

EdTPA—Successes and Challenges in Teacher Education

by Beth Clark-Gareca and Catherine Box

Created and developed by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE), edTPA was designed “to answer the essential question of whether new teachers are ready for the job” (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2014; Pearson, 2014). A new performance-based teacher assessment, edTPA was implemented in New York State in 2013–2014 as a required test for preservice teacher candidates to become initially certified in ESL in K–12 environments. Because of its swift implementation, teacher preparation programs in New York State have been reeling with the task of how to help teacher candidates navigate the rigorous process of submitting their edTPA portfolios.

EdTPA is currently in use in some capacity in at least 34 states, and is required for certification in New York, Washington, and Wisconsin. It incorporates three overarching tasks for candidates: planning for instruction and assessment, instructing and engaging students in learning, and assessing student learning. These tasks involve the submission of extensive electronic documentation, including two video clips of ENL classroom instruction and artifacts in the form of teaching materials, assessments, and rubrics. Teacher candidates must design 3–5 consecutive lessons representing 3–5 hours of consecutive instruction. Then, they write detailed reflective commentaries in which they respond to specific prompts, explaining their rationales for their pedagogical decisions (SCALE, 2015a; 2015b). To put this task into perspective, submissions are often between 40 to 50 pages long; portfolio submissions thus undoubtedly represent many hours of candidates’ investment in reflection, organizing, and writing.

Once the portfolio is submitted, each of the three tasks is scored according to five specific rubrics, for a total of 15 rubric evaluations. The maximum possible score is 75 points. Currently, the EAL passing cutoff score is 41 points, which is the equivalent of between a 2 and a 3 on each rubric; a score of 48 points or above indicates a level of EAL mastery. As of July 1, 2016, candidates who do not achieve the minimum score will not be eligible for NYS certification, a policy that places considerable pressure on candidates to achieve a passing score, as well as on teacher education programs to guide them through the process.

Our presentation at the November 2015 NYS TESOL conference offered a basic overview of edTPA for English as an Additional Language (EAL), which included details related to the test itself, the required components for submission, the rubrics, and the scoring process. Programmatic changes made based on this new requirement to one TESOL program were reported in this presentation, and included: (a) the implementation of college-wide workshops and technology services, (b) the alignment of lesson plan templates with the elements of the test portfolio, and (c) the creation of graduate edTPA assistantships to support candidates. It was also highlighted that as programs become more familiar with edTPA, there has been an overall lessening of its effect on our practicum curriculum.

To gain further insight into our candidates' impressions of the edTPA process, a survey was administered to three TESOL teacher candidates—Brianna, Tracy, and Allison—who had taken edTPA in the spring of 2015. Brianna and her two peers found the video portion of edTPA to be worthwhile, and noted that watching themselves on the video gave them a perspective on their teaching that they had not gained through classroom discussions or microteachings during their teacher preparation coursework. They also felt it helped them prepare for realities in the field. Allison in particular thought as well that the video was worthwhile for her development as a teacher and increased her awareness of her classroom. She explained that the video allowed her to review, in detail, her lessons and her teaching, often revealing to her what she could not see at the time of delivery.

The three candidates expressed doubt about the validity of the test because it captured a very small sample of teaching; as Allison stated, “Not every lesson will have everything that edTPA is asking for.” She felt that candidates could show a ten-minute clip of highly effective teaching—ensuring a passing score on the test, but not necessarily indicative of the quality of the entire lesson. Tracy felt that edTPA was primarily an exercise in persuasive writing ability. The rating, after all, could be dependent on how well a candidate frames and articulates a lesson plan through academic writing, rather than a measure of the actual teaching of the lesson. Despite being a strong writer herself, she was concerned that writing, rather than teaching, seemed to be the construct of the test.

All candidates mentioned that they found the alignment of our program-wide lesson plan template with edTPA components to be useful. They also expressed appreciation for our efforts to maintain the balance between edTPA and other teaching themes that are important to new teachers in practicum.

Finally, candidates offered the following logistical advice to teacher education faculty and future edTPA test-takers:

- The winter break is the ideal time to complete the portfolio. Students need time and energy to focus on edTPA, which is difficult to do around student teaching and coursework during the academic year.
- Students should be encouraged to compile a checklist of what they need to get from their fall student teaching placements before they leave, including evidence necessary to complete different sections of edTPA.
- An edTPA touch-base component is well placed in the student teaching seminar, but time dedicated to the assessment should be monitored carefully. Candidates felt that venting test-related anxieties was typically not productive in completing the portfolio.
- The EdTPA should not be the only measure by which novice teachers define their entire practice; though it does have useful components, it is just one gauge of overall teaching effectiveness.

In New York, as we all face new certification requirements in preparing K–12 ENL teachers, programs need to consistently support candidates through the edTPA process. By listening to our candidates' suggestions, and being responsive to their concerns as they complete their portfolios, we continue to work toward our larger goal of preparing teachers for the real-world demands of their own ENL classrooms.

References

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