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There is Another Way: The Faculty-developed Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Assessment for K-8 Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract

In this era of external teacher testing with the intent of ensuring the competence of the teaching force, as well as holding students and institutions accountable for results, the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Assessment (ICLA) stands in sharp contrast. It represents an alternative to external testing of pre-service teachers, testing procured from an outside agency unconnected to pre-service programs, since it has been developed and is managed by literacy faculty from Idaho's major institutions of higher learning. This paper provides a brief history of major events in the field of literacy including teacher testing initiatives and policies, which led to the creation of the ICLA. A description of the ICLA assessment and its construction is provided, along with a report of initial performance. Implications and policy consequences of this approach are explored.

Regardless of what one thinks of the policy, teacher testing has arrived at the national and State policy scene and will likely remain for the foreseeable future (Ludlow, Shirley, and Rosca, 2002). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) mandates competent teachers in all classrooms and that prospective teachers demonstrate this competence before entering the teaching force. States have logically moved to establish teacher tests to determine the competence of pre-service teachers. In addition, with the reauthorization of Title II of the Higher Education Act in 1998 (Public Law 105-244), teacher education programs must annually report the performance of pre-service teachers on a variety of state tests. Teacher testing has become a mainstay in teacher education and certification.

Youngs, Odden, and Porter (2003) provide a snapshot of state pre-service testing practices for the 2001-2002 academic year, showing the extent to which teacher testing has expanded in a relatively short time. Thirty-seven of 50 states employ basic skills tests for licensure, 33 states require tests in content knowledge, and 26 states require pedagogy tests. Given the momentum of this policy across states, and national legislation authorizing its implementation, the number of states with teacher testing policies is undoubtedly growing.

Despite the momentum for teacher testing, the policy is not without justifiable criticism. As an example, Ludlow (2001) identified sub-standard psychometric characteristics of teacher tests in Alabama and Massachusetts. For Alabama, the consequence of poor test development practice was severe. The court directed Alabama to pay large compensation packages to individuals who showed that poor test development adversely impacted many test takers, and that in some cases, the test discriminated against minority groups.

Teacher testing in Massachusetts received considerable attention. The highly politicized and publicized teacher testing resulted in firestorm of controversy (Flippo, & Riccards, 2000; Haney, Fowler, & Wheelock, 1999; Ludlow, Shirley, and Rosca, 2002). Apparently, the content of the test is unconnected to good teaching or what teachers actually do (Ludlow, Shirley, & Rosca). In addition, although the Massachusetts test is lauded as a mastery test, norm-referenced test development procedures were used, undermining the mastery intent of the test (Haney, 1999). The end result is the mis-measurement of teacher competence in Massachusetts. The inflammatory language used by State policy makers to describe those who failed the test and institutions that performed poorly is disappointing and illustrates the challenges ahead as states continue to impose teacher testing.

It is clear that the intent of these teacher tests is to hold students and the system accountable. The accountability approach relies upon an external test, a test developed by an external agency, that requires certain pass scores for students and pass rates for institutions.

One real consequence is the possibility of public shaming of teacher education programs that do not meet pass-rate expectations; another is sanctions, which threaten the very existence of the programs. In response, for example, many institutions in Massachusetts conduct a variety of program initiatives in an attempt to boost pass rates (Ludlow, Shirley, & Rosca, 2002). Some of the initiatives have actually worked. However, it is unclear whether higher pass rates on tests considered unconnected to teaching, indicate that more competent teachers are entering the teaching force.

A Focus on Reading

While discussions and debates about the role and place of teacher testing continue, other issues in teacher education have also emerged. One such issue is reading instruction. The focus on literacy occurred as a natural outcome of numerous investigations and reports detailing poor reading achievement in the United States and proposals for intervention. Correspondingly, teacher preparation in reading has been subject to considerable debate and discussion.

A resonant theme from the debate about reading is that too many students cannot meet basic literacy standards. Numerous reports have called for reform. The first of these reports came in 1983 when the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported to the Secretary of the Department of Education and to the nation that student achievement in reading, math, and science had declined since. In the well known report titled, *A Nation At Risk*, the National Commission on Excellence in Education claimed that students in the United States experienced shorter school days, shorter school years, less homework, and lower graduation requirements than did students in many other developed nations. They urged the Nation to set higher educational standards and provide the resources that would assure that the United States would remain globally competitive.

In 1990, then President Bush and the Nation's governors established six national educational goals for the year 2000. Goals 4 and 6 called for literacy to become a top priority for all students K-12 (Executive Office of the President, 1990). Under President Clinton, the number of goals was expanded to eight (Alliance 2000 Project, 1994), including the focus on reading.

In 1997 Congress asked the Director of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, in consultation with the Secretary of Education, to form a panel to synthesize research on reading instruction. This National Reading Panel (2000) analyzed research in the areas of alphabets, fluency, comprehension, teacher education and reading instruction, and computer technology and reading instruction. The report was controversial, further complicating the discussion and debate about reading and how best to achieve reading outcomes. Moreover, serious questions were raised about the trustworthiness of the report itself. Yatvin (2002), a member of the panel, was one of the panel's critics. She relates a disturbing narrative of events that culminated in the final report being published without adequate proofing.

Camilli, Vargas, and Yurecko (2003) replicated the National Reading Panel's meta-analysis of phonics instruction. After arriving at conclusions different from those in the report, they raised questions regarding National Reading Panel's methodology and the link between the evidence and the Panel's conclusions.

Recent No Child Left Behind legislation (Public Law 107-110, 2001) reiterated recommendations from previous reports. In addition, it requires that every teacher be highly qualified in the subjects taught, including reading. Paraprofessionals would need to earn the equivalent of an Associate Arts Degree. Close monitoring of the progress of individual students would become necessary in order to identify potential at risk learners, intervene instructionally, and measure the effects of instruction on an ongoing basis. The need to interpret these assessments and respond instructionally highlighted the importance of teachers and paraprofessionals having an in depth knowledge of beginning reading instruction and the decoding process.

A second strand in the debate surrounding reading instruction comes from researchers and educators in literacy education. In response to the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) report, *A Nation at Risk*, the National Academy of Education Commission on Reading (1985) published *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. This report stated that reading is a complex process and not a series of isolated sub-skills. This report was cautious about the recommendations from the National Commission on Excellence in Education report. *Becoming a Nation of Readers* reasserted that teachers have a greater impact on literacy learning than any instructional approach, set of materials, or structural change, a recurring theme still advanced today.

In 1990, Adams published the seminal work *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*. This extensive review of the research on reading supported the recommendations in *Becoming A Nation of Readers* (1985). Systematic phonics instruction, while essential, should be accompanied by reading quality children's literature. In addition, as prerequisite skills for phonics, phonemic and phonological awareness are essential to early success in reading.

Eight years later, Snow, Burns and Griffin (1998) edited *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children*, which summarized an analysis of 30 years of scientific research on reading instruction and causes of reading failure in young children. Recommendations from this review mirrored those of Adams (1990) by calling for systematic instruction in reading along with wide reading and writing both in and out of school. The position taken was that such instruction benefits not only students at risk in reading, but all students as well.

A related body of research has examined the effects of teacher decision-making on reading achievement. Findings have consistently shown that teachers who make good decisions regarding instruction are more effective than any single instructional strategy deemed best practice (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Pearson, 1997; Ruddell, 1997). Good instructional decisions coupled with good pedagogical strategies are the most effective ways to teach children to read. Duffy and Hoffman call for more flexibility in public educational policies that value teachers' decision making.

Because of the growing interest in teacher education as a critical component in systemic reform efforts, particularly as it pertains to reading instruction, the International Reading Association established the National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction, commonly known as the IRA Commission (Maloch, Fine, & Flint, 2002). The IRA Commission identified teacher education program features that lead to excellent reading instruction and student reading achievement. These features include:

- ❖ A clearly articulated institutional mission
- ❖ Committed faculty
- ❖ High standards and multiple measures used for selection, monitoring, and support
- ❖ Strong emphasis on current literacy theory and best practices
- ❖ Faculty modeling instructional elements they want to see in their students.
- ❖ Well supervised field experiences
- ❖ The fostering of professional identity
- ❖ Faculty exercising autonomy

An interesting first year finding by the IRA Commission was that teachers who had graduated from one of these programs responded to their students' needs in flexible, knowledgeable, and strategic ways. In point of fact, these are the types of teachers that research has demonstrated are the most effective (Duffy & Hoffman, 1999; Ruddell, 1997).

In sum, numerous reports have documented the perceived and real need for increased student reading achievement and enhanced teacher preparation. These reports have called for changes in the time allocated to literacy instruction, curriculum development, instructional strategies and materials, allocation of human resources for remedial instruction, and an increased use of both summative and formative assessments. Because there is considerable research that suggests teacher decision-making, along with sound instructional approaches, are likely the most important factors impacting student reading achievement, teacher preparation programs have reexamined the content and pedagogical knowledge emphasized in their literacy courses. There has been a substantial shift in focus, consequently. Phonological, phonic and structural analysis knowledge, accompanied by renewed support for direct, systematic approaches for teaching beginning reading, characterize many reading methods courses required of pre-service teachers today.

The brief historical review here is not meant to be comprehensive. It is illustrative of the division between policy makers and educators. Policy makers focus on structural change and the use of particular reading strategies to improve reading. Educators cite research showing that teacher decision making, along with good instructional strategies, provide the best hope for increased reading achievement. Idaho embraced the latter set of ideas as the State sought to improve reading achievement.

Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Initiative

With the national focus on literacy intensifying, Idaho, like many other States, began to examine in greater depth the reading performance of its K-8 students. A study of 938 fourth grade students in 41 schools across Idaho found that, depending upon which of six common reading measures were employed, from 21% to a high of 62% of all students tested read below grade level (Canney, 1998; 1999). Of equal concern was the finding that among students qualifying for special assistance (Reading Recovery, Title I, Limited English Proficiency, and Migrant), from 42% to 100% of the students assessed were not reading on a fourth grade level, depending upon the group and the assessment measure. These findings motivated the development of legislation affecting the content and focus of reading instruction K-8. Teams of teachers, administrators, university faculty, and interested citizens convened to develop standards for reading instruction and recommendations for best practice (Idaho's MOST, 2001).

Seeing pre-service education as a key component in systemic State education reform policy, the Idaho Legislature also called for the creation of the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Assessment (Idaho Statute 33-1207A, 1999), which pre-service elementary and special education teachers would have to pass to certify after August 2002. To recertify, K-8 teachers and principals would have to either pass the same assessment or successfully complete a three-credit course—the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Course.

Efforts to assess teacher knowledge of best practices in reading had already begun in two other States. In California, pre-service teachers applying for a teaching credential after September 1998 need to pass the Reading Instruction Competence Assessment (RICA), available in a written form or in a video performance form. Four areas are targeted: instruction based assessment; phonological and linguistic processes; comprehension; oral and written language development. In the written form candidates examine actual student

artifacts to write long-range instructional plans (Carlson, 1999; California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1998).

Texas began its pre-service teacher-testing program in 1986. The most recent version is a set of assessments known as Texas Examinations of Educator Standards (TExES). The TExES is made up of 33 separate assessments that test a variety of content areas and specialties (State Board of Educator Certification, 2003). There are four English Language Arts/Reading assessments within this set of 33 assessments. While TExES remains under development, each K-12 pre-service teacher must pass two TExES assessments, one on pedagogy, the second in the pre-service teacher's area of expertise (M. Janysek, personal communication, September 11, 2003).

Interest in Idaho for measuring pre-service teachers' literacy knowledge and performance was informed by the Standards for Professionals in Reading developed by the International Reading Association, Professional Standards and Ethics Committee (1998). The document contains 16 knowledge, performance, and disposition standards for reading professionals. The Standards became an important guide for the committee developing core standards for initial teacher preparation in the language arts. The Standards also influenced the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Assessment committee's efforts to create an assessment that included both a measure of pre-service teachers' knowledge of research-based best practices in reading, and their ability to apply this information to classroom teaching situations. The Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Assessment committee made a deliberate move to develop an assessment that reflects the knowledge and performance recommendations of the IRA Commission and what research in reading instruction has shown to be most effective.

The Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Assessment

At the direction of the State Board of Education, a committee of literacy professors, classroom teachers, school administrators, and State Department representatives formed to develop the Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Assessment (ICLA). After some deliberation, a committee of literacy professors at various institutions in the State worked to create the ICLA, resulting in a pool of items assembled as two forms of the ICLA. Three Statewide pilot tests of these forms were conducted with pre-service elementary education majors between April and December of 2001.

Measurement consultants conducted statistical analyses for item and test development. The percent correct for an item was used as an initial means to consider the quality of an item. Since the ICLA is a criterion-referenced test, the percent correct was used not as means to discriminate among students (as done with norm-referenced tests), but used instead as an indicator of mastery (Anastasi & Urbina, 1997). Operationally, if more than 50% of the students responding to an item answered incorrectly, the item was examined by the committee to determine if the item was flawed, needed revision, or should remain. This process continued systematically after each pilot administration and remains the current practice.

The construction of the ICLA was guided by the development of a validity framework (Shepard, 1993). The framework specified the rationale for the assessment, the conceptual basis for the assessment, and logical questions that could be asked of the assessment and process. In addition, the Office of Civil Rights (Berkowitz, Wolkowitz, Fitch, & Kopriva, 2000) developed a set of recommendations for the development of high

stakes tests to ensure that the test does not unfairly disadvantage students from under-represented groups. This guide also informed the construction of the ICLA.

Format

The Idaho Comprehensive Literacy Assessment is divided into three Standards. Standard I, Language Learning and Literacy Development, addresses emergent literacy, phonological and phonemic awareness, phonics and structural analysis, sight vocabulary, morphemic analysis, and research-based instructional practices for developing accurate and automatic decoding. Standard II, Reading Comprehension Research and Best Practices, focuses on fluency, vocabulary development, comprehension instruction, and text genres. Standard III, Literacy Assessment and Intervention, deals with common assessment procedures, interpretation of assessment results, and instructional activities for struggling readers.

Each Standard, in turn, is separated into three sections—1, 2, and 3. Sections 1 and 2 assess basic knowledge of key vocabulary, reading skills, and instructional strategies and procedures. All items are objectively scored. Section 3 contains two open-ended essay questions that assess students' application of knowledge; each essay question depicts a classroom scenario. Students are asked to explain the purpose of the instructional activity, provide a rationale in light of current research, and give two or three alternative activities that address the same instructional objective.

A third version of the assessment now exists, and a fourth version is under development. In addition, an on-line version of the assessment has been piloted, but no study comparing the paper and pencil and on-line assessment has been conducted. Pass rates appear to be comparable. Due to lack of resources, refinement of the on-line version has been put on hold.

To assist students preparing for the ICLA, an electronic study guide (Squires, Blacklock, Christy, Nelson, and Palmer, 2002) was created with content information and sample test items. This guide is available at no charge to students. In addition, each institution schedules test review sessions prior to the administration of the next round of the ICLA.

Scoring Rubric and Protocol

The ICLA Committee created a four-point rubric with which to score the scenarios. The rubric identifies how well a respondent addresses a scenario question, including references to research-based best practices, evidence of understanding and sensitivity to learners' differences, and the rationale behind teachers' instructional decisions.

Scenario responses are scored by ICLA committee members, all of whom are literacy professors at the several teacher preparation institutions (4 public, 3 private) across the State. Scoring the essay items takes place at a central location. If pre-service teachers respond with unexpected information, the scenario question is reviewed and, if needed, revised for clarity in subsequent administrations. Before any scenario is scored, the rubric is reviewed and important elements of student responses discussed. For new members, this procedure serves as an effective induction process.

Two evaluators read each response. If their two scores are identical or differ by only one point, the score is averaged between the two readings. If the score of the two readers differs by more than one point, a third evaluator, without knowledge of the previous two scores, also rates the response. Should two evaluators agree on a score, that is the score assigned. If the three evaluators disagree, the score is averaged.

Setting Pass Scores

Standard-setting processes were employed to determine the overall pass score for the ICLA. After some deliberation, the ICLA committee decided that each of the three assessment Standards should receive a separate pass score. A measurement consultant guided the standard-setting process by first providing the committee with the advantages and disadvantages of various standard-setting approaches. Given its simplicity and popularity, the committee decided to use the Angoff Method for the objective items; the Benchmark method was used for the scenarios (Cizek, 1996).

The process resulted in setting a 70% pass score for each Standard and each form. In addition, the committee considered the relatively heavy influence of the objective items on the pass score. Initially, a student could pass a Standard without obtaining any points on the scenarios. The committee selected a 60-40 percentage split between objective items and scenarios. To accomplish this split, weights were applied to the scenarios in each Standard.

Fairness Review

A fairness review committee was established to investigate, identify, and correct any item thought to disadvantage students based on race, gender, ethnicity, or disability (Kimtta & Goellner, 2002). The fairness review committee was composed of eight individuals representing people of diverse groups. Representation included the disabled, English as Second Language, African American, Native American, Latin American, lower socio-economic status, and gender.

The fairness review committee was provided with a reading of the review process, a rubric, and a matrix recording form. During the review, members of the committee read each test item and flagged the items that posed a problem of bias. Each problem item was brought before the committee for discussion. The results of this work were then discussed with the ICLA Committee. Items of concern were corrected by changes in wording, inserting geographic examples from Idaho, or proper name changes.

Administration Procedures

The ICLA is administered three times per year, fall, spring, and summer. Pre-service teachers may take one or more Standards during an assessment period, but only one Standard per day, and no Standard more than once during the assessment period. Students failing to pass a Standard may take another form of that Standard at the next testing session. Students unable to pass one or more Standards after three attempts may request a special oral examination. Accommodations are available for special needs students.

Summary of Initial Assessment Results

The following provides a summary of the initial ICLA results for Idaho pre-service teachers by Standard and administration period. Pass rates by attempt are also provided, as well as knowledge (sections 1 and 2 objective items) versus performance (section 3 scenarios) results.

Total Pass Rates by Standard

Table 1 presents the overall pass rates by Standard for the initial four administration periods, beginning in April 2002. Standard I, Language Learning and Literacy Development, consistently produced the lowest pass rates. There was an overall increase across testing periods in the percentage of pre-service teachers passing Standard I, with a high of 72 percent passing in December 2002. The number of pre-service teachers passing dropped to 66 percent in April 2003. The pass rates for Standards II and III remained relatively high in comparison to Standard I performance. This pattern was consistent across administrations.

Table 1
Total ICLA Pass Rates by Standard, April 2002 – April 2003

Standard	Number Taking	Number Passing	Percent Passing
1	1,457	934	64
2	850	713	84
3	838	712	85

Pass Rates by Attempt

In April 2002, 186 of the 326 examinees taking one or more of Standards I-III were doing so for the first time. The other examinees had exposure to one or more of the pilot administrations. April 2002 was also the first fully operational administration of the ICLA. Thus, the results of the first time test takers, starting with the first administration, were tracked to determine the number of attempts needed to pass a particular standard. The data provided baseline information to the Idaho teacher preparation institutions.

Standard I. Table 2 provides the cumulative pass rates for Standards I, II and III. In April 2002, 80 of 186 pre-service teachers (43 percent) passed Standard I on their first attempt. The following July, 45 of 61 pre-service teachers (24 percent of the 186 pre-service teachers starting in April 2002) passed on their second trial. In December 2002, 16 of 31 pre-service teachers taking the Standard for the third time passed (9 percent of 186 pre-service teachers starting in April 2002). In April 2003, 12 of 14 making a fourth attempt passed (6 percent of 186). Altogether, of the 186 pre-service teachers who took Standard I in April 2002 for the first time, 153 passed (82 percent).

Table 2
Cumulative Pass Rates for Candidates taking Standards I, II, and/or III one or more times between April 2002 – April 2003

Standard	Number Taking	Number Passing	Percent Passing	Cumulative Percent
1	186	153	82%	43-82%
2	138	136	98%	93-98%
3	144	129	90%	85-90%

Standard II. Using the same cumulative analysis for Standard II, after three attempts beginning in April 2002, and ending in December 2002, the cumulative pass rate increased from 93% to 98%.

Standard III. For Standard III, from the first to the fourth administration, the cumulative pass rate increased from 85% to 90%.

Discussion

The ICLA has now been operational for approximately two years, after seven administrations of the test. During the beginning stages of the ICLA development, the committee set a Statewide and institutional goal of an 80% pass rate for each Standard. Some institutions have reached this goal and, while the goal has been met for Standards II and III across the State, students continue to find Standard I to be the most difficult. In addition, students continue to perform better on the knowledge portion of the assessment (Sections 1 and 2) than on the performance part of the test. These two issues—Standard I difficulty and knowledge versus performance scores, continue to garner a good deal of attention by the committee. Ways to improve the assessment, changes to the curriculum, and revisions to instruction have been topics of ongoing discussion.

The authors acknowledge the controversy surrounding teacher testing and the limited research that connects pre-service training and testing with student achievement. Our argument, however, is that given mandated testing, there are far more benefits to using the approach discussed in this paper, than could be obtained through the widespread practice of using externally procured tests. We also recognize that there have been reservations about using faculty-controlled assessments. A common argument is that the faculty-controlled assessments and scoring process lack objectivity. Faculty members are viewed as being too close to day-to-day instruction and, as a result, are too vested in the pass rate outcome to remain unbiased. Oversight, therefore, must come from the outside. However, our experience with what has actually occurred in Idaho when higher education faculty members work in a collegial and professional manner has shown that concerns about faculty bias have been unfounded. To the contrary, the benefits of this collaboration have been impressive. Although faculty members set an 80% pass rate, this target has yet to be achieved for all

cohorts and standards Statewide. In addition, some institutions have struggled to meet the 80% target, even after multiple attempts by individual students. Faculty members have consistently shown themselves unafraid to impose a rigorous examination, even if it means some students may fail or that their respective institutions may not meet the 80% target.

Still others may argue that faculty members across institutions who espouse different philosophical orientations about how students learn to read and therefore how reading should be taught, are ill-suited to productively work together to create and sustain an assessment of this magnitude. Again, the evidence suggests otherwise. Literacy faculty members from institutions in Idaho that often compete with one another for enrollment, resources, and political support, have chosen to work together amicably. Faculty members have also worked to overcome differences of opinion about best instructional practices. This level of cooperation was accomplished by first agreeing on the outcomes assessed by the ICLA. Once this understanding was reached, faculty members agreed to support the possibility of multiple strategies for obtaining literacy learning outcomes for Idaho pre-service teachers. Thus, phonics and whole language approaches remain firmly embedded at the institutional level.

The ICLA committee has worked professionally and responsibly to implement operational policies concerning the ICLA. These policies are always developed with forethought and fairness in mind. Policies include when and how the ICLA will be administered, number of possible retakes, accommodations, and the like. Recently, the State Board has charged the Colleges of Education Deans' Council to oversee the work of the ICLA committee and to develop a budget for the ongoing work of the committee. The Deans' Council has remained supportive of the work of the faculty and the role of the ICLA. In large part, faculty members remain in control of the assessment.

What, then, does this ICLA experiment offer the teacher education community, as well as State and Federal policy makers? First, it is a fundamentally different test development and refinement process than the externally contracted tests now sweeping the country. While the ICLA is in direct response to State legislation focused on improving reading instruction, the process embraced in Idaho is one under the purview of faculty members directly responsible for literacy courses in pre-service programs in the State. Second, it is an assessment approach decidedly weighted in favor of program improvement rather than common notions of accountability through external testing. Finally, it is a process that exemplifies the recommendations put forth by the National Commission on Excellence in Elementary Teacher Preparation for Reading Instruction (Maloch, Fine, & Flint, 2002).

The test is definitely high stakes for students and institutions. Students who do not pass the test cannot be credentialed in the State of Idaho. Institutions are faced with ensuring that a high percentage of their graduates can demonstrate content and pedagogical knowledge appropriate for well-prepared teachers (Public Law 107-110, 2001). However, what the State receives for reformulating current notions of accountability is a test with relevance. Rather than external teacher tests with a lack of connection to what teachers should know and do, this Idaho test assesses content and performance outcomes directly related to State and National professional standards for pre-service literacy preparation. Moreover, the ICLA was developed with rigorous measurement procedures that meet industry standards. These measurement procedures are consistent with the criterion-referenced nature of the ICLA. The ICLA data indicate that the test provides reliable and valid results that can be used to make sound decisions about teacher competence and refinements to pre-service teacher preparation programs.

A further benefit of this testing process is its contribution to the continuous improvement of pre-service programs. Faculty members develop tests, arrange for their administration, analyze the results by item and task, and discuss results. Since faculty members are intimately involved in all aspects of the assessment process, they act on the results (Weiss, 1998). Based on regular discussions of test results and accompanying input from colleagues across the State, faculty members make changes in their pre-service course curricula and instruction. Thus, this approach stands in direct contrast to external testing strategies by external agencies which, to date, have not been shown to effect changes in pre-service courses (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2001).

Despite the ICLA's initial accomplishments, repeated attempts to obtain a budget from the State for this project have failed. The funding to initiate the project came from one-time State allocations for a related literacy initiative. However, these funds have not been replenished. The funds for the current operation are derived from modest student registration fees, while the faculty members continue to invest enormous time without compensation. The work to print, disseminate, score, and send reports to institutions, is accomplished through short-term time slip employees. Clearly, the infrastructure supporting the ICLA is fragile and its future is in question.

We want to underscore the fact that the cost for a testing approach such as the ICLA is likely a fraction of what states typically spend on externally procured teacher tests. By employing a testing process like the ICLA, states will not only have a test with relevance used, in part, to improve pre-service instruction, they will also have a testing process with reduced expenditures on teacher testing, saving scarce state resources.

Two additional challenges for the ICLA will need attention. First, much of the policy rhetoric concerning teacher testing is focused on the assessment of performance. A handful of states have explored the implementation of actual performance assessments, although because of the cost and difficulty of establishing adequate reliability and validity, most states have shied away from these assessments (Youngs, Odden, & Porter, 2003). Early deliberations concerning the ICLA stressed the importance of assessment of performance, but given the resources the choice was made to opt for more cost effective and efficient assessment strategies. A consequence is the use of less authentic approaches to assessing performance outcomes, but the push for assessment of performance remains. The committee has outlined a new version of the ICLA that would make it more performance-oriented than the current paper-and-pencil version; development awaits funding.

Second, given the high stakes nature of teacher tests, concern for disadvantaged pre-service teacher candidates will continue to grow (Young, Odden, & Porter, 2003). The high stakes testing guidelines developed by the Federal government (U. S. Department of Education, 2000) as well as the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association; American Psychological Association; National Council on Measurement in Education; Joint Committee on Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, 1999) provide the legal, professional, and moral imperative for monitoring differential performance across student groups. This monitoring is a critical aspect of the ICLA process. Currently, the number of students in any historically disadvantaged student group is so small in Idaho that statistical analysis has been rendered meaningless. A list of acceptable accommodations for special needs students is now part of the policy governing the ICLA and is clearly outlined in the ICLA Study Guide. In addition, given the relatively small number of students in teacher education programs in general, faculty members know students personally, particularly students from underrepresented

groups. Careful oversight for the welfare of these students has been occurring at the program and institutional level. The ICLA Committee will continue to attend to this issue.

Summary

As external teacher testing continues to work its way into State and Federal reform policy, the ICLA stands apart. By using an assessment developed and maintained by faculty, rather than one developed, procured, and maintained by an external agency, the ICLA represents another way for State and Federal policy makers to think about teacher testing and the benefits and limitations associated with such practices. The ICLA test and process is decidedly focused on rigorously assessing pre-service teacher knowledge and performance in reading, and using the results to revise pre-service instruction. No external teacher test has shown to impact the curriculum and instruction of pre-service instructional programs. However, in Idaho the effect of pre-service teacher performance on the ICLA, particularly on Standard I, has directly impacted the literacy course content and delivery at Idaho teacher preparation programs.

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