

Section I Introduction

**Performance Assessments and Competency-based Teacher Preparation
in Content Area Literacy and English Language Arts Instruction
for 7-12 Educators in Connecticut**

FINAL REPORT

Introduction

Project Overview

On both the national and state level teacher candidates are now expected to demonstrate competencies in what they know and what they can do through performance-based measures rather than the completion of specific credit-bearing courses. Teacher preparation programs seeking national and state accreditation, therefore, are now required to show how their pre-service teacher candidates demonstrate specific knowledge, pedagogical, and dispositional competencies. Programs seeking accreditation must clearly articulate how they assess candidate performance according to these new standards.

Through funding from the Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement Grant our workgroup was formed to create performance-based assessments for pre-service teacher candidates in secondary English Language Arts certification programs. This project started two years ago with the goal (as noted in our proposal) of creating:

“a research-based curriculum model that has two components: a description of the competencies for teacher preparation in content literacy and English language arts and a set of rubrics for evaluating the performance of pre-service teachers in these areas. This curriculum model will be descriptive in nature, indicating the depth and breadth for the preparation of teachers. A goal of this project is to describe competencies in alignment with the current competencies delineated by the learned societies in literacy and the English language arts, specifically the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA), and with the standards delineated by national accrediting agencies, such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC)... In addition, this project aims to develop a model in alignment with the Connecticut BEST program so that

the preparation of Connecticut teachers may be viewed on a continuum, indicating the competencies of teachers new to the profession but successful in their completion of their university-level preparation.” A copy of our full proposal is in Appendix A of this report.

Midway throughout our project, however, this goal shifted from a global to a local and much more specific perspective in order to address new performance-based standards and NCATE’s requirements of a unit assessment system for teacher preparation programs. Instead of developing a curriculum model (the global perspective), our work shifted to the development of one performance-based assessment task (the local perspective) as an exemplar for assessing pre-service teacher candidates at one point in their Secondary English Language Arts certification program. (See Appendix A for proposal modifications.) In keeping with the intent of our original proposal, however, our goal of aligning our work with relevant professional standards did not change, specifically those of the relevant learned societies and Connecticut’s BEST program.

Included in this proposal change was the shift to focus our work on the competencies, performance assessment task, and accompanying rubric solely for candidates in the Secondary English Language Arts (7-12) program and not on the English Language Arts competencies for secondary-level teacher candidates in the content areas. Although we had much discussion about the language and literacy commonalities that cross all content areas, due to the scope and timeline of our project, we focused on the secondary English teacher candidate. Therefore, several questions outside the scope of this project still remain: What are the candidate competencies in teaching literacy in content area secondary school classrooms? How are these competencies similar to the competencies in teaching secondary-level English? How are they unique and different? What would be an appropriate teacher candidate performance-based assessment in teaching literacy across the content areas? The significance of these questions is that if one takes the perspective that the improvement of student literacy processes is a shared responsibility among all teachers, then candidates in all content areas need to demonstrate competency in the teaching of language and literacy. Unanswered questions are related to the depth and breadth of candidate knowledge, skills, and dispositions for content area literacy instruction and assessment. These questions could fuel further research.

Deliverables

Our workgroup completed three major deliverables, all of which are included

in the Appendix of this report:

- *Literature Review*

The approach of our workgroup was first to conduct a literature review about performance-based assessments for Secondary English Language Arts programs so that we would inform our work with current research. Included in this literature search was a review of research about the broader issues of performance-based assessment of teacher candidates. Our literature review also included a review of competencies and standards from the learned societies, from Connecticut, from the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). A specific review was for the standards in Reading (the International Reading Association) and the English Language Arts (National Council of Teachers of English).

- *Competencies in English Language Arts*

Based on our literature search we discussed the competencies for Secondary English Language Arts candidates. The consensus of our workgroup was that since the English Language Arts program reviews were conducted through the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) our competencies should be aligned with the NCTE competencies. However, since the NCTE standards also address program standards, our consensus was to use the standards descriptive of candidate knowledge, pedagogy, and dispositions. Furthermore, our consensus was to use a "Short Version" of the standards which summarized candidate performance.

- *Performance Assessment*

Based on our literature review and our discussion of candidate competencies we selected the "gate" prior to student teaching as the point for assessing candidate performance. Through several iterations of pilot testing, we designed a performance task, created a rubric for assessing candidate performance, and selected anchor sets for the rubric. Included in our discussions were materials we developed to review the validity, reliability, and other test characteristics of the assessment.

We decided to focus on the analysis of student writing since it is paramount for an English teacher to know how to analyze student writing, to know how to provide feedback to the student for improving his/her writing performance, and to

know how to design appropriate instruction. We also decided to align our work with what is expected of students in Connecticut classrooms, as evident by the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). It is our belief that teacher candidates in Connecticut need to demonstrate that they are knowledgeable about the CAPT as well as strategies for improving student performance in responding to literature. As noted on the CAPT, 2nd Generation (which is the form we used) students are expected to know how to read and respond to literature, demonstrating that they have a basic understanding of the story, that they can develop an interpretation, that they make connections of the story with their own experiences, and that they can take a critical stance. Students are also expected to make thoughtful judgments about the literary quality of the story and write well-organized, well-supported, fluent responses. Our assessment task focused on the most complex response: making a critical stance. Our final version of the assessment requires teacher candidates to read two student samples, provide feedback, and generate appropriate instructional strategies for making a critical stance.

Project Members and Collaborative Efforts

As a state-wide effort, our workgroup comprised educators throughout the state in both public and private university settings, in 5-12 school settings, from the Connecticut State Department of Education, and from the university-level Reading and Language Arts Think Tank, from the Connecticut Association of Reading Research. (A list of all project participants is in the front of this report.) Included in this group were those who had expertise in the field of PK-12 Reading and Language Arts as well as in 7-12 Secondary English; in addition to university professors who taught in those programs, we had a secondary English department chair, director of a teacher preparation program, reading and language arts consultants, and the curriculum specialists in Language Arts from the State Department of Education. In addition, due to the involvement of the specialists from the State Department of Education, we were informed of the CAPT and the BEST programs. This representation was integral to the process of creating an assessment with high content validity.

The project spanned two years and was completed in two phases, each with membership for different purposes. During the first phase of the project, which included a review of the literature, a discussion of the competencies, and an initial draft of the performance task, we met for a total of ten large group meetings; teams of members formed in sub-committee for smaller group meetings to complete and

discuss specific sections of the literature review. During the second phase of the project the focus was on the refinement of the performance task, the piloting of the assessment, and the creation and revision of the accompanying rubric with anchor sets. The membership during this phase was specific to the pilot assessment. Our workgroup met for several "retreat-style" meetings for discussion of the task and rubric. The administrators of the pilot assessment met in sub-committee to discuss the protocols for the data collection.

Included in this Appendix of this report are the meeting agendas, as well as meeting materials. The following section contains the assessment task, rubric, and revisions to these materials.