

Using “Clickers” to Enhance Face-to-Face Conversations With Stakeholders

*Marlene Deringer, Ph.D.
Otterbein College, Westerville, Ohio*

As part of the accreditation process for our teacher preparation program, it is important to continually invite feedback from those who work with our faculty, our teacher education candidates, and our alumni. We have consistently done this by soliciting feedback through student teaching evaluations, appraisals of our program, surveys of graduates and employers, meetings with supervisors, etc.

However, this past year we tried a new format to encourage dialogue among various stakeholder groups. Eleven Education faculty met with a representative group of thirteen stakeholders – including students, alumni, supervisors, cooperating teachers, and building administrators - to share perceptions about how well our candidates exemplify the ideals stated in our Mission Statement and Beliefs, which comprise the “conceptual framework” that grounds our Teacher Education program:

The professional education unit of Otterbein College is committed to providing a coherent, developmentally-based teacher education program that prepares teachers to create and work within learning communities which maximize the potential of all learners. The program promotes collaborative learning and critical reflection as a way to develop a community of life-long learners who can respect diverse perspectives, make informed decisions, and be responsive to the changing needs of children in our society.

We Believe In:

- The Power of Knowledge
- The Interdependency of Pedagogy and Content
- The Potential of All Children
- The Richness of Diversity
- The Importance of Accountability
- The Possibilities of Technology
- The Necessity of Reflection
- The Merit of Experiential Learning

The fast-paced 2 ½ hour session included an overview of the Teacher Education program by the Education Department Chair and a series of statements/questions to elicit feedback and discussion. Because we were interested in collecting both quantitative as well as qualitative data, the following process was used:

- The mission statement and eight belief statements were presented through a series of PowerPoint slides;
- Anonymous feedback was gathered using “clicker” technology;
- Participants wrote down individual perceptions on response sheets before the aggregated clicker data were displayed; and
- Notes were taken during small-group discussions in which participants shared individual perceptions as well as reactions to the aggregated data displayed by the clicker technology.

Clicker technology allowed us to efficiently gather (and display) the following data:

Prompts based on Belief Statements	SA	A	N Op	D	SD
The Mission Statement is an accurate depiction of our program.	38%	50%	4%	4%	4%
Teacher candidates and graduates are knowledgeable and committed to continued learning.	21%	50%	17%	13%	0%
Our graduates and teacher candidates clearly understand the interdependence of pedagogy (teaching and learning) and content.	12%	52%	24%	12%	0%
Our graduates and teacher candidates are prepared to maximize the potential of all children.	9%	55%	18%	14%	5%
Our graduates and teacher candidates are able to use diversity to enrich the classroom.	29%	33%	25%	13%	0%
Our graduates and teacher candidates are prepared to enhance instruction by integrating technology.	21%	38%	29%	8%	4%
Our graduates and teacher candidates are reflective about their practice.	38%	38%	17%	8%	0%
Our sequence of required field experiences prepares teacher candidates and graduates to be successful in varied settings.	64%	9%	14%	14%	0%
The program uses assessment data and feedback from stakeholders to refine & update the program.	29%	35%	29%	0%	6%

In addition to the “clicker” data, participants responded individually in writing to each of the components of our Mission Statement and “Beliefs.” Additional notes were taken from the ensuing small group discussions. An analysis of the written responses yielded qualitative data about areas of strength as well as areas that can be improved.

The areas of strength that were noted, in the order of frequency, included:

1. Preparation of candidates in both content and pedagogy, and the integration of the two in the teacher education program;
2. Field experiences throughout the program in varied settings; mentioned as a cornerstone of the program;
3. Sense of efficacy/preparedness to address the potential of all learners; mentioned as a cornerstone of the program;
4. Ability of, and opportunities for, candidates to critically reflect on their performance throughout the program;
5. Accountability, in terms of providing opportunities for stakeholders - including candidates, cooperating teachers, graduates, administrators, supervisors, and employers – to offer input about the quality of our candidates and the program;
6. Disposition of candidates to value learning and exhibit eagerness to learn more as they move into the field;
7. Respect for diversity in terms of learner needs, culture, perspectives.

Areas for improvement were also suggested and are listed in the order of frequency:

1. Maximizing the potential of all learners was often mentioned as a very important goal, and one that is complex and challenging in the field; preparation of candidates to work with special needs, ELL, and gifted students needs to be stronger;
2. Preparation of candidates to use technology needs to remain strong but it was noted that there are often not resources in schools to apply and practice the skills learned; where technology is available, candidates were observed to provide leadership in this area;
3. While the interdependency of content and pedagogy was noted as a strength in Education courses, it was noted as a weakness in content area courses; some perceived that the communication between Education and content departments was inadequate;
4. The important of reflection was noted, but some participants questioned how well reflection skills were taught, when they were taught, and whether time was provided for reflection as a practitioner;

5. A strong disposition for learning was noted in some candidates, but not in others; some commented that graduate work seemed to be undertaken as a requirement, not out of a desire to broaden learning.

In summary, some of the participants’ comments stood out as an affirmation that the Teacher Education program is on the right track:

“Learning from the example of professors, I have acquired a desire to continue learning after graduation; I feel prepared in both content knowledge and ‘street smarts’ of education to make a positive addition to my school community.”

“Candidates are receptive to interacting with all students, regardless of student ability, etc. They seem eager to make a difference when and where they can.”

“I have been blown away by the technology expertise of Otterbein students with whom I have worked. They are becoming building leaders in training (the practitioners) to use education technology effectively and efficiently.”

This unique opportunity to dialogue “face-to-face” provided rich conversation and important feedback about our program. In the near future, we would like to solicit additional feedback from more stakeholders who “live” the mission of teacher education. We have already begun to have quarterly meetings of Teacher Education faculty and Student Teaching supervisors to talk about what faculty believe candidates should be able to do and what supervisors are actually observing.

Author Contact Information

Marlene Deringer
mderinger@otterbein.edu