

**A Triumph of Politics over Pedagogy?
The Case of the Ontario Teacher Qualifying Test, 2000-2005
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Abstract

At a time when most American states have embedded an initial certification test into their teacher preparation programs, Canadian educational authorities are faced with a choice: to test or not. One province, Ontario, has experimented with a standardized entry-to-the-profession testing instrument. For three years, 2002-04, teacher candidates were required to take an externally-administered examination, on top of the normal Bachelor of Education requirements, prior to certification. The results were decidedly mixed: politically viable, but pedagogically questionable. Now, the debate has been re-opened, as a new government seeks a more effective form of entry-level assessment for aspiring teachers..

Introduction

Teacher education and teacher performance are too vital to the success of publicly-funded schools to escape the scrutiny of educational reformers. On the one hand, teacher salaries and benefit packages account for a major share of total school-system expenditures, so naturally the critics seek assurance of value received for money expended. On the other hand, all the curriculum reform in the world will count for little if the front-line provider, the classroom teacher, is unsympathetic to, or unskilled in, its delivery. Consequently, how best to prepare new teachers for teaching, and how best to ensure they are qualified for and ready to perform their role, become essential questions in any jurisdiction guided by liberal-democratic principles.

Fundamentally, there are two competing models to follow in this quest (Roth, 1996). The first might be termed the “professional” model. Practising teachers, organized collectively as a profession with an enforceable code of conduct and observable standards of practice, control entry into their own ranks, assisted by the university-based faculties of education who provide suitably-designed and approved degree programs. The appropriate level of government authorizes and legitimizes the arrangement through a legal framework that recognizes the autonomous existence of the teaching profession (Runte, 1998; Shanker, 1996; Ballou & Podgursky, 1998). With the establishment in the mid-1990s of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) as a professional regulatory body, Ontario seemed well on its way to institutionalizing the “professional” model of teacher accreditation and assessment. The idea for a provincial College of Teachers had been a major recommendation of the Begin-Caplan Report in 1994 (Royal Commission on Learning). Its creation was approved by the outgoing social-democratic government led by Bob Rae, and its formal launch in 1996 was endorsed by the incoming neo-conservative party of Mike Harris (Gidney, 1999).

Though they acquiesced in the establishment of the OCT, the Harrisites were more impressed by an alternative approach to new-teacher preparation and scrutiny we might term the “public accountability” model. One of the initial attractions for them of an independent regulatory body was that the cost of bureaucratic record-keeping and internal disciplinary procedures would now

be borne by the teachers themselves, through their mandatory annual membership fee, thus saving millions of dollars in government expenditure. Ultimate public control of the College of Teachers flowed from the fact that a majority of the members of its governing Council were not members of the teacher federations, and nearly half were government appointees (Krafchick, 1996). Under the “public accountability” model, however, the teacher preparation programs administered by the universities would require external verification. In the United States, where accountability had been a watchword of educational reformers since the early 1980s, the vast majority of states had moved to a system of standardized testing as one part of their teacher certification process. Accountability proponents had pushed hard for a statistically verifiable assessment tool that would be both objective in design and economical to administer. The goal was to provide convincing evidence that the teacher candidates seeking to be certified were in fact qualified to teach. (Kuchapski, 2002; McEwen, 1995; Crundwell, 2005).

Meanwhile, in Ontario the College of Teachers initially moved in the direction of the “professional” model, by instituting a mandatory accreditation program, not of individual teacher candidates, but of the teacher education programs housed in various universities around the province. It remained to be seen which model would most appeal to the new Progressive Conservative (PC) government, with its lean-government policies packaged under the populist slogan, “The Common Sense Revolution” (Sears, 2003). And, would the choice be based on pedagogical or political considerations?

An Overview of the Ontario Experience

On May 11, 2000 Janet Ecker, Ontario’s Minister of Education, rose in the Legislature to announce “the framework for a comprehensive Ontario Teacher Testing Program.” Most of the media attention focused on the controversial plan to require experienced teachers to undergo an ongoing re-certification process that entailed the completion of a set number of courses every five years. Somewhat lost in the shuffle was a second element aimed at novice members of the profession. Beginning “in 2001, all new teachers will have to pass a test before they can qualify to teach in Ontario” she explained. “This will ensure they know the subjects they will be

teaching.” Coupled with this written assessment, Ecker promised that the Ministry of Education would be “designing an induction program, similar to an internship, that will help new teachers develop good classroom management and teaching skills, through coaching and support from more experienced colleagues” (Ecker, 2000). Although the induction program failed to materialize during Ecker’s time as Minister, the promise of a written test for beginning teachers was followed up.

The mandatory re-certification policy for experienced teachers was a hot-button political issue from the time Premier Mike Harris had introduced it as a Progressive Conservative promise in his pre-election “Blueprint for Ontario” in April, 1999. By contrast, the idea of an entry-to-the-profession test for teacher candidates seemed to attract much broader support. The Opposition Liberals had included it in their own election platform for 1999. A year later, the Ontario College of Teachers endorsed the idea in their response to Ecker’s request for advice on a teacher testing program. Recommendation 3, from the 2000 OCT report, *Maintaining, Ensuring and Demonstrating Competency in the Teaching Profession*, stated:

That applicants for membership in the Ontario College of Teachers, in addition to program and practicum requirements, be required to complete successfully a written assessment of knowledge related to Ontario curriculum and education legislation and policy appropriate for beginning teachers prior to entrance to the profession in Ontario (OCT, 2000, p. iii).

Several provincial Faculties of Education even consented to sending representatives to a consultation in Toronto with the Ontario College of Teachers in October 2000, to brainstorm and reflect on the format that an entry-to-the-profession test might take.

By the Fall of 2001, when Ecker finally introduced legislation to “establish a new qualifying test to insure that those who want to teach in Ontario have the necessary skills and knowledge required before they become certified,” bi-partisan support for the measure had been somewhat eroded. The acrimony surrounding the government’s Professional Learning Program (PLP), in process of being set up to operationalize the mandatory re-certification policy for experienced

teachers, was chiefly responsible. The new measure, entitled *Quality in the Classroom Act, 2001*, coupled province-wide standards for school board appraisal of teaching performance with the enactment in law of a qualifying test for new teachers, to be phased in beginning in the spring of 2002 (Ecker, 2001). Given the developing war of words between the teacher federations and the PC government over the PLP, the Opposition Liberals chose to oppose the bill, though even then they did not specifically renounce the concept of a teacher test as part of initial certification.

Three years later, much had changed in Ontario politics. Mike Harris had retired, his successor, Ernie Eves, was Leader of the Opposition, and the Liberals now formed the Government. Rumours began to circulate within the province's educational community that the Ontario Teacher Qualifying Test (OTQT), established by the PCs in 2001, run as a field test in 2002, and folded in as a real part of teacher certification in both 2003 and 2004, might be slated to follow the PLP into oblivion. These rumours were fed by a position paper, *Teaching Excellence - Unlocking Student Potential Through Continuing Professional Development*, which first appeared on the Ministry of Education website in June 2004.

Having an entry test to teaching is consistent with our approach of treating teachers as responsible professionals and is helpful to ensure student familiarity with Ontario curriculum and provincial education objectives. There is significant prospect for improvement, however, in the convenience for teacher candidates and the relevancy of the test. Instead of the ministry having responsibility for the test, we propose a revitalized College of Teachers could work collaboratively with the faculties of education. The test could be redesigned to ensure there is a core of common learning without homogenizing our diverse teacher preparation programs. Potentially, the test could be moved to after the end of the first practice or 'induction' year (Ontario Ministry of Education [MOE], 2004, p.5).

While the Ontario Association of Deans of Education (OADE) appreciated the more consultative style of Gerard Kennedy, the Liberals' new Minister of Education, it declined his invitation to develop a mutually acceptable "assessment scheme," if that scheme were simply a rehashed

OTQT. “We would be less than candid,” the Deans wrote to the Minister, “if we agreed that there is a need for this kind of evaluation” (Correspondence, OADE to Kennedy, June 18, 2004).

In the absence of a firm consensus between the Ministry, the Deans and the College of Teachers on a new format, and with the original contract between Ontario and the giant U.S. firm Educational Testing Service (ETS) about to expire, Kennedy pulled the plug on the OTQT on November 23, 2004. In an open letter to all graduating teacher candidates in Ontario Faculties of Education, the Minister stated unequivocally that “subject to regulatory amendments, there will be no OTQT administered in the spring of 2005.” While the OTQT was dead, Kennedy still did not renounce the idea of an entry-to-the-profession evaluation instrument.

It is our ministry’s view that the OTQT should be replaced with a better assessment mechanism that is relevant, convenient, and evaluates teaching skills and know-how in a meaningful way. Our government is also exploring an induction program for first-year teachers, which could include mentoring, increased professional development opportunities, and other resources to supplement pre-service training. We plan on having some form of assessment to be done at the end of the first year of teaching (Kennedy, 2004).

The sit-down, pen(cil)-and-paper OTQT would be replaced by an as-yet-undefined “assessment mechanism” that would occur after a year of teaching in the field, (Kennedy, 2004). In the meantime, B.Ed. grads in the Class of 2005 were informed that they would receive a modified Certificate of Qualification (Provisional) from the College of Teachers (Kennedy, 2005).

As the Ontario Ministry of Education pondered the value of some new “form of assessment” for beginning teachers in the process of entering the profession, it presented an opportune time for all those associated with teacher education in Canada to consider the implications of this policy initiative. Are there valid reasons for adding a common, externally-administered “test” to the traditional Bachelor of Education requirements? Is there compelling evidence to support such a departure from the status quo? Will teaching improve? Will our students benefit? These are apt questions to consider, as we examine in more depth the recent Ontario experience with a teacher qualifying test. In so doing, we might reflect on the conclusions reached by an assistant dean at the University of Calgary, some twenty years ago. “A logical approach to the problem,” Ron

Conklin declared, “might be to decide not whether competency assessment should be performed, but rather what form it should take and at what point in the occupational preparation of the teacher it should be administered” (Conklin, 1985).

Contextual Background

Although Ontario first introduced a province-wide teacher certification test in 1871, when attendance at the Normal School in Toronto was problematic for many potential teachers, this initiative was ended in 1906, rendered obsolete by the proliferation of teacher-education programs in various regional centres (Childs, Ross & Jaciw, 2002). Why then did the idea re-surface in 1999? What was the problem, for which teacher testing was the solution? In the minds of the backroom advisors who crafted the Mike Harris Blueprint for Ontario, the problem was how to get the PC party re-elected in the face of polls showing them trailing the Opposition Liberals. Internally conducted surveys showed that the general idea of testing teachers was popular with voters. In keeping with their general philosophy of public accountability, the PC election platform set out the policy in a context of rights and responsibilities. Teachers had the right to respect from their students; in return they had the responsibility to possess “the up-to-date skills, training and knowledge to put our students at the top” (Harris, 1999). Predictably the teacher federations, with their inclination toward self-governing professionalism, objected to the testing of experienced teachers, and both the Liberals and the New Democratic Party (NDP) followed suit. This made teacher testing a wedge issue between Government and Opposition, with the PCs onside with a majority of Ontario voters. From such political astuteness, the PC election victory of 1999 was crafted.

The next priority was to actually implement a teacher testing program. This proved to be much more complex than the PC brain trust had ever imagined. After several months of indecision, punctuated by announcements of firm intent but little action, the Minister of Education, Janet Ecker, formally asked the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) for advice as to how it should proceed. This arms-length agency had its own credibility problems. Recommended by a Royal Commission established by the previous NDP government, the OCT was formally created early

in the life of the Harris PC regime, against the wishes of the established teacher federations, who denounced their minority status on the governing Council. Now, after only three years of existence, the provincial government was tossing it the hot-potato issue of teacher testing. In response, the College of Teachers orchestrated a major research and consultation initiative. One condition it could not shake was that the Minister had asked not whether to implement, but “how to implement a program for teacher testing” (Ecker, 1999).

In the United States, a large majority of state governments have instituted teacher testing as part of their initial teacher certification. The wave began in the late 1970s, and continued through the 1980s and 1990s. One surprising supporter was Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, who argued from the perspective of quality assurance as a means to teacher professionalism. “If teaching is to become a true profession,” he wrote in 1996, “we must establish high standards for entry into teacher training programs and deliver high-quality preservice education to prospective practitioners. We must set and maintain high and rigorous standards for entry into the profession and evaluate practitioners according to those standards.” Shanker advocated both a screening test to regulate entry into teacher education programs and a rigorous exit examination, based on content mastery. “There must be serious exams of teacher knowledge,” he maintained. “One cannot teach what one does not know well.” Given his view of “the sorry state of teacher education,” it is no surprise that Shanker recommended placing the responsibility for this gatekeeper function with “accrediting bodies” independent of faculties or schools of education (Shanker, 1996).

Shanker’s passionate advocacy of teacher testing as part of an overall program to raise the standards of the teaching profession rested on two assumptions. The first was that testing would result in more competent teachers. A vigorous entry-to-the-profession test would screen out those applicants with an inadequate knowledge and skills base. The second was that rigorous testing, by keeping incompetent candidates from being licensed, would increase overall public confidence in teachers. Unfortunately for the proponents of this hypothesis, study after study has come to the same depressing conclusion. There is little or no correlation between results on a standardized pen-and-paper knowledge and skills test, and observed success in a classroom. As

Dybdall, Shaw & Edwards (1997, p.252). put it, “after more than a decade of teacher testing, research has failed to demonstrate any significant relationship between basic competency tests and other measures of program success, including success in teaching”. Ayers (1988) was one of the first researchers to report little correlation between scores on a widely-used, standardized teacher test and subsequent classroom performance as measured by principals, pupils and independent observers. Around the same time, Madaus and Pullin (1987, p.37) reported “troublesome questions concerning the validity of teacher certification tests and the procedures used to validate such tests.” Haney, Fowler, Wheelock, Bebell and Malec reported in 1999 that the infamous Massachusetts Teacher Tests, which had gained national notoriety in the United States when 59 per cent of the test takers failed the first version of the standardized exam, was a woefully flawed instrument. After subjecting the tests to normal statistical checks for validity and reliability, they concluded that “these new tests are so unreliable and of such poor validity that they are passing candidates who should fail and failing ones who should pass” (Abstract, p.2).

As time and experience revealed the paucity of desired results from basic competency testing, a trend began to focus more on potential teachers’ decision-making capacity. While such an orientation began with knowledge of subject matter, it extended into awareness of appropriate instructional materials, command of a diversified repertoire of instructional strategies, and possession of interpersonal skills and values conducive to converting acquired knowledge into effective teaching practice. Acceptance of this broader measure of what we want to know about a teacher candidate inevitably leads to a search for more authentic assessment instruments than standardized multiple-choice tests. As Brookhart and Loadman (1992, p.355) had noted, “Policy makers and educators are looking toward alternative assessments, like portfolios and observation of performance, with more obvious relationships to what teachers do.”

A teacher-testing policy that was driven by a desire to improve teacher effectiveness would doubtless embrace these more complex forms of assessment, regardless of the cost. By contrast, a teacher-testing policy driven by a desire to reap the political benefits arising from being seen to hold the teaching profession accountable would place more emphasis on simplicity and cost-

effectiveness. Miles and Lee label this phenomenon of “the government’s and public’s acceptance that this test will provide positive public benefits” as the “political validity” of teacher testing (2002, p.3). Proponents and beneficiaries of the “political validity” of an entry-level qualifying test would care less about the traditional concerns of reliability (consistency of measurement) and validity (success on the test corresponds to success in the real world) that preoccupy statisticians and psychometrists.

Given the strong political imperative to establish a visible system of entry-level teacher testing, and given a parallel economic imperative to preserve both simplicity and cost-effectiveness, test designers cannot avoid the need to utilize instruments that they know produce results of doubtful reliability and questionable validity. What to do? Klein addressed these issues succinctly in a 1998 journal article that previewed the eventual test format employed in Ontario from 2002-2004 with amazing accuracy.

“...the best approach is to use a balanced combination of measures. This includes multiple-choice items (to ensure breadth of content coverage, equating, and overall score reliability) and open-ended questions and tasks to assess important skills and knowledge that cannot otherwise be measured with the multiple-choice format. To the extent possible, the open-ended tasks should mirror the kinds of common or critical situations that are likely to arise in practice . . . Teacher tests should also be standardized in the sense that on each administration, all candidates answer the same questions at the same time and under the same conditions . . . For the open-ended section, all responses should be graded by trained readers who use a common rubric and mutually agreed on benchmark answers (p. 136).

Earlier in the article, Klein connected evaluation of teachers to evaluation by teachers. “Some contend,” he noted obliquely, “that how we test teachers should model how teachers should test their own students” (p. 124). In 2002, Ontario teacher candidates opposed to the rushed implementation of the first new-teacher qualifying test in this country in over a century would make the same point.

The authors of the OCT’s April 2000 report (“A Response to the Request from the Minister of Education re a Teacher Testing Program”) were well aware of the body of literature that cast doubts on the usefulness of a teacher test as part of the initial certification process. On page 54,

they noted that “at the very best the use of testing for the certification of new teachers might be described as providing limited information.” On page 55, they added this comment: “Teacher tests, researchers also propose, fail to address the complexities of teaching. A consensus on what defines teacher competence is elusive.” Later on that page, they noted the negative impact of American teacher testing “on the entry of minority candidates to the teaching profession,” because of majority-culture biases in the test questions. “Designing and implementing teacher testing is an expensive proposition,” they added. Turning the page, they warned that “legal cases, arising out of the teacher-testing milieu, are well documented in the United States.” The OCT report quoted approvingly a preliminary report from the U.S. National Research Council that tests for licensing teachers “are not designed to predict who will become effective teachers,” nor are they able to “distinguish between candidates who are minimally competent to teach and those who are not” (OCT, 2000). Why even think about doing this, the document seemed to ask.

And yet, in Section F, under the heading “Advice to the Minister of Education,” we find Recommendation 3: “That applicants for membership . . . be required to complete successfully a written assessment of knowledge . . . prior to entrance to the profession in Ontario.” Again, why were we doing this? The answer appeared to lie, not in considerations of the psychometric, but of the political validity of a teacher test. The Premier, Mike Harris, had promised one in the election campaign. The Minister, Janet Ecker, subsequently confirmed it as government policy. Thus, a test there must be. Experienced teachers were powerful, organized, and spoiling for a fight with the College of Teachers. By contrast, pre-service teacher candidates were divided, dispersed, and distracted by the demands of their program. In its data summary, the OCT report had noted that “a number of education stakeholder groups and other organizations suggested that if testing was introduced, an examination at the entry to the teaching profession would be the most appropriate approach.” To put it bluntly, the entry-test recommendation was an attempted political trade-off: something that looked like a real test at the entry to the profession, in return for a portfolio approach to experienced-teacher certification. The OCT Report even suggested the government could recoup the cost of implementation through a “fee charged to the candidates” (OCT, 2000, p.123). It was not the Ontario College of Teachers’ finest hour, but the government did move from its initial policy of periodic testing of all teachers to a test for novices, combined with

mandatory professional development for veteran teachers.

Theory into Practice

What was Ontario's actual experience with this experiment in entry-level teacher testing? While the College of Teachers had advocated an integrated approach, wherein preservice teacher education blended into a two-year induction program that in turn led to life-long professional development, the Ministry chose to focus on three priorities, according to Paul Anthony, the newly-appointed Director of Policy and Standards for the Ontario Teacher Testing Program. These were: the initial certification test for beginning teachers, the "certification maintenance" or re-certification process for experienced teachers, and a standardized classroom performance appraisal framework to be implemented by the boards of education. The two-year induction program for new teachers was left for a second phase. Anthony, in a plenary address to the joint Ontario Teachers Federation/Ontario Association of Deans of Education conference on Teacher Education in May of 2001, asked the participants to picture parents and the general public asking this question. "How do we know the new teacher is qualified to teach the new Ontario curriculum?" Soon, the answer would be that, in addition to a university degree and a Bachelor of Education, the new teacher had passed the qualifying or initial certification test, for entry into the profession. A month later, while addressing the annual Forum of the Ministry of Education and Faculties of Education, he revealed that the Ministry branch he headed was at work converting the College of Teachers' recently adopted standards of practice into a series of competency statements. The five categories were: technology, classroom management, communication, leadership, and teaching for all students (Author's meeting notes: May 5 and June 4, 2001).

The PC government decided to farm out the task of designing the new qualifying test, and accordingly Janet Ecker announced on March 14, 2001 the issue of a Request for Proposals. The document addressed the goals of the exercise as follows:

The Ontario Teacher Qualifying Test will be used to confirm the readiness of a new graduate from an Ontario faculty of education, or a teacher trained in another

jurisdiction who wishes to begin a teaching career in education. The purpose of the test is to provide appropriate and fair evidence that each new teacher has an acceptable level of knowledge with respect to competencies and expectations in the Ontario Curriculum, and knowledge of teaching skills and strategies, learning theory, special education, classroom management, the use of educational technologies, and knowledge of legislation relating to expectations for teachers (Ontario MOE, 2001).

On June 7, the government announced that the winning bidder was a consortium made up of the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC) and the giant New Jersey-based Educational Testing Services. The initial contract was for a three-year period. In an article in its own professional journal, OPC explained the apparent irony of an American company helping to design the government's heralded made-in-Ontario testing policy. "ETS will provide the leadership and technical expertise in test development and delivery. OPC will provide the Ontario logistics." OPC had commissioned a poll through Ipsos-Reid that showed that 80% of Ontarians supported the pre-service teacher test. By teaming with ETS, OPC believed it would be "part of a process to assure the public that new teachers are well prepared for Ontario schools" (Ontario Principals' Council, 2001).

The OPC believed it was making a positive contribution to enhancing public confidence in Ontario's school system. The Ministry of Education was happy to finally see progress, and the Minister busied herself with securing legislative approval. The Ontario College of Teachers and the teacher federations were so embroiled in the acrimony of the PLP that they thought little of the OTQT. That left two interest groups watching and reacting to the test development by ETS/OPC: the Faculties of Education, and the B.Ed. teacher candidates. Neither was happy. The students were naturally opposed to a high-stakes, one-shot exam where a bad day could keep them from being certified, despite the completion of an intense and challenging Bachelor of Education program. The Deans of Education were not happy with the imposition of a standardized test to assure the public that their graduates were qualified to teach. The B.Ed. degree, in their view, already signified mastery of the required topics.

At Ontario faculties of education, student teachers receive intensive classroom instruction, practice-teaching experience, and comprehensive evaluations of their performance on these important subjects. They cannot be assessed effectively in a

single four-hour ‘licensing’ exam. How can a multiple-choice test meaningfully measure such crucial teaching qualities as dedication, leadership, sensitivity, reflective thinking, ability to communicate, and social awareness . . . themes also addressed in teacher-education programs (Ontario Deans of Education, 2002).

The Deans, acting collectively through OADE, were determined to do whatever they could to dissuade the government from proceeding with a costly, and in their view insulting and redundant, qualifying test.

The government, on the other hand, was determined to push ahead. For seven years, the Harris-led Tories had followed a consistent pattern of ramming controversial changes through to completion on the partisan political side, and then leaving it to their appointed officials to figure out how to make them work. The OTQT was no exception. Though the Ontario Association of Deans of Education, the Ontario College of Teachers, the Ontario Principals’ Council and the Educational Testing Service - the last two being the test developers - all advised the government that the first test should serve as a trial run, both Ecker and Harris were adamant that the 2002 test would count. This caused great anxiety for the Education students. In their own courses, they were learning the value of clear learning expectations, set levels of achievement, carefully-designed rubrics and model exemplars, all tied to their program syllabi. None of that existed for this high-stakes test, mandated by the same Ministry of Education. According to the Registration Bulletin prepared by ETS, and printed by the Queen’s Printer for Ontario, the OTQT was “a four-hour examination”. It consisted of a combination of multiple-choice questions, that would be marked correct or incorrect, and case studies followed by short-answer questions, that would be scored as zero, one or two. Putting the best face possible on the frenzied process to design and administer the new test while meeting the provincial government’s politically-motivated deadlines, the bulletin had this to say about the development and marking of the controversial testing instrument:

All test questions used in the Qualifying Test were developed by English or French educators in Ontario. Professional test writers took the test questions through a fairness and bias review using rigorous standards established by professionals in the field of testing. Prior to being used in the certification test, the test questions were field-tested with groups similar in background and educational preparation to actual candidates....Your responses to the case-study questions will

be scored by Ontario teachers and faculty. These scorers will be trained to judge candidate responses using scoring guides, or rubrics, based on the test specifications (ETS: OTQT Registration Bulletin, 2002, p.4).

The reassurance about trained markers was somewhat undercut by an ad placed in *Professionally Speaking*, the OCT journal, by ETS and the Ontario Principal's Council, "seeking Ontario teachers to mark the Ontario Teacher Qualifying Test. Applicants must be experienced teachers who are members of the Ontario College of Teachers" (2002, p.24). It was well known that the teacher federations were adamantly opposed to any association with the OTQT, so the markers were likely to be former rather than active teachers.

Along with ambiguity about the content and format of the test, there was confusion about the registration process and the location of examination centres. Pushed to the limit, the Education students across the province planned their own form of resistance. Spearheaded by the OISE/University of Toronto Student Teachers' Union, the B.Ed. students formed a Stop the Test Organizing Committee. On March 27, 2002, they held a protest march and rally at Queen's Park, attended by hundreds of teacher candidates who bussed in from around the province. In addition to the student leaders, other speakers represented the teacher federations and Opposition parties, including Gerard Kennedy, the Liberal education critic. And still the PC government refused to budge . . . till Ernie Eves replaced Mike Harris as Premier, and Elizabeth Witmer took over as Minister of Education. With just four days to spare, Witmer announced the tests would serve as a pilot, only. B.Ed. students still were required to write, but to try it was to pass it. Showing flexibility on this issue was intended to soften the confrontational PC image, as Eves strove to picture himself as a kinder, gentler version of his old legislative seatmate, Mike Harris.

With 2002 established as a field test, the ETS/OPC consortium administered the OTQT for two years, 2003 and 2004. In each case, the main testing date was in April. Early in June, 2003, Elizabeth Witmer proudly announced that over 97 per cent of Ontario's teacher candidates (8,329 of 8,523) had passed the first official Ontario Teacher Qualifying Test. "Now parents can definitely be assured that new teachers entering the classroom have a solid foundation of knowledge and skills to help students achieve," she declared (Ontario MOE, 2003). A year later,

the government was Liberal, and the Education Minister was Gerard Kennedy, the same fellow who had attended the students' protest rally at Queen's Park in March, 2002. Many people thought he would cancel the OTQT, as he had cancelled the PLP. He did not, at least not yet. The B.Ed. class of 2004 duly wrote their tests in April. The results were similar. The success rate was 96%, based on 8,226 test takers. Even this statistic under-represented the eventual passing outcome, since those who failed the test were welcome to try again. It was hard to know what to read from the results. Among other things, was it worth the millions it had cost, to re-affirm what the Education Deans had said all along? . . . Ontario B.Ed. grads are qualified to teach (OADE Minutes, October 2004).

The Road Ahead

Was the OTQT a success? That depends upon what we decide its main purpose was. As part of an overall "teacher testing" policy, it probably helped to re-elect the Harris government in 1999. Polls, taken before and after that election, seemed to show the popularity of the policy with the general public. And yet its main virtue may have been symbolic - apparent proof that the government was committed to effective teaching. In that sense, the qualifying test had political validity. Ironically, five years after the Ontario College of Teachers first called for an intentional program of new teacher induction, largely through mentoring, there still is no meaningful in-school induction program in place, though the Ministry of Education announced in late Fall of 2005 that one was being introduced (MOE, 2005). Scarce resources of time and money were diverted to the more overtly measurable, though ultimately pointless, single-event test, when a one-year or two-year induction process may have been closer to what was needed. Not for the first time, the hare got the attention, while the tortoise got stifled.

What does it all mean for those of us who are teacher educators? Can we turn our backs on recent polling evidence - once for the Harris PCs, an admittedly biased source, but once also for the Ontario Principals' Council, by the respected Ipsos Reid polling firm - that the general public favours, by large margins, the imposition of a "final exam" upon teacher candidates we have already evaluated, and passed? We could be elitist, and say the public be damned. Or, we could admit that there are genuine worries, fears that our teacher preparation programs may not be as

effective as they could or should be. In Ontario, at least, a pattern has emerged. From the 1994 Royal Commission, through the Education Improvement Commission, to the Harris Blueprint, to the Ontario College of Teachers report on new teacher induction, to the recent Gerard Kennedy White Paper, there has been a common thread. A significant portion of the general public fears that teacher education programs, as currently constituted, are not preparing candidates as well as they should for what those beginning teachers will face in the classrooms of the future.

Consensus is hard to achieve in the field of education, but there does seem to be virtual unanimity on one point. Better teaching will contribute directly to more effective student learning. How do we get from here to there? The focus of this paper has been on recent efforts in Canada and the United States to ensure that prospective teachers have acquired the knowledge, skills and attitudes that will equip them for success in the classroom. And while there is widespread acceptance of the goal of better teaching, it must be acknowledged that there is spirited disagreement about the means to that end.

Clearly, the ultimate test of any proposed new program to establish professional validation (under the professionalism model) or monitor quality assurance (using the public accountability model) for beginning teachers is the one of validity. To the extent that the assessment procedure is quantifiable, then it must meet the standard requirements of statistical validity and reliability. This requires careful design, preliminary field testing, and an ongoing commitment to the accurate and contextual reporting of test results, so that more harm than good does not result from their publication. If the evaluation instrument is more qualitative than quantitative in nature, and conducted in less visible ways than a one-shot mass-testing event, it still must meet the standard of pedagogical validity. Much of the value of more authentic forms of assessment comes from an intentional utilization of learning activities which occur naturally in the real world. It is vital to the long-term success of such proposed evaluation methods as peer assessment, professional portfolios, and collegial mentoring of novices by veteran teachers, that they be carefully designed and vetted. Otherwise, they run the risk of trivialization, becoming little more than the proverbial hoops that aspiring teachers must jump through on the path to final accreditation.

Finally, it must be emphasized that whatever approach or combination of approaches are adopted in a particular jurisdiction, they must meet the challenge of political validity. The inescapable reality is that, in a functioning liberal democracy, the ultimate authority is *vox populi*. Periodically expressed through general elections, the voice of the people is also reflected, albeit less authoritatively, in public opinion polls. While tenured academics may wish to overlook this reality, elected politicians do so at their peril. In the final analysis, education that is delivered through a publicly-funded school system is a democratic, therefore a political, enterprise. Like justice, then, educational reform must not simply be done; it must be seen to be done. Once this fundamental fact of life is accepted, and internalized, by all who are engaged in the worthy pursuit of reforming teacher education in the ultimate interest of improved student learning, then another truth becomes evident. The best choice is not professionalism **or** public accountability. The best choice is professionalism **and** public accountability.

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