Chapter 75

Portfolios²:
TESL Candidates' Transformed Understandings of Portfolio Assessments With English Learners Through Performance-Based Assessment

Joan Lachance
UNC Charlotte, USA

ABSTRACT

Graduate level teacher candidates preparing to work with English learners participate in coursework related to theory and practice for many aspects of second language acquisition. In this presentation the author describes and discusses an innovative capstone project, completed in the context of the second language acquisition course, which conceptualizes and embodies performance-based assessments. What makes this exceptional is that teacher candidates demonstrate deep insight regarding the authenticity of using performance-based assessments with K-12 English learners while simultaneously connecting the concepts to their own pre-service teaching performance-based assessments; Portfolios².

INTRODUCTION

In the field of teacher preparation, a wide variety of assessments is used to document pre-service teachers' performances related to university-based teacher preparation programs. In many cases, these assessments include performance-based systems of evaluation to showcase candidates' outcomes related to the required learning expectations for the recommendation of initial licensure and teacher certification. Over the past decade alone many countries worldwide have examined and scrutinized how candidates' performance can be assessed and measured to develop and improve learning outcomes. Specifically in the United States, education reform is in a critical moment for teacher preparation and teacher evaluation, whereby states across the nation are undergoing extensive changes with regard to the use of performance-based teacher evaluations. This movement for transformation also calls for increased innovation from teacher

preparation programs so as to create and enhance the quality of teacher training as opposed to substituting long-standing prior challenges with new ones (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation [CAEP], 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Along this line of thinking, this presentation considers the idea that teacher candidates, and in this case, those working with English learners, can greatly benefit by extended exposure to the concept of performance-based evaluations. The innovative approach included in this information explores how teacher candidates themselves deepen their understandings of performance-based assessments, serving as an authentic pathway to demonstrate gained skills and knowledge. Likewise, candidates explore and discover the crucial aspects of using performance-based evaluations and assessments with their own K-12 English learners. Conceptual connections between the two avenues for using performance-based assessments solidify and reinforce the importance of these assessments and their focus on authenticity with teacher candidates as well as with English learners.

BACKGROUND

Teacher Preparation and Authentic, Performance-Based Assessments

Theory and research suggest there is an ever-growing focus on teacher preparation and the assessment of pre-service teachers. Within current education reform there is increased accountability and focus on student outcomes based on effective teaching practices (Okhremtchouk, Newell, & Rosa, 2013; U. S. Department of Education, 2010). Furthermore, there is extensive literature to support the links between high quality teaching and student achievement as well as the sustained impacts on learners (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003). This on-going restructuring also resonates within teacher preparation programs to embody an intensified concentration on pre-service teacher assessments. That said, there is also great concern that many of the current pre-service skills-based assessments neglect the myriad intricacies that should be measured, describing an in-depth sense of authenticity to accurately measure and portray the multidimensional nature of teaching and learning in a standards-based era (Darling-Hammond, 2014; Corcoran, 1995). As such, it is often challenging for educational administrators to really establish which teachers are proficient and which are struggling with directly impacting increased student outcomes. Likewise, it is equally challenging to understand which teachers are on target with the on-going progression of masterful teaching that takes years of practice and reflection to access (Ovando & Ramirez, 2007) solely based on annual, disconnected skills-based assessments.

Correspondingly is the notion that teacher evaluation systems must reinforce on-going, self-directed improvement with advantageous pathways for productive development (Darling-Hammond, 2014). Additionally, existing literature strongly establishes that self-reflection and performance-based evaluations in teaching contexts, for both initial teacher preparation have an important impact on how teachers aim to improve their own practices (Richards, 1998). Therefore, the relevance of on-going performance-based teacher evaluations becomes imperative for accredited teacher preparation programs on a global scale. Many nations, including the US, have developed teacher preparation programs that focus on candidates' creation of a comprehensive portfolio to authentically document their skills, knowledge, successes, and preparedness for the teaching profession (Denny, Grier, & Buchanan, 2012). This design is attributed to the credence that teachers' increased sense of problem solving through critical and reflective approaches increases student outcomes. Furthermore, this transformational development emerges with increased

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