



A Status Report on the Implementation of the Dance Entry Level Teacher Assessment (DELTA)

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Dance is the only art form for which there is no national entry-level teaching examination, comparable to the Praxis II, that serves as a gateway for dance certification and measure of subject-matter competency (similar to the exams administered by Education Testing Service for music, theater, and visual art). A major ramification of the absence of a teacher readiness assessment is that without it, states have difficulty determining baseline competencies, and they have no means of attesting to the abilities of individual teachers seeking dance certification. In some states, the absence of a means of verifying teachers' pedagogic content knowledge, the intersection between requisite content knowledge and application (Shulman 1987), is a barrier to dance licensure. 10

To complicate matters, licensure decisions are the purview of individual state departments of education. Furthermore, each state has its unique sets of procedures, its own sets of standards, and in some instances multiple pathways to certification, all of varying quality (Darling-Hammond 2001). It is not surprising then, that there is tremendous variability in content focus among the 57 colleges that offer teacher preparation programs leading to K–12 teacher dance certification throughout the country. 15 20

These circumstances led to the creation of the Dance Entry Level Teacher Assessment (DELTA) from 2012 to 2015. Funded by two successive grants from the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), DELTA is a collaborative endeavor between the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) and the State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education (SEADAE) to codify crucial pedagogic content knowledge in dance education with the intent of inculcating commonly held values into the nation's dance teacher preparation programs. The intent of DELTA is to serve as one measure of allowable proof of subject-matter competency. DELTA is not envisioned to supplant other measures of readiness such as portfolio reviews. 25 30

It is the belief of NDEO and SEADAE that widespread adoption of a national entry-level teacher readiness examination will begin to ameliorate some of the current disparities in dance teacher preparation (Schmid 2015). Additionally, by attaining more commonality of instruction across programs organized by big ideas, the likelihood is increased that newly entering K–12 dance educators will be well-informed in the artistic processes of creating, performing, and critically analyzing works of art (NDEO 2011a). DELTA represents a first step toward reaching national consensus on crucial fundamental skills for beginning dance teachers. 35 40

Ultimately, greater parity of content focus in dance education preparation programs throughout the country will be advantageous to beginning dance teachers as they seek entry-level teaching positions wherever they might arise.

DELTA'S GOALS

The broad goals of DELTA are to empower new dance educators to do the following:

1. Understand the content, skills, and knowledge students are expected to know and be able to do as set forth in the National Standards for Dance Education (National Dance Association 1994), the Standards for Learning and Teaching Dance in the Arts: Ages 5–18 (NDEO 2005b), and the National Core Arts Standards 2015 (National Coalition for Core Arts Standards n.d.);
2. Discern how students develop content, skills, and knowledge in dance in a developmentally appropriate manner;
3. Know industry standards for learning and teaching dance (including dance content, education theory, practice, and methodology) as set forth in The Professional Teaching Standards for Dance Arts (NDEO 2005a), which were developed by NDEO in cooperation with the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS n.d.);
4. Measure knowledge and skills as a means of engaging students and informing teaching and learning in a manner consistent with national standards (NDEO 2011a, 2011b; National Coalition for Core Arts Standards n.d.);
5. Function as reflective practitioners driven by self-knowledge of pedagogic strengths and weaknesses;
6. Embrace lifelong learning and a commitment to continuous improvement.

THE OPERATIONALIZED EXAM

The operationalized form of DELTA is composed of the highest functioning items from previous field tests and field trials. Based on the analysis of field test data, there is solid evidence to indicate that DELTA is a coherent, valid, and

reliable instrument for measuring pedagogic content knowledge in dance, as a demonstration of subject-matter competency.

As of the publication of this article, Maine has already passed legislation mandating DELTA, and SEADAE continues to motivate other state education agency licensing divisions to support DELTA's adoption or endorsement as a nationally recognized, valid measure of teacher readiness for entry-level K–12 public school dance educators. Currently, SEADAE is in dialogue with its representatives from seven states (Nebraska, New Jersey, Maryland, Missouri, Colorado, Utah, and Georgia) who expressed strong interest in pursuing the adoption or endorsement of DELTA in a recent SEADAE poll. Other states that have expressed moderate interest include Arkansas, Idaho, New Hampshire, Delaware, Florida, and Indiana.

From among these 14 states, NDEO and SEADAE are endeavoring to stage the first administration of DELTA in May 2018. NDEO and SEADAE are also exploring several models by which DELTA can be institutionalized, buoyed by the potential of online courses through NDEO's Online Professional Development Institute, and SEADAE's virtual education platform, Pepper.

For more information on DELTA, including its technical specifications or how you or your college or university can participate in DELTA, contact Dr. Dale Schmid, NDEO Past President and DELTA Project Manager, at dale.schmid@doe.state.nj.us.

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