Chapter 9

Preparing Elementary Education Teacher Candidates to Design Learning Segments: The Case of edTPA Task One

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ABSTRACT

By program completion teacher candidates should be able to proficiently demonstrate the skills associated with the teaching profession. This includes their ability to design instructional units on a set of standards. This chapter describes the process of preparing teacher candidates to design instructional units as part of the edTPA performance-based assessment. Two specific course assignments that are completed during candidates’ junior and senior years are described. Implications for teacher education programs include the significance of providing candidates with multiple experiences to develop the skills associated with the performance-based assessment and providing adequate feedback to candidates throughout the entire process.

BACKGROUND

On a daily basis teachers take on the role of instructional designers as they take content standards, unpack their meaning, and then design instructional activities that provide their students with rich experiences to develop an understanding of the content in the standards. In educator preparation programs (EPPs) this progression often starts with the planning and creation of a single lesson, and eventually develops into the planning and creation of a sequence of related lessons sometimes referred to as an instructional unit or learning segment. In this chapter the focus is on the design of learning segments.

Frameworks and models that can be used to support teacher candidates’ instructional design have been advanced by various educational leaders (Smaldino, Lowther, Mims, & Russell, 2014; Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Smaldino et al. (2014) proposed the ASSURE model which is an acronym for the
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The model focuses on designing instruction through a systematic process of Analyzing learners, Stating objectives, Selecting methods, materials, and media, Utilizing or teaching with materials and media, Require learner participation or engagement, and Evaluating and revising the instructional plans and materials. The developers of the ASSURE model in their materials stress the importance of the various steps of the process aligning to each other and building off one another (Smaldino et al., 2014).

Wiggins and McTighe (2011) created an Understanding by Design (UbD) framework which has also been called Backwards Design. The UbD framework includes 3 stages of developing instructional units. First, teachers identify the desired results with a specific focus on the essential questions and goals of the instruction. The second stage is to determine the evidence that students will produce to demonstrate that they have met the goals. The third stage of the UbD process is to determine what instructional activities and materials should be in the learning segment in order to help learners demonstrate the evidence. Just like the ASSURE model, the UbD framework emphasizes absolute alignment between the three processes.

Research studies related to teacher candidates’ ability to design learning segments indicate that several factors contribute to their success. Author (2011) found that providing a lesson plan template that prompts teacher-candidates for specific components, such as reform-based instructional strategies, or 21st century skills greatly increases the likelihood that teacher candidates will include those components. Further, the process of providing teacher candidates and novice teachers with opportunities to collaboratively plan supports their work (Lawrence-Brown, 2004). Tricarico and Yendol-Hoppey (2012) found that developing teachers’ self-regulation and self-assessment skills led to stronger instructional plans. Author (in press) also found that having specific knowledge of learners, instructional resources, and standards led to more effective instructional plans.

The knowledge required for teacher candidates to design effective instruction can be described as knowledge-for-practice as well as knowledge-in-practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) as teachers need to have an understanding of standards they are expected to teach, content related to those standards, pedagogy related to that specific content, and then the skills and knowledge to create an effective instructional plan. Shulman’s (1987) model of Pedagogical Content Knowledge and a more recent model of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK; Mishra & Koehler, 2006) posit that knowledge related to teaching is an intersection of pedagogy, content, and in the case of TPACK, technology. To this end, there is a need for educator preparation programs (EPPs) to provide teacher candidates with experiences that develop their knowledge of content, pedagogy, and other related aspects of teaching so that teacher candidates are able to apply this knowledge in authentic settings.

In this chapter we detail out the process of preparing teacher candidates to design learning segments focused on literacy as part of Task 1 of the edTPA performance-based assessment. In the next section we provide an overview of edTPA Task 1 and the two courses focused on the design of lessons and learning segments.

PREPARING TEACHER CANDIDATES TO DESIGN LEARNING SEGMENTS

Context

The university that this chapter describes is a large university in the southeastern United States. The Elementary Education program consistently graduates approximately 75 students each December and
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