

The Voice of Teacher Education: Using Impact Data to Tell Our Story

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Introduction

Educator Preparation Programs (EPP) is expected to graduate teacher candidates that are able to demonstrate an immediate positive impact on student achievement. The USDOE defines an effective teacher as one whose students achieve acceptable (1 grade level in an academic year) of student growth (Race to the Top definition). The Florida Department of Education has created a definition for the Beginning Effective Teacher Candidate (BETC). It is one who has sufficient understanding of core research-based instructional strategies and behaviors so there is a high probability of having a positive impact on student learning.

In the United State EPPs apply for state program approval and may also apply for national accreditation. In the state of Florida, an EPP can apply to the Department of Education to have the education program approved by the state when the program is able to demonstrate that it has met the initial teacher program approval standards. This is a peer review process whereby the program submits a folio to the Department of Education for review. The standards include demonstrating program candidate and completer quality, high quality field and clinical preparation, and program effectiveness. The program must describe “how it will assess, monitor, and document candidate’s progress and mastery of the Uniform Core Curriculum (UCC) in coursework and in fieldwork” (Rule 6A-5.066, F.A.C.). The UCC includes the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices, the Competencies and Skill for Teacher Certification, state adopted content standards, scientifically-researched reading instruction, content literacy and mathematical practices, strategies appropriate for instruction for English Language Learners and student with disabilities and school safety. The final summative evaluation of candidates in their final internship (student teaching) must be one of the state approved performance evaluation system that is utilized by the school district. These systems are based on the work of Robert Marzano (2013) and Charlotte Danielson (2011). EPPs are required to remediate candidates on all aspects of the UCC and are also required to remediate program completers for up to two years after graduation as requested by the school districts. The benefit to graduating from a state approved program is that the teacher candidate is qualified for professional teacher certification.

State program approval and national accreditation efforts have required educator preparation programs to gather candidate and completer data and then analyze those data to determine an impact on student achievement. In addition these data will identify areas of improvement and inform decision for continuous program approval and identifying high quality practices. A candidate is defined as an individual who is in the process of completing coursework, fieldwork, and clinical practice. A completer is one who has demonstrated proficiency on the required standards and indicators in both coursework and in the field. In addition, the individual must complete a battery of examinations entitled the Florida Teacher Certification Exams (FTCE). This paper will describe the way one university has designed teacher preparation programs on the undergraduate and graduate program and how it is able to document teacher candidates’ proficiency on state required standards and impact on student learning.

Literature review

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs (NCATE) anticipated the increased accountability of teacher preparation programs, linking the performance of teacher candidates and completers to student outcomes (Harris, Salzman, Frantz, Newsome, & Martin, 2000). However, what assessment variables would be utilized for effectively linking the performance of teachers with student learning outcomes has been a challenge of consideration. In 2012, U.S.

Education Secretary, Arne Duncan, proposed regulations that would require each state to issue report cards for all teacher preparation programs at private and public universities that rated each program in four areas based on how teacher candidates performed after graduation (Layton, 2014). The rating variables included: if the teachers get jobs in their subject field; how long they stay in those jobs; and how their students perform on standardized tests measuring academic achievement. There was a significant reaction to the use of student achievement data as a measure of teacher preparatory programs proficiency, and concern that this variable would prevent graduates from working in poor communities across the country. The regulations were then revised, and final regulations are expected to be released in the fall of 2015.

Critical aspects in supporting accountability related to student outcomes in k-12 settings and teacher preparation programs are well documented in research. Researchers have identified the importance of connections between instructional practice and teacher preparation program components (Amrein-Beardsley, Barnett, Ganesh, & Tirupalavanum, 2013; Harris, Salzman, Frantz, Newsome & Martin, 2000; Sawchuck, 2015; Wilson, 2014). The alignment between core standards, program coursework and field experiences is extremely important in developing assessment of teacher preparation programs and student learning accountability measures.

Core standards, such as the UCC in Florida, embedded in course content; state standards (FEAPs) for effective teacher practice; field work experience and observation of those field work experiences link the importance of reflection and action that support teachers and students in the production of positive learning objectives and goals. Feedback to students in a variety of ways supports the growth of teachers' skills, impacts data collection and analysis, and further supports the goals of increased accountability.

Partnerships between regional school districts and teacher preparatory programs are important to insure that student learning standards are embedded in course content of the university programs. Practitioners use data to drive instructional changes in k-12 settings to improve student outcomes. Similarly, teacher training programs need to be accountable, using data to align course content, field work experiences and feedback to students to improve teacher practice.

Collaborative efforts between schools, school districts and teacher preparatory programs provide benefits to all stakeholders (O'Brien, 2014). Teacher quality and student performance improves when shared competencies are communicated and focused upon.

The FLDOE requires communication between districts and university teacher prep programs, as some data indicators, student specific, must be obtained from the district where the graduate is working. Since there is no uniform data collection used for benchmark assessments in the 67 school districts in the state, building relationships through positive partnerships with districts is helpful. Teachers graduate and may be in any of those districts across the state, so it is important for component districts to have a clear understanding of the measureable outcomes required of university programs to report of program graduates.

Teacher Preparation Programs:

The undergraduate teacher preparation Bachelor of Arts degree programs at the university include Elementary Education (grades K-6) and Middle Grades Education (grades 5 – 9 including concentrations in Science, Social Science, Mathematics, and English). The issue that makes the data delivery and collection a little more complex is the diversity of students and locations related to the program. The middle grades programs and the elementary program are offered at our main campus, located near Tampa, Florida and at nine other locations in northern and central Florida ranging from the Panhandle region to Jacksonville on the Atlantic and south to Ocala in the middle of the state.

Since programs are in a variety of locations, each location has an advisory council made up of local citizens and those professionals who interact with the K-12 educational environment. Meetings of these local subgroups are usually held once a year in the fall. Some meetings have a theme such as student test scores or new program requirements. The important feature of these meetings is the professional and community related feedback that is obtained at these meetings. The feedback and comments are used to improve programs in general or in specific locations. A larger, more diverse advisory committee meets once a year, usually in the spring, at the main campus to further filter concerns and focuses on directions and improvements for the programs.

The University offers a Master of Education program with a specialization in Exceptional Student Education and one in Reading. The Exceptional Student Education program can be an initial certification program or can be a new certification area for teachers with a professional certification. Reading is an advanced degree only.

All teachers in this program already possess a professional teaching certificate. The majority of candidates in the graduate program are teachers with professional certificates. The graduate programs are offered online only through the eCollege platform. The majority of courses are offered in an 8 week format. The practicum and internship courses are 16 weeks in length. Courses are interactive with synchronous and asynchronous instruction.

Teacher Candidate Requirements:

During each semester, there are a variety of evaluative instruments that are used to inform and monitor programs, students, faculty, and curricula. These include syllabi checklist and monitoring; teacher candidate observations, critical task assessments, end of course evaluations, and faculty observations.

Each full-time faculty member in the education department is responsible for at least one education course. The course is developed by the full-time faculty member and a master syllabus is created for each course. There is a syllabus checklist that has been created to make sure all syllabi conform to specific guidelines and contact information related to state approval. All faculty and adjuncts who teach that course are required to use the master syllabus with changes only related to personal contact information and possibly additional assignments. All syllabi are collected at locations and/or university campus to ensure consistency of content and assessment. If there are questions, then the course instructor contacts the faculty member responsible for that specific course. The required state standards required by the Uniform Core Curriculum are embedded within the course syllabi to ensure that the content knowledge for the standards are taught within the courses. Critical tasks were designed to assess the standards. There are master matrices that document where standards are addressed and assessed within coursework and field experiences. The use of master syllabi ensures consistency in course delivery regardless of the platform or location.

Another critical part of each semester is the on-going data collection activities of the teacher candidates both in the field and in coursework. Candidates are assessed on the following standards: Florida Educator Accomplished Practices (FEAPS), Subject Area Standards (Elementary, Middle Grades, Reading and Exceptional Student Education), Reading Endorsement Competencies, and English Speakers of Other Languages standards (ESOL) in addition to the other aspects of the Uniform Core Curriculum. Teacher candidates are in a practicum class for each semester they are in the program with the final experience being student teaching. This is a 15 week, 40 hours a week experience where the students take full control of the learning environment. Students are observed in these experience with a standard lesson observation form and summative instrument that documents proficiency on the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices. The third practicum is where candidates demonstrate proficiency in the English Speak of Other Languages (ESOL) standards. Both the University Supervisor and the Cooperating Teacher observe and document proficiency on these required standards. Candidates in the final practicum, student teaching experience, are also assessed by the performance appraisal system utilized in the school district. For the majority of the students the Marzano or Danielson framework is used. The Department of Education has created a crosswalk of the Marzano and Danielson indicators and the Florida Educator Accomplished Practices. Candidates also demonstrate proficiency in the reading standards in this experience.

In-course assignments are tied to each of the standards and are assessed through critical tasks. There is a standardized scoring rubric for each assignment. Standards are assessed and reported into a data system that documents candidate proficiency on standards. Learning Outcome Manager (LOM) is the platform that is used to aggregate and disaggregate candidate performance on critical tasks and fieldwork. Candidates are rated on a scale of 0-4 with 0 being missing or not evident, 1 being novice, 2 is considered basic, 3 is proficient, and 4 is exceptional. Candidates are required to score at a proficient level. When a candidate is below proficient, the professor works to remediate the candidate. If the candidate is unable to score at a proficient level after remediation, the candidate fails the course and must retake it another semester. This system is used at the graduate and undergraduate level. Data is review by student and by program each semester by the program administrator and the data analyst. Yearly the data is reviewed by the entire faculty to look for patterns and trends for continuous improvement for the program.

Assessment of subject area competencies are assessed by a state administered examination. Score reports are sent to the University. Individual results are used to remediate students who do not attain a passing score. Results for each standard and indicator are reported by the department of education. The data is analyzed by the program administrator and the data analyst each semester and is reported by student and by program across all centers. Yearly the data is analyzed for patterns and trends to use for continuous program improvement.

Candidate Impact on Student Achievement:

Teacher candidates are required to demonstrate an impact on student learning. Each program has the opportunity to define impact on student learning. The elementary and middle school program define impact as follows. Documentation of candidates' impact on K-12 student learning is collected and evaluated by the EDU 481 *Seminar: Final Internship* instructor during the final internship. Final interns are required to plan and implement a curriculum-appropriate mini-unit of instruction for their students with the guidance of their cooperating teacher. The final intern administers and evaluates the results of a suitable pre-assessment. A minimum of three lessons, each necessitating a detailed lesson plan, are developed and executed by the final intern. At the completion of instruction, the final intern administers and analyzes a post-assessment. Each intern creates a data chart based on the results of the pre- and post-assessments. The final intern reflects on the student learning that has taken place and prepares a two-page minimum narrative report which discusses K-12 students' mastery of the objective(s). Inclusion of student work samples is a requirement of this "Impact on Student Learning Project. Candidates are required to remediate students who do not show progress toward mastery between the pre- and post-tests. The assignment criteria require all candidates to successfully document impact on K-12 student learning in order to successfully complete this project and successfully completing this project is a requirement for successfully completing the final internship. ." If the candidate is not able to demonstrate an impact on student learning, the seminar instructor will remediate the candidate and the candidate will be required to repeat the process with new lessons and assessments.

Therefore, 100% of all candidates document an impact on K-12 student learning. Evidence is aggregated to the program level. Candidates in the Reading and Exceptional Student Education practicum course complete a comprehensive reading project demonstrating their impact on K-12 student learning. Candidates are required to work with a group of students with disabilities (SWD) during their practicum. The candidates administer reading assessment to their students at the beginning of the project to determine reading levels as well as proficiency in each strand (phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension). Students have the freedom to choose the reading assessment for the strand that would be appropriate for their students, since candidates were assessing students in different grade levels. An assessment used with a Kindergarten student might be not appropriate for a high school student.

Instruction is planned and provided to address areas of identified concern. At the end of the 16 week practicum, the candidate reflects on student learning that has taken place, and prepares a narrative report identifying strengths and suggestions for growth or revision when working with SWD. Candidates administered assessments in each of the strands at the beginning of the practicum. The impact on student data is based on candidates' reflection and observation of K-12 student improvements. Data revealed that candidates demonstrated a positive impact in all six strands: oral language, phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Another element of this process is faculty observations. All faculty members (graduate and undergraduate) are required to be observed by their chair each year. During the first three years of employment, both the dean and the chair are required to observe. The observations last around one hour and usually take place at the beginning of the class period. Not only are full time faculty observed, but all new adjuncts are observed and continuing adjuncts are observed once every four years. All observations are recorded, sorted, and stored. Faculty who receive poor scores on observations are observed again and/or receive additional training related to inefficiencies. When adjuncts score low and do not show significant improvement, their course clearances are eliminated and they no longer teach in our programs.

Completer Impact Data:

Program completers must also demonstrate impact on P-12 student learning based on student achievement data during the first year of teaching. This state of Florida provides a value added model score based on statewide assessment testing for teachers who teach infield and teach in a grade that is tested with the assessment test. This score indicates the impact of the teacher on the student's performance on the assessment test. It is expected that the student will have one year of growth over last year. This score considers many factors and determines if the teacher had an impact on the score. A score of 0 indicates that the student performed as would be expected so the teacher did not have an impact. A score above 0 indicates the teacher had a positive impact on student learning. A negative score would indicate the teacher had a deleterious impact on student' learning. These results are provided to the university by the Department of Education. Limited data has been reported over the past two years.

There are little difference among the scores so it is difficult to use these data for continuous program improvement. The University is setting up partnerships with the districts where the program completers are teaching to gather student data on benchmark testing. Benchmark testing is done a minimum of three times a year to determine students' needs on the required K-12 Florida standards. Because this testing occurs over time, it is expected that this would be a better measure of teacher impact. The statewide assessment is completed by students each spring.

End of Course Evaluations:

All courses at the university require a student end of course evaluation. These are distributed in paper form to students during their final class of the term. These evaluation forms are collected, sealed and directed to the Office of Assessment where they are recorded and summarized. By the middle of the next term, faculty members receive their end of course evaluation from the previous term. The Dean and the department chair also receive these reports. With the reports sent to the administrators, an analysis is included that calculates the grade distributions in the courses as well as the students' evaluation of the professor.

Survey data:

Graduating students at all locations are surveyed for their comments and scoring of their educational experiences as well as for their suggestions leading to program improvement. This data has been extremely valuable. For example, for several years, students indicated that they did not feel accomplished or comfortable in using instructional technology. The university and the department wrote grants, received funds and established two 21st Century Classrooms with the technology common in K-12 schools today and in the future. The classrooms are equipped with iPads, iPods, Smartboards, clickers, and a variety of other hardware and software to improve learning. Students are not the only ones who have benefited from this initiative. This past summer, teachers in local school districts were invited to attend a summer seminar that showed them how to use the latest technology for instruction.

After students are hired, principals are surveyed regarding our students and their performance in the classroom in relation to the Uniform Core Curriculum. Principals rate our students in comparison with other teachers in the school. If our students do not rate successfully, then the university is responsible for remediating the student and bringing him/her up to the standards expected by the principal. We have never had to remediate a graduate, but a plan is in place if we were called upon to do so. Our students are successful teachers and we are very proud of their accomplishments in the workplace.

The Department of Education will be implementing six key metrics to create the Annual Program Performance Report (APPR) which will measure the effectiveness of Educator Preparation Programs in the state. The metrics are: placement of completer in a public or private Florida school, retention rate of program completers, student learning growth of PK-12 students performance on statewide assessments, student performance by subgroups (White, African American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, free/reduced lunch, student with disabilities, and English Language Learners), results of completer's performance evaluation, and an increase in the number of completers in critical shortage areas (bonus only). The scores achieved on the APPR will contribute 50% to the overall continued approval process. These metrics are required in Florida statute and state board rule.

How is all this data used to make decisions? One university in the state reported that it felt like they were drowning in a sea of data. Individual data elements were given to department chair and program administrators to review. It was expected that they would share the results with the faculty. This led to fragmented decision making. The faculty was being reactive instead of practice based on the most recent data presented to them. The University hired a data analyst who initially worked with the Associate Dean responsible for program approval to develop systems to collect the required data. This individual created an annual program data report of all data collected over a three year period. The data included but was not limited to: number of students admitted, enrolled and completed, status of students admitted with a waiver, graduation rate, results of the Florida Teacher Certification Examinations reported to the indicator level, impact data, employment data, Value added model (VAM) data, and survey data. This data is reported on a program level. A new process is in development whereby the analyst tracks the progress of individual students in each program using these data and continues to track their success after completion into the field. The fields added include VAM data as a teacher, impact data as a teacher, and annual performance evaluation rating. These data are reviewed annually to look for patterns and trends over time to support continuous program approval.

Conclusion:

The data collection process and analysis help to inform curricula changes, enhancements, assessments, and modifications. The process also compels us to notice and report the actualization of improvements over a period of time and/or supplies the evidence that improvements have not accomplished the desired tasks or metrics.

The amount of data collected can be staggering unless it is structured and formatted in ways that accommodate programs, faculty, candidates, completers, and conform to state mandated requirements. The data may stand alone in separate configurations, but through the analysis process, data must be compared in ways that add dimension and depth.

Reporting of the impact data requires stakeholder involvement and is critical to the analysis process. Student learning outcomes of completers in their first year of teaching is a vital component of data gathering and reflects on the university's effectiveness as well as determines continuous program approval. A noted area of concern is faculty development as it relates to data analysis. Teaching faculty how to acquire and analyze the data is also an important element in the process of continuous improvement. In some circumstances, faculty, and part-time faculty are not aware of the critical nature of data reporting, data aggregation, and analysis.

While it is critical to identify state and federal requirements as they relate to excellence in teacher preparation programs, the partnership with practitioners demands a higher level of communication and cooperation than previously required. University program faculty and practitioners must be able to communicate on an ongoing basis. Systems of communication and collaboration must be developed and maintained in order to meet the rigorous standards of data analysis and reporting, as success for completers impacts approval for university teacher preparatory programs, teachers in schools, and most importantly, positive student learning outcomes.

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