the state and NCATE team as by the partnership agreement. Consequently, there were as many different forms of joint visits as there were number of institutions that sought NCATE accreditation.

Transcript analysis indicated that the chairs, in the main, regarded the joint visit process favorably. They believed that the joint visit usually resulted in more human resources in conducting the on-site review. They also reported that the state team, being more familiar with the state and institutional context, usually contributed to bringing about a more accurate evaluation of the institution under review. The chairs expressed concerns when one or more of the following three scenarios applied to a joint visit: (1) when the format of the joint visit preferred by the state team did not yield the aforementioned benefits of having a joint visit; (2) when the chairs perceived that the state team members were not adequately trained on NCATE standards and procedures; and (3) when member(s) of the state team exhibited behaviors suggesting a conflict of interest.

Given the myriad forms of the joint visit and the chairs' expressed concerns, the researcher raised three questions during the interviews. First, was the NCATE on-site visit process affected by the presence of a state team? The answer was a resounding "yes." Second, was the outcome of the NCATE on-site visit significantly affected by the presence or absence of a state team? The chairs seemed to agree that the outcome was not significantly affected either way. Third, did the variation in the joint visit result in inconsistency in the outcome of BOE teams' on-site visits? The answer was also a negative one. The chairs appeared to have a great level of confidence in the BOE teams' as well as their own ability to benefit from the added advantages of the joint visit.

Findings Related to the On-site Visit

Importance of the Pre-visit

The chairs regarded the pre-visit to be a very important activity necessary for ensuring a successful on-site visit. They asserted that a good pre-visit would accomplish three objectives. First, the pre-visit allowed the chair to ensure that all the logistics for the on-site visit would be worked out in as much detail as possible. Interview schedules, working and boarding facilities for the team members, and negotiating with the state team chair (if it was a joint visit) for a clear understanding of "how joint" the visit would be were among the major components of the logistics. Equally important as working out the logistics during the pre-visit was the psychological benefits to both the chair and the institution. This aspect of the pre-visit related to the chairs' perception that institutional personnel were usually nervous about the process. They felt that meeting institutional personnel would help minimize the unnecessary anxiety. The third objective for the pre-visit was for the chair to ensure that the institution could best present itself. While pointing out that they should not act in a consulting role, the chairs believed that they could ask the institution for more information in certain areas and make suggestions concerning how the document room should be organized. Such a helping role was consistent with the chairs' assertion that the team should always have the institution's best interest in mind.

Building the Relationship with the Institution

Building the relationship with the institution is interpreted here as building a level of trust with the institution. Four themes emerged from the chairs' discussions within this category.

The first theme related to the chairs' perception of NCATE accreditation as a voluntary process in which institutions chose to participate. The institution's voluntary submission to such professional scrutiny of its program quality, therefore, should be recognized by the team. This recognition was often expressed by the chairs as they express their appreciation to the institution for having **invited** the team to come.

Along with the expressed appreciation was the concept of empathy the team should demonstrate for the institution. Recognizing the intensity of preparing for the on-site visit, the chairs would often affirm the tremendous efforts the institution had made even before the team's arrival. The empathy also stemmed from the chairs' belief that there was no one right approach to preparing teachers.

The third theme in the chairs' discussions on building a level of trust with the institution was to convey the right attitude. Aside from expressing appreciation for the institution's invitation and affirmation of its hard work, the chairs tried to convey to the institution that the team came not just to evaluate, but also to learn from the institution. They seemed to suggest that NCATE accreditation was not merely a mechanism of evaluation, but rather, it was a public forum for teacher educators to explore the best practices in the profession.

Emphasizing that the building of trust must begin with the first contact one would make with the institution, the chairs saw the pre-visit as a major opportunity to develop this trust and the entire on-site visit as the process in which the trust was maintained and strengthened.

The last theme within this category focused on the "human conditions" which might circumvent the team's effort to maintain a professional attitude toward the institution. Such human conditions included (1) poor institutional report/poor organization of institutional documents, (2) institutional hostility toward the team and (3) the institution's failure to take care the team's creature comforts. Some chairs hypothesized that a strong correlation existed among these conditions and the quality of the institution, a hypothesis that warrants further investigation.

Building the Team

The redesign on-site visit described by the chairs was characterized with concepts such as "team efforts" and "team decisions." The chairs saw themselves playing a crucial role in ensuring that BOE members functioned as a real team. Their leadership skills were demonstrated in conducting a successful pre-visit, establishing a healthy level of trust with the institution and in managing the on-site visit. This category focused on the chairs' sentiment toward working with BOE members whom they already knew. Many chairs appeared to regret the discontinuation of having team members from the same cadre.

Building the Case

Three themes emerged within this category. The first theme focused on the chairs' knowledge of the standards. Although improved BOE training and the refined standards themselves had resulted in few misinterpretations of the standards, proper interpretation of the standards' intent by the team members remained the biggest challenge for the team. The chairs discussed at length the personal biases team members brought to the on-site visit, such as the diversity issue. These discussions have implications for practice.

The second theme dealt with the chairs' knowledge of the on-visit process. Within this theme, the chairs discussed how they made team assignments. They also elaborated on how they ensured that multiple sources of information were sought by team members in validating the institution's compliance with the standards. The chairs' stories revealed that their practices suggested a high level of consistency among the chairs and with the protocols established by NCATE. Frequently, the chairs alluded to the importance of pacing the team meetings to allow sufficient discussions without "dragging on." They demonstrated the need to maintain effective communication among the team members so that the "culture of evidence" would portray the institution fairly and accurately. They emphasized that "there should be no surprises" to the institution in terms of a team's findings of the institution's compliance with the standards. Although most chairs reported incidents where a team member would not "pull his/her own weight," they added that individual behaviors usually did not significantly affect the team's overall effectiveness.

The last theme within this category addressed the chairs' experiences in writing the

BOE report which was the culmination of the team's findings and, once submitted to the Unit Accreditation Board, became a public document. They emphasized that every team member was responsible for writing some part of the report and that the chair did not make any substantive changes to the final report. But, at the same time, the chairs appeared to willingly bear full responsibility for the quality of the report. A good report, they said, should be concise in presenting the team's findings and contain adequate supporting evidence for the findings. How team reports were utilized by NCATE and how the UAB's responses to the reports might be improved to benefit both the institution and BOE teams were two areas in question.

The BOE Team's Role

From the chairs' perspective, BOE teams served two roles. BOE members were representatives of NCATE; the chairs were leaders of these representatives. They believed that BOE teams' conduct in the context of on-site visit largely shaped the public's perception of NCATE's credibility. Consequently, the chairs took their leadership responsibilities seriously. BOE members were also representatives of the teacher education profession because they had been nominated by the major stakeholders of the profession. Receiving no financial compensation for their NCATE activities, the chairs

appeared, nonetheless, to be very proud in offering their services to the profession. Their perception of this dual roles: NCATE and teacher education profession representatives, prevailed in their experiences as BOE members and underscored every step in the on-site review process.

Consistency

Many chairs questioned the rigor exercised in selecting and screening prospective BOE members; all the chairs shared stories reflecting less than satisfactory performances of some BOE members including the performances of some chairs. Yet, when asked to judge the overall consistency in conducting the on-site review process, the chairs overwhelmingly agreed the consistency level was rather high. This claim was supported with several assertions based on perceptions as well as concrete experiences.

One assertion made by the chairs was that most BOE members were competent individuals sophisticated in their knowledge of teacher education and well trained in applying the standards. Their experiences and skills in conducting on-site visits often mitigated the inadequate performances by a rather small percentage of BOE members. Most chairs were such competent individuals.

Another assertion was that most BOE teams were carefully composed to reflect diversity in gender, ethnicity, institutional sizes and constituency representation. Along with balanced team composition was the assertion that the review process strongly encouraged team efforts and a consensus approach to arriving at team findings.

The third assertion was concerned more with accreditation decisions than with the on-site review process. While the BOE report constructed from the team's findings provided a vital indicator of an institution's compliance with the standards, other documents including the institutional report and rejoinder also formed the bases on which an accreditation decision was made. Further, a group of professionals other than the BOE team would render the accreditation decision. All of these served as means of triangulation in enhancing the consistency of the decisions.

Defining consistency in general terms within the context of NCATE accreditation appeared to be problematic. Some chairs compared it to administering a criterion-base test; the evaluation of evidence was set against the standards rather than among institutions. Other chairs defined it as "consistently using the best objective judgment one can make on the basis of available evidence." The chairs appeared to agree that two similar institutions might not receive similar evaluations because "no two institutions are the same no matter how much alike they appear to be on the surface."

Implications for Research and Practice

Implications for Research

Interviews with seventeen BOE chairs generated over 600 pages of transcripts which provided rich descriptions of the chairs' experiences with the training, the on-site visit, the partnership programs and other aspects of the NCATE on-site review process.

In this section, the research will focus on the findings which most deserve further research.

1. The participants agreed that the on-site review process had achieved a high level of consistency by the teams. This finding is consistent with earlier reports in the literature (Roth, 1989; Jones, 1991; Jones, 1993; Gardner, et. al., 1996). Yet, defining what consistency means appeared to be problematic to the chairs. Given the fact that inconsistencies in the NCATE review process as well as in the accreditation decisions remain a strong criticism (Gardner, et. al., 1996; CIC, 1996), future research should focus on: (a) how BOE members define consistency and (b) case studies detailing and analyzing examples of inconsistency. Findings from such research efforts would present further empirical evidence for understanding the nature of the criticism surrounding the issue of consistency.

2. The stories shared by the participants of this study about team members with less-than-satisfactory performance substantiated the frequently-heard allegation that some BOE members were unqualified. Some chairs attributed the unqualified BOE members presence to NCATE's lacking a rigorous screening system at the end of the initial BOE training; other chairs readily disagreed. A research project designed to examine the nomination and selection process of new BOE members would help to clarify the issue and, consequently, reduce the number of unqualified BOE members.

3. The data strongly suggested that experienced BOE members as well as good chairs play a significant role in ensuring that BOE teams function as real teams. Yet, burn-out due to intense workload in conducting on-site reviews appeared to pose a serious threat to retaining experienced BOE members. Future studies should explore effective

ways for the retention of experienced BOE members and chairs.

4. Several relationships were reported by some participants. One was between the quality of institutions' self-presentation (as reflected in the institutional report and documents) and the quality of their programs. Another was between the institution's attitude toward the team and the tone of the team report. The third set of relationship appeared between the tone of the report and the Unit Accreditation Board's decision on the institution's accreditation status. Further studies need to focus on each of these perceived relationships to test their validity.

5. The majority of the chairs participated in this study were females. This finding reflects the total BOE composition. While Annah's story of an on-site visit essentially describes those of her male counterparts, differences were also discernible in the meanings they gave to various aspects of their NCATE experiences. Female chairs, for example, tended to attach more importance to working with BOE members they already knew. Male chairs, on the other hand, did not feel as strongly about such factor. Could such difference be attributed to gender difference? Given the fact that higher education as well as educational policymaking bodies are still dominated by males, the large representation by females on the Board of Examiners poses some interesting questions. Why are there more female than male BOE members? How might the way on-site reviews are conducted have been affected by the large representation of female chairs? To what extent have the findings of this study been shaped by the greater representation of female chairs? Further studies focusing on only male or female chairs would provide insights to these questions.

6. While NCATE collected from several sources information related to BOE

members' on-site performances, how such information was used in BOE training and retention as well as for institutional improvement is unknown. Future studies are needed to focus on the utilization of this information by NCATE.

7. Three chairs expressed concerns with the quality of communication between the Unit Accreditation Board and the chairs regarding the Board's reactions to the team report. Studies need to explore effective ways in making the UAB reactions to the team report more useful and responsive to BOE chairs in writing future reports without making chairs feel that theirs and their teams' efforts had been slighted.

8. The findings of this study present a very favorable picture of NCATE after the 1986 redesign. Consistent with the existing literature (Gardner, et. al., 1996; Jones, 1993), data from the current study indicated that the redesigned NCATE process had reached a respectable level of consistency in making accreditation decisions. Despite the large amount of qualitative data resulting from the interviews, however, the scope of this project and the findings were limited. The final recommendation for research, then, is to call for replications of this study so that more empirical data could be gathered to provide a more conclusive answer to the question of consistency.

Implications for Practice

The themes in the findings of this study provided many areas for recommendations for practice. The following discussion will focus on the recommendations for practice which this researcher feels most relevant.

1. Although not without controversy, the 1986 NCATE standards and their subsequent refinements have left little room for misinterpretation by BOE members. Differences arise among the team members primarily in the area of interpreting institutional data in relationship to the standards. Consistency in this area entails two dimensions, i. e., external consistency and internal consistency. Here, external consistency is interpreted as the same application of the standards to be applied to two institutions with similar data. Internal consistency, on the other hand, focuses on reaching consensus among the members of the same team. No reference is given to observing external consistency. Since no two institutions are alike, regardless of their superficial similarities, attempts at achieving external consistency would seem futile. If a BOE team's professional judgments are to be respected, the argument for enhancing internal consistency would allow NCATE to avoid being trapped in the consistency debate. A clear definition of consistency (i. e., internal consistency) would also help institutions to better understand what consistency is in the context of seeking NCATE accreditation.

2. NCATE would benefit from clarifying its efforts in screening and eliminating unqualified BOE members. Such information should be made public so that both BOE members as well as institutions have confidence in the rigor of NCATE's selection and retention of qualified BOE members.

3. Different approaches to BOE training should be explored to ensure that all BOE members would have the knowledge and skills to properly interpret and apply the NCATE standards. The same recommendation was made by Jones in his longitudinal study of NCATE (1993).

4. BOE chairs need to exercise good judgment in making team assignments so that the responsibility for validating institutions' compliance with the diversity requirements would not fall on the minority team member(s) on the team. Such practice would help minimize the adverse and, at times alienating, effects frequently associated with the diversity requirements.

5. Institutions should demonstrate more confidence in their peers' professional competence in carrying out the peer review process. They should realize, as did the chairs, that BOE members represent not just NCATE; that the members represent teacher education. Further, institutions need to realize that an NCATE accreditation decision is made not on any one person's judgment, but on the judgments of at least two groups of professionals, most of whom have demonstrated professional competence and a strong sense of responsibility. Unprofessional conduct of one individual on a team, in most cases, will unlikely compromise the team's effectiveness. On the other hand, NCATE's credibility, and that of the teacher education profession, are greatly affected by individual team members' conduct in their interaction with institutional personnel. BOE members should take their assignments seriously and act responsibly as their level of professionalism reflects on both NCATE and the profession.

6. Given the potential impact of and the perennial debates surrounding the NCATE process, it appears surprising that so few empirical research studies have been conducted to systematically study the NCATE on-site review process. The fact that no empirical study focusing on BOE members' experiences, prior to this one, has ever been undertaken is a perplexing phenomenon. Professional organizations such as AACTE

would do a great service to teacher education by encouraging more empirical studies to be conducted.

While a few themes reported in this study identified areas for improvement, most of the themes supported the current literature that the redesigned NCATE, especially the use of BOE teams, has resulted in a significantly high level of consistency in conducting the on-site reviews (Gardner, et al, 1996; Jones, 1993; Roth, 1989; Scannell, et al, 1983). Consistent with the tenets of symbolic interactionism, BOE members' application of the standards, especially their interpretations of the institutional data, are influenced by their individual experiences, causing potential threats to consistency. But such threats are significantly reduced by the consensus approach characteristic of the on-site visit process.

Transcript analyses suggest that the chairs who participated in this study are both strong advocates for and articulate critics of NCATE. While sharing their concerns and frustrations with certain aspects of the process, most of them also expressed strong confidence in NCATE's future and the benefits institutions could reap from their active participation in NCATE accreditation.

Ironically, criticism of the current NCATE has never been more serious. While criticism of NCATE comes from many fronts (Gardner, et al, 1996; Guy, 1995), the most concret challenge to NCATE is found in the actions that have been taken by the Council for Independent Colleges (CIC) to explore an alternative accreditation body for teacher education since 1990 (CIC, 1996). In a paper addressed to the members of the Association of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges for Teacher Education, CIC criticized NCATE in virtually every aspect of the organization. Drawing on the concept of "audit

design,” the main thrust of a recently published essay on accreditation (Grahm, Lyman, and Trow, 1995), CIC has put forth the major features for a new accrediting body and named it TEAC (Teacher Education Accreditation Council) (CIC, 1996). Other organizations which met with members of CIC to discuss “mutual concerns” included the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (CIC, 1996; 5). Two major concerns CIC has expressed with the current NCATE process are:

- The inconsistency of decisions between different levels of the organization, which is confusing to institutions and often appears arbitrary in nature.
- The perception that standards are not appropriately applied to different types of institutions (CIC, 1996; 2).

To the extent that the findings of the current study reflect the overall quality of the redesigned NCATE process, CIC’s above-mentioned charges are unfounded. Furthermore, an analysis of the mission, the process and the structure of the CIC proposed TEAC reveals little difference from what NCATE has been doing or desires to accomplish in its future operation. One is left to wonder as to exactly what compels those who attempt to create yet another accrediting agency for teacher education.

If teacher educators are serious about self-renewal, improving the profession’s societal status and producing competent teachers for the nation’s schools, solidarity must be achieved for productive and civil dialogues to take place in the interest of continuing improvement. NCATE offers a vehicle as well as an opportunity to achieve this goal.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

NCATE Constituent Members

Teacher Educator Organizations

American Association of Colleges
for Teacher Education
Association of Teacher Educators

Teacher Organizations

American Federation of Teachers
National Education Association

Policymaker Organizations

Council of Chief State School Officers
National Association of State Boards of
Education
National School Boards Association

Subject-Specific Organizations

American Alliance for Health, Physical
Education, Recreation, and Dance
Council of Learned Societies in Education
International Reading Association
National Council for the Social Studies
National Council of Teachers of English
National Council of Teachers of
Mathematics
National Science Teachers Association

Child-Centered Organizations

Association for Childhood Education
International
Council for Exceptional Children
National Association for the
Education of Young Children
National Middle School Association

Technology Organizations

Association for Educational
Communications and Technology
International Society for Technology
in Education
International Technology Education
Association/Council on Technology
Teacher Education

Specialist Organizations

American Library Association/American
Association of School Librarians
National Association of School
Psychologists

Administrator Organizations

American Association of School
Administrators
Association for Supervision and
Curriculum Development
Association of School Business Officials
International
National Association of Elementary
School Principals
National Association of Secondary
School Principals

Other

National Board for Professional Teaching
Standards
Public Representatives
Student Representatives

APPENDIX B

Preconditions to Determine Eligibility for NCATE Accreditation

Precondition

- #1 There is a written description of the professional education unit that is primarily responsible for the preparation of teachers and other professional education personnel.
- #2 A dean, director, or chair is officially designated to represent the unit and assigned the authority and responsibility for its overall administration and operation.
- #3 There are written policies and procedures upon which the operations of the unit rest.
- #4 The unit regularly monitors and evaluates, both internally and externally, its operation, scope, quality of its offerings, and effectiveness of its graduates.
- #5 The unit has criteria for admission to basic teacher education programs that include an assessment of basic skills.
- #6 The unit assesses the academic and professional competencies of education students at exit from all programs at all levels through multiple evaluation methods.
- #7 In states with a program approval process, the unit's programs are approved by the appropriate state agency or agencies.
- #8 The unit submits a curriculum portfolio for each program for which there are NCATE-approved guidelines. (Units in most states that have been recognized under Options 1 or 2 by NCATE are exempt from this precondition. However, institutions in these states may voluntarily respond to this precondition.)
- #9 The institution is fully accredited by the appropriate institutional accrediting agency recognized by COPA.
- #10 The institution is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, age, or handicap (consistent with Section 702 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which deals with exemptions for religious corporations, with respect to employment of individuals with specific religious convictions).

APPENDIX C

NCATE Accreditation Standards (1995)

Standards Category	Standards		Initial Teacher Preparation	Advanced Preparation
Design of Professional Education <i>Curriculum</i> <i>Delivery</i> <i>Community</i>	I.A.	Conceptual Framework(s)	X	X
	I.B.	General Studies	X	
	I.C.	Content Studies	X	
	I.D.	Professional and Pedagogical Studies	X	
	I.E.	Integrative Studies	X	
	I.F.	Advanced Professional Studies		X
	I.G.	Quality of Instruction	X	X
	I.H.	Quality of Field Experiences	X	X
	I.I.	Professional Community	X	X
Candidates in Professional Education	II.A.	Qualifications	X	X
	II.B.	Composition	X	X
	II.C.	Monitoring and Assessing Progress	X	X
	II.D.	Ensuring Competence	X	X
Professional Education Faculty	III.A.	Qualifications	X	X
	III.B.	Composition	X	X
	III.C.	Professional Assignments	X	X
	III.D.	Professional Development	X	X
The Unit for Professional Education	IV.A.	Governance and Accountability	X	X
	IV.B.	Resources for Teaching and Scholarship	X	X
	IV.C.	Resources for Operations	X	X

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. How did you come to be involved with NCATE?

- (a) earliest involvement
- (b) involvement in what capacity
- (c) time since becoming a BOE member
- (d) number of times served on a BOE team

2. Tell me about the training you received from NCATE.

- (a) number of times
- (b) benefits from the training
- (c) opinion about the form and content of the training
- (d) how do you feel about the quality of the training?
- (e) difference(s) between the training for chairs and for BOE members.

3. Tell me what you do as a Chair?

Think of your last visit, tell me in as much detail as possible how you prepared for the visit.

- (a) Tell me how you became a chair.
- (b) What did you do to prepare for the campus visit?
- (c) How do you see your role as a BOE member? As the Chair?

4. Walk me through your campus visit.

- (a) How was the work divided?
- (b) As you reflect on the visit, which of the standard(s) generated most discussions/disagreements among the team members? How was that resolved?

5. How did you feel about your decisions on the unit's compliance with the NCATE standards?

Could you imagine that a different conclusion(s) might have been made should you have a different group/composition of the BOE members?

6. What do you think about the redesigned NCATE?

- (a) standards?
- (b) the overall effectiveness of the standards--consistency in interpretation and reliability in judgments?

7. Factors contributing to inconsistency of the process/decision?

CONSENT FORM

The purpose of this study is to seek your knowledge and expertise toward a better understanding of the inner workings of the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education's evaluative process. The central question of this study is "How do BOE members experience the NCATE accreditation process?"

The interviews will be audiotaped. Your responses to any inquiries during the study will be kept completely confidential; so will the audiotapes. Anonymity will be maintained in future use of your input by this researcher except only where you wish to be identified as the source of a statement(s). One copy of this consent form will be stored along with the interview tapes in a filing cabinet in my office.

There are no foreseeable risks involved in your participation in the study nor are there direct benefits to you. Your participation will, however, provide you with the opportunity to reflect on your experience and will help increase much needed knowledge concerning the success of the profession's new accreditation standards.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may opt to not answer any specific questions or you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If you have any further questions about this project, please contact Li Jun at 523 Shave Dr., Talbott, TN 37877. You may reach Li Jun also by one of the following ways

Tele: 423-471-3445 (office) or 423-585-5297 (residence)
Fax: 423-471-3475 (office) or 423-587-9334 (residence)
Internet: jun@cncacc.cn.edu

I fully understand the explanation of the study and I agree to participate in the study.

Name

Date

I permit Mr. Jun Li to transcribe the audio tape(s) and use the information I provide for this study.



**NATIONAL
COUNCIL
FOR
ACCREDITATION
OF TEACHER
EDUCATION**

September 22, 1995

*Arthur E. Wise
President*

Dear BOE Chair:

This letter accompanies a request from Li Jun of Carson-Newman College for information related to your experience as chair of an NCATE BOE team. Mr. Li will be interested in interviewing you as part of the research he is doing for his doctoral dissertation.

I have reviewed Mr. Li's proposal and would appreciate any help you can give him.

Cordially,

Arthur E. Wise

AEW/sh

APPENDIX E

INSTRUMENT FOR ASSESSING THE ADEQUACY OF STANDARDS

DIRECTIONS: Indicate whether you think the institution has "Met", "Excelled", or "Not Met" the standard by assigning numerals (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) on a scale value as indicated below:

- Assign 1 if The unit does not meet the standard.
- Assign 2 if The unit meets the standard with weaknesses.
- Assign 3 if The unit meets the standard with strengths and weaknesses.
- Assign 4 if The unit meets the standard with strengths.
- Assign 5 if The unit excels in meeting the standard.

PLEASE NOTE: A unit may not meet one or more elements within a standard, and still be deemed in compliance with it. This exercise does not lend itself to precise cut-offs or other decision rules. In your judgement, you will have to decide whether or not, overall, the unit meets the spirit and the letter of the standard.

STANDARD	FINDINGS	
	BASIC	ADVANCED
Scale Value for Standard I.A		
Scale Value for Standard I.B		
Scale Value for Standard I.C		
Scale Value for Standard I.D		
Scale Value for Standard I.E		
Scale Value for Standard II.A		
Scale Value for Standard II.B		
Scale Value for Standard II.C		
Scale Value for Standard III.A		
Scale Value for Standard III.B		
Scale Value for Standard III.C		
Scale Value for Standard III.D		
Scale Value for Standard IV.A		
Scale Value for Standard IV.B		
Scale Value for Standard IV.C		
Scale Value for Standard IV.D		
Scale Value for Standard V.A		
Scale Value for Standard V.B		

APPENDIX F

From: IN%"pamencate.org" 24-APR-1996 10:26:23.11
To: IN%"jun@cncacc.cn.edu"
CC:
Subj: NCATE questions

In response to your questions regarding NCATE BOE training, I can give you the following information:

Locations of BOE training (Location is determined by what institution would be suitable and willing to host an on-site simulation of a BOE visit):

1995 Alverno College (Milwaukee, WI)
1994 Pacific Lutheran University (Tacoma, WA)
1993 University of Missouri, Kansas City
1992 Oakland University (Rochester, MI)
1991 University of Florida
1990 University of North Carolina-Charlotte

1996 trainings will be held in July with University of Memphis, and November with University of Miami.

I've asked Donna to fill me in on the earlier trainings.

BOE Chair trainings: (These trainings do not require any "on-site" work and therefore are not held in conjunction with an institution; the locations of the first three, which had the largest groups, were chosen as a "weekend retreat")

Fall 1992 North Carolina
Spring 1993 Florida
Fall 1993, California
Spring 1994, Spring 1995, and Fall 1995 were held in D.C.

In fall 1994, did not hold a chair training, but did have a "continuing accreditation training" - the purpose of which was to train experienced BOE members in NCATE's new continuing accreditation procedures. This training was held in Destin, FL; faculty from the University of West Florida participated in some of the training. A continuing accreditation component for experienced BOE members was also included in the BOE training held at Pacific Lutheran U in summer 1994, and at Alverno in 1995, and will be included in 1996 trainings.

From: IN%"pamencate.org" 29-APR-1996 13:08
To: IN%"jun@cncacc.cn.edu"
CC:
Subj: BOE training

Here is the list of BOE trainings prior to 1990; the first training after NCATE redesign was either fall 1986 or Jan 1987, Donna doesn't remember exactly. Apparently, there were several trainings in 1988.

86 or 87 Florida (U Florida??)
Jan 1988 Houston (U of Houston)
June 88 Omaha, NE (Creighton U)
July 88 (2 sessions) MN (U of Minnesota)
July 1989 FL (U of South Florida)
Aug 89 ND (North Dakota State U)

Pam Magasich

VITA

Jun Li was born in Xining, Qinghai Province, People's Republic of China on August 21, 1965. After receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree in English Language and Literature from Zhengzhou University and an advanced certificate in International Journalism from Beijing Broadcast Institute in 1985, Mr. Li began his teaching career as an English instructor in the Foreign Language Department of Zhengzhou University, PR China.

Mr. Li received his Master of Arts in Teaching from Carson-Newman College, Tennessee, in 1989 and received the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Leadership Studies from College of Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in 1996. While completing his doctoral studies, Mr. Li taught for Carson-Newman College in areas of Education and Foreign Languages.

Currently, Mr. Li is Assistant Professor of Education at Carson-Newman College, Jefferson City, Tennessee.