

Chapter 6

Supporting Teacher Candidates Completing the edTPA

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ABSTRACT

The edTPA (Teacher Performance Assessment) is an enormous undertaking that requires much time and effort. This can create a stressful situation that can have an impact on the teacher candidates and affect their student teaching experience. With this in mind, schools of education have to look for ways to support teacher candidate and make the process less burdensome while not losing sight of the goals of student teaching or their school missions. This chapter will start with an explanation of the acceptable guidelines for support for the edTPA. It will then move into explaining the challenges teacher candidates face such as mastering unfamiliar language, test documents, and digital literacy skills followed by support strategies. The next section considers the populations of teacher candidates who might need specialized support due to the lack of local scoring and the inherent biases embedded in standardized assessments for a diverse population. The chapter concludes with the benefits and consequences of providing support for teacher candidates to pass the edTPA.

OVERVIEW

Performance assessments are not something new. Since the 1990s, education programs have been moving to pre-service teacher evaluation that is situated within authentic contexts (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000). Teacher candidates show their aptitude thorough assignments such as case studies, video analysis, and problem-solving logs. Lesson observations are probably the most common and longstanding practice as teacher performance assessment. As early as 1870, the “Normal School” that would later become Hunter College had clinical fieldwork in which teacher candidates were observed and critiqued about their teaching (Loeb Stern, 1970). Still today, field supervisors review instructional plans, watch lessons, and debrief with the teacher candidates, allowing for reflection and critical feedback. This is all done to facilitate growth across the semester and determine classroom readiness.

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The edTPA takes performance assessments to a large scale as an assessment currently used in multiple states that allows for the comparison between teacher candidates and teacher education programs across the country. In a 2009 speech at Teachers College at Columbia University, Arne Duncan, United States Secretary of Education, “declared that a standardized performance-based exit exam would measure both prospective teachers’ competence to teach and the quality of the credential programs that get them ‘classroom-ready’ was key” to improving America’s public schools in order to keep this country competitive. He explained that “Part of the \$3 billion Race to the Top funds would provide resources and incentives to construct and promote these assessments” (Berlak, 2011, p. 188).

The origin of the edTPA began in fall of 1998 when California adopted a bill requiring teacher candidates to pass a performance assessment in order to be certified. In 2001, a group of twelve California schools of education came together to create an assessment to fulfill this requirement which was spearheaded by Linda Darling-Hammond and her team at the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE). This work became the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT). SCALE’s leadership in the national Teacher Performance Assessment Consortium (TPAC) organized efforts to use teacher performance assessments, specifically the edTPA, throughout the country (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity, 2014a). With the edTPA being, “endorsed and promoted by AACTE”(AACTE, n.d.), SCALE has influence in the field of performance assessments.

Although there are specific versions of the edTPA for most certification fields, the edTPA structure is similar across content areas. There are three tasks: planning, instruction, and assessment. To pass the edTPA, the focus shifts from inputs (teaching) to outputs (student learning) with ten of the eighteen rubrics in the elementary education portfolio focusing on some aspect of data collection, analysis, or usage (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity, 2014d).

Additionally, teacher candidates must also learn how to navigate the assessment itself. They must learn the language, format, scoring procedure, and digital literacy skills necessary to be successful. Unlike other certification exams, this assessment requires schools of education to provide structures and support since the edTPA is conducted during student teaching and accreditation as a school of education is linked to passing rates in some states, such as New York. Whether through coursework, fieldwork assignments, workshops, or other support structures, schools of education need to utilize multiple sources of support to 1) help students pass the edTPA, 2) have the edTPA not feel so overwhelming, and 3) allow students to focus their efforts on their student teaching placement rather than just passing the assessment.

This chapter will start with an explanation of the acceptable guidelines as laid out by the creators of the edTPA, SCALE. It will then move into explaining the challenges teacher candidates face in terms of the unfamiliar language; navigating the handbook, rubrics, and supporting documents; and the digital literacy skills required. Once the challenges are explained, areas of support will be outlined. The next section considers the populations of teacher candidates who might need specialized support due to the lack of local scoring and the inherent biases embedded in standardized assessments for a diverse population. The chapter concludes with commentary on the benefits and consequences of providing support for teacher candidates to pass the edTPA.

APPROVED GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORT

In acknowledging the necessity to help students to navigate the edTPA process, guidelines were set up to outline how teacher educators could help their students in an ethical way. The SCALE(2014) clari-

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