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## Faculty Pressures and Professional Self-Esteem: Life in Texas Teacher Education

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## **Faculty Pressures and Professional Self-Esteem: Life in Texas Teacher Education**

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### Abstract

Studies of the beliefs of teacher educators record high levels of professional self-esteem, but also document the perceived lack of professional regard from colleagues in other areas, informing and redirecting our professional needs assessment. The literature documents that a general disregard for teacher educators as professionals has become a part of the academic culture at many institutions of higher learning in the US. With all of the external pressures on teacher educators, from governmental and accrediting agencies, the public, and professional organizations, perhaps we should address the attitudes of our academic colleagues as one area in which faculty pressures might be lightened.

### Introduction

Contemporary teacher educators in Texas are under enormous pressure from several fronts. Reform pressures combined with the growing demand for public school certified teachers have created a difficult situation for traditional teacher preparation programs.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold. First, current external pressures placed upon contemporary Texas teacher education faculty members are identified. The paper also reports the results of a large-scale survey examining teacher educator professional self-esteem as well as the professional self-esteem teachers perceive from their academic colleagues in other departments.

### External Pressures

Teacher educators in Texas are under increasing pressure to produce quality public school teachers quickly. Increasing student enrollments combined with accelerating teacher retirements, have produced a situation where 9,000 more teachers are needed annually than the State can produce (Littleton, 2000). Nationally, it is estimated that schools will need to hire 200,000 teachers K-12 teachers annually during each of the next ten years (Resta, Huling, & Rainwater, 2001).

Perhaps the largest source of angst among teacher education faculty is associated with the Examination for Certification of Educators in Texas test (ExCET). The high-stakes standardized test anchors the Accountability System for Educator Preparation (ASEP). Littleton (2000) provides a good description of the genesis and evolution of the ASEP. Student and graduate performance on the test determines a program's ability to continue operation. The overall impact associated with a possible program loss, have placed teacher preparation programs under tremendous scrutiny. It is important to note that Texas institutions have accepted the challenge and widely embraced the peer assistance program entitled Texas' Educator Preparation Improvement Initiative (EPII). Warner, Craycraft and San Miguel (2000) provide a good summary of the EPII.

Changing teacher certification guidelines provide another source of discontent among contemporary teacher educators. The establishment of a grade 4-8 certificate represents a recent example of the trend. Education Service Centers and select community colleges are now in the teacher preparation business.

In addition to pressures associated with the ExCET testing program, teacher educators in Texas must respond to changing K-12 assessment strategies. Baker (2000) concludes that education faculty and field supervisors

...will continue walking a knife edge. On one hand, they must prepare students to deal with the realities of Texas public schools, building the confidence of the capable but anxious, and gently confronting the assumptions of the idealistic rebels who wish to ignore the TAAS. On the other hand, they must be tirelessly innovative and persistent in persuading their students that public school teaching can and should be more than merely preparing learners for high-stakes tests (p.14).

The belief that teacher education is an unworthy interloper among the other "real" fields of study has become ingrained in the academic culture of many institutions of higher learning in the United States. From the inception of schools, departments, and colleges of education, many other faculty members did not view professional education as a discipline worthy of university status and, as such, did not treat teacher educators with professional respect or accept them as academic equals (Reynolds, 1995). This negativism continues as part of the culture of higher education in this country.

Take one example from the numerous sources in print that document these negative beliefs. In his 1963 book *The Education of American Teachers* (New York: McGraw-Hill) James Conant, a veteran chemistry professor, wrote:

Early in my career as a professor of chemistry, I became aware of the hostility of the members of my profession to schools or faculties of education. I shared the views of the majority of my colleagues on the faculty of arts and sciences that there was no excuse for the existence of people who sought to teach others how to teach . . . . When any issues involving benefits to the graduate school of education came before the faculty of arts and sciences, I automatically voted with those who look with contempt on the school of education (pp.1-2).

While Conant's beliefs about professional education changed over the years, in general such beliefs persisted. Researchers have attempted to determine the causes behind these beliefs and have found that several factors have contributed to this negativism. Scholars have documented that teacher educators typically come from more humble beginnings than most other faculty members in higher education, have worked in lower schools for many years, and have seldom traveled far from home to attend college or graduate school (Lanier & Little, 1986). Faculty members in other areas most often had gone straight through undergraduate and graduate programs, while teacher educators had worked their way through on various non-traditional timetables taking classes on and off as they were able. Teacher educators did not enter academe in the same way and were to be forever contaminated by their exposure to public schools. Both academically and socially, teacher educators were, from the outset, destined to be set apart from the rest of academe.

Now, it is important to remember that teacher educators once maintained their own institutions—devoted to the training of future teachers—the teacher institutes we have all read about that evolved into normal schools. From the perspective of the teacher institutes, becoming part of a college or university must have seemed like a step up or a promotion. However, it is apparent to us now, in retrospect, that they moved into larger institutions only to be looked down upon by narrow-minded academic colleagues who assumed that teachers were born and not made and that pedagogy is simply learned tacitly through the in-depth study of the subject matter with experts. Subject matter expertise was their yardstick for measuring professional competence, and they did not believe teacher education was even a legitimate subject.

### Assessment of Professional Self-Esteem

The present study explored the beliefs of teacher educators in Texas and described their levels of professional self-esteem and the levels of professional esteem that they believe non-professional education faculty hold for them. Specifically, this study was designed for the following purposes:

- To determine whether there was a significant difference between the levels of professional self-esteem of teacher educators and their perceived professional esteem from colleagues in other departments. (If perceived professional esteem from colleagues and professional self-esteem are significantly different, then we know that teacher educators still have an image problem.)
- To determine whether there was a significant difference in the levels of professional self-esteem between faculty members from NCATE accredited and non-NCATE accredited institutions. (Ten institutions in Texas have chosen to seek and maintain NCATE certification, a difficult, time-consuming, and expensive proposition that should, intuitively anyway, lead to higher prestige and a stronger sense of professional self-esteem.)

Reynolds (1992) survey instrument was sent to 549 teacher educators in Texas' 68 four-year college and university teacher preparation programs. Responses from 239 returned surveys

were analyzed to determine differences between the levels of teacher educators' professional self-esteem and their levels of perceived esteem from academic colleagues in other departments. Levels of professional esteem for participants from different Carnegie Classifications of institutions, as well as participants from NCATE and non-NCATE accredited institutions, were analyzed and tested for statistical significance.

The survey instrument contains forty belief statements. Each respondent is to react to each statement in two ways: A) I believe . . . and B) I believe my colleagues in other departments would say . . . . Responses were on a Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Questionnaire belief statements and associated factor groups are provided in the Appendix.

### Hypotheses Tested

Hypothesis 1: There are no significant differences between levels of teacher educators' professional self-esteem and their perceived professional esteem from non-professional education faculty. Stats—Hypothesis 1: Paired-sample *t* tests were used to compare the means of each pair of factor sums from Response Sets A and B of Part 1 of the instrument in order to compare the means of the "I believe . . ." responses to the means of the "I believe my academic colleagues would say that . . . ."

Hypothesis 2: There are no significant differences in levels of professional self-esteem between teacher educators from NCATE accredited and non-NCATE accredited institutions. Stats—Hypothesis 3: Independent samples *t* tests were applied to each of the factor sum means from both Response Sets A and B of Part 1 of the instrument to test for any significant differences between the responses of teacher educators from NCATE accredited and non-NCATE accredited institutions.

### Results

- Teacher educators' levels of professional self-esteem were significantly higher than the levels of professional esteem they perceived from academic colleagues. Group mean values and summary statistics are provided in tables 1 and 2.
- Teacher educators from NCATE accredited and non-NCATE accredited institutions reflected no significant differences in levels of professional self-esteem or perceived professional esteem from academic colleagues in 11 out of 14 factor sum comparisons. Group mean values and summary statistics are provided in tables 3 and 4.
- On each of the three points of significant difference, the responses of the non-NCATE accredited teacher educators displayed higher levels of esteem than the responses of the NCATE accredited teacher educators. One factor with significant differences between the two groups concerned the quality of education students from the "I believe . . ." point of view. The other two factors with significant differences concerned the perception of rigor in teacher education from both the "I believe . . ." and the "I believe my colleagues outside professional education would say that . . ." points of view.

## Conclusions

- A low level of professional esteem for teacher educators from faculty members in other departments is uniformly perceived by teacher educators in Texas from institutions with or without NCATE accreditation.
- Teacher educators in Texas are able to maintain levels of professional self-esteem that are significantly higher than the levels of professional esteem they perceive from their academic colleagues in other departments.
- NCATE accreditation has a slightly negative impact on teacher educators' levels of professional self-esteem as well as on their levels of perceived esteem from academic colleagues.
- NCATE accreditation does not boost professional self-esteem or perceived professional esteem from academic colleagues.

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Table 1  
*Paired Samples Statistics*

Pair	Factor	Mean	N	Std. Dev.	Std. Err. Mean
1	A1	30.57	225	3.59	.24
	B1	23.77	225	4.27	.28
2	A2	17.09	234	4.20	.27
	B2	16.59	234	3.78	.25
3	A3	19.26	235	5.19	.34
	B3	20.05	235	4.24	.28
4	A4	20.78	231	3.67	.24
	B4	15.13	231	3.79	.25
5	A5	15.15	233	3.08	.20
	B5	11.61	233	3.25	.21
6	A6	19.17	230	2.46	.16
	B6	15.89	230	2.89	.19
7	A7	13.27	236	2.71	.18
	B7	8.97	236	2.76	.18

Table 2

*Paired Samples t Test*

	Mean	Std.			Sig.
Pair	Diff.	Dev.	<i>t</i>	df	(2- tailed)
1	6.80	5.04	20.249	224	.000
2	.50	3.23	2.387	233	.018
3	-.79	3.74	-3.242	234	.001
4	5.65	4.63	.18.560	230	.000
5	3.54	3.19	16.968	232	.000
6	3.27	3.02	16.444	229	.000
7	4.30	3.01	21.918	235	.000



Table 3  
*Group Statistics--NCATE/Non-NCATE*

Factor	NCATE	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Std. Error Mean
A1	Yes	75	30.01	3.96	.46
	No	157	30.78	3.43	.27
B1	Yes	74	23.55	4.70	.55
	No	154	23.86	4.06	.33
A2	Yes	77	16.69	4.40	.50
	No	158	17.29	4.09	.33
B2	Yes	76	16.53	4.15	.48
	No	158	16.62	3.60	.29
A3	Yes	77	18.40	4.60	.52
	No	159	19.64	5.42	.43
B3	Yes	77	19.42	3.96	.45
	No	159	20.29	4.41	.35
A4	Yes	76	20.58	3.65	.42
	No	159	20.90	3.67	.29
B4	Yes	75	15.47	4.03	.47
	No	158	14.96	3.65	.29
A5	Yes	76	14.28	2.84	.33
	No	158	15.58	3.11	.25
B5	Yes	76	11.04	3.02	.35
	No	159	11.86	3.32	.26
A6	Yes	76	18.83	2.27	.26
	No	160	19.34	2.52	.20
B6	Yes	73	16.10	2.68	.31
	No	157	15.80	2.98	.24
A7	Yes	77	12.32	3.05	.35
	No	160	13.71	2.40	.19
B7	Yes	76	8.26	2.78	.32
	No	160	9.31	2.69	.21

Table 4

*Independent Samples t Test--NCATE/Non-NCATE*

Factor	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Std. Error Dif.
A1	-1.508	230	.133	-.76	.51
B1	-.512	226	.609	-.31	-1.50
A2	-1.034	233	.302	-.60	.56
B2	-.178	232	.859	-.0939	.53
A3*	-1.818	232	.071	-1.23	.68
B3	-1.474	234	.142	-.87	.59
A4	-.627	233	.531	-.32	.51
B4	.953	231	.342	.50	.53
A5	-3.095	232	.002	-1.31	.42
B5	-1.813	233	.071	-.82	.45
A6	-1.494	234	.136	-.51	.34
B6	.733	228	.465	.30	.41
A7*	-3.501	233	.001	-1.39	.40
B7	-2.766	234	.006	-1.05	.38

\*Equal variances not assumed

Appendix

## Questionnaire Belief Statements Associated with each Factor

## Factor 1: Legitimacy of teacher education

- 8. Teacher educators make good professors because of their work with K-12 schools.
- 11. The knowledge base for professionals education is well developed.
- 15. Teacher educators are among the best teachers on campus.
- 24. Education as a discipline has yet to develop a body of knowledge and technique of sufficient scope to be given full academic status.
- 31. Teacher educators are lacking in the very teaching skills that they should epitomize.
- 32. Teacher educators are first-rate academic colleagues.
- 35. Teacher educators have distanced themselves from the concerns of teachers and the problems of the schools.

## Factor 2: Acceptance of teacher educators in the academic community

- 5. Teacher educators are fully accepted in the academic community.
- 20. Teacher educators are viewed as marginal people at the periphery of the academic community.
- 22. The practical, school-oriented responsibilities of teacher educators lead to lowered status on campus.
- 29. Teacher educators have traditionally had a difficult time defining their role in higher education.
- 37. Teacher educators are respected in the academic community.

## Factor 3: Acceptance of teacher education on campus

- 3. Teacher education has second-rate status in the university.
- 10. The campus image of teacher education is often reflected in meager financial support.
- 14. Teacher education is tolerated rather than accepted in the university.
- 21. The practical vision of teacher preparation and the university's norms of scholarship are compatible.
- 25. Teacher education programs are held in high esteem on campus.
- 40. On this campus teacher education does not have a prestige problem.

## Factor 4: Research and publication activities of teacher education

- 2. The quality of teacher educators' research is equal to that found in other academic units.
- 16. Teacher educators are committed to scholarship.
- 26. Teacher educators have low rates of publication.
- 30. Teacher educators are weak in research skills.

36. Conducting research is a high priority for teacher educators.

Factor 5: Quality of education students

- 4. Teacher education admits many students who would never be admitted to other programs.
- 23. Teacher aspirants are more intellectually able than the average college bound high school graduate.
- 27. Some students choose education as a last resort after failing in other majors.
- 33. Education professors have been tarnished in the eyes of their peers by the quality of students admitted to the field.

Factor 6: Teacher educator's influence on education students and education practice

- 6. Teacher educators have a strong formative influence on preservice teacher candidates.
- 13. The research of teacher educators leads to improvement in educational practice.
- 28. Being part of an academic community enhances the teacher educator's ability to be effective with the schools.
- 34. Teacher educators have a positive impact on students.

Factor 7: The perception of rigor (or lack of it) in higher education

- 7. Only those education faculty whose research and scholarly publications help elevate the status of the department should receive tenure.
- 9. Teacher education has enough faculty lacking in scholarly productivity to warrant criticism.
- 39. Teacher education is a haven for less able academics.

Additional Survey Items

- 1. Teacher educators are scholarly.
- 12. Teacher educators live in an impossible world serving "two masters"; the teaching profession and the academic community.
- 17. Studies in teacher education are more demanding than studies in other disciplines.
- 18. Classroom teachers regard the academic work of teacher educators as irrelevant.
- 19. The reward system of this institution fairly recognizes good teaching.
- 38. Teacher education is a legitimate academic field of study.