

2013

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Recommended Citation

Jagla, Virginia M.. (2013). Could Newly Mandated Teacher Candidate Evaluations Be Leveraged as a Gateway to Practitioner Research. *i.e.: inquiry in education: Vol. 4: Iss. 2, Article 1*.

Retrieved from: <https://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol4/iss2/1>

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i.e.: inquiry in education is published by the Center for Practitioner Research at the National College of Education, National-Louis University, Chicago, IL.

Could Newly Mandated Teacher Candidate Evaluations Be Leveraged as a Gateway to Practitioner Research?

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In the current age of accountability, many states in the US have adopted the edTPA and other assessments as gatekeeping evaluation to the profession of teaching children from preschool through high school. While much has been written regarding the value of these measures, the inevitability of implementation is certain. My thought is, why not use these “gatekeepers” as “gateways?”

As many of us know, edTPA is a teacher performance assessment to be required in many states as a capstone evaluation which teacher candidates must pass in order to qualify for licensure to teach. This accreditation measure is touted for having been “developed by the profession for the profession.”

The Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity, in partnership with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, led the development of edTPA with collaboration from more than 500 design team members and reviewers from institutions of higher education nationwide. Today, more than 480 institutions of higher education in 33 states plus the District of Columbia participate in edTPA. (edTPA Fact Sheet, p. 2)

This “authentic assessment” compels teacher candidates to examine their own teaching through analysis of their practice. Multiple measures are assessed through the candidate’s written qualitative inquiry based on videotaped lessons, student work, and their own reflection of their teaching. This sounds like action research to me.

Of course, the submitted assessment is scored by teachers and teacher educators who are specifically trained to evaluate this complex measurement. However, preparing candidates for this high stakes assessment is really teaching them to do action research on their burgeoning teaching practice. The main purpose is improvement and further professional development for each teacher candidate.

While many colleges of education, including my own, are scrambling to find the best methods to prepare teacher candidates to pass this high stakes gatekeeping performance assessment, it occurs to me that we need to approach this as a gateway to becoming reflective practitioners. Candidates are trained to collect valuable data and analyze them in worthwhile ways based on

sound teaching and learning theories to discover from their own reflection and improve their performance.

I believe this is what is meant as action research. In this issue, Rademaker provides us with a wonderful review of the Efron and Ravid book, *Action Research in Education: A Practical Guide*, in which the authors tell us how to teach action research to novice teachers. Their emphasis on the literature review fits well with the importance edTPA places on theoretical understanding and effective writing skills.

Willard-Grace and her colleagues examine their own learning in their journey to become health coaches within the world of medical assistant practice. The authors discover that this particular training requires both didactic learning and hands-on practice in order to incorporate the model fully. Additionally, by using participatory action research, the authors feel that they experienced “transformative learning,” and that this learning enabled them to continue to think reflectively on their practice beyond the training, and to help others in the learning process to transform themselves within the desired model of practice.

Ryan explores the idea that Action Research (AR) and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) are related via commitment, examination of self, and ongoing reflective practice. This theoretical essay explores these common facets of the two genres, with the idea that the two concepts together can help pre-service and in-service teachers connect the theoretical with the practical. Ryan states, “AR and the SOTL, while embracing praxis, will allow most studies to clasp the 'whole' culture in a manner that will produce useful professional development outcomes” (p. 11).

Born and Curtis lead us to further understanding of effective assessment strategies for teaching of reading. The authors, a third-grade student teacher and her university faculty mentor, investigate the implementation of recorded readings with third-grade students. Through their study they notice benefits of student-recorded readings for teacher and students. This leads to a reconnection with Retrospective Miscue Analysis (RMA). Since the third-grade students participated in the analysis of their oral reading, they gained understanding of what they needed to do to become fluent readers. As the students reflected upon their reading practice, they learned where they commonly made miscues, how to identify the impact of miscues on their comprehension, and how to make corrections.

Huss and Eastep examine their students’ attitudes and perceptions of learning online. They discover the main issues which are important to their students and use student feedback to strengthen their course design and course delivery. They gathered information about the diversity of online experiences at their university in order to improve as designers and professors of online education. Much can be extrapolated for distance learning environments at other institutions as well.

Shosh provides us with a vivid description of the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA). He explores their dynamic work “across the Americas” and beyond.

References

edTPA. (n.d.). *edTPA fact sheet*. Retrieved from <http://edtpa.aacte.org/about-edtpa>