

With Our Feet on the Ground
(and in the Classroom):
Towards Making
State-Mandated Assessment Meaningful

Susan Carlile

California State University, Long Beach

Preparing “highly qualified” new teachers has become the mantra of our nation’s school reform. Taking up this charge, teacher educators continue to look for ways to help pre-service teachers put both theoretical and empirical knowledge into practice. However, they often lament that what pre-service teachers demonstrate and believe while they are taking coursework is sometimes erased the moment they spend full days in the school. When pre-service teachers do their student teaching, they quickly become submerged in every day school culture, and they often resort to non-theory driven behaviors rather than implementing what they learned in methods classes, a phenomenon among teachers that Lortie (1975) long ago recognized. Layered onto our responsibility as teacher educators to help pre-service teachers be reflective in their practice are new high stakes assessments that teacher preparation programs are expected to implement. This is particularly salient in California with the advent of a state-developed Teaching Performance Assessment as a feature of recent reforms in the standards for preparing new teachers (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2003). In an attempt to address these issues simultaneously, this study considered the problem of ineffective fieldwork experiences in the English Single Subject Credential Program at California State University, Long Beach prior to student teaching by combining structured fieldwork into a

Susan Carlile is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at California State University, Long Beach.

newly established state-mandated assessment, Teaching Performance Assessment Task 1 (TPA 1).

Our program has struggled to get pre-service teachers into the field in meaningful ways. We are a commuter campus with students spread throughout a large geographical region. Our students come to us with full lives—children, debt, jobs, sick family members etc... As much as we would love to require more extensive early fieldwork opportunities in tandem with our courses, this will not be possible in the foreseeable future. Presently pre-service teachers are required to do 75 hours of fieldwork prior to their student teaching semester; however, these experiences have not been considered valuable by them, nor satisfactory to us. Too many of these pre-service teachers struggle quite significantly when they become student teachers. Therefore, we had been looking for ways to be efficient with the hours that they spend in the field prior to being student teachers.

This combination of a structured fieldwork component with TPA 1 was implemented in the last course, Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English (C&M), that pre-service teachers take prior to student teaching. [I will use the term “pre-service teacher” to refer to those students in our English Single Subject program who have not yet begun student teaching and the term “student teacher” for those who are doing student teaching]. In this course, pre-service teachers are required to do fifteen hours of fieldwork. Four skill areas are targeted in TPA 1: (1) creating developmentally appropriate lesson plans (DALs), (2) designing effective assessments (Assessment), (3) working with English Language Learners (ELL), and (4) working with Special Needs students (Special Needs).

Specifically, the study looked at how participants, who were now student teaching, perceived the value of this structured fieldwork infused into TPA 1 and how they articulate their skills and knowledge in the four focus areas. Perception and articulation were assessed during the student teaching semester through a series of interviews with eleven student teachers. These participants had all completed the C&M course with the TPA 1 structured fieldwork component and were student teachers the semester immediately following. This study, which compared three focus areas, DALs, Special Needs, and ELL, that included structured fieldwork and one (Assessment) that did not, found that structured fieldwork, made TPA 1 more relevant, and thus more effectively prepared students for student teaching. Not only were participants more prepared in these three areas, but they also felt more confident as they entered student teaching, what is often considered “a baptism by fire.” TPA 1 provided the structure, but the fieldwork infused into this state-mandated assessment made it relevant in a way that students genuinely valued.

Literature Review

It is a commonplace that pre-service teachers who are doing their student teaching tend to struggle as they attempt to apply the knowledge and skills they learned in coursework to classroom situations. As a result, the need for more mentoring and induction programs is frequently called for by educators (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Gold, 1996; Hargreaves & Jacka, 1995; Moir, 2003; Odell, 1990; Odell & Huling, 2000). However, these calls are less urgent when pre-service teachers have strong early fieldwork experiences that give them hands on experience with the real problems they will face in the classroom. Therefore, it is not surprising that early fieldwork is known to improve pre-service teachers' abilities when they become full-time teachers (Goldstein & Lake, 2003; Ferguson, 1989; Henning et. al. 2005; Maxie 2001; Pryor & Kuhn 2004).

Alongside the concerns that our students were not being properly prepared in early fieldwork experiences for student teaching at the forefront of our minds, No Child Left Behind (2002) insists that we assess our pre-service teachers to confirm that they are "highly qualified," a highly contested term (Porter-Magee, 2004; Fritzberg, 2003). California's recent reform of teacher education, known as SB 2042, initiated the Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) and Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA) that are also highly contested (Berlak, 2003). Thus, we were faced with the two-fold task of preparing pre-service teachers for the juggling act of effectively merging theory and practice, while also assessing them according to state and federal mandates. To merge theory and practice, pre-service teachers needed effective fieldwork experiences. According to Willard-Holt and Bottomly (2000 in Henning, et al.), "In order for field experiences to have the greatest positive impact on pre-service teachers, the connection between coursework and field experience must be clear" (p. 189). Our internal concern about ineffective fieldwork combined with these required external forces, and the belief that the connection between state-assessments and practical experience and training must be clear were the impetus for this study.

Context

In the Fall of 2003 our program began the process of embedding Task 1 of the California TPA developed by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing in the C&M course that pre-service teachers take just prior to the student teaching semester. Now pre-service teachers were asked to read and respond to four scenarios (DALs, ELL, Special Needs and Assessment) in the course. However, our experience told us that these

assessments were too general and hypothetical and that they did not actually help produce better student teachers. Pre-service teachers also felt that these were just isolated tasks that did not accurately measure their abilities. For example, for the Developmentally Appropriate Lesson Plan, pre-service teachers were given a contextual situation, which included grade level, time allotted for the lesson, learning goals and California 6-12 standards, and some general information about the group of students:

Students are in a high school English class. They particularly need to have opportunities to learn content in different ways and to revisit content. Many of the students enjoy the school environment and like to socialize with each other. Most of the students are active in after-school activities, including sports, clubs, tutoring, and jobs, which leaves little time for homework. The majority of the class plans to attend the local community college or technical computer school. There are some students who are unsure about what careers they want to pursue. About two-thirds of the students in this class have at least one other class with their classmates.

For the ELL and Special Needs Scenarios students were given short descriptions of each type of student, which included basic information such as; “she is literate in Spanish,” “report cards from Mexico indicate she has above average grades,” CELDT results indicate... Early Intermediate range” (scores provided); “both her parents are professionals,” she is “somewhat shy socially, but is well liked and works well in small groups.” For the Special Needs student data provided included: “independently reading text at 7th grade level;” identified in second grade with learning disabilities, has support from the resource room; “struggles to decode words,” “has asthma,” and is a “self-isolating person (CCTC,2003).” Although these descriptions attempted to give pre-service teachers a good picture of these scenarios, they lacked the personal contact that could infuse these scenarios with meaning. With the little time that we have to prepare prospective teachers to face a classroom of middle or high school students, we wanted to employ every classroom activity to its maximum potential. These scenarios were too generic and produced overly generalized responses that did not reflect students’ more refined knowledge.

Therefore in the Spring of 2004 we added a fieldwork component to three of the four scenarios (See Table 1). In the fifteen hours that were already allotted pre-service teachers could end up not taking an active role in the classrooms they were visiting, and they often complained that after having done observations in other courses this requirement was redundant. These, in fact, are the last of the 75 hours that they are required to do. By moving the scenarios from “academic” assessments to fieldwork assessments we hoped to provide a more meaningful experience for our prospective teachers.

Table 1. ADAPTED PROMPTS from California Teaching Performance Assessment, Task 1.

SPECIAL NEEDS SCENARIO

Based on the special needs student you studied during your five hours of shadowing, answer the following:

- 1a. Describe your student, age, grade level, learning difficulties, personality, present motivational level, and two of his/her specific learning needs.
- 1b. Identify two instructional strategies or student activities that could be challenging for your student and explain why it might be challenging.
- 1c. Describe how you would adapt each strategy or activity to meet the needs of the student.
- 1d. Explain how your adaptations would be effective for the student in making progress toward specific learning goals (identify the goal(s)).
- 2a. What progress monitoring assessment(s) would you choose to obtain evidence of the student's progress toward these learning goal(s)?
- 3a. Give a rationale for your choice of assessment. Use your knowledge of the English-language arts pedagogy and this student's learning needs in your rationale.

ELL SCENARIO

Based on the student you studied during your five hours of ELL shadowing, answer the following questions.

1. Describe your student, age, grade level, language background, regular exposure to L1 & L2, performance in past schools (if available), personality, present motivational level, and two of this student's specific learning needs.
- 2a. Identify one instructional strategy that could be challenging for the student.
- 2b. Explain why the strategy or activity you chose could be challenging to the student. Use your knowledge of ELL's and your analysis of the student's learning needs in your explanation.
- 3a. Describe how you would adapt the strategy or activity you identified above to meet the learning needs of the student. Consider specific subject matter pedagogy.
- 3b. Explain how your adaptation would be effective for the student in making progress toward: i. the learning goal(s) of the lesson and ii. English language development. Refer to your various aspects of your description of the student and examples of proficiency in English.
- 4a. Based on specific learning goals that you observed in your student's classroom, which progress monitoring assessments would you choose to monitor this student's progress toward achieving these goals?
- 4b. Give a rationale for your choice of progress monitoring assessment. Use your knowledge of English language arts content, English language arts pedagogy, and this student's English language abilities in your rationale.
5. Based on what you learned about this student's English proficiency, what would be your next steps in planning to facilitate his/her English language development? Consider specific information from your student description and his/her language samples when responding.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE LESSON SCENARIO

Based on the one-week lesson sequence that you write, you will teach 2-3 days of these lessons. At least one of these days you should videotape yourself. You will need to write a 2-page video reflection to include with this scenario.

- A. Describe the class, type of students, assigned level, actual levels, interests, motivational levels, educational aspirations, in one paragraph.
- B. Then think about the lesson you taught, which addressed both the learning goals (objectives) established by the teacher and the developmental needs of the students. What combination of instructional strategies (what the teacher does) and student activities (what the students do) did you include in the lesson? Describe one or more combinations of instructional strategies and student activities that address both the learning goals and all of the developmental needs of the students. Your description of the instructional strategies and the student activities should refer to and include what instructional resources would be used and how they would be used.
- C. Use your knowledge of English-language arts pedagogy and adolescent (9-12) development to explain why your instructional strategies and student activities:
 - i. are appropriate for this high school class
 - ii. address the developmental needs of these students
 - iii. help these students make progress toward achieving the academic learning goals

The goal was to require structured fieldwork that would provide realistic scenarios that would dovetail with the original scenario questions. In the DALs scenario pre-service teachers got to know a class of middle or high school students, determine their developmental needs, and then teach a 2-3 day sequence of videotaped lessons. The videotape served, along with preparing pre-service teachers for TPA 4, to provide several important tools for learning. First it was viewed by the pre-service teacher, who wrote a reflection essay that explored his/her awareness of success in meeting students on a developmentally appropriate level. Then, the instructor of the course viewed the video to look for the pre-service teacher's ability to do the same. In some cases, the videotape was viewed by the master teacher as a tool for discussion about how the lessons worked. For the English Language Learner and Special Needs scenarios pre-service teachers were required to shadow both an English Language Learner and a Special Needs student. Each of these scenario questions was slightly adapted from the original state-developed template so that the fieldwork component was taken into consideration within the prompt. The fourth assessment (the Assessment Scenario) did not include fieldwork because the 15-hour requirement at that time seemed too short to incorporate all four scenarios. This scenario was unaltered from TPA 1, and students did the assessment scenario during class time. Given the time constraints, we determined that this scenario would be the one that lent itself to completion as a traditional class assignment, rather than a fieldwork assignment.

In order to create a more logical flow we changed the order of these assignments. First, it seemed important that pre-service teachers start out getting to know a few individual middle school or high school students. Then they could spend some time with the teacher and the entire classroom before they jumped into the 2-3 day lesson. Therefore, during the beginning of the semester pre-service teachers were expected to get to know the school and shadow both the English Learner and the Special Needs student. The Assessment Scenario, which did not include a fieldwork component, occurred about midterm. After getting to know the middle school or high school students individually and as a class pre-service teachers wrote developmentally appropriate lesson plans, units, and curriculum maps. Then near the end of the semester they were expected to implement a 2-3 day lesson plan considering developmental appropriateness. Near the end of the semester they responded to the Developmentally Appropriate Lesson Plan prompts.

Data Source

Thirty-four Fall 2004 pre-service teachers had taken the prior semester's (Spring 2004) C&M course with the altered Scenarios. I took a purposive sampling of this group and invited fourteen of these people, who had now become student teachers, to participate in this study. Eleven chose to participate. This was approximately one-third of the potential number of student teachers who could have been involved. Of the group of eleven student teachers, three were interns, teaching a full load and considered a probationary employee of the district; six were traditional student teachers, assuming the responsibility of three classes normally taught by a certified master teacher and getting regular feedback from him/her; and two began with a traditional status but became interns midway through the semester. These students answered three surveys and met every other week for two-hour taped sessions throughout their student teaching semester. The objective was to discuss both their perception of our structured fieldwork infused TPA 1 that they had done the previous semester and how they perceived that these assessments helped them be more prepared for student teaching. The meetings were taped and later transcribed.

Results

Student teaching often requires a radical shift of understanding, challenging a student teacher's identity, as he/she must assume the role of the classroom authority and directing agent, rather than being the one who responds *to* the directing agent. As we know, having to finally be "the teacher" can often challenge what student teachers believe in. They can find themselves questioning some of those belief statements that they wrote so passionately about in Philosophy of Teaching assignments. Overall, the participants in this study did feel that the TPA structured fieldwork gave them a much-appreciated head start to their student teaching experience. They referred to the shift from pre-service teacher to student teacher using metaphors that point to the foundational nature of these changes. Kevin talked about how important it was to learn how to "think on my feet," and Marisol described these fieldwork infused TPAs as a way to "get my feet wet." Given their articulation of this need to have as much practice as possible, most of them had positive feelings about having structured fieldwork attached to TPA 1. Estrella summed this up well, "I enjoyed this aspect of all of the [TPA]assessments that we did because I actually got to put the theory into practice." These student teachers seemed to feel a bit more confident and ready to try out what

they learned when they reached student teaching. They referred to these early fieldwork experiences as aids in adapting to this fundamental shift that is student teaching.

Therefore, the most significant result of this study was discovering the importance of structuring early (pre-student teaching) fieldwork. When correlated with specific learning outcomes, in this case TPA 1's focus on Special Needs students, ELLs and Developmentally Appropriate Lesson Plans, this early fieldwork in the C&M course was far more powerful than simple observation. Participants were able to demonstrate a stronger awareness of these particular aspects of their teaching. Another important result was that TPA 1 became much more effective as an assessment tool, since students didn't see it as just another required assessment, but rather a meaningful part of their training.

Perceived Value of TPA Structured Fieldwork (ELL and Special Needs Shadowing)

Two of the scenarios focused on shadowing an ELL student and a Special Needs student. Shadowing proved to help participants become more intimately aware of the difficulties that ELL and Special Needs students face. They frequently described how they had learned many SDAIE strategies during their coursework, but then had not had a chance to really try them out. The common adjectives used to describe shadowing were "beneficial" and "useful." Working with individual middle and high school students helped them discover how these strategies do in fact get results. Estrella explained,

Working with ELL students helped me understand their needs in order to be able to adapt my lesson so that they can achieve success in the classroom. This [TPA]assessment was definitely beneficial in that aspect...I actually have a few English Language Learners [in student teaching] who have been mainstreamed...and they are keeping pace with me in the classroom. I did benefit from this [TPA]assessment by seeing which strategies the teacher used that worked and which ones I would change. Even more importantly the [TPA]assessment taught me about the communication breakdown between English Learners and teachers. It made me more aware of the problems ELLs face and how if they don't know how to read or write well in English—it affects all other subject areas—and they get behind rapidly.

Through the fieldwork connected to the TPA 1 ELL scenario, Estrella learned that problems often occur because of miscommunication between teachers and ELL students. Participants also realized that good teachers take the initiative in helping ELLs be successful. "You need to

approach [ELL students] because they won't always come to you. They may feel uncomfortable with their L2 skills, [so it's important to] have students help each other" (Marisol).

For some student teachers the act of responding to the questions of the TPA assessment helped them make even more sense out of the experience. It helped them fill in the gaps that existed in their preparation up to this point and forced them to articulate why they do what they do in the classroom. Sandra described this effectively:

I do know that I feel more confident in adapting my lesson because I have so many new resources available to me for ideas and guidance. When I started [to respond to the questions] I thought it was going to be difficult, but as I looked into it more I realized that there are a plethora of strategies that can be used with ELLs to help them succeed in the classroom. I thought this assignment was very helpful in exposing me to new strategies.

When working with Special Needs students, the most frequent theme that arose from pre-service teachers was their realization of the importance of working closely with resource people at their school site. Another fairly regular comment was that Special Needs middle and high school students do not necessarily call attention to themselves. Elise explained:

[This TPA assessment] opened my eyes to the fact that students with special needs may not always have that label. [It also] allowed me to look closer at all students who struggled. I learned the value of making deals or compromises with these students. I now feel better prepared because I learned that class does not always have to be the same for each student.

Many participants also commented on how timely and necessary learning to adapt their lessons was. Sandra explained that learning about "alternative assignments and modified assignments was the most helpful [aspect of this TPA assessment]." Participants began to realize the intricacies of the challenge of working with mainstreamed ELL and Special Needs students. Most described the Special Needs shadowing as essential simply because it raised their awareness. "I had to pay more attention to these students. Just facing the problem, just knowing that it's out there, getting it in my head, is probably the best thing" (Elise).

For many this part of the TPA fieldwork was the first time that they were required to practice theories and strategies that they had learned in earlier courses. "Yeah [the TPA assessment] helped... It's good to see [Special Needs students] throughout the day and how they change and the pace changes from a regular class to an RSP class. It's a good experience" (Kevin). Pre-service teachers also learned the importance of carefully thinking about students needs and using multiple strategies to meet those needs.

Although these TPA shadowing experiences generally proved helpful to participants when they became student teachers, the most frequent complaint with shadowing was that they didn't feel they had enough time with the middle or high school students to really get to know them. This complaint is valid, since it was suggested that they spend five hours with each middle or high school student. This suggestion was based on the 15-hour requirement: 5 hours shadowing/studying the Special Needs Student, 5 hours shadowing/studying the ELL and 5 hours preparing and teaching a 2-3 day sequence of lessons. As understandable as the complaint about the lack of time is, it also indicates the success of the project, since participants were asking for more, thus indicating that they saw the value of the exercise. Mandy made a suggestion that we will incorporate in the future for both shadowing assignments:

Perhaps if we shared our results and got to see how others [in the class] dealt with their special needs students, we would have a bag of tricks to pull from when we later found ourselves in that scenario.

Some participants felt that the TPA shadowing lacked an important element: consulting more with the middle or high school student's teacher. They believe this would have better helped them understand how classroom teachers manage Special Needs students in a mainstreamed classroom.

I just wish I had more of a background in how to help them... Because I mean, the [TPA]assessment we did was somewhat helpful, but I didn't really talk to the teacher about the student. It was more about me and the student, me assessing the student, and not me talking to the teacher about how they would do it. So I think that would be helpful, because I have eight [special needs students] in one of my classes. (Sandra)

Although it offered them a chance to break away from the theories and get to know an individual middle or high school student, which they felt was a great benefit, some thought it did not prepare them with strategies to teach.

...it was helpful to make them human, and get on their same wavelength; but, as far as practical skills that I have in the tool box, it didn't help at all. In the class I have right now I have just a handful of students that are ELL, and I really don't have, sort of, in my tool box of differentiating my lesson plans, I don't have anything like, right off the top of my head that I can use with those students. (Mandy)

The eternal problem, that is, that every middle or high school student is different and different strategies work with different students, was a recurring comment with these TPA assessments. Participants didn't

expect a formula for dealing with individual students, but some felt they still weren't prepared to handle some of their most difficult middle and high school students. Although it did seem to help set a foundation, the TPA shadowing was clearly not the silver bullet that gave participants all the knowledge and skills that they hoped for.

In Educational Psychology I did a report on ADD that really got into detail, and then in your class I observed the ADD student, and now one of my worst students has ADD. But I wasn't really prepared for it, even knowing what I did. It just didn't help me. I think in the report that I did for you I had said, well, I'm going to make him do more work. And I remember one of your notes said "Are you sure you want to make him do *more* work if he has a hard time concentrating?" I haven't really differentiated the work for ADD students—and I do have a lot of students. I haven't had the time... I'm just barely getting my lessons out there to alter it. So they're just, I think, doing the best they can, and I give them more class time. You know, things like that, but nothing major, nothing major where I say, "Do 2, 4, and 7, and that will tell me..." (Mandy)

With so much to manage in one's first semester of student teaching, especially if one is an intern—like Mandy—, the challenge to just have provocative lessons ready every day for all five class is more than enough, and having to consider ways to adapt them seems impossible.

However, the majority of the participants did describe some benefit of these shadowing experiences. Chris pointed out that considering strategies to teach specific middle and high school students has helped him be a better teacher to all students. He describes how he uses strategies that he learned during this shadowing. "[Shadowing students] affected the way I work with students in general...and how I get to know them." Given these comments it seems that pre-service teachers believe that the structured fieldwork was effective in helping them be, at the very least, more aware of Special Needs and ELL students.

Articulated Demonstration of Success with ELL and Special Needs Students

The second aspect of this study concentrated on how pre-service teachers were actually demonstrating their ability to adapt their lessons when they started student teaching. This structured fieldwork within TPA 1 had in fact impacted their skills and confidence as pre-service teachers. They discussed a wide range of strategies that they had tried with their ELL students. The following strategies were the most commonly mentioned:

- Use more visuals
- Focus more on vocabulary, including word part and Latin roots
- Balance the focus on content and grammar
- Do mini-grammar lessons and with each new lesson build accountability
- Design carefully structured group work
- Give extra time to complete assignments
- Offer more one-on-one attention
- Encourage students to respond with personal experiences
- Remember that speaking skills and writing skills often do not match

They were also very sensitive of the stigma attached to being an ELL.

The thing is you have to be really careful about the way you do it, too. Because you don't want to make them feel bad, or, you don't want to make them feel stupid. If you make them feel stupid then they won't want to do the work. (Craig)

I try to put my ELL kids with someone I knew would be able to help them... because they have the same language background or because that kid is just kind of cool...and has a good attitude...I [also] give them study guides, just to give them time in class to work. (Kevin)

Pre-service teachers also discussed specific strategies that they used when working with Special Needs students. Many strategies were similar to those used with ELL students, but several strategies they described were specific to Special Needs students:

- Start with a quick-write (timed) and turn this into a longer essay.
- Give students just three writing goals and peer edit, highlighting problems with just these three. Then for the next essay, add one or two more.
- Give extra time, allow student to read another book when rest of class is reading—since he's already finished at home.
- Have students do prewriting, bubbling, clustering.
- Do a lot more graphic organizers.
- Have more student conferences.

Pre-service teachers seemed comfortable using the resources at the school to learn better how to help each individual student. Some commented on how important it is to know the student's IEP plan and adapt the lessons based on these suggestions. Others commented on using the resource rooms that their schools provided. Often they found the rewards of this extra effort surprisingly satisfying.

I have a student who has difficulty with languages and math due to a processing disorder related to visual and auditory skills. So, I read [the IEP] when I first got it...And...he brought his grade up from an F to a C,

throughout the quarter, just because I started giving him a little more time on tests, and a little more time on essays and writing assignments, and I felt he really needed it. (Elise)

Marisol expressed her concern that Special Needs students feel too singled out, especially in IEP meetings. She concentrated on the good behaviors and strong skills of her students during these encounters with administrators and parents. Overall pre-service teachers were sensitive to the difficulties that Special Needs students face. They were all conscious that they have to have different expectations for their Special Needs students.

In sixth period I have four to five kids...So, I always have to be careful about the seating chart, you know, I want them to all sit next to each other, I don't want them to sit where they're going to be distracted, I try to move them closer to me. And, I just kind of keep tabs, when I'm walking around I make sure to check on them and I try to be understanding. Sometimes they might take longer to get things started, so I won't get mad at them the way I would other kids. I say, "Well, why isn't your work out, what's going on?" I won't have that attitude with them, I might say, "Oh? are you getting ready to start? all right, so..." (Marisol)

Estrella realized that seating was crucial so that Special Needs students felt a part of the class, not just the teacher's special project. "I always made sure I kept them close to me. Not too close to me where other students were going to wonder why I'm talking to them on the side, but just to make sure that they have the assignment down, they know what they're doing."

Still, not all student teachers experienced success in helping English Learners and Special Needs students. The first problem for some was that they did not really know when they had ELL or Special Needs students in their room. They had either not been given information from the administration, or they were unaware that they were expected to read the codes on their roster that might have given them an indication. Some were not able to clearly articulate what they would do if they had an English Learner in their class. In some cases it seemed that if the student was compliant then the student teacher was not focusing on him/her. As is common when teachers are faced with five large classes a day, student teachers seem much more concerned with those that are just not doing the work. In some cases they had no idea whether these were also the middle and high school students who were coming from ELL backgrounds or who had Special Needs.

These extensive conversations showed that most student teachers found that the structured fieldwork combined TPA 1 that they had done in the previous semester's course helped them significantly by increasing

their sensitivity to otherwise often overlooked populations. They were not only reading and discussing how to deal with these two groups of students, they were living it. It is less clear, however, what the correlation is between the structured fieldwork and the skills that students were successfully able to implement. Still, these conversations did pointed out that the TPA structured fieldwork and assessment had clearly given them exposure and awareness.

Perceived Value of TPA Structured Fieldwork (Creating, Implementing, Evaluating DALs)

Near the beginning of the Curriculum and Methods class pre-service teachers had gotten to know two individual middle or high school students through the shadowing fieldwork described above. At the end of this course they were able to practice the full experience of teaching their own class. This experience of creating, implementing, and evaluating developmentally appropriate lessons plans [DALs], was perceived by most pre-service teachers to be the most valuable part of the structured fieldwork experience. Students thought it was beneficial that they had been required to do an extended lesson in the C&M course and to really think carefully about how to engage their students. One of the most important products of this experience was the way in which pre-service teachers expressed their awareness that every class is different and that it is the job of the teacher to discover the level of every group they teach and create lessons that take them from where they are to a place of greater knowledge and skills. Marisol summarized:

This [TPA]assessment helped me understand the complexity of making lesson plans. I saw how students' reality and learning goals have to be taken into account. I had to organize objectives, instructional strategies, student activities and instructional resources. These were all things that I knew were necessary, but I'd had few opportunities of explicitly combining them in lesson plans...I began to understand that having lesson plans using such elements helps give appropriate/adequate instruction.

Some did not find success in their first extended teaching opportunity. However, although the 2-3 day lesson did not go well for some, they felt they had learned valuable lessons about the complexity of meeting middle and high school students where they are, rather than expecting students to already have a certain level of preparation. They commented on how enormous a task it was to make their lessons developmentally appropriate. Pre-service teachers learned that a middle or high school student might be trying very hard to follow, but that certain factors just were not yet in place. They learned the importance of breaking material

into small chunks. Some described how the same lesson had to be tailored to individual classes. Elise describe her experience:

I definitely used that [TPA]assessment ...and saw the difference because I taught two days of freshmen classes—one was an honors, and one was a regular. The regular class had the Special Needs student that I followed before, earlier in the semester, and the honors class obviously was far more intellectually advanced. So, the first day, we read the same story. I walked the regular kids through it. With the Honors kids, we read half together and they finished on their own. The next day I had the regular kids do a storyboard on construction paper, you know, just do a basic plotline. We discussed the mood and the theme, but it wasn't our primary objective because they struggled with just getting the plot line in the correct order. The next day with the honors class, instead of focusing on plot, we reviewed setting quickly, what setting means, and then we did a Venn diagram comparing two settings. We also discussed how the setting affected the mood. Finally, they made a big movie poster incorporating the mood of the story into a poster. I definitely had more confidence in this area when I started student teaching.

However, Elise was sure that she had not mastered the skills of creating DALs. She was honest and insightful about the difficulty in learning her students' "actual levels, interests, motivational levels, educational aspirations" required by the assignment. Although she was successful in doing the assignment she explained,

I hope that [the [TPA]assessment] will be relevant. Right now, adjusting for the interests and learning goals is impossible. As the majority of my students' learning goals are to graduate or get a good grade, it seems that the only adjustment is to make sure they understand everything (which is no true adjustment).

Comments like this remind me that we need to improve our methods for teaching pre-service teachers "how" to learn about their students. Our C&M course failed to do this. Often student teachers start their first week thinking that they just have to know their material and keep control of the class. By doing more to learn about their middle school and high school students early, they will find that they can fine-tune their content so that it's more engaging to their students. This engagement will alleviate one of a pre-service teacher's greatest worries, keeping misbehavior to a minimum.

Still, being able to think and plan in a systematic way after acquiring an understanding of the developmental level of a class was considered highly valuable to these student teachers. Some commented on the importance of reflecting on this teaching experience. Sandra stated:

[This TPA assessment was] very practical [and] very useful. I like the fact that we planned it and actually followed through with it. It gave me a foundation to plan for enough time and teach so there is no time wasted... [It] also allowed me to re-evaluate and distinguish between fun activities and fun learning strategies, like group work, Think, Pair, Share etc....

An especially salient outcome of this assessment was that pre-service teachers became more aware of the importance of reflective practice. Craig found the exercise of actually creating DALs in a fieldwork setting helped him see the value of learning about his middle and high school students in more detail. Even though he was still having trouble executing lesson plans that did in fact meet his students at the appropriate developmental level, he felt he had strategies to learn about his students. Therefore he was moving towards lesson plans that were effective. "Yea, we had talked about [creating DALs]. Talking about it is one thing, doing it is another....more practice would have been better."

This discussion led to an assessment of how much our program requires pre-service teachers to practice the things that they are learning in the classroom. Chris felt that when courses had a component that required him to go out to the schools, the expectation (explicit or implicit) was that he would be observing, which he admitted was "a lot of times, kind of pointless... Curriculum and Methods was my only fieldwork...I know for a fact when it was called 'fieldwork' I realized 'I'm in for something now.' And luckily I did that. Otherwise I would have gotten here and I would have been like, oh my gosh, what am I doing? And I still was like that, it just would have been worse."

Articulated Demonstration of Success with DAL

During student teaching, students described a number of skills that they were now practicing that demonstrated their ability to create Developmentally Appropriate Lesson Plans. They also listed a wide range of strategies they use to assess middle school and high school students' developmental levels and create lessons plans that would meet them where they were and take them further. The following were regularly employed by one or more of the student teachers:

- Prewriting
- Scaffolding
- Role Playing
- Guided reading
- Teach the Class
- Anticipatory Sets
- Reciprocal teaching

- Graphic Organizers
- Early writing samples
- Designing, and teaching with, Rubrics
- Bloom's Taxonomy applied to questioning
- Graded papers evaluated to inform planning

However, even though most student teachers could list many ways in which they would try to create developmentally appropriate lesson plans, this did not always ensure that they could describe how they determined a middle or high school student's level, nor did they consistently feel they had hit the mark. "This is a weak area for me. Um, I get a lot of kids that don't understand, and I don't know what to do because I am so busy with everybody else, and then I get a share of kids who are, just not getting anything" (Mandy). Although they were showing some awareness of the need to meet students wherever they are, student teachers still had a hard time articulating how they do it. As a teacher educator I found it difficult to determine if their inability to articulate reflected their inability to also create Developmentally Appropriate Lessons. During some of our discussions their primary concern was just having enough material to get through the period, to get their students' interest and to keep them on task. Our program still needs to consider other/more ways to teach pre-service teachers to assess their students' interests, to find out at what level their students are developmentally, and to monitor and adjust as necessary.

Perceived Value of TPA *without* Structured Fieldwork (Assessment)

Unlike the shadowing experience and DAL assignment, the Assessment component did not require structured fieldwork. Looking back from the vantage point of student teaching, students were less enthusiastic about the Assessment assignment. Most found that it did remind them about the importance of multiple assessments. Marisol states, "I remember thinking how easy it can be to forget the logic of assessments." Jackie explained that "this will help me to make sure I don't ask too much of the ELL kids. It also will help me design assessments for the ELL kids that are specifically relevant to them, so that they can better identify with what I am asking them to do." And Katrin attested to the fact that it "helped me see alternatives." However, overall they felt that the Assessment scenario, which had them look at one assessment plan and determine how to improve it, was too reductive. One student teacher called it "basic common sense" (Estrella) and another admitted, "I was unclear about the instruction and felt as if I were explaining very little"

(Sandra). They also felt that this was just an exercise, not a useful experience. Kevin described, "When I did this assessment...I just needed to look at that one [scenario] in particular, but I didn't necessarily get a global approach to it." Mandy admitted, "I honestly felt like I was giving the answer my instructor wanted, instead of fully understanding the assessment process. Understanding students' academic strengths and weaknesses also plays into assessing effectively." However, one student, Elise, considered the Assessment scenario valuable. "I think improving one teacher's assessment definitely helped just to give me more creativity. It was definitely an exercise in creativity and adaptability. Since it was only that one exercise, though, I think if you did more throughout the class..."

Articulated Demonstration of Success with Assessment

In the actual act of student teaching, assessment proved immensely challenging for most student teachers. Craig's comment is representative of many of the student teachers struggles. He explains that when he began student teaching he was so focused on creating good lessons that he thought he could just use his master teachers' assessments. Soon he felt like

...the guy in the circus with all the plates in the air...And I came to this realization one day that I had to sit down and make sure I was really assessing what they were learning... then I realized, okay well, other teachers are going to assess differently than I assess because they're going to teach differently than I teach...now I tell myself, "You know what you want them to learn, and you know what you're going to get at, and you know that you can tell yourself when you don't get to something that you will not assess them on that." And so I've just really tried to make sure that I write down what I do, and then when I get to the assessment I ask myself, "Did I really do that?" You know, so I just have to keep questioning myself.

During student teaching, although they felt they lacked skills in assessment they were still able to list many ways in which they assessed their students.

Clearly student teachers had a myriad of ideas for how to do assessment well; they did not thoughtfully identify, however, what students should be learning each day, and thus it seemed that they may not have been doing assessment in a systematic way. They came up with good ideas, but then didn't necessarily implement them as often or as appropriately as they could. Mandy's concern about completing the course assignment without structured fieldwork in the area of assessment resulted in her feeling that she was just "giving the answer my instructor wanted." Her suggestion was to include "numerous, specific

scenarios that credential students could use as practice [which] would give students a more prepared understanding of assessment. (Almost like drills—constant drills).”

This difference in response between those TPA areas that had structured fieldwork and the one that did not is indicative of the importance of structured fieldwork. Being exceptional, and even adequate, in any of these areas is a challenge for all teachers, and most teachers would agree that assessment is just as challenging as the other three. Also, student teachers’ immaturity in assessment cannot be entirely linked to a lack of fieldwork prior to student teaching. However, the fact that the student teachers themselves suggest including the fieldwork component in this scenario indicates that they see the value in it. As we can see from the Special Needs, ELL, and DAL scenarios, at the very least, this goal-oriented early fieldwork created heightened awareness and sensitivity. In the Assessment component this sensitivity was not nearly as pronounced.

Discussion

This study confirms the hypothesis that having pre-service teachers more regularly involved in structured fieldwork experiences which are tied to TPA 1 makes them feel and be more prepared for student teaching. Although I had my doubts when they were first introduced, this state-designed assessment has in fact helped this course become more focused. I had been fairly resistant to the expectation that I would have to include a TPA Task in my course, since I have often felt that these types of assessments are not productive for student learning and only serve to provide confirmation at the state level that we have standards and we are standardized. However, I was surprised at how choosing these four areas to focus the course provided a structure that the course had been lacking. Although the state-developed template we were given needed slight altering for clarification, it took me into new areas of inquiry that have strengthened the course. The assignment also enriched shared inquiry during class discussion. Still, throughout the surveys, discussions and interviews, student teachers did not remember or even mention much about writing responses to the state-designed assessment. What they considered valuable—what they remembered—was the fieldwork.

Therefore this study seems to indicate that structured fieldwork is more effective and combined with the TPA requirement improved the way we prepare our pre-service teachers for student teaching. Participants demonstrated that they not only perceived the value of the TPA structured fieldwork, but that they had a heightened awareness of these

objectives and a greater concern in learning how to be better teachers in these areas. It is also apparent that without the fieldwork component students were not as aware or sensitive, that is, in the area of assessment. Therefore, structured fieldwork will continue to be implemented in our C&M course alongside each of the four parts of the TPA 1.

Kevin reiterated how important structured fieldwork is: "I am sure I will continue to appreciate [these hands-on assessments]... There probably could be more of this 'real life' fieldwork in the program." Although a very motivated student teacher, Craig also described how even though his professors encouraged him to play an active role when he was doing "observation hours," without structured fieldwork he found it difficult to initiate activity. It was only through TPA structured fieldwork that he felt he was really being prepared for student teaching.

I was stretched to find the time to get into the schools as much as I did, and I remember being scared to ask a teacher if I could teach something. Now, I'm thinking to myself, man, I wish I had asked three other teachers if I could do a lesson in their classroom. There's got to be a way before student teaching to give students this kind of experience in the classroom because it's not as bad as I thought it was going to be...doing these projects at least got me into the classroom to work with a teacher who I could talk to.

Even given programmatic constraints, we can give pre-service teachers a variety of hands-on, focused experiences. In addition, our program will now need to find ways to make the observation hours that we require in other courses, a total of 75 for each pre-service teacher, matter much more. Focused fieldwork assignments give pre-service teachers realistic classroom situations with which to grapple. Mandy reminds us just how important it is for student teachers to not simply have book knowledge, strategies they can list, but to begin to form habits of mind.

Right now... it's just so incredibly overwhelming that anything that wasn't a habit in the past just gets lost... there's so many decisions that you have to make during the day, and so many things you're balancing, you know, staying in the eye of the storm... it would be nice if all of those things were already a routine and if we were so saturated with it that you didn't have to think twice.

Having structured fieldwork experiences, and thoughtful discussions about these experiences in the university classroom, means that student teachers will have more confidence when they approach their first weeks in student teaching. They will have begun to develop habits that will not "get lost" in the whirlwind of daily planning and decision-making. Even more importantly, the greater amount of real life experience that we can

give our pre-service teachers in the schools, the more likely they will stay in this profession after student teaching and make it their life career.

References

- Berlak, A. (2003). Who's in charge here? Teacher education and 2042. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 30(1), 31-40.
- California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. (2003). *California teaching performance assessment*, Sacramento, CA: Author.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *Doing what matters most: Investing in quality teaching*. New York: National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.
- Ferguson, P. (1989). A reflective approach to the methods practicum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 40(2), 36-41.
- Fritzberg, G. J. (2003). Revise and resubmit: a critical response to Title One of the No Child Left Behind Act. *Journal of Education*, 184(1), 69-87.
- Gold, Y. (1996). Beginning teacher support: Attrition, mentoring, and induction. In J. Sikula (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (2nd ed., pp. 548-94). New York: Macmillan.
- Goldstein, L., & Lake, V. (2003). The impact of field experience on preservice teachers' understandings of caring. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 30(2), 115-132.
- Hargreaves, A., & Jacka, N. (1995). Induction or seduction? Postmodern patterns of preparing to teach. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 70(3), 41-63.
- Henning, J. E. et al. (2005). The teacher work sample: A tool for scaffolding and assessing preservice teachers' early field experiences. *Teacher Educator*, 40(3), 188-206.
- Lortie, D.C. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Maxie, A. (2001). Developing early field experiences in a blended teacher education program. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 28(1), 115-131.
- Moir, E. (2003, July). Launching the next generation of teachers through quality induction. Paper presented at the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future State Partners Symposium. Retrieved July 12, 2005 from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future Web site: <http://www.nctaf.org/documents/nctaf/Moir2.doc>
- Odell, S.J. (1990) *Mentor teacher programs*. Washington, DC: National Education Association.
- Odell, S.J., & Huling, L. (Eds.). (2000). *Quality mentoring for novice teachers*. Washington, DC: Association of Teacher Educators/Indianapolis, IN: Kappa Delta Pi.
- Porter-Magee, Kathleen. (2004). Teacher quality, controversy, and NCLB. *Clearing House*, 78(1), 26.
- Pryor, C., & Kuhn, J. (2004). Do you see what I see? Bringing field experience observations into methods courses. *Teacher Educator*, 39(4), 249-266.
- Willard-Holt, C., & Bottomly, D. (2000). Reflectivity and effectiveness of preservice

teachers in a unique field experience. *Action in Teacher Education*, 22(2), 76-88.