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## Teacher Competency Testing and Its Effect on Minorities: Reflection and Recommendations

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### The Move to Test Teachers

In the last decade, state education departments, sometimes on their own, more often at the insistence of governors and state legislatures, have placed added emphasis on the use of standardized examinations for prospective teachers. In nearly every case, state education departments have established a cutoff score, prohibiting teacher candidates from proceeding any further in their pursuit of a teaching position until they have jumped over this hurdle. In some instances, state education departments have mandated testing programs for fully certified teachers already in the classroom. Since the issuance of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in April 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the move toward teacher testing has become a stampede.

By 1984, over half of the states had implemented some form of testing requirement for prospective teachers. By 1988, nine more states will join their ranks, having already passed the necessary enabling legislation. The tests vary from state to state in terms of when they must be passed, whether basic skills only are tested, or whether general knowledge and/or subject matter mastery tests must be passed as well, and what the minimum passing score is for a given test.

In November 1984, Educational Testing Service reported that 17 states require an individual to pass a test prior to his or her entry into a teacher education program. This is usually a standard college entrance test or a test of basic skills. Including 12 of these states, a total of 28 states have a testing requirement for teacher credentialing. A

variety of tests or a combination of tests are in current use: the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), five states; the American College Testing program (ACT), five states; the California Achievement Test (CAT), five states; the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST), two states; the National Teacher Examination Core Battery, one state; state-developed examination, five states. Minimum passing scores for the SAT range from combined scores of 745 to 1000. Of the states requiring a test for certification, rather than for entry into a program, six states have developed their own tests, ten states use the NTE Core Battery, and ten states use the NTE Specialty Area tests. Passing scores vary. For example, in the NTE Specialty Area Test, Education in the Elementary School, the grading scale is from 250 to 990 points and the minimum passing scores vary from 480 to 600 points (Goertz and Pitcher, 1984, pp. 2-3.)

Prospective teachers in California who have not graduated from a state-approved academic waiver program are required to score above a specific minimum cutoff score on the National Teacher Examination (NTE). Since 1983, prospective teachers are also required to take the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), which is designed to measure *basic* skills in mathematics, reading, and writing. They must take the test for diagnostic purposes before they can student teach and must pass it before they can be certified.

Virtually the only point on which all observers of the current trend in teacher testing can agree is that the use of such tests can be highly problematic. Some have argued that the use of virtually any standardized competency examination is fundamentally unfair, because few, if any, competency examinations have been found to be valid predictors of teacher effectiveness in the classroom. The National Education Association (NEA) has been quite cautious about the place of testing in teacher recruitment, selection, evaluation, and promotion. The NEA also contends that there are other legitimate reasons for opposing the use of such standardized examinations. In a 1980 report, *Measurement and Testing: An NEA Perspective*, the NEA argues that standardized examinations are: 1) "biased against those who are economically disadvantaged or who are culturally and linguistically different"; 2) "invalid, unreliable, out of date and restricted to the measurement of cognitive skills"; 3) "used by book publishers and testing companies to promote their financial interests rather than to improve measurement and instruction"; 4) "used by the media as a basis for invidious comparisons." Thus, the NEA says they should not be "used to evaluate teachers" (NEA, 1980, p. 51).

The NEA's position is not shared by the other major teachers' professional organization, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The AFT supports the use of "accurate and appropriate measures to certify teachers" (quoted in Scherer, 1983, p. 49). The AFT's position more accurately reflects teacher sentiment. According to the 1984 Gallup Poll of Teachers' Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, 63 percent of teacher respondents expressed support for "a state board examination to prove their knowledge in the subjects they plan to teach" (Gallup, 1984, p. 104). There is some evidence that teacher support at the grass-roots level for competency testing may be a defensive reaction, a response by teachers to public fears that the schools are being staffed with teachers who are professionally incompetent.

Also supporting the use of competency examinations for teachers have been state education department officials and many deans of schools of education. Most state superintendents have come out in support of teacher examinations because this has proven to be an effective means of communicating to the larger polity their commitment to "standards of excellence." Commenting on the work of the ad hoc Committee on Competency Tests and Performance Assessment of the Council of Chief State School Officers, the committee's chief of staff was reported to have stated that the committee's greatest concern is that "cutoff scores may not reflect standards of excellence but may merely reflect consensus and the desire to maintain teacher supply in the state. . . . What we found is that many states that have required competency tests have done it for political purposes and are not better off as far as standards are concerned" (Scherer, pp. 59-60).

Many deans of schools of education have supported examinations for prospective teachers as a means of improving overall student quality in their units, even where the "cost" of this quality increase can be measured in an immediate enrollment decline. Some deans taking this position have argued that these short-term declines in enrollment will be more than offset by long-term increases in enrollment of higher quality prospective teachers. Some observers have cited what they believe is evidence for this "addition by subtraction" policy. For example, the University of Oregon experienced—for the first time in its long history—a waiting list to enroll in the university's teacher education program, following its decision to raise admission standards (Pugach and Raths, 1983). What is not clear is whether Oregon actually *increased* the relative attractiveness of teaching vis-à-vis other programs of study for academically accomplished students, or merely

improved its student body by cutting off admission to students who would have been admitted under former admission standards.

Unless teaching attracts a greater proportion of academically accomplished students, the "addition by subtraction" argument remains unconfirmed and troublesome. For a school of education dean in a college or university experiencing overall enrollment declines, where there is great counter-pressure to relax standards in order to increase enrollments, the "addition by subtraction" plan may be considered a risky path to take.

Going beyond teacher testing to evaluation of pre-professional programs in education, some state legislatures have mandated the use of standardized examinations in teacher recruitment, selection and evaluation, and as a means for holding institutions of higher education and departments of education accountable for the performance of their current students and recent graduates. In 1984, the Tennessee State Legislature passed a law requiring the State Commissioner of Education to place on probation for one year those schools and departments of education in which 30 percent or more of the students failed the state's basic skills test. When the student failure rate exceeds 30 percent for two consecutive years, the law requires the commissioner to revoke the institution's accreditation for teacher training programs. A comparable law passed in Florida resulted in 18 out of the state's 25 teacher training institutions losing state approval of one or more of their educational programs (Stoddart, Losk and Benson, August 1984, p. 7).

Many may claim that this is a "punitive" approach and they also, quite correctly, point out that other professional schools are not subject to a similar fate when their students fail licensure examinations at higher than acceptable rates. For example, in California the failure rate for the February sitting of the state bar examination usually is about 72 percent. While California law schools *are* rank-ordered according to their student passing rate for some purposes by the state bar, no one has suggested that a law school should have its accreditation revoked because of the relatively poor showing of some of its students on the state bar examinations, despite the belief of those who score the essay portion that the writing ability of candidates for the bar is on a steady decline.

Perhaps because of the differential in status ascribed to the candidates sitting for the respective examinations, prospective lawyers as a group may be viewed as professionals responsible in good part for

their own fortunes and performance, while prospective teachers are not afforded this measure of respect and are assumed to be a "product" turned out by their school. While the common term is "teacher training institution," the counterpart for the legal practitioner is not a "lawyer training institution."

The assumption underlying the view of both sets of institutions is one that belongs in the marketplace: Many good students want to go to law school. When such students see that the graduates of certain law schools are more likely to pass the bar examination, the best students will apply to these schools and on down the line, with few students applying to the schools with very poor pass rates. The inverse of this situation is sometimes seen in schools of education. The assumption is that the schools of education need to find students and, if left unrestrained, they will pull in—off the street, if they have to—just about anyone, with no regard for past academic performance or for professional potential. Although we know that this exaggeration is rarely true, it has been true enough, often enough, to raise the suspicions of many governmental policy makers, inside *and* outside of the educational establishment.

### Attacks on Testing

With greater reliance on both student and teacher testing, the controversy surrounding greater use of standardized examinations has intensified. In addition to the NEA, among those most reluctant to endorse the increased reliance on standardized examinations are groups sensitive to the unique problems confronting prospective teachers from minority backgrounds.

The reluctance of these groups is understandable given the tests' effects on such individuals. In California—according to the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC)—of 6,644 candidates from minority groups who took the first California CBEST exam in 1983, 3,854, or 58 percent, failed. The highest failure rate was among Black candidates. Of the 2,040 Black candidates who took the exam, only 530 were able to proceed with their plans to be teachers, a paltry 26 percent. For other minority groups, the test results were not much better: only 834 out of 2,133, or 39 percent of Mexican-American candidates passed, and only 50 percent, or 637 out of 1,259 Asian-American candidates passed the CBEST exam. In comparison, the passing rate for

White candidates was 76 percent, with 18,856 of the 24,540 candidates passing (CTC, December 1984).

The problems associated with these high minority failure rates are made all the more serious by our increasing need for qualified Black, Hispanic, Asian-American, and Native-American teachers at a time of rapid demographic change. Again, California provides a dramatic example of national demographic trends. In the 1981-1982 school year, the state's total public school population was only 56.4 percent non-Hispanic White. For grades K-3, the *majority* of the state's public school pupils were: 34.1 percent Hispanic; 9.1 percent Black; 6.8 percent Asian American or Pacific Islander; and 0.8 percent Native American. If current trends continue, by 1995 more than 50 percent of the state's total public school population will come from a minority group. If California's public schools indeed do exceed a 50 percent minority enrollment, they would join most of the nation's 35 largest city school districts, the majority of which now have overwhelmingly minority enrollments. Needless to say, high minority pupil enrollment rates, if unchecked by dramatic interventions, could result in a high degree of conflict between minority parents and a largely non-minority teaching staff, similar to the one that plagued public education during the 1960s in many of the nation's larger cities.

The rates of failure on these teacher examinations reflect two ominous trends: First, interest in teaching on the part of many well-educated students, especially talented minority students, has declined precipitously in the last 15 years. As the teacher surplus of the 1970s drastically reduced opportunities and salaries for teaching, college students increasingly chose other majors. Moreover, as new career opportunities outside education have opened up for them, talented minority and women students, who earlier would have entered teaching, have chosen other fields. The proportion of college-bound students who said they intended to major in education fell from 24 percent in 1969 to less than five percent in 1982. The decline has been particularly evident for highly qualified minority candidates and women. Second, colleges and universities are failing to guarantee that their graduates, including many minority graduates, can read with comprehension, write literately, and perform routine mathematical computations. This trend is a clear manifestation of the general failure of many colleges and universities to exercise proper leadership and authority over their educational programs. The report of the Association of American Colleges (AAC), *Integrity in the College Curriculum*:

*A Report to the Academic Community*, argues that "evidence of decline and devaluation is everywhere." Moreover,

there is so much confusion as to the mission of the American college and university that it is no longer possible to be sure why a student should take a particular program of courses. Is the curriculum an invitation to philosophic and intellectual growth or a quick exposure to the skills of a particular vocation? Or is it both? Certainty on such matters disappeared under the impact of new knowledge and electives in the late nineteenth century. The subsequent collapse of structure and control in the course of study has invited the intrusion of programs of ephemeral knowledge developed without concern for the criteria of self-discovery, critical thinking, and exploration of values that were for so long central to the baccalaureate years. The curriculum has given way to a marketplace philosophy: it is a supermarket where students are shoppers and professors are merchants of learning. Fads and fashions, the demands of popularity and success, enter where wisdom and experience should prevail. Does it make sense for a college to offer a thousand courses to a student who will only take 36?

The marketplace philosophy refuses to establish common expectations and norms. Another victim of this posture of irresponsibility is the general education of the American college undergraduate, the institutional course requirements outside the major. They lack a rationale and cohesion or, even worse, are almost lacking altogether. Electives are being used to fatten majors and diminish breadth. It is as if no one cared, so long as the store stays open (p. 12).

If these trends continue—and make no mistake about it, they will as long as colleges and universities, ignoring the implications of the findings contained in *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, continue to permit these students to chart their own intellectual development—the situation can only deteriorate further. Unaided by the collective intelligence of the academy and a commitment to improving the attractiveness of the teaching profession, the supply of talented, well-educated teachers from minority groups will continue to nosedive, a result that is as disturbing as it is unacceptable. Equally serious is the prospect that when minority group pupils, especially those contemplating teaching careers, learn that many prospective minority teachers are judged not good enough to teach, they may lose confidence in their own abilities, reaching the conclusion that the teaching profession is "off limits" to students from minority groups. Also, students from these groups, who desperately need to see successful role models, would be denied access yet again to exemplars of success.

Even before recent reports revealed the potential for negative effects

on minority group representation in the teaching force, there was opposition to teacher competency testing. Many who are sensitive to the unique problems of minorities have been vocal and active in their opposition. Among them is Professor Walter A. Mercer of Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, a historically Black college supported by the state. Professor Mercer contends, quite persuasively, that the policy of the Florida State Board of Education that imposes a minimum SAT cutoff score of 835 for prospective teacher training candidates will have a devastating impact on the future supply of Black teachers. Predicting that "future teachers from groups could become vanishing breeds," Professor Mercer calls on policy makers to establish *alternative* teacher education admission requirements (Mercer, 1984, p. 29).

Mercer's concerns are borne out by the report that only 200 Black teachers were part of a total of 5,500 teachers certified in Florida in 1981. These low numbers were mirrored in the pass rates on Florida's Teacher Competency Examination, given for the first time in 1983: 90 percent of White candidates passed, 35 percent of Black candidates, 51 percent of Hispanic candidates, and 63 percent of Asian candidates. Also passing were all four of the Native American candidates who sat for the examination (Smith, 1984, p. 7).

The pass rates are no more encouraging elsewhere. The first administration of the Texas examination for prospective teachers eliminated 84 percent of the Black candidates and 65 percent of the Hispanic candidates on the basis of the mathematics examination; 87 percent of the Black candidates and 65 percent of the Hispanic candidates failed the reading test; and 80 percent of the Black candidates and 56 percent of the Hispanic candidates failed the writing test (G.P. Smith, p. 7).

A group of Texas researchers has predicted that, if the present trend is uninterrupted in Texas by 1988, since candidates must pass all three examinations—as they must in California—96 percent of Black candidates and 84 percent of Hispanic candidates will be denied permission to teach on the basis of their reading tests alone. On a national level, if the currently observable trend continues unabated, "along with normal rates of attrition through retirements and teacher burnout, minority representation in the national teaching force could be reduced to less than 5 percent by 1990" (G.P. Smith p. 8).

The picture painted by these numbers is as horrifying as it is unacceptable. Therefore, it would be easy to be diverted by the nightmarish quality these statistics create. We are fully aware of the devastating

effect this reality creates for the young people who have a strong desire to build a career for themselves by educating our young. We are equally well aware of the full implication for minority children in current and future classrooms who will believe that minority people may not teach. The first reaction of some is to claim "racism" and to insist that alternate certification standards must be adopted for minority candidates. Otherwise, human potential will be ground into the dirt and the promise of democracy and the promise of equality placed, yet again, in deep jeopardy. The question remains whether this prospect necessarily rules out the use of proficiency tests.

### In Favor of Competency Testing of Minority Candidates

We can gain many insights into the need for proficiency testing by analogy to the argument of sociology professor Harry Edwards at the University of California at Berkeley regarding the NCAA's "Rule 48", which sparked "what is probably the most heated race-related controversy within the NCAA since the onset of widespread racial integration in major college sports programs during the 1950s and 1960s" (Edwards, 1983, p. 33). The rule stipulated that "beginning in 1986, freshman athletes who want to participate in sports in any of the nation's 277 Division I colleges and universities must have attained a minimum score of 700 (combined) on the SAT or a score of 15 (composite score) on the American College Test and must have achieved a C average in 11 designated high school courses, including English, mathematics, social sciences and physical sciences" (*ibid.*).

The concern voiced by many Black leaders was intense and immediate. Some were angered because they were not consulted in the formulation of the rule, others claimed that the setting of the SAT minimum score was arbitrary. Still others stated that the SAT and the ACT are racist diagnostic tests, biased in favor of White students, and that the proposed cutoffs imposed unfair penalties on Black athletes. Edwards took a stand supporting the enforcement of the rule. He agreed that the cutoff scores may well have been arbitrary, but found them so arbitrarily low as to constitute no standard at all. Edwards stated:

Further, were I not to support Rule 48, I would risk communicating to Black youth in particular that I, a nationally known Black educator, do

not believe that they have the capacity to achieve a 700 score on the SAT, with three years to prepare for the test, when they are given a total of 400 points simply for answering a single question in each of the two sections of the test, and when they have a significant chance of scoring 460 by a purely random marking of the test. Finally, I support the NCAA's action because I believe that Black parents, Black educators and the Black community must insist that Black children be taught and that they learn whatever subject matter is necessary to excel on diagnostic and all other skills tests. (Edwards, 1983, p. 37)

We need to couple support of such rules for minimum competency with the insistence that we work together to ensure that minority children receive the education necessary to enable them to score competitively on examinations from SAT, to NTE, to CBEST. We must also insist that state public officials, in and out of the education establishment, develop, fund, *vigorously* monitor, and intelligently evaluate targeted school improvement programs so that minority students at all levels can become more competitive on all examinations of scholastic achievement. In taking this line, I am not contending that these examinations are problem-free, or totally unbiased. In some instances, these tests may be biased in favor of or against any particular ethnic, racial, or cultural group. They certainly are heavily class-biased. Allan Nairn said of the SAT: "In sum, it is advertised as a test of 'scholastic aptitude' . . . used by colleges to accept and reject applicants ostensibly on the basis of merit. For many students, the SAT may be more a reflection of their social class than of their potential for accomplishment inside or beyond the classroom" (1980, p. 652).

Mary Frances Berry furthers this argument with her assertion that "a major differential [among test scores] was *not* between Black and White students, but between students from well-off families and students from poor families. The better off the family, the higher the score—for Whites *and* Blacks" (Berry quoted in Edwards, p. 34). Indeed, the College Board's *Profiles, College-Bound Seniors, 1983* shows exactly that. The relationship between family income and test scores is highly significant. While not as high, the relationship between level of parental education and SAT scores of high school seniors is also very substantial.

We must interrupt this cycle of failure. Certainly, standardized tests cannot, to quote *Washington Post* columnist William Raspberry, "measure patience, love of children and learning, the ability to maintain order, and a hundred other things that make up teacher competency. But the tests can measure whether a teacher has learned the

basics of pedagogic techniques (which we consider important, else why would we mandate education courses for teachers?) and whether a teacher has a solid grasp of the material to be taught . . . . I assume that the reason minority applicants fare worse on the tests than Whites is that they themselves are victims of inferior schooling" (quoted in Brott, 1983, p. 37).

I fully agree with this view and would add that, whereas I would *not* rely on a test to tell me who had the personal warmth and caring required of a good teacher, and I would *not* expect a test to tell me who from among a pool of applicants has ambition, drive, or dedication, I *would* expect a test to give me some reliable information about the basic competencies of a pool of applicants. I would *not* want such a competency test to generate a list of prospective students in a rank order, because we do not know enough about individual differences to do that. Further, I believe that, as much as measuring potential aptitude, perhaps even more so, tests such as the SAT and well-constructed, appropriately-used tests such as the CBEST measure both what students have learned *and* show how well students are able to apply their learning to what the test asks of them.

What all of the test results we have discussed thus far indicate is that we are still neglecting the children of low-income families. The test results show that those who enter our system with the most at their disposal are the ones who will get the most out of our system. The system continues to be "theirs." If we were to do as Arnold M. Gallegos, dean of the College of Education at Northern Arizona University suggests and set apart alternative methods for certifying minority group members who want to teach (Gallegos, p. 361), then we would be perpetuating the cycle, however benign our intent.

If we take note of Henry Levin's provocative finding that each additional point scored by teachers on *their* SAT verbal subtest can be translated into a net gain of .175 points to the verbal scores of Black students and .179 to the verbal scores of White students (Weaver, p. 110), then we have that much more impetus to work to provide educational settings that would give students from low-income backgrounds the same chance at passing teacher credentialing examinations—whether SAT, CBEST or NTE—as students from middle-income backgrounds. As Dean Gallegos quite correctly states, historically we have tended to "blame the victims," that is, the minority students, for their failure on examinations, not the institutions that prepare them (*ibid.*, p. 631).

If we are to interrupt the cycle of failure, we must take direct action to provide *all* students in or public schools with quality education that is responsive to their real needs. We cannot begin this effort without well-qualified teachers, including well-qualified minority teachers. To meet the challenge we face, we need to take steps to ensure a larger pool of qualified minority teachers, while also maintaining and improving quality standards.

We know full well that all of the knowledge and skills that are tested are learnable. Students can achieve acceptable test scores if we teach them what they need to know. This means teaching all of the skills and understanding that they will require if they are to function well in the contemporary world and also be prepared to make the best adaptations and choices in their lives as they move into the future. All of this is said in full acknowledgement of the pain and suffering that is experienced by those who are not presently armed with the knowledge and the skills required to pass present minimum competency examinations.

What I am about to propose will bring a transitional period of short-run disappointment for some who will be locked out of the teacher training programs they wish to enter. But it will finally put a stop to "victim blaming" measures that have created more problems each time they have been applied in place of long-range, well articulated solutions.

Toward that end, I propose a three-step, comprehensive program to include: early identification of minority and low-income students who have a commitment to teaching; intensive university and postgraduate teacher training; and programs and rewards for outstanding, effective teachers once they are in the classroom.

### **Step One: The early identification and intensive training of minority students who wish to teach**

As early as high school, students who have expressed an interest in teaching as a career would be selected to participate in a special university pre-professional teacher preparation program. Program admission standards would consider potential for growth and an exceptionally strong willingness to learn, in addition to the traditional criteria of grades and past achievements. Special efforts would be

made to recruit students with a background or interest in areas of special need, such as mathematics, science, or language and literacy. The program would require a five-year university course of study leading to the Bachelor's degree and would provide a series of *paid* school year and summer teaching-related internships.

Upon entry into the program, optimally with entry into college, students would be given a series of criterion-referenced tests for diagnostic purposes. In conjunction with their regular course load, the students would be enrolled in a series of self-paced tutorials to work on basic skill development in those areas that their diagnostic tests indicated as areas of need. These tutorials would be an integrated part of a substantive undergraduate liberal arts program leading to a subject major B. A. or B.S. degree.

Upon satisfactory completion of the program and the conferral of the degree, students would be *guaranteed* admission to participating colleges and universities (in the case of California, the California State University or University of California Graduate School of Education programs), where they would be enrolled as regular students. Graduate scholarships covering the full costs of student fees and filing expenses would be provided to all of these students who enter graduate teacher education programs with an undergraduate grade point average of B+ or better. Partial tuition scholarships would be available to high-achievement students with a B average. Regular financial aid programs would also be available. Again, as in the first phase of this program, paid internships would be provided to *all* qualified students for the duration of their postgraduate teacher training studies.

During the course of the program, the tutorials would be designed to do away with troublesome conditions such as those identified in Stanley Ivie's analysis of Black student achievement on the NTE. Ivie noted that Black students perform poorly on the NTE because the examination is as much a reading test as a subject matter test and that many Black students cannot perform well on the test because of poor reading skills. He states that most Black students have not "mastered the basics" prior to entering college and that college does little to correct the situation because of an insufficient emphasis on the teaching of writing and the possibility of students avoiding all liberal arts courses that have substance or rigor (Ivie, 1982, p. 171). Given such circumstances, it is sadly understandable why tests taken at the end of college too often show poor results.

In response to these needs, the developmental programs I am pro-

posing would focus in the undergraduate level on reading skills, basic mathematics operations—with heavy emphasis on reasoning skills manipulations and application—and good, clear writing. Since the students would at the same time be enrolled in courses that required these skills, they would have sufficient opportunities to practice the skills as they are developing them, while receiving continuous positive feedback as they utilize new skills in their course work. At the end of two years, the students would take a series of tests to measure their growth. A new program, based upon current skill levels, would be developed and the process would be repeated on a higher level. The students also would take practice versions of the required teacher licensing exams.

The licensing tests themselves should not be used as diagnostic tools. There have been problems in this area in California with the CBEST. In a report on the use, and potential for misuse, of the CBEST, Richard Watkins, CBEST consultant to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, cautioned that far greater demands are made on a test to be used for diagnosis than for determining proficiency, since a diagnostic test must "yield reliable measurement over a continuum of skill or ability and provide reliable scores on several reasonably different skills and subskills." Watkins concludes that tests such as the CBEST can only make the most general predictions about outcomes and cannot be used for prescription on the basis of their results alone (California Post-secondary Education Commission, 1984, p. 7). This explains the lack of success for those who have failed the CBEST and attempt to use their test results as a basis of preparation for reexamination. The candidates who have done this have been frustrated and angered by their lack of progress. The approach recommended above would avoid this frustrating outcome by providing accurate diagnostic tools combined with practice on the actual test to gain familiarity and confidence in standardized test taking.

As I noted earlier, I strongly urge that the entry tests into a teacher education program *not* rank-order test takers. The purpose of these tests is to establish the presence or the absence of a prerequisite degree of knowledge and sets of skills. We are not looking for a cutoff point in order to limit entry on the basis of a basic skills examination. The ideal condition would be if almost all of those who sat for basic skills tests were equipped to pass them. The society needs educated people. So far as selection into a teacher training program is concerned, we are bogged down in the issue of pass rates because so many people are not

passing, not because these tests are the primary criterion for acceptance into a program. The evidence of basic skills competency is the baseline from which the selection process can proceed. We must create the situation in which we are selecting from among all qualified candidates in order to identify those who possess the greatest degree of those qualities that make for an outstanding teacher.

Given the realities of the present, several things will have to be changed before we can proceed realistically, and only one of them involves raising the competency level of those applying to become teachers. We must acknowledge that if we wish to attract and retain the most qualified, the best applicants, then we have to treat them as young professionals are treated in other career fields. Only then do we have the right to expect high-level professional performance and long-range staying power from them. In terms of the minority/low income candidates we need to recruit, this means that we will have to affirm our national commitment to quality education and underwrite, through federal and state contributions, the creating of excellence. This would require incentives to the potential teachers in the form of merit/potential scholarships and loans with forgiveness provisions based upon number of years' service as a teacher. If we wish to retain good people, we will also have to make serious moves to bring teaching salaries into the professional range. In California, we have just begun the process.. Many hope that it is not too little too late.

### **Step Two: Placement and retention of teachers from a highly qualified applicant pool**

Even given the current condition—that of being at the end of a period of oversupply of teachers—we can look to the future by beginning an implementation process based upon the recommendations in my report *Race, Ethnicity and Equal Employment Opportunity: An Investigation of Access to Employment and Assignment of Professional Personnel in New York City's Public Schools*:

First, any "alternative teacher selection processes" should be terminated. Though such programs may have been successful in increasing minority employment opportunities, they have operated as racial conduits, steering newly hired minority teachers into almost exclusively minority schools. Then, such old systems for selection and evaluation

of new teachers should be replaced with ones that encourage personnel officials to match the needs of students in the public schools more closely with the talents of potential teachers in the qualified applicant pool.

We must always be mindful that the effectiveness of our school systems will not be found in the statistics on the racial composition of our teaching staffs but rather in the statistics reflecting the mastery of basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic by all of our students. We must once and for all understand that proportional minority participation in the career of teaching and high-quality outcomes in terms of student learning are not at odds with each other. There is no such thing as a choice between equity and excellence. There is no equity in the absence of excellence.

If we are to meet our moral and legal responsibilities to both the potential teachers in our population and to their future students, we must continue to employ valid, job-related written examinations of potential teachers' basic skills. As we do so, we can make significant advances toward reversing the persistent trends in which teachers with less experience, few advanced degrees, and lower salaries are assigned to schools with high proportions of minority/low-income pupils. As soon as teachers gain enough seniority to do so, they move on to "better" schools populated with middle- to high-income students. We must reverse this practice and work on developing systems of equal employment opportunity goals and plans that would integrate school faculties and show *all* school children that quality education is a function of many factors and that achieving high scores on tests is a function of many factors as well, but that group membership is no longer one of them.

### **Step Three: Identifying and rewarding outstanding teaching**

In addition to the various kinds of testing programs we have proposed and discussed, I propose an additional one: a test to be taken after at least three years of practice in a full-time public school teaching position. This test would measure not only subject matter competency in a given field, but also: 1) knowledge of learning theory, that is, professional judgment as evidenced by ability to diagnose accurately student needs in terms of skill level and social development and select appro-



appropriate learning experiences; 2) ability to match instruction, materials and methods to the needs of the students; 3) ability to monitor progress of students in a systematic way, providing useful feedback mechanisms; ability to create well-balanced lessons that vary activities and build progressively from facts to concepts to valuing and evaluating, thus giving students opportunities for and experiences in raising their thinking and reasoning skills; and 4) ability to evaluate accurately student progress in a manner that is consistent with stated goals and objectives and that involves students as active participants in the evaluation process.

Such a test would be to teaching what the Certified Public Accountant's examination is to accounting. As such, it would be entirely voluntary. Only those who wish to take the test for purposes of professional advancement would do so. I would also strongly recommend that the test be made voluntary on a nationwide basis. This would have the added benefit of opening up the job market for master-level teachers. Outstanding educators who find themselves in a dead-end position in their own school district could seek advancement not only outside their district but also outside their state. Such open competition would work for the benefit of all concerned. Areas experiencing growth would have an excellent pool from which to select, while teachers who are seeking advancement in their career goals would not have to leave teaching in order to progress professionally. These master-level teachers would be compensated accordingly, just as CPA-level accountants are.

Of course, individual states (and districts) could supplement the national examination with locally designed sections, reflecting state concerns and priorities. For example, a state with a large pupil population whose English skills are limited might want to emphasize the importance of teachers being expert in this area, while other states might emphasize other areas of great need.

In addition to promoting teacher professionalism by encouraging and rewarding teachers who have objectively demonstrated superior skills as educators, the introduction of a CPA-like examination for teachers would also place teachers (and the polity) in a more strategically advantageous position to press colleges and universities to undertake reforms that would improve the educational enterprise, at all levels. In particular, teachers and policymakers would be in a position to press the higher education establishment to think more systematically about the process of teaching (knowledge transmission) and

learning (knowledge acquisition) in particular disciplines.

Traditionally, disciplinary departments (i.e., physics, English, mathematics, etc.) have not directed much of their resources or energies toward understanding how students learn specific subject matter, what difficulties they face in learning how to think abstractly, what preconceptions they bring with them to the classroom, what instructional approaches are most effective for particular types of students, and how best to take full advantage of the potential of computer-based intelligent tutoring systems. The very promise of a CPA-like exam for teachers, covering what teachers should know about teaching and learning in particular subject areas, would vastly improve the linkages between teachers in the schools and teachers in colleges and universities. Here again, the AAC report, *Integrity in the College Curriculum*, speaks truth to established wisdom:

If departments, particularly research departments, allocated one or two regular faculty positions to research on learning their discipline, they could produce results which would improve their own teaching effectiveness and would have visibility and impact beyond the walls of their own institutions. They would influence instructional materials at the secondary as well as the college level. And they could educate young researchers who would continue the enterprise and propagate it to institutions where it does not yet exist (p. 16).

## How Do We Pay for These Programs?

In addition to the means of support for individuals already mentioned, we could finance these teacher education scholarships and internships from at least three possible sources. Since all students benefit from better qualified public school teachers, one appropriate source is a small increase in the registration fees that all university students pay. For example, if the University of California raised student fees by only \$25 per semester, it could generate over \$7 million per year—enough to support over 900 teacher education students each year. If the State University raised student fees by the same amount, it could generate over \$15 million per year, enough for over 2,000 teacher candidates.

State lotteries are also appropriate sources of funding. In most states with lotteries, by law, lottery profits are supposed to support education. What better use for these monies than to increase the number of qualified teachers in our schools? Finally, the legislature could provide the funds through a direct allocation for this program. Frankly, in today's fiscal climate, this approach seems to hold the smallest prospect for implementation.

## Conclusion

While we all agree that during the transition period there will be disappointment for those who fail the tests requested for teacher credentialing, competency examinations for teachers—as long as they are well constructed, correctly standardized measures—are necessary for the development of the teaching profession and beneficial to the education of our young. If we do have a commitment to quality education for all, as part of our dedication to the principles of equality, then we will not change the requirements to fit the present median performance of minority applicants to teacher education programs. Rather, we will keep the desired performance level and provide the kinds of support and training that will make it possible for minority applicants to garner the learning and experience needed to pass the examinations for entry into and exit from teaching credential programs. We have the “know-how” to do this, all we need now is the affirmation of the belief that we will only have a quality system of education when we can provide equality of outcome in basic skills across economic as well as across racial and ethnic lines.

Teaching, the transmission of thought from one mind to another, traditions and values from one generation to the next, is one of the most important activities of the human race. It is the one skill whose absence prevents magnificent successes and guarantees startling failures. Without good teaching, genius is struck dumb, poverty is permanent, power is likely to be brutal, and culture doomed to be channeled into mind-forged ruts. Good teaching enables and ennobles, providing society with the tools necessary for self-perpetuation and self-renewal. To put forth the argument that minority youngsters, the most disadvantaged of the poor, and the least able to emancipate themselves from their impoverished surroundings, should be taught by our less-than-best teachers is to pervert the nature of justice. As admirable and important as is the goal of increasing the ranks of minority teachers, this objective must not be put before the more fundamental objective of securing good teaching for those who need it the most.

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