



Predicting Teaching Performance: Proceed with Caution

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State and federal policy makers continue to promote standardized test-based criteria for weeding out candidates for the teaching profession. The tests used should show a relationship with measures of teaching performance. This study examined five years of assessment data on over 1800 teaching candidates to determine the relationship of standardized test data and grade-point average (GPA) to end of program performance measures. Findings indicated negligible correlations between standardized tests and end of program performance measures. GPA measures were better predictors. Results indicate standardized tests do not relate to later success in teaching and are of questionable help in identifying low-performing candidates.

In an era of continued efforts to impose control on teacher education through application of standards and high-stakes assessments, it seems appropriate to ask what evidence we have for correlations between the tests required and indices of quality teaching. Traditionally, preparation programs have used a combination of assessments throughout the program to assure candidate proficiency. Recent calls for increasing the selectivity of teaching candidates have led to renewed calls for more stringent and often test-based criteria for admission to programs (Auguste, Kihn, & Miller, 2010; Iowa Department of Education, 2012). For these test-based strategies to be successful in weeding out candidates who would not be good teachers, the test scores should show a high degree of relationship with measures of teaching performance.

The standards and accountability movement of the present emphasizes a virtually exclusive focus on outputs and results of teacher education (Cochran-

Smith & Demers, 2008). Teacher education programs have responded by developing performance assessments of teaching that provide very detailed portraits of teaching competence carefully matched to professional standards. A recent review by D'Agostino and Powers (2009) from 123 studies indicated that standardized test scores did not relate strongly to teaching competence. Performance in preparation programs was a significantly better predictor of teaching skill. Additionally, test scores did not seem to provide any additional information to add to the evidence of competence. Similar results were obtained by Kirchner, Evans, and Norman (2010).

On the other hand, Gitomer, Brown, and Bonett (2011) argue that having such test-based admission requirements do a favor for students as passing the basic skills test has a positive relationship with passing tests (paper and pencil) required for licensure. While it is true that paper and pencil tests show a high degree of

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relationship with one another, they fail to demonstrate similar links to actual performance in teaching.

We have five years of data at our university that include state-mandated standardized tests (Praxis I and Praxis II (for elementary majors only) as well as teacher performance assessments and grade point averages that reflect both content mastery as well as proficiency in methods courses leading to student teaching. These data provide a basis for judging the adequacy of both standardized assessments and within program assessments. The questions we asked were:

1. What is the relationship of standardized test data to the end of program performance evaluations of our students?
2. What is the relationship of grade point averages (Total GPA and GPA in the major) and end of program performance evaluations?
3. What are the implications of these relationships for our program and for state policy?

Methodology

Data from 1872 graduates of our teacher education program were used to determine correlations among GPA, Praxis I scores in mathematics, reading and writing, Praxis II (tests 11 and 14), ACT composite scores and outcome measures including Teacher Work Sample (TWS) scores and student teaching composite evaluations. These graduates matriculated between Fall 2005 and Spring 2011.

Results

The correlation between TWS Composite and Major GPA was .21 ($n = 1323$, $p < .001$), a small value. However, the correlations between TWS composite and the teaching-oriented standardized test scores (Praxis II, Tests 11 or 14) were much smaller: (a) Praxis II Test 11, $r = .10$ ($n = 500$, $p = .003$); and (b) Praxis II Test 14, $r = .04$ ($n = 236$, $p = .332$). Our other major teaching performance based assessment, the Student Teaching Composite, also correlated much better with Major GPA than with Praxis II Tests 11 and 14, as shown in Table 1. We take this to mean that the countless assessments that make up grades over several years provide feedback to candidates and faculty that cannot be matched by a single test that has little or no

demonstrable relationship to performance in real classrooms. We also note that these correlations do not reflect those students who elected or were counseled to leave the teaching major.

Discussion

The data collected in this study provide additional quantitative evidence that within program assessments as reflected in GPA have a stronger relationship to two measures of teaching performance than do standardized test scores at the time of entry and at the time of exit. Results suggest a cautionary tale for policies that emphasize additional test based barriers as a means to improve the quality of the teaching force.

We are currently studying ways to strengthen our teacher performance assessment (we are a TPAC state and institution) and extend this performance assessment to the mentoring and induction of new teachers. We are hoping to extent our study of pre-service indicators to assessments collected during the first years of teaching.

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