

Chapter 20

Assessing Teacher Candidates' Professional Competence for Evaluating Teacher Education Programs: The Case of German-Speaking Europe

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ABSTRACT

The conception of teacher preparation programs in German-speaking countries usually rests on a largely normative set of professional competencies to be acquired by teacher candidates. The fact that this cluster of competencies is quite complex entails the considerable challenge of finding adequate procedures for the assessment at the end of the training. Valid and reliable information on professional competencies of teacher candidates can only be obtained by analyzing their actual teaching performance in the classroom. This chapter discusses theoretical assumptions of current assessment practices, a variety of methodological approaches, current developments, and implications for teacher education programs. A special focus is on the use of video portfolios as an assessment tool in the final stage of teacher preparation programs. The results of such assessments can provide a solid base for answering the question of whether the training program has managed to achieve its major objective, namely to qualify the candidates to teach successfully.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher Education: Effectiveness and Outcomes

The vexed question of how to appraise the effectiveness of a teacher education program has repeatedly led to controversies. One reason for these debates is that there are still considerable differences in terms of theoretical assumptions and methodological approaches. Cochran-Smith et al. (2012) basically distinguish between three perspectives that are closely connected: first, the focus can be on specific characteristics of training programs, for example the selection of candidates, the curriculum, or the beliefs, knowledge, and competencies to be acquired in the course of the training. Second, the analysis can center on outcomes, for example on how long teachers stay in their job, on the pedagogical practices teachers use, or on student learning progress. Third, it can be asked to what extent the first two perspectives are related, that is, what connections can be established between characteristics of teacher education programs and effects in the classroom.

This chapter rests on the assumption that the *quality of professional action* at the transition between training and entry into the job is of crucial importance for two major reasons: on the one hand, the quality of a teacher candidate's performance in the classroom is indicative of the competencies acquired in the preparation program, and it mirrors the extent to which the training has been effective when judged against internal standards. On the other hand, practical teaching competence, understood as a multifaceted cluster of part-competencies, is the most promising indicator of successful classroom instruction if success is defined in terms of student learning progress.

Keeping to these basic assumptions, the subject of this chapter—that is to say the assessment of practical competencies of teacher candidates at the end of their training—does not solely address the issue of how to ensure appropriate grading but also, and essentially, the question of whether the training program has managed to achieve its objectives, namely to qualify the candidates to teach successfully. This implies that it is necessary to assess practical competencies of teacher candidates as reliably as possible because only then the data can serve as a solid basis for an evaluation of the effectiveness of a training program.

Significance of Competence Assessments in the Context of Teacher Education

Owing to the increasing emphasis on the development of competencies in European educational systems in general, the need for instruments which reliably assess these competencies has steadily been growing also in the context of teacher education. In essence, valid and reliable instruments for assessing the quality of teacher candidates' performance are supposed to fulfill the following functions:

- Reference to the status quo allows teacher candidates to compare their competencies to the pertinent benchmark.
- Prospectively, the data generated by these instruments provide schools with information concerning the candidates' ability to act professionally, and thus perform a gatekeeper function. As diplomas or certificates are considered to be an important indicator of professional qualification, it is indispensable to base them on reliable assessments.

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