The Teacher Performance Assessment: Reflections on the Pedagogical Thought Processes of Three Student Teachers

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Citation

Abstract

The impact of the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) on three pre-service teachers' pedagogical thought processes and self-perceptions is the focus of this study. Qualitative research procedures included interviews, observations, and coding of the pre-service teachers' written documents.   Emerging themes and implications for teacher education include variance in: 1) the pre-service teachers' ability to analyze and articulate learner outcome results; 2) how they thought they impacted student learning; and 3) their locus of control.

Keywords: pre-service teachers, pre-service teacher supervision, qualitative research, teacher performance assessment

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What is teacher quality? What attributes and dispositions must teachers possess to demonstrate quality? What is the relationship between teachers' instructional decisions and students' learning?   These questions are just a few on the minds of teacher educators in this era of No Child Left Behind and heightened interest in pre-service teacher effectiveness. Because teacher attributes resulting in significant learner gains are difficult to determine and classify, recent experiences using performance assessments is drawing attention. This article suggests that the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA), although strong in its ability to evaluate entry-level teacher competencies, is capable of yielding more important information about teacher candidates: their pedagogical thought processes and perceptions of themselves as teachers.

The Teacher Performance Assessment

Conceptualized at Western Oregon University as the "teacher work sample," the Teacher Performance Assessment (TPA) was developed as a means to assist pre-service and new teachers to evaluate their instructional effects on learners (Devlin–Scherer, Burroughs, Daly & McCartan, 2007; Girod & Girod, 2006). More precisely, Girod and Girod state that the purpose of the TPA is to develop in teachers the ability to "make systematic connections between their teaching actions and the learning of each student in their classrooms" using student data (p. 482). To ensure this occurs, pre-service and new teachers ("candidates," henceforth) follow a six-step process while planning a unit of instruction which involves documenting: 1) student contextual features; 2) desired learning outcomes; 3) instructional plans; 4) assessment plans; 5) evidence of learner gains; and 6) reflections on student achievement and instructional decision – making (French, 2002).

It is not surprising that the TPA methodology is receiving widespread attention among

teacher preparation programs. Federal and state education reforms have created a high-stakes

atmosphere, and at no other time in American public school history has student achievement

been scrutinized as closely as it is today (French, 2002; Mayer, 2005). Changes occurring in the

credentialing and licensing of new teachers is an example of the impact of these reforms. Many

states now have new-teacher induction programs, bureaucratic accountability systems, and new

teacher standards to evaluate entry-level competence (Branyon, 2008; Mayer, 2005; Ohio

Department of Education [ODE], 1999; Pecheone, Pigg, Chung & Souviney, 2005). In addition

to these responses to education reform, teacher accreditation organizations, such as the National

Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) have revised their standards to

include performance-based models for assessing teacher candidates and accrediting teacher

preparation programs (Cawyer & Caldwell, 2002; National Council for the Accreditation of

Teacher Education [NCATE], 2008).

The current educational reform environment has given rise to several studies examining the

value of using the TPA to evaluate teacher candidates' entry-level teaching skills. One theme

emerging from the current literature concerns candidates' attitudes and supports they perceive to

have received while completing a TPA. With regard to attitudes, Okhremtchouk, Seiki, Gilliland,

Ateh, Wallace and Kato (2009) found the TPA adversely affects candidates' ability to complete

concurrent university coursework and impedes their ability to maintain normal sleeping routines

and personal relationships. Another study conducted by Stone (1998) revealed lack of time and

lack of preparation assistance by university supervisors as deterrents to

the candidates' attitudes toward performance-based assessment. Taking this finding further,

Devlin – Scherer et al. (2007) reported that some mentor teachers are unsupportive of pre-

assessment techniques as a method for determining instructional course of action by teacher

candidates. Even worse, the candidates in Okhremtchouk et al. reported that mentor teachers had "nothing to do" with candidates' teacher performance preparation and maintained an "indifference to [its] importance and significance" (p. 54). Thus, the attitudes regarding TPA supports reported in these studies may be suggestive of team members' competing pedagogical beliefs and differing levels of expertise with performance assessment. Reports such as these may also justify the move of some teacher preparation programs to train partner teachers in the TPA process (Branyon, 2008; Devlin – Scherer et al.).

Recent research has also explored teacher candidates' perceived value of the TPA in terms of informing their instructional practice. Girod & Girod's (2006) web-based simulation, the "Cook School District Simulation," is one example. Used as a training tool to introduce teacher candidates to performance assessment methodology, the Cook Simulation rendered positive results in candidates' ability to connect teaching and learning in simulated classroom exercises. Okhremtchouk et al. (2009) found that despite the performance assessment's negative features (i.e., the consumption of one's time and the sacrifice of other coursework), candidates reported to have improved their skills in lesson plan development and aligning assessment with state standards. Branyon's (2008) study further affirms the methodology's power to inform instructional practice. This study reported that candidates "had indeed affected K-12 student learning" (p. 36), and the collaboration of skilled mentor teachers was an essential factor in the candidates' performance. Yet another marker of the perceived value of the TPA by candidates is the extent to which they claim to differentiate instruction based upon diverse learning needs and learning styles. In the Devlin – Scherer et al. (2007) study, candidates reported reflection and experimentation with fusing theory and practice as the key elements to informing their instructional decisions regarding individualized adaptations.

In summary of the literature, the TPA is a powerful methodology for evaluating teacher candidate instructional effects on learners. It sensitizes beginning teachers to numerous factors and nuances of classroom teaching. Because of this, candidates need to possess nominal skills and understandings prior to commencing a TPA. The collective skills represented in the research above stipulate common features to determine candidate effectiveness, which include: 1) the ability to demonstrate effective oral and written communication; 2) the ability to identify and articulate learner outcomes; 3) the ability to identify appropriate assessment procedures; and 4) the ability to adapt instruction according to student dynamics and student outcomes. The collective research also underscores the importance of developmentally appropriate instructional practices as informed by theory and practice as well as the presentation of thorough and accurate content knowledge as requisite understandings of teacher candidates. The Teacher Education Program (TEP) described in this article affirmed this collective body of knowledge and scaffolded the skills and understandings in courses and field – experiences prior to its candidates' Clinical Practice Semester.

Methodology

The role of the TPA on the pedagogical thought processes of 3 student teachers and the perceived impact on student learning described in this article took place at a regional university in the Southern region of the United States during the 2008 spring semester.   The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the state's teacher licensing board accredit this university's teacher education program. The College of Education at this university is composed of three departments, all of which share in the pre- and post-professional preparation of teachers, both undergraduate and graduate.

Prior to this College of Education's adoption of the TPA, faculty assessed their student teachers' initial teaching competencies using a portfolio of artifacts aligned with state teacher standards. Although the Portfolio was designed to represent a comprehensive evaluation of the student teachers' exiting competencies, several faculty members criticized the method for its lack of tangible, quantifiable evidence of pre-service teacher skills (e.g., articulation of instructional decisions as determined by student data) and for its "scrapbook" format.   Members of the faculty and clinical practice supervisors decided to replace the Portfolio with the TPA and vigorously drafted its own manual and scoring rubrics using existing TPA models, such as *The Renaissance Partnership Teacher Work Sample* (The Renaissance Partnership for Improving Teacher Quality [RPITQ], 2004).

The author ("professor," henceforth) hoped to gain insight into the pedagogical thought processes of 3 student teachers during and following their work on the TPA. She solicited volunteers from among the College of Education's student teachers during their Clinical Practice semester. The professor informed the volunteers that the inquiry would consist of regularly scheduled conferences, interviews, and observations in order to render conclusions about their thought processes, actions, and self – perceptions as teachers.

The professor collected data about the 3 student teachers' pedagogical thought processes using methodology from the qualitative research tradition; more specifically, classroom action research. According to Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), this tradition involves researchers assisting teachers in "making judgments about how to improve their own practices" (p. 569). The professor employed a reflexive system of questioning in order to challenge the student teachers' existing views of theory and practice as well as their interactions and actions in the classroom. In doing so, the professor relied upon the unique context of each student teacher's placement to

determine the sets of questions asked. However, to stimulate thinking about lesson planning and differentiation, the professor developed some common questions that she asked of each student teacher:

1) Given the special needs identified in your classroom, how do you expect to modify instruction for every child?

2) What do you believe will be some obstacles or challenges when designing your lesson plans for your group of students?

3) What do you believe to be your strengths and/ or weaknesses with regard to the topic you are about to teach?What do you plan to do to compensate for weak areas?

4) Can you explain how community factors and background experiences of your students will impact the unit you are about to teach? And, how do you know these factors will impact learning? What is the relationship between the community factors and background experiences to the unit topic you are about to teach? What do you anticipate some misunderstandings will be?

As the student teachers progressed through the teaching of their units, the professor queried them about their lesson plans, the delivery of instruction, their assessment practices, and their instructional decision – making. Examples of these questions included:

1) During your lesson today, I noticed that you had confused the students on the explanation of two similar, but different concepts. Can you identify when that happened during your lesson and identify the two concepts?   How do you think you will address this error tomorrow in your teaching?   What strategy do you think will help iron – out the students' confusion? (student teacher #1, Marie)

2) How did you derive the questions asked during the interviews of your students? Did these interviews elicit the responses you wanted? Why or why not? (student teacher

#1, Marie)

3) What do you predict your students' retention level will be using the strategy you have selected? What other strategies have you tried when helping your learners with rote – level tasks? Did they work? Why or why not? (student teacher #2, Anne)

4) During your lesson, I observed two students off-task. Can you identify when this occurred? Physical and cognitive disability aside, what could you do to ensure that everyone participate? How do you know they understand "rhyming"? Did the "tick- marks" used to tally their claps demonstrate an understand of rhyming? Why or why not? (student teacher #2, Anne)

5) Based upon results of your pre-assessment, what modern day examples do you think you could use to serve as analogies for explaining prohibition and women's suffrage? How do you know your students will identify with these examples? What is their connection to these examples? (student teacher #3, June)

6) Can you explain how you decided upon "community-building" as part of your lesson plan development? What factors about the students influenced your decisions to use community building in your lessons? During your observation, I noticed a breakdown of the "democratic process." What do you believe caused this breakdown? How do plan to restore democracy tomorrow? (student teacher #3, June)

The professor archived the questions and responses in individually labeled portfolios for each student teacher. These portfolios also held classroom observation protocols, email exchanges, the student teachers' written lesson plans, action-impact-refinement essays, and drafts of narratives of their TPA documents. Following each meeting with the student teachers and review of TPA documents, the professor recorded notes on an Excel spreadsheet and coded them according to decisions about instructional strategies, adaptations, assessment procedures,

and resources used. The professor also recorded verbatim comments made by the student

teachers that appeared to be unique thoughts and responses to their teaching and learning

experience. It was during this process of recording the student teachers' interview comments,

written reflections, and anecdotal information from observations that the professor employed the

constant comparative method and discovered patterns emerging from the data.

According to Strauss and Corbin (1998), the constant comparison method enables the

researcher to identify "variations in the patterns" of the data by comparing those patterns to

various "properties and dimensions under different conditions" (p. 67).   The researcher coded

the student teachers' information according to pre-conceived properties (e.g., instructional

strategies, assessment plans, etc.) and found variance in their behaviors, thinking processes, and

comments. The researcher deduced the variances were due to the individual context and

predilection of each student teacher as well as the context of their classroom placement. This

process generated three themes attributed to the student teachers' entry-level competencies in

which this article proceeds to report: 1) their ability to analyze and articulate learner outcome

results; 2) their perceptions of how they thought they impacted student learning; and 3) the role

their exhibited locus of control played in the delivery of their lessons.

The Student Teachers

The professor assigned pseudonyms to the three student teachers in order to protect their

anonymity. Each of the 3 participating student teachers were dual special education and regular

education majors and completed their Clinical Practice Semester in the same school district close

to the university. The school district services students of the entire county and consists of one

high school, one middle school, and four elementary schools. Although the district is rural and

generally homogenous in terms of ethnicity and religious background, several aspects regarding the grade level, classroom profile, and subject matter deemed each of these student teachers' experiences as very different.

The first student teacher, Marie, was a dual elementary P-5/MSD (moderate to severe disabilities) P-12 major and assigned to a self-contained, inclusive 5th grade classroom. Several of Marie's students exhibited the range of ability levels often associated with inclusive learning environments. These ability levels included students with significant learning delays and/ or disabilities in addition to students designated as academically gifted. At the time of Marie's arrival, the class was studying early history and political life of the American colonies. To keep with this general theme, Marie's cooperating teacher assigned the Preamble to the United States Constitution as the subject for her TPA learning sequence.

The second student teacher, Anne, also a dual elementary P-5/MSD P-12 major, was assigned to a self-contained, multi-age MSD classroom consisting of grades 6, 7, and 8. Each of the 9 students in this classroom had disabilities which precluded their ability to function in regular education settings, although a few of these students "went out" for physical education, social studies, and music. Some of the specific disabilities represented in this classroom included Down Syndrome, Childhood Ataxia with Central Hypomyelination (CACH), and other neurological and physical disorders impeding normal cognitive development and growth. The curriculum practiced in this classroom primarily focused on the practical living needs of the students supplemented with some academic instruction in reading, mathematics, and science. Anne's cooperating teacher assigned poetry, more specifically, the attributes of rhyme and rhythm of poetry as her TPA learning sequence topic.

The third student teacher, June, was a dual elementary P-5/LBD (Learning and Behavior

Disorders) P-12 major, and assigned to the county high school for her student teaching

assignment. Her experience occurred in an 11th grade LBD Resource Classroom in which the

students' disabilities consisted of mild mental disorders, emotional behavioral disorders, and

specific learning disabilities in reading and comprehension. June's cooperating teacher taught

mathematics, language arts, and social studies at different times of the day, and assigned June

U.S. History, more specifically, the Roaring Twenties, as her subject for the TPA learning

sequence.

Findings

As stated previously, the professor spent significant time conferencing with the 3

participating student teachers during and following the completion of their TPA for the purpose

of understanding their pedagogical thought processes. These conferences along with their

individual TPA documentation produced several findings which appeared to have profound

effect on these pre-service teachers' decision-making skills and the achievement of their

students. These findings include variances in their understanding of their students' prior

knowledge and cognitive capabilities, their perceptions of how they thought they impacted

student learning, and the extent to which their observed locus of control may have contributed to

their perceptions of their impact on learning.

Prior to the TPA learning sequence, each student teacher ascertained their students' prior

knowledge by administering an informal pre-test. Although the student teachers gleaned

productive information from these pre-tests, especially in the form of zeroing in on daily skill

and concept targets, the professor noted differences in the student teachers' expectations of

student performance and cognitive capabilities. Marie, whose TPA learning sequence was

written for a 5th grade social studies class, appeared to have the greatest challenge reconciling her students' misunderstandings with her selected instructional strategies. Marie's pre-test results indicated that 100% of her students could recite the Preamble with near perfection, that 62.5% of her students understood that the Preamble is an introduction, and that 37.5% of her students knew the Preamble is part of the U.S. Constitution. These results indicated that her students' rote-level understanding of the Preamble was sufficient and did not require extensive re-teaching. However, the pre-test also showed Marie that only .03% of her students understood the meaning of each of the 6 goals listed in the Preamble; thus, "after the pre-test, it was clear that my students only had a superficial understanding of the Preamble" and its role in American's lives. This pre-test result caused Marie to focus her daily instruction on the "current day representations of each goal so that [the] students can derive meaning from the complex words." Marie developed higher – order objectives using Bloom's Taxonomy that she hoped would enable her students "to apply those meanings to present day experiences." In summary, Marie "felt that having the students recite a bunch of big words without any conceptual understanding would serve little, if any practical purpose."

To aid her students' understanding of the Preamble and its current day representations, Marie planned a variety of instructional strategies that were hands-on, engaging, and nurtured conceptual understanding. The conferences with Marie and the notes in her TPA revealed that she planned these exercises according to Lev Vygotsky's theory of zone of proximal development utilizing scaffolds such as rich conversation, analogies, and current event representations of the Preamble. Marie alluded to this constructivist approach by commenting,

> I will probe the students about their understanding of the Constitution ... as an analogy using a game board. This activity will take the form of a whole class

discussion ... present[ing] the information in a student inquiry method. I will

have the students discover the meaning of the game board by guiding them to

the final conclusion that the Constitution is like the instruction manual for our

nation's government.

Marie also demonstrated a constructivist approach to teaching this topic by her frequent

use of "interactive PowerPoint," in which the teacher recorded student comments and questions

on the computer for all students to see. This approach allowed Marie's students an opportunity to

revise their thinking about each goal of the Preamble as they proceeded through their activities.

Using the interactive PowerPoint Marie "move[d] onto the next activity using newspapers ...

each group [having] one goal from the Preamble and had them take time to locate articles from

the newspaper that represent that goal." As each group presented their current event

representation of the Preamble, "students [were] encouraged to jot down notes" using the

PowerPoint as their guide.

Although Marie observed slight gains in her students' conceptual understanding of the

Preamble's 6 goals, she appeared somewhat discouraged in their ability to retain or make sense

of the goals' abstract meanings. To compensate for this, she supplemented the interactive

PowerPoint exercises with core content textbooks, re-taught the newspaper exercise using video

clips and discussion, and asked the students to illustrate their personal constructions of the goals

in small groups. The professor's classroom observations with Marie also indicated that she had

confused the students during their daily discussions on two of the goals by giving vague

definitions and examples to ambiguous goals, namely, "providing for the common defense" and

"establishing domestic tranquility." Despite this error, the students' scores regarding the

meanings of the 6 goals listed in the Preamble did improve on the post-assessment that Marie

administered, moving from .03% correct responses to 56.2% correct. Marie commented that, those scores show a marked improvement in the conceptual understanding of the goals ... I think that this [the Preamble] was an extremely challenging and abstract concept for 5th graders to understand and that my class especially had trouble due to their limited means and limited experience outside of their rural community.

Marie exhibited a strong internal locus of control in her TPA documentation as well as during the conferences she had with the professor. When asked about how she thought she impacted student learning, it was clear that she derived her explanations from thoughtful observations and data evaluation. She testified in her TPA that 88.8% of her students improved their conceptual understanding of each of the Preamble's goals between their pre-test and post-test performances. She made a decision to "teach the Preamble from a conceptual standpoint" and added that she "expect[ed] the students at the end of the unit to be able to provide specific examples and evidence of how the goals in the Preamble can be seen in action today." Marie's decision-making appeared effective as she observed that her students "provided examples of each goal from the Preamble," and attributed her students' success to factors for which she was in control as evidenced in her comment that, "after reviewing the students' [written] answers, I

could see much of my phrasing that was used throughout the learning sequence." In short, Marie's students were successful in repeating drilled examples of the Preamble's goals in written form.

Further evidence of Marie's strong internal locus of control in impacting student learning occurred during the administration of a second tier to her post-test. Cleverly designed to augment her understanding of the depth of knowledge gained by her students, Marie interviewed 4

students of differing academic abilities and socioeconomic backgrounds about the goals set forth in the Preamble by showing them pictures of events, people, and/ or situations. Marie noted vast differences and errors in their responses and interpretations about the pictures, and reasoned that 5th grade students have "a limited ability to attach the meaning of the goals to pictorial representations" and to explain them in their own words. Marie further reasoned that her students' difficulty to think abstractly on the subject was due to their "limited experiences," yet qualified this statement by recounting various compensations she implemented to bridge the experience gap. Thus, Marie's use of interview allowed her to discover firsthand the degree to which environment plays in students' abstract thinking and served to reconcile for her the importance of examining instructional inputs in light of students' special backgrounds.

Anne's experiences teaching her TPA learning sequence and the expectations she had for her students were notably different than Marie's; the most important difference being the student context of Anne's classroom: multi-age students with severe neurological, physical, and cognitive disabilities. Each of Anne's students were exempt from state standardized testing. As Marie had done, Anne administered a pre-test about rhyme and rhythm in poetry. Her pre-test differed from Marie's, however, because Anne developed pre-tests according to each student's individual IEP and Alternate Portfolio. Having access to each of the students' records therefore enabled Anne to effectively plan her learning sequence and assessments based upon known abilities and frustration levels.

Each student failed Anne's pre-test which contained questions regarding the rudiments of poetry, rhyme, and rhythm. Anne informed the professor that she expected each of the students to fail the pre-test because of their cognitive disabilities and because "the students lacked basic understanding and / or awareness of this literary genre." Anne reasoned that her daily objectives

needed to focus on the lowest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, and, tasks will need to be age appropriate since they are in middle school, even though their academic and functional abilities are as low as a typical 1st grader ... I feel emphasizing the knowledge, comprehension, and application levels will be appropriate for my students because I want them to work at both the independent and instructional levels. I don't want to push my students to their frustration level because they can get very sensitive, and their [impaired] confidence will prohibit them from achieving my objectives.

As a result of Anne's acute attention to her students' cognitive capabilities, she developed only one to two lower-order objectives for each day of her instructional sequence with sub-objectives specifying adaptations for each student.

The theoretical foundation by which Anne selected instructional strategies to teach about rhyme and rhythm in poetry differed markedly from Marie's unit on the Preamble. Whereas the latter relied heavily on "students making meaning," (i.e., constructivism), the former selected strategies which had more in common with behaviorist assumptions about learning (Parsons, Hinson, & Sardo – Brown, 2001). Using the stimulus – response model, Anne taught rhyme by reading rhyming words from Shel Silverstein's (1996) "Spoiled Brat" and having her students match Silverstein's words to highlighted words on individualized worksheets. In addition, Anne attempted to teach rhythm by breaking down the skill into small, easily emulated tasks. Anne introduced syllables and rhythm by reading segments of another Shel Silverstein (1974) poem, "Alice." She read phrases out loud and clapped with the expectation of students echo clapping in unison. As a follow up to this exercise, the students were given a sheet with the poem printed on it. To the side of each phrase, space was provided for students to write in tick marks. Tick marks indicated each time a clap was heard. For this activity, the teacher clapped the poem as the

students made tick marks.

Following the post-assessment on rhyme and rhythm in poetry, Anne discovered that her students demonstrated limited success toward her established objectives. Anne's pre-test scores were extremely low prior to her unit (i.e., 33%, 44%, 25%, and 0% for each of the four students taught), yet the daily formative assessment scores were nearly perfect. Anne commented, with the results of their formatives being so high, I expected a near perfect summative assessment [for each student] ... Knowing that my students have such limited cognitive ability, I had to provide several manipulatives and accommodations during their lessons to help them be successful.

Anne was surprised with the students' post-test results as only two students passed her test on rhyme and rhythm with scores of 70% or higher. Anne's reflection revealed that she may have contributed to the low scores by not taking into account her students' inability "to retain even the simplest skills and pieces of information on a day-to-day basis." As a self-identified growth area, Anne emphasized the need for frequent repetition, modeling, and immersion while developing new skills and concepts, especially with students having moderate to severe learning disabilities.

Whereas Anne's TPA documentation and conference notes indicated significant elaborations regarding her instructional plans and was replete with data used to inform her practice, Anne's perceptions for how she thought she impacted learning were less detailed. The professor observed that her reasoning emanated largely from the obvious physical and cognitive impairments of her students, their academic histories, and their behaviors in class; in other words, factors beyond her immediate control. Thus, Anne exhibited a greater tendency to justify her students' performance based on their disabilities and other extraneous factors. In terms of her

students' reluctant behaviors and limited attention spans, Anne attributed frequent interruptions in the classroom as the impediment for meaningful instruction to occur, by noting,

most of my students need bathroom assistance, which is provided by the teacher or one of her aides. This can take away a lot of the day because of how much time it takes to get to every student in the room.

Anne also attributed her students' limited attention span on day 2 of her learning sequence by commenting, "My students were not as engaged in the activities I had. The behavior of one student was slouching, putting her head down, and arguing. Others were frustrated that we were working with poetry again." And finally, Anne pointed out that in order to maintain a student's Alternate Portfolio designation, pre-test scores for the core content must fall below 50%, and based upon that standard, "By looking at my [post-test] results, I feel that my students did have success."

Anne's TPA lacked compelling evidence to suggest that she thought constructively about the impact of the external factors on her instructional delivery and on her students' achievement, even though she mentioned the externals several times. Anne provided little to no reflection for how to atone for those factors by taking responsibility for them. Instead, Anne's documentation contained several references of the burden for achievement as belonging to the students, such as in her statement that, "Being able to retain knowledge into another lesson can be hard for students, but it is especially hard for my students." Further, Anne's documentation mentioned "review" as a means to address her students' inability to "retain knowledge"; yet she inadvertently failed to identify specific instructional interventions and their predicted impact on learning. Because of this omission, Anne's understanding of the overall contributions she made toward her students' achievement may only be superficial.

The final student teacher, June, appeared to have the fewest struggles planning and teaching her TPA learning sequence. Like Anne, June had access to her students' individual IEPs and academic histories which enabled her to differentiate instruction according to specific learning styles and needs. Although her students were 11th graders in a special education Resource Classroom, none of her students' learning delays were severe enough for exemption from the state standardized test for U.S. History. In conferencing with June, the professor found that developing a learning sequence with strong connections to the present was her primary focus. With help from her cooperating teacher and investigation into the state's core content for assessment, June identified the "Roaring Twenties" as the topic that would elicit the greatest interest and discussion among her students.

June's pre-test consisted of 10 questions using the Anticipation Guide method (Fisher, Brozo, Frey, & Ivey, 2007). Her aim was to determine what the students considered fact or fiction regarding women's suffrage, prohibition, and cultural change in the 1920s. The results of June's pre-test showed that the students had naïve constructions of the term, "women's suffrage," had little understanding of the term "prohibition" and its effects on American society, yet had realistic understanding of the impact of automobiles and factories on society and on the economy. These misunderstandings caused June to focus her learning sequence on women's suffrage and prohibition by, tapping into students' interests and background experiences, asking them to make comparisons of women's rights of yesteryear with the present, and by asking them to think about restrictions on the sale of alcohol in our state today compared to the past. June's TPA suggested numerous efforts to compensate for her students' lower academic aptitudes and impaired motivations to learn by involving them in the planning and decision-making process of the learning sequence. Much in the spirit of John Dewey's (1933) democracy-

building in the classroom, June commented that, "Each of [the students] gave me their suggestions on how to make the unit beneficial to them . . . I added those suggestions before I taught the unit. These suggestions included more visuals and more class participation assignments."

In addition, June attempted to nurture community- building and participatory citizenship skills among her students by involving them in a constructive discussion exercise. June observed that the topics of women's rights and restrictions on the sale of alcohol evoked emotional and argumentative responses from her students. The professor observed that June did not succumb to their outbursts and strong convictions; instead, she decided to channel their intensity "by having them participate in a teacher - moderated debate between the boys and girls." To prepare her students for the debate, June provided video clips, primary sources such as advertisements and photographs, and short journal articles and newspaper clippings as resources for their position development.

June's students collectively demonstrated significant gains in achievement between her pre-test and post-test administrations; the former average being 66.67% and the latter being 92.67%. She noted, however, that her students struggled on the segment of the post-test which assessed students' analysis of the Roaring Twenties' issues and their relationship to contemporary society. June noted that because of the open-ended format and requirement to "write complete sentences and use paragraph form," her students "had trouble explaining in writing, when they rarely have trouble explaining verbally," even though the task was necessary for her to determine their depth of understanding.

Throughout the TPA process, June exuded enthusiasm and self-confidence in her instructional abilities both in her written documentation and conversations with the professor.

June opined in her reflection, I feel that I have not only grown as a teacher, but I have also grown as a human being. I have been able to experience this growth from the beginning to the end. Now, that it is over, I feel successful and confident in my abilities and for a new teacher that is the best reward.

Perhaps more so than her peers, June claimed the greatest responsibility for her actions and their effects on her learners, suggesting a strong internal locus of control. To support her students' recommendations regarding strategies they would like to see her employ, June overtly sought ways to make her unit on the Roaring Twenties meaningful through extensive background reading on the subject. Owning up to this responsibility she commented, I think that I need to focus on the content areas I struggle with in order to better prepare myself for the classroom. As teachers, we are taught a wide range of content and information in a short period of time. With that in mind, I believe that as much as we tell our students that they need to be *lifelong learners,* we ourselves need to take that into consideration and should never stop increasing our knowledge of the content.

Insofar as the perceived impact June's instruction had on her students, the professor observed that June felt she could control for her students' various learning disabilities by actively involving them in the learning process. June's written notes indicated that her cooperating teacher conditioned the students to work silently and independently in the Resource Classroom with little teacher/student interaction. By experimenting with Deweyian principles, June altered the learning arrangement to include group work, exchange of ideas through debate and discussion, and democratic decision-making. Her own decisions to include these strategies appeared beneficial, as evidenced in her observation that, "Each of my students was able to give an 'alcohol' law and state their opinion on why the government created that law. Learning from

each other's comments, this discussion was very successful in meeting my objective."

Thus, June's thought processes recorded in her TPA suggest that she perhaps displayed the strongest self-efficacy, or power, to impact learning among the three student teachers. She appeared to exert enthusiasm for the teaching process, appeared to own the responsibility for student achievement regardless of extenuating factors, and appeared to compensate for her students' motivational challenges by involving them in the instructional decision-making process.

Discussion

As stated earlier, the purpose of this inquiry was to help the professor gain a better insight into student teachers' pedagogical thought processes and perceived impacts on student learning during their completion of a TPA. The professor's inquiry involved only 3 student teachers and therefore the results described in this article are not necessarily demonstrative of their peers' within the same population. Nonetheless, the professor uncovered worthwhile observations about these 3 student teachers' thought processes and actions during their TPA which may have implications for teacher preparation programs and for predicting teacher effectiveness. Specifically, these implications concern the articulation of desirable TPA outcomes and desirable supervision of student teachers during their completion of TPAs.

First and perhaps most important, the snapshots of these 3 student teachers' experiences reveal that they demonstrated rudimentary instructional and analysis skills. Their TPAs represent the first opportunity to independently plan, implement, and analyze student assessment results for an entire learning sequence. In terms of knowing what to teach and cogitating appropriate strategies, each of these student teachers appeared to understand the connection between pre-

tests and instructional targets. Additionally, each student teacher attempted to address student learning needs and learning preferences by differentiating instruction as much as possible.

One explanation for these observations may rest in the fact that each of the 3 student teachers majored in both regular and special education (i.e., MSD and LBD specifically) and benefited from the emphasis placed on assessment and differentiation in their special education courses. If this is true, which continued research in this area could illumine, teacher preparation programs utilizing the TPA as a means of evaluating candidate competency should ensure all methods courses embed assessment and differentiation practices in their syllabi.

A second implication regarding these 3 student teachers' experiences during their TPA completion is in the area of data analysis. Each of the student teachers adequately reported pre-test, formative, and summative assessment results in their TPAs using appropriate statistical calculations, graphs, and tables.   Each attempted to articulate the meanings of those results; however, these attempts depicted nothing more than written summaries of their graphs, tables, and data artifacts found in the TPA appendices. Although sensitized to the importance of data collection and analysis to inform instruction, each of the 3 student teachers lacked important inferences and speculations about their students' achievement and long – term impact on learning. An explanation for this observation may reside in the psychology of cognitive development; that as adults continue to grow and enter new situations and experiences, their ability to reason contextually expands. Due to these student teachers' experiential and cognitive limitations, teacher preparation programs may need to consider the inability of the TPA to evaluate the likelihood new teachers can effectively use and make meaning of student data.

A third and final implication regarding these 3 student teachers' thought processes during the completion of their TPA concerns the influence of internal and external factors on the

shaping of their instructional decision-making. Two of the student teachers exhibited strong internal loci of control as evidenced by taking responsibility for reducing barriers to learning and holding students to high standards for achievement. The other student teacher, although equally capable and conscientious in her efforts, exhibited an external locus of control tendency as factors beyond her control (i.e., the students' obvious physical and neurological disabilities, and classroom interruptions) appeared to influence her instructional responses. An explanation accounting for this variance in their decision-making and perceived impacts on learning may reside in their innate personalities, but also in the degree to which they believe their instructional efforts will be worthwhile. As a result, teacher preparation programs utilizing the TPA should nourish the attitude in their student teachers that all students are capable of learning regardless of intervening factors. Supervisors particularly should regularly query and challenge their student teachers' thought processes in such a way that is conducive to enlightened instructional practice.

In closing, this article reported on the pedagogical thought processes of 3 student teachers as derived from TPA documentation and conferencing. The findings included variances in the student teachers' understanding of their students' prior knowledge and cognitive capabilities, their perceptions of how they thought they impacted student learning, and the extent to which their observed locus of control may have contributed to their self-perceptions. The insights illuminated in this article will hopefully spawn new interest and dialogue in the evaluative possibilities of the TPA in predicting teacher candidate effectiveness as it relates to student achievement.

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