

Early Childhood Teacher Candidates' Perception of their Support and Readiness for a Teacher Performance Assessment

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Comprehensive early childhood teacher preparation programs offer courses and curricula that are aligned with current research on best practices and related to the knowledge and skills that early childhood teacher candidates are expected to demonstrate on certification exams and teacher performance assessments. To support the alignment of early childhood coursework in a teacher preparation program with a teacher performance assessment (edTPA), the purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which teacher candidates felt their early childhood coursework prepared them for the edTPA. The findings from this study suggest that early childhood teachers' perception of their readiness for a teacher performance assessment may indicate the extent to which their coursework prepared them to meet the requirements of the edTPA. Implications from this study suggests that early childhood teacher preparation programs should continuously examine how faculty are introducing and supporting professional teaching standards, assessment for learning and evaluation of learning throughout course work and student teaching experiences.

Introduction

The education and pre-service professional development experiences of early childhood teacher candidates is critical to creating developmentally appropriate learning environments and sustaining high quality early learning experiences for young children (NAEYC, 2009). Early childhood teacher candidates in well-designed teacher preparation programs develop professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions in a community of learners making sense of readings, observations, field experiences, and group projects through their interactions with others (NAEYC, 2009; 2011). Comprehensive teacher preparation programs offer courses and curricula that are aligned with current research on best practices and related to the knowledge and skills that early childhood teacher candidates are expected to demonstrate on certification exams and teacher performance assessments.

Beginning in May 2014, all education program graduates in New York State (NYS) must pass new and/or revised certification exams in order to become certified to teach in NYS. Early childhood teacher candidates enrolled in an approved NYS teacher preparation program are

required to pass the Academic Literacy Skills Test (ALST), Content Specialty Test (CST-Multi-Subject or Multi-Subject: Teachers of Early Childhood (Birth-Grade 2)), Educating All Students (EAS) test and a Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA for Early Childhood) in order to be recommended for certification. The new teacher certification examinations serve as a critical benchmark of a candidates' readiness to teach in NYS. For the first time, teacher candidates are required to submit an edTPA portfolio. The edTPA evaluates practice-based skills proven to have a positive impact on student achievement. The edTPA is aligned with the teaching standards and requires candidates to plan and implement lessons consistent with the Common Core learning standards.

edTPA: Early Childhood and Elementary Education

Early childhood education focuses on the social-emotional, physical, cognitive and language and literacy skills that develop in children from birth through age 8. Elementary education (also known as childhood education) refers to the primary education that comes after preschool but before middle school. While the age groups and grade levels overlap, there are significant differences in the teacher performance assessment for early childhood and elementary education that need to be highlighted in order to better understand the edTPA for Early Childhood.

Purpose

The purpose of the edTPA for Early Childhood is to measure teacher candidates' readiness to teach young children, ages 3–8. The purpose of the edTPA for Elementary Education is to measure novice teachers' readiness to teach both literacy and mathematics in the elementary grades. The edTPA assessment for both early childhood and elementary education is designed with a focus on student's learning and principles from research and theory. It is based on findings that successful teachers:

- Develop knowledge of subject matter, content standards, and subject-specific pedagogy.
- Develop and apply knowledge of varied student's needs.
- Consider research and theory about how students learn.

- Reflect on and analyze evidence of the effects of instruction on student learning (SCALE, 2014, p.4).

Tasks

The edTPA tasks represent a cycle of effective teaching. The planning task documents the teacher candidates' intended teaching, the instruction task documents the enacted teaching, and the assessment task documents the impact of the teaching on student learning (SCALE, 2014). The edTPA tasks and the evidence that teacher candidates provide for each of the tasks are framed by their understandings of students' and their learning. As they develop, document, teach, and assess their lessons, teacher candidates reflect upon the cyclical relationship among planning, instruction, and assessment, with a focus on their students' learning needs.

The edTPA Early Childhood assessment is comprised of three tasks: Planning for instruction and assessment (Task 1), instructing and engaging children in learning (Task 2) and assessing children's learning (Task 3). Whereas the edTPA Early Childhood Assessment has three tasks, the edTPA Elementary Education Assessment has four tasks: Planning for literacy instruction and assessment (Task 1), instructing and engaging students in literacy learning (Task 2), assessing students' literacy learning (Task 3), and assessing students' mathematics learning (Task 4). Tasks 1–3 are elementary literacy tasks and Task 4 is an elementary mathematics assessment task. The edTPA Elementary Literacy tasks begin at the planning stage of the cycle, and the Elementary Mathematics Assessment task begins at the assessment stage of the cycle to inform further planning. The purpose of edTPA Elementary Education is to measure teacher candidates' readiness to teach both literacy and mathematics in the elementary grades (SCALE, 2014).

Learning Experiences and Learning Segments

In early education settings, learning experiences provide young children with the skills and learning opportunities that are designed to support them in their development. These learning experiences can be presented in various ways including storybook and dialogic readings, small group activities, songs and finger plays. To guide young children in their exploration and discovery and to extend their thinking and problem-solving skills, the learning experiences also

include the design and organization of the learning environment. Learning experiences include a multitude of foundational learning opportunities for young children.

Learning segments are a set of lessons that build upon one another toward a central purpose with a clearly defined beginning and end. The central focus can be expressed by a theme, overarching concept, skill or essential question. Learning segments are specifically designed lessons that support elementary age children in acquiring the knowledge and skills that build the foundation to become adept learners.

The edTPA requires the early childhood teacher candidates to develop 3–5 consecutive learning experiences that build on each other and are to be implemented over the course of one week. Each learning experience should include developmentally appropriate practices that promote the active and multimodal nature of young children’s learning and intentional support for language and literacy development in an interdisciplinary context. However, the elementary education teacher candidates develop and teach 3–5 consecutive literacy lessons as part of learning segments that include learning tasks in which students have opportunities to develop a key literacy strategy and related literacy skills to comprehend or compose text. In addition, the elementary education teacher candidates’ develop or adapt a relevant assessment of student learning, analyze student work, and design re-engagement instruction to develop mathematics understanding in the elementary mathematics assessment task. The elementary mathematics task centers on two high-leverage teaching practices: using assessments to analyze student learning concepts and re-engaging students to develop their understanding of specific mathematical concepts. While the edTPA for early childhood does not specifically outline or require a mathematics task, the early childhood teacher candidates can incorporate math concepts, skills and content that is developmentally appropriate for young children in their learning experiences.

Evaluation Criteria

Teacher candidates’ provide evidence for the planning, instruction, and assessment components within the corresponding tasks of the edTPA. They provide evidence for analyzing the teaching component across all tasks (3 for early childhood and 4 for elementary). For the edTPA Early Childhood, teacher candidates provide evidence for the language development component in the planning task, as well as in the instruction and/or assessment tasks. For the edTPA Elementary Education, teacher candidates provide evidence for the academic language

component in the Elementary literacy planning task, as well as in the Elementary literacy instruction and/or assessment tasks.

An essential part of the Early Childhood edTPA is the submission of evidence of teacher candidates' planned and implemented developmentally appropriate learning experiences to promote language and literacy development in an interdisciplinary context while attending to the active, multimodal nature of young children's learning. This evidence includes both artifacts and commentaries. The artifacts represent authentic work completed by the teacher candidates and their students. These include plans, copies of instructional and assessment materials, video clips of their teaching, and children's work samples (e.g., drawings, writing, photos of block buildings or constructions, or children at work). The commentaries require teacher candidates to describe their artifacts, explain the rationale behind their choices, and analyze what they have learned about their teaching practice and the children's learning.

Rubrics are used to score teacher candidates performance on the edTPA. The five-level rubrics address a wide range of performance, beginning with the knowledge and skills of a novice not ready to teach (Level 1) and extending to the advanced practices of a highly accomplished beginner (Level 5). The evidence that the early childhood and elementary education teacher candidates submit with the edTPA portfolio will be evaluated on five components of teaching practice: Planning, instruction, assessment, analyzing teaching, and academic language.

Academic language is the oral and written language used for academic purposes. It is the means by which children develop and express content understandings. Academic language represents the language of the discipline that children need to learn and use to participate and engage in the content area in meaningful ways. There are language demands that teachers need to consider as they plan to support children's learning of content. These language demands include vocabulary, language functions, and syntax. For the Early Childhood edTPA, however, academic language is focused only on vocabulary (SCALE, 2014, p. 47).

Purpose

To support the alignment and sequencing of early childhood coursework in an accredited teacher preparation program (see Appendix C for list of courses and descriptions) with the edTPA, the purpose of this study was to examine the degree to which teacher candidates felt

their early childhood coursework prepared them for the edTPA. In addition, this study sought to determine how early childhood teacher candidates perceived their readiness for the edTPA.

To determine which courses in the early childhood program supported the components and requirements of the edTPA the following research question was examined:

1. Which courses in the early childhood program did teacher candidates feel supported them with the edTPA tasks and evidence of teaching practices?

Early childhood teacher candidates' perceptions of their readiness for the edTPA were examined through the following research question:

2. How do early childhood teacher candidates rate their readiness for the edTPA tasks and evidence of teaching practices?

Early childhood program course sequence

Teacher candidates are encouraged to register for courses in a specific sequence during their graduate studies in the early childhood program. The purpose of course sequencing is to present material, content and development in a logical and orderly progression, initially laying the foundation and then building on that foundation while supporting in-depth knowledge and learning as they progress through the program. In order to ensure that teacher candidates possess a specific body of knowledge to be successful in the early childhood program, they must receive a satisfactory grade in prerequisite courses before they are allowed to register for more advanced courses. The prerequisite courses include child development (ECF 700) where students discuss the developmental domains of young children, social and historical contexts for early childhood (ECF 701) where student examine and analyze these contexts in the scope of early childhood education, early childhood curriculum (ECC 703) where models of developmentally appropriate curricula are examined, and language and literacy (birth-kindergarten – ECC 705) in which students examine the process of early literacy development. Table 1 lists the courses in the recommended sequence in the early childhood program and the pre- and co-requisites for the advances level courses.

Table 1: Graduate Early Childhood Courses

Courses (ECC - Early Childhood Course ECF – Early Childhood Foundations)	Full Title	Credit Hours
ECC 700	Child Development: Birth to Age Eight (15 hours field experience)	3
ECC 701	Social and Historical Contexts of Early Childhood Education	3
ECC 703	Early Childhood Curriculum: Birth through Grade 2 (20 hours field experience) Pre/co-requisite: ECF 700 *Also offered in Summer term	3
ECC 705	Language and Literacy: Birth through Kindergarten Pre/co-requisite: ECF 700	3
ECC 712	Pre-Student Teaching Field Placements in Early Childhood (50 hours/or ten days field experience) Pre/co-requisites: ECC 703 *Winter or regular terms	1
ECC 706	Language & Literacy: K through Grade 2 Pre/co-requisites: ECC 705 *Also offered in Summer term	3
ECC 707	Language & Literacy: English Language Learners Pre/co-requisites: ECC 705 or ECC 706 *Winter & Summer terms only	1
ECC 708	Children with Special Needs: Birth through Grade 2 (15 hours field experience) Pre-requisites: ECC 703, Pre/co-requisites: ECF 702	3
ECC 710	Early Childhood Mathematics: Birth through Grade 2 Pre/co-requisites: ECC 703	3
ECC 711	Science in Early Childhood: Birth through Grade 2 Pre/co-requisites: ECC 703	3
ECF 702	Assessment in Early Childhood Pre-requisites: ECF 702/ECC 703	3
ECC 713	The Expressive Arts in Early Childhood	3
ECC 714	Health, Safety, Nutrition in Early Childhood Pre/co-requisites: ECF 700	3
ECC 715	Educational Technology in Early Childhood *Winter and Summer terms only	1
ECC 720	Integrative Seminar in Early Childhood Pre-requisites: ECF 701, 702; ECC 703, 705 and 706, 707, 708, 710 and 711	3

Methods

Participants

At the time of the study, the teacher preparation program in an accredited school of education only offered a graduate program for students seeking initial certification in early childhood education (Birth-Grade 2). The participants were Masters of Science teacher candidates seeking initial certification in early childhood education. The teacher candidates were required to enroll in a supervised practicum in early childhood near the completion of their graduate coursework. The practicum is an on-the-job experience and is taken by teacher candidates who are lead teachers, associate or assistant teachers in early childhood schools and programs. It is a college-supervised experience with a 15-hour seminar. All of the early childhood teacher candidates (10) who were enrolled in the course were recruited to participate in this study. To avoid the appearance or potential for coercion, a part-time instructor who was not the practicum instructor or onsite supervisor discussed the research project with the teacher candidates.

The teacher candidates were employed in a variety of settings (public, private, religious and/or community based) and at various grade levels (preschool through first grade). While all of the teacher candidates enrolled in the practicum class had taken the prerequisite coursework required for registering in the practicum course, their level of classroom experience in their current worksites varied from less than one year to ten years.

Data Collection

Teacher Candidate Questionnaires

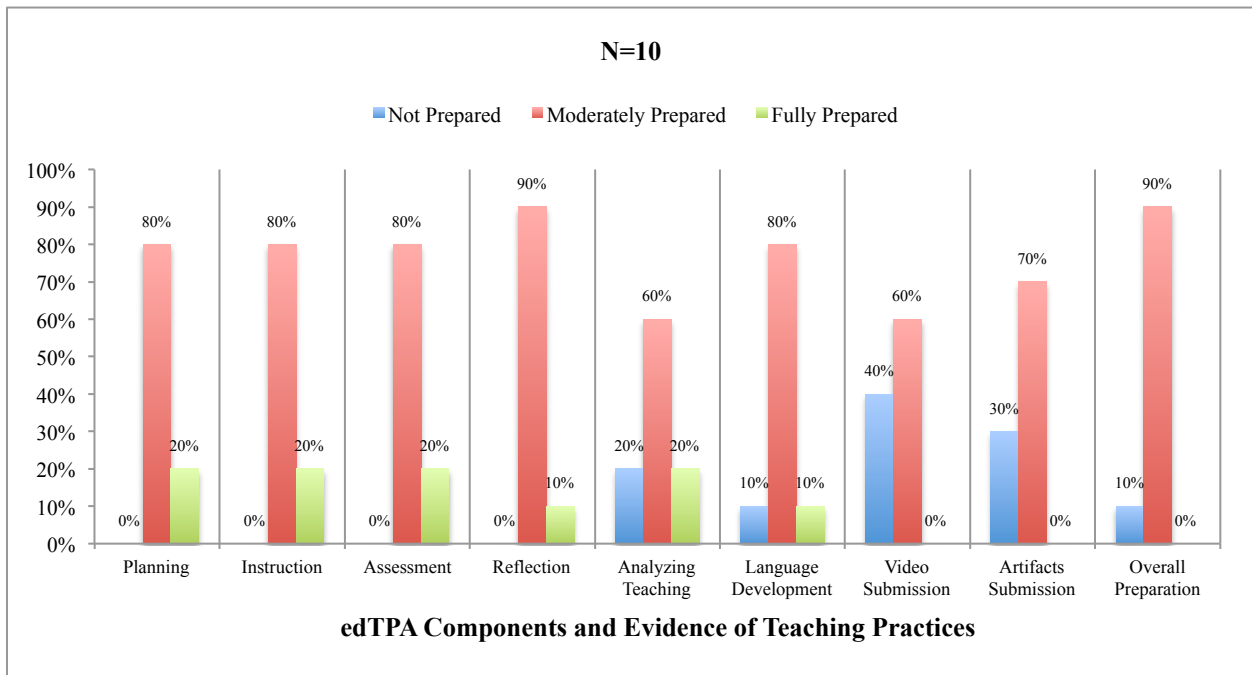
The part time instructor distributed and collected pre- and post questionnaires. Teacher candidates completed the pre-questionnaire in the first practicum class of the spring 2014 semester which took approximately 20 minutes to complete. Teacher candidates completed a post-questionnaire during the last practicum class of the spring 2014 semester which took approximately 20 minutes to complete. The teacher questionnaire was designed to explore teacher candidates' perceptions about the prior coursework in the early childhood program and their familiarity with the expectations of the edTPA (Appendix A).

Findings

Familiarity and Readiness for the Early Childhood edTPA

In addition to determining which courses supported teaching candidates with the edTPA, this study was also designed to ascertain their familiarity with the tasks and evidence of teaching practice requirements of the edTPA prior to their enrollment in the practicum course. The analysis of the teacher candidate questionnaire found that teacher candidates were generally familiar with the planning, instruction and assessment components while less familiar with the analyzing teaching and video submission requirement. With 90% of the teacher candidates reporting that they were not familiar with the specific requirements of the edTPA prior to reading the handbook results showed that, on average, teacher candidates perceived themselves as moderately prepared to take the edTPA (chart 1). A teacher candidate wrote, “I am aware that there are new requirements. I did not know it was a videotaping and so much writing.”

Chart 1: Teacher candidates’ perceptions of their reading for the edTPA



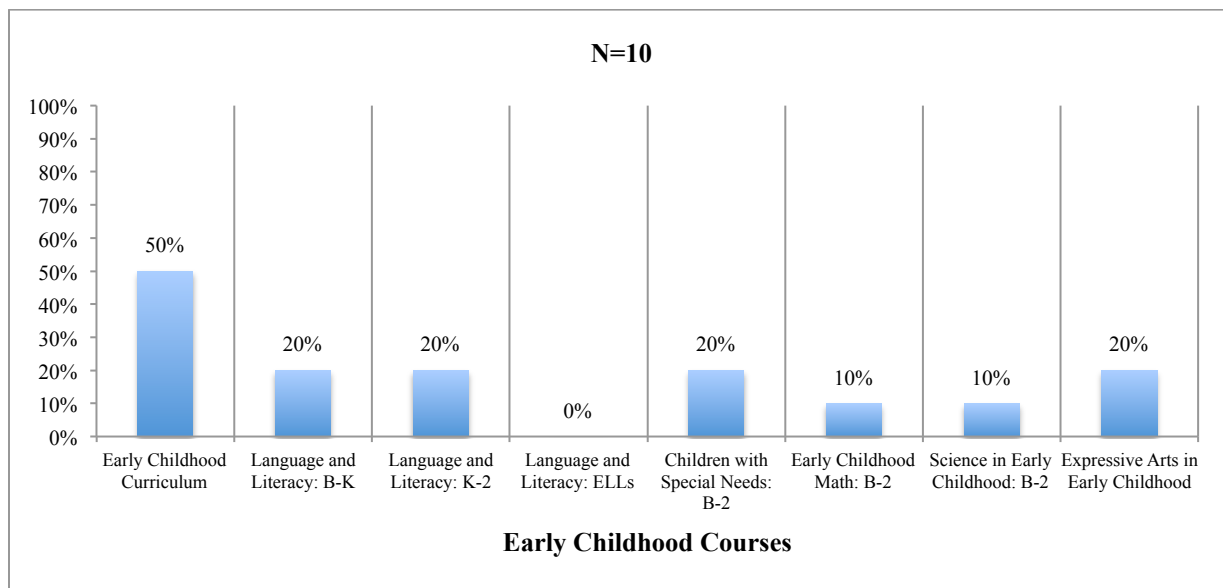
Support for Task 1: Planning and assessment

For Task 1 of the Early Childhood edTPA, teacher candidates are required to:

- Select one class as a focus for the assessment.
- Provide relevant context information.
- Identify a learning segment to plan, teach, and analyze children's learning. The learning segment should include 3–5 learning experiences.
- Determine a central focus for the learning segment. The central focus should support children's language and literacy development in an interdisciplinary context through active and multimodal learning experiences.
- Write and submit a plan for each learning experience in the learning segment.
- Select and submit key instructional materials needed to understand what the teacher and the children will be doing.
- Respond to commentary prompts prior to teaching the learning segment.
- As part of the commentary, choose one learning experience to analyze children's use of vocabulary. Identify the language that children will be expected to use to engage in the learning experience and the teachers' instructional supports for that language.
- Submit copies of directions for all planned assessments from the learning segment (SCALE, 2014, p.6).

Fifty percent of the teacher candidates indicated that the early childhood curriculum course supported them in planning the learning segments in order to teach and analyze children's learning (chart 2). Teacher candidates identified the language and literacy course for English Language Learners as being the least supportive with no candidates indicating that this course supported them with the planning and assessment components of task 1. This one credit course is typically taken after teacher candidates have completed the language and literacy courses for birth through kindergarten and kindergarten through second grade. This course is offered in the summer and winter terms in a one-week (Monday-Thursday) session.

Chart 2: Teacher candidates' perceptions of their support for Task 1



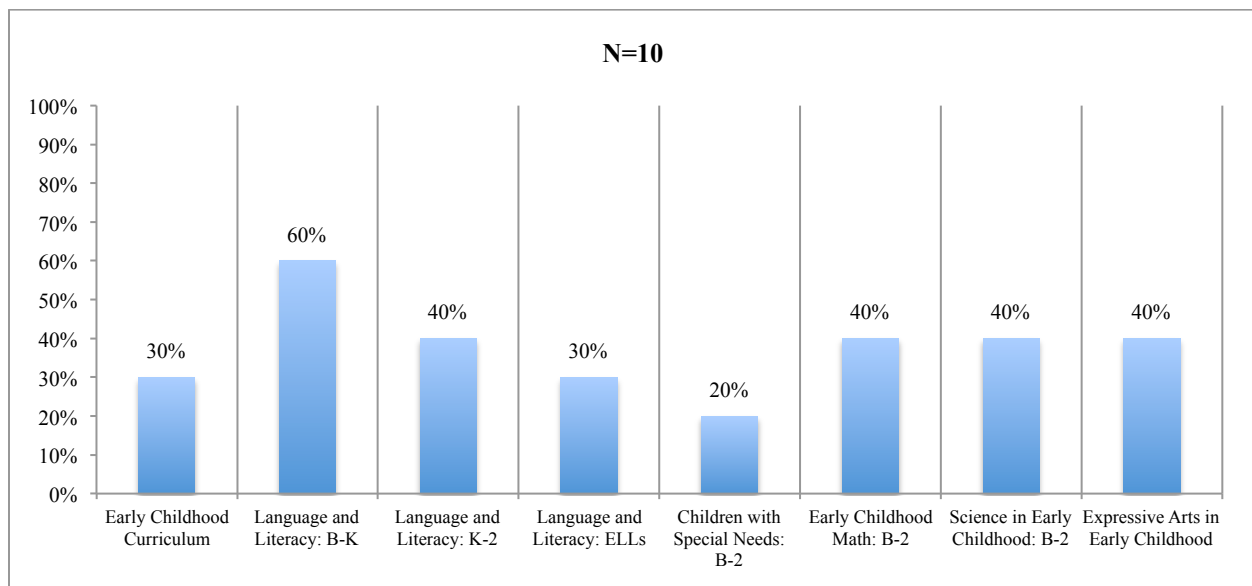
Support for Task 2: Instruction

For task 2 of the Early Childhood edTPA, teacher candidates are required to:

- Identify learning experiences from the learning segment in task 1 to video record. Teachers choose learning experiences that show them interacting with children to promote language and literacy development in an interdisciplinary context during active and multimodal learning experiences.
- Video record their teaching and select 2 video clips (no more than 15 minutes total). Clip 1 should show large-group interaction (minimum of 4 children), and Clip 2 should show small-group interaction or interaction with an individual.
- Analyze their teaching and children's learning in the video clips by responding to commentary prompts (SCALE, 2014, p.7).

Overall, the teacher candidates felt that their prior coursework in the early childhood program supported them with the instruction segment of the edTPA (chart 3). Generally, teacher candidates identified the methods courses, which include language and literacy, math, science and the arts, as supporting them with instruction component of the edTPA.

Chart 3: Teacher candidates' perceptions of their support for Task 2



Support for Task 3: Assessment

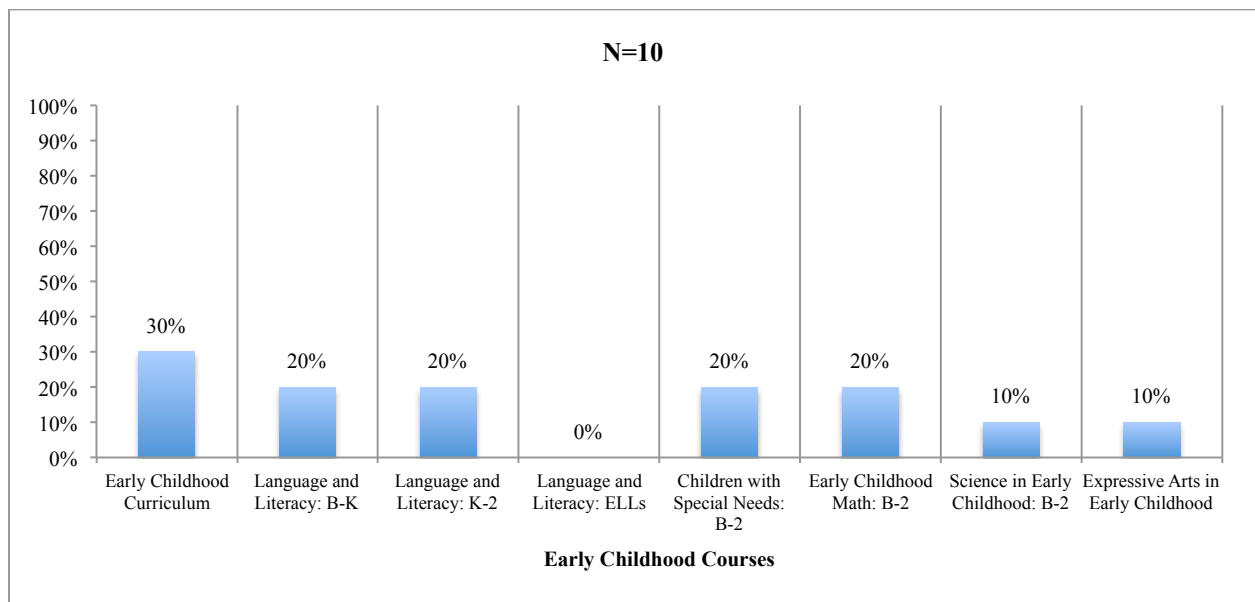
For task 3 of the Early Childhood edTPA, teacher candidates are required to:

- Select one common assessment from the learning segment that they will use to evaluate the language and literacy development for all of the children they are working with in the learning segment.
- Define and submit the evaluation criteria they will use to analyze children's learning related to their language and literacy development
- Select 2 children who represent a range of developmental levels related to the central focus of the learning segment. These children will be the focus children for the analysis. At least one of the children must have identified learning needs.
- Collect and analyze 3 sources of evidence related to the assessment for each focus child.
- Analyze the sources of evidence to identify quantitative and qualitative patterns of learning.
- Summarize the learning for all of the children within the learning segment, referring to the evidence of learning from the 2 focus children to illustrate patterns in children's understanding.

- Submit feedback for the evidence of learning for the 2 focus children in written, audio, or video form.
- Analyze evidence of children’s language use from (1) the video clips from the instruction task, (2) an additional video clip of one or both of the focus children using language within the learning segment, and/or (3) the evidence of children’s learning from the Assessment task.
- Analyze evidence of children’s learning, and plan for next steps by responding to commentary prompts (SCALE, 2014, p.8).

For the most part, teacher candidates indicated that their prior coursework in the early childhood program did not support them in assessing children’s learning as required in task 3 of the edTPA (chart 4). Teacher candidates indicated “There was more attention on instruction” and “We used the activities, but no assessment in the class”.

Chart 4: Teacher candidates’ perceptions of their support for Task 3



Discussion

Support for Task 1

Lesson Plan Template

In Task 1: Planning for Instruction and Assessment, teacher candidates will describe their plans for the learning segment and explain how the learning experiences they have planned are appropriate for the children they are teaching (SCALE, 2014, p.9). Courses in the early childhood program that have assignments that require students to develop lesson plans use a similar template with comparable requirements. The information that is required in the lesson plan template (Appendix C) for all courses include:

- The rationale and justification for the lesson.
- The objective of the activity lesson.
- The connection to the early learning guidelines and/or standards.
- The language objectives.
- Methods of assessing students which includes the pre-assessment, assessment of student learning and assessment of children's language learning.
- Plans for differentiated and individualized instruction that includes supporting children with identified developmental delays or disabilities and supporting English Language Learners.

Early Childhood Curriculum Course

Fifty percent of the teacher candidates identified the early childhood curriculum course as supporting them with the planning component of the edTPA. As a prerequisite course, the curriculum course is taken within the first two semesters of the graduate program. Models of developmentally appropriate curricula are examined in light of theories and research that guide the education of children birth through 2nd grade are discussed in the course. The creation of appropriate curricula and physical environments for fostering social, emotional, cognitive and physical growth of diverse learners are explored, along with ways of guiding young children's behavior and assessing environments and curricula. For the final project in this course, early childhood teacher candidates create an integrated curriculum plan and portfolio for a school year. The requirements for the portfolio include: Describing the group of children they are planning

for, developing topics, themes or projects for the year including the goals/objectives, the environmental plan, and a plan for assessing curriculum and teaching strategies for young children. Early childhood teacher candidates specified that this course supported them in the planning task for the edTPA indicating, “We did a lot of planning in the class. It should help with the learning segments”. Another candidate stated, “Curriculum planning showed us lots of ways we can plan for children.”

Twenty percent of the teacher candidates identified the language and literacy courses (Birth-Kindergarten and Kindergarten-Grade 2), the early childhood math course and children with special needs course with supporting them with planning. The children with special needs course (Birth-Grade 2) explores the special learning needs of young children with developmental delays and disabilities along with intervention guidelines. This course introduces various types of special needs in young children and how these special needs (physical impairments, developmental delays, emotional disturbances, language disorders and cognitive disorders) impact educational settings. Intervention strategies are discussed as well as a historical background on how special needs programs, interventions, and strategies have evolved, including the Inclusion Model. The two assignments for this course require students to: (1) Write a paper (4-6 pages), choosing 2 out of 3 scenarios that describe a teacher's ability to communicate special concerns of their students to their parent or guardian and (2) Write a paper (4-6 pages), based on observations in the field that compare and contrast a general education classroom with a special education classroom, and describe, compare and contrast 2 children with the same identified diagnosis. The final exam requires teacher candidates to choose 3 scenarios of special needs students and create 2 modifications each for 3 times during the school day.

The course assignments for the language and literacy courses as well as the math course will be discussed in the next section.

Courses that Supported Task 2

In Task 2: Instructing and Engaging Children in Learning, teacher candidates will demonstrate how they support and engage children in learning (SCALE, 2014, p. 19). Teacher candidates identified content methods courses as supporting them with the instruction component of the edTPA citing, “All these classes helped with appropriate instruction.” With the

exception of language and literacy (Birth-Kindergarten), these courses are taken after the prerequisites are met (see Appendix B for a description of the prerequisites courses).

Early Childhood Math

This course examines the educational and psychological research and theories concerning the development of children's (birth-Grade 2) mathematical thinking. It considers applications of this knowledge to teaching and assessment in the early childhood classroom. Students are engaged in developing and implementing appropriate activities and materials that promote children's mathematical understanding as well as assessing children's mathematical learning. For the final assignment, Math Implementation and Impact Project, students develop appropriate math activities for young children. The goal of this assignment is to provide students with an opportunity to use their individual creativity to develop activities as well as to draw upon and synthesize much of what they learned in the course. To support students in understanding how and what children learn from the activities, teacher candidates assess children's learning through observations and interviews. They are also required to provide an evaluation of children's learning and understanding of mathematics based on their observations of children during and after the activity as well as using their clinical interview and anecdotal recordings. A student stated that, "The class helped us with using different strategies and language to support children."

Language and literacy: Birth-Kindergarten

This course examines the process of early literacy development from birth through Kindergarten. Research and practice in language learning and the development of early literacy skills among diverse learners are also explored. Students supplement their readings and study with actual observation and reporting of children's language and literacy behaviors, collaborate to assess and develop supportive classroom environments and create theme-based literacy plans. An early childhood candidate wrote, "Writing about the reading development of a child helped me with the instruction and planning." The final assignment for the course, Oral and Written Language Development Case Study, requires students to choose one child (3 months-5), obtain relevant background information, collect reading, writing, and language samples from the child over a 3-month period and create a portfolio of observations, assessments, work and language

samples. Based on the analysis of the portfolio items, students describe 4-6 activities that will support the child's continued oral and written language development.

Language and literacy: Kindergarten-Grade 2

This course deals with the theories and philosophies that have shaped literacy development and learning from birth through 2nd grade. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing development of young children across a variety of cultural and linguistic communities are examined in light of research and current practice. The roles of families, programs, schools, and communities in urban environments, and assessment of early literacy development are addressed. Students conduct observations and analyses of young children's language and literacy behaviors. The final assignment for the course, Oral and Written Language Development Case Study, has the same outline and requirements as the assignment for the language and literacy (Birth-Kindergarten) with students choosing a child in kindergarten, first or second grade to observe and document their language, literacy and reading development.

Science in Early Childhood

This course explores the theories and research of scientific thinking in young children, especially focusing on the inquiry process in developing concepts and understandings of the natural and people-made world in young children. Included in the discussions are ways of assessing science learning in infant, toddler, preschool, grade K-2 settings and how to incorporate the use of community resources in scientific learning. For the final assignment, Learning Center Unit Presentation, students develop a science learning center unit that includes hands-on science inquiry activities and materials used in the center along with related books.

The Expressive Arts in Early Childhood

This course is designed to introduce teacher candidates to the role of the arts (visual arts, music, dance, and theater) in learning across the curriculum. Teachers will understand how to plan and develop art activities that open a deeper understanding of specific works of art under study that are appropriate for early childhood (birth through grade 2). Through the course's modeling of an aesthetic approach to art education, teachers will learn how to describe, analyze and interpret works of art. Through the close study of works of art, teachers will develop and

enhance their cognitive, perceptual, expressive and imaginative abilities through process-oriented activities that call upon interdisciplinary connections, divergent thinking and creative problem solving. Teachers will gain knowledge of the importance of the arts in early childhood development and the basic principles of connecting the arts to early childhood curriculum.

The methods courses in the early childhood program incorporate assignments that allow teacher candidates to creatively plan activities that will guide and support young children's development. In addition, the required assignments also support the context for learning component of the Early Childhood edTPA. The context for learning requires the teacher candidate to supply information about the school they are teaching at, the class that is featured in the assessment and specific information about the children in the class. The required information includes grade and age range, number of children in the class and the variety of learners in the class (i.e., English language learners, gifted children, children with Individualized Education Plans and struggling learners).

Task 3: Assessment

In Task 3: Assessing Children's Learning, teacher candidates will analyze children's learning and their language use. Overall, teacher candidates did not perceive the courses in the early childhood program as supporting them with the assessment component of the edTPA. Although teacher candidates are required to take Assessment in Early Childhood Education, this course is offered through another program within the same department as the early childhood program. This department provides a foundation of research, measurement, assessment, program evaluation and applied statistics for educational settings and related fields. The Assessment in Early Childhood course provides students with an understanding of the role of assessment for planning and implementing effective early childhood programs for young children, ages birth to age eight, from culturally diverse environments and with varied learning needs. Students explore both qualitative and quantitative approaches to assessment and learn how to translate results of assessment to inform instruction. Students learn to incorporate a variety of assessment strategies into the daily routine in order to document learning and developmental progress and to adjust teaching. The final assignment for this course, Assessment ePortfolio Project, illustrates teacher candidates' ability to design developmentally appropriate and educationally sound assessment practices founded on their understanding of child development and learning, informal and formal

assessment strategies, while considering the learning contexts of the students. Students are also required to complete a thorough written evaluation of the child assessed using evidence from developmental domains (social-emotional, cognitive, emergent literacy, gross and fine motor development). Implications for instruction (learning prescription) should be presented with the action plan for creating authentic learning experiences to remediate for areas in need of strengthening.

Some teacher candidates indicated that the assessment and math courses supported them in meeting the requirements of the assessment component of task 3 in the Early Childhood edTPA. A teacher candidate wrote, "Using the learning trajectories in my math assignment helped me to assess (my case study). I was able to create activities knowing what level he was at." Another candidate wrote, "The assessment and math courses helped me to look at children from different perspectives and assess them using authentic methods."

Limitations

The purpose of this study was to support the alignment of coursework in an early childhood program with the edTPA with the intention of enhancing the courses. The purposeful sample was from a small number of participants, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to the larger early childhood teacher candidate population. In addition, the sample was from the graduate school population, which excludes the perceptions and experiences of the larger undergraduate population.

Recommendations

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has developed Standards for Initial and Advanced Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs (NAEYC, 2011). These standards describe what early childhood professionals are expected to know and do, defining essential learning outcomes in professional preparation programs and presenting a shared vision of excellence (p.9). Using these standards as a guideline, the following recommendations are made to enhance the early childhood program in preparing teacher candidates to become highly effective practitioners while supporting them with the submission of their edTPA portfolios.

Recommendation 1

Course instructors in the early childhood program should provide opportunities for teacher candidates to create learning segments that include multiple learning activities and/or opportunities in their lesson plans. Course assignments that require lesson plans should require students to plan, guide, and assess the skills and processes identified in the learning segments. Course instructors should support teacher candidates with planning the learning segments to ensure the activities are developed in a comprehensive and integrated way to promote children's development. Standard 4: Using developmentally effective approaches to connect with children and families in the NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs state that "candidates prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that teaching and learning with young children is a complex enterprise, and its details vary depending on children's ages, characteristics, and the settings within which teaching and learning occur. They understand and use positive relationships and supportive interactions as the foundation for their work with young children and families. Candidates know, understand, and use a wide array of developmentally appropriate approaches, instructional strategies, and tools to connect with children and families and positively influence each child's development and learning" (pp.51-52).

Recommendation 2

Course instructors in the early childhood program should be explicit in defining how the course assignments, specifically case studies, support the formative, authentic assessment of young children's development. Case studies provide teacher candidates with the opportunity to detail the developmental progression of children in the early childhood setting over a period of time. Authentic assessment is a crucial part of curriculum planning and determining instructional strategies to support young children's development. Standard 3: Observing, documenting, and assessing to support young children and families in the NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs state "that candidates prepared in early childhood degree programs understand that child observation, documentation, and other forms of assessment are central to the practice of all early childhood professionals. They know about and understand the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment. They know about and use systematic observations, documentation, and other effective assessment strategies in a responsible way, in partnership

with families and other professionals, to positively influence the development of every child” (p.50).

Recommendation 3

Course instructors in the early childhood program should provide opportunities, beyond student teaching, for teacher candidates to reflect upon and analyze their teaching practices to determine the effectiveness of their instruction on children’s learning. Thoughtful practitioners ask insightful questions and routinely use the answers to guide and adapt their instructional practices so they can be more responsive to children’s needs. A key element in Standard 4 (4d) in the NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs states that candidates in early childhood degree programs should reflect on their own practice to promote positive outcomes for each child.

Strong professional preparation programs ensure that faculty members and course instructors demonstrate the qualifications and characteristics needed to promote students’ learning in relation to the NAEYC standards. The early childhood program should continuously examine how course instructors are introducing and establishing professional teaching standards through planning and assessment for learning and evaluation of teaching and learning throughout their courses.

Conclusion

Professional preparation for early childhood teachers is more than a list of competencies to be assessed or a course list to complete (NAEYC, 2009). Research has demonstrated that a degree alone is insufficient to ensure teacher quality at the early childhood level (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). Rather, it is the presence of that degree in combination with specialized training relating to classroom practice that results in quantifiable teacher-quality improvements (Pianta & Hamre, 2009) along with a focus on evidence of teacher candidate knowledge and demonstrated competencies (Pettus & Smith, 2001; Ramey & Ramey, 2006).

Although the results from this study indicated that teacher candidates perceived their support for the edTPA during their course of study as moderate, implications from this study suggest that the early childhood program should support course instructors in developing course assignments that not only align with the language and expectations of the edTPA but adhere to

the NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Professional Preparation Programs as well. Early childhood teacher candidates' perception of their readiness for a teacher performance assessment may indicate the extent to which their coursework prepared them to meet the requirements of the edTPA. While it appears that some of the coursework and associated assignments supported the teacher candidates with task 1 and 2, the projects did not appear to have fully prepared them for the complete process (planning, instruction and assessment) of the edTPA especially the assessment component and analyzing teaching effectiveness in task 3.

Even though early childhood teacher candidates have access to edTPA materials as well as support in understanding the requirements while completing their portfolios during the student teaching and practicum experience, the course work in the graduate program is not expressly or specifically aligned with the language and expectations of the teacher performance assessment. Revisiting and revising course assignments will not only strengthen teacher candidates' planning for instruction and assessment strategies as well as evaluating their students' performances, but will also help them prepare for certification exams and the submission of the edTPA portfolio.

While a degree in early childhood education is one of the qualities of a competent teacher, effective early childhood teachers also have knowledge about child development, understand how to plan and implement developmentally appropriate instructional strategies and use observation and assessment data to support children at various developmental levels. Having experiences and expectations aligned to a teacher performance assessment and certification exams will support teacher candidates not only in passing the exams, but also in becoming responsive, reflective practitioners.

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Appendix A

Early Childhood Teacher Candidate Questionnaire – Spring 2014

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Experience

1. What year did you begin graduate coursework in early childhood education at Hunter College? _____
2. How long have you been teaching in your current grade level? _____
3. What grade level are you currently teaching? _____
4. Have you taught any other grade level(s)? yes no
If yes, what grade level(s)? _____
5. Do you currently have certification in an area other than early childhood? yes no
If yes, what area? _____
6. Have you taken any certification exams? yes no
If yes, which exams?
 Educating All Students Test (EAS)
 Academic Literacy Skills Test (ALST)
 Content Specialty Test (CST)

Expectations

How familiar are you with the following regarding the requirements of the edTPA:

	Not Familiar	Somewhat Familiar	Very Familiar
a. Planning	①	②	③
b. Instruction	①	②	③
c. Assessment	①	②	③
d. Reflection	①	②	③
e. Analyzing Teaching	①	②	③
f. Language Development	①	②	③
g. Video Submission	①	②	③
h. Artifacts Submission	①	②	③

Which area(s) do you feel you need support in regarding the following:

	No Support	Some Support	Maximum Support
a. Planning	①	②	③
b. Instruction	①	②	③
c. Assessment	①	②	③
d. Reflection	①	②	③
e. Analyzing Teaching	①	②	③
f. Language Development	①	②	③
g. Video Submission	①	②	③
h. Artifacts and Documentation	①	②	③
i. Other:			

Preparation

Which area(s) do you feel Hunter College early childhood education coursework supported your preparation for the following:

	No Support	Some Support	Maximum Support
a. Planning	①	②	③
b. Instruction	①	②	③
c. Assessment	①	②	③
d. Reflection	①	②	③
e. Analyzing Teaching	①	②	③
f. Language Development	①	②	③
g. Documentation	①	②	③
h. Collecting Artifacts	①	②	③
i. Other:			

Which Hunter College early childhood course(s) have supported your preparation for the certification exams:

	No Support	Some Support	Maximum Support
a. ECC 703 (Curriculum)	①	②	③
b. ECC 705 (Language and Literacy: B-Kindergarten)	①	②	③
c. ECC 706 (Language and Literacy: Kindergarten-2 nd)	①	②	③
d. ECC 707 (Language and Literacy: ELL)	①	②	③
e. ECC 708 (Children with Special Needs: Birth-2 nd)	①	②	③
f. ECC 710 (Early Childhood Mathematics: Birth-2 nd)	①	②	③
g. ECC 711 (Science in Early Childhood: Birth-2 nd)	①	②	③
h. ECC 713 (The Expressive Arts in Early Childhood)	①	②	③
i. Other:			

Which course(s) supported you in the following areas (check all that apply):

	Planning	Instruction	Assessment	Reflection	Analysis	Language Development
ECC 703						
ECC 705						
ECC 706						
ECC 707						
ECC 708						
ECC 710						
ECC 711						
ECC 713						
Other:						

Additional Comments:

Appendix B

Early Childhood Courses Program 1: Students without prior certification 2013 College Catalog

ECC 703 Early Childhood Curriculum: Birth through Grade 2 – 3 credits

Models of developmentally appropriate curricula are examined in light of theory and practice, and the needs of diverse learners. Strategies for guiding young children's behavior, for assessing environments and curricula, and using computer technology in early childhood. 20 hrs of fieldwork, 10 hrs at each of two age levels

ECC 705 Language and Literacy: Birth through Kindergarten – 3 credits

Research and practice in language learning and the development of early literacy among diverse learners. Examination of the process of early literacy development between birth and kindergarten and the role of families, programs and schools in early literacy development. pre- or coreq: ECF 700

ECC 706 Language and Literacy: K through Grade 2 – 3 credits

Examination of research and practice on emergent literacy and the development of literacy learning among diverse learners between kindergarten and second grade. The role of families and schools in children's literacy development in urban environments. pre- or coreq: ECF 700

ECC 707 Language and Literacy: English Language Learners – 1 credit

Second language acquisition and the development of literacy. Special emphasis on language and culture, dialect variation and development of social and academic language. coreq: pre- or coreq: 705 or 706

ECC 708 Children with Special Needs: Birth through Grade 2 – 3 credits

The special learning needs of young children with developmental delays and disabilities along with intervention guidelines. prereq: ECC 703; pre- or coreq: ECF 702

ECC 710 Early Childhood Mathematics: Birth through Grade 2 – 3 credits

Theories and research that focus on the relationship between children's development and learning of mathematical concepts and skills. Appropriate mathematics activities for children from birth to second grade and ways of assessing mathematical learning in diverse infant, toddler, preschool, and grade K-2 settings. pre- or coreq: ECC 703

ECC 711 Science in Early Childhood Education: Birth through Grade 2 – 3 credits

Theories and research of scientific thinking in young children; the inquiry process in developing concepts and understandings of the natural and people-made world in young children. Ways of assessing science learning in infant, toddler, preschool, and grade K-2 settings. pre- or coreq: ECC 703

ECC 712 Pre-Student Teaching Field Placements in Early Childhood – 1 credit

This course consists of a 15-hour seminar plus a total of 50 hours of field experience in early childhood programs, with 25 hours at any one of the three following age/grade levels: pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, grades 1 or 2. Students will observe various aspects of an early childhood program and study firsthand how programs for children of different age levels diverge. prereq: ECC 703

ECC 713 The Expressive Arts in Early Childhood – 3 credits

Research and practice on the importance of creative expression in young children's development. Inquiry into children's artistic and intellectual inventiveness through art, music, movement, theatre and dance activities that reflect the needs of diverse learners in a multicultural environment. Offered in collaboration with Lincoln Center Institute. pre- or coreq: ECF 700

ECC 714 Health, Safety and Nutrition in Early Childhood – 3 credits

This course prepares teachers of children, birth through second grade, with knowledge and skills of developmentally appropriate practices in health promotion and wellness among children of diverse backgrounds and abilities within the context of the family, school and community. Child abuse, drug abuse prevention, prevention of school violence, and fire safety are included. pre- or coreq: ECF 700

ECC 715 Educational Technology in Early Childhood – 1 credit

Educational technology course for students in the graduate early-childhood education programs. Students will enhance their basic computer skills and learn how to assess and use various applications in their early childhood classrooms.

ECC 716 Student Teaching in Early Childhood Settings – 3 credits

Two student-teaching placements of 20 days each at different age/grade levels (Pre-K, K, grades 1–2) that supplement pre-student teaching field experience.(Birth– 3, preK–2)
prereqs: ECF 702; ECC 703; 705, 706, 707, 708, 710, 711, ECC 712. 30 hrs of seminar plus 40 days of student teaching for students who are not teaching in an early childhood program

ECC 717 Supervised Practicum in Early Childhood – 1 credit

Teaching practicum for students in early childhood education. Students who take ECC 717 must also complete ECC 718. (Not for students who have completed ECC 716.)

prereqs: ECF 701; ECF 702; ECC 703, 705, 706, 707, 708, 710, 711, 712 ; ECC 712
15 hrs of seminar plus conferences

ECC 718 Early Childhood Student Teaching – 2 credits

Student teaching for 20 days at one age/grade level: Pre-K– K, or grades 1–2. Students who take ECC 718 must also complete ECC 717. (Also offered during the summer.) (Not for students who have completed ECC 716.)

prereqs: ECF 702; ECC 703, 705, 706, 707, 708, 710, 711, 712; 15 hrs of seminar plus 20 days of student teaching

ECC 720 Integrative Seminar in Early Childhood Education – 3 credits

Students learn how to use research methods to ask and answer questions related to effective practice in early childhood education. Teacher candidates select an area of study related to their practice and complete a research proposal using established research procedures.

prereqs: ECF 701; ECF 702; ECC 703, 705, 706, 707, 708, 710, 711, 712

Early Childhood Foundation Courses

ECF 700 Child Development: Birth to Age Eight – 3 credits

Overview of the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children, birth to age eight. Theoretical perspectives of typical and atypical development of childhood are discussed with implications for appropriate practice in diverse early childhood settings.

15 hrs of fieldwork, 5 hrs at each of 3 age levels

ECF 701 Social and Historical Contexts of Early Childhood Education – 3 credits

Examination and analysis of the social and historical contexts of early childhood education. Applications to contemporary issues in the education of young children in families, childcare centers, schools and communities in urban settings.

ECF 702 Assessment in Early Childhood Education: Birth through Grade 2 – 3 credits

Basic concepts, principles and fundamentals of measurement and assessment, both formal and informal, are examined along with their relevance in early childhood education.

prereq: ECF 700

Appendix C

Learning Activity Plan for Prekindergarten-Grade 2

Name of Lesson Learning Segment	
Content area(s)/developmental domain(s) addressed	<i>What concepts or developmental skills will this lesson address?</i>
Brief description of the lesson	
This lesson is:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A new concept/activity * A review of a previous lesson/activity * A continuation of a previous lesson/activity * A conclusion of a concept
Rationale	<i>Why is there a need for this lesson?</i>
Timeframe	<i>Keep in mind appropriate length of an activity for preschool-aged children is 20 mins at most, no more than 45 mins for children K-2 grade)</i>
Objective(s) of the activity	<i>What will children know, or demonstrate as a result of this learning experience?</i>
Connections to standards	<i>Which NYS Early Learning, or Common Core Standards are addressed? Are there other standards used?</i>
Language Objectives	<i>What language/vocabulary, communication, or literacy skill(s) do I want my students to develop in this lesson? For edTPA consider this: Which academic language demands am I targeting? Choose one, including language functions, vocabulary, syntax, or discourse that is central to this learning segment. How is this activity using the specific language demand?</i>
Resources/materials needed: (Include any worksheets or sources of evidence for children’s learning you will use during the activity)	
Technology inclusion (if applicable)	

Procedures (step by step)	Anticipatory Set (Connection/Motivation) <i>What will you do to get children's attention, or to introduce children to this learning activity? Describe the process in getting them interested and engaged.</i>		
	Instruction/Mini Lesson <i>(Outline the procedures or sequence activities that will make up this learning experience; for instance, you might follow a routine wherein you model (I try); and ask for active involvement (we try) during a whole group session.</i>		
	Independent Practice <i>(small group activity, working with partners, or independently)</i>		
	Closure (sharing/reflection, next steps)		
Method of assessing children's understanding of lesson/activity/objective(s) (Be sure to include any tools, rubrics/checklists and/or worksheets you will use for assessment(s))	Pre-assessment <i>Outline the steps you will take to evaluate student's prior knowledge.</i>	Assessment of Student Learning <i>Outline the steps you will take to evaluate students' learning. What evidence will I have to assess whether students have successfully achieved the content objectives?</i>	Assessment of Children's Language Learning <i>Outline the steps you will take to evaluate students' language learning. What evidence will I have to assess whether students have successfully achieved the content objectives?</i>
	Plans for differentiated instruction/instructional modifications	Supporting children with identified delays or disabilities <i>What considerations should I keep in mind regarding cultural relevance, age appropriateness, and ability levels for all learners?</i>	Supporting English Language Learners <i>What modifications should I make to the activity to ensure all students are included and engaged in all steps required to meet the lesson's objectives?</i>
Follow up/Extension activities	<i>How can I provide an opportunity to remediate, reinforce, or expand on students' learning today in class?</i>		
Any additional information that would be helpful for the observer to know			