Teacher Testing and Implications for Physical Education

Mary O'Sullivan and Deborah Tannehill
The Ohio State University

There has been a dramatic increase in teacher testing in the last decade. State and national attention to this issue is evidenced by the amount of literature devoted to assessment in general and teacher testing in particular. An invitational conference was held last fall by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to provide a forum for clarifying issues regarding uses of standardized tests in American education in general and teacher testing in particular. Flippo (1986) outlined how all but six states in the nation are presently involved in planning, designing, or implementing some form of teacher testing. Darling-Hammond (1986) predicts that almost all states will have teacher testing by the early 1990s. Haney and Madaus (1989) reported that the volume of standardized testing of teachers and students increased 10 to 20% in the last 40 years. Organizations supporting some type of teacher testing include the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the Holmes Group, the Carnegie Foundation, and the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education.

The major purposes of this article are to outline the history of teacher testing in this county, describe current trends and alternatives to traditional forms of teacher assessment, and draw some implications for physical education teacher education.

History of Teacher Testing

Kinney (1964) suggested that "the first official endorsement of teacher testing occurred as early as 1686 when the General Assembly of Virginia requested the governor to appoint persons to examine schoolmasters. The exams were oral in nature and screened candidates not only for their knowledge of subject matter but also assessed their morality and "muscle and courage" so they might keep order among their charges.

The growth in public education in the 1800s witnessed the transition of control for teacher evaluation from local to county and ultimately to state governance.

The authors are with the School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210.
This was part of a larger trend to greater state involvement in education. The belief was that more objective testing would eliminate incompetent teachers. Haney, Madaus, and Kreitzer (1987) concluded of the process and format of teacher testing at the time that,

systems for testing teachers were closely related to the evolving centralization of school governance. Second, the primary topics of teacher examinations and the main basis for teacher selection were knowledge of what was to be taught and the moral and social suitability of the teacher candidates. Although pedagogy and teaching methods gradually came to be included as examination topics, preparation in these subjects was, at the turn of the century, by no means universally required. (pp. 175-176)

The main developments in teacher testing in the early part of the 20th century saw increased centralization of teacher testing and certification at the state level, a movement toward written rather than oral tests, and the introduction of objective tests for teacher selection and certification (Haney et al., 1987). The rise in the school population saw growing state governance of teacher testing, and by 1921 certification in over half of the states was handled by state authorities. In the early part of the 20th century, passing an examination was all that was needed to teach in most states and there was growing criticism of such examinations, considered by many to be so simple that high school students could pass them. By 1930 teacher certification by examination was replaced by an increase in teacher training, with many normal schools extending their programs from 2 to 4 years (Evenden, 1933).

The late 1930s and early 40s saw the growth of mental measurements, particularly Ben Woods' work on subject matter testing in Pennsylvania. Administration of these standardized tests of subject matter competence, for high school students in particular, was administered under Wood through the Cooperative Test Service. Some of the most prominent educational measurement experts were involved in these early efforts, including Thorndike and Tyler. The Cooperative Test Service also developed the first draft of what is now the National Teacher Examination (NTE) initially to help several eastern school superintendents select teachers. Wood then obtained a grant from the Carnegie Corporation and the American Council on Education to build new teacher examinations, and in 1949 the new teacher tests were administered to 3,500 candidates. With the establishment of the Educational Testing Service in 1947, the NTE was transferred to that agency.

The original test took 8 hours and covered "general quality of intellectual performance, knowledge of general culture and contemporary affairs, and professional information" (Haney et al., 1987, p. 179). The nature of the exam suggested that what was desirable in teacher candidates was a broad range of intellectual skills and learning rather than specialized education knowledge. This view of teacher testing is strikingly similar to today's use of teacher tests. The Pre-professional Skills Test and the California Basic Educational Skills Test, which are administered chiefly to those entering teacher education programs, focus on the basic skills of reading, writing, and math.