Chapter 8
Redesigning Teacher Education in the Context of Multiple Reform Initiatives

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ABSTRACT

Numerous teacher educators are revising their programs by focusing on high-leverage practices (HLPs). Concurrently, edTPA has been adopted by a number of states as a way to assess teacher candidates' readiness to teach. There is considerable conceptual congruence in these reform strategies. Both are practice-based, focusing on the authentic work of teaching. Nonetheless, the origins of these strategies, language, and materials are not seamless. HLPs, and ways of teaching them, are generated by local teacher educators themselves; edTPA was developed on a national scale with one purpose being to provide a common assessment of readiness to teach. This chapter illustrates the collective efforts of one teacher education program to productively handle the challenges that emerge in this dual reform climate while simultaneously meeting accreditation association requirements, including a conceptual framework for educator preparation programs. A model is subsequently presented for meaningful integration of edTPA, HLPs, and institutional conceptual frameworks.

INTRODUCTION

Traditional teacher education has been under attack from those who believe it is not worth the investment—that short, alternative programs can more efficiently supply good teachers by recruiting smart candidates and giving them an intensive, short period of hands-on experience under the tutelage of a

strong mentor. Teacher education reformers may have inadvertently contributed to this attack by focusing more on the reform vision than reform outcomes. Over the past several decades, important and innovative conceptualizations have guided teacher education redesign, including critically reflective teacher education, multicultural teacher education, and social justice teacher education. But a missing element has often been accountability and assessment. How do teacher educators know if their work has lasting, transformative effects or if it continues to be "washed out" (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981) by the contexts in which beginning teachers work—especially in this era of high-stakes testing and increased pressure to teach to the test?

But even if teacher education programs were not under attack, program faculty need to ensure that they spend the time they have with candidates as wisely and effectively as possible. Two innovative reform efforts in teacher education are increasingly used and touted across a number of states, programs and institutions to accomplish that goal. One is edTPA, a teacher candidate performance-based assessment modeled after the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The other goes by a number of names, the most common of which are core or high-leverage practices (HLPs). edTPA seeks to support the professionalization of the teaching field by creating a nationally available common assessment that sets a standard for what teacher candidates should know and be able to do prior to beginning their first year of teaching. HLPs are the core set of teaching practices at which program faculty determine candidates must be proficient before they are recommended for certification. Teacher educators, working in both traditional and alternative arenas, have been using HLPs to re-design individual courses and whole programs.

Although these redesign efforts have operated in relative isolation from one another, finding ways to merge the strengths of the two seems to hold promise. Their philosophical foundations and approaches are highly compatible. By bringing together a focus on ambitious teaching, an understanding of teaching as a complex practice, and a commitment to carefully guiding and assessing core teaching practices, they can offer a seamless convergence between teacher practices and teacher assessment to increase the rigor and accountability of teacher education programs.

If these two efforts are to be successfully merged, however, careful thought must be given to potential tensions that might exist between their implementation and their relationship to the larger accreditation context in which they occur. In our experience, achieving coherence across these agendas has proven to be more difficult and elusive than anticipated, at times causing frustration and anxiety among both students and faculty. This paper explores some of the tensions our institution has grappled with in integrating edTPA and HLP reform approaches with the conceptual framework that had already been developed, for accreditation purposes, to guide our programs. We delve into the sources of that frustration, closely analyzing contextual factors and faculty efforts in order to better understand and lay the groundwork for program transformation.

Although the three of us work in the same academic department, our institutional positions (associate chair, faculty director of edTPA, course instructor) have provided different perspectives and enabled us to draw upon different sources of data including course and assessment materials, conversations with students and colleagues, and committee work. The overarching questions we address are: What challenges are experienced as we strive for program coherence in the context of these multiple commitments? How can we meaningfully integrate these institutional commitments in our programs and in our work?

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