

Update, James Marran (April 15, 2004)

Praxis II

The last involvement with that initiative was in 2000 (except for the GENIP briefing at ETS a year or so ago). I was a member of the Praxis II Advisory Committee along with Sallie Marston. It was through our participation in 1999 and 2000 that the specifications for geography were changed from being themes-based to being standards-based. As a result, both the stand-alone geography test and the geography portion (about 15%) of the general social studies test contain include only standards questions.

I called Greg Vafis at ETS this am and left a message on his voice mail. After that conversation, I will get back to you and let you know what he had to say about the present status and condition of Praxis.

Here is a little context about Praxis II. In the late 1990s, ETS wanted to get into the state licensure business in a big way. They invested a lot of money, time, talent, and effort to launch the Praxis series to attract state education agencies as clients. The plan was to have them include the tests as one of several criteria for initial teacher certification. The goal was to provide a testing program that would be used across the states to assure that beginning teachers would "do no harm" as they moved into their rookie teaching year. The ETS silence suggests to me that the program has not been as widely embraced as ETS had hoped. The Virginia situation might be such an indicator. [Virginia has dropped Praxis and will use SAT scores instead]

One of the components in the creation of Praxis II was the development of a "job analysis study" as a means of defining the necessary components of quality teaching. It was a significant undertaking involving almost two thousand K-12 teachers and selected administrators in each state as well as college faculty. All were randomly selected from the membership of NCSS. It was a fairly complicated process but as I recall, participants were asked to rate specific knowledge statements in the various content domains of the social studies. The biggie of course was US history., but adequate attention was given to the other content areas in the social studies (geography, civics, economics, sociology, etc) as well as pedagogy specific to the social studies.

The results of that study helped advise the work of the Advisory Committee on which Sally and I served. I remember being very impressed with the quality and depth of the study. It was the most comprehensive I had ever seen and tried hard to discover the content substance in the social studies and to provide an informed answer to the question: what is competent beginning teaching?

I no longer have a copy of the study - maybe I never did. I cannot really remember. I only have snippets in my Praxis file from what must have been a comprehensive summary that Greg put together.. And anyway 5 years was long enough ago to raise some questions about the validity of the study now, especially in the era of NCLB and its impact on narrowing the content of the social studies in many school programs - especially at the K-8 level.