**Thinking Organizers: Tools for Candidates to Organize and Record Their Thinking During Both Formative and Summative edTPA Experiences**

**Purpose:** As teacher candidates undergo the edTPA assessment process, they can experience difficulty keeping track of the reasoning and thinking behind all of the decisions that they made during the process. These thinking organizers provide an avenue through which candidates can record their thoughts, reasoning, and evidence of practice throughout the edTPA process and then have easy access to that information when they are ready to write their commentaries.

These thinking organizers were created by Elisa Palmer (edTPA coordinator, Illinois State University) to assist candidates with the organization of their thoughts prior to writing their official responses to the edTPA commentary prompts. These supports provide a table for each commentary question that the candidate fills in with his or her thoughts. The teacher candidate can then use that table to write his or her official response to that question.

Use of the thinking organizers is not limited to work on the summative edTPA portfolio. Instructors can use the tables in formative experiences leading up to the summative edTPA portfolio creation. For example, a course may have an assignment or clinical experience that requires reflections upon professional practice. The course instructor can utilize some of the thinking organizers and adapt them to the particular questions asked in that assignment or clinical reflection.

Overall, the thinking organizers are helpful in aiding teacher candidates in their documentation of their thinking and reasoning throughout the completion of their edTPA portfolio as well as providing a tool for creating and organizing responses in formative course work.



Thinking organizers are available for the following edTPA handbooks:

* Agriculture
* Business Education
* Early Childhood
* Elementary Education
* Elementary Literacy
* Elementary Mathematics
* English as an Additional Language
* Family and Consumer Sciences
* Health Education
* K-12 Physical Education
* K-12 Performing Arts
* Middle Childhood English Language Arts
* Middle Childhood Mathematics
* Middle Childhood Science
* Middle Childhood Social Studies
* Secondary English-Language Arts
* Secondary History/Social Studies
* Secondary Mathematics
* Secondary Science
* Special Education
* Technology and Engineering Education
* Visual Arts
* World Languages

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**Planning Commentary Thinking Organizers and Helpful Hints (Early Childhood Version)**

***Please note: The purpose of this thinking organizer is to help you gather and organize your thoughts in preparation for writing your planning commentary. You will still need to write your answers in paragraph form in the official edTPA planning commentary template. Feel free to add rows to any table as needed.***

**1. Central Focus**

1. **Describe the central focus and purpose for the content you will teach in the learning segment.**

Sentence starters:

The central focus of this learning segment is …

I am teaching this content because…

**b. Given the central focus, describe how the standards and learning objectives within your learning segment promote children’s**

* **active and multimodal nature of learning**
* **language and literacy development in an interdisciplinary context**

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| List the standard or learning objective | Identify if it is connected to the active and multimodal nature of learning or language literacy development. | Explain how these are connected. |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**c. Explain how your instructional plans build on each other to support children’s language and literacy development through active and multimodal learning.**

Note: Discuss how you will use the active/multimodal nature of young children’s learning to help them develop their language and literacy.

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Identify the area of language/literacy development being addressed | How addressed in  Lesson 1 | Explain how Lesson 2 builds on Lesson 1 | Explain how Lesson 3 builds on Lesson 2 |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

1. **Describe how the physical environment in which you are teaching supports the active and multimodal nature of children’s learning. (If, in your view, the physical environment in which you are teaching does not adequately support the active and multimodal nature of children’s learning, please describe the changes you would make.)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristic of the physical environment | How does this support the active and multimodal nature of children’s learning? | Describe any changes you would make (if environment does not promote children’s learning). |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**2. Knowledge of Children to Inform Teaching**

**For each of the prompts below (2a–c), describe what you know about the children in your class with respect to the central focus of the learning segment.**

**a. Children’s development related to the central focus—what do you know about the children’s**

* **social and emotional development**
* **cognitive and physical development**
* **language development for communication**

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Children | Social and emotional development related to the central focus | Cognitive and physical development related to the central focus | Language development for communication related to the central focus |
| Class as a whole |  |  |  |
| Children with IEPs |  |  |  |
| Children with 504 plans |  |  |  |
| Other groups of learners |  |  |  |

1. **Personal/cultural/community assets—what do you know about your children’s everyday experiences, cultural backgrounds and practices, and interests?**

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Children | Children’s everyday experiences related to language and literacy development | Children’s cultural backgrounds related to language and literacy development | Children’s skills related to language and literacy development | Children’s interests related to language and literacy development |
| Class as a whole |  |  |  |  |
| Children with IEPs |  |  |  |  |
| Children with 504 plans |  |  |  |  |
| Other groups of learners |  |  |  |  |

Notes: Stay positive – discuss the children’s assets

Keep the learning segment in mind – only discuss student assets related to the learning segment

**c. Prior learning and prerequisite skills related to language and literacy development— What can they do and what are they learning to do related to language and literacy development? Cite evidence from your knowledge of this class/group of children.**

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Students | Prior learning of language and literacy | Evidence of this prior learning | Prerequisite skills the children already have | Evidence of these prerequisite skills | What are the children still learning to do related to language and literacy development? |
| Class as a whole |  |  |  |  |  |
| Students with IEPs |  |  |  |  |  |
| Students with 504 plans |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other groups of learners |  |  |  |  |  |

**3. Supporting Children’s Development and Learning**

1. **Justify how your planned learning experiences and materials align with your understanding of the children’s development, prior learning, and personal, cultural, and community assets (from prompts 2a–c above). Be explicit about these connections and support your justification with research/developmental theory.**

Organize your answer:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Chosen learning task or material (or adaptation of either) | Associated development, prior learning or asset of the children | Why did you make this choice? | What research supports this choice? | How does the research support this choice? |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

1. **Describe and justify how you plan to support the varied learning needs of all the children in your class/group, including individuals with specific learning needs.**

Organize your answer:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Learning need | What individuals have this learning need? | What instructional support are you providing to these individuals? | How does this instructional support help children achieve the learning objectives? |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**c. Describe common developmental approximations[[1]](#footnote-1) or misunderstandings that pertain to the learning experiences you are planning for the children and how you plan to address them.**

Organize your answer:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Possible misunderstanding/developmental approximation of the children | How will you identify if children have this issue? | How will you address it during instruction? |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**4. Supporting Children’s Vocabulary Development**

**a. Identify the key vocabulary (i.e., developmentally appropriate sounds, words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs) essential for children to use during the learning segment.**

The vocabulary that children will need to use during the learning segment includes…

**b. Identify the learning experience that provides children with opportunities to develop, practice, and/or use the key vocabulary identified in prompt 4a . (Identify the plan day/number.)**

The learning experience that provides children with opportunities to develop, practice, and use the vocabulary occurs on Day \_\_\_\_ in Lesson \_\_\_\_\_.

**c. Describe how you plan to support the children (during and/or prior to the learning experience) to develop and use the key vocabulary identified in prompt 4a.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Description of Instructional Support | How does this support help children develop and use the key vocabulary? |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**5. Monitoring Children’s Learning**

**In response to the prompts below, refer to the assessments you will submit as part of the materials for Task 1.**

1. **Describe how your planned formal and informal assessments will provide direct evidence of multiple modalities to monitor children’s learning of language and literacy throughout the learning segment.**

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Assessment | Where does it occur in the learning segment? | Through what modality does this assessment allow children to demonstrate their learning of language and literacy? | How will this assessment provide evidence of children’s learning of the language or literacy? |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**b. Explain how the design or adaptation of your planned assessments allows children with specific needs to demonstrate their learning.**

*Consider the variety of learners in your class/group who may require different strategies/support (e.g., all children along the continuum of development, including children with IEPs or 504 plans, English language learners, struggling readers, and/or gifted children).*

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Description of assessment or assessment adaptations | The child or children for whom the assessment was designed or adapted | How does this assessment allow this child to demonstrate his/her learning? |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**Instruction Commentary Thinking Organizers and Helpful Hints (Early Childhood Version)**

***Please note: The purpose of this thinking organizer is to help you gather and organize your thoughts in preparation for writing your instruction commentary. You will still need to write your answers in paragraph form in the official edTPA instruction commentary template.***

1. **List the learning experience(s) you have selected for the 2 video clips you are submitting. Identify the learning experience(s) by plan day/number.**

“The lesson shown in Clip 1 is Lesson \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and the lesson shown in Clip 2 is Lesson \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.”

**2. Promoting a Positive Learning Environment**

**a. How did you demonstrate mutual respect for, rapport with, and responsiveness to children with varied needs and backgrounds, and challenge children to engage in learning?**

Organize your answer:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Characteristic of Positive Learning Environment | Video segment(s) with time stamps that demonstrates this characteristic | How does this clip demonstrate this characteristic? |
| Mutual respect for children |  |  |
| Rapport with children |  |  |
| Responsiveness to children’s needs |  |  |
| Challenging children to engage in learning |  |  |

**3. Engaging Children in Learning**

**a. Explain how your instruction engaged children in**

* **language and literacy development AND**
* **the active, multimodal learning**

Organize your answer:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Engagement Activity | Video clips with time stamps that shows this action | How is this action seen in the video? |
| Children are engaged in language and literacy development |  |  |
|  |  |
| Children are engaged in active, multimodal learning |  |  |
|  |  |

**b. Describe how your instruction linked children’s development, prior learning, and personal, cultural, and community assets with new learning.**

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Instructional connections between the children’s characteristics and new learning | Video clip with time stamps that shows this connection | How is this connection seen in the video? |
| Children’s development |  |  |
| Children’s prior learning |  |  |
| Children’s personal assets |  |  |
| Children’s cultural assets |  |  |
| Children’s community assets |  |  |

**4. Deepening Children’s Learning during Instruction**

**a. Explain how you elicited and built on children’s responses to promote children’s language and literacy development through active learning.**

Organize your response

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Evidence of eliciting responses from children to… | Video clip (including time stamps) | Describe how you elicited responses from the children through active learning to promote their development of language or literacy |
| Promote children’s language development |  |  |
|  |  |
| Promote children’s literacy development |  |  |
|  |  |

**b. Explain how you made interdisciplinary connections in ways that deepen children’s development of language and literacy.**

Organize your response

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Incidences of… | Video clip (including time stamps) | Describe how this is seen in the video clip |
| Interdisciplinary connections to children’s development of language |  |  |
| Interdisciplinary connections to children’s development of literacy |  |  |

**5. Analyzing Teaching**

1. **What changes would you make to your instruction to better support children’s learning related to the central focus? Be sure to address the needs of all children, including those who need greater support or challenge.**

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Learning need seen in video | Video segment (Including video # and time stamps) | Proposed change in teaching practice |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

1. **Why do you think these changes would improve children’s learning? Support your explanation with evidence of children’s learning and principles from developmental theory and/or research.**

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Proposed change in teaching practice | How would this change assist children with language and literacy development? | What research is this change based on? | How does this research support your proposed change? |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

**Assessment Commentary Thinking Organizers and Helpful Hints (Early Childhood Version)**

***Please note: The purpose of this thinking organizer is to help you gather and organize your thoughts in preparation for writing your assessment commentary. You will still need to write your answers in paragraph form in the official edTPA assessment commentary template. The exception to this is your response to 1b.***

**1. Analyzing Children’s Learning**

**a. Identify the specific language and literacy objectives for the common assessment you chose for analysis.**

Organize your answer:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Learning Objective | Explain how is how this is measured in the assessment |
|  |  |
|  |  |

**b. Provide a graphic (table or chart) or narrative that summarizes the class/group’s learning for the common assessment.**

*Create a table or graph that shows the children’s learning/performance by question or activity aligned to objective.*

**c. Use the class summary you provided in prompt 1b to analyze the patterns of language and literacy learning for the class/group.**

Organize your answer:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pattern of children’s learning observed  (What are they doing well or what are they struggling with?) | What language or literacy learning is this pattern related to? | Related Objective or Standard | Which children are showing this pattern? | What evidence from whole class summary supports your conclusion? |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

**d. Analyze the patterns of learning for the 2 focus children. Reference the 3 sources of evidence you collected for each of the 2 focus children.**

Consider children’s strengths (what children understand and do well), and areas of learning that need attention (e.g., common errors, confusions, need for greater challenge).

Focus child #1

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Learning pattern | Related objective or standard | Evidence of this learning pattern from child’s work samples |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

Focus child #2

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Learning pattern | Related objective or standard | Evidence of this learning pattern from child’s work samples |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**e. If video or audio evidence of learning or a video or audio work sample occurs in a group context (e.g., discussion), provide the name of the clip and clearly describe how the scorer can identify the focus children (e.g., position, physical description) whose work is portrayed.**

1. **Feedback to Guide Further Learning**

**b. Explain how feedback provided to the 2 focus children addresses their individual and developmental strengths and needs relative to language and literacy development.**

*Hints: Be sure to provide feedback to the children based on both their strengths and their needs.*

*Be sure to provide relatively equal feedback to both focus children.*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Focus student | Description of feedback provided relative to language and literacy development | Associated learning objective | How does the feedback address the child’s strengths and/or needs? |
| 1 |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |

**c. How will you support each focus child to understand and use this feedback to further their learning related to learning objectives, either within the learning segment or at a later time?**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Focus child | How will you support this child in understanding and using this feedback? | How will this feedback help further the child’s learning related to the learning objective? | When will the child have the opportunity to further his or her learning? |
| 1 |  |  |  |
| 2 |  |  |  |

**3. Evidence of Language Understanding and Use**

1. **Explain how children were able to use the key vocabulary to support their learning of the content.**

Organize your response:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Incident of children using vocabulary | Evidence of use in video clips or work samples (be specific) | How does this evidence show the children using key vocabulary to support their content understanding? |
|  |  |  |
|  |  |  |

**4. Using Assessment to Inform Instruction**

**a. Based on your analysis of children’s learning presented in prompts 1c–d, describe next steps for instruction**

* **for the class/group**
* **for the 2 focus children and other individuals/groups with specific needs**
* *Consider the active and multimodal nature of young children’s learning and the variety of learners in your class who may require different strategies/supports (e.g., children with IEPs, English language learners, children at different points in the developmental continuum, struggling readers, children who are underperforming or those with gaps in academic knowledge, and/or gifted children*).

Organize your answer:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Children | Next steps for instruction |
| Class/group |  |
| Focus student 1 |  |
| Focus student 2 |  |
| Individuals with specific needs |  |
| Groups with specific needs |  |

1. **Explain how these next steps follow from your analysis of children’s learning. Support your explanation with principles from research and/or developmental theory.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Next step for instruction | What learning need is this in response to? | Why did you choose this as your next step for instruction? | What research supports this instructional choice? | How does this research support this instructional choice? |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |  |

1. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)