

January MACTE Minute

An important anniversary, for which we offer a small remembrance this morning, somehow slipped past us in 2009. We should mark this event for the significant influence it has on our work, both for those who prepare Minnesota's teachers and for those who guide the licensure process authorizing their practice. During the fall of 1999 a new word began to dominate our conversations with colleagues and students. Then new to the work of teacher preparation after serving as an instructional developer and program evaluator, I first encountered "The Minnesota Standards of Effective Practice for Teachers" during a June conference hosted by the Board. At that gathering I learned that Minnesota's colleges would soon use these new "SEPs" to identify, instruct, and assess the pedagogical knowledge and skills to be acquired by Minnesota's future teachers. Where once the number of course credits, course titles, and their descriptions were criteria for approving a program of study leading to a teaching license, now our colleges would provide evidence that their candidates' preparation included sufficient and appropriate opportunities to learn, practice, and to be assessed on the knowledge and skills described by each of the 140 SEPs as well as the content standards for each licensure area.

Given my past work in the systematic design of courses and curricula and my limited knowledge of teacher preparation from earlier years, I expected that moving toward explicit statements of intent and away from an emphasis on credits and courses would enhance the instruction of prospective teachers. These standards could focus the efforts of those who would prepare them for their roles on essential knowledge and skills. Attending my first MACTE meetings in October of that year called my optimistic projection into question. Were Dr. Simms with us today, he could attest to many heated discussions fed by a wide range of emotions surrounding our state's adoption of "standards-based teacher preparation." Like most folks, college faculty show faint zeal for fundamental changes in their work which they did not devise.

Today, we have moved well beyond those first steps toward standards-based teacher education. During the past 16 months, 13 faculty members from many of Minnesota's 28 teacher preparation institutions have invested more than 700 hours working with Board of Teaching staff to revise the assurance process first used in 1999, later reborn as PEPER. Difficult work remains before PERCA, Performance Effectiveness for Continuing Approval, can meaningfully and consistently affirm prospective teachers' attainment of the knowledge and skills stipulated by the standards of pedagogy and content that guide their preparation. Continuing collaboration will prove essential for the successful development and adoption of this next step in Minnesota's standards-based teacher preparation.

What have we learned about standards-based teacher education in the decade past?

- Viable standards, as statements of educational intent, must be clearly understood by all who are to employ them in the design of meaningful instruction and useful assessments. Because they must take the middle ground between narrowed prescription and vague generalization, good standards are hard to come by.
- Those whose practice will be shaped by such standards must be involved in their development and implementation. Standards are of little value if not used by those whose practice they are to shape.
- Standards make it possible to assure Minnesota's citizens of the fundamental competence of novice teachers when they guide the preparation of all who begin their practice. Only when the same standards guide every novice teacher's preparation can such assurances be confidently advanced. Their ultimate value depends on the results of their use.