# edTPA

*by Elizabeth Cassidy Parker*

I recently taught in a teacher education program that was implementing edTPA, formerly the Teacher Performance Assessment, as a requirement for all education majors. edTPA was developed by The Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) and is being adopted at varied levels including within institutions and across states. Many states have begun instituting a policy toward a "passing score" on edTPA for teacher licensure. As a teacher educator, I briefly experienced preparing teacher candidates (TCs) for edTPA prior to moving to Pennsylvania. Within my first month here, I observed edTPA emerge in our PMEA higher education dialogue; a cursory look at edTPA indicates several institutions in PA have begun participation. The purpose of this article is to briefly outline the goal and tasks of edTPA and to highlight a few issues I have observed while teaching in another institution.

## A Primer

The goal of edTPA is to measure the readiness of novice teachers to instruct students in P-12 settings. Using planning, instruction and assessment as the three central tasks of effective teaching, TCs prepare an electronic portfolio and submit to a portal on the edTPA website at the end of their student teaching semester. Managed by Pearson Education, edTPA scorers—individuals who have been trained to evaluate edTPA portfolios and who have experience within P-12 and/or teacher education contexts, review each task using five rubrics. A candidate's performance may vary on each rubric from a level one (not ready) to a level five (highly accomplished beginner). Individual scores from each rubric are totaled to create the TCs' composite score. At this time, states are conducting standard setting procedures; TCs' composite scores within the state are being compared with TCs' composite scores throughout the nation to develop a passing score. In addition to other program requirements, a passing score on edTPA may be tied to a TCs' program completion at an institution and/or initial certification within the state. At the time of writing this article, the cost to the student for having their portfolio scored is $300.

Task 1 encompasses planning for instruction. TCs select one class from their student teaching experience and collect information about the context, such as school setting and facilities, required district curricula and information about the class structure and students, including those who might be identified as ELLs, gifted, with IEPs or 504 plans. In Task 1, TCs also prepare three to five consecutive hours of instruction or lessons with the same class (depending on how often TCs see the selected class, their instructional time might occur during one week or several weeks). TCs' instruction is expected to reflect the national standards specific to the discipline, a central focus for instruction, as well as identify language demands. They are to demonstrate a contextual understanding of the class they chose to focus on, how their instruction supports student learning and how they plan to use multiple forms of assessment to track student progress. Within Task 1, TCs also provide planning commentary that describes, explains and justifies their planning decisions.

Task 2 focuses on instruction and engagement in learning. TCs instruct their planned lessons, and for performing arts disciplines, select two continuous ten-minute videorecorded teaching and learning segments. The TCs also provide an instructional commentary regarding student engagement, how they are deepening student learning and how students are applying their skills toward standards such as creating, performing, responding, or connecting. As TCs reflect on their teaching effectiveness, they are expected to address both the group and individuals' needs within the classroom context.

Though all three tasks use artifacts as evidence, Task 3 focuses on analyzing assessment artifacts. TCs identify patterns of learning including both what students are able to know and do and what they still need to know and do. They also analyze three specific student work samples and demonstrate their understanding of student progress through responding to prompts. Consistent with other tasks, TCs are expected to explain and provide evidence of student progress, rather than focusing on instruction alone. At the end, TCs describe their next steps in the planning, teaching and assessment cycle, steps that are to be supported by research and theory within their discipline.

## Initial Perspective

As a music teacher educator, preparing TCs for successful completion of edTPA began to alter the structure and content of my methods courses. One example of this was prior to edTPA, students might articulate several objectives that reflected their goals for student learning within a given lesson. I viewed these objectives as reflections of dynamic and interactive music-making contexts. P-12 students are often progressing on multiple musical skills and understandings simultaneously, and within one music class period, teachers address several areas. edTPA plans require a central focus/objective. It is

vital that the TC supports the objective through teaching and learning interactions, as well as assessment evidence. This new laser light focus began to infuse teaching and learning within the methods courses. There were benefits to collaborating with TCs on this approach as they concentrated on deepening their understanding toward a singular objective. edTPA plans required attention to standards specific to the discipline, such as the National Core Arts Standards, and this helped to strengthen TCs' work. Rather than simply attaching one or several standards to lesson plans, TCs appeared to more thoughtfully reflect on which standard aligned with their goal. There were also drawbacks as I wondered how this might alter the experiences of music-making for P-12 students. How would a highly focused approach to planning, teaching and assessment effect teaching and learning interactions over several lessons and shape the overall curriculum?

I also noted a challenge aligning edTPA within the student teaching practicum. In the formative stages of adopting edTPA, the three tasks appeared extraneous to student teaching. TCs often attended workshops to strengthen their edTPA preparation, which appeared distant from their contextual student teaching duties. It occurred to me that TCs' edTPA work was situated within a tension between completing prescribed requirements for the teacher education program and their job of learning to be a teacher. Surely these tensions are not new as TCs often describe having one foot in their music teacher education program and the other in their future career aspirations. However, these tenuous connections between edTPA and the student teaching experience need further attention and ask us to consider if and how they might be integrated to support TCs' preparation for teaching.

New adoption of edTPA brought stressors between what cooperating teachers required of their TCs, and what they were expected to accomplish for their edTPA portfolios, specifically during these three to five hours of instruction. For example, in some cases, edTPA instruction could only occur after performance evaluation, or with a specific class in the school that had the curricular space to support TCs' portfolio development. The benefit was most TCs appeared to attend with greater thought to individual student learning and individuals' needs in the classroom. TCs who were able to integrate new ideas quickly and were strong oral and written communicators grew considerably. Those who did not have strong oral and written communication skills had greater difficulty documenting their teaching and learning interactions with students. Prior to edTPA, TCs did not complete an assessment that required as much time and attention during the student teaching semester. Learning to adapt to a new and considerable requirement was a challenge toward implementation.

Finally, one cannot cursorily discuss edTPA in an abbreviated form, even in one such as this, without noting the financial burden that it places on TCs. In addition to tests such as the Praxis, TCs are required to allocate additional monies toward edTPA portfolio scoring. I witnessed firsthand several TCs struggle to meet increasing costs toward teacher licensure. There were limited supports in place at the beginning of implementation, but no long-term solution was offered. Over time, TCs were expected to acclimate to this additional cost and absorb it as they did other such expenses at university.

As I stated at the beginning of this article, I observed the beginnings of implementation within an institution and state that adopted edTPA. There are several levels of implications for introducing teacher performance assessments. As music education majors, music teachers and music teacher educators, a continual robust dialogue is needed regarding how initiatives such as edTPA within teacher licensure influence careers, teacher preparation programs and the music teaching and learning in P-12 contexts. A dialogue that seeks to embrace both multiple and diverse voices may help PA institutions address the question, "Why adopt _____?" Conversations might then lead thoughtfully to how we would adopt or choose not to adopt these initiatives, carefully navigating each step along the way.

For more information about institutional and state adoption of edTPA: edtpa.aacte.org/state-policy.

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