

Rebuttal to Dover et al.

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This commentary rebuts several questionable claims asserted by the [Dover et al. \(2015\) commentary](#) regarding the development and implementation of edTPA. Based on our deep and long-term involvement with the initiative, we counter their assertions drawing on a range of scholarly and experiential evidence that suggests their analysis is partial at best.

In the spirit of critical analysis for which TCR is renowned, we would like to offer a counter-narrative to the commentary on edTPA from <http://www.tcrecord.org/Content.asp?ContentID=17914>.

We represent the experience of institutions in Illinois that have committed to the implementation of edTPA, as part of an effort that has yielded significant positive outcomes for our programs and teacher candidates.

edTPA is a research-based, nationally available assessment and support system developed by educators that provides independent evaluation of teacher candidate performance as one indicator for readiness to being an effective beginning teacher. We have been immersed in edTPA implementation for several years at our respective institutions as the designated lead administrators (for implementation support in Illinois) and as scorers and scoring trainers. We have been committed to moving beyond compliance with state policy to using edTPA as a positive force to support critical faculty inquiry into teaching and learning. When Illinois State University faculty first reviewed the edTPA rubrics in 2009, it was clear that the rubrics put student learning at the center of this process. We also saw an innovation that provided clear, concise, and precise descriptors for key features of effective instruction, suitable for beginning practice. We have continued to engage more deeply because of its intrinsic value to help us achieve the practice we want in all our institutions.

edTPA gives us a productive alternative to localized descriptors of professional practice; a dramatic contrast to the status quo, in which schools with staff from different preparation routes lack a shared understanding of effective practice. edTPA follows the contours provided by the InTASC standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012). To that end, edTPA is much more than an assessment because it focuses on integrating content knowledge with student strengths and needs to support learning. Most importantly, edTPA is deepening faculty and student understanding of professional practices by providing a national academy of faculty to support implementation of edTPA, numerous program resources, a website, webinars, and national, regional, and state conferences.

We are knowledgeable advocates who have observed its effect on our programs and our candidates and networked with other institutions of higher education in Illinois and nationally. Our experiences lead us to two broad strokes about the impact edTPA is having in teacher education. First, the assessment is deepening the professional dialogue between candidates and their supervising faculty. Second, it is bridging our conversation with our P-12 partners to the

extent that we now know we are focusing on the same critical aspects of effective instructional practice.

ACKNOWLEDGING CONTROVERSY

edTPA has not emerged without controversy. There have been objections to the operational partner, Evaluation Systems of Pearson, as a for-profit entity with far too much influence in the accountability and testing movement affecting education writ large. There are concerns about the expense of the assessment (\$300) in a course of study leading to a profession that is ubiquitously acknowledged as being underpaid. Pearson plays a very specific role as an operational partner, by providing the platform for candidates to upload edTPA materials so that scoring and score reporting can be delivered. Pearson has no control over the design that was developed under the leadership of the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) with input from faculty nationwide prior to any Pearson engagement—see SCALE 2013 Field Test Summary report for details on development and roles (Sato, 2014). The use of a testing company to deliver a consequential assessment is common in education and across most professions.

DISPUTING ERRONEOUS CLAIMS

Based on our experience, expertise, and available edTPA documentation, the commentary in question presents a one-sided view of the potential impact of edTPA. The authors ignore readily available data that contradicts many of their points—see edTPA Summary Report 2013 (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, 2013) and an administrative report for 2015 forthcoming. The authors include the edTPA Summary Report in the list of references but do not cite evidence from that report in the body of the article. Instead, they cite research on the previous Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) using data from 2006 and earlier.

Dover, et al. offer incomplete and misleading information about the hiring and training of edTPA scorers. Potential scorers are interviewed *after* they provide documentation that they are credentialed to teach in the subject area, in which they intend to score and must demonstrate experience teaching in that field, teaching methods courses, or supervising teaching candidates in that field. Their employment is verified, and then they experience a short interview to determine their commitment to training and scoring.

The training is rigorous, and begins with an examination of potential biases and how to avoid them. Scorers must demonstrate their ability to identify evidence and make consistent scoring decisions responding to fifteen specific questions about key constructs in planning, instruction, and assessment. Scorers are monitored during training and while scoring to ensure they continue to score consistently and within parameters that do not privilege speed over accuracy. In fact, scorers are limited in the number of portfolios they can score within a 48-hour window, and any scorer spending less than two hours on an individual portfolio is flagged for review. Lastly, all participating campuses have a document that explains levels of candidate performance against rubrics to help program faculty understand what is expected with the assessment.

Further, the authors rely on a single 45-minute conversation with an anonymous source, which is not substantial enough to warrant the conclusions they use it to support. Based on SCALE and Pearson requirements, the parameters for scorer eligibility are tight: scorers must have expertise and teaching experience in the specific subject, with teachers as mentor, supervisor, or program faculty. In fact, 50 percent of scorers are teacher education faculty or supervisors; 50 percent are P-12 educators—a large portion of which are National Board certified. Scorers are well oriented to beginning teacher performance and respective content areas, before they are considered to train for scoring. edTPA scorers are motivated by many things, including the opportunity to contribute to improved preparation, supporting the field, and their own professional development (Spesia, 2015). To focus on the compensation is a red herring.

Dover, Schultz, Smith, and Duggan portray an unquestioned assumption that the status quo for entry into teaching is working well for all. Our school partners, including the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Education Association (NEA), have judged otherwise (Berry, 2009; CCSSO, 2012). These are not enemies to teacher education calling for its demise; rather they are committed stakeholders who are encouraging more reliable measures of classroom readiness. In fact, the AFT has formally called for a “bar exam” for teaching and learning to support greater equity and comparability across IHEs (American Federation of Teachers, 2012).

We are concerned that the authors privilege a parochial right rooted in local control to gauge candidate readiness over a uniform professional standard for markers of safe professional practice. Further, we dispute the charge that the field is outsourcing professional judgment. We see immense value in independent, calibrated affirmation of our candidates’ readiness—or not—to lead student learning as a way to inform professional judgment. Also, we embrace the opportunity to use the feedback we receive to support continuous program improvement (Peck, Sloan, & Singer-Gabella, 2014) and deepen professional dialogue.

Clinical supervisors report to us anecdotally—and in focus groups—that they are more inclined to focus on the evidence of candidate performance, as the basis of conferencing, rather than summary judgments of lessons that “went well.” They are discussing aspects of classroom practice that reflect, or fall short of, the teaching we want to see. edTPA has given us precise, research-based characteristics of effective instructional practice to provide focus for supervision and feedback. Certainly, we have previously cared about these features, but not in the deep and subject-cross-cutting ways that edTPA supports. In short, edTPA has been an innovation that augments our programs across our institution, and reinforces a more institutionally coherent discussion of professional expectations (Peck, Sloan, Singer-Gabella, 2014).

As we have introduced the use of edTPA into our student teaching practice, our P-12 cooperating teachers and administrators see converging considerations of effective teaching practice. Together, we are engaging students in learning, using student knowledge to plan instruction, and implement assessments that provide actionable insights to guide student learning. edTPA focuses our attention on the difference between “pop quizzes” that support the teacher’s exercise of disciplinary power and “assessments” that support inquiry into the status of student mastery, regarding identified learning objectives.

We have come to appreciate that edTPA is best understood in the context of a support and assessment system that promotes extensive and intensive collegial collaboration and professional learning. Preparing for implementation has encouraged us to work together to understand this assessment system and how to support our candidates to be successful. edTPA provides us with actionable data and insights for program improvement. Whereas Dover et al. charge that we lose local autonomy for candidate evaluation, those who have been deeply involved in implementing the assessment understand that it augments our evaluation of candidates and deepens our understanding of teaching and learning, rather than displacing it.

IN CLOSING

edTPA is job-related and assesses the core teaching competencies of planning, instruction, and assessment embedded in authentic practice. edTPA exceeds comparable licensure exams in other professions, such as the NCLEX in nursing, which measure a candidate's professional *judgment*. edTPA takes it to a higher level, examining a candidate's professional *performance and judgment*. This is a measure to help reassure ourselves and our school partners that the graduates we recommend for licensure are fully ready for the performance standard established for Illinois educators. Likewise, it helps us reassure parents and the children in Illinois public schools that the new teachers arriving in classrooms are ready to lead learning at the outset.

Ensuring all teachers are prepared for professional practice requires an assessment based on common standards that are measured independently, objectively, and with strong evidence of reliability and validity. As teacher educators it is our responsibility to commit to ensuring that all students have access to a highly qualified competent teacher—a “civil right” that all students and parents deserve and should demand. Thus, we would argue this is not a high-stakes assessment as much as it is a high-stakes moral and ethical responsibility of the state and its preparation programs to establish and enforce standards for teaching.

We have shared a variety of objections to Dover et al. (2015) and counterpoints to affirm why we find edTPA a worthwhile innovation in teacher preparation. We offer one last point. edTPA, in intent, architecture, and scoring, is modeled directly on the processes used by the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards for certification of accomplished teachers. National Board certification is an established and respected endeavor in the profession. edTPA is similar in spirit and geared toward effective beginning teaching. With the increasingly prevalent use of Danielson's Framework for Teaching as the scaffolding for teacher evaluation, what could emerge is a coherent set of professional standards for practice that span the career continuum from entry to ongoing development and culminating in excellence represented by National Board Certification.

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