

Reflections on an edTPA Experience: A Disappointing, Anticlimactic Conclusion

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Implemented as a high-stakes Teacher Performance Assessment, in my opinion, edTPA holds great promise for evaluating novice teachers' readiness. However, in its current stage, this pre-service assessment is better in theory than practice. I do not want this paper to evolve into a ranting diatribe against edTPA, rather, I hope my insight will shed some light on how we can collectively move forward with sound strategies that best support our teachers and students in the field we all love: education.

I recall my first encounter with edTPA; my peers in the TESOL K-12 program and I were handed a memo from the New York State Education Department outlining a brand-new initial teacher certification requirement. We were further informed that this new requirement—while it was still unclear how—would directly affect our cohort. All future notices and advice appeared to materialize in a similar fashion: “This process is new to us [professors], too, do not worry...” “Yesterday, we just received more information on how to support you...”

Over the next several months, we scrambled to unpack and understand all the components of edTPA to best prepare ourselves for the colossal—and still ambiguous—task ahead of us. Our year-long Supervised Student Teaching course might have well been entitled ‘Unpacking edTPA.’ While the entire process produced honest anxiety and frustration, primarily due to the myriad of pending questions, together we successfully deciphered this mammoth project, crowning us the guinea pigs of edTPA. Are we celebrating our successful feat of understanding edTPA, or for passing it?

There are many elements of edTPA that fascinate me as an educator. Recently, there has been considerable discussion about the notion of ‘professionalizing’ the field of education. Opponents argue that this goal insults all those who have dedicated their lives to teaching. Yet, I believe that as teachers we must always reflect upon our practice and strive to better our profession. It is not about us as teachers, rather teaching is about our students and how we can best facilitate discussions and support their learning. For this reason alone, I openly praise edTPA for its aim to assess teachers' abilities to teach. This may sound nonsensical, but for decades, hundreds of thousands of teacher candidates have been deemed ‘ready to teach’ if they, along with student teaching hours, completed general and subject-specific teaching certification exams. Although useful in terms of reliability and practicality, certification exams alone cannot measure teacher readiness for the classroom. Often, states allow teacher candidates to retake these exams until they pass. Given the considerable impact teaching has on student lives, we should raise the bar for teacher licensure, but simultaneously ensure the support and resources necessary to retain excellent teachers. Without a doubt, the edTPA process affects the student teaching experience, not only for the teacher candidate, but also for the cooperating teacher and their school.

By requiring teacher candidates to execute edTPA's three primary tasks (*Planning for Instruction and Assessment*, *Instructing and Engaging Students in Learning*, and *Assessing Student Learning*), I believe we can make stronger inferences about teacher candidates' abilities to teach. Reflecting back, I was more prepared to teach during my second semester student teaching placement after having completed the edTPA process. Whether or not my success at my

final placement was a direct effect of edTPA, I regard the process as an invaluable experience for teacher candidates to develop an original mini-unit and submit teaching footage along with self-reflections. While I found the edTPA commentaries to be tedious, I would not argue for them to be reduced in quantity. I would rather see the commentaries be more concise and richer in quality without repetitive questions.

The manner in which we received our results sums up my edTPA experience. Anxious and excited, yet also not sure of its true impact, I immediately downloaded the Portable Document Format that displayed my score profile. Yet again scrambling, I rummaged through each page, searching for the word 'pass.' I read 'Total edTPA Score' and 'Average Rubric Score,' but nowhere on the document was the word 'pass.' As I continued to scroll through the PDF and bounce between the score profile and the New York State's Minimum Passing Score memo from Commissioner John B. King, Jr., I thought: "Did I pass? I think I passed?"

Ironically, the new teacher certification standards have already been jeopardized. Last week Commissioner King, Jr. announced that students who did not receive a passing edTPA score are now eligible to revert to the old ATS-W to receive initial certification until June 30, 2015. Again, does a passing edTPA score indicate teacher readiness? For me, this recent statement emphasizes the ambiguous nature of the process of teacher preparedness and teacher evaluation. Whether or not edTPA debuted prematurely, this recent redefining of the ratings and requirements for certification post-implementation sends a grim and unacceptable message to educators around the country.