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## Not So Different After All: Examining the Shift from Oregon Teacher Work Sample Methodology to edTPA

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# Not So Different After All: Examining the Shift from Oregon Teacher Work Sample Methodology to edTPA

## Abstract

Through a comparative analysis, the previous Oregon Teacher Work Sample Methodology utilized to assess preservice educators' competency is compared to the edTPA performance assessment, which formally replaces the later assessment system for newly minted Oregon educators as of the 2018-2019 school year. While Oregon Work Sample Methodology was cutting edge from the 1980s onward, the state legislature adopted edTPA in 2016. Many educators, administrators, and other hiring committees are not familiar with the new assessment system as they hire new educators coming out of state-accredited programs. After a comparison of both assessment systems' components in regards to InTASC standards, it is clear that the edTPA assessment is built off of the foundation that Oregon Work Sample Methodology brought to the teacher preparation field and allows for a level of rigor consistent throughout the nation.

## Keywords

Oregon Teacher Work Sample Methodology, edTPA, teacher assessment, preservice training, teacher candidates

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# Not So Different After All: Examining the Shift from Oregon Teacher Work Sample to edTPA

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*Keywords:* Oregon work sample, edTPA, teacher assessment, preservice teacher

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## **Introduction**

Oregon has a long history of requiring a level of rigor in teacher licensure requirements that has been rarely matched elsewhere in the United States. From being the first state to adopt the National Evaluation Series in 2010 (Pearson, 2010), to strict requirements for reciprocity of teacher licensure, the Teachers Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC) in conjunction with the legislature, has long held a level of expectation that influences policy both in and out of the state. Perhaps never was this more evident than when the Oregon Teacher Work Sample Methodology became the standard for initial teacher licensure requirements in the 1980s. This tool remained the exemplar nationally for nearly thirty years, being referenced by a wide range of stakeholders, such as the National Education Association (2014) and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (n.d.-b).

Nationally normed processes and assessments are not new to Oregon educators. PRAXIS examinations have been the standard for specialty endorsements for decades. The state held on to its Teacher Work Sample Methodology until 2016 when edTPA entered into state law as the initial licensure assessment for all new educators. Not immediately enacted but eased into practice for three-years, new educators graduating this past school year (2018-2019) are the first whose licensure is reliant on passing edTPA. At the precipice of this shift, a cohort of new educators is entering the Oregon workforce with generations of fellow teachers, administrators, and district personnel unfamiliar with their preparation and evaluation entering classrooms. Through this work, the aim is to demystify the shift from the state to a nationally normed assessment process, by bringing forward commonalities between both systems while acknowledging the components that contrast. The foundation of this review lies within the immense influence the Oregon Teacher Work Sample laid for edTPA and should be a source of pride, not rumination, for those in the field in Oregon.

### **History of the Oregon Teacher Work Sample Methodology**

Work Sample Methodology or Teacher Work Sample Methodology is the process from which preservice teacher candidates develop their work sample (Girod, 2002). These work samples serve as a culminating portfolio that demonstrate a preservice educator's ability to plan, instruct, assess, and reflect instruction within the context of the classroom. While the Oregon Teacher Work Sample Methodology served as the state's official process for licensure for 30-years, it had a long history of development within the state prior to implementation. H. Del Schalock joined the staff at Oregon College of Education (now Western Oregon University) in 1960, tasked with research around teacher effectiveness and laid the groundwork for 40-years worth of study that impacted practice both in the state and on the national level (Schalock & Schalock, 2011). The heart of this work culminated in a system of licensure centered on the learning preservice educators were able to facilitate for students in K-12 classrooms. Thus, leading to competency-based teacher preparation.

While Schalock wrote his first published pieces regarding licensure as early as 1979, it took other institutional changes to help make Work Sample Methodology a more applicable approach to assessing new educator effectiveness. The author described "Oregon's adoption of a 'goal-based (a precursor to today's 'standards-based') approach to schooling forced attention by Oregon educators to the outcomes expected from schooling," (Schalock & Schalock, 2011). This began a chain reaction that led to the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission's ultimate decision in 1986 to move toward an evidence-based approach to licensure. Research continued at Western Oregon University to further refine the methodology, partnering with the university's teacher

preparation program and others throughout the nation. A critical refinement was a pivot away from individual lessons and instead toward units of study during the work sample, which allowed a greater scale of student gains to be assessed by the preservice educator's practice.

The Oregon Teacher Work Sample Methodology broke on to the national scene out of a fundamental shift in the public education system both in the state and burgeoning nationally. Facilitated by the 1991 passage of *Oregon's Educational Act for the 21st Century*, the standards movement was further ushered in with the requirement of unified content standards in select grade levels, that eventually expanded to the full K-12 spectrum (Legislative Committee Services, 2014). The standardization of content and expectations for student learning within Oregon classrooms led to a large-scale redesign of the work sample model for teacher licensure, to uphold the demands of the educational reform (Tucker & Stronge, 2005).

### **Shifting to edTPA in Oregon**

Work Sample Methodology was a shift that oriented teacher preparation practices toward deepened alignment with classroom instruction (Tucker & Stronge, 2005). Process-oriented, a candidate would have to complete the following components of the work sample, which were evaluated for competency:

- “1. Description of intended teaching and learning outcomes; 2. Description of the teaching and learning context (school setting, number of students, demographics), 3. Fully developed lesson plans, 4. Pre and post assessment tools, 5. Evidence or data to show student academic growth (pre and post-assessment results), 6. Reflection on the teaching and learning in their unit as well as the next steps for continued candidate learning” (McConney, Schalock, & Schalock, 1998, p. 347).

For each step, evidence in the form of artifacts or written summaries were compiled. These components aimed to depict the instruction and facilitation of the candidate during a three to five-week unit. This teaching, and reflection, took place during the preservice teacher's student teaching placement. Candidates were required to complete a work sample in each area of age authorization they were applying for licensure in (i.e., early childhood/ elementary, elementary/middle, middle/high) as well as any specific endorsement areas that they were adding to initial licensure. University personnel would observe instruction during the unit, and thoroughly assess candidate work samples using a standardized rubric to provide recommendation for licensure. A passing mark was relayed to the Teachers Standard and Practices Commission to allow initial teaching license to be issued, in conjunction with any other license requirements, such as content or basic knowledge exams required at the time of application.

At the time of implementation, the work sample approach had strong validity within the state of Oregon (Tucker & Stronge, 2005) and was often cited in a vast array of publications as an effective approach, “that attempts to link learning to the educational goals being sought,” (p. 39). Organizations like the National Education Association reference the approach, while the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education published texts from leaders of the research at Western Oregon University (Girod, 2002). The method scaffolded early career practitioners to consider the students in front of them and reflect on how instruction did or did not help students make gains toward grade-level standards. The Oregon Teacher Work Sample was one piece of documentation that required potential new teachers to consider the role data has in instructional practice and encouraged reflection (National Education Association, 2014).

In 2013, the tide began to change for the Oregon Teacher Work Sample with the publication of an audit on teacher preparation programs released by the Secretary of State. *Education: Additional Efforts and Resources Needed to Improve Teacher Preparation and Professional Development* (TSPC, 2019). This plan advocated for a transition away from the Oregon specific work sample. While the Commission wrote favorably of the Oregon Work Sample Methodology's ability to showcase teacher candidates, "ability to plan, instruct, and assess K-12 students in a public school setting," (Secretary of State Audits Division, 2013, p. 21), they found it lacked an essential component: independent scoring and verification. The Commission explicitly called out the potential of adopting edTPA as a tool to allow for independent evaluation of candidates. Thus, avoiding potential risks associated with intentional or unintentional bias of university programs evaluating their own students. The same year, edTPA was adopted by the Commission as the assessment system moving forward to provide the state evidence that new candidates had met a standardized expectation for preparation (TSPC, 2019). With the passage of OAR 584-017-1100, it became state law in 2016 (Secretary of State, 2018).

### **edTPA: Not So Different After All**

In adopting the edTPA formally in 2016 and using a gradual implementation model culminating in its requirements for licensure in 2018-2019 (TSPC, 2019), Oregon has rectified the issues of independent verification indicated in the 2013 audit. For many current practitioners, there has been limited communication about what edTPA is and what it requires for teacher candidates. For many practicing teachers, they do not become aware of the changes in licensure until they host a student teacher in their classroom and learn of the components required by edTPA. As a standardized assessment, there seems to be a lack of understanding and potential misconceptions about the type of "test" it is, especially in the climate of a generalized anti-standardized assessment movement prevalent in

Oregon. So what is the edTPA, and how does it differ from the work sample model?

Built by Stanford University faculty and the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE), edTPA was developed to address the same key component Oregon's audit articulated: impartial evaluation of teacher candidates (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], n.d.-b). In partnership with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education and founded in processes like National Boards, the edTPA (formerly the Teacher Performance Assessment) was refined and field-tested with 12,000 teacher candidates (AACTE, n.d.-a.). The assessment itself is markedly similar to the work sample, with candidates developing a portfolio through a three-step process of planning, instruction, and assessment (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, 2013). For each of these indicators, preservice educators must bring in artifacts, including lesson plans, video, instruction commentary, and student work that are assessed by multiple rubrics for each indicator. Candidates are also assessed regarding their analysis of teaching and academic language. Just as the Oregon work sample aimed to assess licensure potential using methods similar to classroom practice, edTPA strives to do the same, having student data be a focal component of evaluation.

Table 1 Oregon Work Sample and edTPA Comparison demonstrates a visual comparison of the Oregon Work Sample Methodology and edTPA components in relation to InTASC core teaching standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013) and other structural components.

**Table 1**  
*Oregon Work Sample and edTPA Comparison*

	Oregon Work Sample Evidence	edTPA Evidence
Instructional Length	3-5 week unit	3-5 lessons
Standard 1: Learning Development	Contextual Factors Lesson Plans Assignments/Student Work	Lesson Plans Academic Language Planning Commentary Assignments/Student Work
Standard 2: Learner Differences	Contextual Factors Lesson Plans	Lesson Plans Academic Language Planning Commentary Assignments/Student Work
Standard 3: Learning Environment	Contextual Factors Lesson Plans	Lesson Plans Academic Language Planning Commentary

	Oregon Work Sample Evidence	edTPA Evidence
Standard 4: Content Knowledge	Learning Outcomes Design for Instruction Lesson Plans	Instruction Commentary Lesson Plans Video
Standard 5: Application of Content	Learning Outcomes Design for Instruction Lesson Plans	Instruction Commentary Lesson Plans Video
Standard 6: Assessment	Assessment Plan Pre & Post Assessment Student Work/Artifacts Analysis of Results Reflection	Samples of Student Work Assessment Commentary Evidence of Feedback Evaluation Criteria Student Self-Reflections
Standard 7: Planning for Instruction	Learning Outcomes Design for Instruction Lesson Plans	Planning Commentary Lesson Plans Video
Standard 8: Instructional Strategies	Design for Instruction Lesson Plans	Planning Commentary Lesson Plans Video
Evaluation Process	Conducted by University Personnel Strong validity within the state States Participating: 1	Impartial evaluators Nationally normed cut scores States Participating: 41

Note: Exemplary Work Sample (Girod & Girod, n.d.) was the main source analyzed for Oregon Work sample column.

The InTASC teaching standards were adopted in Oregon in December of 2011 to comply with the demands of Senate Bill 290 (Oregon Department of Education, 2018). The Professional Responsibility standards (standards 9 and 10) have been explicitly removed from the table comparison, as they are not as applicable to preservice educators due to their short-term involvement in buildings during student teaching. The similarities are marked, with nearly both assessments capturing each component of the InTASC standards, with the starkest differences being in structural components, such as the length of an instructional unit, video component, and evaluation (impartial vs. university personnel).

The other shift between the two assessments that is not as apparent from Table 1 is the demands of the edTPA on academic language (TSPC, 2018). Historically, the learner context in the work sample would have been a place that academic language supports could be addressed, however, the edTPA requires it as part of essential lesson planning. EdTPA demands candidates to consider language needs and ensure that emerging bilingual students or those with limited English proficiency have their needs met through the course of instruction.



### **Implications for Hiring**

Currently, 876 teacher preparation programs throughout the nation use the edTPA as one of their evaluative tools to determine a teacher candidate's preparedness for licensure (AACTE, n.d.-a). Eighteen states have policy or legislation, like Oregon, requiring edTPA at the state level, while 41 states have at least one teacher preparation college utilizing the tool. With this level of participation throughout the nation and the large number of additional programs and states looking into policy for edTPA, results from this evaluative tool are becoming consistent nationally (Bradley, 2017). With the impartial nature of evaluation, a recommended score of 42 (Pearson, 2019) becomes relevant regardless of location or preparation program attended. For Oregon, one of the most relocated to states in the nation currently (Njus, 2018) growing population and potential of teacher shortages are a reality, accentuating the need to be able to recruit new educators from throughout the nation. By adopting an evaluative tool with national norms and impartial review, Oregon districts can now compare potential incoming educators from throughout the country more effectively. This consistency could allow for a potential increase in hiring and ease in the transfer of out-of-state licensure. With the demands of edTPA anchored in planning, instruction, and assessment, a passing score can also give a small glimpse into the components covered in initial teacher preparation, even for hires that did not attend an Oregon based teacher preparation program.

Principals, educators, and other stakeholders engaged in hiring can use edTPA as a baseline of new educator knowledge when reviewing applicants for positions. Is the tool perfect? No. However, it gives hiring teams information from an impartial evaluator on an educator's current understandings in relation to consistent skills, which allows for candidates from in and out of state to be considered on equal terms. With this implication for hiring, it is crucial that in-depth learning takes place about the edTPA by current administrators and licensed educators in Oregon, so they can reflect on the similarities that the completion of a standard assessment necessitates for preservice training of out of state applicants.

### **Findings from the National Field**

While only becoming the an evaluative tool for licensure in Oregon during the 2018-2019 school year, other states have been utilizing edTPA for licensure for multiple years. New York was the second state to mandate edTPA for licensure in 2014 (Kuranishi & Oyler, 2017), and the experience of preservice educators, teacher education preparatory programs, and researchers from this state are beginning to bring forward additional research and reflection on the use of edTPA. The findings from New York, as well as other early adopters, can give Oregon insights into the strengths and limitations of this evaluative tool.

Greenblatt (2019) explored the validity of edTPA's stated goals and objectives in relation to those most effected by the evaluative tool in New York: teacher candidates and preservice teacher educators. Through surveys and interviews, 14 teacher candidates and eight teacher educators reflected on their experience with edTPA concerning what the test creators claimed the tool demonstrates. While a small sample, Greenblatt found consistent results that edTPA may help preservice educators become more reflective of their practice and strengthen data analysis skills. Nevertheless, there were glaring holes where the assessment did not match the real-world experience of these educators. Citing a variety of inconsistencies between stated objectives and experience, the article raises questions in regards to authenticity in instruction, real-world challenges of the classroom, pedagogical methodology, educator confidence, as well as differentiation practices. Preservice teacher educators also found that,

“Regardless of how much schools of education have made changes based on the edTPA, the curriculum is effected because the teacher candidates see edTPA as the priority. As mentioned by participants in the study, certification took precedent over fully engaging in the student teaching placement and their coursework,” (Greenblatt, 2019, p. 84).

Findings such as these bring forward questions concerning the high-stake nature of edTPA. While similar to the Oregon Work Sample Methodology in structure and content, the anonymity of outside scorer brings a different level of accountability and stress than the model previously used in Oregon.

Perhaps one of the most astounding reflections from New York comes from Kuranishi and Oyler (2017) in their piece entitled, *I Failed the edTPA*. Kuranishi was a special education teacher candidate in New York state who did not pass the edTPA on the first attempt, a puzzling development considering his exceptional performance in coursework and student teaching. Using an oral inquiry method, Kuranishi and Oyler, in conjunction with an edTPA trained colleague, examined the rubrics that led to the failing score. While the edTPA scoring expert did confer that one rubric was correctly scored a two, all of the other rubrics should have been passing, in their opinion. The disconnect, the authors speculates, is in the pedagogy within Kuranishi's instruction: universal learning design (UDL). Through the analysis, it appears that Kuranishi was marked lower for not having clear differentiation while his lessons were clearly planned through UDL and inclusive for students. This case study, while examining only one failing edTPA teacher candidate, does continue to raise questions in regard to the type of pedagogy that scorers and perhaps the rubrics themselves elevate. Kuranishi and Oyler also bring up concerns over potential whitewashing of values in regard to literacy and expression, a concern that must be taken seriously. The context of the classroom and students is impossible for a

scorer removed from the setting to fully understand when evaluating edTPA artifacts (Dover & Schultz, 2016) allowing bias to roll-in.

Georgia is another state that has made edTPA statewide policy. They have required a passing edTPA score since 2015 for licensure (Zhou, 2018), and researchers are beginning to examine the effect this policy has had on teacher preparedness. Zhou (2018) conducted a case study of four white first-year educators who had passed the edTPA. All four teachers were in north Georgia and the data was collected over multiple interviews. In the end, two of the four educators had generally successful first years teaching, however, “a high edTPA score does not always translate into a high level of teacher readiness,” (Zhou, 2018, p. 60). The interviews and evaluation scores of these educators seemed to show that mentoring and support from colleagues lead to a more successful first years than the edTPA score they received for initial licensure. This work also brought forward questions about the type of candidate edTPA was designed for and potential for there to be racial biases in the test, or at least in the results that need to be further examined.

### **Lingering Limitations**

Like any assessment, work sample or edTPA, there are limitations to what it can tell licensure and hiring committees. A passing score does not adequately describe the picture of the educator and how they interact with students or colleagues in the context of classrooms or schools. However, both methodologies have fostered a national look at teacher education expectations and, in doing so, ushered the focus to the skill of educators leaving preparatory programs, as opposed to merely the knowledge they acquired. Application is at the core of both assessments, as is student learning.

Even with the strengths of standardization and application for edTPA, there are components of the assessment that warrant serious hesitation. One of the most significant limitations that is pronounced in Table 1 is the length of classroom teaching required. While the Oregon Work Sample Methodology examined three to five weeks of instruction, the edTPA is looking at a micro-unit of instruction. This short duration does not allow for a broader picture of candidates’ formative assessment processes and long-term student learning to be examined effectively. The edTPA process could be refined to allow for more extended units of study to be analyzed, much like the previous methodology in Oregon; however, the impacts to evaluation cost and processing turnaround times may prove to make that type of change prohibitive.

Another glaring concern with this evaluative tool comes from the findings of other states who are further into policy terms with edTPA as their initial licensure requirement. While limited in the scope explored here, there are legitimate questions regarding the type of pedagogy that the edTPA is looking for

in scoring and if it meets the needs of diverse learners. In addition to the instruction it is examining, researchers both in New York and Georgia (Kuranishi & Oylar, 2017; Zhou, 2018) have brought forth questions in regard to potential biases in the test itself for teachers of color. Petchauer et al. (2018) also bring forward the alarming trends of bias in the assessment that are becoming more and more apparent through continued implementation. Their work also questions how the test itself may limit preservice educators from taking on a justice-orientated while teaching. This is a critical concern about edTPA that Oregon needs to be cognizant of as it considers the data it receives in these early years of full implementation.

Oregon is also uniquely poised to collect and compare data between the edTPA and previous Work Sample Methodology to reflect on the current evaluation processes, as well as the effectiveness of teacher preparation practices and programs. While Oregon teacher candidates have been taking the edTPA for three years now, longitudinal data could continue to be collected and analyzed in relation to the thirty years worth of Work Sample Methodology data in the state. This data could be used to reflect on the effectiveness of the shift to edTPA, or to analyze which programs have made critical shifts to their teacher preparation course work to ensure higher licensure rates. It is unknown what trends could come forward from comparing the continued data to the depth of historical data within the state. However, it is worthy of beginning these examinations to best inform policy, practice, and preparation for new educators.

In contrast, Oregon's vast array of work sample data from multiple decades could also be a measure to help analyze the effectiveness of edTPA. While there is potential for the state to examine practice, having a solid foundation of validated methodology in one state can be used as a control set of data, for lack of a better term, for those re-evaluating and refining the edTPA. Extensive research took place to create and vet edTPA nationally. The ability to scrutinize the tool by comparing it to well-established state-level licensure requirements and multiple years of implementation is advantageous to both the creators of the edTPA and states with policy that require it. Questions in regard to pedagogical practice and potential bias could also be examined in relation to previous work sample data, to see if one methodology was more effective or inclusive. In the end, the goal is to best prepare new educators for the demands of modern classrooms and using the data from edTPA as well as what has been collected historically, in states like Oregon, can help improve current preparation and training.

### **Conclusion**

The Oregon Work Sample Methodology is part of the core foundation of edTPA, allowing the state's long held philosophy of classroom application in teacher

preparation to merge with the benefits of a nationally normed assessment system. To current practitioners and administrators who may be unfamiliar with the shift between Oregon Work Sample Methodology and edTPA, lingering questions about how the new evaluation tools measure up against nearly thirty years of collective experience for the current workforce can seem overwhelming. Nevertheless, both assessment tools are markedly similar and edTPA creators even goes as far as to reference Oregon Work Sample Methodology as one of the precursors to the tool itself, which aims to “capture the act of teaching,” (AACTE, n.d-b). In reflection of how the Oregon Work Sample Methodology and edTPA compare, in relation to structure and national norms, it is hoped that educators from throughout the state can see the similar level of rigor that new educators face obtaining licensure is not that different after all.

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