PACE

COMMENTARY

Effectiveness of Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT)

A Tool for Evaluating English-Language Arts Teacher Candidates' Skills and Knowledge to Teach

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Concerned with improving teacher preparation (TPE) in California, the state Legislature enacted Senate Bill 2042, which required candidates to pass standardized performance assessments before certification. As a result, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) developed policy on the Teacher Performance Assessments (TPAs). A consortium of universities later developed the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT) and was approved by the CTC as one TPA for use in California. PACT requires "candidates to demonstrate through performance with K–12 students that they have mastered the knowledge, skills, and abilities required of a beginning teacher, as exemplified in the Teaching Performance Expectations".

A crucial test for PACT is whether it can adequately assess English-Language Arts (ELA) teacher candidates on how they connect teaching to linguistic, social, and cultural context of schooling, and purposes of education in rural border schools. Mexican-American youths in the county of study rely on historically and culturally accumulated funds of knowledge from households that "interconnect them with their social environments (most importantly with other households) and [use] these social relationships [to] facilitate the development and exchange of resources—including knowledge, skills, and labor—that enhance the households' ability to survive and thrive" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, "Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms," 2005, p. 73). However, the PACT view of effective teacher candidate is a generic one that may not have paid adequate attention to how rural border school contexts constrain teacher candidates' abilities to teach in pedagogically rich ways.

The research objective of this study is to examine whether PACT adequately assesses ELA teacher candidates' teaching effectiveness in the face of contextual questions and tensions in the rural border schools. This study is guided by two research questions:

- How does the school accountability context impact ELA teacher candidates' teaching during PACT in rural border schools?
- In what ways do schools' capital resources influence ELA teacher candidates' teaching during PACT in rural border schools?

The study uses PACT Teaching Event commentaries and open-ended questions from eight ELA teacher candidates. The findings suggest that PACT may not have taken into account how contextual constraints such as standardized tests, scripted curriculum, and direct instruction, may have compromised teacher candidates' ability to develop culturally relevant pedagogy that allows them to connect teaching to students' cultural capital: rurality, bilingualism, bi-literacy, and biculturalism. Also, PACT does not reflect the rural schools' reality of fewer resources—where teacher candidates teach from only school-approved textbooks and have limited access to technology and experienced colleagues for support.

The findings have significant implications for PACT:

- PACT needs to assess whether teacher candidates develop culturally relevant pedagogy appropriate for rural border schools by testing whether they link teaching to the issues of rurality, biculturalism, bilingualism, bi-literacy, intercultural exchange, and transnationalism.
- PACT should assess how teacher candidates challenge inequalities and educational status quo, respect cultural knowledge, differences, and work within and against the accountability system to enhance learning, access, equity, and participation for minority ELLs.
- PACT needs to assess whether teacher candidates develop rural border pedagogy that emphasizes critical thinking, project-based learning, discovery (inquiry-based) learning, problem-solving activities, and collaborative learning to prepare students to build and sustain social networks that interconnect them with families, other households, and the community.
- PACT can be strengthened to assess how teacher candidates learn to teach in socioculturally complex contexts. Further studies should focus on fundamental questions: how do cultures and contexts interact and shape learning-to-teach; what are appropriate strategies for teacher candidates to guide learning for rural, bilingual, bicultural students; what constitutes the core of ELA curricula that validates and supports students' bilingualism and intercultural knowledge; and how can an assessment that is rural border context-based be designed to evaluate teacher candidates' teaching effectiveness.

The full study can be found in Performance Assessment for California Teachers and English-Language Arts Candidates in a Rural Border Community, The Educational Forum, Volume 78, Issue 3, 2014.

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