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Dance Entry Level Teacher Assessment (DELTA) One Institution's Perspective

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PREFACE

The Dance Entry Level Teacher's Assessment (DELTA) is a collaborative endeavor between the National Dance Education Organization (NDEO) and the State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education (SEADAE). Funded by two successive grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the intent of DELTA is to codify crucial pedagogic content knowledge in dance education to ensure that beginning dance teachers have the requisite knowledge and skills for successful entry into the nation's public schools. DELTA serves as one measure of allowable proof of subject-matter competency and is not designed to supplant other measures of readiness such as portfolio reviews. The vision for DELTA is that it becomes both a gateway to dance licensure and mechanism for ongoing programmatic improvement of preservice education.

—Dale Schmid, EdD, DELTA Project Director

After teaching dance in a K–12 setting for 15 years, I had an opportunity to make a career shift to higher education. The opportunity placed me into a position leading the dance education program of my alma mater, Hope College, in Holland, Michigan. Following years of practical teaching and application, the idea of sharing my knowledge, understanding, research, and experience of working in the field to prepare future educators for a career in dance education was exciting. At the point of entering the job, numerous changes in dance education were taking place throughout the state. Michigan was, and continues to be, experiencing many changes in its certification and endorsement programs. In addition, a change of leadership in Hope's dance department and faculty was occurring. With the many changes taking place, this opened the door for me to identify strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum. My first goal as director for dance education was to evaluate the current program and its effectiveness. Was the existing model, content, and experience provided to students relevant and rigorous enough for the changing field of dance education? As an alumna of the program, I could attest to the strength and preparation of the program, yet I knew that it was important to assess it from a new perspective. Assuring that students were entering the field with multifaceted comprehension and understanding of content knowledge, along with authentic practical experiences, was a priority.

Fortunately, early on in the program evaluation process, we had the opportunity to participate in the DELTA pilot program. Initially, having my students participate in the DELTA pilot seemed like a big undertaking, coupled with my concern that the DELTA assessment could conceivably unveil gaps requiring a complete overhaul of our program. I decided to dive in, knowing the probable future benefits. Throughout the process of learning about the document and the proposed conceptual framework, I quickly recognized the potential benefits of DELTA to our program. Although our teacher readiness program was quite effective, based on the national consensus of what

entry-level teachers should be able to do when entering the field, the program had the potential to be much stronger. As I examined our program more closely, I was intrigued to identify potential gaps and make connections to both state and national baseline expectations. For me, DELTA and all of its parts served as a gateway to evaluate, redesign, and measure competency for the teaching readiness of our dance education students.

As a state, Michigan has its own set of standards for teaching dance and has a state licensure exam. Therefore, I questioned including DELTA as one of the students' indicators for teacher readiness. My investigation of the two assessments revealed the DELTA model presented far more thorough and applicable measurements of what I considered as the baseline competencies necessary for students seeking certification. From this point forward, my course of action was to compare the required state content/guidelines standard matrix with DELTA's conceptual framework. There were many similarities between the two documents, but the DELTA Assessment Overview and Conceptual Framework facilitated data-driven efforts to reshape the teacher preparation program for dance education students, which Michigan's did not. Using the framework to create a consistent, authentic representation of the pedagogic content knowledge (PCK) created influential ways of thinking and teaching necessary for students to ensure competency for entry-level teaching positions. The criterion-referenced assessment developed through a national consensus of leaders in the field presented a realistic expectation of what beginning dance educators should know. Additionally, knowing that DELTA actually tests what it states will be tested sets a standard for true indicators of what students know.

You might be wondering, why we should go through the effort and work if we already have a solid, accredited program with a 100 percent student passing rate for state certification? The idea that resonated over and over with me was that DELTA provided an opportunity to reshape the teacher preparation program, which was different than simply ensuring that my students could pass the test. As stated earlier, the current dance education

program was great, but I wanted it to be top notch, representing a model in which students would confidently be prepared to pursue the diverse and mobile field of dance education. This seemed essential because many of the students in Hope's dance education program leave Michigan to pursue positions across the United States. Many states have reciprocity agreements, where students can gain certification by passing the state's licensure exam. With the tremendous amount of variability in content focus in K-12 dance teacher preparation programs leading to certification, DELTA offers a strong, cohesive, unified body of knowledge that can ground any program.

The contents of DELTA include three domains of knowledge, which were similar to those of Michigan's requirements; but the breadth of DELTA and exposure to the domains represented a true indicator of competency for students. One beneficial component within the document was the aspect of alignment with the National Core Arts Standards Artistic Processes: creating, performing, responding, and connecting, which I was concurrently using in conjunction with state standards. The composition of DELTA's individual items and item clusters empowered me to shift my instruction and assessment. This document was used to guide my own practice and partnership with students with deep reflection and guidance. This journey has been fruitful and informative on many levels. Over the course of the next few years the ongoing plan is to use DELTA for programmatic development and improvement.

I would highly encourage university dance teacher preparation programs to embrace DELTA, as it is a reliable and valid framework based on a national consensus of baseline competencies. Using DELTA as a tool for continuous improvement of program success opens doors for students to entry-level pedagogy preparedness.

For additional information on—or questions about—DELTA, contact Dr. Dale Schmid, NDEO Past President and DELTA Project Director, at dale.schmid@doe.nj.gov; DELTA@NDEO.org.