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Gwynne Rife, Ph.D.

Professor of Biology and Education
& Chair, Advanced Professional Programs
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edTPA Scoring: Qualified Educators Combined with Careful Training & Support

More state education agencies and teacher preparation programs are turning to performance-based assessments to help determine if a teacher candidate is ready for the classroom.

That goal is shared by Stanford University and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), which collaborated along with educators across the nation to develop edTPA™, a research- and standards-based tool to independently measure candidate performance.

Dr. Gwynne Rife, Professor of Biology and Education, and Chair of Advanced Professional Programs in the College of Education for University of Findlay in Ohio, also shares that goal. It is the main reason she stepped up as one of the growing group of highly qualified educators who score edTPA. She has so ardently embraced the process that she now supervises other scorers.

“This is a very powerful tool that produces ‘wins’ for all stakeholders,” says Rife. “It always bothered me that we test teacher candidates only on their knowledge of the subject area and not whether they’ve learned how to apply that knowledge. And there’s not been any external look to validate their qualifications. That’s why I see this [process] as bringing so much to the table.”

edTPA is an assessment process that requires candidates to submit a portfolio that documents teaching and learning in a 3-to-5 day learning segment with a class of students. That portfolio includes an unedited video of the candidate delivering instruction as well as examples of teaching materials that address planning, instruction, assessment, analyzing teaching and academic language.

Rife notes the selection process for scorers is rigorous and only qualified educators and teacher educators with subject-level expertise are accepted. They also must have recent experience working with teacher candidates on content-specific curriculum, teaching methods courses or directly supervising teacher candidates. Rife, for example, has an undergraduate degree, two master’s and a doctorate in life sciences and provides instruction to teacher candidates in science fields.

In addition to her role at Findlay, she is a supervisor for secondary and middle science edTPA scoring and also works as a “benchmarker” in secondary science, a role that involves working with other science experts to select the training materials to prepare scorers.

Rife adds that after being selected as a scorer she went through 10 hours of rigorous training, followed by another eight hours of “calibration” exercises (including scoring of whole portfolios) to make sure scoring would be reliable and valid.

“The process was very intensive,” says Rife. “It began with a lot of online materials and modules to work through, then webinar conferences followed by practice portfolios followed by live training. Then there were additional online and live training sessions to become a supervisor.

“I think it’s very rare to see a program developed like this with so much thought,” Rife adds. “We’re a small school, but we embraced this change right away.”

At Findlay, the school is monitoring the edTPA results of its teacher candidates for trends that might suggest a need to bolster curriculum or provide more mentoring. It also has taken special steps to train its teacher candidates how to capture video of their teaching and is working with them to embrace edTPA’s emphasis on determining the extent to which their students are learning.

Indeed, says Rife, the biggest value of edTPA may be to the teacher candidates, not just the education departments, state licensing boards and government and state leaders who want a new measure of teacher preparation as a way to help bolster deep content learning by America’s students.

“I see tremendous benefit to the candidates,” she explains. “At a hectic time when they’re balancing school and student teaching, it requires them to stop and reflect on what they have learned in order to prepare this portfolio: to really explore how well they’re teaching and how well their students are learning.

“And if you could just see some of these videos,” she continued. “They’re so powerful. It’s a wonderful feeling to see these young people there in the classroom performing and teaching and the students responding and learning. And the candidates are more at ease because it’s just the camera and not an in-person supervisor or professor evaluating them.”

edTPA was developed and is scored by university and school-based educators organized by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity, or SCALE, with the support of a consortium of more than 20 states and their state departments of education, licensing boards and institutions of higher education, along with AACTE. The subject-specific assessment is available in 25 initial licensure areas in Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle Childhood and Secondary Education.

According to Dr. Ray Pecheone, the executive director of SCALE, edTPA “is very analogous to authentic assessments in other professions such as nursing, medical residencies and architecture. In its most basic form, we collect authentic artifacts of teaching that all teachers use on the job.” As for independent scorers, Pecheone points out that approach has long been used by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards to certify accomplished teachers.

University of Findlay College of Education

Facts & Figures

488
Enrollment (2011-2012)

218
Undergraduate majors

270
Graduate majors

16
Full-time faculty

Offers **8** degree programs and specializations at the Bachelor’s and Master’s levels