



Summary: “Teacher Performance Assessment and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy”

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Critics of edTPA, an assessment of beginning teachers’ readiness to enter the profession, argue that it fails to assess candidates’ ability to deliver culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), teach for social justice, or teach equitably to all students.

These concerns are important since assessments like edTPA make an important statement as to what should or should not be included in teacher preparation program curriculum. To consider how edTPA assesses for a candidate’s ability to teach equitably to diverse learners, we carefully analyzed the 2011 field test version of the Secondary Mathematics edTPA Handbook. We used an extended version of Gloria Ladson-Billings framework of culturally relevant pedagogy (1995) for the analysis. Our analysis focused on two questions:

- To what extent does the edTPA handbook text provide *opportunities* for teacher candidates to reveal aspects related to elements of CRP in their commentary?
- To what extent does the edTPA handbook text *prompt* teacher candidates to reveal aspects related to elements of CRP in their commentary?

edTPA Provides Many Chances to Demonstrate CRP

We found that a total of 70.3 percent ($n = 484$) of the handbook text units (naturally occurring sentences or phrases) provide teacher candidates with either an opportunity to present CRP elements or prompt them to do so. Overall, 57.1 percent ($n = 393$) of these units represented opportunities for teacher candidates to show evidence of culturally responsive teaching, while 13.2 percent of text units ($n = 91$) were prompts for teacher candidates to implement or reflect upon their implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. Nearly 30 percent (29.7) ($n = 204$) of units provide neither an opportunity nor a prompt for teacher candidates to reflect upon or implement CRP elements.

Our findings reveal that overwhelmingly the assessment allows space for candidates to demonstrate elements of CRP but does not require them to do so: while more than 70 percent of the edTPA text units provide opportunities or prompts for candidates to reveal CRP elements, opportunities outnumber direct prompts more than four-to-one.

That is, edTPA offers ample opportunity for CRP-minded candidates to demonstrate their competency in this area, but it does not force all candidates to devote a substantial portion of their responses to CRP elements.

Opportunities and Prompts Are Embedded across edTPA Tasks

We found that there are opportunities and prompts for CRP embedded in edTPA across all tasks of the handbook. Not surprisingly, Task 2, which requires a candidate to analyze clips of

themselves teaching, features the highest percentages of prompts and opportunities out of all the tasks (91.1 percent of text units were coded for either an opportunity or prompt).

When analyzed by domain, four domains show similar percentages of opportunities to provide evidence of CRP elements: Social Relations (65.1 percent), Conceptions of Knowledge (65.1 percent), Focus on English Language Learners (60.5 percent), and Focus on Students with Exceptionalities (60.5 percent). For the fifth domain, Conceptions of Self, 41.4 percent of analytic units were coded as providing an opportunity for candidates to reveal evidence of CRP in their practice. The elements within this domain are:

- Belief that all students are capable of academic success
- Pedagogy is seen as art (unpredictable and in the process of “becoming”)
- Teachers see themselves as members of the community
- Teachers see teaching as giving back to the community
- Ascribe to Freirean belief of “teaching as mining”

Although this domain has the lowest percentages of combined opportunities and prompts, 88.2 percent of the units for the first element concerning the belief that all students are capable of academic success were coded as either opportunities or prompts, including 39.5 percent of prompts. This belief is critical to successful teaching, so it is encouraging that this element is well represented in the assessment.

Other elements within this domain relate to specific dispositions or ideological elements (e.g. teachers see themselves as members of the community and teachers see teaching as giving back to the community) that may be best observed over time in coursework and clinical placements and are challenging to evaluate within an assessment of this type.

Conclusion

The edTPA handbook gives opportunities and prompts for all CRP domains across all Tasks. This parallels the research for preparing teachers for teaching students with diverse backgrounds and experiences: assessments should include CRP elements in an embedded way, instead of a single rubric or one task focused on teacher candidates’ ability to teach “diverse” students.

This means that edTPA is a good vehicle for encouraging the use of CRP and can be used by teacher preparation programs to help meet their goal to translate CRP knowledge into classroom practice. It also is encouraging that the 2013-14 operational version of edTPA handbooks is even more explicit about prompting candidates about students’ personal, cultural and community assets. As a nationally accessible assessment, edTPA has to be designed so that teacher candidates learning from all routes (traditional, alternative, etc.) from different geographic regions and contexts will be able to demonstrate their readiness to teach students in diverse contexts and within diverse classrooms.

Finally, we posit that no one assessment can do it all. It is our responsibility as teacher educators to ensure that all teacher candidates are prepared to teach a variety of learners, taking into careful consideration how students’ prior academic learning, backgrounds and lived experiences should inform their planning, instructing and assessing.