

# HIGH-STAKES TESTING: BARRIERS FOR PROSPECTIVE BILINGUAL EDUCATION TEACHERS

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## ABSTRACT

At present, there continues to be a great disparity in the number of LEP students and the current number of bilingual education teachers. Reyna (1993) reported that in Texas approximately 50% of the students are minorities; whereas, minorities represent only 23% of the teachers. This crucial need for bilingual educators continues to remain a topic that needs to be addressed. Although other obstacles exist in the recruitment and retention of prospective bilingual teachers, one of the barriers confronting bilingual teachers is the issue of high-stakes testing (Valencia & Aburto, 1991a). This paper examines those issues pertinent to high-stakes testing in relation to prospective bilingual/minority teachers. The review of current research examines the institutionalization of high-stakes testing for prospective teachers and the implications of high-stake testing on minority/bilingual teachers. The review also investigates the relationship between entry and exit competency tests and actual teaching performance and presents current entry and exit disaggregated data to identify areas on the test which appear to present difficulty for the prospective bilingual teachers. Two case studies are presented as insights into the relationship between competency and teaching performance. Lastly, recommendations regarding the current testing state, prospective bilingual teachers' status, and future research are provided.

## CASE ONE

Teresa, a Mexican American non-traditional student, faced many obstacles while at the university. Her husband did not want her to attend college and would rip her books to shreds unless she hid them. She was able to solve this problem by studying late at night in the bathroom once her husband went to bed and by working with him to overcome his insecurities. The problem that caused her the most trouble, and was not so easily resolved, was her test-anxiety. With the support of a Title VII bilingual education training program, her peers, and eventually her husband, Teresa completed her degree

requirements with a 3.4 grade point average. But she did not complete her teacher certification requirements because she could not pass the professional and the early childhood sections of the ExCET (Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas). As a student teacher, she received outstanding performance ratings, as she did during her first year as a non-certified teacher. Teresa's gifted ability to teach was soon revealed. Because of her knowledge of pedagogical bilingual techniques, she was often sought out for advice and asked to demonstrate lessons to more experienced teachers. However, Teresa soon found herself faced with another obstacle, the personnel department from her school district had notified her that her contract could not be renewed for the following year until she presented her teaching certificate. Her inability to pass the ExCET left her emotionally shattered. Teresa questioned her ability despite her performance as a student teacher and as a teacher. After receiving emotional support from her peers and help from the Title VII coordinator, Teresa did not waiver and persisted by employing positive imagery while reviewing for the tests. On the fourth and final administration, prior to having to be released from her contract, Teresa passed the final portions of her ExCET. She continues to teach successfully in a predominately minority district in a bilingual pre-kindergarten classroom.

In Texas, prospective teachers are given a year upon completion of degree and certification requirements to pass their ExCET's. School districts can hire prospective teachers who are in this process. However, if after a year of employment they have not completed certification requirements in their area of specialization, such as in bilingual or early childhood by passing the respective ExCET, the certified teacher can only be hired in a non-specialty setting (e.g., non-bilingual, elementary-only) or is dismissed from the district. Yet, at present there continues to be a great disparity in the number of LEP students and the current number of bilingual teachers.

### **CURRENT DISPARITIES BETWEEN BILINGUAL TEACHERS AND LEP POPULATION**

One is confronted with a sense of urgency when examining the current trends in the number of prospective bilingual teachers as compared to the number of Limited English Proficient (LEP) children in Texas. Reyna (1993) reported that in Texas approximately 50% of the students are minorities, whereas minorities represent only 23% of the teachers in Texas. In 1994-1995, the Texas Public School Statistics Pocket Edition (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 1995) reported a 36.1% Hispanic student population as compared to a 14.6% Hispanic teacher population. On the other hand, the number of language minority children entering into the school system is on a continual upswing. An increased student enrollment of 7.1% in bilingual/ESL education classrooms was reported in the pocket edition (TEA, 1995). In 1993, Reyna indicated that in Texas, the rate of increase in the number of LEP students entering public schools, as compared to the low rate of newly trained bilingual teachers, created

an annual deficit of 1,118 bilingual teachers. Valencia and Guadarrama (1995) provided an estimate of the demand for PK-6 bilingual teachers based on TEA's 1994 demographic data; based on a 22 to 1 student-teacher classroom ratio, they estimated a 7,261 PK-6 bilingual teacher shortage. In Texas, 8% of the bilingual and English As a Second language (ESL) teachers are currently on emergency teaching permits (TEA, 1993). According to TEA, the largest proportion of teachers not fully certified is in the area of bilingual education and ESL. Johnson (1993) confirmed that the number of teachers prepared to meet the linguistic needs of language minority children has not kept pace with the rise in the number of LEP students in Texas. By the year 2000, a majority of the minority student population will be sitting in the classrooms of Texas. The largest group of these will be Latino students largely from Mexican American backgrounds.

This trend is not likely to change in the immediate future. TEA (1994) reported that the majority of the Texas teaching force is White. The 1994-1995 Pocket Edition of Texas Public School Statistics confirmed that 76.6% of the teachers are White (TEA, 1994b). A current TEA Interim report of first-year teachers indicated that 76% were White, while only 16% were Hispanic (1995b). As indicated by the aforementioned data, the number of minorities entering the teaching profession remains low, whereas most new teachers entering into the field are members of the majority group. On the national level, Haslekorn and Calkins (1993) reported that while 25% of minorities are college age, only 17% are actually enrolled in institutions of higher education. Further, they purported that although enrollment for Hispanics has increased since 1980, this increase represents less than 5% of the total college enrollment. Recruiting New Teachers, Inc. (1993) provided national figures on the percentages of minorities in relation to the teaching profession. Minorities represent 10% of the current teacher workforce, and currently only 8% of minorities are in teacher training program; on the other hand, 30% of school age children are minorities.

## **RATIONALE FOR BILINGUAL TEACHERS**

The lack of bilingual educators is a vital issue that should be continually addressed. Although the great disparity between trained bilingual teachers and the number of bilingual teachers-in-training clearly shows the need for increased retention of prospective teachers, there are also other pedagogical reasons for the retention and recruitment of prospective bilingual teachers. In her review of the Ramírez, Yuen, and Ramey 1991 study, Cazden (1992) concluded that teacher qualifications and parent involvement are two other factors which are critical in minority language learning and school success. Valencia and Aburto (1991a) clearly provided evidence for three major reasons for the recruitment and retention of prospective minority teachers. Their rationale included shared identity between teacher and student, the notion of minority role models, and the need for a culturally pluralistic curriculum. Other researchers further

reported that minority teachers serve as role models for minority students and that it is justifiable that the shortage of minority teachers be addressed (Castro & Ingle, 1993; Farrell, 1990; Middleton, Mason, Stilwell, & Parker, 1988; and Zapata, 1988). Valencia (1991) indicated that there was a disproportionate level of failure among Chicano students. Texas Public School Statistics reported that Hispanics represent 51.9% of all dropouts (TEA, 1995). Furthermore, researchers suggested that the need for bilingual teachers is critical due to the increased numbers of, and the educational needs of, language minority children (Valencia & Aburto, 1991a; Valencia & Guadarrama, 1995).

Teachers receiving training in bilingual education are provided specialized skills in dealing with issues concerning language minority children. By contrast, all teachers (i.e., all racial/ethnic backgrounds) obtaining generalized preparation receive minimal training in the areas of multicultural curricula, and even less in the area of bilingual education (Castro & Ingle, 1993; Valencia & Aburto, 1991a). Monsivais' (1990) study with Latino teachers found that only 41% of these teachers "felt well prepared to teach Latino students" and "only 34% felt well prepared to teach 'limited English proficient' (LEP) students" (p. 5). TEA (1995b) also reported similar findings, primarily that university-trained teachers and alternative certification program teachers felt ill prepared to teach in such settings. The limitations of existing pedagogical training for bilingual populations, along with the increasing failure of language minority children, further support the need for the recruiting and retaining of prospective minority/bilingual teachers. Unfortunately, the relatively small number of bilingual teachers cannot meet the growing demands of language minority children. Although other obstacles exist in the recruitment and retention of prospective bilingual teachers, one of the barriers confronting bilingual teachers is the issue of high-stakes testing (Valencia & Aburto, 1991a).

Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine those issues pertinent to high-stakes testing in relation to prospective bilingual/minority teachers. Valencia and Guadarrama (1995) defined "high-stakes testing as the exclusive or near-exclusive use of a test scores to make significant educational decisions about students, teachers (prospective and incumbent) and schools" (p. 562). The first part will be a review of current research. Initially and briefly, the review will explore the institutionalization of high-stakes testing for prospective teachers. Secondly, the review will investigate the implications of high-stakes testing on minority/bilingual teachers. Thirdly, the review will investigate the relationship between entry and exit competency tests and actual teaching performance. Following the review, current entry and exit disaggregated data will be analyzed to identify those areas on the test which appear to present difficulty for the prospective bilingual teacher. Two case studies are presented as insights into the relationship between competency and teaching performance. Lastly, recommendations regarding the current testing state, prospective bilingual teachers' status, and future research will be provided.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING

As part of the educational reform in Texas, entry and exit tests have been required of prospective teachers for approximately ten years. This institutionalization of high-stakes testing began as early as 1970 as a result of the public's demand for assurance in quality education and qualified educators (Valencia & Guadarrama, 1995). As early as 1985, over forty states had some type of recertification for teachers (Hanes & Rowls, 1984). In Texas, testing of teachers began in 1987 with implementation of the Texas Examination for the Certification of Teachers and Administrators (TECAT); the first tests were the Pre-Professional Skills Test (PPST) and the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET). PPST was identified as an entry competency test for prospective teacher candidates, while ExCET is an exit competency test for prospective teachers. The PPST was only for prospective teacher candidates and was later replaced by the Texas Assessment Skills Program (TASP) exam which is now currently required of all entering undergraduates. While the TECAT did not have a major impact on reducing the number of existing professionals, the same cannot be said for current entry and exit competency tests. Upon initial implementation, Melnick and Pullin (1988) did not foresee any positive impact in improving teacher education or in enhancing the competency of future professionals. Rather, a negative outcome was predicted; Spellman (1988) and Zapata (1988) proposed that the potential pool of minority applicants would be further reduced by these reforms.

### IMPLICATIONS OF HIGH-STAKES TESTING ON PROSPECTIVE BILINGUAL TEACHERS

The impact of high-stakes testing on prospective minority/bilingual teachers has continued to be of great concern to some educators (Savage and Briggs, 1993; Valencia & Aburto, 1991a; Valencia & Guadarrama, 1995). These researchers have indicated that there is a high incidence of failure rate among minority prospective teachers. Under the guise of educational reforms, state mandated entry and exit minimum competency tests (MCT) not only present barriers for minority/bilingual prospective teachers, but prospective minority/bilingual educational leaders as well (Valencia & Aburto, 1991a). In addition, MCT limits the number of minority/bilingual special education teachers and other advanced professionals such as counselors, reading and math specialists, educational psychologists, etc. Thus, there is need to identify reasons for such failure rate among prospective bilingual teachers. Perhaps by identifying these reasons, we can assist prospective bilingual teachers in overcoming these barriers. Therefore, it is important to explore the testing pipeline through which prospective bilingual teachers must pass in acquiring their teacher certification.

## **EXPLORING THE PIPELINE**

It appears that minority students are confronted with several milestones on their path to becoming bilingual teachers. TEA (1994) traced the common progression of minority students from seventh grade through high school, college, and teaching. The pipeline for Texas teachers has milestones for each phase which are reflected by the successful completion of the following requirements: (a) passing Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) exit-level test, (b) graduating from high school, (c) taking Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) or American College Testing (ACT), (d) entering college, (e) passing Texas Assessment Skills Program (TASP) exam, (f) graduating from college, and (g) passing the appropriate ExCET's. During this ten-year span (i.e., 1982-1983 thru 1992-1993). The data clearly indicated the implications of entry and exit tests on the Hispanic population. For each milestone, the number of successful Hispanics continuing in the pipeline dramatically dwindles.

The limited pool of prospective bilingual teachers is attributed to several factors. The rate of completion of high school and college for Mexican Americans as compared to the rate of dropouts was identified as a contributing factor to the lack of college degree completion (Flores, 1994; Howley & Huang, 1991). Valencia's (1991) review of research revealed factors such as lower rates of college eligibility, lower rates of enrollment, and higher rates of attrition attributed to the lack of educational attainment for Chicanos. Valencia and Aburto (1991) cited declining interest in the teaching profession by minority students and high failure rate on teacher tests. Schmidt (1993) reported that the National Council of La Raza attributed the lack of educational attainment to the level of poverty among Hispanics; unfortunately, the number of Hispanics living in poverty continues to increase. García (1991) suggested that the disproportionate rate of educational attainment for minorities as compared to non-minorities called for a major reassessment of the current educational practices. Valencia and Aburto (1991b) and Valencia and Guadarrama (1995) suggested that current assessment practices should also be reformed. If there continues to be such high failure rate among prospective bilingual teachers, then this current disparity will naturally increase.

## **TESTING AND PERFORMANCE**

In exploring competency testing and performance, one can validate or negate the need for continuing the practice of high-stakes testing. Since the institutionalization of high-stakes testing, there has been an on-going debate about the usefulness and the legality of such tests (see, Scherer, 1983; Lines, 1985; Brodbelt, 1988). Proponents of competency testing have suggested that assessing prospective teacher abilities would improve the educational system; as support for this notion, they indicated that test scores on competency tests have increased, which indicates an improvement in teacher-preparation programs. Individuals who oppose competency tests question the validity of such measures to predict actual teaching performance. Hood and Parker's (1991) review of judicial decisions provided highlights of recent court rulings

on the use of high-stakes testing. They pointed out the disastrous effects of MCT on the pool of minority applicants. Hood and Parker concluded that recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings, which upheld the uses of such tests, are indicators of a regressive step toward the inclusion of minority teacher candidates.

Valencia and Aburto (1991b) concluded “that the existing psychometric research is, in general, weak and irrelevant, and that although there has been an attempt to debias existing tests, differential criterion validity research across ethnic groups is sorely needed” (p. 195). Recently, Williams and Wakeford (1995) examined the predictive validity of the National Teacher Examination (NTE), which is used for admission to teacher education programs across the country. As in Texas’ TASP, prospective teacher candidates are required to pass the NTE tests of Communication Skills (CS) and General Knowledge (GK) prior to entry into the university teacher-training program. Williams and Wakeford’s study was conducted with subjects enrolled at 15 campuses of a large southern public university. Although there was a high correlation between SAT and NTE scores, the authors concluded that these tests were actually a measure of test-taking abilities. The NTE entry tests did not meaningfully contribute to the candidates’ final two years grade point average (GPA) given the inclusion of entry GPA (i.e., prior to admission to teacher program) and SAT. This was contrary to the anticipated findings, since NTE is expected to display criterion-related validity related to final GPA. The researchers concluded that NTE does not merit inclusion as entry requirement into the teacher-training program when there are other test scores and prior grades available as selection criteria. The NTE’s CS and GK tests were predictive of performance on the NTE Professional Knowledge, the state certification examination. Other studies conducted have shown a correlation between the NTE tests and college course achievement (e.g., see Schurr, Ruble, Henriksen & Alcorn, 1989).

There have been limited studies which examined the relationship between the NTE core battery and teacher performance. Pultorak (1991) conducted a study exploring student teachers’ performance in relation to the NTE Core Battery (i.e., CS, GK and PK). Student-teacher performance was measured by the observation instrument used by school and university supervisors at Indiana State University. The observation instrument consisted of five major evaluation categories: (a) Teaching Skills, (b) Professional Competence, (c) Personal Characteristics, (d) Interpersonal Relationships, and (e) Summary Evaluation. He found that the NTE Core Battery was related to various college courses and supervisors’ perceptions of student teachers; however, there was no relationship found between the NTE and student teaching performance. Daniel (1993) conducted a multivariate investigation on the prediction of student teaching performance and NTE scores. Using student-teacher assessment instruments as measures of teaching performance, he found that the NTE scores were not very good predictors of teaching performance and that GPA served as a relatively good predictor.

Moore, Schurr, and Henriksen (1991) conducted a study of first-year teacher effectiveness in relation to NTE Core Battery and college grade point average. Teacher effectiveness was assessed by an instrument which measured eight performance areas: (a) managing instructional time, (b) managing student behavior, (c) using instructional strategies, (d) monitoring student performance, (e) providing instructional feedback, (f) facilitating instruction, (g) exhibiting effective human relations, and (h) performing non-instructional activities. Moore et al. (1991) found a lack of empirical evidence between the NTE Core Battery and teacher effectiveness. In fact, grade point average was a better predictor of effectiveness than the NTE's Core Battery.

As previously shown, it appears that the NTE Core Battery serves as a limited predictor of future performance in teacher-training programs. The previously cited studies also showed the lack of correlation between the NTE Core Battery and actual teacher performance. What further confuses the issue is the fact that the Educational Testing Service has asserted that the NTE Core Battery does not predict teacher performance (Pultorak, 1991; Valencia & Aburto, 1991b). Furthermore, Valencia and Aburto's (1991b) comprehensive review did not find any studies that correlated the NTE with actual teaching performance. As is asserted by Savage and Briggs (1993), "licensure tests must discriminate good from poor practitioners" (p. 431). The current NTE is not able to do this (Daniel, 1993; Moore et al., 1991; Pultorak, 1991; Valencia & Aburto, 1991b; Williams & Wakeford, 1995). Thus, it is only reasonable to concur with previous researchers, that the lack of correlation between the NTE Core battery and its use as an entry or exit criteria for prospective teachers removes the rationale for this test (see Valencia & Aburto, 1991b; Williams & Wakeford, 1995).

Only one study was found which correlated the SAT and GPA to ExCET scores. White, Burke, and Hodges (1994), found a significant correlation between GPA and ExCET scores as well as a significant correlation between ExCET and SAT scores. However, is it possible, as Williams and Wakeford suggested, that the correlation exists because the ExCET and SAT may be measuring the same thing, i.e., test-taking skills? Perhaps the correlation between grades and ExCET scores is simply a reflection of the curriculum being aligned with the test (see Valencia & Aburto, 1991b). Because of the secure nature of the ExCET, these types of queries are difficult to answer. Furthermore, the study does not validate the ExCET as a predictor of future performance. Therefore, although much has been said about high-stakes testing, there appears to be a lack of research that explores the relationship between Texas' competency testing and actual teaching performance.



## ANALYSIS OF DATA

### EXAMINATION OF CURRENT TEXAS' DATA

Valencia and Aburto (1991a) provide us with a start on examining teacher competency tests. In examining passing certification rates for six states with large minority population, they concluded that "the data appear to indicate that in general, failure rates are higher for tests of basic skills and general knowledge but tend to decrease with examinations more closely assessing teaching (e.g., professional knowledge examinations and classroom observations). There appears to be variability in pass/fail rates between types of examinations (e.g., basic skills v. professional knowledge) within type of examination" (p. 192). As previously noted, all prospective teachers are required to take entry (TASP) and exit (ExCET) tests. In order to understand the nature of these tests, it is important to identify what is being measured in each type of test. Below is a brief description of each.

#### TASP

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) sets the standards for the TASP (1995). In 1986, a committee report indicated that nearly 30% of students entering Texas public institutions did not have the basic skills to perform effectively in higher education. Thus, the decision was made to adopt a diagnostic test that could be used to identify such students. It was also decided that college students failing any one portion of the test would be required to take a remediation course prior to enrolling in college-level courses. The TASP has three major areas that are measured: reading, writing, and mathematics. Within those three major areas are 28 skills that can be assessed by the TASP. Students are exempt from taking the TASP if they score exceptionally high on SAT, ACT, or the TAAS. It should be noted that Hispanics represented 8.3% of all exemptions; Whites accounted for 77.8% of the exemptions (THECB, 1995b). Currently, students must pass writing and mathematics with a minimum score of 240 and must pass reading with a minimum score of 220 prior to accumulating nine college hours. If the student accumulates nine hours and has not passed all three sections, the student is barred from further registration in college courses until all three portions of the test are successfully passed. It should be noted that some institutions require that students pass all three sections prior to first semester enrollment. Enrollment for students who fail is restricted to remediation-type courses in the areas not passed. THECB (1995) reported that many students who fail to pass all three sections, having completed nine hours, do not attempt to retake the test. They assume that these students have achieved their limited educational goals and have left higher education. According to the THECB (1995), no demographic group has been affected disproportionately by these changes. The 1994-1995 Summary data showed that 40.4% Hispanics as compared to 64% white students

passed all three sections of the TASP on initial attempt. Of current college students, 42.9% Hispanics as compared to 63.7% Whites completed TASP requirements; these figures included re-takes. The THECB (1995b) reported that scores for all ethnic groups were increasing.

### **ExCET**

The *Educator Assessment in Texas: 1992-1993 Report* (TEA, 1994b) indicated, "The purpose of the ExCET is to ensure that each educator has the knowledge necessary to begin teaching in Texas public schools or to be granted a professional certificate. ExCET tests are related to the job which is required at the entry-level" (p. 1). The ExCET is a criterion-referenced, multiple-choice test. The TEA (1994b) report clearly showed that while the Hispanic total seeking initial university certification was only 15.3%, the White total seeking initial certification was 77.3% percent. The ExCET tests taken by prospective teachers are dependent on the type of certification that the individual is seeking; the current cost for each test is seventy-two dollars. In the case of bilingual teachers, along with the Texas Oral Proficiency Test (TOPT), which is a Spanish language proficiency test, two ExCET tests are currently required: Professional Elementary and the Comprehensive/Bilingual Education. It is important to note that beginning in the fall of 1995, the Comprehensive and Bilingual Education ExCET's were converted from two exams into one exam, i.e., Comprehensive/Bilingual Education. For bilingual early childhood teachers, all the above must be taken in addition to the Early Childhood ExCET test. The Professional Developmental Tests for Elementary teachers "measure pedagogical knowledge in areas such as instructional planning and methodology, curriculum development, classroom management, assessment and evaluation, and principles of education" (TEA, 1994b, p. 6). Content Specialization Tests "assess subject knowledge that is appropriate for entry-level certification in the content area, endorsement, or delivery system" (TEA, 1994b, p. 9). These content tests include comprehensive elementary, bilingual education, and early childhood education. The TOPT measures oral language proficiency (TEA, 1994b).

In order to explore reasons for the disproportionate failure rate for prospective bilingual teachers, this section will examine recent TASP and/or ExCET scores. An analysis of TASP and/or ExCET aggregated and disaggregated data may reveal the areas presenting potential difficulty for prospective bilingual teachers. Valencia and Guadarrama (1995) examined the PPST and ExCET 1991-1992 data and found that these MCTs were gatekeepers for prospective minority/bilingual teachers due to the high failure rate of minority students.

In the case of prospective bilingual teachers in the Title VII program at UTSA, the test that appears to present minority females with most difficulty is the mathematics portion of the TASP. THECB (1995) data indicated that the mathematic's pass rates were lower than the other two sections for all ethnic groups with the exception of Asians. A total of 59% of minorities, as compared

to 75.3% Whites, passed the mathematics section in 1994-1995. What can this difficulty in mathematics be attributed to? It is our contention that there is a mismatch/misalignment between what the students learned in school and what is being tested in the TASP. In the case of the UTSA's Title VII trainees, some are non-traditional students who are returning to school after a period of five or more years after graduating from high school. For these students, algebra was not required, or only two years of math were required to graduate from school. Many attended low-income barrio schools where math was not emphasized or where there was a lack of adequately trained or certified mathematics teachers. Thus, these trainees have to begin at the very basic foundations of math offered at the university or community college. However, after several semesters of refresher math, TASP Math, pre-college algebra, etc., most (currently 100%) have been successful in passing the math portion of the TASP.

In an analysis by Valencia and Guadarrama (1995), the ExCET test drawn from 1991-1992 data, which appeared to present minority students with the most difficulty was the Professional Development. This was especially true for the Hispanic students, the usual source of bilingual teachers. An examination of the TEA Report (1994b) revealed that the Professional Test and the Early Childhood Test presented the most difficulty for Hispanic students. The overall passing rate for all elementary examinees for the professional test was 88.5% with only a 66.5% passing rate for Hispanic students. The early childhood test for all examinees indicated a 75.1% overall passing rate and a 47.85% passing rate for Hispanic students. The disparity in these scores, particularly from the early childhood test, merits a close examination and analysis.

For university-based examinees, the professional test showed an 87.7% passing rate for all first time takers and only a 68.2% passing rate for Hispanics. Although more Hispanic students took this test for the first time, the passing rate was lower than the 1991-1992 data reviewed by Valencia and Guadarrama (1995). The TEA report (1994b) also provided first and second time cumulative ExCET results; these data showed an increase for Hispanic examinees from 68.3% (first time) to 76.4% (second time). Thus, an additional 76.4% of the students retaking the exam passed on their second attempt. Interestingly, universities that have a large concentration of Hispanic student enrollment had *lower overall passing* rates on the professional test; e.g., UT Brownsville, 59%; UT Pan Am, 61%; Texas A&I University, 56.9%. The passing rate among Hispanics was lower at these universities in comparison to other universities; e.g., UT Brownsville, 31%; UT Pan Am, 59%; Texas A&I, 37.5%. In the case of some schools with a large minority concentration, their overall passing rate was average (e.g., UT El Paso, 78.9%) with a somewhat low passing rate for Hispanics (e.g., UT El Paso, 68.9%). UT Permian Basin, which is predominately a white institution, had an overall passing rate of 85.3 with only a 57.9% passing rate for Hispanic students. It was noteworthy that UT Austin, which is also predominately White, had an overall passing rate of 98.7% and 95.1% passing for Hispanic students. Since no in-depth studies have been conducted regarding

these disparities, it is not known what accounts for these gross differences in scores between the different universities. At the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), the test that appears to present the greatest difficulty for Title VII trainees is the professional test (based on raw data collected for Title VII reports). This problem is also revealed when comparing the overall data to the Hispanic passing rate data as reported on the TEA (1994b) Report. At UTSA an 87.8% overall passing rate for the professional test was indicated, with a 74.6% passing rate for Hispanics. Data collected for Title VII reports indicate a high passing rate 98.7% on a second time administration.

Nevertheless, the professional test appears to present a great deal of difficulty for Hispanic students. The disaggregated data from Sept. 1, 1995, to April 4, 1996, for Hispanic students at UTSA revealed interesting information. The data indicated the passing score plus the specific score for each domain. The three main domains for the professional tests include (a) Domain I: Understanding Learners (33% of test); (b) Domain II: Enhancing Student Achievement (40% of test); (c) Domain III: Understanding the Teaching Environment (27% of the test). Table A on the following page shows the percentage of domain failures per total number of students who passed or failed the professional development ExCET. For this analysis, it was determined that the *difficulty* of the domain was represented by the percentage failing for each group. In the pass group, Domain I appears to present difficulty for approximately 9% of the Hispanic students in the passing group. Contrastingly, Domain I presented greater difficulty for 79% of the fail group. Domain II presents difficulty for only 8% of the pass group while presenting difficulty for 64% of the fail group. Domain III presents difficulty for only 5% of the pass group and 79% of the fail group. For the fail group it appears that Domain I and II presented the greatest difficulty.

In the case of the Early Childhood Test, university-based passing rates revealed an overall passing rate of 73.4%. However, only 44.3% of Hispanic students taking the test for the first time passed the test. The data revealed an increase to 56.8% passing on the second time for Hispanic students. Again, examining the same previously mentioned universities revealed some interesting information: UT Brownsville, 42.9% overall passing and 36.4% Hispanic passing; UT El Paso, 63.6% overall passing and 43.9% Hispanic passing; UT Pan Am, 38.7 overall passing and 32% Hispanic passing; Texas A&I, 45.2% overall passing and 31.8% Hispanic passing. UT had 100% overall and Hispanic passing. UTSA had a 71.7% overall passing and a 58.8% Hispanic passing.

The Early Childhood Test also appears to present great difficulty for UTSA Title VII bilingual students (based on raw data collected for Title VII reports). The second time passing rate is not as high (75%) with several students having to take the test three or four times before passing. There are five domains which are included in the Early Childhood Education ExCET: (a) Domain I: Fostering Social and Emotional Development (16% of the test); (b) Domain

II: Fostering Language Development (20% of the test); (c) Domain III: Fostering Aesthetic and Physical Development (20% of the test); (d) Domain IV: Fostering Thinking Across the Curriculum (20% of the test); and (e) Domain V: Development the Whole Child (28% of the test).

Again, by examining UTSA's disaggregated ExCET data, some interesting findings for Hispanic students were found, as shown on Table B. Domain I presented difficulty for 18% of the pass group, whereas it presented difficulty for 17% of fail group. Domain II was difficult for only 20% of the pass group while it presented difficulty for 45% of the fail group. Domain III was difficult for 15% of the pass group and 13% difficult for the fail group. Domain IV was difficult for 38% of the pass group while only being difficult for 29% of the fail group. Domain V did not present any difficulty for the pass group while 25% of the fail group found this domain difficult. Domains II and IV presented the greatest difficulty for both pass and fail groups.

The implications of these data clearly support the notion that ExCET tests, especially the professional and early childhood tests, are presenting barriers for Hispanic students. TEA's (1995b) Interim Report also indicated that the first-time passing rates for the professional development exam were significantly lower for Hispanics as compared to their white counterparts. They concluded that the ExCET did not serve as a gatekeeper since 95% of the participants in their study had passed the test. A word of caution is necessary; the TEA (1995b) study only included prospective teachers who had met certain criteria: (a) first-year, (b) identifiable certification route, and (c) had taken one or more ExCET tests by December 1994. These data do indicate that the tests are serving as gatekeepers for Latino students regardless of how TEA presents and interprets their findings.

The analysis of Title VII trainees revealed that often students would register to take more than one test at a time; students who overloaded on the number of tests often did not do well. It also revealed that non-traditional students often had more difficulty than traditional students. Title VII trainees who do not pass the test are advised to study specific readings and not to take more than one test at a time. Once the failure was noted for Title VII trainees on the early childhood test, the data revealed interesting information. Some of the students who had failed the early childhood test had taken a particular foundational early childhood course with an adjunct lecturer. Prospective bilingual teachers who had not yet taken the course were advised to do so with another professor with a *proven track-record* (i.e., known to be a challenging teacher with high teacher effectiveness and student expectations).

*Table A: Professional Test  
Percentage of Domain Failures per Pass or Fail*

Domain by P/F	Pass N=66	Fail N=14
I. Understanding Learners	9%	79%
II. Enhancing Student Achievement	8%	64%
III. Understanding Teaching Environment	5%	79%

*Table B: Early Childhood  
Percentage of Domain Failures per Pass or Fail*

Domain by P/F	Pass N=34	Fail N=24
I. Fostering Social & Emotional Development	18%	17%
II. Fostering Language Development	20%	45%
III. Fostering Aesthetic and Physical Development	15%	13%
IV. Fostering Thinking Across the Curriculum	38%	29%
V. Developing the Whole Child		25%

It is also interesting that one of the tests taken by the greatest number of examinees was the early childhood exam; of these only 17.2% are Hispanics while 77.9% are White (TEA, 1994b). Considering the number of LEP children and other demographics, this represents another area of great concern. If the majority of early childhood teachers are White, pre-kindergarten and/or kindergarten LEP children will not have an equal opportunity to learn in their native language.

There are several questions that come to mind after this surface level analysis. How can we explain the differences from institution to institution regarding the passing rates for Hispanic students? Are less-prepared students “weeded-out” in certain institutions, making higher passing rates a reflection of this attrition process? Are there lower expectations in universities where there is a predominant minority presence? Are the teacher-trainers (university faculty) adequately prepared to teach a diverse population? Are the university

faculty/staff experts in the field? Does the difference simply reflect differing populations, e.g., age, type of schooling, etc.? Are some tests more theoretical in nature than others? Do the professional or the early childhood tests require more field experience to answer adequately? Do early childhood theories conflict with the socialization patterns of minority children or parents?

## CASE TWO

After completing general education requirements at a small rural South Texas community college, Julia, a Mexican American, transferred to the University of Texas at San Antonio. The change in institutions initially presented Julia with academic difficulties. However, she adjusted to the curriculum demands at UTSA and eventually completed her degree and certification requirements in bilingual early childhood and elementary education. Julia had successfully completed student teaching in the fall and was quickly hired upon completing certification requirements by a large predominately White suburban school district. In January, Julia was assigned to a bilingual kindergarten classroom in one of the cluster bilingual schools in the district. Julia demonstrated her gifted ability in teaching. Teachers often remarked on her teaching ability and were often amazed to discover she was a first-year teacher. During her first semester (spring) as a teacher, Julia received notification that she had passed all her ExCET's with the exception of the early childhood test. She submitted for and was awarded a teaching certification for bilingual and elementary. But she was not successful in passing her Early Childhood ExCET. Nevertheless, she returned to her position in September and registered to take the Early Childhood ExCET a second time. Her district notified her that unless her certification for early childhood was completed by December, she would not be allowed to return to the district in January. Her teaching performance continued to be exceptional; unfortunately, she was again not able to pass the Early Childhood ExCET. During December, she was notified of her dismissal. Since she was certified as a bilingual elementary teacher, she had inquired about the possibility of being hired in a non-early childhood classroom. The district did not give her any hope of being hired and told her that she could only be hired as a substitute teacher at substitute pay. However, she was told that no preferences would be afforded her by the district even as a substitute teacher. Needless to say, she was emotionally distraught. Julia contacted the Title VII Bilingual Education Coordinator for guidance as she had done many times as a student at UTSA. The Title VII Coordinator provided her some study material and assisted her with test-taking techniques to prepare her for the next attempt with the ExCET. In the subsequent administration of the early childhood ExCET, Julia passed the test. Julia was elated and saddened at the same time. Although the Title VII coordinator had assisted her in finding another bilingual teaching position, she was not in an early childhood bilingual classroom. Furthermore, she was disheartened by the fact that the teacher who had replaced her at the other district was monolingual and was working with

Spanish dominant children; she was genuinely concerned for the educational welfare of her language minority children. At the end of the spring semester, even though she had experienced success as a fourth grade bilingual teacher, Julia decided to move back to her south Texas town. Although she had received much support from peers and the Title VII Coordinator, she felt that she could no longer stay in San Antonio; she could not raise her children in a community where there are people who simply do not care for their fellow human beings. San Antonio's loss was a south Texas town's gain; Julia is currently teaching in an early childhood bilingual classroom.

Although both of the two case studies have happy endings, one has to wonder how many Teresa's or Julia's do not seek assistance or support and simply disappear from the bilingual teaching ranks. One of the important revelations that comes from these case studies is the need for a support structure for prospective bilingual teachers while enrolled as students at the university and until successful completion of all ExCET tests. It also appears that the school districts do not serve as a support structure for incipient teachers. Fortunately, both of these individuals felt secure to reach out and seek assistance from an existing support structure, namely the Title VII Coordinator at UTSA. With the current move to eradicate Title VII, where will individuals like Teresa and Julia reach out for support?

## **SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Calderón and Díaz (1993) suggested that recruitment for teachers should be as aggressive as pre-engineering programs. As result of a survey conducted by Case, Shive, Ingebreston, and Spiegalm (1988), it was determined that new polices should be considered in the recruitment and retention of minority teacher candidates. Based on the survey's findings, they concluded that (a) prospective teacher candidates must be identified earlier; (b) recruitment methods must become more personalized; (c) support services must be adequate in meeting students' needs; and (d) exit criteria should not solely rely on standardized testing. As a result of this review of research, the examination of entry and exit data, and the two case studies, there are two major areas that should be addressed in the area of high-stakes testing. First, we will consider alternative assessment and this will be followed by some recommendations and conclusions.

## **ALTERNATIVE ASSESSMENT OF PROSPECTIVE BILINGUAL TEACHERS**

In order to change the state of high-stakes testing, there is a need for alternative assessment of prospective teachers. There are three main reasons that support this notion. First, there are those minority students whose potential may go undiscovered simply because they are barred from continuing in college due to failure on a portion of the TASP test. Secondly, although remediation and assistance are helpful for minority students, minority students are indirectly



penalized; for example, (a) increased costs of remediation (i.e., additional course work), (b) increased costs of having to retake either TASP or ExCET, and (c) loss of potential earnings due to increased course work (i.e., postponement of graduation). Thirdly and most importantly, there has been no correlation established between MCT such as TASP or ExCET and teacher performance.

The use of alternative assessment to predict performance has been suggested by several researchers (Gallegos, 1984; Valencia & Guadarrama, 1995; Williams & Wakeford, 1995). However, a word of caution is necessary. Using GPA or other scores as predictors of future performance do not exempt the institution from providing support services for prospective teachers. Freeman, Martin, Brousseau, and West (1989) found no significant differences in basic skills in reading or math when GPA was used as an arbitrary cut of score for prospective teacher candidates in Michigan. Increasing the GPA as a standard did not drastically change the candidates' need for remediation in reading or math. Furthermore, the use of standardized test scores (SAT or ACT) also can limit the number of prospective teacher candidates; several authors noted the high correlation between standardized tests and NTE's CS (Communication Skills) and GK (General Knowledge) (Williams & Wakeford, 1995; Hashway, Jones, & Barnes, 1993). Prospective teachers performing poorly on SAT or ACT should also be provided support services that include remediation in basic skills' areas (Hashway, Jones, & Barnes, 1993). In essence, increasing the number of prospective minority teacher candidates includes a vigorous, out-reaching plan to provide remediation in areas of weakness.

Shechtman's (1991) study concluded that a group assessment procedure based on final student-teacher evaluations was an effective measure in predicting initial teacher success. Other admission criteria (intelligence scores and GPA) produced inconsistent results. Valencia and Aburto (1991b) and Valencia and Guadarrama (1995) provided the most useful suggestions and cautions in alternative assessment of prospective minority teachers. Valencia and Guadarrama suggested that there should be *test equity*. This calls for a new paradigm that "includes a combination of assessment strategies and instrumentation that focus on a system that is well-planned, clearly stated, and part of a continual process and whose goals and policies reflect an affirmation and commitment to ensuring equity for all students. Most importantly, the proposed assessment paradigm must deal in a proactive, responsible manner to eliminate test abuses associated with testing minority students" (p. 597). Savage and Briggs (1993) also raised the same concerns regarding minority students. They suggested that a promising effort is one that would follow the direction of Education Testing Service in which paper and pencil measures would be replaced "with a package of tests that involves interactive video, computer simulations, classroom observations, and portfolio development - all to be utilized at various points in the collegiate teacher-education program"

(p. 431). According to Savage and Briggs, this new measure was to be unveiled in the 1991-1992 year; however, a computer search on teacher testing did not yield any information on this topic. These types of alternatives measuring teacher effectiveness are needed to assure quality education.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUPPORT STRUCTURES**

Minority students are often faced with several obstacles in achieving their educational goals. There has been a clear presentation of evidence that having supportive structures (networks) can assist minority students in achieving their educational goals (Alva, 1991; Alva & Padilla, 1995; López, 1995; Gordon, 1996). Non-traditional minority students can be assisted in accomplishing their educational goals by providing the appropriate types of remediation. THECB (1995) reported a high level of success (i.e., retention and actual completion) for students who had been provided remediation. The same has been found at UTSA.

The two case studies presented clearly demonstrate the need for support services and the evidence that competency testing should not solely rely on standardized testing. In addition, the analysis of ExCET data revealed the need for support services for prospective bilingual teachers. The analysis conducted by the first author revealed that examinees often overload on tests; thus students should be advised on the number of tests that are taken in one sitting. Providing students with reading lists also focuses their review in a specific area like early childhood. Another important recommendation is that a careful analysis of the data should be conducted; the analysis may reveal patterns of failure by students who were enrolled in a specific section(s) or may reveal specific areas of weakness on a given test.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

There are educational reformers who feel that competency testing is necessary for improving education. However, there appears to be no support for this link between competency testing and actual performance. This crucial issue that so greatly affects Latinos merits in-depth study. Nevertheless, there is a need for a much deeper investigation of high-stakes testing regarding the content and construct validity of such measures. Another consideration for further research is whether high-stakes testing has had an impact on educational reform.

For those individuals who argue that the disproportionate number of minority and bilingual teachers is not due to high-stakes testing, another area which can be explored is the possibility of curriculum mismatch and the actual test. This can occur for the returning non-traditional minority student or for

the student who has attended a school whose focus is not on preparing students for college. Perhaps the test is culturally loaded in some particular areas as a result of the interaction of the minority student's acculturation level and/or language proficiency.

If there are no distinct problems with these TASP and ExCET tests, then there is a need to explore other areas that may be contributing to the failure rate. Perhaps conducting a study which explores the relationship between the organizational culture and the failure rate may provide some answers. For example, is there a relationship between the organizational culture and the failure rate? In order to explore the possible relationship between the organizational culture and failure rate, the following are some guiding questions. Does the educational setting provide the minority student the opportunity to learn the skills needed to be successful on the test? Does the educational setting empower the minority student?

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, it is apparent that there is a need for further research in the psychometric properties of current entry and exit tests. These tests, as they currently exist, are presenting barriers for prospective bilingual teachers. It is also evident that prospective bilingual teachers as well as current first-year bilingual teachers need a stronger support structure in overcoming current barriers such as high-stakes testing. Prospective bilingual teachers need to be actively recruited and be given the support structure required to achieve their goals. Building learning communities which bridge high schools, community colleges, and universities can assist in the recruitment and retention of prospective bilingual teachers (Calderón & Díaz, 1993). Greater investment and support from the community are also required in assuring the quality of teacher-training; paper and pencil tests do not assure teacher competency.

Finally, there is a need for a new paradigm in the assessment of prospective teachers; perhaps alternative measures which were cited by Savage and Briggs (1993) will assist in this shift. It is also important to take into consideration cautions expressed by Valencia and Guadarrama (1995). Rather than implementing a top-down policy, a bottom-up approach can improve the quality of education for all children. Thus, policy-makers should engage a team of current teachers in designing these alternative measures. Rather than arbitrarily weeding-out potential bilingual teachers, these alternative measures should be used as diagnostic tools. These tools can thus assist in the improvement of teacher-training and ultimately teacher effectiveness. Furthermore, this type of quality assurance will increase the educational opportunities for minority children. It is toward this goal that we should strive.

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