

Assessment of Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers

Sharilyn C. Steadman
Chan Evans
East Carolina University

From the founding of the Boston Latin School in 1635 through the changes brought about by Horace Mann, the Progressive Era, *Plessey v. Ferguson* in 1896, and the Supreme Court's ruling on *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954, the history of public education in the United States has been populated with calls for reform... and that pattern persists. Thirty-one years ago, the authors of *A Nation at Risk* (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) asserted,

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. As it stands, we have allowed this to happen to ourselves.

That declaration was followed with a call from the Commission for a variety of wide-ranging reforms. In the document, educators were placed in the category of "The Tools at Hand," and were praised for their "dedication, against all odds, that keeps teachers serving in schools and colleges, even as the rewards diminish" (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Eighteen years later, Public Law PL 107-110 of 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act introduced a set of measures dedicated to achieving significant gains in student achievement and placed a higher degree of accountability for student progress on local schools, districts, and states (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). NCLB required that every teacher be deemed *highly qualified* in every subject that she or he taught. At that time, highly qualified was broadly interpreted to mean that a teacher was certified and demonstrated proficiency in her or his subject matter (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011).

The most recent government-enacted reform, Race to the Top (RttT), was launched in 2012 and includes four chief areas of focus:

- Development of rigorous standards and better assessments;
- Adoption of better data systems to provide schools, teachers, and parents with information about student progress;
- Support for teachers and school leaders to become more effective;

- Increased emphasis and resources for the rigorous interventions needed to turn around the lowest-performing schools. (United States Department of Education, 2014)

Eighteen states and the District of Columbia received funding and are currently implementing multiple changes required by the funding agreement.

As key members of the educational system, teachers have been affected by all reform movements that have occurred over the nearly 400-year history of American public education. Notably, aspects of the last two large reform efforts, NCLB (2001) and RttT (2014), have specifically addressed the qualifications and efficacy of in-service teachers, and thus, by extension, the teacher education programs that produce these teachers.

Calls for reform have come from within the world of teacher education as well. In November 2010, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) released *Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers*, an examination of clinical preparation and partnerships, essential components of teacher education programs (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). In the report, the blue ribbon panel endorsed a shift *away from* embracing and relying upon loosely linked academic preparation and field experiences in pre-service teacher education and a shift *toward* programs grounded in clinical practice interwoven with academic content and professional courses. The panel further identified a need for rigorous accountability and contended that such accountability was a foundational component of the transformation. In response, many teacher education programs across the nation began examining their own practices and are currently striving to (1) develop or adopt reliable instruments to assess their pre-service teachers' readiness to assume responsibility for their own classrooms, (2) identify and implement needed programmatic changes, and (3) attain meaningful data on the performance of their program completers after one, two, or more years in their own classroom settings in order to inform next steps in the development of teacher education programs.

Thus, rigorous assessment of pre-service and in-service teacher knowledge, pedagogical skills, and impact on classroom student learning dominates the contemporary conversation on education at all levels, from preschool classrooms to university campuses, and educators currently find themselves, their practices, their programs, and their impact on the learning of their students under intense scrutiny. A debate, populated by voices of educators and non-educators alike, currently rages about how to define and assess quality teaching, and once defined and assessed, how to develop it in teacher candidates (Anderson & Stillman, 2011; Ball & Forzan, 2009; Darling Hammond, 2010; Hollins, 2011). As a result assessment is emerging not only as

an integral component of students' lives, but also as a routine component of teachers' lives.

The current issue of the *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction* responds to one of the dominant themes in education today, *pre-service and in-service teacher assessment*, and features five articles, each of which addresses various aspects of that topic.

Invited Article

In "Driving Blind: Why We Need Standardized Performance Assessment in Teacher Education," Peck, Singer-Gabella, Sloan, and Lin (2014) assert the need to implement rigorous, and at times high stakes, standardized performance assessments rather than local, or *home grown*, assessments. They acknowledge the resistance that often accompanies such implementation, but assert that not only do these rigorous evaluations serve as a means of measuring individual teacher candidate performance and provide feedback to faculty from the teacher candidates' programs, they also provide learning opportunities for networks that go beyond particular settings. When these networks, consisting of teacher education programs at multiple institutions, share a standardized form of teacher candidate assessment and the accompanying standardized language, the results of each institution's assessments inform not only their own programs, but also the larger conversation on effective teacher education. Such interactions result in cross-institution conversations that afford all participants access to a broader and deeper understanding of teacher candidate performance and opportunities for meaningful, multi-institution collaboration. By sharing data in this manner, the involved teacher education programs address the call issued by NCATE in *Transforming Teacher Education through Clinical Practice: A National Strategy to Prepare Effective Teachers* (2010) for rigorous, shared data and accountability.

Practitioners Platform

Shaffer (2014) describes the impetus for and development and implementation of a locally constructed teacher candidate instrument in the first article in this section, "When Assessment and Accountability Intersect, Good Things Can Happen." Prompted by feedback from P-12 partners that cited pre-service teacher candidates' assessment skills and practices as an area of need, the teacher education program, with over 1000 teacher candidates, examined their existing course structure to identify how and when assessment was taught. Because the size of their program dictated the need for multiple sections and numerous full-time and adjunct faculty, a lack of consistency, and by extension, accountability, surfaced. In response, the program instituted a new program-wide performance instrument designed to respond to the interplay of assessment and accountability. Shaffer offers a detailed description of the instrument and lessons learned throughout the process of implementing it that have implications for constructing program-responsive local assessment instruments.

In the second article, “Using a Mnemonic Strategy to Match Elements of Response to Intervention Lessons with Performance Assessment Requirements,” Vostal, Messenheimer, Hampton, and Keyes (2014) address the disparity between the requirements of a performance assessment instrument (e.g., edTPA) and the teaching requirements of preservice special educators using a Response to Intervention (RTI) model. Rather than focus on *learning segments* (i.e., three-to-five lessons), intervention specialist candidates in one university program used an author-developed first-letter mnemonic, DESCRIBE IT, to implement an *instructional unit* for students receiving specialized instruction. The authors provide a rationale for the importance of using a systematic approach, and they detail the experience of a preservice candidate in his practicum placement as he planned for, taught, and assessed a student receiving specialized instruction. Within this process, the authors define each sequential step and provide a specific example of it. Then they describe how these steps align with edTPA components. They conclude with implications for using this promising heuristic in addressing the potential mismatch between elements of performance assessments and expectations of intervention delivery.

The third article in this section, “Mapping the Journey of Reform and Assessment for an Elementary Education Teacher Preparation Program,” is a description of an eight-year process within a pre-service undergraduate program. Cuthrell, Stapleton, Bullock, Lys, Smith, and Fogarty (2014) provide an account of revisioning and renovation in their elementary education curriculum based on a needs assessment, data collection and analysis, and implementation of innovative practices. First, they offer an overview of the program and a summary of results of candidate exit surveys and a drill-down research study that indicated target areas to address. Next, they describe four strategies that were incorporated throughout the pre-service program: instructional modules, intern coaching by mentor teachers, guided video observations, and co-teaching with clinical teachers. Concurrent with these innovative practices was the implementation of a teacher performance assessment (edTPA). The authors summarize the process of using this instrument to further guide program improvement. Finally, they provide recommendations and lessons learned through the non-linear and complex journey.

Perspective

In their article, “A New Approach to Educator Preparation Evaluation: Evidence for Continuous Improvement?” Donovan, Ashdown, and Mungai (2014), endorse the need for teacher education programs at institutes of higher education (IHE) to analyze data collected on their program graduates’ effectiveness at various stages of their teaching careers. The authors assert that such data have the capacity to afford programs opportunities to ascertain levels of individual course, internship, and overall program efficacy. After engaging in a close examination of two accountability reports, an institutional feedback report from the Teacher Quality Research Center and a Teacher Preparation Program report from the New York City Department of Education,

the authors identify several specific findings relating to local context, program improvement, clinical practice and school partnerships, and policy implications. They conclude that establishing causal links between teacher performances and program components is a highly complex, but essential, component of program improvement. Further, the authors recommend that evaluation of program graduates' performances can be most effective if viewed across time (from program entry through early career) and through a system perspective that includes the teacher candidates themselves as well as their IHEs, K-12 schools settings, and policy makers. At a time when IHEs are being called upon to reform programs in response to graduates' classroom performances, these authors call into question the kinds of data needed to link graduates' performance to program elements with any degree of specificity.

Final Thoughts

The quality of the teacher is widely trumpeted as the most important element in a student's success (Rand Corporation, 2012); thus, the call for more rigorous and valid means of assessing teachers' efficacy, at both the pre- and in-service levels, is understandable. Just as teachers strive to construct appropriately rigorous and valid measures of their students' knowledge and areas of need, teacher education programs and school systems across the country are engaging in a parallel struggle to identify and implement appropriate means of assessing their teachers. The articles featured in this issue of *JoCI* provide insights into the complexity of assessing teachers who now find themselves sharing a common role with their classroom students: No longer are teachers only the assessors; they are also the assessed.

References

- Anderson, L., & Stillman, J. (2011). Student teaching for a *specialized* view of profession practice? Opportunities to learn in and for urban, high needs schools. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62(5), 446-464. [CrossRef](#)
- Ball, D. L., & Forzani, F. M. (2009). The work of teaching and the challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 60(5), 497-511. [CrossRef](#) [GS Search](#)
- Cuthrell, K. C., Stapleton, J. N., Bullock, A. A., Lys, D. B., Smith, J. J., & Fogarty, E. (2014). Mapping the journey of reform and assessment for an elementary education teacher preparation program. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 8(1), 67-85. doi:10.3776/joci.2014.v8n1p67-85
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2011, November). Address to National Council of Teachers of English Annual Meeting; November 18, 2011; Chicago, IL.

- Donovan, C. B., Ashdown, J. E., & Mungai, A. M. (2014). A new approach to educator preparation evaluation: Evidence for continuous improvement? *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 8(1), 86-110. doi:10.376/joci.2014.v8n1p86-110
- Editorial Projects in Education Research Center. (2011, September 19). Issues A-Z: No Child Left Behind. *Education Week*. Retrieved May 22, 2014 from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/no-child-left-behind/>
- Hollins, E. R. (2011). Teacher preparation for quality teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 62(4), 395-407. [CrossRef](#) [GS Search](#)
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). (2010). *Transforming teacher education through clinical practice: A national strategy to prepare effective teachers*. Washington, D.C. Retrieved May 22, 2014 from <http://www.ncate.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=zzeiB1OogPk%3d&tabid=715>
- Peck, C. A., Singer-Gabella, M., Sloan, T., & Lin, S. (2014). Driving blind: Why we need standardized performance assessment in teacher education. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 8(1), 8-30. doi:10.376/joci.2014.v8n1p8-30
- Rand Corporation. (2012). *Teachers matter: Understanding teachers' impact on student achievement*. Santa Monica, CA: Retrieved May 23, 2014 from http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/corporate_pubs/2012/RAND_CP693z1-2012-09.pdf
- Shaffer, C. (2014). When assessment and accountability intersect, good things can happen. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 8(1), 31-47. doi:10.376/joci.2014.v8n1p31-47
- United States Department of Education. (2014). Race to the Top Fund. Washington, DC; US Department of Education. Retrieved May 23, 2014 from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>
- United States National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A Nation at Risk: The imperative for educational reform: A report to the Nation and the Secretary of Education, United States Department of Education*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html>
- Vostal, B. R., Messenheimer, T., Hampton, D., & Keyes, S. E. (2014). Using a mnemonic strategy to match elements of Response to Intervention lessons with performance assessment requirements. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, 8(1), 48-66. doi:10.376/joci.2014.v8n1p48-66

About the Authors



Sharilyn C. Steadman, PhD, is an assistant professor and program coordinator of English Education in the Department of Literacy Studies, English Education, and History Education in the College of Education at East Carolina University. Her research focuses on pre-service teacher development, effective means of supporting the transition from teacher candidate to classroom teacher, and the use of authentic data to inform program improvement.
E-mail: steadmans@ecu.edu



Chan Evans, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Special Education, Foundations, and Research in the College of Education at East Carolina University. Her research interests include academic and behavioral support for students with emotional/behavioral disorders across educational environments, teachers-as-researchers, and universal design for learning.
E-mail: evansru@ecu.edu