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Ignatian Pedagogy and Its Alignment with the New Teacher Bar Exam (edTPA) and Action Research Frameworks

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Abstract

Teacher Preparation Programs are subject to increasing demands on their curriculums, with no corresponding increases in contact time or duration of programs. As new high-stakes pre-service teacher assessments come online, programs must prepare candidates for success with them while still honoring other elements, such as research in accelerated graduate programs and university identities through specialized pedagogies. Programs face the challenge of teaching it all, and doing so in a coherent manner. This article addresses the alignment across components of edTPA (pre-service education Teacher Performance Assessment), action research, and Ignatian pedagogy, providing a table that aligns the three frameworks.

Teacher Preparation Programs across the nation face increasing mandates, especially regarding accountability for candidate readiness to teach. For universities, this means that in addition to meeting obligations of mission and research expectations, programs must also prepare for high-stakes external assessments of their candidates to meet new state requirements. As requirements multiply, contact time remains constant. So how are faculty to deal with the pressures of simultaneously honoring the mission of their organizations, the demands of the profession, and the mandates of external organizations?

Washington State has long legislated that teacher candidates take a performance assessment during their student teaching experiences. A few years ago, that assessment shifted to the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA), a test that is common across some of the United States. In spring 2014 it became high-stakes, meaning that “candidates completing teacher preparation programs must successfully pass this assessment” in effect – a “bar exam”.¹ Gonzaga University was one of the first to pilot, and later field test, the assessment. One advantage of beginning pilot efforts early was

that programs could make gradual changes to align to the content of the assessment through annual modifications to better support candidates and their chances for success on the high stakes evaluation. Candidates in graduate programs were also expected to display some level of scholarship through research, another demand that the Master in Initial Teaching program was challenged to accommodate in a year-long program. In addition, at Gonzaga, we also strive to demonstrate Ignatian Pedagogy, described further in the paper, in our classrooms. The balance of honoring the Ignatian mission, while tending to research demands and simultaneously meeting external mandates of high-stakes testing, was daunting in a time-bound program. And so the question had to be addressed: Do any of these demands align?

This paper explores the why and what of the edTPA framework, Ignatian Pedagogy, and action research model, and then attempts to align components of each to inform work within teacher preparation programs. For the purpose of this paper, only graduate teacher preparation will be addressed, specifically due to the nature of the demands of research at

that level, particularly action research by teacher candidates in the field.

The Challenge of Doing It All

In my role as the research and assessment point-person for our Master in Teaching cohorts, I took on the task of addressing state mandates to have candidates demonstrate positive impact in the classroom, to be aware of edTPA components, to practice Task 3 – the assessment task, and to conduct a form of action research in the field. While edTPA and action research have their own conceptual frameworks, Ignatian pedagogy implies yet another. Considering the timeline of the program, about one year, and the amount of contact time with candidates, usually about 2 hours a week – teaching each framework, associated skills, and giving time to practice and reflect was more than a challenge.

Below, the word “components” is used to denote parts of a conceptual framework or tasks associated with a larger idea that would be addressed in a program as the “why” and “what” of each framework is discussed. The frameworks are not discussed in any particular order of relevance or emergence, with edTPA first, Ignatian Pedagogy next, and an action research overview last. Described separately, they are then analyzed for overlap and displayed in an alignment table.

Why was edTPA developed?

When Stanford and the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) joined to develop and share a teacher assessment, they did so with the following rationale: “One of the most important challenges facing public education is to ensure that the nation’s increasingly young and inexperienced teacher workforce is prepared to meet the academic needs of all students. Teachers must be ready to teach, with the necessary skills needed to support student learning, from the first day they enter the classroom” (nd, para 1).² AACTE maintained that there was a need for a uniform and impartial process to evaluate aspiring teachers. According to a participation map, 28 states and the District of Columbia had joined the

Teacher Performance Assessment Consortium (TPAC) and more than 160 teacher preparation programs had participated in edTPA activities as of fall 2013.³ As an accelerated state, Washington required edTPA in all institutes of higher education granting teaching certification. The assessment was high-stakes based on the notion that candidates must pass it before being granted a teaching certificate. Additionally, it is electronically uploaded and assessed by an external agent, Pearson Measurement. Also, engaging with edTPA begins to prepare the pre-service candidate for professional expectations in the field, and aligns with many Teacher/Principal Evaluation Project (TPEP) state criteria.⁴

What are the components of edTPA?

The edTPA used in Washington contained three tasks evaluated by 15 common rubrics and three additional state-specific rubrics. Each task required an associated written commentary and work samples/artifacts. Five dimensions of the assessment included:

1. Planning Instruction and Assessment establishes the instructional and social context for student learning and includes lesson plans, instructional materials and student assignments/assessments. Candidates demonstrate how their plans align with content standards, build upon students’ prior academic learning and life experiences and how instruction is differentiated to address student needs.
2. Instructing and Engaging Students in Learning includes one or two unedited video clips of 15-20 minutes from the learning segment and a commentary analyzing how the candidate engages students in learning activities. Candidates also demonstrate subject-specific pedagogical strategies and how they elicit and monitor student responses to develop deep subject matter understandings.
3. Assessing Student Learning includes classroom based assessment (evaluation criteria), student work samples, evidence of teacher feedback, and a commentary analyzing patterns of student learning. Candidates summarize the performance of

the whole class, analyze the specific strengths and needs of three focus students, and explain how their feedback guides student learning.

4. Analysis of Teaching Effectiveness is addressed in commentaries within planning, instruction, and assessment tasks. In planning, candidates justify their plans based on the candidate's knowledge of diverse students' learning strengths and the needs and principles of research and theory. In instruction, candidates explain and justify which aspects of the learning segment were effective, and what the candidate would change. Lastly, candidates use their analysis of assessment results to inform next steps for individuals and groups with varied learning needs.
5. Academic Language Development is evaluated based on the candidate's ability to support students' oral and written use of academic language to deepen subject matter understandings. Candidates explain how students demonstrate academic language using student work samples and/or video recordings of student engagement.⁵

In the big picture for edTPA, one of our first programmatic efforts centered around aligning coursework to relevant tasks, and then identifying edTPA practice tasks as key assessments, a la NCATE language. In this way, we could be sure that each candidate will have seen, practiced, and received feedback on each task prior to encountering it in the high stakes arena of student teaching.

Through the years, I have noted a change in anxiety levels as new groups of student teachers come in for registration on the Pearson system to upload their assessments. Early on, with the newness and lack of practice, anxiety ran high and perceived relevance was elusive. However, this academic year, the cohort was calm, seemed prepared, and even went a step beyond the edTPA overview and registration agenda. We added an activity wherein they aligned edTPA language to the state teacher evaluation language (TPEP) to look for alignment and gaps. Relevance was no longer an issue.

When is the edTPA required in our program?

Candidates practice each edTPA component, described above, during their program coursework in a formative manner before they reach the high-stakes version of the assessment. Then, during student teaching, candidates focus on three to five days of individual instruction to conduct the edTPA. Then candidates complete commentaries and upload materials for final submission to Pearson's online portfolio system.

Why Ignatian Pedagogy?

The pursuit of institutional mission through teaching at a Jesuit university lends itself to the employment of an Ignatian pedagogy – modeled in 1993 by the International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE) in the form of the Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach (1993).⁶ The adaptable model strives for relationship through practical meaning and application in pursuit of academic formation. Our university website goes as far as promising that Ignatian Pedagogy will help teachers be better teachers. It calls upon us to support the intellectual growth of members, while providing opportunities for spiritual growth and development alongside a commitment to social justice. Stressing the social dimension of teaching and learning, it encourages cooperation, sharing of experiences, and dialogue – relating learning to personal interaction and human relationships.

What are the components of Ignatian Pedagogy?

Ignatian Pedagogy can be modeled through the lens of six key teaching elements:

- Context
- Experience
- Engage
- Reflect
- Action
- Evaluation

Our university clarifies the elements thusly calling on interpretations from the

Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities:

Context - What needs to be known about learners (their environment, background, community, and potential) to teach them well?

Cura personalis--personal care and concern for the individual--is a hallmark of Jesuit education, and requires that teachers become as conversant as possible with the context or life experience of the learner. Since human experience, always the starting point in a Jesuit education, never occurs in a vacuum, educators must know as much as possible about the actual context within which teaching and learning take place. Teachers need to understand the world of the learner, including the ways in which family, friends, peers, and the larger society impact that world and affect the learner for better or worse.

Experience - What is the best way to engage learners as whole persons in the teaching and learning process? Teachers must create the conditions whereby learners gather and recollect the material of their own experience in order to distil what they understand already in terms of the facts, feelings, values, insights and intuitions they bring to the subject matter at hand. Teachers later guide the learners in assimilating new information and further experience so that their knowledge will grow in completeness and truth.

Reflection - How may learners become more reflective so they more deeply understand what they have learned? Teachers lay the foundations for learning how to learn by engaging students in skills and techniques of reflection. Here memory, understanding, imagination, and feelings are used to grasp the essential meaning and value of what is being studied, to discover its relationship to other facets of human knowledge and activity, and to appreciate its implications in the continuing search for truth.

Action - How do we compel learners to move beyond knowledge to action? Teachers provide opportunities that will challenge the imagination and exercise the will of the learners to choose the best possible course of action from what they have learned. What they do as a result under the teacher's direction, while it may not immediately transform the world into a global community of justice, peace and love, should at least be an educational step towards that goal, even if it merely leads to new experiences, further reflections, and consequent actions within the subject area under consideration.

Evaluation - How do we assess learners' growth in mind, heart, and spirit? Daily quizzes, weekly or monthly tests and semester examinations are familiar instruments to assess the degree of mastery of knowledge and skills achieved. Ignatian pedagogy, however, aims at evaluation that includes but goes beyond academic mastery to the learners' well-rounded growth as persons for others. Observant teachers will perceive indications of growth or lack of growth in class discussions and students' generosity in response to common needs much more frequently.⁷

Why action research?

Action research is generally undertaken to solve a problem or positively impact a situation.⁸ While the concept did not originally emerge in education, it was quickly applied in that arena and is particularly appropriate to address the "theory-practice" gap that is most apparent in the pre-service educator's classroom.

Action research takes a stance of professional inquiry, an important disposition for educators. Especially while viewed through the increasingly common lens of continuous improvement, action research provides a framework for teachers to investigate their own practice, curriculum, and results in the classroom through a reflective, action-oriented systemic process.

edTPA framework	Ignatian Pedagogy	Action Research
Context for Learning	Context	Participants – Issue (Identifying and idea & reconnaissance)
Task 1: Planning	Experience	Plan
Task 2: Instructing & Engaging	Engage	First Action
Task 3: Assessing	Reflect	Evaluate – Amended Plan
Task 3: Assessing	Action	Second Action
Task 3: Assessing	Evaluation	Evaluation (then repeat cycle)

Figure 1. Alignment of edTPA, Ignatian Pedagogy, and Action Research

What are the components of action research?

While multiple models of action research exist, they have similarities such as recursive processing and action steps. In general, most heed some spiral nature wherein action steps are informed by previous reflection, and are situated contextually, for example – in a classroom. For the purpose of this paper, Lewin’s model of action research will be used, but it should be noted that others fit the framework as well. Lewin, who is credited with coining the phrase “action research,” models action research by drawing an iterative process linking the components of fact finding, planning, taking action, evaluating, amending the plan, and then moving into a second action step.⁹


Aligning the Frameworks

Attempting to separately teach the three frameworks – edTPA, Ignatian Pedagogy, and Action Research – is time-prohibitive and duplicative. As I considered our short graduate program, I was daunted by the task of doing justice to each idea and helping our graduate students connect their work to the frameworks below. After several years of haphazardly applying each component in a less-than-optimal manner, I finally sat down and I asked myself how they fit together. Where did they overlap and complement each other and where did they stand alone? Figure 1 shows how I aligned the frameworks based on common language and descriptors.

Analysis & Conclusions

Aligning across rows, it becomes clear that each framework begins with an emphasis on

understanding the *contextual* factors of a setting and the people to be served. This contrasts with an imposed, uninformed entrance to a setting in which an educator might believe that s/he comes in with a toolkit of one-size fits all answers. Based on that contextual experience, the educator seeks to *plan* to address issues in an attempt to positively impact a setting by taking *action* within it. The notion of action is directly addressed in each framework, the primary mode of such action being *teaching*. The results are continually *evaluated* and *reflection* then informs following action steps. Additionally, no framework implies a linear process with a clear start and end point. Rather, the goal is positive developing, an iterative search for the better result, or as Ignatius would say, the *magis*.

The clarity brought to my coursework based on the understanding of the oneness of these frameworks has lowered my blood pressure. As educators attempt to address increasing volumes of curriculum content, finding that some of it seems to be grounded in sameness allows us to make connections amongst the various demands upon our profession and delve deeper into the content rather than plowing the proverbial mile-long, inch-deep curriculum. Whether we couch our language as positive impact, continuous improvement, or the *magis* – educators can continue to seek out better practices and results alongside their students with a more holistic understanding of the relationship between the frameworks we use to guide our work. 

Notes

¹ Professional Educators Standards Board, “edTPA,” accessed April 14, 2014, <https://sites.google.com/a/pesb.wa.gov/assessment/assessments/edtpa>.

² American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), “About edTPA,” accessed April 14, 2014, <http://edtpa.aacte.org/about-edtpa>, para. 2.

³ AACTE, “About edTPA.”

⁴ Washington State Teacher/Principal Evaluation Project, “Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (2010-13),” accessed April 14, 2014, <http://tpep-wa.org/>.

⁵ AACTE, “About edTPA.”

⁶ International Commission on the Apostolate of Jesuit Education (ICAJE), *Ignatian Pedagogy: A Practical Approach*, accessed April 14, 2014, http://www.rockhurst.edu/media/filer_private/uploads/ignatian_pedagogy_a_practical_approach.pdf.

⁷ Gonzaga University, “Jesuit Education,” accessed April 14, 2014, <http://www.gonzaga.edu/about/mission/Jesuit%20Education.asp>, para 10-14.

⁸ C. A. Mertler, *Action Research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2013).

⁹ “Kurt Lewin: Groups, Experiential Learning and Action Research,” accessed April 14, 2014, <http://infed.org/mobi/kurt-lewin-groups-experiential-learning-and-action-research/>.