

Universidad de Puerto Rico
Facultad de Educación
Recinto de Río Piedras
Centro de Investigaciones Educativas
Cuaderno de Investigación en la Educación, número 9, diciembre 1995

Testing teaching-competency: Minority teachers' double edge
María del R. Medina
Catedrática Auxiliar fundamentos de la Educación

This paper discuss two main aspects: the education of the minority population in the United States and the use of tests for measuring teaching competency. The author argues that the interplay between these aspects influences the shortage of minorities in the teaching profession.

Education of minorities

Since A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) hundreds of report of the education reform movement recommend that more rigorous demands and higher expectations must be placed on teachers in order to improve students' learning and achievement. For example, A Nation at Risk devotes an entire set of recommendations for improving the training of teachers and to make teaching a more rewarded and respected profession. More recently, two reports-Tomorrow's Teacher (Holmes Group, 1986) a consortium of deans of schools of education at research universities, and A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st century (Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1986)- prescribe solutions at college and professional levels for attracting qualify recruitments and recommend changes for the way that teachers are trained.

Excellence in education has been defined in terms of measurable students' results, and the students achievement scores are the single most important criterion of teaching excellence in the mind of critics, politics and economists. Responding to this mandate for excellence, state legislatures and state boards of education have moved to implement simplistic solutions to the complex maze of educational problems. A national response is the adoption of state mandate competency tests for certification of teachers and of setting more strict criteria for the selection and training of the future teachers at college and university levels. As a consequence, teachers have become an object of scrutiny, and testing has become a mechanism of control over their professional competencies in order to ensure the "quality" of teaching.

Demographic figures show that Hispanics represented 8.2% of all 18-24 year old population but 5% of the college population in 1985 (American Council on Education [ACE], 1987). Similarly, the black college-age population of 13.7% translates into 9.7% of the college enrollments, and Native Americans were 0.5% of the college population compared to 0.7% of the total population in that group. In contrast, the enrollment of whites at college level was 86%. In addition, students from all minority groups tend to be concentrated in two-year public colleges. More than half of all Hispanic and Native American college students are enrolled in community colleges, compared with only 39%

of Blacks and 33% of whites. This constitutes a difference in educational environments and resources, such as libraries, financial aid and faculty salary available for minority students and supported by state policies in comparison with four-year educational institutions.

The critical issue is: where are the minority high school graduates who are not entering college? Some possibilities are: in vocational, business and technical schools (32%), in the armed forces (e.g, Blacks were 19% of active duty forces in 1984), or unemployed. The last condition seems the most pervasive: among minority youth, the unemployment rate is double of the whites, reaching almost 50%, and for minorities who are dropouts, it climbs to about 65% (National Coalition of Advocates for Students, 1985). This data is evidence of the minority groups' realities in the job market: low-paying jobs or unemployment are the dead-end for many minority youth after high school.

Another aspect that should not be missed is the amount of minority dropouts at the high school and college level. It is interesting to notice how these figures are not considered in many of the reports. What will become of the 78% of Blacks who dropout in New York and Chicago, or the 40-50% of Asian Americans who dropout in Boston, or the 48-85% of Native Americans who dropout nation wide? The cruel reality of the high rate of dropouts among cultural minorities is another symptom of the degree to which the educational system does not address and deal effectively with the needs of cultural and linguistic minority students. For example, nearly 25% of all public school teachers had students with limited English proficiency (LEP) in their classes in 1981, but only 3.2% of those teachers said that they had academic preparation or language skills to instruct their LEP students. This lack of teacher preparation in multicultural facets as well as the lack of support of bilingual education are indicators of the failure of the most of the school districts in promoting the diversity of students' languages and cultures as potential strength for the students themselves and as a resource for the community.

Education as a career

Regarding college completion, Blacks were the only minority group to experience decline in the number of degrees awarded at nearly all levels of college between 1975-76 and 1984-85 (ACE, 1987). Hispanics had considerable gains in the number of degrees earned but they continue to be one of the most underrepresented populations in higher education. Also, Native Americans have the least number of graduates at all college levels during these periods.

In 1975-76, education was the most frequently chosen field by minorities but by 1984-85 it had slipped to the third most popular degree field at the undergraduate and master's levels. Business/management was the most popular area of concentration in 1985 for all minority degree recipients, at both baccalaureate and master's levels. In contrast, education and social sciences revealed a decline of 50% and 28% respectively, in the baccalaureate degrees awarded from 1975-76 to 1984-85. At the doctoral level, the most frequently chosen field of all students was education between 1975-76 and 1984-85. In 1985, the number of doctorate degrees in education conferred to minorities was 819 of 7,032 (11%): 521 to Blacks, 163 to Hispanics, 84 to Asians, and 51 to Native Americans. Under representation of minorities is most severe at all levels in engineering, natural sciences and mathematics.

Education as an intended career field has become less attractive to many college-bound high school seniors. In general, there is a slight increase in the number of students planning to major in education (7% to 11%) but this group constitutes mostly White. At the same time the figures of Black colleges reveal a decrease in education major from 13% to 8%; while, Hispanics have been the only group that has showed an increased interest in teaching.

In summary, these figures related to minorities' college enrollment and degrees awarded reveal that the proportion of college minority population has declined as well as the number of them that chose education as a major. In addition, factors such as high rates of school dropout, unemployment, lack of support of multicultural and bilingual programs, differences in educational treatment due to cultural and gender biases, and lack of equality in the allocation of human and budget resources are some of the barriers that influence minorities' low representation in higher education. Consequently, these factors account for their virtual absence from education or other professional careers. In simple words, the shortage of minority teachers is not an isolated phenomenon.

Besides the issue of the under representation of minorities in teacher education programs at the college level, it is relevant to ask whether in-service and future White teachers are prepared to deal with the increasing diversity of class, race and language of the minority of population. Moreover, it must be asked if the Schools of Education in colleges and universities, themselves predominantly White and male, are preparing for this challenge.

Minorities in the teaching force

By 1985, racial/ethnic minorities represented 23% of the total United States population, and 29% of the public elementary-and-secondary school population, with Hispanics registering the greater gains. In the country's 20 largest school districts, about 70% of the student enrollment was minority (Center for Educational Statistics, 1987). In the same period, the elementary and secondary public school teaching force was 8% Black and 2% hispanic. Sixty-seven percent of public school teachers in the United States were women; and 89%, 6%, and 3% of the bachelor's degree in the education were awarded to White, Black, and Hispanic women, respectively (Apple, 1988). Also, graduate degrees conferred in education showed the same trend: more women received master's degree than men during 1984-85 particularly White females (84%), Hispanics (3%) and Blacks (8%).

By the next century, estimates are that more than one-third, perhaps 40%, of the total school enrollment will be non-White: the Black population will expand from 12% to 14% of the population will expand from 6% to 15%; the Native American population will expand from 0.6% to 1%; and Asian American as group will expand from 2% to 5% of the population (ACE, 1987). In contrast to this increase in minority population, this nation's teaching force remains homogeneous, and it is projected to become more homogeneous in the next century. Though the current school population is 29% non-White, only 12 to 14% of the teachers are non-White; and it is 67% female (CES, 1987). Also, as teachers go to retirement, and less percentage of new minority teachers are hired, a greater decline of minority teachers appears imminent (Gehrke & Sheffield, 1985). This implies that minority and White students will see fewer minority teachers

throughout their educational experience. This is particularly important for minority teachers as role models. Also, cross cultural exposure for children of the majority population is an important factor in their development of a healthy social attitude. Besides, testing policies for teaching-competency seems to be another variable that contributes to minority teachers shortage.

Teaching-competency testing

The initiative for testing teaching comes from state legislature and boards of education rather than from teachers organizations or colleges and universities schools of education. The mandatory statewide testing program can have three levels: for entry into a teacher training program; for exit from that program; and as a condition for receiving a standard certification renewal. Since the testing teaching-competency movement began in 1964, when North Carolina required entering teachers to take the National Teachers Examination (NTE) for certification prior to entering teaching profession, then followed by Louisiana in 1977, and Georgia and Florida in 1978, this movement has spread around the country. At present, there are 45 states which have implemented or will soon implement testing requirements for certification (ACE, 1987). Twenty-three states required students to pass a test before entering a teacher education program and eight had attached assessment requirements for continuing employment and/or certification renewal (Flippo, 1986).

These statewide testing policies have been the target of criticisms regarding content, linguistic and cultural biases, and the lack of relation to teacher effectiveness. Almost all of the tests administered measure general knowledge and certain skills as reading, writing and mathematics. Some of the tests administered are Pre-professional Skills Test (PPST), American College Test (ACT), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and National Evaluation Systems (NES) which includes the Core Battery Test (CBEST). They do not measure teacher's skills such as performance, classroom control, motivation, application of knowledge in teaching situations, personality or social skills. Also, they do not have predictive validity, i.e., there is low correlation between test scores, and teacher evaluations. In short, teaching-competency tests do not assess such critical skills related to classroom teaching practices.

Implications for minority teachers

There is not conclusive evidence about the impact of testing requirements on minority teachers due to the variation among states testing policies, the lack of a mandatory policy that states collect and release test results by racial/ethnic composition, and the lack of a state-by-state profile of minority performance at least on widely-used tests such as NTE and Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST). However, we can take note of two tendencies: (a) that a disproportionate number of minority teacher-candidates are being screened from the teaching profession, and (b) that the passing rate for these groups is far below that of Whites.

Despite the rise in the number of baccalaureate degrees awarded, the proportion of graduates who became eligible or certificated to teach declined by 42% between 1975-76 and 1984-85. Of the 1983-84 colleges graduates with bachelor's degree who were certified to teach, 90% were White, 6% were Blacks, 2% were Hispanics, 1.2% were Asians, and 0.5% were Native Americans. Blacks had the lowest certification rate

for the newly employed teachers (78%) and approximately 82% of newly recent Hispanic college graduates were certified.

States in southeastern and western regions of the country required passing competency test for initial certification more than did the states in other regions (National Education Association, 1987). Since minorities are a higher proportion of the population in these regions than in the rest of the country, they are more likely to have been subject to certification testing than Whites. For example, nineteen southern states--were, historically, Black colleges have provided more than half of the bachelor's degrees awarded to Blacks-- have led the way in instituting examinations that prospective teachers must pass to be licensed. This is an additional requirement beyond completing an approved curriculum and being recommended by colleges authorities to state certification. White graduates in these states pass tests at rates ranging from 62% to 90%, while Blacks graduates are passing at rates from 10% to 70%. Louisiana has a pass rate for White teachers candidates of 78%, and a pass rate for prospective Black teachers of 15%. Georgia has a pass rate of 87% for Whites but a pass rate of only 34% for Blacks (Graham, 1987).

Reports in minority performance on teacher competency examinations in Florida, California and Texas are equally discouraging. Florida tests results in 1983 showed a first-time pass rate of 90% for White teacher candidates, 35% for Blacks, 51% for Hispanics, 63% for Asians, and 100% for four Native Americans (Smith, 1984). In California, where approximately two-thirds of all the candidates passed all three sections of the CBEST -reading, writing and mathematics- only 26% of the Blacks candidates and 38% of the Hispanics passed. The case of Texas is more dramatic: it is likely that around 96% of Blacks and 84% of Hispanics applicants may be denied admission to teacher education on the basis of the reading test alone (PPST).

Another fact is that a significant number of the states that have adopted competency tests are also states that are under federal mandates to desegregate their institutions of higher education. This picture of the teachers' tests in the southern states illustrates a problem that is common in sections of the nation that have high concentrations of poor families, particularly when racial differences affect that concentration. The fact that children of poor and of minority families are receiving distinct educational treatment to that of White children have influenced the tests results in the long run. To exacerbate the situation even further Blacks consistently score lower than Whites on all sections of the NTE. When minority students, especially those contemplating teaching careers, learn that many prospective minority teachers are judged not to good enough to teach, they may lose confidence in their own abilities and conclude that the teaching profession is "off limits" to minorities.

By the same token, the recruitment procedure for entering a given program seems to be biased against minorities as well. The exclusive use of tests scores, such as the SAT, to single out successful teacher candidates is a highly suspect and discriminatory process. It seems that across the nation, multiple criteria are being used for admission into teacher education programs. García (1986) reported that in 1986 sixteen states sampled out of the nation included data on admission failure rates of ethnic minorities. One apparent reason for this incidence is that the use of cut scores on state-mandatory tests prevents entry into or continuation in teacher education programs. Each state determines cut scores, and this policy has meant that scores

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have been sat at high enough levels to eliminate a disproportionate number of minority candidates. Although, multiple criteria are used in the selection process, single cut off scores are a powerful factor because the applicants are not considered on the remaining criteria.

In the cases in which single test score such as the SAT are considered as entry criterion, scores have not predicted successful teachers. It is well known that the SAT scores are valid predictors only for the first years of college in terms of academic achievement, and hence they are not valid predictors for either performance at higher levels or for successful teaching. The experience of Black students is insightful in this regard: Blacks intending to major in education score at the bottom of the SAT scores, and the dropping rate of Blacks majoring in education is twice the rate of decline for Whites.

Furthermore, in evaluating biases of the tests we have to consider factors external to the structure of the test itself that can yield biased results. The family income level of the examinee is a variable that undeniably affects aptitude test scores such as the SAT and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Thus, it is reasonable, to argue that some of the teaching-competency tests are biased regarding the income level of the prospective teachers. These tests in principle-- "de jure", according to their psychometric properties might not be biased but in practice-- "de facto", promote unfair and discriminatory procedures of selection. In the same way, the use of grade-point average as another criterion for selection involves a great amount of variability and subjective weight.

In short, the realities of testing-teaching competencies are evidence of the vulnerable position that minority prospects and in-service teachers have in the school systems. In many cases their contracts or professional status are at risk. Test results can bring contract terminations, mobility, and in extreme cases, unemployment. Moreover, to deny the opportunity to teacher candidates to enter or continue in a teacher education program constitutes a negation of the right of education and free choice of a professional career. This is another example of how career decisions and job opportunities of many minorities are controlled by the hands of political and bureaucratic policies.

Finally, what to do with the teachers that do not pass the tests? Some alternatives are: remedial courses for "test-wiseness", prepackaged materials for preparing to take the exam, and so on. Eventually, these strategies result in higher costs and more frustration for teachers. Isn't this more proof of "deskilling" teachers? I think that it is, and for various reasons: in the way that the teachers' skills and knowledge are segmented, and how the teachers' training as well as students' learning are guided by test scores--they are "curriculum-test-oriented".

Conclusions

My attempt in this essay has been not to propose solutions or remedies to the chaos of the practices of testing teaching-competency. Several authors have done this work for us. Rather, I prefer to finish this paper with a skeptical position about the future of this particular seed of educational reform.

So far, we see how excellence in teaching has been operationalized in a narrow sense, i.e., a score on a test. Issues related to accountability have taken precedence over more fundamental educational and human concerns. Important educational

issues such as equity, distribution of resources, students' economic and social needs, educational conditions of minority and poor children, cultural differences and the attention paid to them in educational settings, and teachers' working conditions have been obscured in favor of issues concerning standards and students' achievement. The testing movement seems to be another political artifact- "a smoke curtain", of state officials and professional organisms for distracting the public from focusing on more critical educational issues. Tests and tests scores have become a powerful weapon in the hands of politicians. For instance, in the way that they play with the test results in their attempts to promote a favorable public image that they are concerned and working toward a better education. Education for whom?

Any educational reform should attend to the educational attainment of minorities. Minorities are overrepresented in the ranks of low achievers, dropouts and those failing in standardized tests. Increasing their achievement and expectancies will be possible when their economic, social and educational conditions improve. In order to attract able, well prepared, and compassionate minorities to teaching, we must first focus on their social and economic circumstances in the United States. If more than one-quarter of all Hispanics and more than one-third of all Afro-American live below the poverty line, then poverty constitutes a wide barrier for the academic success of the minority and poor children.

Since income level of a child's family is a major determinant of the quality of education that child receives; it is hard for poor and minority children as well for their teachers to believe that their educational situation will change dramatically in the next ten years. Schools will remain essentially the same. The lesson that minority and poor children are learning today is that schools are not the best place to learn, and that their teachers' professional and working conditions are terrible. Thus, if we have a shortage of minority teachers today, tomorrow we may have none.

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