

# A return to local governance of world language teacher preparation is needed

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## Abstract

Given the call by Krashen (2012) and others advocating for shorter, easier to digest research papers, we provide a shorter than usual summary of the World Language edTPA via empirical findings from the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity and researchers in the field. We argue in favor of abandoning the World Language edTPA for manifold reasons in favor of placing world language teacher preparation and subsequent teacher candidate recommendation for certification and licensure where it belongs—in the competent hands of the teacher educators who prepare these individuals.

## Measurement of Teacher Effectiveness

Since the 1960s, teacher education has been both a political and social focus in the United States. Starting with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, United States, 1965) in 1965 (P. L. 89-10), federal legislation emphasized equal access to education while setting high standards for academic performance and demanding accountability from schools and districts within a framework of nine Title government programs (e. g., Title 9). ESEA has been reauthorized approximately every three to five years by each presidential administration, and the Obama administration's reauthorization required states to measure beginning and veteran teacher effectiveness to receive full funding (United States Department of Education, 2009). During the Great Recession (2007-2009), states competed for federal education funding and developed legislation focused on pre-service teacher preparation and licensing / certification standards, underscoring teacher performance and effectiveness at the state level (e. g., Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2014; Illinois State Board of Education, 2012). As part of the funding, states had to require the use of student learning as evidence in teacher evaluation practices (Darling-Hammond, 2012), such as the results of classroom practices having a direct impact on student learning (Goe et al. 2008). Such impact was made visible via teacher performance assessments.

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Teacher performance assessments, such as edTPA, seek to evaluate teacher candidate knowledge, skills, and effectiveness in the classroom. These assessments can provide valuable information to a variety of educationalists such as the people who work directly with teacher candidates, entities like program directors and college of education leadership, and most importantly, to the teacher candidates themselves. With respect to World Languages (WLs), the WL edTPA was developed and has been used as one means to evaluate beginning teacher readiness by assessing three to five lessons created by the individual teacher candidate within three areas or tasks: Planning for Instruction and Assessment, Instructing and Engaging Students in Learning, and Assessing Student Learning. Typically, during their final semester in a teacher preparation program (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2016), teacher candidates embark upon their student teaching residency. During this time, they teach classes and develop an edTPA portfolio. Adhering to strict submission guidelines and submission dates, teacher candidates submit their portfolios along with \$300 to have it assessed.

Teacher candidate performance is evaluated via a digital portfolio that includes extensive written passages and videotaped teaching segments. That is, each teacher candidate, without any assistance from university faculty or their mentor teacher, must write a Context for Learning statement, 3-5 days of consecutive lesson plans (3-5 hours of connected instruction) for one class that include instructional materials, assessments, commentaries to explain and reflect on for each of the three tasks, learner work samples and reflections, and no more than 15 minutes of video (1-2 video unedited clips) in specified tasks (totaling no more than 15 minutes in length, but not less than 3 minutes) (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, SCALE, 2019). There are strict font, margin, page length, and video format (e.g., mp4) requirements that teacher candidates must obey. For example, each lesson plan cannot exceed four pages, instructional materials cannot have more than five additional pages per lesson plan, and citations must be included for materials that the teacher candidate did not create (e.g., websites, materials from other educators).

Moreover, teacher candidates must obtain parental permission in order to film the learners in the classroom during instruction/assessment, which was highly problematic when schools were meeting in person (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2016). Starting in 2020, with the Covid-19 pandemic and the plethora of modes of instruction in effect (e.g., in-person, online, hybrid classes), securing parental permission has been shown to be even more difficult than before (Journell, 2020). The portfolio must be submitted adhering to Pearson's strict schedule. In addition, teacher candidates must submit their portfolio about half way through the semester so that if they do not pass, they have time to revise the portfolio and resubmit before the semester ends. If they do not pass by the time the semester ends, they must start over because the portfolio must be completed with the same group of students (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2016).

The portfolio assessment process is facilitated by the "controversial British-owned testing and publishing conglomerate Pearson" (Journell, 2020, p. 1), where trained evaluators score teacher candidate performance in each of the three areas (discussed later) using 13 standardized rubrics with each rubric ranging from level 1, the lowest, to level 5, the highest. The WL edTPA is aligned with the *World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning* (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) and the *Common Core State Standards* (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). According to Pearson (n. d.), edTPA scorers must possess (1) expertise in the subject matter or developmental level of the teaching field (degree and/or professional

experience), (2) teaching experience in that field (or experience teaching methods courses or supervising student teachers in that field), and (3) experience mentoring or supervising beginning teachers, or administering programs that prepare them. Additionally, reviewers are expected to have worked with teacher candidates in the past five years as well as having National Board certification or a current teaching license in the content area in which they want to score edTPA portfolios. Furthermore, potential reviewers must complete 19-24 hours of online training, which includes scoring practice edTPA portfolios.

### **The Rapid Proliferation of edTPA**

In 2013, New York and Washington became the first two states to require that teacher candidates for state teacher certification take and pass the edTPA (Meuwissen et al., 2016). Once those states officially began using edTPA for initial state certification, other states quickly followed. In 2014, edTPA was in various stages of implementation in 34 states and the District of Columbia (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019). Two years later in 2016, edTPA was in 668 Educator Preparation Programs in 36 states and the District of Columbia participating in edTPA (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2016). In 2017, edTPA was used in 747 teacher education programs across 40 states and the District of Columbia (Swanson & Hildebrandt, 2017). In 2018, it was part of 789 educator preparation programs in 41 states and the District of Columbia (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019). At present, edTPA is in more than 976 Educator Preparation Programs in 41 states and the District of Columbia (American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education, 2021).

### **Investigating the Effectiveness of the WL edTPA**

As its growth accelerated, researchers began to investigate the use of the WL edTPA. In an exploratory study, Hildebrandt and Swanson (2014) reported that teacher candidates in two large WL teacher preparation programs scored higher on Task 1 (Planning for Instruction and Assessment) and Task 2 (Instructing and Engaging Students in Learning) than on Task 3 (Assessing Student Learning). The findings suggested that WL teacher preparation programs needed to add more instructional time on assessment. Then, in an effort to understand more about the communicative nature of the WL edTPA portfolio, Swanson and Hildebrandt (2017) examined five of their high-scoring teacher candidates' portfolios focusing on the communicative learning outcomes they developed for the portfolio with respect to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches. Results from the external reviewers suggested that the portfolios were "outstanding examples of high quality planning and highly effective teaching in the WL context" (p. 342). However, data analysis of the portfolios did not support such a conclusion.

In fact, nearly all of the "lesson plans in the dataset were not logically sequenced, and grammar lessons were inserted haphazardly with newly-learned structures not used for communicative purposes in subsequent activities" (Swanson & Hildebrandt, 2017, p. 342). It was common to find that the students of these teacher candidates were filling out worksheets that simply practiced grammatical forms in a decontextualized manner. Overall, data analysis revealed a frequent lack of adherence to CLT principles and misunderstandings of the three modes of communication. The researchers cited an example in which one teacher candidate had an activity where students developed a conversation, then read it aloud to the class, and had the activity categorized as interpersonal. However, the interpersonal mode is for activities that promote spontaneous communication as well as requiring negotiation of meaning. The presentational mode allows for such rehearsed language. While other discrepancies were reported, concerns about the external reviewers' qualifications were

raised. Swanson and Hildebrandt (2017) noted that based on the incongruity between data analysis and the teacher candidates’ high scores, there are discrepancies between CLT practices taught in methods classes and what reviewers believe are effective practices. Results from the study, perhaps more importantly, call into question the high-stakes nature of the WL edTPA as a required assessment for teacher licensure in many states.

Over the years since edTPA’s inception for teacher certification (i.e. teacher candidates must pass edTPA for certification purposes), mean national composite scores for the WL edTPA have steadily decreased across the nation (SCALE, 2015, 2016a, 2017a) as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Means and standard deviations for total WL edTPA scores for both national and program data.*

2014 National WL edTPA Total Score (N = 416)	40.00	7.73
2015 National WL edTPA Total Score (N = 572)	37.24	7.30
2016 National WL edTPA Total Score (N = 655)	35.94	6.47
2017 National WL edTPA Total Score (N = 747)	35.62	5.70
2018 National WL edTPA Total Score (N = 832)	35.50	5.70
2019 National WL edTPA Total Score (N = 891)	35.75	6.30

However, while the composite scores continued to drop, the number of WL edTPA submissions increased nationally from 416 in 2014 (SCALE, 2015) to 891 in 2019 (SCALE, 2021) as the mean scores dropped and plateaued at approximately 35. Meanwhile, the cut scores that reflect passing scores for individual states have continued to rise. Clearly, there is cause for concern when the national averages continue to fall and stagnate as the cut scores continue to rise. For example, in Tennessee, a state with policy in place mandating edTPA for purposes of teacher licensure, a cut score of 32 was required through 2018 and then increased to 33 in 2019, 35 in 2020 and 36 in 2021 (Tennessee State Board of Education, 2020).

While such findings are startling, scoring discrepancies have caused researchers to investigate the credentials of the external reviewers. As mentioned earlier, scorers must meet specific criteria in order to rate teacher candidate portfolios. Nevertheless, Pearson is not transparent about the demographics of the external reviewers, such as their qualifications, when they were certified to teach languages, whether or not they are fully credentialed educators in the field or did they test in to the subject area, their familiarity with CLT approaches, and their knowledge of the World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning, to mention a few. Hildebrandt and Swanson (2016) reported during informal interviews that external reviewers “were not required or asked to present a demonstration of their planning, instructional, or assessment abilities. They were not asked about their planning for instruction regimen, their ability to teach in the target language 90% of the time at all

levels, or their knowledge of assessment in general or integrated performance assessments in particular” (p. 247). Those interviewed said that they were motivated to become external reviewers in order “to make a little extra spending money” (p. 247). As noted by Meuwissen and Choppin (2015), such an opaque rating process makes people uneasy.

Given the high-stakes nature of the WL edTPA with respect to the certification and licensure of teacher candidates in various states, research has shown that external reviewers rate teacher candidates’ abilities on Rubric 8 (Subject-Specific Pedagogy) the lowest of the 13 rubrics (Beheny, 2016; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2014, 2016, 2019; Ruiz-Funes, 2016), which is corroborated by SCALE (2015, 2016b, 2017a). Such a finding suggests that reviewers may not be up-to-date on two of the five goal areas from the *World-Readiness Standards for Language Learning*, Comparisons and Cultures, when evaluating teacher candidate performance via one 15-minute, unedited video and one prompt of the written instructional commentary.

In order to work with SCALE on a revision of the WL edTPA, a task force sponsored by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages was created in 2015. The content experts had several conversations with members of SCALE regarding the WL edTPA and issues surrounding Rubric 8. Researchers presented data as well as the incongruity of the WL edTPA with CLT approaches and best practices in the field. Unfortunately, even after being “assured that the concerns expressed would be taken into consideration when revising the subsequent WL edTPA handbook” (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019, p. 28), meaningful changes to the WL edTPA never took place.

The lack of collaboration with researchers and teacher preparation program leaders continues to show a serious discrepancy in scoring with respect to the teacher shortage and diversity in the profession. In a study regarding the use of edTPA in general in Georgia, New York, Washington, and Wisconsin, Chang (2021) reported that edTPA is socially, economically and racially inequitable. Citing data from the four states, edTPA reduced new teacher hires by a magnitude between 21.6% and 58.6%, reduced black representation among new hires, mainly in Georgia, reduced the number of graduates majoring in education by 17.8%, and reduced black representation among new teacher graduates in more selective teacher preparation programs. Additionally, Chang reported that edTPA reduced students’ reading and mathematics scores for 4th grade students, it had a negative impact on higher-achieving students, and it lacked significant impacts on the test scores of 8th grade students.

With respect to WLs, Russell and Davidson Devall (2016) reported that the nonnative English speakers in their study had the two lowest composite scores on the assessment, suggesting a bias against those whose first language is not English due to the academic writing that is required. Jourdain (2018) reported similar findings showing that “native/heritage Spanish speakers were less likely to receive a passing score than the portfolios of native English speakers preparing to become Spanish teachers” (p. 97). Unfortunately, such reports are not unique to the WL edTPA as the 2016 edTPA report (SCALE, 2016b) showed that nonnative English speakers performed significantly lower than native English speakers across 29 different disciplines.

Overall, researchers have reported that edTPA deprofessionalizes teacher and teacher education through the encroachment of corporations like Pearson into educational decision-making (Dover et al., 2015; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013). Additionally, others have found that edTPA depersonalizes teaching and teacher education as it diminishes local control of teacher preparation (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013) and teacher candidates’ attention to diversity as they prepare their edTPA portfolios (Au, 2013). Finally, edTPA’s \$300 price tag has been a concern (e. g. Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2016) as more than 40,000

teacher candidates submitted portfolios were expected for official scoring in 2017 (SCALE, 2016a), which created a revenue stream that year of \$12 million for SCALE and Pearson on the backs of teachers.

### **Removing edTPA from Teacher Preparation**

Since its rollout in 2013-14 after two years of pilot testing, as discussed earlier, edTPA proliferated quickly. As it grew in prominence, state leaders who were eager to adopt it as a means to measure teacher effectiveness began to listen to those in the field. Controversy swirled as researchers and others noted that edTPA policy has caused colleges of education to alter their curricula for assessment compliance (Downey, 2020 ). Rather than supporting the development of WL expertise or fostering creative approaches to proficiency-oriented classrooms, it puts preservice teachers in an unpleasant position of relying on others outside the teacher preparation program (e.g., cooperating teachers, school districts) to secure their certification (Journell, 2020). While others have reported edTPA's negative effect on the teacher supply (Chang, 2021; Swanson & Hildebrandt, 2016; Swanson & LeLoup, 2021), research continually shows that edTPA remains a serious barrier to entry to the profession due to the cost (Swanson & Hildebrandt, 2016; Takahama, 2021) while being socially, economically, and racially inequitable (Takahama, 2021). For the aforementioned reasons, and perhaps others, states previously requiring edTPA have begun to reconsider if edTPA should be a state requirement for certification and licensure.

In 2020, Georgia's Professional Standards Commission decided to eliminate the edTPA requirement for teacher candidates. Citing that "critics have long worried that it has forced colleges of education to teach to the test and has pushed aspiring teachers—especially those from marginalized backgrounds—out of the profession" (Will, 2020, p. 1), as well as other factors such a bias against diversity of teacher candidates, the PSC unanimously voted to remove the statewide edTPA requirement even though individual programs could still have candidates take the edTPA for programmatic purposes. A year later in Washington state, state legislators proposed House Bill 1028 that would remove that state standard requiring teaching candidates to pass edTPA (House Bill 1028, 2021). Citing similar issues to those in Georgia and in other states, lawmakers noted that many students in the state were not able to take or pass the test this past year largely due to a key part of edTPA requiring students to film themselves teaching in a classroom, which was hijacked during the COVID-19 lockdown. An amendment to the bill proposed temporarily lifting the edTPA until fall 2022 when schools would most likely open for traditional instruction. However, lawmakers voted against the amendment and in favor of eliminating edTPA as a requirement for certification. Several months ago, state education officials in New York recently proposed to remove edTPA and seek instead "to require teacher preparation programs to come up with a replacement" (Amin, 2021). New York officials stated that edTPA is a "barrier to diversifying the teaching workforce and is exacerbating teacher shortages" (p. 1). Amin noted that "Black test takers were nearly twice as likely to fail the edTPA compared to their white or Hispanic peers (p. 1).

### **Out with the Old and In with a More Effective Tool**

As concerned citizens for the education of America's youth and parents, we are in favor of teacher accountability. However, with respect to our field, the WL edTPA has serious issues, and it has become apparent that SCALE is not interested in listening to experts in the field to revise the assessment in a serious manner. edTPA covers several dozen content areas measuring beginning teacher performance and is present in 976 educator preparation programs nationally



because local control over beginning teacher assessment became outsourced to corporations like Pearson (Au, 2013; Cochran-Smith et al., 2013; Dover et al., 2015; Winerip, 2012). Based on research findings and conversations with SCALE, it has become apparent that edTPA was “designed to answer questions posed by corporate education reformers instead of the questions of teacher educators” (Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013, para. 16). Without a doubt, the testing industrial complex promotes “excessive high-stakes testing, false political narratives about improving education, and the transfer of curricular and financial governance from individual to local, local to state, and state to national/private entities” (Croft et al., 2013, p. 72).

Officials in several states have now realized that edTPA is not an answer to beginning teacher evaluation. Instead, states like New York and Georgia are returning to local control over new teacher preparation and assessment. Before the implementation of the WL edTPA, many, if not all teacher education programs, had developed Teacher Work Samples that were used to evaluate teacher candidate performance during the student teaching semester. The work samples were very similar to what the WL edTPA required yet were more informative. Teacher candidates had to develop lesson plans and assessments for an entire unit of study for the classes they taught, evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction by examining student data from assignments and assessments, and examine videotape recordings of the teacher candidate teaching entire lessons.

Teacher candidates kept a journal and were required to meet with their university supervisor at least four times throughout the semester, although usually they met more frequently. The teacher candidates developed a substantial portfolio without page limits or video length requirements under the mentorship of highly trained content experts. University supervisors utilized carefully constructed rubrics that were aligned with state and national standards as well as CLT approaches to measure the effectiveness of the teacher candidates. Unlike data from SCALE regarding the passing scores on the WL edTPA, university faculty were able to predict the relative prowess of each teacher candidate by examining the score on the work sample.

The following problems with the WL edTPA plague WL teacher preparation:

- edTPA's \$300 cost to have a portfolio reviewed;
- the documented issues relating to diversity (Chang, 2021) and opportunity to enter the teaching ranks;
- the lack of mentorship throughout the development of the teacher candidates' portfolio of teaching excellence and the development of becoming a highly effective teacher;
- the mixed results between edTPA scores and improved student learning (Goldhaber et al. , 2017);
- the deprofessionalization and depersonalization of teachers and teacher education (Dover et al. , 2015);
- the lack of respect for local control of teacher preparation;
- and the lack of transparency about portfolio reviewer qualifications (Swanson & Hildebrandt, 2017).

As a remedy, we call for a return to local control of WL teacher education.

As noted by Hlas (University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire), edTPA's adoption by so many states assumed that our current system was not working and the “solution to this problem is to outsource the teacher licensing process to a for-profit company” (Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2016, p. 179). She further noted that the rigid common architecture for edTPA emanated from mathematics and was not well vetted as an instrument to measure world language

teacher effectiveness. Clearly, outsourcing teacher education to for-profit corporations is a bad idea. An equally poor decision was to allow a teacher candidate's success to hinge on 3-5 days of instruction highlighting 15 minutes of video demonstrating one's effectiveness that is evaluated by reviewers with unknown, up-to-date content expertise.

Teaching is a highly complicated, complex endeavor, and we believe the people who articulate the policies that govern teacher preparation have good intentions. However, as noted by Cochran-Smith (2003), "policies intended to improve teaching quality can only be as good as the underlying conceptions of teaching, learning, and schooling on which they are based" (p. 3). It is evident that many current policies and policy recommendations have been found to share narrow and impoverished notions of teaching and learning that fail to account for educational complexities (Cochran-Smith, 2001, 2003; Earley, 2000; Engel, 2000) as well as the expertise of the individuals entrusted with teacher preparation.

As former high school Spanish teachers who entered higher education to prepare the next generation of WL teachers after several decades of recognized, highly effective language teaching in the classroom, we believe in local control of teacher preparation (i.e., the experts coordinating WL teacher preparation programs). Our colleagues are content experts who are highly skilled teacher educators and outstanding models and mentors for the teacher candidates in their programs. These individuals are knowledgeable, competent, and proficient instructors who take pride and a substantial amount of individualized time to prepare highly effective WL teachers. They should be the ones informing the state certification boards that these individuals are ready to join the teaching profession.

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