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Putting PACT in Context and Context in PACT: Teacher Educators Collaborating around Program-Specific and Shared Learning Goals

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One of the more noteworthy developments in university-based teacher education today is the proliferation of preservice teacher assessment, and in particular, teacher performance assessment (TPA). Indeed, more than 160 teacher education programs in more than 25 states recently adopted the edTPA, a Stanford University developed teacher performance assessment tool (formerly the Teacher Performance Assessment Consortium or TPAC), to determine teacher candidates' eligibility for a teaching credential (AACTE, 2012a).

The scaling up of teacher performance assessment is taking place in the face of an increasingly negative discourse about and growing scrutiny of university-

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based teacher education and has therefore generated strong reactions from the teacher education community. Some leaders in the field have endorsed the edTPA, arguing, for example, that it will offer teacher educators evidence of candidates' abilities to facilitate K-12 student learning and bring credibility to the profession (AACTE, 2012b; Darling-Hammond & Hylar, 2013; Hollins, 2012). Others have voiced concern about, for example, potential threats to program quality and faculty professionalism posed by edTPA's status as a high-stakes assessment, as well as its partnership with Pearson—a for-profit education corporation (Au, 2013; Sawchuk, 2013; Winerip, 2012).

In many respects, developments in California have served as harbingers for these debates nation-wide. In 2008, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing mandated that every teacher candidate enrolled in an approved teacher education program must pass one of three approved preservice teacher assessments in order to earn a credential; more than 30 programs state-wide chose the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT)—essentially an early version of the edTPA. Like current reactions to the edTPA, responses to PACT have included both praise from those who believe it has the capacity to hold programs more accountable for candidates' learning and performance and concerns from those who worry about its potential—as a top-down, high-stakes assessment—to contribute to the standardization of teacher education.

This article describes the efforts of a collective of seven teacher educators, representing three of California's many university-based teacher education programs, to respond with agency to some of the opportunities and concerns described above. To place PACT and our collaboration around it in context, the article opens with a brief overview of the research on the implementation of top-down reform and high-stakes assessment in teacher education, focusing on the potential opportunities and obstacles it presents. We then offer a brief description of our collaboration, which was anchored in our shared commitment to improving education for historically marginalized youth. Specifically we articulate the kind of teaching practice—contextualized practice—that we hope to prepare future teachers to engage in, and we share a tool that we developed to help ourselves determine whether and how PACT might assist us in assessing the development of this particular kind of practice among our respective teacher candidates. We conclude by discussing patterns seen across programs regarding candidates' demonstration of contextualized practice and by raising questions about the kinds of conditions and resources that would support teacher educators to use performance assessment tools in adaptive and inquiry-oriented ways.

The Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT)

Like the edTPA, PACT takes a portfolio approach to assessment, with its centerpiece being the “teaching event”: videos of candidates delivering a lesson

in their field placement classrooms, accompanied by student work samples and multiple, candidate-authored written tasks, including lesson plans and reflections. The written tasks are associated with each of PACT's five domains: Context for Learning; Planning for Instruction and Assessment; Instructing Students and Supporting Learning; Assessing Student Learning; and Reflecting on Teaching and Learning. With the exception of the Context Commentary—PACT's only un-scored domain—candidates must each earn a passing score, requiring at least a 2 on a 4-point scale in each domain.

Research suggests that top-down reforms in teacher education, including high-stakes assessments like PACT, can lead programs to privilege compliance with external mandates over more authentic pursuits (Rennert-Ariev, 2008), and/or to standardize their curriculum (Berlak, 2003; Kornfeld, Grady, Marker, & Ruddell, 2007). These are particularly troubling trends given that standards often fail to encourage, and may even undermine, efforts to prepare culturally responsive teachers (Sleeter, 2003; Zeichner, 2003). Indeed, scholars have raised concerns about, for example, the cultural-bias of teacher performance assessments, and have questioned teacher performance assessments' capacity to accurately evaluate teachers of color in particular (e.g., Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Keeping these concerns in mind, and acknowledging current debates surrounding the top-down implementation of edTPA, it is notable that most existing research articles on PACT, specifically, tend to report on PACT's potential to positively impact program practice, especially when faculty take an active role in its implementation. Two studies, in particular, suggest that PACT can stimulate productive dialogue among teacher educators and lead to program improvement (Pechone & Chung, 2006; Peck, Gallucci, & Sloan, 2010). Similarly, in their study of how teacher candidates frame and treat English Learners in PACT materials, Bunch, Aguirre, and Téllez (2009) found that PACT implementation *can* “serve as a forum for [teacher educators] . . . to come together to discuss shared or divergent understandings of the goals of their . . . endeavors” *if* and *when* teacher educators engage with one another around PACT implementation and analyses of PACT data (pp. 123-124). In another example, van Es and Conroy (2009) found that teacher educators were better able to scaffold candidate learning in relation to program goals after conducting case study analyses of candidates with high and low PACT scores.

Nonetheless, several studies also reveal the potential shortcomings of PACT, as well as potential problems raised by its implementation. For example, some research suggests that strict implementation of PACT, combined with its high-stakes nature, can lead candidates to focus on PACT completion and passage at the expense of authentic endeavors—including those that engage them with K-12 students directly—such as coursework and student teaching (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009). This is perhaps particularly problematic, given one recent study that highlights discrepancies between university field supervisors' informal evaluations of candidates (based on real-time observations of their practice with children in

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classrooms) and candidates' formal PACT scores (based on retroactive analyses of single—and perhaps strategically selected—video-taped segments) (Sandholtz & Shea, 2012). Sandholtz and Shea underscore the limits of any assessment tool, including PACT, to capture and assess with accuracy teaching's various dimensions, particularly its harder-to-capture competencies, such as those that comprise culturally responsive teaching. As a result, authors argue the importance of using multiple methods and “multiple sources of evidence from multiple evaluators” in order to ensure “a more thorough assessment of effectiveness” (p. 48).

While many of these studies yield insights that hold promise for informing improvements to teacher educator practice, others raise concerns about the potential unintended consequences of PACT implementation. With the exception of Bunch, Aguirre, and Téllez (2009), who illustrate how PACT can bring program-wide attention to the needs of diverse learners, the research base offers good reason to attend vigilantly to the role PACT plays in the preparation of teachers generally and in the preparation of teachers to serve diverse students, specifically.

Our Collaboration

Our collaboration began at the 2008 PACT Implementation Conference, when two teacher educators presented several questions that had emerged from their involvement in the redesign of their teacher education program. These questions pressed participants to consider (a) how and to what degree different learning experiences within programs enabled teacher candidates to develop the capacities necessary for facilitating learning among diverse students; (b) what evidence programs were collecting to demonstrate that their candidates were developing these capacities; and (c) what interventions programs employed when evidence indicated that candidates were not developing, or were struggling unduly to develop, such competencies. Following the presentation, faculty from several programs expressed interest in meeting after the conference to begin thinking together about the issues at hand—particularly how they were manifesting across different teacher education programs and what role PACT might have to play in addressing them. Members' interest in inter-institutional collaboration also reflected their desire to begin responding intentionally to what were at the time relatively new criticisms of the knowledge base on teacher education—namely its reliance on research and other accounts focused primarily on single courses and/or programs (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005).

When the group next convened, the conversation turned more concertedly to PACT as an *opportunity* for generating valuable assessment data, generally, and concerning candidates' abilities to facilitate learning among diverse populations, specifically. Some participants shared stories about candidates who had scored poorly on all or parts of the PACT, but were considered strong when assessed otherwise during coursework and field experiences. Others shared stories of candidates who were perceived as weak by program faculty, but who had received high scores on

PACT. These anecdotes led several participants to raise questions regarding PACT's capacity to capture candidates' understandings of and actual abilities to enact culturally responsive instruction. More specifically, questions began to coalesce around PACT's domains of practice and corresponding rubrics. These included: How do the rubrics press PACT scorers to emphasize particular aspects of practice? Which aspects of practice, if any, seem to be underemphasized and/or underspecified? Which rubric components seem most and least equipped to capture examples of candidates' knowledge and enactment of culturally responsive instruction? Other questions focused, for example, on issues related to scorer calibration.

At the close of this meeting, faculty from one large public university's Bilingual, Crosscultural, Language, and Academic Development (BCLAD) program, another public university's Bilingual and Multicultural Education program, and one private university's urban-focused MAT program—each in different parts of the state—devised a plan to explore together PACT's capacities to evaluate candidates' understandings and enactments of culturally responsive instruction. To that end, the group agreed to explore a random sample of PACTs completed by graduates of our respective programs. We anchored this exploration with the following question: What is PACT's role in capturing teacher candidates' knowledge about and abilities to enact culturally responsive instruction?

When we reconvened months later, we drew on the PACTs we had analyzed to engage in a more detailed discussion of PACT's role in capturing candidates' understandings of and abilities to practice culturally responsive teaching. Not surprisingly, we learned that candidates across our three programs demonstrated considerable variation in their understandings about how to teach diverse students in culturally responsive ways; however, we found it difficult to assess the nature of this variation using PACT rubrics, particularly because the Context Commentary—the PACT component designed to capture candidates' knowledge about learners and plans for leveraging that knowledge in instruction—has no corollary PACT rubric and thus goes un-scored. At this meeting, we also realized that, despite possessing what we perceived to be similar goals, we did not always use the same language to describe quality teaching. We agreed that we needed to come to greater clarity about our common ground—what we, as a collective, hoped our teacher candidates would demonstrate as a result of matriculating through our programs, and thus what we hoped PACT might help us assess.

To begin this process, we established agreement about the basic premise—asserted by numerous scholars—that excellent teaching necessarily requires that teachers draw upon knowledge of their students in order to adapt the 'given' curriculum to suit the specific context and learners (Hollins, 2008). Keeping this assertion and PACT's features in mind, we decided to review literature related to the development of "ambitious" pedagogy generally (e.g., Ball, 2000; Ball & Forzani, 2009; Lampert & Graziani, 2009; Windschitl, Thompson, & Braaten, 2011) and culturally responsive pedagogy specifically (e.g., Au, 2001; Gay, 2002; Hollins,

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2008; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2005; Nieto, 1992), and then to focus on and explicate a foundational element of responsive teaching, which we call “*contextualizing practice*.” This construct—elaborated below and operationalized in the tool we present in subsequent sections—articulates common ground among our collective and serves as an explicit bridge connecting educational theory and practice to the contextual realities of students’ lives.

Coming to Clarity:

Contextualizing as Common Ground

Our notion of contextualizing practice draws on a deep body of work that both theorizes and posits practical approaches for facilitating learning and improving outcomes for diverse students, particularly those representing historically marginalized groups. As a general rule, these works problematize traditional assumptions about the relationship between culture, teaching, and learning as reflecting deficit and assimilationist ideologies; and they conceptualize new relationships that underscore marginalized students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences as assets for learning.

Beginning in the early 1980s, scholars began to offer accounts of teachers and teaching that research suggested might facilitate learning among students from historically marginalized communities more effectively than traditional instructional practices (e.g., Au & Jordan, 1981; Lipka & McCarty, 1994; Michaels, 1981; Noordhoff & Kleninfeld, 1993). Many of these accounts foreground and/or have been interpreted as foregrounding challenges posed by cultural “mismatch” and possible solutions rooted in cultural compatibility and correspondence. Michaels (1981), for example, documents how a White teacher’s failure to understand and see as a resource one African-American student’s discourse impeded the child’s opportunity to learn. Although the student’s discourse was just as developed as the discourse considered ‘normal’ or ‘standard’ by the teacher, the teacher was unable to recognize its value—an inability that resulted, even if unintentionally, in marginalizing the student within the discursive community of the classroom. Au and Jordan (1981), meanwhile, illustrate how teachers who privileged a “talk-story” interaction structure during language arts instruction—rather than traditional turn-taking and teacher-led discussion—yielded increased engagement and participation among Native Hawaiian students.

Scholarship on multicultural education—emerging as an identifiable field of study in the 1990s—likewise advances the notion that educators must “move beyond tolerance” of students from non-dominant backgrounds (e.g., Nieto, 1994), and instead embrace diversity as an asset for learning. Like the research already described, multiculturalists assert the importance of teachers modifying curriculum content to more accurately reflect diverse perspectives and experiences while also engaging in equity-minded, student-centered, and responsive pedagogical practices (e.g., Gay, 2000, 2002; Grant & Sleeter, 1996; Sleeter, 1996). Some scholars among

these additionally underscore the importance of helping students to view knowledge as socially constructed and to participate in knowledge construction themselves (e.g., Banks, 1995, 1996).

The work of Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) and others builds on this line of scholarship and emphasizes an explicit structural critique. *Culturally relevant pedagogy*, which Ladson-Billings conceptualized based on a study of eight highly effective teachers of African American students, advocates instructional approaches that support students to make sense of new knowledge through their own cultural frames. As Ladson-Billings explains, this perspective on the relationship between culture and teaching challenges the tendency—even among some multiculturalists—to conceptualize effective instruction for diverse learners as involving efforts to promote “compatibility” or “congruence” between students’ cultural and linguistic practices and the cultural and linguistic practices deemed most valuable by schools. In particular, Ladson-Billings claims that working to increase home-school compatibility and/or congruence often does little to challenge mainstream notions of schooling and success and can result in overt or tacit goals that position diverse students as having to ‘fit’ into mainstream society as it is, and to succeed on its terms (problematic as they may be). Thus, Ladson-Billings (1995) theorizes a relationship between school and home culture that “not only addresses student achievement but also helps students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate” (p. 469). Underlying this perspective is a definition of culture that recognizes its dynamism and complexity, and privileges students’ everyday practices rather than their “fixed” cultural traits (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

More recently, researchers and educators have built on this scholarship and, in doing so, drawn on theoretical perspectives that explicitly acknowledge the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of learning (e.g., Cole & Engestrom, 1990; Tharpe & Gallimore, 1988; Vygotsky, 1978). “Funds of knowledge,” theorized by Luis Moll and colleagues (1992) to capture the “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well being” (p. 133) represents one of the most commonly cited—and often reductively interpreted and misused—concepts in this lineage (e.g., González, Wyman, & O’Conner, 2011). Among respected contemporary scholarship, much of the work that is drawing on and building out from these social and cultural perspectives and key concepts explores how teachers’ practices can scaffold diverse students’ learning within specific content areas. Multiple scholars, for example, have applied this work to literacy instruction (e.g., Au, 2001; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005; Lee, 2001, 2007; Orellana, Reynolds, Dorner, & Meza, 2003). Lee (2001), for example, has documented the effectiveness of having African American high-school students analyze their own language practices, and leverage that knowledge to analyze the language featured in canonical literature. Meanwhile, Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2005) have

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described how popular culture texts, such as hip-hop lyrics, can serve as a bridge for students to develop the knowledge and skills articulated in the state standards for English/Language Arts.

Increasingly, researchers are also applying these frameworks to other content areas as well (e.g., Brown & Ryoo, 2008; Emdin, 2010; Moje et al., 2004). Brown and Ryoo (2008), for example, illustrate how a “content-first” approach to science instruction—which introduces scientific concepts in students’ everyday language, followed later by instruction using academic language—supported a group of mostly African-American students to better acquire science content knowledge and the academic language necessary for expressing understanding. Particularly notable among these more recent studies are educators’ efforts to tap into students’ salient everyday experiences, and to consider these assets just as essential for learning as students’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Stretching across these works is recognition that preservice teachers must develop ideological clarity about teaching historically marginalized youth *and* develop pedagogical clarity grounded in that ideological clarity. In other words, teachers need to understand with clarity their purpose *and* their context, including the school, community, and broader socio-political landscape; they must believe in students’ capacities for success, and they must work to ensure students’ needs are met, even—indeed, especially—within oppressive school and societal structures. This requires that teachers continually ask themselves “if, when, and how their belief systems uncritically reflect those of the dominant society and support unfair and inequitable conditions” (Bartolomé, 2002, p. 168). Such clarity is essential in order to avoid what Bartolomé and Trueba (2000) describe as “blindly following lock step methodologies and promulgating unexamined beliefs and attitudes that often compound the difficulties faced by immigrant and U.S.-born low-status minority students in school” (p. 279).

After much discussion about the aforementioned works, we established common ground around the essential component of quality teaching that we call “contextualizing.” We felt strongly that our definition of contextualizing should reflect dynamic notions of culture and attend to students’ everyday experiences, as well as their cultural and linguistic backgrounds; these are values we hope that we and our respective programs imbue in teacher candidates. We also felt strongly that our definition should emphasize the actions we hope to see candidates take and the academic content candidates aim to teach. Ultimately, we sought a definition that would anchor our efforts to determine the degree to which and how our teacher candidates were tailoring instruction to the *contexts* where they were teaching and to the *learners* who they were teaching. Thus, we defined *contextualizing practice* as: “making learning meaningful and accessible through unearthing, recognizing and leveraging learners’ prior knowledge, values, and salient experiences, employing familiar cultural and linguistic tools, and engaging strategies such as explicit teaching, coaching, and scaffolding to support learning.”

With this definition, we attempted to move beyond an expectation that candidates would make their instruction more culturally “compatible” or “congruent”; indeed, our use of the term “leveraging” represents our effort to articulate an approach through which the content is not only made accessible to students, but is also transformed by the knowledge and resources that students bring to the table. This particular distinction is important, because while cultural recognition and relevance remain crucial preconditions for academic learning, they alone will not ensure intended learning unless coupled with inspired, ambitious pedagogies. Such pedagogies aim “to teach all kinds of students to not only to ‘know’ academic subjects, but also to be able to use what they know in working on authentic problems in academic domains” (Lampert, Boerst, & Graziani, 2011).

Contextualizing Practice and PACT

Following the development of the above definition, we created a matrix-style diagnostic tool (see Figure 1), both to operationalize our understanding of contextualized practice, and also to assist ourselves in determining where examples of candidate practice embedded in completed PACTs might fall along a continuum of contextualization. With this tool, we aimed to assess candidates’ demonstrated capacities to recognize, make sense of, make connections to, respond authentically to and/or intentionally leverage students’ prior knowledge and lived experiences when planning, enacting, and reflecting on teaching practice. Wanting to also acknowledge the interaction between candidates’ degree of ideological clarity and the degree of pedagogical clarity—and wanting to acknowledge the possibility that candidates would potentially demonstrate differing degrees of each—we assigned rough categories pertaining to ideological clarity to the columns in the matrix, and we assigned rough categories pertaining to pedagogical practice to the rows in the matrix.

Constructing these categories occurred through our engagement with PACTs we shared across programs. We then assessed shared PACTs, utilizing this tool to determine to what degree candidates appeared to engage in the kind of practice outlined above. Here we offer some examples to demonstrate some key distinctions.

Consider, for example, Jason, whose PACT featured him introducing through roleplay a lesson on the concept of addition number stories in a kindergarten classroom. (Jason, and all other names, are pseudonyms.) During this roleplay, Jason had several students come to the front of the classroom, pretending to go to the park, and then invited two more friends to meet them there. Instead of using an abstract problem, the students were the “items” being added, so they could immediately (and in a developmentally appropriate manner) connect with what was happening. Later in the lesson and lesson sequence, the teacher employed manipulatives (small plastic bears) to tell—and have students retell—number stories about going to the market and going swimming, activities with which Jason assumed (but did not seem sure) his students were familiar. In the planning commentary, on which Jason

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Figure 1: Contextualizing Practice Matrix

	Teacher as Technician ⇔		Teacher as Agent ⇔	
Ideology ⇔	Denial/ Rationalization denies importance of contextualizing practice OR rationalizes decision to not contextualize practice/explains why could not contextualize practice . . .	Passivity recognizes importance of culturally responsive instruction but does not see oneself as individually responsible for contextualizing practice . . .	Engagement recognizes importance of culturally responsive instruction and demonstrates some sense of responsibility for contextualizing practice . . .	Ownership recognizes importance of culturally responsive instruction, demonstrates sense of responsibility for contextualizing practice and holds oneself accountable for students' learning outcomes . . .
Practice ⇓				
Naming as important, but Not Evidencing understanding of students' prior knowledge, values, high-salience experiences and familiar cultural and linguistic tools . . .			Jason	
Identifying/Recognizing students' prior knowledge, values, high-salience experiences and familiar cultural and linguistic tools . . .		Roxana		
Connecting to students' prior knowledge, values, high-salience experiences and familiar cultural and linguistic tools . . .			Sara	
Responding to students' prior knowledge, values, high-salience experiences and familiar cultural and linguistic tools . . .			Alicia	
Leveraging students' prior knowledge, values, high-salience experiences and familiar cultural and linguistic tools to facilitate learning of academic knowledge and language . . .				Marisa

scored all 3s (i.e., exceeding the passing score of 2 on the PACT 4-point rubrics), he explained, “when I was planning, I took time to make sure that I was making culturally significant references for them... I know how much fun they have using stickers and [bears].”

What this and the rest of Jason’s PACT documentation indicates is a level of engagement, in the sense that he demonstrates a sense of responsibility for contextualizing (here, for example, in his stated interest in providing “culturally significant references”). However, it also reveals a fairly shallow understanding of how to tap into students’ prior knowledge, values, high-salience experiences and familiar cultural and linguistic tools; indeed, it was students’ “fun” with stickers and plastic bears, for example, that Jason framed as “culturally significant.” Interestingly, Jason had written in his context commentary about, for example, his students living within close, walking distance of the school. One, he wrote, also lived in a nearby homeless shelter, about which he noted, “this home environment brings a whole new set of interesting things to think about when teaching and making relations to home.” Yet, Jason never mentioned what these “things” might be and how they—or other aspects of his students’ lives beyond school—might actually influence his instruction. His instruction did not manifest substantive aspects of contextualizing; he seemed mostly to make general assumptions about students’ salient experiences, and did little to draw out and build upon students’ knowledge and familiar cultural and linguistic tools.

Now consider Roxana, who completed her PACT in an English Only 6th grade math class that was part of a larger dual immersion language program. In her PACT—which centered around a series of lessons aimed at teaching students about percentages—Roxana conveyed some deficit thinking, particularly concerning English Learners’ academic capacities and needs, across various PACT components. For example, in the planning component, where candidates are prompted to explain instructional accommodations they will make for particular groups of students, including those considered English Learners (ELs) or as having special needs, Roxana’s response illustrated (though she did not seem to recognize this) that she would in fact lower expectations for these students, as opposed to making accommodations that would support them to perform at high levels. Specifically, she commented, “To account for these [EL] students’ needs, I have been sure not to ask for written explanations [of their understandings]...” Among other things, she also presented GATE students (those designated as “gifted”) and ELs as necessarily mutually exclusive groups (e.g., “While whole group learning may move at a slower pace than is necessary for [GATE students] in order to accommodate EL students, once in small groups, they [GATE students] should be sufficiently and adequately pushed...”).

Such comments suggest that Roxana may understand the importance of planning instruction that responds to specific students’ needs; however, we can not be sure, since she was responding to a prompt that asked her to describe the accom-

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modations she *will* make, rather than to explain whether or not, and why, she *would* make accommodations. Either way, Roxana clearly struggled to understand how accommodations could be made in a way that would treat all students as possessing important resources for learning.

In addition, throughout her PACT, Roxana mostly treated students' prior knowledge related to percentages as necessarily being rooted only in their involvement in prior lessons (i.e., in this case, prior lessons focused on converting fractions to decimals), and she mostly overlooked how students' out-of-school knowledge and experiences might serve as a bridge to academic content. And, even in instances where Roxana seemed to recognize students' out-of-school knowledge and practices, she did so in relatively superficial terms. To make learning experiences more "relevant" for students, for example, Roxana—similar to Jason—reported using "familiar" language and content in word problems she created (e.g., sneakers, bike shop, grocery store, Target, [School name] sweatshirt).

Roxana did also describe incorporating actual coupons/advertisements from "local" publications "to connect what we will be doing in the classroom to the real world." That said, her choice of realia (coupons/advertisements) raised questions about their relevance—most were clipped from an 'eco-circular,' some for organic chocolate, some for a gourmet-ish food shop, some for commuter-rail tickets, and none selected by kids themselves. In addition, evidence of the candidate actually uncovering and contextualizing in students' knowledge and experiences remained limited (e.g., "when we had finished one example, I asked students to think about something they had purchased recently... by pulling in examples that were relevant to the students, the concept became more applicable to their daily lives") and tentative (e.g., "students may make the connection between the lesson that will be presented and finding the best discount at the grocery store with their parent").

Roxana's reflections reveal some evidence of potential development around this issue—for example, Day 2 reflections included comments about her decision to add a homework component asking students to "find an advertisement, cut it out, and calculate how much they will pay if they use the coupon... to connect students' learning in class with their lives outside of school." Still, student-centered artifacts remained at the periphery; core materials, examples, and problems orbited around Roxana, who seemed to assume their relevance to all students based on their potential relevance to some (e.g., assuming a flyer is relevant because it circulates frequently on the block where she and two students live) and/or based on basic topical interest (e.g., assuming biking-related coupons' relevance because some students like biking).

Though evidence of contextualized instruction was limited, Roxana did acknowledge explicitly in her context commentary that "all students... bring resources from their home and community lives" and that these resources are "not all equally valued by schools." And in her reflective commentary she offered an example of how one student's "funds of knowledge" emerged in the course of a lesson. Based

on his experiences grocery shopping with family members, “one student shared that just because something has a discount doesn’t mean that it is cheaper. He explained that food on the bottom shelf is usually cheaper than food on the higher shelves. His advice was to figure out how much the food on the higher shelf costs with the discount and then check to see if it was cheaper than the food on the bottom shelf.” This example is notable both in that the instruction allowed for this knowledge sharing and that Roxana recognized the value of this student’s contribution; these are necessary preconditions for contextualized instruction.

Yet it is also telling that Roxana employed this example mostly to demonstrate her belief that students’ limited “academic language”—in this case, not knowing the word discount at the outset of the lesson sequence—tended to under-represent students’ conceptual understanding. In her final reflection commentary, she admitted being, “surprised at the level of conceptual understanding that students brought... given their lack of basic computation skills”; for example, she noted surprise that her students “already understood that the new price would have to be lower than the original price.” While it was no doubt important for the candidate to surface and reflect on pre-PACT assumptions, her revelations nevertheless raise questions about the nature/content/source of her assumptions (i.e., assuming limited prior knowledge), her corollary and fairly low expectations for (most) students, and her tendency to view computational fluency (i.e., calculating percentages and converting fractions to decimals) as the gateway to conceptual understanding.

Ideologically speaking, Roxana—similar to Jason—at times recognized the importance of making her instruction somehow “relevant” to students. At the same time, she failed in many instances to view students’ prior knowledge as something beyond what students have learned in school and often tended to characterize students as having deficits in ability and prior out-of-school knowledge. This suggests a more *passive* orientation towards contextualized teaching. Rather than actually contextualizing her instruction, Roxana spent considerable time in the Reflective Commentary *explaining* what appeared to be a newfound *understanding* of students’ prior knowledge and high-salience experiences as well as a new awareness that these *could* be connected, responded to or leveraged for instructional purposes in subsequent lessons. In other words, while Roxana began to demonstrate some understanding of how students’ out-of-school knowledge and experiences might relate to academic learning, she did not really work to establish connections (except superficially), to respond to students’ prior knowledge and experiences, or to leverage their prior knowledge and experiences for learning.

Sara’s and Alicia’s efforts to contextualize went beyond those of Jason and Roxana in important ways. Both Sara’s and Alicia’s lessons were conducted in demographically diverse upper elementary classrooms, where Latino students (many ELs) comprised the largest student subgroup. Sara made connections between the solid figures that were at the heart of her math lessons and her students’ lives. Despite receiving all 2s across rubrics (with the exception of one 3 in planning), her PACT

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demonstrated fairly high-level efforts aimed at making mathematical concepts more accessible to students. She explained her goal was, “to make solid connections to the outside world in terms of the application of the content knowledge [students] acquire... especially in the real-world application of volume.”

Sara used “realia and real-world examples” to introduce solid figures to the students in the first lesson. She brought in her own examples which consisted of items the students might find familiar: a cereal box, can of corn, *Harry Potter* book in Spanish, *Ice Age* DVD, and two types of candy. Sara displayed the objects and said to students, “These are examples of solid figures from my home. What are some examples from your homes?” This question, while subtle, demonstrated that Sara realized the items in her own home might differ from those in her students’ homes. She then invited students to bring in items from home and created a table for the whole class to use with a column where they could list “examples from [the] real world.” As the lessons continued, Sara introduced new mathematical concepts (e.g., faces, edges, and vertices), using the solid items brought to class; throughout, however, she engaged students primarily around *her* items and examples, including a cereal box, which students were invited to wrap and unwrap as they explored the relationship between volume and surface area.

These lessons reflected Sara’s *engagement* in efforts to contextualize; they offered opportunities for students to make meaningful *connections* between mathematical content and their own lives. Had Sara moved her students’ examples to the center of the instruction (e.g., trying to engage *them* in discussion about when and why in their own lives it might be important to know the surface area of a solid, when and why they might need to wrap solid items, etc.), she would have been poised to actually *respond* to and *leverage* in the interest of learning the knowledge students’ brought with them into the classroom.

Alicia takes an added step. Her Context Commentary, too, revealed her desire to make classroom learning relevant to her students. She also mentioned that because her cooperating teacher did not allow any Spanish to be spoken in the classroom, she sought to make her instruction more porous to students’ knowledge and experiences:

Therefore, many of my students come from a rich Hispanic heritage and share many cultural traditions with others in the class; however, they are rarely asked to bring that heritage or those traditions to bear during classroom lessons taught by Ms. Hanson. During my learning segment, therefore, I will work to incorporate not only my students’ prior knowledge, but also their cultural and familial experiences outside of [the] classroom in order to connect their “worlds” with the content at hand.

Alicia’s learning segment lessons, which focused on different forms of measurement, incorporated efforts to draw out and on students’ knowledge and experiences. For example, when discussing the metric system, Alicia asked students to share if they had visited other countries or communities where a different measurement system was used and explained that, “It’s important, as mathematicians, and as

world travelers, to understand how to use both systems of measurement.” At the end of this lesson, Alicia asked students what units of measurement they would want to use to measure the playground, the distance between school and their own homes, and the length of a videogame. She also asked the students to give examples of times when they used measurement in everyday life and of careers that would involve using measurement.

With this foundation in place, lessons two and three responded more authentically to students’ lives outside math class, while also making cross-curricular connections to physical education. Knowing students were training for an upcoming timed run and roadrace, she invited them to estimate and then measure the distance around the lot where they practiced, to “see how far we’ve really been running all this time.” This second lesson then continued outside, where students measured the asphalt, generated data that was used in the subsequent lesson, and drafted their own formulas for perimeter and surface area. In her reflection, Alicia explained,

The students seemed to be... excited to have an actual application of the topic to their everyday lives (how far they run each day). In fact, one of my students, Ashley, who tends to struggle... came up to me after class, and she had calculated the distance the students run each week, all by herself. When I shared that fact with the class, many more students decided to try to calculate the distance they run each month.

That students themselves generated their own extension activities, and that Alicia responded to their authentic interests, speaks to the power of contextualized instruction; as she put it, “when they were ... given a context for measurement’s use (such as how rulers can be used outside of the classroom), students suddenly ‘came alive’ and were able to use that understanding to continue to create new knowledge.”

As an example of particularly high-level contextualizing, we draw from the PACT of Marisa, who completed her PACT in a high school art class. We recognize that many might consider this PACT an outlier, given that it was not completed in a traditional academic discipline. Still, even though we found other examples of high-level contextualizing, we offer this one as an example here, because it, in particular, makes evident the important link between ideological and pedagogical clarity, while also situating ‘clarity’ in robust notions of culture. Specifically, Marisa’s PACT involved having students create “*Social Conscience Posters*”—artistic representations in which they had to take a position on a social issue that concerned or interested them. Marisa stated that her main goal was to, “make students aware of the educational, informative, transformative, and persuasive abilities of art, and in the process, refine their artistic perception.”

Throughout the PACT, Marisa articulated clearly her understanding of the importance of making instruction responsive and relevant to students. In her account of how she guided students to select topics for their posters in the planning component, for example, Marisa explained, “I greatly emphasized my wish for students

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to choose issues that are relevant to their lives, mainly because they will be more likely to produce more meaningful work if it is tied to their personal experiences in some way.” Distinguishing her notions of cultural responsiveness from those espoused by Jason and Roxana, Marisa did not presume to know ahead of time what would be relevant to her students or to assume that the same topics/issues would hold the same relevance for all students. Rather, Marisa seemed to view culture as dynamic and her students’ diversities as intersecting. In her rationale for sharing with students a wide range of existing social conscience posters, for example, she explained,

I decided not to narrow down the list of artists or artwork to a select few cultures, but chose to broaden it to include as many cultures as possible... [J]ust because a person is from a specific ethnic background does not mean that he or she actually identifies with that ethnicity, so I tried to showcase different types of artwork to avoid stereotyping students and assuming they would identify with it.

In addition to possessing a more robust understanding of culture, Marisa also conveyed her belief that the *responsibility* for contextualizing instruction was indeed hers. In her Reflection Commentary she expressed that,

As instructors, we must make our content accessible, interesting and most of all relevant to our students so they feel there is a need to learn these new concepts. If students don’t feel a connection with the subject, if they don’t see a real world application to it, there is no real desire to learn and internalize the content.

Importantly, this comment demonstrates Marisa’s sense of *responsibility* for student learning in that her interest in making the content relevant is tied to her goal to facilitate *learning*, not just to increase students’ interest or engagement.

Also worth mentioning are Marisa’s stated understandings of students’ prior knowledge and the role of prior knowledge in facilitating learning. Across multiple PACT components, she discussed prior knowledge both in terms of students’ life experiences and also in relation to students’ previous experiences with and understandings of the subject matter, including their past experiences with art materials and their feelings toward art-making, in general. Recognizing that these past experiences could influence students’ willingness and ability to create artworks, Marisa offered students the opportunity to complete a written reflection on these experiences and their potential impact on the current assignment.

After introducing students to a variety of social conscience posters from different parts of the world and from different time periods, Marisa supported students to choose a social issue that resonated with them and/or their community; she then supported students to draw on experiential knowledge and specific technical skills to make artworks that would persuade their audiences to take some form of related action.

The lessons incorporated academic language, such as “innovation,” “conservation,” “conscience,” “humanitarian,” and so on. The lessons also involved teaching

academic content and critiquing artwork in tandem—a pairing that helped scaffold students’ understanding and use of content-specific vocabulary (e.g., complementary, monochromatic, line, color, shape, shade, shadow, texture, contrast, etc.). Students also learned about the technical aspects of art-making, including how to use a new medium, color pastels; the final requirements for the posters were rigorous concerning artistic qualities, reasoning, and persuasiveness. Students’ work samples demonstrate that they chose a range of issues and were able to use the skills that were taught to create effective and technically sophisticated artwork.

Thus, Marisa demonstrated *ownership* in that she took full responsibility for contextualizing her practice vis-à-vis students’ lives. Her PACT, thus, captures her sense of ideological clarity—clarity that guided *her* in guiding *students* toward the creation of artworks that voiced their concerns and offered up a social critique. Her PACT also illustrates pedagogical clarity, in that her actual practice involves *leveraging* students’ knowledge and interests to facilitate students’ learning of rigorous academic content.

Discussion

As the literature cited earlier in this manuscript suggests, supporting teachers to contextualize their practice is both an essential and daunting task for teacher educators. For student teachers, too, contextualizing poses specific challenges; student teachers are new to the profession and often also new to the schools and communities where they teach. And yet the examples above suggest that some are, nevertheless, successfully enacting aspects of contextualized practice. We find this encouraging on multiple levels.

Most pertinent here, we are encouraged by the information that PACT provides about our teacher candidates’ efforts (or lack thereof) to contextualize practice. We believe that the performance assessments we use for general credentialing (and for other purposes) *should* also help us to encourage and accurately gauge candidates’ progress toward the specific kinds of learning that we consider most essential. The examples above suggest that PACT holds the potential—in theory and under the right conditions—to do so, both within and across teacher education programs, and that the matrix-style diagnostic tool might prove useful in surfacing some of the specific aspects of practice that we support and look for in our candidates’ teaching. To that end, some among us have begun applying the matrix tool more broadly in our respective programs.

That said, through our shared use of the matrix tool to analyze the aforementioned random sample of PACTs, we also identified several cross-program patterns. One of the trends was that candidates tended to mention students’ prior knowledge regarding school-based content, but neglected to discuss students’ lived experience—as members of families and communities—as providing rich funds of knowledge for school-based learning. Although candidates serve as student teach-

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ers in other teachers' classrooms for a relatively short amount of time (compared to an entire, fulltime academic year) and therefore have relatively limited opportunities to learn about students, their families, and communities, most candidates' lack of acknowledgment—or merely superficial attention—concerning the role that students' out-of-school prior knowledge should play when planning lessons was rather disheartening. Our respective TEPs espouse valuing students' home and community experiences and leveraging students' out-of-school knowledge for school-based learning, and yet some candidates seemed not to be acknowledging or incorporating these emphases into their PACTs. Given that the majority of candidates mentioned students' prior knowledge, it seems clear that many had internalized—or at least taken up the language of—the idea that new learning must connect with and build upon what students already know. However, they often appeared wedded to a view of learning that was primarily school-based and thus particularly problematic if they were working with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, whose home and community experiences might not reflect traditional or mainstream/Whitestream “school” norms but are nevertheless critical to their healthy identity development and represent powerful resources for facilitating learning new academic content.

A second cross-program pattern concerned candidates' *assumptions* about students' interests and experiences and what would be relevant to students' lives. While some of these assumptions may have been accurate (e.g., kindergartners spending time at the park), few candidates dedicated time in their planning or took time in their lessons to actually ask the students about their lives and then ground their instruction in what their *students* deemed interesting and/or relevant. Indeed, one of the characteristics that distinguished Marisa's PACT from others we analyzed was the fact that she did not assume relevance. Instead, she sought to learn from students about their experiences, concerns and interests, created space in her lessons for exchange of ideas, and actively (and explicitly) strove to avoid stereotyping students based on their race or ethnicity.

The combined trends of candidates (a) either not acknowledging or superficially acknowledging out-of-school prior knowledge, and (b) relying on assumptions, rather than authentic exchanges, about students' lives when they did try to recognize the knowledge students carried with them into the classroom offer direction for us, as teacher educators thinking about program improvement and the messages being taken up, with varying degrees of depth, by our teacher candidates. Specifically, these findings press us to consider how student teachers, as guests in other teachers' classrooms, can learn about students, families, and communities in meaningful, respectful ways and how our programs can support candidates to use what they learn to inform—indeed, to contextualize—their instruction.

Conclusion

While we are able to identify some of the key differences between candidates'

degrees of contextualization, we are left with more questions than answers. Specifically, it is beyond the scope of this investigation to pinpoint why certain candidates were better able than others to contextualize their practice. Since this analysis was exploratory in nature, we did not, for example, collect supplementary background information on the candidates whose PACTs we analyzed. Nor did we have the opportunity to interview them before, during, or after PACT completion about the thinking that went into their teaching events. We know, for example, that Marisa and Jason attended different teacher education programs; but we do not know whether and how the content of their programmatic coursework contributed to the differing degrees of contextualization evidenced in their PACTs. Likewise, we cannot speak to the other factors that may have led to their seemingly different capacities and/or inclinations to demonstrate contextualized practice in the context of their respective PACTs.

While Jason's, Roxana's, Sara's, and Alicia's PACTs were representative in some ways of many teaching events we analyzed, Marisa's was an outlier of sorts—in the random sample, and in our own anecdotal accounts of other candidates' performances on PACT—when it came to contextualizing practice. None of the members of our collaborative taught Marisa in class, and so we found ourselves wondering, “Who is she? What contributed to her ability to contextualize her practice in more robust ways?” Given her teaching event's outlier status, we tend to think that it was not program coursework alone that contributed to her capacity to contextualize her practice as she did. We also have some concern about holding hers up as an exemplar; indeed, from a developmental perspective, it may not be reasonable to expect most preservice teachers—novices at the very beginning of their development as educators—to construct lessons that land them in the “ownership” column and “leveraging” row of our matrix, although certainly this is a worthy, if lofty goal. While we are curious to know what makes Marisa—and other candidates like her—so special, what supports her to contextualize as she does, we are perhaps more acutely concerned with candidates like Jason, Roxana, Sara, and Alicia, as they likely represent the majority of the students we teach, and how we can best support them. How, for example, can we move Jason—who states clearly the importance of contextualizing—from merely naming this as important to *identifying, connecting, responding* and/or *leveraging* students' actual interests and experiences? How can we move Roxana further along on the “ideology” continuum, so she *engages* with and takes *ownership* of her responsibility to contextualize practice?

Given the richness of our own learning experience as teacher educators, we also wonder how other teacher educators might be supported to engage in inquiry-oriented and adaptive implementation of common teacher performance assessment tools. For example, how can we protect against candidates—and teacher educators—engaging with a performance assessment like PACT in ways that privilege rubric points over principles, technical skills over ideological clarity, policy compliance over programmatic coherence? What can be done to position PACT

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data or data from other performance assessments as one component of a multiple measures assessment *system*—the kind of system that we know is essential in order for assessment to be accurate, fair, and reflective of local values and goals? How can performance assessment help us navigate tensions that arise when emphasizing the contextualization of practice across multiple, varied settings, while also working to construct coherence and develop shared knowledge? Finally, because we recognize the tremendous value of cross-instructional collaboration, we also want to acknowledge that our collaboration took place mostly on our own time, outside our programmatic roles and responsibilities, and with varying degrees of institutional support; this alone raises questions about the conditions, practices, structures and systems that would best support teacher educators to engage ongoing in this generative, inquiry-oriented work.

Our analysis of sample PACTs thus far does not allow us to answer these—and other—questions that arose for us over the course of this exploration. It does, however, assist us in posing and refining such questions. It also gives us space to think together about and better articulate what we hope our candidates will know and be able to do as future teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students. Like others, we believe that today’s teachers must be “thoughtfully adaptive” (Duffy, 2005); indeed, that very idea is central to the kind of teaching that contextualized practice represents. Contextualizing is nothing if not thoughtful adaption that takes into consideration the needs of learners, as they are situated in social, cultural and historical contexts. While not without its flaws, we appreciate that PACT provided us with common tools for use in collaborating across programs and around shared goals. As we take our findings back with us to our respective programs, we are hopeful that the matrix tool we developed will serve as a resource for other teacher educators—both within and across TEPs—who aim to prepare teachers who can contextualize their practice in order to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, particularly those who have been historically underserved.

Note

The authors would like to thank Dr. Etta Hollins for her leadership in organizing and supporting the collaboration that led to this publication.

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