Chapter 8

Examination of Content Validity for edTPA: Academic Language and Representation

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors examine the content validity of edTPA for middle grades and secondary mathematics and raise critical questions regarding the edTPA's emphasis on academic language and the required use of representation as part of the subject-specific pedagogy. The authors compare the edTPA description and published validity information to standards for validity and the mathematics education research base. The discussion suggests that there is limited evidence for content validity and more work is necessary to support characterizing the edTPA as research-based and correlated with increasing student performance. Future research is suggested for improving the implementation and validation of performance assessments along with discussion of implications for teacher education programs.

INTRODUCTION

With the edTPA's (formerly Teacher Performance Assessment) potential to impact teacher preparation programs in a profound way, the validity of the edTPA instrument and the questions and issues related to the implementation of the instrument merit critical reflection and review. In this chapter, mathematics teacher educators examine edTPA with a focus on its content validity. The chapter begins with a discussion of ideas related to the validation process of measurement tools and then continues on to raise critical questions regarding the way academic language is emphasized in the instrument and the way in which representation is required as part of the subject-specific pedagogy. The purpose of the chapter is not to support or argue against the use of the edTPA instrument in teacher preparation programs. Instead,
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the issues discussed in the chapter may encourage various stakeholders in mathematics education to participate in a meaningful examination of the new teacher performance assessment that informs policy and practice.

BACKGROUND

Among the many contested topics concerning teacher preparation is a discussion of the most appropriate methods to test teacher knowledge for initial certification. The establishment of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in 1987 and the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) in 1992 called for the development of performance-based assessment for teacher certification. These calls paralleled the development of curriculum standards and standardized achievement testing in K-12 educational settings. The 1998 enactment of Title II of the Higher Education Act (Public Law 105-244) set forth a requirement for all states to report the rate at which teacher candidates pass licensure exams, thus effectively mandating teacher certification testing (Wilson & Youngs, 2005). One such assessment, the edTPA was developed by researchers and teacher educators of the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) at Stanford University in collaboration with teachers and teacher educators. SCALE is responsible for the content of the assessment and trains the scorers of the assessment.

The subject-specific edTPA assessment examines teaching through evidence (i.e., candidates’ narratives and artifacts) of planning, instruction, and student assessment during a field experience. The evidence ranges from lesson plans and instructional materials to videotaped lessons and feedback on student work. Another key feature of the portfolio is the candidate’s narratives, which include describing the planning, analyzing the enactment and assessment of teaching, and reflecting on ways to improve the instruction.

Since the edTPA has been made available, teacher preparation programs in 35 states and the District of Columbia have begun implementation of the instrument to evaluate the teaching of their teacher candidates. In addition, some states have policy or pending policy to establish regulations for its use (SCALE, 2013). An expected implication of these policies is that multiple states will mandate that all teacher candidates pass the edTPA as a requirement for initial certification.

Historically, assessments used in determining teacher certification have taken the form of multiple-choice, paper-and-pencil tests in which candidates are questioned on various aspects of knowledge for teaching, including content knowledge, foundations of education, and pedagogical concepts (Wilson & Youngs, 2005). Questions around the predictive validity of such paper-and-pencil tests (Wilson & Youngs, 2005) are propelling the field of teacher education to consider different forms of assessments of teacher knowledge and competence.

The developers, adopters, and users of the edTPA expect it to have high predictive validity regarding the performance of new teachers as it purports alignment to authentic practices and performance standards of teaching. However, research in the specific area of mathematics education has yet to support the edTPA as a credible basis upon which to assess readiness for certification. In a myopic view, teaching involves only the teacher and students. However, considering the broad spectrum of learning to which preservice teachers (PSTs) are exposed as they engage in student teaching, the perspectives on the teaching and learning of mathematics by mathematics teacher educators and education researchers should also be acknowledged. For example, questions persist as to what knowledge should be measured,
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