

# STATEWIDE TEACHER CERTIFICATION MODELS

Speakers: Robert Shaefer, *Arizona State University*  
David Rankin, *California State University, Dominguez Hills*  
Introducer/Recorder: Sandra Murphy, *University of California, Berkeley*

Robert Shaefer opened the session with a brief history of the Arizona Teacher Proficiency Examination, a test required of all college students who declare themselves as interested in matriculating in the state's teacher preparation programs. The exam has sections on professional knowledge, reading, mathematics, and grammar. Shaefer reported that controversy had developed over the grammar section of the exam. One issue which had caused concern was the high rate of failure on this section of the examination. Quoting an article which appeared in the *Arizona Republic* in January, 1985 (p. A15), Shaefer reported that "the grammar portion was failed by nearly 55% of the Hispanics, nearly 70% of the Indians, and 59% of the Blacks. Anglo students fared better but still 36% failed the grammar portion of the exam."

Shaefer also described the dispute which developed between the Board of Regents and the legislature over using the total test as a screen for teachers entering teacher education programs, noting that legislation which went into effect in August, 1984 required that students, as well as college graduates seeking certification in Arizona, had to pass each portion of the basic skills test with at least an 80% score. Shortly before, the Arizona Board of Regents had mandated that students who failed the test but met all other university entrance requirements be granted conditional admission to the teacher education programs of the state's three universities. This policy placed the Regents in direct conflict with the 1984 law, which clearly states that students wanting admission "must" pass the examination. The Regents were under pressure to either revise or accept the test and then remove the condition of temporary admission for students who fail the exam. The week before Shaefer's report, the Arizona Board of Regents adopted a new test for admission to the state's colleges of Education, the Pre-professional Skills Test, an examination developed and administered by the Educational Testing Service. Shaefer reported, however, that the State Department of Education would continue to use the Arizona Teacher Proficiency Examination for certification purposes.

Shaefer said that a twelve-member-technical panel made up of university and community-college faculty, including researchers who specialize in psychometry, found potential bias against minorities in certain features of this (e.g., determining whether exclamation points are used properly, and identifying words that sound the same but are spelled differently). Shaefer went on to discuss the implications of assessing grammar in general, and the confusion that can arise from mixing different meanings of the word "grammar." Drawing on the work of Nelson Francis, Shaefer described three sorts of "grammar." He described "grammar one" as "the unconscious or implicit knowledge of our language which all of us use every day to carry on our communicative needs." In contrast, Shaefer described "grammar two" as what linguists and grammarians are concerned with: "A description, analysis, and formulization of formal language patterns."

Traditional, structural and transformational grammar serve as examples of this latter type of "grammar." The third type, or "grammar three," is "grammar in the sense of usage," or what Francis called "linguistic etiquette."

It is this third type of "grammar" that Shaefer feels has created problems. Shaefer pointed out that if one is testing something called grammar, one should have a rather clear idea of what one is testing for. Students he has interviewed about the Arizona Teacher exam report having to supply exclamation marks, quotation marks, and hyphens, to distinguish between who and whom, and that and which, and to identify split infinitives. Shaefer said that the inclusion of such items indicates that the test makers are using items in grammar three when they really wish to test grammar one.

Shaefer also questioned assumptions that may underlie the testing of grammatical knowledge: 1) that if people know either traditional, structural or transformational grammar, they will be able to speak and write fluently, and 2) that if teachers know and teach structural, transformational, or traditional grammar they will be able to bring about fluency in reading and writing in their students. Shaefer then went on to argue that the concept of a single standard of correctness, or "classroom English," affects the perception of the American public and through the American public, school board members, members of boards of regents, and state legislators. He cited Gere and Smith (*Attitudes, Language and Change*, 1979, p.9) to describe a myth which influences the public's attitude toward what should be taught (and tested) in schools:

Myth 3A: 'Standard English' is a clearly definable set of correct pronunciations, grammatical structures and word choices. It is a 'standard' because it represents the widest usage and because it has been refined to be the most versatile and acceptable form of English.

Shaefer indicated that it is quite possible that members of the public and their representatives in various political organizations may employ test makers who believe in Myth 3A, while most of the linguistic research in the twentieth century indicates that myth 3A is simply not true. In concluding his address, Shaefer predicted that we will continue to have difficulty with test making in the area of grammar until the concept of "appropriateness" becomes a standard itself in American English and the fact of continuing language change becomes acceptable to a majority of Americans.

David Rankin also addressed the issue of statewide teacher certification models, providing a description of the development and content of the writing section of the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST), the teacher certification competency test required of most applicants for a first teaching credential or a service credential in California with the exception of certain exempt credentials (e.g., credentials for adult non-academic subjects or vocational subjects). The test is also required for the issuance or renewal of an Emergency Credential unless the applicant already holds a California teaching credential for which a baccalaureate degree is required.

The California State Department of Education was responsible for the development of the test and the initial establishment of the required passing scores. An

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advisory board which included classroom teachers set the initial specifications for the skills to be measured. Test development committees composed of California college and school faculty members wrote and selected all of the questions in the three sections of the test. The three sections of the CBEST include a section testing competency in mathematics, a section testing reading, and a section testing writing.

The reading and mathematics sections of the test are composed entirely of multiple-choice questions. The writing section consists of two essay questions — one calls for exposition, the other for a personal experience essay. Each essay is graded by two readers who are college professors from public and private institutions in California or English teachers from California elementary and secondary schools. The essays are scored independently by the two readers, who assign a score of 4 to a passing essay, a score of 3 to a marginally passing essay, a score of 2 to a marginally failing essay, or a score of 1 to a failing essay. In assigning a score, teachers refer to predetermined grading criteria for each of the score categories. According to Rankin, the 4-point scale was adopted because the committee felt it was not important to make really fine distinctions in the upper ranges. The committee was primarily interested in eliminating those candidates who are clearly unable to handle the written idiom at all.

Because different editions of the test may vary in difficulty, raw scores are converted to scales that take differences in the difficulty of test questions into account. The passing score on each section of the test is a scaled score of 41, which means that a total score (the sum of reading, mathematics, and writing scaled scores) of 123 is required for passing status. It is not possible to pass the CBEST if any section score is below 37, no matter how high the total score may be. The test performance standards for passing were established by the Superintendent of Public Instruction. To pass the writing section, applicants must receive at least a score of 12 (a score of 3 from both readers on each of the two essay questions). Roughly 70% of those who take the writing section make a scale score of 41 or above and pass. The pass rate for the other two sections is also roughly 70%.

Applicants who do not pass the CBEST may retake the examination as many times as they choose, and if they have obtained a passing score (41 or higher) on any particular section of the test, they do not have to retake that section. When tests are retaken, all sections that were not passed on previous tests must be taken.

In concluding his discussion, Rankin commented that he is generally impressed with the quality of the prospective teachers who take the test, saying that their performance is superior to that of the average undergraduate. According to Rankin, the test helps to ensure that students will only be admitted to the profession if they are above the median in their disciplines.