ETHICAL TEACHER CANDIDATE SUPPORT FOR HIGH STAKES LICENSURE ASSESSMENT

MOODY, CHERYLYNN JODY
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
TEXAS A/M SAN ANTONIO
SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

CONWAY, NADJA
DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING
LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Dr. Cherylynn Jody Moody
College of Education and Human Development
Texas A&M San Antonio
San Antonio, Texas

Mrs. Nadja Conway
Department of Teaching and Learning
Loyola Marymount University
Los Angeles, California

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Synopsis:

How can we support and mentor teacher education candidates within ethical guidelines for high stakes consequential assessments, i.e., the edTPA? This discussion will include: creating formative experiences, connecting fieldwork and coursework experiences, building strategies for organizing portfolios, graphic organizers, and retake counseling. You will be provided supports for your candidates who are taking the edTPA.

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ABSTRACT

Educator Preparation Programs balance supporting teacher candidates with high stakes licensure assessments that are consequential for credentialing. Mentoring and supporting teacher education candidates within ethical guidelines for high stakes consequential assessments, specifically the edTPA, for licensure, may include creating formative experiences, connecting fieldwork and coursework experiences, building strategies for organizing portfolios, using graphic organizers, and retake strategies.

Teaching to the Tests and Teaching Teachers: The Delicate Balance
As more consequential teacher education assessments serve as gatekeepers for state licensure, institutions of higher education are facing key ethical questions and dilemmas: teaching to the test, ethical coaching of candidates, and retake strategies. How can schools of education in states where edTPA or other consequential teacher licensure exams create environments that are supportive and comprehensive, yet are not crossing ethical boundaries?

Setting the Stage

"Teaching to the test," words of accusation, fear and misnomer, are shunned by schools and colleges of education across the landscape of higher education. Many EPPs (Educator Preparation Programs) wish they were in an environment where teacher efficacy is easily measured and yet not standardized since just like every student, not every teacher is alike. With all the different types of high stakes assessments for teachers, from content based to performance assessments, most are contingent on the state mandated requirements of a passing score which are often consequential for licensure. Specifically for the teacher candidate, without a passing score, no credential will be issued even if course and fieldwork at an EPP have been completed and passed. Content exams such the California Basic Educational Skills Test (CBEST) and California Subject Examination for Teachers (CSET) require candidates to pass a content and basic skills assessment with a passing score, similar to Texas' Content Exams (TExES) for all teacher licensure areas. Many states such as California and soon to be Texas require a high-stakes teacher performance assessment (HSTPA) for licensure as well, most commonly the edTPA or another state issued teacher performance assessment i.e., in California, the CalTPA.

edTPA Minimum Scores

In 2014, California, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) approved the edTPA with a specific cut or minimum score be mandatory for teacher licensure. The California minimum also known as cut scores are as follows (they differ from state to state):

- 18 rubric portfolios (Elementary Education Literacy with Mathematics Task 4 and Elementary Education Mathematics with Literacy Task 4): 49
- 15 rubric portfolios (all Secondary and Education Specialist except World Languages): 41
- 13 rubric portfolios (World Languages): 35

Note, up to 2022, California had the highest minimum score in the nation, which now has been surpassed by Tennessee with one point higher across all areas. In addition to the edTPA, California EPP's can choose another teacher performance assessment option, the CalTPA, which has a similar rigorous minimum score for passage.

In Texas, the Texas Education Agency, TEA, has yet to determine minimum scores, as the edTPA has yet to be voted on as consequential for licensure; the vote will take place in June 2022. The minimum score will be set if all goes through with a passing vote, 2024.

Other High Stakes Assessments

In addition to the HSTPA requirement, in California all elementary (Multiple Subjects) credential candidates and education specialists must also pass the RICA, Reading Instruction Competence Assessment. According to RICA Specifications (2009), it was designed to ensure all multiple subject teachers and education specialists are able "develop competent, thoughtful readers who are able to use, interpret, and appreciate all types of text." (para 1) In Texas, a similar exam is required, the Science of Teaching Reading exam for EC6 (early childhood to sixth grade) teacher candidates, which was recently according to TEA (2022), "passed during the 86th Texas Legislature, established the requirement that all teacher candidates who teach students in grades Pre-K-6 demonstrate proficiency in the science of teaching reading on a new, standalone certification exam." (para 1)

High Stakes for Educator Preparation Programs
According to Goodman & et al., (2008) universities are held accountable for how their candidates perform on the state mandated assessments, especially in the two states, Texas and California. If candidates fail to meet the passing rates of the exam(s) then the programs are called into question, especially around accreditation from their state agencies. "The inevitable result of this practice is that, to survive, teacher education programs must adjust their curriculum to prepare teacher candidates to pass the test." (p. 27) How do these adjustments reflect the teacher's "real world" preparation for teaching in California and Texas?

Teaching to the Test?
So with this comes teaching *to the test* or accusations thereof both in and out of the EPP world. Yet in the same breath, how do states accrediting bodies and EPPs measure the art and science of teaching? According to Larson, (2012) "teaching cannot be broken down into separate components and standardized. To do so would scrutinize the teacher's professionalism and authority." (p. 14) As professors and program faculty who support teacher candidates and high stakes assessments in fieldwork and coursework, we have heard the inquiries and protests about assignments that don't align directly to the tests, yet we worry about "teaching to them" directly. Navigating the turbulent waters of educator preparation and maintaining the tools sharp for support is what keeps EPPs and candidates afloat.

According to Werler (2016), teachers throughout the day make judgments based on the needs of their students; they must interpret the students' life world. They then can conclude that they daily make ''proxy-actions,'' i.e. he or she makes decisions to lead the student in a didactically planned way in order to create opportunities of learning which have the potential to generate meaning for the student. This means that teachers have to make choices in order to be able to teach (to survive in the classroom); beyond that, teachers have to organize and structure those choices." (p. 64). O'Brien and Robb (2017) claim, "the edTPA is driving virtually all coursework and assessment throughout our program now" (p. 6). So how do EPPs maintain "proxy-action" formative experiences, alignment to the teaching world and engaged in deep reflection around fieldwork experiences all the while preparing teachers for the high stakes exams?

Rose Colored Glasses
Faculty have asserted that if we teach all the teacher performance expectations (TPEs) in classes then all our candidates will pass the exams and we should not worry. Years of working with the TPAs and high stakes exams have taught us differently. Yes, the expectations and standards are our guides, yet there are aspects of the exams that are nuanced and need intentional coverage. For example, in California there are no TPEs for academic language in the classroom other than the work candidates do with English Learners. There is no mention of specifics around Academic Language Demands, supports and evaluating evidence. These scaffolds are inferred within California TPE 1.6, yet not broken down by what candidates must demonstrate on the edTPA. If candidates are not robustly prepared in Academic Language Demands, they will be challenged by at least two rubrics, Rubrics 4 and 14. This fall on the EPP to uncover those areas of the HSTPAs are not covered in the TPEs.

Tangible Ways to Support Candidates: Questions and Cautionary Tales
Candidate comments heard at the onset of education classes may include, "What does this course have to do with passing the edTPA or reading exam?" or "How does this assignment help me pass the edTPA?" How can institutions and schools of education do this without turning into "Teacher Test Prep 101"? How can we not teach to the test and support candidates with their high stakes assessments, i.e., edTPA, RICA, and others, when the pressure is placed on our students and programs to do so? Yet, teaching them to be a good teacher, covering all that is on these high stakes assessments, is that enough? According to Nai-Chang (2019), universities are now becoming "test-preparation" institutions. (p. 50-51) Chui's (2014) claim resonates with some students, "the world within the various edTPA tasks is unrealistic, and the task demands do not take into consideration the real-life demands of teaching in a public classroom." (p. 29)
A high scoring edTPA completer noted the following:

> The edTPA gave me too much power, power to select what I wanted to show. I could have shown the best clip of my teaching. Honestly, I could have faked so much. There was no accountability to prove what I showed with my focus students and in my lessons. I was not surprised at my score, I followed the Progression Guide (Understanding Rubric Level Progressions) and did what it said, I passed (Steve, personal communication, 2019)

Steve was not alone, according to Nai-Cheng "Such an assessment promotes pre-service teachers to write skillfully (or even lie) to pass edTPA." (p. 9) Yet, hearing the opposite with non-passers, one particular pre-service teacher lamented, "I wanted to show the scorers what was really going on in my classroom-the disruptions, the messiness of teaching." (Jennie, personal communication, 2019) Jennie struggled to follow the Progression Guide and edTPA Handbook as she wanted the scorer to see what was going on in her classroom; unfortunately, this mindset will only yield an incomplete and poor scoring portfolio that did not demonstrate her ability to follow the handbook and guides provided by Stanford and Pearson. This cautionary tale needs to be shared to encourage students to follow the rubrics, handbook and guides, such as Understanding Rubric Level Progression and Understanding Academic Language and be selective with evidence to demonstrate what is going on in the classroom.

Training Faculty and Staff and Alignment
First, faculty and supervisors need to be intimately knowledgeable of the exams and what is covered, always looking for opportunities in the curricula to address those areas where candidates need strategic support. This process takes time and devotion to professional development of faculty and supervisors. Taking this on requires time to align what coursework covers based on the teacher expectations and what each rubric or specification covers. Without this alignment work, the candidates will experience gaps in the course and fieldwork and not feel prepared for the exams. Time and effort needs to be taken on the behalf of faculty and supervisors to ensure this alignment. The edTPA National Academy provides alignment charts for EPP's to analyze the rubrics and course alignment based on the following: rubric, coursework, learning opportunities, and level of candidate work required. This process should be done by each program to ensure that all credential areas are covered. Then those areas that are deficit or not covered, a formative experience can then be embedded.

Checklists
There are the technical aspects of the exams that need to be covered such as prevention of edTPA "condition codes" and what those mean. The technical reasons why a portfolio would be "unscoreable" must be addressed long before a candidate submits, i.e., not meeting the correct number of lessons, submitting videos that have been edited or pasted together, or submitting the wrong template. Highly recommended, once a candidates' complete their portfolio, is to look over candidate portfolios artifacts and commentary based on the technical requirements at the back of each handbook, "Artifacts and Commentary Specifications."

Formative Experiences
Once faculty and supervisors are trained on supporting the exams, it is essential to know where the candidate is with regard to the knowledge being assessed. One suggestion is to first survey the knowledge of a specific domain of the exam at the onset of the term in a simple pre-assessment. This will help direct the faculty as to the areas that need most attention, time and intervention. Candidates need to have time and space to wrestle and demonstrate these concepts in the "real world" praxis-based action that Werler spoke about. Often we are coupling comments such as "this is just good teaching" while walking candidates through edTPA rubrics or test specifications. As professors we are looking to connect the dots around the test requirements and opportunities to practice good teaching strategies and skills.

Observation Tools
Clinical fieldwork is designed to meet fieldwork requirements and enhance the experiences of teacher education interns and student teacher candidates. Candidates enrolled in field experience courses are required to demonstrate mastery of the state's teacher performance expectations during classroom demonstrations, post-reflections, and professional dispositions. Candidates also receive support through reflective discussions that revolve around events in content classes, field experiences, supervised teaching, and collaboration between the candidates, university personnel, and the district's employed supervisor. Fieldwork is a critical component of the teacher candidate's preparation, linking theory to practice and rooted into the EPP's key frameworks and informed by the state-based teacher credentialing requirements. The field experience course is meant to support what candidates are learning in the other teaching credential classes.   In other words, field experiences are meant to bridge content in coursework classes with real life experiences in the classroom of the candidates. Here is where "praxis-based" experiences happen, unfold and are reflected upon. Teaching teachers to be reflective practitioners is one of many key skills they need to achieve before they complete their credential work. Throughout the year, candidates are observed by the fieldwork instructor a minimum of twelve times in California. For these observations, the fieldwork instructor should utilize an observation tool that is valid, reliable, and aligned with teacher performance assessments and expectations. Building an observation tool used by the fieldwork instructors that aligns to the three edTPA tasks will create a seamless alignment with the tool: Planning for Instruction and Assessment, Instructional Delivery, and Assessment. For those EPP states who have edTPA as their licensure requirement, it is highly recommended to use the edTPA rubrics and handbook for evaluating candidate performance within each section there are categories with specific guidelines:

- Planning: Standards and Target Alignment, Multiple Forms of Assessments, Differentiation for Diverse Learners, Support of Academic Language, Knowing Students' Assets and Academic Background
- Instruction: Subject Specific Pedagogy, Checking for Understanding and Adjusting Instruction through Formative Assessment, Deepening Learning, Respectful and Positive Learning Environment, Engagement for All Learners, Reflection based on student learning
- Assessment: Feedback to Learners, Assessment Analysis, Analysis of Evidence of Students' Use of Academic Language, Reflection based on Assessment Data

There should also be space for candidate reflection post teaching. This last section of the tool allows for the fieldwork instructors to include detailed notes on the areas of strength and need, as well as candidate reflection. The candidates are able to receive feedback on specific elements of the lesson allowing for focused coaching. Ultimately, candidates and fieldwork instructors share a common language and together create goals, both short term and long term, based off of the data from the observation tool. Because the observation tool is aligned with the edTPA rubrics, this formative evaluation supports good teaching practice while also preparing candidates to successfully complete teacher performance assessments.

Three Way Conference
To further the impact of the data collected from the observation, candidates benefit from a powerful collaboration between fieldwork instructors and district employed supervisors. The candidate meets with the fieldwork instructor and mentor (cooperating) teacher or site-based mentor during each semester to build consensus. Each participant completes the sheet independently and evaluates the candidate's growth in pedagogy and professional dispositions. During this three way conference, a consensus is established and one to two goals for the next term are agreed upon, including specific ways that the fieldwork instructor and master teacher/mentor will be supporting the candidate in achieving these goals. During the meeting, the candidate, fieldwork instructor and mentor discuss planning, instructional delivery, assessment, analysis of teaching, as well as professional commitment and behaviors, professional relationships, critical thinking and reflective practice. This constructive conversation about best teaching practices is another strategy that allows candidates the opportunity to reflect upon the skills and knowledge required for effective classroom instruction.

Video Coaching and Video Exemplars
Each semester, the candidates record themselves teaching lessons and use video tool platforms to upload those videos. Candidates are able to share the videos with fieldwork and coursework instructors. The videos will prepare the candidate and their students for their HSTP as well as a powerful tool for reflection and data based instruction. If the videos are used throughout the candidate's experience in fieldwork it can be used to demonstrate growth from the onset of the term to the end.

Again for those EPP states who have edTPA, consider using the edTPA rubrics 6-9 for evaluating the videos. As the candidate practices: positive learning environment, engaging students in learning, deepening instruction, and subject specific pedagogy, they will be better prepared for demonstrating these rubric areas in their edTPA video(s). Then their supervisors can

provide them feedback based on the rubrics. The candidate can see what a positive learning environment looks like in their own videos.

Once an EPP collects a library of high scoring videos from scored portfolios, they can then share them with candidates and the exemplar scores. This will reinforce high leverage practices for the four key areas based on the edTPA rubrics, such as what does deepening student learning look like, what does subject specific pedagogy look like in secondary math and so on.

Purposeful Video Assignment: Connecting Fieldwork and Coursework
From the onset of the school term, faculty and fieldwork instructors are all looking for ways to support teacher candidates. One concrete way to support candidates is to coach and provide feedback within the ethical guidelines on implementation of the candidates' teaching practice through the use of video coaching. The video can be an essential element for feedback and candidate reflection. We have created one assignment connecting clinical fieldwork and academic coursework where candidates submit a video of their teaching that is evaluated by the fieldwork and coursework instructors. The purposeful video assignment is an effective, meaningful task that allows for self-reflection, feedback from multiple sources, and practice for the edTPA. The candidate video is scored on an internal rubric based on the edTPA and because the same video is scored by two instructors, there is robust feedback.

In preparation for this assignment, the fieldwork and coursework instructors met together to view exemplars, practice using the rubrics and calibrate scores. As part of the iterative process, we collectively uncovered:
- What does a positive learning or a challenging learning environment look like?
- What are ways we can coach our candidates to interact with students to activate prior knowledge and/or link to students personal and cultural assets?
- How can a candidate deepen student learning during instruction?
- What does it mean to explicitly teach a target strategy and provide opportunities for guided practice?

edTPA Graphic Organizers for Trimming Task 2 Videos
With the video practice and exemplars, the candidates need to know how to trim their videos down to the maximum number of minutes in their recording, i.e., maximum total running time for most portfolios is around twenty minutes with usually no more than two videos. For some this can be a daunting task as they may have hours of video to cull. The authors designed a set of graphic organizers to help guide candidates through this process. Each organizer is subject specific based on that particular edTPA portfolio. It is highly recommended to consider using these to support candidate success with Task 2 of the edTPA.

Retake Coaching for the edTPA
Contingent on the state requirements, candidates may need to retake an assessment. Since many states have minimum or passing scores, EPPs need to be prepared to support candidates with the retake process. In California the passing score for the edTPA is close to the recommended Professional Passage Standard (PPS). According to AACTE Annual Report, (2016) "The edTPA national recommended professional performance standard is 42, although states are free to set their own cut scores. Today, state-set cut scores range from 35–41." (para 8)

After years of working with HSTPAs, candidates and retakes, it is recommended first to provide the candidate time to process their recent failure. This may take a few hours to a few days. If too soon before they have time to process, the candidate may first blame those closest to themselves, which is often the coordinator or supervisor. They need to first accept this before they can construct a retake plan for themselves. Once they have accepted their retake, they can then be ready to plan their next steps. Recommended would be to schedule a one on one retake counseling appointment, to check in on their progress, then have the candidate go through their non-passing portfolios and analyze the rubrics they did not pass. The edTPA Retake Instructions guide candidates through this process and should be utilized along with a retake coaching session (SCALE, 2017). In addition, in their score report, it details what rubrics are passing and non-passing rubric scores. The candidate and advisor then need to come up with the plan advising them what tasks to retake since a candidate can do a partial retake to achieve a passing score. Once the analysis has taken place, the candidate then can retake those tasks with the lowest scores and also must take into account the feasibility of a retake. For example, if the candidate receives the non-passing score report at the end of the school year and no longer has access to students, they need to consider that into the plan. They are able to complete Task 1 without students and they no longer are in a teaching environment. Therefore, feasibility and timing needs to be considered for the candidate to retake. From there, the candidate and the advisor should go over where they missed the mark based on the score, feedback and rubric requirements. Then the candidate can build a retake based on the task(s) they are resubmitting. The edTPA process will then begin again.

Conclusion
With all that hangs in the balance for teacher candidates (employment and future career goals) the EPP must be able to pivot around the test requirements ensuring that candidates have the tools to pass and pass on the first try. It is the responsibility of the candidate to clear all these hurdles, yet the EPP plays an integral part. The EPP must align their program to the specifications of the tests, as multiple forms of assessment. Yet, this is a tenuous balance between maintaining the constructs, morays, culture and goals of the EPP and the test passage is a challenge. Ideas presented here are but a few, but in the end it's the EPP that drives these decisions for candidates.

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