What's the Hardest Part of edTPA?

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The idea for my edTPA unit came to me while watching the news. Diane Sawyer was interviewing Malala Yousafzai on ABC's *20/20* and I immediately realized that this paralleled perfectly to the book we had just begun in my third grade ESL self-contained class. A text-to-world connection! I thought to myself, "If this idea doesn't persuade edTPA that I am worthy of being a teacher, then I don't know what they want." Then again, at the time, none of us knew (or know now) what edTPA wants from us. Despite the endless depths of knowledge questions we bombarded our professors with, who did their best to negotiate the meaning of the new and vague edTPA, there was no way to prepare for the unit I was about to design. I saw the news. I made the connection. I immediately began planning for the next day's lesson.

My original plan was to design my edTPA unit and lessons well in advance so that I would have time to review the edTPA requirements, brainstorm creative activities, and design plenty of artifacts that my students could use to demonstrate their learning. That is not what teaching is, however, and that is not what I ended up doing. I can't say as to whether or not I was at a disadvantage for jumping into my edTPA lessons so suddenly. That being said, I passed, so perhaps that's a mute point.

The advantage I know I did have was that by mid-October, I had strong relationships with my students both individually and as a whole class, I was solo student teaching, and I had taken risks in my lesson planning so that I could introduce students to new activities as well as improve my own instruction and differentation.

This, in my opinion, was the key to completing edTPA. You have plenty of time to go back and revise your lesson plans and commentary. However, there is never enough time for getting to know your students and for practicing your instruction. Don't be afraid to ask for more responsibilities from your cooperating teacher. Don't be afraid to try a new activity or book that might go terribly wrong; you need these moments in order to improve and to eventually capture two 10-minute videos that show your edTPA evaluators what kind of teacher you are (on those two particular, staged, yet *so* original, days). It is also helpful to talk with your students about what activities they liked or didn't like. After all, they are the primary audience you are catering your work to. Looking back now, these were the cornerstones of my edTPA lessons.

Of course, once you have the blueprints, there are certain details that you need to consider. You want to anticipate any possible setback in your teaching schedule or technology: the angle at which you are videotaping, the specialist who might interrupt the instruction, student requests for the bathroom, time and day of the week, etc. That is why you should record as many lessons within the unit you are hoping to submit for your assessment. I think that what matters to the edTPA evaluators is that you are able to control your classroom environment for two 10-minute videos. If you have enough videos of your instruction, then you will have the freedom to choose what to submit. Also, photograph and save anything and everything you used, created, and collected from students during your edTPA unit. It's better to have more evidence and artifacts than realizing two months later that you're missing that one essential poster you made with your students. After you've taught the lessons, reviewed the videos, and collected any possible artifacts, take a break; take a break from edTPA and go back to dealing with your graduate work, student teaching, and life. You're done with the hardest part.