Building for Success through edTPA Portfolios: A Top 10 List for Pre-Service Teacher Candidates

Dr. Carolyn D. Corliss
Associate Professor
Certification Officer
University of Mobile

Pre-service teacher candidates have been assessed for their knowledge of teaching theory and specific content knowledge, such as Social Science, Elementary, Special Education, etc. by passing written exams. When successful, they are recommended for a teaching certificate allowing them to practice their craft as classroom instructors.

However now, there is a push by many stakeholders and before applying for certification, an additional requirement has been added to obtain certification. This prerequisite focuses on how pre-service teacher candidates perform in the classroom during their internship. A number of state and teacher education preparation program goals now require that pre-service teacher candidates are able to translate college classroom learning/knowledge into effective instruction while teaching in a P-12 school setting (Caughlan & Jiang, 2014).

One of the leaders in pre-service teacher candidate assessment is the edTPA, formally known as the Teacher Performance Assessment. Prior to being evaluated through written exams, edTPA requires pre-service teacher candidates to submit portfolios during the internship experience which contain the following: lesson plans, videos of them teaching P-12 students, examples of their student work, and reflections of how, in their role as a pre-service teacher candidate, might they improve instruction. Trained third-party scorers examine the portfolios and using a liker scale of 1-5 (with 5 being the highest possible score) rank each task and rubric. To be an edTPA scorer you must meet the following minimum qualification, current or retired university faculty member, field supervisor, or other university educator. You must have content-specific expertise in the content area you are scoring. One must have university or P-12 classroom teaching experience in the United States, extensive professional development, and a bachelor's degree or higher. In addition, the scorer must work with pre-service teacher candidates or teachers within the last five years in one or more of the following ways: teach a content-specific course within a teacher preparation program you are qualified to score, supervise field experience or pre-service teacher candidates in the edTPA content area you are qualified to score, or lead and/or assist with edTPA implementation at your college/university. Retrieved from http://scoreedtpa.pearson.com/become-an-edtpa-scorer.html April 16, 2015

This new performance-based assessment was created in response to the ongoing debate of how to improve teacher preparation programs (Retrieved from http://edtpa.aacte.org/, October 2014). The edTPA was launched after several years of development and field testing. While Chiu (2014) suggests that the edTPA is a difficult assessment due to the added stress and burden during student teaching, many pre-service teacher candidates having participated in the process of performance-based assessment, indicate it is successfully achieved with proper planning (Chiu, 2014). In true David Letterman form, this article depicts a Top 10 List to help pre-service teacher candidates be successful in completing their edTPA portfolios.

10. Cooperating Teacher. The cooperating teacher will be the pre-service teacher candidate's most appreciated resource. The cooperating teacher will be able to assist the pre-service teacher candidate with important decisions such as what lessons to teach, how to differentiate instruction for students' needs, and guidance in creating appropriate assessments.

9. Judgment. It is important the pre-service teacher candidate knows where students are academically before planning and teaching each edTPA lesson. Awareness of student backgrounds will help guide instruction and provide needed materials for the commentaries. Commentaries are answers to an edTPA prompt, which asked the pre-service teacher candidates to describe, explain, and/or justify how your students learn and are able to identify and analyze what you do to help them learn and the specific, concrete evidence of their learning. (Retrieved from http://edtpa.aacte.org/, October 2014).

8. Planning. The edTPA requires the pre-service teacher candidate to teach a minimum of three to five lessons from a subject-specific learning segment. Although it is not necessary to create a unit from scratch, pre-service teacher candidates should be able to adapt to meet the needs of students' as well as State Standards. Make certain you know and are able to identify the key concepts, central focus/essential question, primary source of evidence, adaption for diverse learners, and learning targets of your lesson before beginning instruction. This will allow pre-service teacher candidates to evaluate and measure these during and after the lesson, helping support and justify them in the commentaries.

7. Management Systems. The Pearson's ePortfolio system allows the pre-service teacher candidate to upload their edTPA Portfolio directly into the scoring site. This prevents the pre-service teacher candidate from having to download commentaries, type a separate document, upload them to your platform, and then submit the edTPA portfolio from your platform to Pearson. The pre-service teacher candidate is able to complete the entire portfolio using one platform. There are many platforms available; therefore it is important for the pre-service teacher candidate to get used to navigating the preferred platform site. Regardless of the platform, review the file types, and choose one type for consistency. Example: Save all work as PDF file or as a WORD document.

6. Data. Provide a mix of data as evidence in the pre-service teacher candidate commentaries. This will demonstrate the pre-service teacher candidate understanding of the entire classroom and student needs. For example: Know the number of diverse learners and give specific examples to demonstrate your impact on student learning (10 out of 18 can identify verbs). This will help the scorers understand the pre-service teacher candidate students' background and how you planned for differential instructions to adapt to all. Collecting the needed information early during student teaching will provide evidence when the pre-service teacher candidate begins writing the commentaries to defend the teaching choices.

5. Handbook Prompts. Pre-service teacher candidates should be very familiar with each prompt that focus on commentary topics, before they begin planning lessons. Pre-service teacher candidates need to provide evident to exhibit how they created a positive learning community, reflected on the needs of students, and how the planning engaged students in the use of appropriate academic language during the lessons. When writing commentaries, it will be easier (for the pre-service teacher candidate and the scorer) if this is information is documented rather than having to search for it in video recordings and/or lesson plans.

4. Video Recording. Video record as many lessons as possible. The pre-service teacher candidate will need to make certain they have a wide variety of recording in order to choose the best video that captures student engagement and has good sound quality, for the required 15-minute segment. This makes scoring much easier.

3. Video Recording Permissions. Before student teaching, the pre-service teacher candidate needs to review the school policy on video recording for their assigned classroom. Some schools/districts will have a blanket video recording policy and others will not. It will be important to get the video recording permission forms signed during the first week of student teaching.

2. Day of Video Recording. For the few students who never return his or her video recording permission form or the parent denied permission, the pre-service teacher candidate must position the video recording device where those students' faces and/or names do not appear in the video. Normal seating locations may need to be rearranged, on the day of videotaping, to ensure only the backs of the heads are visible for the students without permission forms.

And the number one way to ensure pre-service teacher candidates' success through edTPA portfolios?
1. On Task and Engaged. In the video recordings, scorers need to see what students know and what they can do. Students without permission forms are required to participate in the lesson; however their identity cannot be shared during recording. The pre-service teacher candidates will have many opportunities to justify teaching choice in the commentaries they submit.

In sum, pre-service candidate must make the best instructional choices possible based on the knowledge of their P-12 students. Choices are reflected in commentaries and via performance-based assessment videos. While edTPA is not intended to measure content knowledge, it does give the pre-service candidate a deeper understanding of the P-12 students. Maybe most importantly, edTPA provides much needed time to think critically about what pre-service teacher candidates and Institutions of Higher Education do well and what can be done better, a win/win for all involved.

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