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*Mas está tudo tão mudado
Que não vi em nenhum lado
As tais janelas que tinham tabuinhas*

*But everything is so changed
That I haven't seen anywhere
Those windows that had little shutters*

Currently, the tradition is carried on by *fadistas* who follow on the footsteps of their forefathers, and continue singing of life, love, tradition, *saudade*, and hope. Mariza is arguably today's most internationally renowned Fado singer. But now, *fado* does not just belong to Portugal and the Portuguese, it is a gift to the world.

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Biographical Sketch

Pedro J. Lopes is an Associate Professor of Foreign Languages at Henderson State University. He was born in Mozambique of Portuguese parents and grew up in Portugal. After graduating in Communication Sciences from the University Fernando Pessoa, Porto, Portugal, he decided to pursue a Ph.D. in Romanic Languages and Literatures at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill. He has since taught Portuguese, Spanish, and English as a Second Language both in the United States and in Europe.

An Assessor's Guide to Successfully Taking and Passing Praxis III

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Abstract

In order to become a fully licensed teacher in Arkansas, new teachers and teachers transferring from out of state must pass Praxis III. Praxis III is a three part assessment in which the new teacher is interviewed, then teaches an observed lesson, and is then re-interviewed by an Arkansas Department of Education assessor. It must be passed in order to gain state licensure. The process of preparing for and successfully passing Praxis III can be a very stressful time; a novice teacher is placed under enormous pressure to perform in an independently assessed interview and taught class. This paper will present an assessor's guide

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to overcoming some of the more commonly seen challenges and experiences that might negatively influence the Praxis III assessment.

Introduction

One of the challenges faced by state education departments is ensuring that quality teachers are educating their youth. This is accomplished through many different methods such as requiring teachers to have a degree, pass specific licensure requirements, receive a set number of professional development hours, and many others. These requirements vary by state, and unfortunately the standards of one state may not necessarily be equivalent to another.

Teacher licensure is important to the Arkansas Department of Education, and is reflected in their strict requirements for becoming successfully licensed in the state. In addition to the requirements of many other states such as having a four year degree – although there are of course some exceptions to even that rule – Arkansas requires newly hired teachers to pass an additional assessment: Praxis III.

Most education students in Arkansas will be familiar with Praxis I and Praxis II. Praxis I assesses basic reading, writing, and math skills and is usually taken early in an education degree program. The Praxis II tests focus more specifically on subject knowledge and are taken toward the end of the degree. Upon graduation, the student is granted a provisional or initial teaching license. In order to obtain a standard license, that teacher must pass Praxis III. Although the most frequently assessed teacher is a new graduate, other teachers new to Arkansas (i.e. those who transferred from another state) are also required to pass Praxis III.

What is Praxis III?

Praxis III, developed by Educational Testing Services (ETS), is comprised of three components: a pre-observation interview, an observation of a taught lesson, and a post-observation. It is based on the 4 domains and 19 subdomains of the Pathwise system, also developed by ETS.

Why Praxis III?

Although each state has their own process for licensing teachers, Arkansas has adopted Praxis III as part of this process. First piloted in 2001-2002 (Office of Teacher Quality, personal communication) Praxis III has helped Arkansas to become nationally recognized for preparation and licensure.

According to “Quality Counts 2017” (Education Week, 2011), Arkansas ranks third in the domain of ‘the teaching profession’, preparation and licensure. In addition, the state was ranked sixth nationally in ‘lifetime education preparation’.

Who Will Assess Me?

The entire process is conducted by a trained assessor hired by the Office of Teacher Quality in the Department of Education. Each assessor is carefully screened by the Office of

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Teacher Quality and is required to go through extensive training to become certified, and attend re-calibration training each year. Such training helps to ensure that the scoring of Praxis III is consistent across assessors. Thus, it should not matter who the assessor is, the outcome of the assessment should be the same. Although there is diversity within the assessors, all will have an extensive background in education. Examples of assessors include current and retired public school teachers, administrators, and university professors.

When Should I Take It?

Within the calendar school year, there are scheduled windows in which Praxis III can be applied for and taken. Whether a novice teacher wishes to undertake the assessment in the fall or spring semester is up to the teacher. However, the vast majority prefer to take it in the spring after having taught for a semester. Thus, the fall semester can serve as an opportunity to become familiarized with the school, policies, fellow teachers, and students.

The Process

Typically, the assessment process for Praxis III occurs in a logical fashion. After the novice teacher has applied to the Department of Education to be assessed, the teacher's contact information is sent to an assessor. That assessor is then required to contact the teacher within 24 hours and confirm a date and time to complete the assessment. The date and time is set by the teacher, not the assessor.

Following an agreement on the date and time, the assessor will send a confirmation to the novice teacher and school principal. A reminder will be sent a few days before the assessment.

On the day of the assessment, the novice teacher should be available for approximately one hour prior to the classroom observation window. The time may vary depending on the assessor, but enough time is needed to complete the pre-observation interview. During this time the assessor will ask a set of standardized questions based on Domain A of Pathwise. Both the pre and post observations must occur in a closed environment undisturbed by others. Failure to do so may require the assessment to be retaken.

Following the pre-observation interview, the novice teacher will be required to teach an observed lesson. Usually, the assessor will sit somewhere unobtrusive for the duration of the lesson. However, if the assessor has difficulty hearing the teacher or seeing the lesson's content, he or she may move around during the class. The assessor is looking for evidence to support Domains B and C of Pathwise. During the lesson, no other licensed teacher is permitted to be in the room.

At the end of the classroom observation, a post-observation interview occurs. Its purpose is to gather evidence for Domain D of Pathwise. Similar to the pre-observation interview, a set series of questions will be asked.

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When Do I Find Out My Results?

With approximately 1500 Praxis III assessments occurring in Arkansas each year (Office of Teacher Quality, personal communication), the Office of Teacher Quality is extremely busy during the assessment windows. Following the assessment, the assessor is provided with two weeks in which to write the report, have the report checked and approved by an auditing assessor, and submitted to the Office of Teacher Quality. The short answer is that while most novice teachers will learn of their results within a few weeks, it can take longer if the assessment has occurred at a particularly busy period of the window. Usually taking Praxis III toward the end of an assessment window will slow the process.

General Guidelines for Success

It should be noted that because Praxis III is copyrighted, some aspects of the assessment cannot be discussed. For example, it is not permitted to provide questions that will be asked in the pre and post observations. However, a discourse of how a student can be expected to meet the requirements of Pathwise in the observed lesson is acceptable.

It is important to note that there are some aspects of the Praxis III assessment that are not “graded”. For example, an assessor cannot fail a novice teacher who is late arriving or comes across as rude during the interview process. Failing to respond to e-mails or calls quickly will not fail a novice teacher. However, although assessors are trained to be objective, they are human and thereby some subjectivity still remains. Praxis III and Pathwise are not objectively perfect. Thus, rather than test the limits of their objectivity, the recommendation is to err on the side of caution. Speaking politely, dressing well, being on time, offering a drink of water, or any other methods that might make the assessor think positively are all good ideas.

Nerves are a frequent occurrence in any event that a person deems important. Thus, it is hardly surprising that novice teachers can be nervous. From an assessor’s point of view, nerves will not count against the novice teacher unless it negatively effects the assessment in some way. However, this is atypical, and it is entirely natural to be nervous.

Meeting Pathwise Standards in General

Assessors are required to see evidence of all Pathwise domains and subdomains. Evidence for Domain A is accrued during the pre-observation interview and during the post-interview for Domain D. Both interviews include standardized questions to which the novice teacher is expected to respond.

Most of the variability in passing or failing is likely to be found during the observed lesson. After all, the lesson is a dynamic environment and more things can go awry. While this paper is not going to cover every aspect of the lesson, presented are some general areas that are not frequently observed that may make the difference between a pass and fail.

An assessor needs to see and hear the novice teacher actually teaching. Although evidence for some domains can be gathered through other methods (i.e. observing the teacher smile at students or seeing them circulate around the room), much of the evidence must come

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from direct instruction and guidance during the lesson. Thus, when preparing a lesson to be observed it is important to design one that allows you to be visibly teaching. Designing a lesson where students work by themselves on a project the entire lesson, for example, is not recommended.

High Scores for Domain B

Within Domain B there are several areas that are infrequently seen in an observed lesson that could significantly improve a novice teacher's scores. More often than not, teachers are fair in the treatment of students and meet the standard 2.0 score. However, in order to score a 3.0 the teacher must actively encourage fairness among the students. Active encouragement of fairness would be evidenced when a teacher observes unfairness and corrects it, or finds ways to educate the students on the importance of fairness.

Similarly, establishing rapport is often observed in questions such as, "How is everyone today?" Such efforts will usually only score a 2.0. Thus, in order to score maximum points it is important to apply that rapport to students' diverse backgrounds and needs. As an example, this can quickly be accomplished at the beginning of the lesson by asking questions that are specific to each student. "Tony, how was your fishing trip this weekend with your dad? Did you catch anything?" Such questions would demonstrate familiarity with the student's background.

Subdomain B3 assesses whether the novice teacher is communicating challenging learning expectations to each student. Rarely will a teacher score a 1.0, and a 2.0 is most common, but rarely is evidence for 3.0 noted. The key for obtaining a 3.0 is the term "actively". In other words, the teacher should be evidently encouraging his or her students. An example might be a teacher who says, "I know this is a hard equation, but I also know you are all capable of solving it. I know you like a challenge and I know you can do it!"

During an observed lesson, the students are the dynamic variable that cannot be totally controlled. Thus, within Subdomain B4 there is the chance that it could go horribly wrong. A 2.0 score usually means that if there were minor interruptions because of behavior, they were not really an issue, or the novice teacher tried to deal with them respectfully. If the students' behavior was consistently appropriate or the teacher was able to deal with the misbehavior in an appropriate manner then a 3.0 is awarded. The key in B4 is not whether or not the students were disruptive, but how the teacher responded to the misbehavior and whether the students improved their behavior.

Typically, a score of at least a 2.0 on Subdomain B5 is common unless there is a clear safety hazard. Ensuring that the physical environment is safe and conducive to learning as possible is something that can be easily prepared in advance. However, one suggestion to encourage a 3.0 is to use the physical environment as a resource during the observation. Normally, posters, rules, and student work adorn the walls of the classroom. An assessor is looking to see whether the novice teacher will use those resources in a class. Thus, a recommendation is to reference the materials that are in evidence. Examples might include referring to the class rules, the periodic table on the wall, or the solar system that students have

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made and hung from the ceiling. Whatever the subject and lesson, find a way to use the classroom as a clear resource rather than just making it more attractive. Such efforts will yield higher scores in this domain.

High Scores for Domain C

Subdomain C1 is to make sure that student learning goals and instructional procedures are clear to students. A couple of things should be noted in this subdomain. First, instructional goals and learning procedures are different. Goals are for what the student is expected to learn. Procedures are how a teacher gets those goals accomplished. It is a good idea to clearly state the goals at the beginning of the lesson and review them at the end.

Procedures will vary depending on the grade and the lesson's goals. The term "clear" is important in C1. Not only must the novice teacher have procedures that aim to realize the goal, the students must understand them. It is okay if one or two students are initially confused. However, if it is apparent that most students are confused about what they are supposed to be doing a 3.0 score is unlikely. One suggestion to ensure that students do understand the procedure given is to ask one or two random students to explain what they are supposed to do. This allows the teacher to determine if what is intended is comprehended.

One of the most important aspects of teaching is making the content of the lesson comprehensible. After all, it does not matter how good the teacher or lesson is if the students are not learning. An assessor looking for evidence in C2 will expect to see and hear factual content that is accurate (i.e. no mistakes in the content) and that the students appear to understand the content. In order to earn a 3.0, the lesson should also have a logical and coherent structure. This should not be difficult, as usually one process or piece of information builds upon another.

Subdomain C3 is perhaps one of the most difficult in which to score a 3.0, particularly in elementary grade levels. That is not to say that it is not possible, but full scores are less often seen in this subdomain. A score of 2.0 is met by asking some general questions that might extend thinking. In order to go beyond this score, there should be a specific plan or method to actively encourage higher level thinking.

An assessor will be looking for activities or questioning that gets students thinking, creating, imagining, and any other means that encourage them to go outside of their comfort zone of knowledge or thought processes. The Socratic Method is one method that can be used and by asking how, why, and so on about specific topics so that personal growth can occur.

Subdomain C4 is a combination of both monitoring of student content and providing feedback. Also, any instructional adjustments would be noted here. It is not detrimental to adjust a learning activity. There are situations where a particular plan will not work. Rather, it is better to make the adjustment than continue trying something that is not working.

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Monitoring students, whether as individual or groups, usually comes from question and answer, or a presentation of work. A teacher that moves around the room checking on student progress would be noted in this section.

The difference between a 2.0 and 3.0 in this subdomain primarily rests on the quality of feedback. A teacher who gives feedback such as, “Good. I like that. Yes, that’s it. Well done.”, is giving feedback, but it is hardly substantive and specific. Instead, what an assessor is looking for is feedback that focuses specifically on what was liked or could be improved. “Jennifer, I love how you’ve managed to combine both elements in your painting. It really draws you in.” “Bryce, your cursive is really improving. I’m very impressed with how straight across the page you are writing now. Keep it up.” Such feedback is individual specific, and is more likely to receive higher scores.

Passing Pathwise

In order to pass Praxis III a novice teacher needs to score an average of 2.0 on each domain. In addition, the teacher must score at minimum a 45 overall on the 19 subdomains. The scoring system is non-negotiable. Even if a novice teacher scores highly in three of the four domains, failing a domain even by half a point is a fail. Thus, it is important to score as highly as possible in all areas. Should a novice teacher fail, he or she is required to retake the assessment. However, the second attempt will be observed by a different assessor.

Biographical Sketch

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Can You Turn It, Baby? The Christmas Calf

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Abstract: Last summer I wrote a series of stories, entitled, “Yo’ Daddy Stories” with Daddy as the main character. These stories addressed the notion of community through relationship. My hairdresser, George Cornelius, and others within the community (Prescott and Nevada County) asked me to write ““Can You Turn It, Baby?” The Christmas Calf.”

The text of the essay:

Daddy used to say “Can you turn it, Baby?” when I was lying in a prone position with my right cheek resting on that soft spot between a cow’s rear end and her tail bone, with my right arm up to my shoulder inserted into a cow’s uterus trying to turn a calf to assist her in the