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House of Cards: An edTPA Orientation Activity

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Abstract

In this article, the author shares a theoretically-informed activity to support teachers who are impacted by Washington's edTPA, the Teacher Performance Assessment. The author considers the edTPA as a common language for best practices in teaching and as a useful tool for orienting candidates to the profession. Step-by-step instructions are complemented with explanations of the conceptual connection between the activity and the edTPA requirements.

Introduction

After several years of development and refinement, the edTPA is now implemented in the state of Washington. Candidates must now demonstrate pedagogical competence in its three tasks of planning, instructing, and assessing student learning before they can be certified to teach in this state. It is an expensive high stakes test, easily criticized as an intrusive and coercive means of professional accountability. This article, based on a presentation given at the 2013 meeting of Northwest Association of Teacher Educators, does not address the political machinations and ramifications of the legislation and policies of its mandate. Rather, the edTPA is used to as a common language for best practices in teaching, and thus as a teacher educator I regard it as a useful tool for orienting candidates to the profession.

Preparation programs, whether traditional or alternative, have responded to this new standard assessment by revising their courses and checkpoints to introduce the skills candidates need to be successful in practice, ever mindful that the aggregate of candidates' scores will be published and used as a measure of the preparation program's effectiveness. Scores of field supervisors as well as methods and foundations instructors need to understand its structure and logic as well as its usefulness to continue teaching what is already a part of the curriculum; its nuances of reform must also be made explicit. Although the handbooks are clear and specific, they cannot be absorbed quickly if the concepts are counter-intuitive and complex, as is the edTPA. In addition, the proprietary behavior of the edTPA publishers renders the handbooks inconvenient to access. Thus we need some professional development tools to help both novice and expert educators understand edTPA function and structure both systemically and contextually.

Presented here is an activity that is easy, inexpensive, memorable, and meaningful for making the sequence and integrity of the edTPA experience self-evident. This orientation activity uses just five index cards to build a 3-dimensional metaphor providing an intuitive understanding of the way all the parts work together, beginning with an understanding of the students. Then we identify the items included in each task and how student voice is integrated; we highlight key words and the importance of using academic language. Finally,

we fashion a pediment that represents the civic ideals that are the purpose and motivation for school. As each card is folded and the entire structure gradually assembled, participants are encouraged to share insights about the construction and their experiences implementing the edTPA. Either to conclude the activity or to reinforce it later, a worksheet (Figure 17) prompts the recall of the edTPA tasks and components as well as the Professional Education Program courses in which they are taught.

The lesson is informed by current theory and research regarding student engagement (Kuh, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & Hefflebower, 2011), self-regulation (Ertmer & Newby, 1996; Zimmerman, 2001), and multiple modalities (Gardner, 2006; Shearer, 2004). However, its success can also be analyzed in terms of Vygotskian cognitive tools promoted by Egan's (1997) imaginative education, considered to be less linear and atomized and more intuitively accessible to non-western perspectives (Duran & Duran, 1995). The activity and its attendant commentary demonstrate the primary challenge faced by most candidates: integrating their knowledge, skills, and disposition to be effective in the classroom. The commentary is crucial to reveal strategies of effective teaching and their own learning process during the activity. Included here are rough quotes of a typical presentation, intended to prompt frequent student voice (PESB, 2008).

LESSON TITLE:	House of Cards: Introducing the edTPA
CONTEXT:	Candidates for Teacher Certification in an orientation class. (Professional development for inservice educators).
OBJECTIVES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain the components of each edTPA task. • Predict opportunities to develop edTPA skills. • Observe and label the experience.

MATERIALS:	5 index cards
TIME ESTIMATE:	30-40 minutes with full commentary.
STEPS:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fold and label cards. 2. Write edTPA task notes on back. 3. Match Professional Education Program courses to task concepts.
ASSESSMENT:	<p>Formative: Observation during the lesson.</p> <p>Summative: Worksheet</p>

Figure 1. House of Cards lesson outline.

This activity is a convenient opportunity to demonstrate the practices we promote, so I tend to be deliberate about such routine functions as distributing materials (e.g. a stack by the sign-in sheet with a label saying “take 5 cards”; starting open packets to pass around the room with instructions to “take 5”), pausing to ask: “What other ways could these materials have been distributed?” and, to establish a learner-centered perspective, “Think of a grade level. What would a student in that class be thinking now that he or she has five cards?” To underscore the importance of being able to translate unspoken thought and feeling into language, and to set the stage for later discussions of student voice, I might prompt them to “Find out what your neighbor thinks might happen next.”

For a transition, I might say “Let’s see if you are right.” And, I might comment that suspense is a good tool for engaging student attention. This is partly to give teacher candidates a fairly reliable teaching tip but also to acknowledge the reality that you cannot guarantee the way things will turn out in the classroom—or in life for that matter. You can anticipate, prepare, rehearse, and monitor the unfolding drama. This understanding is key to a successful shift from thinking like a student (successfully completing a task as designed

by others for your development) to thinking like a teacher (successfully designing a task in response to others' need for development). But it is important to set up experiences for such insight to be self-evident.

The First Card: The Foundation

The first phase in the activity focuses on edTPA Task 1.A., the Context for Learning, but I don't tell teacher candidates that yet. I am transparent about my procedures: "Hold up one card" and I will hold it up, sweeping the room to make eye contact as I wait. I am careful to use no extra words and to patiently wait until all eyes are on me. And we immediately begin alternating between the activity and the metacognition about it: "In this first minute of the activity, what was I doing? What decisions did I make? Think like a teacher and describe what happened." They might mention eye contact, classroom management, wait time, patience, monitoring, or expectations, but rarely using those terms. Whatever they bring up, I'll nod to encourage observation and commentary. "That's what teachers do all day long: Make decisions and observe what happens."

If I am using a document camera to demonstrate the manipulation of the cards, I will point that out, as in "Your classrooms will be equipped with some sort of technology to help you display visuals. I will be using a document camera. I'm not sure what equipment will be available to you." Thus, I am establishing a comfortable awareness of tools for functions rather than specific equipment. This focus reinforces the important perspective of a resourceful and flexible teacher compared to a diligent but rigid student. The entire exercise establishes the importance of commentary, that is, finding words to explain an experience.

1. Fold the card in half horizontally, and in half again horizontally.

At this point, I have the perfect opportunity to make the concept of 'academic language' meaningful as well as the importance of choosing 'developmentally appropriate' content. "How many of you were thinking 'hot dog'?" Most will grin, and I will launch a brief Socratic dialogue: "At what age would it be appropriate to use the term 'hot dog'?" Several will suggest a very young age. I will nod and comment, "Using a familiar shape is a useful way of engaging students the first time, and it makes the activity less intimidating to think

of such a familiar object.” Then: “At what age would it be appropriate to use the term ‘horizontally’?” Most will suggest middle school, some younger. I will look doubtful and ponder, “I wonder which grade is expected to understand the term ‘horizontal’ in the Common Core Standards.” I will shrug and say, “They can handle ‘tyrannosaurus rex’ at age 5, so I don’t think this will throw them.” (Most smile.) I turn serious: “So why on earth would someone use the term ‘hot dog’ more than once if the children can understand the more accurate term ‘horizontal’? Because it is cute, and that is why people use baby talk: to let kids know you expect them to remain cute and naïve and inaccurate. As teachers, we want kids to think of themselves not as ex-babies but as future engineers, future airline pilots, and future artists – anyone who might need to consider the horizon. Be casual, implying that of course they can understand this because they are smart!”

A metacognitive moment provides the transition back to the task at hand: “You can seamlessly integrate academic language into your speech, reinforcing their confidence in using accurate terms and their optimism in becoming one who would. You are nudging them toward success with the subtle use of academic language. I hope you didn’t mind a brief bird walk to emphasize the importance of deliberately using academic language appropriate for your students’ development. You do know that no matter what you teach, you are responsible for monitoring your students’ language development, right? So let’s find out about your students.”

2. Label each section (Figure 2.). Sometimes for professional development workshops for inservice educators I might print the front side on the cards, but I usually demonstrate writing each term via the document camera, for it is less passive for them to write the words themselves and it gives them time to consider that each term is a separate aspect of the concept.

1. A. Context
School
Community
Individual

Figure 2. Front side of Task 1.A card.

“Each one of your students will walk through your door with an identity already intact: ‘This is who I am, and that is what I have in common with other people.’ They also walk in with their own circumstances, or context, that may differ quite a bit from your own.”

3. On the back, write your best guess about students you might teach (Figure 3).

“Think of a real school in a real location. How might your students see themselves? What will they look for in each other to feel like they have something in common? Or more importantly, from a student’s point of view, why might they feel left out? ”

School Features/Expectations
Classroom Structure
Student Characteristics; Subgroup identities
(Current events; local circumstances)

Figure 3. Backside of Task 1.A card.

4. Partially unfold so it forms a step (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Task 1.A Context

5. Discuss the importance of accurately describing the students and their context. (If they discuss in small groups, you have an opportunity to gauge their level of awareness as well as expression.)

“Do you think any of this context might affect their learning? This is the first step of the first task of the edTPA, the Teacher Performance Assessment. It takes a week during your student teaching. You must demonstrate adequate mastery of all three edTPA tasks for a teaching certificate. It is a logical but fairly involved experience, and this context information will be infused in all the decisions that follow. Everything must be designed to benefit the real students in the real context you are really teaching.”

6. Predict opportunities to learn more.

Most candidates in an orientation course are not yet familiar with the many courses and their sequence in the Professional Education Program (PEP) (Appendix A). They are still applying to be accepted into the program, taking their entrance tests, and rounding up recommendation letters. This is therefore an ideal opportunity to engage their student voices in their own learning: “When will you have an opportunity to learn more about these context factors? Write the PEP courses near the topic.” At the end of the activity, they are given a chart showing when each edTPA task is introduced and reinforced throughout the program (see Appendix B).

“In the next steps we build three pillars, one for each edTPA task: Planning, Instructing, and Assessing. Each of these three cards will be folded lengthwise into thirds to form pillars. These are the pillars of your teaching performance.”

The Second Card: edTPA Task 1 B-E Planning

7. Fold the second card into thirds lengthwise and label it Task 1 B-E Planning (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Front side of Task 1.B-E card.

“The Context is actually the first part of this task. It is edTPA Task 1.A. There are four more parts to this task which we list on the back.”

8. List parts B-E on the back (Figure 6).

B. Lesson Plans
C. Materials
D. Assessment Plans & Materials
E. Reflective Commentary

Figure 6. Back side of Task 1.B-E card.

“You will plan all five parts of Task 1 Planning before you teach any lessons. The planning is your rehearsal for all the activity and materials but also for finding out whether your students actually learned what you hoped they would.”

Figure 7. Assembled column of Task 1.B-E Planning card.

9. Predict opportunities to learn more. “So far you have the steps for your students to enter the classroom and you have planned what they will learn. In addition you have figured out ways to find out if they learned it. Finally, you have explained your decisions in terms of theory and research. The Planning task covers a lot, and fortunately you will take several different courses to learn many ways to do each part.” Again, refer to the Professional Education Program course list (Appendix A) to find opportunities to learn more about each of the edTPA Task 1 Planning components.

The Third Card: edTPA Task 2 A-B. Instructing

“The first task is completed before you teach; the other two tasks occur after you have taught the 3-5 hours of connected lessons. Once you have done all the planning and it has been approved by your supervisor, it is time to implement the plan.”

10. Fold the card into thirds lengthwise and label it Task 2 A & B Instructing.

Figure 8. Front side of Task 1.B-E card.

11. Label the back with the two components of Task 2. “No more planning. Now you just do what you planned but also you monitor how it is going and adjust it so the students are engaged. Notice the two bullet points. These two points are what the video clips will capture: how well you put everything together and keep the momentum, engaging students. Let’s make it personal: Have you been actively engaged so far? What teaching skills have you noticed? Share one thought about your experience so far related to being actively engaged and observing skills.”

<p>A: Video recordings</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pedagogical Skill</i> • <i>Student Engagement</i> <hr/> <p>B. Commentary on video clip evidence.</p>

Figure 9. Back side of Task 2.A&B card.

12. Identify professional education program opportunities to master Task 2 skills. “Have you seen the classic teacher bumper sticker that ‘They don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care’? Your relationships – your interactions and responses to students—are so important that several courses focus on those dynamics: classroom management, bilingual methods, students with exceptionalities, in addition to both general methods and your content area methods. The video clips will be just brief snapshots representing what you are doing all the other time you teach. Of course, it’s one thing to be able to teach and another to be able to videotape, so you will have some practice doing that in several courses, especially your content area methods courses. And, in every single course you will have practice reflecting on your experiences. You are not simply recalling the events, but interpreting your experience in a professional way by integrating your knowledge of psychology, educational theory, research, and especially the context of the real students you are actually teaching.”

Figure 10. Assembled column of Task 1.A&B card.

Now we will take a metacognitive moment. I might simply direct them to “Tell the person next to you what is occurring to you.” An open-ended invitation is adequate to prompt the candidates to recognize how they are feeling and what language they have to describe it. Rather than ask for volunteers to share their thoughts or what they heard someone else say, I will ask a few general self-identifies. “Is anything looking familiar?” If it looks like someone is eager to share, I’ll invite candidates to do so, linking whatever they say to an appropriate course they will take, commenting that “you have plenty of time to learn more about that in the next year or so.”

It is important to address the affective dimension. “Anyone feeling overwhelmed or confused? On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being completely mellow and 5 being completely freaked out, show us your fingers. Look around: notice that others may feel differently but you are definitely not alone. Your students will have a range of reactions, too, and that is what you will notice in your video clips.”

The Fourth Card: edTPA Task 3 A-E. Assessing

“The last task, assessing, involves using the assessments you planned in the first task and administered while teaching those lessons. You are demonstrating your ability to monitor your students’ learning and to adjust your teaching in response to their progress.”

13. Fold the card in thirds lengthwise; label it front and back Task 3 A-E Assessing.

Figure 11. Front side of Task 3.A-E Assessing card.

Figure 12. Back side of Task 3.A-E Assessing card.

“Notice that the tasks are no longer about you and how well you teach. This is all about your students and how well they have learned. To illustrate, let’s position the Task 1.A. Context steps before the three Task columns (Figure 13).

“This task is all about collecting evidence of effectiveness. You will use the assessments that you already planned in Task 1 to generate student work samples (A) and you will summarize the trend in student work (D). You could use the video clips or more student work to prove you gave feedback (B) and were interested in student voice (E). Your

commentary (C) will show that you have a professional understanding of the students' work and you can make new plans based on what you think these students need to learn better."

Figure 13. Assembled Task 1A, Task 1 B-E, Task 2, and Task 3 cards.

The Fifth Card: The Learning Focus

"Thus we arrive at the last and most significant element: the learning focus. This is not a separate task but an overarching perspective guiding all the tasks. This last card (Figure 14) requires a different folding technique:

14. Fold under a base for it to stand on, and fold back the two corners to form a triangle.

Figure 14. Front side of Learning Focus card.

15. Label front and back with the systemic issues infusing all three tasks: “If these terms don’t seem obvious, relax: that is why you have the rest of the Professional Education Program: to learn about teaching strategies and how to incorporate them into your professional perspective. By the time you student teach and you take a week to complete the edTPA, you will be confident in your skills to do so. Today it is enough for you to grasp the scope of teaching you will be mastering. You can trust that the program is designed to address what you need, and at this point, you need to know that each one of the courses in the program is a door to much deeper understanding.”

Figure 15. Back side of Learning Focus card.

Figure 16. Assembled edTPA structure sheltering some third-graders. “Now for the most important question. What difference would it have made in your understanding of the edTPA if you had not constructed this model of a classroom from the ground up but instead you had been given a worksheet with it drawn and ready to label? Find out what your colleagues think.”

Folding five cards to create a structure is a variation of Zikes’ foldables technique (e.g. <http://foldables.wikispaces.com/Foldables>) of using hands-on manipulatives to make concepts more self-evident. The innovative variation is in the building metaphor: the foldable is a memorable image for the entire structure of the edTPA tasks but also the routine interaction of teachers’ logic and decisions. I must admit that when I first developed the activity I was teaching middle school social studies and it was useful for the very challenging unit on the U.S. Constitution. Each card was introduced on a different day, focusing on different National Council for the Social Studies themes. The three columns

represented Power, Governance, and Authority; the top pediment Civic Ideals. However, the Context steps remained somewhat similar: Individuals, Group affiliations, and Formal organizations. The students enjoyed storing the cards flat in their textbooks, ready to add more notes. The bonus was that they were allowed to use their cards on the test, as long as all the writing was in their own handwriting. Many tried to write legibly and small for the first time. More importantly, they all managed to explain democracy in a pluralistic society.

According to exit surveys and 'metacognitive moments' in class, following this activity candidates' gain not only understanding of what the edTPA entails but also optimism in their own capacity to learn the skills necessary to be successful student teaching. The candidates are not the only ones who need to be oriented to the edTPA, though. Especially problematic is the need to orient administrators and Professional Education Advisory Board (PEAB) members who may be somewhat removed from the classroom and may not have become familiar with the academic language of the instrument. Because students of all ages benefit by using hands-on, interactive instructional methods, the elements of the House of Cards activity are foundational and therefore useful for orienting future teachers and other stakeholders to the complexity and logic of the decisions they will make.

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Appendix A:

Central Washington University Professional Education Program

The Professional Education Program provides opportunities to acquire the pedagogical knowledge and skills that allow students to demonstrate a positive impact on P-12 student learning. The Program offers information about and experience in integrating research-based pedagogical constructs for diverse learners and learning situations.

Pre-Admission Observation. (no credit). Students must complete 40 hours of observation in a P-12 school prior to enrolling in EFC 210. Students must arrange to complete this observation outside of Ellensburg, and must complete a short workbook that has been verified by a school official.

EFC 210. Seminar. (1) Discussion of field observation. Program planning. For prospective teachers. Prerequisites: Completion of Pre-Admission Observation required prior to enrolling.

EFC 310. Orientation to Teaching. (3). Teaching as a career and essential features of preparation. Study of the teacher's role and function in the school; characteristics of good teachers; preparation for professional competencies and certification; the American public school system; and the responsibilities of schools in a democratic society. Prerequisites: Prior or concurrent enrollment in EFC 210.

EFC 315. Educational Assessment. (3). The Assessment/Planning/Instruction cycle. Standards-based assessment. Reliability, validity, bias. Basic statistics used in test construction and interpretation. Construction of classroom tests: multiple-choice, short answer, essay, etc. Performance assessment, portfolio assessment, affective assessment. Prerequisites: EFC 210 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

EFC 320. Multicultural Education. (3). Exploration of marginalized groups and the implications for change in education. Examination of foundational elements of and

approaches to Multicultural Education as the underpinning to the development of cultural competence. Prerequisites: EFC 310 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

EFC 330. Field Experience. (2). A laboratory experience for prospective teachers. The opening of school, professional relationships, school/community relationships, school district organization, instructional support, and resource services. Students are assigned in off-campus centers for approximately two weeks prior to fall quarter. Grade will be S or U. Prerequisites: EFC 310 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

EFC 340. Methods of Instruction. (3). Introduction to basic methods of classroom instruction. Development of a comprehensive curriculum unit plan. Methods appropriate for subject and grade level in lab and field experience. Prerequisites: EFC 310, admission to the Teacher Preparation Program, and prior or concurrent enrollment in EFC 315, EFC 320, and EFC 330.

EFC 350: Classroom Management. (3). Development of values, confidence, assertiveness skills, and decision making skills in classroom management. Development of a comprehensive management plan for first year teaching. Includes a field experience component. Prerequisites: PSY 314, EFC 340, and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

EFC 416: Educational Technology. (3). Concepts and resources related to appropriate and effective integration of technology and media in school settings. CS 101 or IT 101 recommended prior to enrollment. Prerequisites: EFC 340 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

EFC 440: Educational Law. (3). Major legal issues confronting educators, including student and teacher rights, due process, torts, and the identification and reporting of child abuse. Prerequisites: EFC 340 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

EFC 480: Student Teaching. (16). Teacher candidates must demonstrate their competence by student teaching a full quarter in their major endorsement area. Includes 20 hours of seminar at a time and place designated by the university supervisor. See Student Teaching Requirements in this catalog, and the Student Teaching Handbook for other requirements and policies. Prerequisites: All other courses in the Professional Education Program with a grade of C or higher. SCED 325 may be substituted for EFC 350, and SCED 487 may be substituted for EFC 416.

PSY 314: Human Development and the Learner. (4). Development through the life cycle. Prerequisites: None.

EDSE 302: Introduction to Students with Exceptionalities. (3). Designed to introduce effective teaching strategies and strategies for adapting standard instruction to meet the needs of a range of students found the typical classroom. This course provides information about students considered disabled as well as gifted, and students with multicultural heritages. Prerequisites: EFC 340 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

EDBL 401: Principles and Practices for Educating Linguistically Diverse Students. (3). Required coursework that provides the fundamental background in language and learning theories needed to educate linguistically diverse students. The basics of sheltered instruction are introduced. Prerequisites: EFC 340 and admission to the Teacher Preparation Program.

Appendix B:

edTPA Tasks in CWU Professional Education Program (PEP) Courses

Student Teaching edTPA									
EFC 480									
PEP Check-point 3: <i>Clearance to Student Teach</i>									
Endorsement Programs: <i>Academic language; Content methods</i>									
PEP									
Professional Education Program	Pre-Admission Segment	EFC 310							
EDTPA TASKS		PSY 314							
		EFC 210							
1: PLANNING									
A. Describe context.									
B. Plan lessons.									
C. Select materials.									
D. Plan assessment.									
E. Write commentary									
2: INSTRUCTING									
A. Video recordings									
B. Reflective commentary									
PEP Check-point 2: <i>Adequate Progress in Course Performance</i>									
PEP									
Foundation Segment		EFC 340							
		EFC 320							
		EFC 315							
		EFC 330							
1: PLANNING									
A. Describe context.									
B. Plan lessons.									
C. Select materials.									
D. Plan assessment.									
E. Write commentary									
2: INSTRUCTING									
A. Video recordings									
B. Reflective commentary									
PEP Check-point 1: <i>Admission to the Teacher Certification Program</i>									

3. ASSESSING																	
A: Student work					X	X											
B: Evidence of Feedback					X	X				X							
C: Commentary			X			X							X				
D: Evaluation Criteria			X			X											