

**Society for Music Teacher Education:**

**An Affiliate of the National Association for Music Education**

**Statement on High Stakes Evaluation in Pre-service Music Teacher Education**

On November 11, 2015 the American Educational Research Association (AERA) issued a statement cautioning against the use of value-added models (VAM) for high-stakes decisions regarding educators, adding to previous statements of concern by the American Statistical Association (2014) and numerous researchers (Amrein-Beardsley, 2014; Darling Hammond, Amrein-Beardsley, Haertel, & Rothstein, 2012; Rothstein, 2009). The statement addressed the scientific limitations of these measures for evaluating educators and programs that prepare teachers. Despite these cautions, policy makers continue attempts to evaluate in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, and educator preparation programs by means of rigid, test-score based measures.

Members of the Society for Music Teacher Education (SMTE) echo the chorus of general education scholars disputing the appropriateness and effectiveness of using high-stakes test-based measures and value-added models across the field of education. In this brief, we specifically dispute the practice of applying these evaluation models to pre-service teachers. We begin with specific concerns regarding two of the current models of pre-service teacher evaluation: the EdTPA and the Praxis II. We conclude with a discussion of who should be evaluating pre-service music teachers.

**EdTPA**

EdTPA, or education teacher performance assessment, grew out of work at Stanford's Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE). Based on three tasks (preparation, instruction, and assessment), pre-service teachers submit video clips of their

teaching, and include instructional artifacts and commentaries. Each of the three tasks is scored on a set of rubrics, leading to a numerical score. Currently, 13 states require edTPA as a part of teacher credentialing (edTPA, n.d.), and the assessment is currently being used in more than 668 educator preparation programs in over 36 states and the District of Columbia to evaluate student teacher preparedness for licensure, and/or program effectiveness (edTPA, n.d.).

Scholars have noted numerous problems associated with the edTPA, including issues of cost, privacy, validity, and the narrowing effect that the assessment can introduce to the vital student teaching semester (Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015a, 2015b; Sawchuk, 2013; Soslau, Kotch-Jester, & 2015). In terms of cost, pre-service teachers must pay a fee of \$300, adding to the mounting costs of teacher certification tests and licensure fees. Unclear ownership and access to videos of public school students have invited privacy concerns. Most pressing, though, are the multiple concerns regarding validity. Though edTPA reports tout efforts at ensuring reliability and validity (EdTPA, 2014), and Pearson guarantees its scorers are trained in scoring portfolios, experiences with edTPA tell a different story. For one, Pearson's scorers are hired on a temporary basis, and little is known about the subject-area qualifications of the scorers, who are paid \$75 to grade each portfolio. As we discuss later, scorers should be qualified and have deep knowledge of student's work.

Second, we have validity concerns regarding edTPA's ability to address the complexities of music teaching. In this sense, the edTPA presents the same problems as high-stakes standardized tests do for P-12 students. Standardized assessment rubrics tend to be reductive, ignoring much of the complexity necessary to fully evaluate teacher

performance in the diverse and highly contextual settings in which music teachers work. The edTPA limits the evaluation of music teaching readiness to essentially a writing test and 2-3 short video clips. As a corollary, there is no compelling evidence that success on the edTPA is tied to success as an in-service music teacher. After an extensive examination of the use of edTPA in arts classrooms specifically Parkes and Powell (2014) suggested:

We strongly suggest that the edTPA, especially its use as a high-stakes assessment tied to teacher licensure, be put on hold until research can establish a relationship between successes on the edTPA and “success” as a teacher. If no such relationship can be found (and, as a matter of principle, we doubt that it will), we recommend abandoning the edTPA as a standardized measure of teacher readiness. (p. 111)

### **Praxis II Exam**

Elpus (2015) provided an important profile of scores on the Praxis II, a written teacher certification music content test administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). He reported that 43.28% of all working public school music teachers in the United States have taken the Praxis II music content test. But Elpus’s analysis of scores demonstrates major concerns about the test’s potential biases and potential effects on the makeup of the music teaching profession. Based on his analysis of 20,521 examinees from 2007-2012, Elpus found that Praxis II scores were significantly correlated with race, sex, and other demographics, with White candidates earning significantly higher Praxis II scores than Black candidates, and males earning significantly higher scores than females.

Elpus also address the same predictive validity concerns that Parkes and Powell (2015) raised about the edTPA, stating:

It is presently unknown how, or if, a preservice teacher's performance on a music teacher licensure exam is associated with the likelihood that the preservice teacher will develop into a an effective or a superlative music teacher. Thus, while a music teacher licensure exam requirement for teacher licensure likely does screen out candidates who do not perform well academically in college, it cannot be known whether the exam requirements prevents preservice teachers who otherwise might excel in classroom practice from entering the profession. (p. 19)

### **Who Should Be Evaluating Pre-service Music Educators?**

SMTE supports the principle that authentic assessment of pre-service music teachers must be conducted by those who best know the candidates and are familiar with their work in music classrooms; namely, music teacher educators (MTEs) who have the responsibility for recruiting, preparing and supervising these teacher candidates. Through their work in teaching music education methods classes, placing their students in music field experience settings and student teaching placements, and supervising music student teachers in the schools, MTEs demonstrate their commitment to their students and knowledge of school music programs. We believe that MTE's commitment to and relationship with pre-service teachers spurs more thorough and nuanced evaluation, making this option a clear improvement over "one-off" evaluations from impersonal outside scorers. In addition, MTEs are able to give valuable feedback to pre-service candidates regarding their teaching performance. By contrast, edTPA scorers give no

feedback, only a pass/fail score. We consider these important issues of validity in pre-service music teacher evaluation.

## **Conclusions**

As discussed, we believe that standardized measures of teacher performance, such as edTPA and the Praxis II, lack the flexibility, specificity, and sophistication to capture the complexities of pre-service student learning in music education. To be sure, our solution is not to remove assessments and high standards from teacher preparation. Indeed, one would be hard pressed to find pre-service teachers not engaging in meaningful assessment of content knowledge and teaching proficiency. But the singular privileging of high-stakes licensure test score data is troubling, especially given the concerns over these measures. SMTE believes that music teacher educators are best positioned to evaluate pre-service music teachers and ensure a quality workforce.

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