

Teacher Educators' Professional Autonomy and Academic Freedom Must Be Safe-guarded

For more than two decades P-12 public schools, teachers and teacher education programs have been blamed for the purportedⁱ crisis in public education. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Race to the Top (RTTP) legislation have responded to the assumed failures of teachers, public schools, and teacher preparation programs by instituting value-added accountability systems that rely on high stakes testing measures to track the impact teachers and those who prepare them have on student learning.

The current use of these standardized tests narrows the curriculum, fails to accurately assess student learning, and de-professionalizes teachers. Accordingly, teachers and parents as well as some of their unions and organizations have called for more authentic assessments, greater autonomy for teachers, more resources, smaller class sizes, and the withdrawal of for-profit corporate intrusion into public education.

Requirements proposed for professional education programs by Race to the Top (RTTP) and the Council on Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) have received less critical attention. Teacher Performance Assessment protocols and exams are now being imposed by state governments (called “edTPA” in New York State) on schools of education and teacher education faculty. Originating from Stanford and designed by teacher educators, much of the content of edTPA contains important components of good teaching and some of the component evaluative methods represent good practice; such as the use of portfolios and multidimensional assessments. edTPA, however, “is designed to be *educative and predictive of effective teaching and student learning.*” (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity, 2012)

The central, “predictive” claim of edTPA must be placed within the dominant historical context of the testing regime that pervades federal and state assessment policies. As an assessment measure, edTPA is linked to existent student success measures (high stakes testing) which are, in turn, used to evaluate teachers. In these circumstances, what edTPA will predict are successful outcomes valued by federal and state policy-makers and not necessarily successful teachers.

The requirements imposed by edTPA policy suffer from many of the same flaws evident in P-12 reforms:

- They fail to take into account the specific communities and populations professional education programs serve. For example, the regulations imposed by RTTP and CAEP measure teacher education programs by the rates of employment of their graduates and by the default rate on loans taken out by their students, all of which are dependent on economic forces beyond the control of the programs.
- They focus on high stakes tests scores, utilizing them to assess performance of graduates and their students. For example, they establish cut scores on standardized exams for graduates and hold teacher education programs responsible for these and for how well the students of their graduates do on high stakes exams.

- Without adequate research to affirm the connection, they assume the validity of value added measures based on test scores, and use the model to evaluate professional education programs by the impact their graduates have on their students' scores on tests over time.
- They ignore or marginalize the expertise of the faculty in these programs. The regulations force professors to teach a curriculum that is driven by standardized assessments, rubrics and quantifiable outcomes developed by individuals and corporations not directly connected to those programs, resulting in violation of academic freedom and de-professionalization. Professors are required to hand evaluations over to outside scorers. In particular edTPA, the performance-based assessment tool that will be required for all NYS teacher candidates as of May 1, 2014, turns evaluation over to individuals trained by Pearson, Inc. and even prohibits valuable professor-student collaborative reflection on assessment videotapes

Similar to the test fixated reforms imposed on P-12 public schools by NCLB and RTTP, RTTP's and CAEP's requirements for professional education programs are being implemented without pilot studies, without a solid research base and without professional consensus in the field about their value. To make their case, RTTP and CAEP rely on the MET studies on the assumed reliability and validity of value added measures based on test scores, on what constitutes best practices, and on analogies between medicine and teaching. All of these have been convincingly challenged.ⁱⁱ

As professional teacher educators and scholars in our field, we believe that teacher education programs must be responsible for developing their own local criteria for evaluating their graduates. These criteria should be developed in collaboration with the schools and communities that the programs serve and be informed by the knowledge and professional experiences educators in those programs bring to their work. The mission of teacher education also consists of helping students become critical participants and agents for change in the schools where they work. We believe that assessments of programs should give equal weight to the resources available to the programs to carry out their mission. Given the increasing responsibilities placed on teachers and the programs that educate them, such as the need to prepare graduates to teach growing English Language Learners (ELL), special needs and immigrant student populations, as well as the increasing numbers of students who live in poverty, resource standards should be given preeminence in any evaluative system, so that teacher education programs can provide a quality education to future teachers.

As experienced, professional educators, and because we are vitally concerned about the education of our future teachers, we cannot in good conscience support assessment systems that narrowly define the preparation of our teacher candidates and encroach on our academic freedom. We, therefore object to the implementation of CAEP in its current form and to RTTP's school profiles and edTPA, and urge that there be further discussions before these are implemented

CAEP and edTPA reduce the practice of teaching to a series of quantifiable behaviors that do not capture the complexity and nuance of teaching. There has been no trial period established for evaluating the effects of edTPA on teacher candidates or teacher education programs. Finally, the cost of edTPA, which is \$300 per candidate, puts an undue burden on our students.

We therefore reject the notion that CAEP in its current form and edTPA constitute appropriate assessments of professional education programs and teacher candidate performance, and we believe that their rushed implementation will undermine the preparation of teacher candidates in New York State.

ⁱ See David Berliner et al for discussion of how this crisis was manufactured.

ⁱⁱ Berliner, D. (2014). Effects of inequality and poverty vs. teachers and schooling on America's youth" *Teachers College Record* Volume 116 Number 1, 2014, p. - <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 16889, Date Accessed: 10/16/2012 1:36:08 PM

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REVIEW OF TWO CULMINATING REPORTS FROM THE MET PROJECT

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January 2013

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Vanderbilt University

February 2013

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Sean P. Corcoran

Annenberg Institute for School Reform Education Policy for Action Series

Lipman, P. 2011. *The new political economy: Neoliberalism, race and the right to the city*. Routledge.

National Academy of Sciences 2010 report, *Preparing Teachers: Building Evidence for Sound Policy*. The Academy panel sifted through hundreds of research studies from recent decades and, not surprisingly, concluded that more research is needed in order to have sound evidence about the impact of particular aspects of preparation.