

## Chapter 8

# Assessed by Anonymous: A Study of Pre-Service Teachers

Thomas Huston

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5820-8010>

Purdue University Global, USA

### ABSTRACT

*This study sought to contribute to the scholarly discourse of understanding how pre-service student teachers experienced evaluation via teacher performance assessments (TPAs). More specifically, this study sought to explore the experiences that pre-service teachers underwent to complete the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). Through extensive interviews and thematic data analysis, this research discerned what the informants' experiences were. Although informants experienced many benefits while completing their portfolios, three primary areas of struggle emerged from the data. First, informants struggled with interpreting and navigating the edTPA assessment handbook. Second, informants had problems adapting edTPA requirements to their teaching. Third, informants experienced problems with their concept of audience. As a result, the findings reported in this study have numerous implications that would prove beneficial to teacher educators, institutions of teacher training, policymakers, designers of assessments, and future and current educators.*

### LITERATURE REVIEW

There has often been a public perception that teaching is a relatively easy job to learn (Au, 2013). Part of the problem within the educational debate has been that there are many different conceptualizations of what “good” teaching is, or what it means to be a “good” teacher (Torres, 2005; Shober, 2012). The most common conceptualization, both historically and in the present, especially in light of recent efforts of politicians, is to define “good” teaching in terms of specific behaviors. For example, the most common and often used teacher licensure assessments, such as Praxis II, focus on questions such as “Can a preservice teacher do X, Y, and Z?” Many feel, however, that learning to teach is quite a difficult process, and that current state tests such as Praxis II do not recognize effective teachers or competent teaching, nor do they promote deeper thinking among teacher candidates (Torgerson, et al., 2009; Nelson, 2014).

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The teacher performance assessment (TPA) is considered more rigorous than paper and pencil exams for teacher licensure because it requires teacher candidates to perform and record teaching in a number of contexts to a broad range of learners (Sandholtz & Shea, 2012). The most recent teacher performance assessment, *The Educative Teacher Performance Assessment* (edTPA), is fundamentally rooted in the design of two other TPAs, the *National Board Certification* and the *Performance Assessment of California Teachers* (PACT). This study examined how four student teachers experienced the standard edTPA elementary assessment.

Burroughs et al.'s (2000) early scholarship on TPAs showed how the *National Board Certification* was problematic for four teacher candidates in the following five areas: "writing apprehension, representing tacit knowledge, understanding sample logic, negotiating the standards, and providing evidence from teaching" (Burroughs et al., 2000, p. 22). Candidates were nervous the person grading the assessment would not be able to identify or understand their competence in teaching from writing alone. Burroughs (2001) stated because candidates were required to write to an undetermined audience in an unfamiliar genre, they took on a social role of defensive writing, and, as a result, the assessment was for many teachers intimidating and arduous. The rhetorical problems of genre, audience, and social role are not part of the normal courses in teacher education, nor are they typically found in professional development (Burroughs et al., 2000; Burroughs, 2001).

The standard edTPA elementary assessment is provided to student teachers in a 75-page handbook containing both literacy and math assessments and published through the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE). The content of the assessment handbook is used nationally for grades kindergarten through sixth. The handbook's current title is *Elementary Education: Literacy with Mathematics Task 4: Assessment Handbook* (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity [SCALE], 2019). Although the assessment handbook has undergone minor revisions, the current version of the handbook is nearly identical to the version used by informants in this study; both versions of the handbook contain the same cover photo, page layout, table of contents, section titles, and terminology (SCALE, 2014; SCALE, 2019). It appears the next iteration of the edTPA assessment handbook shall remain identical to the current version in terms of content. According to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE), "Updates to the assessment materials were made to address errata items, and no other content changes have been made" (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2021, para. 2).

## **Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA)**

The edTPA assessment may be close to becoming the first standardized, one size fits all national assessment for teaching licensure. As of February, 2021, a total of 955 teacher education programs in 41 states take part in edTPA, and 18 of those states require passing edTPA for state licensure (AACTE, 2021, para. 1). At a cost of \$300, the edTPA assessment is usually taken during the teacher candidate's semester of student teaching. The developers of the edTPA assessment recommend a score of 42 out of 75 (Tran & Dee, 2020). edTPA's design was intended to articulate the notion that an assessment needed to be implemented to find out if new teachers are prepared for the job, and if new teachers can demonstrate effective teaching (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2013). The edTPA assessment has been referenced as a potential "gatekeeper" for low quality teachers entering the field (Ledwell & Oyler, 2016).

Major concerns surrounding teacher performance assessments included validity, reliability, cost, and rhetorical problems such as privileging students already adept at academic English and writing, the

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