

A Program's Early Implementation of a High Stakes Teacher Performance Assessment: Inquiry on Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

In response to increased accountability demands placed on teacher preparation programs across the United States, some programs are using standardized teacher performance assessments, such as edTPA. In our elementary teacher preparation program, a recent state mandate stipulated that teacher candidates had to successfully complete edTPA in order to receive teacher certification. This case study used mixed methods to examine teacher candidates' (N=30) experiences and views while engaging in the assessment. Preparation for edTPA was integrated in specific courses in the program. Data were collected through a survey and individual interviews, with the analysis showing the teacher candidates felt largely ready for and supported during

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the edTPA completion but did not view the assessment as a fair measure of teaching effectiveness or tend to believe it improved them as neophyte teachers. The findings illuminate concerns about edTPA's use and implications for the program that could be considerations for others using edTPA, including program and curricular refinements.

Keywords: elementary teacher preparation, teacher performance assessment, edTPA

Introduction

Teacher effectiveness has shifted to the top of education policy agendas (Darling-Hammond, 2017), with more policies and practices directed at the standardization of teacher education. A growing approach is the use of teacher performance assessments (TPAs) (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2013) such as edTPA®, which has become a popular means of evaluating teacher candidates' (TCs) instructional effectiveness and readiness for classrooms (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2021). Institutions of higher education in 41 states plus the District of Columbia are using edTPA, with 18 states adopting it for licensing new teachers or actively considering this step.

edTPA's use in some states as the gatekeeper for teacher certification is controversial. A notable issue is its dual positioning as formative and summative assessment, aiming to serve as an educative assessment to support TC growth and also a final evaluation determining licensure (Ledwell & Oyler, 2016). This duality too often contributes to student teaching no longer being a capacity building experience involving reflection on learning processes and becoming a skilled teacher, but instead is centered for many TCs on passing this high stakes assessment (Clayton, 2018; Seymour et al., 2018). We, as educators in a teacher preparation program with a state mandate requiring passing edTPA for certification, were observing this specific tension manifest in our TCs, particularly during the assessment's early implementation in the program. These localized concerns, along with the broader critique of the assessment as a high stakes measure, propelled us to investigate the experiences and views of the stakeholders most impacted by edTPA, our TCs, as they engaged in the assessment.

Related Literature

edTPA: Purpose and Development

Federal legislation (e.g., No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Every Student Succeeds) has required teacher preparation programs

to: (a) align goals and experiences with state and national standards; (b) measure their effectiveness based upon the output of their graduates' teaching effectiveness in K-12 schools; and (c) prepare TCs to meet the needs of diverse learners in a global economy (Cochran-Smith et al., 2016; Tanguay, 2017). There is growing recognition that strong program assessments are needed (Grossman, 2008), with critique related to lack of validity, reliability, and a shared language of practice regarding TCs' knowledge and performance (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Consequently, programs are increasingly using TPAs with attention to construct validity, content validity, interrater reliability, and predictive validity, as recommended by the accrediting body Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation ([CAEP], 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Mehta & Doctor, 2013; Peck et al., 2014; Sato, 2014; Wei & Pecheone, 2010).

In addition to exams largely focused on TCs' content knowledge (e.g., Praxis), many states are exploring and/or using TPAs, such as edTPA, which also measure TCs' pedagogical content knowledge (Darling-Hammond, 2010). However, teacher educators have expressed mixed feelings about the use of TPAs as standardized measures of their TCs and programs (Kornfeld et al., 2007; Lit & Lotan, 2013; Meuwissen & Choppin, 2015; Peck et al., 2010; Peck & McDonald, 2013; Sloan, 2015). Supporters of edTPA argue its goal is the professionalization of teaching, with the assessment serving as a gatekeeper into the occupation and a catalyst for curriculum change in programs (Adkins, 2016; Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2013; Pecheone & Whittaker, 2016; Tanguay, 2020). Conversely, critics of edTPA voice several concerns, such as: (a) the assessment's remote scoring by a corporate entity (i.e., Pearson Education); (b) a common assessment requiring uniformity of teacher preparation processes; and (c) validity issues as to whether there is one core body of knowledge and skills exemplifying effectiveness (Au, 2013; Dover & Schultz, 2016; Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013). Additionally, others call into question its technical properties, including that the reliability and precision of edTPA scores remain unknown (Gitomer et al., 2020). Others have similarly criticized TPAs (Dwyer et al., 2020; Mills & Goos, 2017) as having a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to take into account context, and also having a narrow view of classroom readiness since "teaching is an intellectual exercise requiring constant informed and complex decision making" (Mills & Goos, 2017, p. 637).

edTPA has its beginnings in California, where for over a decade teacher certification has been linked to successful completion of a state-approved TPA (AACTE, 2021). Following extensive implementa-

tion, testing, and revision of the Performance Assessment of California Teachers (Pecheone & Chung, 2006; Pecheone & Chung, 2007), edTPA was developed by researchers and teacher educators at the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE). edTPA is the first subject-specific, nationally-available TPA incorporating assessment of 80% general pedagogy and 20% subject-specific pedagogy constructs across 27 content areas (Pecheone et al., 2016). Our TCs complete the Elementary Education version composed of four tasks: (a) Planning for Literacy Instruction and Assessment; (b) Instructing and Engaging Students in Literacy Learning; (c) Assessing Students' Literacy Learning; and (d) Assessing Students' Mathematics Learning (SCALE, 2015). As TCs develop, teach, and analyze lessons, they reflect upon cyclical relationships amongst planning, instruction, and assessment, with a focus on students' learning needs. TCs submit a variety of documents in their edTPA portfolio, such as contextual descriptions of classrooms (i.e., Context for Learning document), lesson plans, and assessments, as well as written commentaries for each task that respond to specific analytic prompts (e.g., justifying instructional decisions, analyzing teaching effectiveness, describing patterns of student learning). In addition, for the second task TCs are required to submit two video clips of instruction ranging from 6-20 minutes. The tasks are completed during student teaching, with the portfolio submitted to and evaluated by Pearson Education, costing the TC \$300 (AACTE, 2021).

edTPA: Related Research with Teacher Candidates

As more states are using edTPA, there is increasing research related to the assessment. A number of edTPA-focused studies have examined TCs' experiences, and the findings indicate positive outcomes for this stakeholder group as well as difficulties. One study showed that as a result of completing edTPA, TCs reported gaining a deeper knowledge of understanding children, instructional strategies, collective learning, and self as a teacher (Huston, 2016). Additional benefits were evident in Paugh and colleagues' (2018) inquiry, including that TCs appreciated edTPA's emphasis on inquiry-based learning and reflection on instructional processes, which other studies have similarly found (Clayton, 2018; Heil & Berg, 2017; Lunsford et al., 2016). Other findings were that TCs believed edTPA developed their understanding of the connections between planning, teaching, and assessing learning, but the requirements of edTPA's documents and commentaries inhibited their ability to demonstrate this understanding and did not capture the complexity of classrooms (Paugh et al., 2018). Mixed perspectives

were also evident in another study showing TCs' perceived their experiences with the assessment made them more reflective students, but not necessarily more effective teachers (Margolis & Doring, 2013).

Additional challenges for TCs are evident in the extant research, including that edTPA completion is often an intense and dominating experience (Clayton, 2018; Seymour et al., 2018). The assessment has been described as "subtractive" (Clayton, 2018, p. 115) in that it takes away from other important aspects of student teaching. Similarly, a study showed 87% of TCs reported being overwhelmed with edTPA (Burns et al., 2015). Meuwissen and Choppins' (2015) inquiry identified tensions related to edTPA completion for TCs, characterized as support (e.g., ambiguities about which modes of assistance were acceptable), representation (e.g., uncertainties about how to best demonstrate nuanced, contextualized, and iterative teaching practices), and agency (e.g., challenges with negotiating influencing external factors). Other researchers have found TCs were concerned about lack of understanding of edTPA tasks and terminology, which may not have been addressed in program courses (Lunsford et al., 2016; Margolis & Doring, 2013; Meuwissen et al., 2015).

Research indicates that specific components of edTPA are particularly difficult for TCs, including the writing of documents, especially the commentaries, and the videoing of instruction. For example, a study showed that although TCs generally understood edTPA's expectations for instruction, they had difficulty translating these experiences into writing (Chandler-Olcott et al., 2016). Further, TCs have perceived the prompts for the commentaries as ambiguous and redundant (Heil & Berg, 2017). Video-recording was shown to be a distraction and stress-filled experience in TCs' student teaching classrooms, such as continuously making sure the technology was in working order (Goulette & Swanson, 2017). When considering these challenging components, one study revealed that TCs viewed program initiatives such as edTPA boot camps, practice submissions in courses, and intentional program coordinator and faculty support as essential for their success in putting together the edTPA portfolio, especially videoing instruction (Holden et al., 2020).

The extant research described above illuminates both positive and troubling aspects of edTPA for TCs. These findings, coupled with the ever-increasing use of the assessment with high stakes consequences across the United States, provide warrants for more inquiry. There has been a call for "fine-grained" studies of edTPA, as the "implementation of a performance assessment intended to promote national standards of teacher quality will be experienced variously in different contexts"

(Chandler-Olcott et al., 2016, p. 241). For example, the particular context for this study is an urban-situated elementary teacher preparation program with a recent state mandate requiring TCs' successful completion of edTPA for licensure. Most studies of edTPA have involved either qualitative or quantitative methods, with the present one using mixed methods within a case study design to create a nuanced yet full picture of edTPA's experiences. This research question guided the inquiry: How do teacher candidates in an elementary teacher preparation program experience and view the recently mandated, high stakes edTPA?

Methodology

A descriptive, holistic case study design (Yin, 2014) was used, since this inquiry involved an in-depth investigation of a case within a real-world context. We examined TCs who were completing student teaching and navigating the high stakes edTPA during a program's beginning stages of use of the assessment. For this case study, a "concurrent triangulation" (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 224) mixed methods approach was applied, meaning that quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, given equal priority, and integrated during the analysis phase, in order to form the descriptive findings. The use of mixed methods allows for understanding of complex phenomena, including confirmation and explanation, by drawing on the strengths and minimizing the limitations of both methods.

Participants and Setting

Participants included 30 TCs who were completing student teaching in an undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at a large, urban university in the southeastern United States. They (28 women, two men) identified as 47% Black, 20% White, 17% Asian or Pacific Islander, 10% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and 3% other. The student teaching schools in which they were placed were located throughout the metropolitan area, with most being in urban settings.

The 2-year teacher preparation program, completed during the junior and senior years, is intended to lead to a Bachelor's degree and teacher certification in Early Childhood Education (grades PreK-5) and endorsement in English for Speakers of Other Languages. It consists of 3 semesters of courses with concurrent 2-days-per-week field placements, followed by a 5-days-per-week semester of student teaching. Approximately 150 TCs are placed each semester in schools. TC data show 70% are from underrepresented groups in the teaching profession and 61% are eligible for the federally funded Pell grant program that

supports students with exceptional financial need. Retention data indicate 91% of graduates remain in the teaching profession after 5 years. The program emphasizes the connection of coursework with field experiences and research-based practices for instruction of diverse learners in urban schools. Beginning 2015-2016, the state required TCs to pass edTPA to receive teacher certification.

The program uses a developmental model, which is a distinctive configuration grounded in children's progression across the elementary grades. Specifically, coursework and field placements during the first semester focus on pre-kindergarteners and kindergarteners, second semester emphasize first through third graders, and third semester focus on fourth and fifth graders. Preparation for edTPA was embedded in specific courses and their signature assessments across these semesters, grounded in the long-standing experiences the program offers and connected with edTPA's components and language (see Table 1). TCs also participated in six 2.5 hour edTPA-focused seminars during stu-

Table 1
Cohesive Preparation for edTPA

<i>Signature Assessments in Courses and Field Placements</i>	<i>Aligned edTPA Components</i>
Semester 1	
Lesson Plans inclusive of context for learning, including students' prior academic knowledge, personal interests, and cultural and community assets as related to instruction	Context for Learning and Task 1 (Literacy Planning)
Semester 2	
Planning Project inclusive of a 2-day sequential lesson learning segment in literacy	Task 1 (Literacy Planning)
Assessment Module inclusive of assessment plans and implementation of those plans in conjunction with the Planning Project	Task 3 (Literacy Assessment)
Semester 3	
Mathematics Assessment inclusive of 2-day sequential lesson learning segment in mathematics with re-teaching	Task 4 (Mathematics Assessment)
Video-recorded Lesson and Reflection on Practice	Task 2 (Literacy Instruction)

dent teaching. Both cooperating teachers and university supervisors supported TCs' completion of edTPA during student teaching. Cooperating teachers were asked to provide classroom opportunities for TCs to complete the requirements of edTPA and offer resources and materials. University supervisors ensured that TCs complete all parts of the assessment according to the program timeline, while following *edTPA Guidelines for Acceptable Candidate Support* (SCALE, 2014).

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were drawn from two sources: quantitative data collected through a survey and qualitative data gathered via individual interviews. Data collection occurred during the student teaching semester of the second mandated year of edTPA. All TCs completed an edTPA-related survey at a student teaching seminar held near the end of the semester. This timing was purposeful, as the TCs had submitted their edTPA portfolios for scoring but not received their scores from Pearson Education. Also at this seminar, the TCs were invited to participate in an individual interview that occurred over the next 2 weeks and before scores were received.

All TCs completed an edTPA-related survey created by the full research team. The team was studying edTPA in a number of ways, and it was composed of three tenured professors and one clinical professor with 14-23 years of experience in the program, along with two doctoral students. The professors had extensive experiences with survey construction and use in prior research. Drawing from these experiences, their substantial expertise related to initial teacher preparation, immersion in edTPA as course instructors and coordinator in the program, and a review of extant research focused on edTPA and TCs, the survey items were collaboratively generated through several rounds of analysis, with refinements aimed at answering the research question. During this recursive process, the items clustered around several areas, and the final TC Survey contains 31 Likert-type scale items (scale of 1-5, including strongly disagree, disagree, uncertain, agree, and strongly agree, with higher scores indicating more agreement) centering on: *preparation and understanding, educative value, and implementation in placement classrooms* (see Appendix A). Two additional items focus on *preparation and understanding* by course and task and use a 5-point scale, ranging from "very prepared" to "not prepared at all."

The six TCs involved in individual, semi-structured interviews were randomly selected in order to represent the group as a whole. Six interviewees is considered an appropriate sample size for a case

study design (Yin, 2014). Individual interviews were specifically used as a means of understanding each interviewee's personal rendition and own sense of meaning related to edTPA. Given the likelihood of sensitivity and charged emotions associated with the high stakes assessment evidenced in the existant literature, one-on-one interviews were the most appropriate methodological choice to provide a context for honest expression of each interviewee (Nepomuceno & Porto, 2010; Yin, 2014). The interviews ranged from 30-55 minutes and were conducted on campus. The interview protocol (see Appendix B) included questions related to experiences with and views on edTPA. A protocol question was only a starting point, with the interviewer prompting for elaboration. A doctoral student who had not previously interacted with the TCs conducted all interviews.

Data Analysis

The TC Survey was analyzed using individual response analysis by examining the mean for each item. For the interviews, audiotapes were transcribed and thoroughly de-identified, and three members of the research team deductively analyzed these data. Given the mixed methods approach, the analysis began by considering data segments parallel with constructs on the survey, specifically focusing on responses related to: (a) readiness and support during student teaching; (b) impact on TCs as future teachers; (c) improvements in teacher preparation; and (d) fair measure of teaching effectiveness. The interview data were intended to illuminate the survey data, so pre-determined or *a priori* codes were used (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Within the focal data segments, the three researchers first looked for *a priori* codes related to the *how* and then the *why* of responses. The *how* codes focused on responses to specific questions in these areas, looking for the three codes of *affirmative*, *negative*, or *uncertain*. Then, they looked for the *a priori* code of *why* focused on the reasoning behind this response, specifically analyzing descriptive justifications related to the three categories of responses (i.e., affirmative, negative, or uncertain). For example, with the response to the interview question, "Do you believe edTPA is a fair measure of your teaching effectiveness? If yes, how so? If no, why?", initial analysis involved determining if the response was affirmative, negative, or uncertain and then for an examination for the related rationale. The three researchers individually engaged in this process, and also collectively engaged in consensus building procedures around interpretation of the data, including multiple examinations and discussion of the data. Consistent with a concur-

rent triangulation mixed methods approach (Creswell et al., 2003), the interview and survey data were jointly considered in the analysis and are presented together in the results.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the study was established in several ways (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For example, the inquiry involved: (a) multiple researchers with in-depth knowledge of the context; (b) multiple data sources both quantitative and qualitative in nature; and (c) consensus-building processes around the meaning of the data.

Results

The findings are presented in the four areas of: (a) readiness and support during student teaching, (b) impact on TCs as future teachers, (c) improvements in teacher preparation, and (d) fair measure of teaching effectiveness. Survey item responses, largely focusing on the highest and lowest means, are included in each of these areas (see Appendix A for full TC Survey and means). Additionally, within each of the four areas, the three coded responses of affirmative, negative, or uncertain are described, followed by elucidating justifications. Table 2 shows the three coded responses for TCs across the four areas to provide an overview and show variability. Interview findings are linked to individual TCs by participant number (TC1, TC2, TC3, TC4, TC5, TC6).

Readiness and Support During Student Teaching

On the TC Survey, the five items with the highest means (scale of 1-5, with higher scores indicating more agreement) are shown in Table 3. All of these items are related to readiness and support for

Table 2
Coded Responses for Each TC across the Four Areas of Analysis

	<i>TC1</i>	<i>TC2</i>	<i>TC3</i>	<i>TC4</i>	<i>TC5</i>	<i>TC6</i>
Readiness and support during student teaching	Affirmative	Affirmative	Affirmative	Affirmative	Affirmative	Affirmative
Impact on TCs as future teachers	Uncertain	Uncertain	Affirmative	Uncertain	Affirmative	Negative
Improvements in teacher preparation	Uncertain	Uncertain	Affirmative	Uncertain	Affirmative	Negative
Fair measure of teaching effectiveness	Uncertain	Negative	Uncertain	Uncertain	Negative	Negative

edTPA completion, such as understanding expectations, support from the university supervisor, and necessary resources. An additional item not shown in the table and related to support, specifically from cooperating teachers, also tended toward agreement (3.7). However, they did not perceive cooperating teachers as knowledgeable about edTPA, with this item having the second to lowest mean (1.90) on the survey.

When interviewees were asked if they were prepared for edTPA during student teaching, their coded responses were all determined as affirmative, indicating they were ready to largely ready for edTPA. Given the four areas of analysis (see Table 2), this one comparatively evidences the greatest amount of affirmation. Interviewees' statements of readiness were often accompanied with caveats, such as "I think I was as prepared as I could have been without having done it before" (TC2). Several interviewees described how they were more ready for the edTPA mathematics task than the three literacy tasks, because they had completed a simulated version in their mathematics methods course. One said:

I would say the math part I was [ready] because of a previous class that we had she made us do a mock edTPA. But for the literacy part, somewhat okay. We had seminars on it, but it was really kind of like a fish out of water and let me figure it out. (TC5)

This view was further illuminated via the TC Survey on two items related to preparation by task and in courses. On a 5-point scale (5 is "very prepared" and 1 is "not prepared at all"), TCs indicated they were most prepared for the edTPA mathematics task with a mean of 4.20, with preparation for the three literacy tasks ranging from 3.23-3.33. They were also asked about six different courses' preparation for

Table 3
Items with Five Highest Means from the TC Survey

<i>Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>
I understood the expectations for completing edTPA.	4.13
I was supported during edTPA by my university supervisor.	4.00
In my student teaching placement, I was encouraged by my cooperating teacher to plan my own lessons for edTPA.	3.98
I had the necessary resources (materials and curricula) for edTPA.	3.93
I was prepared to create the documents and artifacts submitted for edTPA.	3.87

edTPA, and the highest means were mathematics methods with 4.33 and literacy methods with 3.30. The assessment course had the lowest mean of 2.50.

The interviewees shared additional insights about aspects for which they were and were not ready, providing potential directions for program refinements and also illuminating the complexity of a program aiming to provide cohesive preparation for edTPA and not generate a culture of grooming for a high stakes test. Several TCs mentioned they were ready for the planning and teaching required by edTPA but not for the writing requirements that involved responding to specific prompts (e.g., “It was a lot of questions” TC1) and the videoing components. One said, “Writing it up, that was the tough part” (TC6), while another asserted “I wasn’t prepared as much as far as the videos are concerned” (TC4). Three interviewees also expressed a desire for connections between learning experiences and edTPA’s expectations to be explicitly pointed out across the program. One described it this way:

We take the child development class. That would have been helpful for when we have to put down all the theories and stuff [in edTPA]... Because before I’m like, I need to know Vygotsky—why? And then now I really wish I had taken better notes in that class because I really needed to know that [for edTPA]. And, I had to go dig all this, these binders I’ve kept, and I took horrible notes. I should’ve taken way better notes. (TC3)

While illuminating a need related to readiness for edTPA, this interviewee’s perspective also points to salient aspects of the psychology of learning, namely motivation. Motivational goals for learning adopted by a TC would certainly influence how edTPA is approached, with some being more productive than others. Those who adopt extrinsically-oriented goals (as opposed to learning for the sake of improving understanding), such as the TC in this quote, may experience more angst when it comes to edTPA completion, particularly within a context of weighty consequences.

Impact on TCs as Future Teachers

The findings of the TC Survey indicate that several items with the lowest means focus on edTPA’s professional impacts, as shown in Table 4. TCs’ responses tended toward disagreement that the assessment made them more effective teachers, was useful in their preparation as neophyte teachers, and improved their classroom teaching practice. The TCs also leaned toward disagreement that the students in their student teaching classroom benefitted from edTPA, which would likely shape their lensing

about the extent to which it influenced them as developing teachers.

When the interviewees considered if edTPA impacted them as future teachers, there was variability in their responses (see Table 2): two were affirmative (TC3, TC5), one was negative (“No, not at all” TC6), and three expressed uncertainty, stating “I have no idea” (TC4), “Not as much as I think they would have wanted” (TC2), and “Maybe, in a way” (TC1). While there was skepticism about edTPA’s professional impacts, five of the interviewees did mention positive influences, such as edTPA generated in them a mindset that effective instruction involves a planning, teaching, and assessing cycle with a focus on learners and their needs. For example, one described her mentality of focusing on learners during planning as:

I’m still in that mindset of I need to plan, and why would the students [need to learn this]?... How can I apply this to them [students]? edTPA has been over for 2 weeks now, and I’m still thinking about this is what I need to do for a lesson. (TC3)

For another, this learner-centeredness was linked to the importance of assessment of student learning to guide instructional decision-making:

Especially with assessments, the assessment and analyzing to see where your students are, because I think that is very important. Because I know teachers can get really overwhelmed with everything they have to do. And, sometimes they miss those students who did not understand the concept or what was being taught at that moment. So, taking out the time to kind of look through those assessments and figure it out, which students met the goal and which ones didn’t... You have to reteach. (TC5)

These quotes illuminate how the experiences of edTPA seem to have pushed some of these fledging teachers toward orienting their work around responsiveness to learners. Additionally in the findings, the interviewees described the impact of continuous self-analysis of instruc-

Table 4
Items with the Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth to Lowest Means on the TC Survey

<i>Item</i>	<i>Mean</i>
edTPA made me a more effective elementary teacher.	2.30
The children in my student teaching classroom benefited from edTPA.	2.27
edTPA was a useful assignment to prepare me for teaching.	2.17
edTPA improved my classroom teaching practice.	2.10

tion learned through edTPA (e.g., “It prepared me to make sure I constantly reflect” TC4; “I can see its benefits... to look at your teaching and dissect every single part” TC2). edTPA appears to have fostered growth in some of the TCs as reflective practitioners.

When considering edTPA’s professional impacts, four interviewees expressed misgivings about the assessment that were linked to several things. For example, though they described positive influences related to completion of the assessment (e.g., learner-centered mindset, self-reflection), two asserted these competencies were already emphasized and learned across the program, removed from edTPA completion during student teaching (e.g., “It [edTPA] gave me a chance to look at my teaching, but then again we did that all through the 2-year preparation program” TC2). Additional hesitations related to edTPA’s impacts were linked to its prescribed nature, with one declaring: “I wasn’t given a lot of leeway in what I wanted to do for edTPA... Like I had specific constraints that I had to meet, so as a teacher in the classroom I might not necessarily do everything exactly like I did for edTPA” (TC1). Lastly, an interviewee described how edTPA did not influence them as teachers because the assessment simply measures other abilities besides teaching, such as writing:

You can be a not so good teacher and do great on the edTPA, because you’re a good writer and you know how to manipulate your words. You know the right things to say. But, then again, you can be an awesome teacher and not have the ability to express those things on paper and to write. (TC6)

This TC went on to describe how her teaching effectiveness had already been deemed by evaluators internal to the program via observations of her classroom instruction, and the tension associated with her representing that effectiveness in her edTPA portfolio: “As a future educator, I don’t think it [edTPA] impacts me at all. I feel like I’m a pretty effective teacher. The people who actually have observed me told me the things I do well, but hopefully it was reciprocated in what I wrote [in the edTPA portfolio]”. While providing insights into edTPA being a measure of writing abilities, this finding also suggests that the evaluation of TCs is best conducted by those internal to the program via actual observations of classroom teaching.

Improvements in Teacher Preparation

Two items on the TC Survey are particularly related to improvements in teacher preparation, including “edTPA improves teacher preparation programs in general” and “edTPA is more of a positive step

than a negative step for teacher preparation programs in general.” The former has a mean of 2.52 and the latter has a mean of 2.40, showing disagreement to uncertainty.

When interviewees were asked if edTPA improves teacher preparation, they responded in different ways (see Table 2). Two indicated yes (TC3, TC5), one responded no (TC6), and the three others stated, “I’m not sure” (TC4), “Hard to answer” (TC1), and “Some ways yes, some ways no” (TC2). When considering improvements in teacher preparation, one interviewee described how edTPA is aligned with the required teacher evaluation system in school districts and this congruence was appreciated:

I was seeing that [state required teacher observation instrument] aligned with edTPA. So, a lot of times when you have a walk through from your principals, they are looking for the planning, how you implement instruction, and how you assess the students. So, that’s basically what edTPA is also preparing you for. (TC5)

Another interviewee described the assessment as one means of others knowing if they are prepared to teach: “edTPA is just another practice, honestly, just like the [state mandated content knowledge assessment]... another practice I suppose just to see what we can do as teachers” (TC4).

The findings show several interviewees felt that edTPA did not improve teacher preparation because of issues taken with the assessment itself, including its high stakes nature and demands. One said, edTPA “doesn’t prove whether I’m able to be a teacher or not and educate my students effectively and efficiently” (TC6), also asserting it should not be the “deciding factor” for teacher certification. Another indicated the requirements of edTPA took away from developing positive relationships with her students (e.g., “I definitely would have had a lot more connection time with the students if edTPA wasn’t in place” TC2), also questioning its professional relevance for future teaching, including that, “My cooperating teacher looked at it, and was like, ‘Wow, this is something that I don’t think you’ll ever see again.’”

Hesitancy about the assessment and associated improvements in teacher preparation was linked to stress, as anxiety and uncertainty were the lensing for perceiving edTPA. All interviewees described negative emotions related to edTPA (e.g., “very high pressure” TC1, “overwhelming” TC3, “nerve wracking” TC4). Notably, across the interviews the word “stress” was uttered 29 times by the TCs. The interviewees provided insights into this affective state, in part linking it to ambiguity about the assessment’s requirements and how the program

is preparing them. They expressed a desire for an introduction to the assessment's contents to have come earlier in the program, which may have alleviated angst. One said:

It was very high pressure I feel like, so I think that it could be done in a way that is less stressful to the candidates... Maybe if they [preparation program] introduced it earlier on, because I feel like the first 2 semesters of the program, edTPA was this far off thing that was mentioned, but not really explained... And I actually got an ulcer block three because I was so stressed out about it. (TC1)

Similarly, another asserted:

edTPA just being so new here at [university]... like ya'll [preparation program] are probably still working on getting things sorted out. That made it a little more difficult... We had been told since the beginning: edTPA, edTPA, edTPA. But, we did not know what edTPA is... It way overwhelmed us. (TC3)

Fair Measure of Teaching Effectiveness

The findings of the TC Survey show the item with the lowest mean (1.80) and strongest disagreement was related to edTPA being a fair measure of teaching effectiveness. Similarly, when interviewees were asked if edTPA was a fair measure of teaching effectiveness, the coded responses show the most negativity and uncertainty compared to the other areas of analysis (see Table 2). Three participants decisively indicated no (e.g., "I do not, I definitely do not" TC2, TC5, TC6), and three expressed views of uncertainty (e.g., "I'm not sure if it's a fair measure" TC4, TC1, TC3). All interviewees described concerns about fairness, which were predominantly linked to their edTPA portfolios being a limited snapshot of teaching and contrived, particularly the use of video clips. One asserted the following, in response to the question about fairness:

I don't think so, no, especially when it comes to the video recordings because it's only 10 minutes. So, you can't really get too much out of 10 minutes. Then, just these four little tasks will determine if you're an effective teacher or not. (TC5)

Overall, the video clips were described as artificial representations of teaching (e.g., "it makes you put on somewhat of a show... fake" TC2), too limited in time, and stressful to create. One said,

I'm not sure if it's a fair measure, only because of the videos... At the end of the day, kids are kids, and I might have one looking down. Are you going to ding me for a kid looking down? I never knew how

they're going to grade us based off the videos... That's why I re-filmed so much, trying to make sure it was perfect enough for them to see everything that they want to see and make sure my students' behaviors were fine. Lots of preparation was going toward the videos, which made me have to keep re-teaching because, oh, I missed this part. Or, I had to cut this out. Or, they couldn't even see my whole lesson, they only saw a small portion of it. Is that even enough for them to grade me because it's just a small portion of the lesson when my lesson is 30 minutes?... So it's a lot of stress as far as clipping, and making sure in this small 10 minute clip they can see everything they want to see, which is almost impossible. So you just try to do the best you can, you try to squeeze it all in in that 10 minutes but then... it's not flowing in the way I would usually teach. (TC4)

Actual observations of classroom teaching by stakeholders in the program were presented as a better alternative than external evaluation via the high stakes edTPA:

I've been teaching for, what, 2 years now, in some way or another. So, I feel my supervisor would have a much better understanding of who I am as a teacher, and my cooperating teacher, and my kids. These people [edTPA evaluators] are just getting a tiny little snippet of what I've done as a teacher. (TC1)

Teaching, learning, and classroom dynamics hold tremendous complexity, and these data provide insights into the constraints of a TPA that is decontextualized, limited in time, and evaluated by those outside a program.

Also when it comes to fairness of edTPA, all interviewees described important aspects of effective teaching that edTPA does not capture, such as: supporting the emotional aspect of learning, caring relationships with children, responsiveness to children's cultures and backgrounds, managing the classroom, and passion for and commitment to teaching. For example:

edTPA does not show my rapport with the students that I have every single day... I think it [edTPA] shows less than 10% of me as a teacher definitely... I think the main important thing is the connection you have with the kids. They need to feel that they are completely safe in your classroom to even improve just a tad bit. If they're constantly scared or do not respect you, they will learn nothing, no matter how great of a teacher you are. (TC2)

I've been teaching in [urban, high need school district]... It's one of those areas that a lot of my kids are experiencing different things within a household, and ultimately those things are brought into the classroom. Being a teacher is not all about teaching—we definitely have to attend to the emotional, the physical, the academic, the be-

havioral, all those different aspects of a student. edTPA is not going to see me being the role model I am to my students. Nothing I write in edTPA shows you I've taken the time out to talk to this child just to make them [sic] feel loved... wanted... appreciated... It [edTPA] was good for what it was good for... *But, what about me being a real teacher?* (TC6)

All in all, the interviewees described critical dimensions of effective teaching that eluded edTPA.

Discussion

Initiatives aimed at standardizing teacher education such as TPAs warrant careful scrutiny, and this study's findings illuminate some of the issues with edTPA's use, along with confirming and extending the extant research. The quantitative and qualitative data collectively show the TCs felt largely ready for and supported during edTPA completion, but during the interviews the TCs expressed a desire for more preparation related to the analytical writing and videoing requirements as found in other studies (Chandler-Olcott et al., 2016; Goulette & Swanson, 2017; Heil & Berg, 2017). Further, there is noted variability in the TCs' need for more support by subject area. There is some divergence of the quantitative and qualitative data in regard to edTPA's professional impacts on the TCs and its educative value. The findings also show troubling aspects related to edTPA and its use as a high stakes measure, with the TCs describing concerns related to evaluation by those external to the program and the limitations of the assessment itself. The results reveal the inundation of stress for TCs, linked in part to the ambiguity of the assessment and how the program was preparing them.

Elementary teachers are typically prepared as generalists during initial certification, meaning they study all core subjects in the elementary curriculum to qualify for positions requiring all-encompassing teaching. Accordingly, the elementary education version of edTPA our TCs complete includes two content areas: literacy and mathematics. The inclusion of two areas rather than one major area differs from most versions of edTPA, and this multi-subject emphasis warrants careful consideration. When it comes to readiness, both the survey and interview data indicate this study's TCs were more prepared for the edTPA mathematics task than the literacy tasks; the survey data also show specific courses prepared them more than others, with the mathematics methods courses having the highest mean. In the interviews, TCs described greater preparedness in mathematics linked to the ab-

breviated version of the edTPA mathematics task completed in their second mathematics methods course (see Table 1).

When edTPA was initially mandated, the mathematics educators in the department aimed to provide integrated, cohesive preparation for the assessment (Swars Auslander et al., 2020). The mathematics methods courses continued with their established learning goals and experiences, including the study of children's thinking and using these understandings to guide instructional decision-making, which provided a critical foundation for the edTPA mathematics task. However, in response to the edTPA mandate, the courses included more explicit emphasis on the required elements of the edTPA mathematics task, specifically in-depth study of the meanings of conceptual understanding, procedural fluency, and problem solving/reasoning. TCs were also required to complete an abbreviated edTPA mathematics task assignment. When considering the findings of the current study, as a result of these experiences in the mathematics methods courses, the TCs reported feeling more prepared during student teaching for the edTPA mathematics task than the literacy tasks. Other studies confirm TCs' need for strong, cohesive preparation in their methods courses for edTPA (Lunsford et al., 2016; Meuwissen et al., 2015). Our findings additionally show the criticality of studying TCs' views and experiences by content area within a multi-subject version of edTPA, in order to make specific curricular enhancements based upon needs in the differing areas.

When it comes to the educative nature of edTPA, the findings show the quantitative and qualitative data both converge and diverge. Only two interviewees responded affirmatively about the assessment impacting them as future teachers, and the TC Survey data show the educative value of edTPA was not readily apparent. However, during the interviews, five of the TCs did describe professional benefits of completing the assessment, including that it supported their mindset of effective instruction being a cyclical process of planning, teaching, and assessing that is focused on their learners' needs and grounded in continuous reflection, as other studies have similarly found (Clayton, 2018; Heil & Berg, 2017; Paugh et al., 2018). This beneficial perspective may have been tempered by the concurrent belief of some interviewees that the program was already developing these habits of mind and that edTPA was not necessary. Further, the inundation of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty related to TCs' experiences with edTPA was often their lensing for the assessment, which would influence its perceived educative value.

The positive outcomes of edTPA for some TCs in this study align with critical goals of teacher preparation programs, including the fos-

tering of TCs who focus on learners during instruction and who are reflective practitioners. Developmental conceptualizations of teachers indicate neophytes are typically focused on self and survival, including their own teaching behaviors and managing the classroom, more so than students and their learning (Fuller, 1969; Piland & Anglin, 1993; Watzke, 2003). However, the experiences of edTPA seem to have pushed some of the fledging teachers in this study toward orienting their work around learners and responsiveness to learners' needs. Additionally, edTPA seems to have propelled some of these TCs in their growth as reflective practitioners. It is imperative that programs not only develop TCs as skillful in their instructional practices but also their continual self-analysis of teaching and learning (Pultorak, 1996; Schon, 1983; Valli, 1997; Van Manen, 1977; Zeichner, 1987).

Both the survey and interview data show the TCs did not believe edTPA was a fair measure of teaching effectiveness. The TC Survey item related to edTPA being a fair measure had the lowest mean score, and none of the interviewees affirmed the assessment was fair. Previous research has indicated this perceived lack of fairness by TCs (Meuwissen et al., 2015). The findings of this study provide additional insights, as interviewees believed the assessment did not accurately represent effective teaching because salient dimensions of effectiveness were missing, such as caring relationships with children, developing the whole child, and responsiveness to children's differing cultural backgrounds. They also described the content of their edTPA portfolio as a limited snapshot of teaching and contrived, particularly when it came to the videos. When considering fairness, the TCs described how actual observations of classroom teaching by those who know them best (e.g., university supervisors and cooperating teachers) and have observed their teaching multiple times, would provide better indicators than Pearson Education's remote scorers. This highlights the concern that teacher preparation is a highly individualized process and that using a standardized outcome measure involving outsourcing of scoring dilutes personalized relationships with education experts, such as university supervisors and cooperating teachers. In fact, this outsourcing of scoring differentiates edTPA from other TPAs that are typically scored by those within a program (Stacey et al., 2019), with some arguing the TPAs should be context specific and evaluated internally by those who know the program best (Dwyer et al., 2020; Mills & Goos, 2017).

Implications and Future Inquiry

This study's findings offer implications for our teacher prepara-

tion program as well as considerations for other programs using edTPA. Since our inquiry occurred during early adoption of edTPA by our state, the results have led to improvements, which is an aim of edTPA: research-based curricular refinements in teacher preparation programs (Adkins, 2016; Tanguay, 2019). See Table 5 for program and curricular modifications driven by the findings of this study, including focus of support, timing, and content. In light of the survey and interview results showing a need for more support in specific areas, the two areas of literacy and assessment were especially targeted, particularly enhancements in course learning experiences and refined signature assessments. This study's findings also show other areas for improvement, and Table 5 depicts supportive modifications related to analytical writing, understanding educational theory and research, videoing instruction, and clarity of connections with edTPA. All in all, these findings have implications for teacher preparation programs using edTPA by providing an example of program and curricular refinements, which could be relevant for other programs and teacher educators navigating an edTPA mandate.

When considering these program and curricular refinements related to edTPA, an issue that should be mentioned is faculty willingness to support TCs when it comes to a mandated change (Tanguay, 2019; Tanguay et al., 2019). This is evident in the study's findings related to differences in task preparation, as faculty commitment and collaboration are necessary to develop embedded signature assessments throughout the program and to implement them with fidelity. In addition, an important finding from this study is the TCs' need for more pointing out of connections between course learning and the expectations of edTPA, along with an introduction to edTPA's content earlier in the program. This finding illuminates the tensions around faculty being careful to not generate a feeling in the program of providing "test prep" for edTPA, yet the TCs in this study desired this explicitness. Now, important connections in courses and signature assessments are directly highlighted (see Table 5), in an effort to reduce TCs' stress by minimizing ambiguity, and also to help them understand that the expectations of edTPA are largely just effective teaching. This finding provides implications for other programs and their faculty to communicate early on that edTPA's expectations are aligned to program efforts to prepare effective teachers.

The results of this study show significant challenges for the TCs while completing edTPA and illuminate concerns about the use of a standardized assessment in high stakes ways. Within the current context of increasing standardization and prescription in many areas of

Table 5
Program and Curricular Refinements Based on the Findings

<i>Focus of Support</i>	<i>Timing</i>	<i>Modifications</i>
Literacy	Semesters 1, 2, and 3	increased focus on strategies for teaching reading comprehension and related skills, along with a new supportive textbook
Assessment	Semester 2	more emphasis on creating strong formative measures that provide actionable and timely feedback for both learners and TCs and include specific, concrete ways for attending to learner strengths and needs based on specific criteria (Hattie & Timperley, 2007)
Analytical Writing	Semesters 1, 2, and 3	assignments revised to include an analytical writing component, aiming to develop reflective thinking through writing, with a particular emphasis on connections to educational theory and research
Educational Theory and Research	Semester 1	resource document provided in the first semester for use in notetaking across the program on the areas of educational theory and relevant research
Videoing	Semesters 2 and 3	explicit instruction on technical aspects of how to record, trim, and compress video clips rubric provided for analysis of videoed instructional practice, focusing on engagement and deepening of student learning with guidance on aspects to notice (e.g., teacher questioning prompting higher level student thinking; differentiated and purposeful teacher questioning such as clarifying, probing, extending, etc.; dialogic discourse with teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions)
Connections with edTPA	Semesters 1, 2, and 3	connections between course learning and signature assessments with edTPA's expectations explicitly pointed out across the program and starting in Semester 1

education beyond TPAs, including curricula, instructional delivery, student assessment (Bartell et al., 2019; Rich, 2021), and teacher evaluation systems (Ford et al., 2017), teacher preparation programs developing in TCs a beginning foundation of professional agency is important. Across TCs' professional trajectory, a well-developed sense of teacher agency is essential so they can act according to their professional values, beliefs, goals, and knowledge within the complex and varying events and contexts they will encounter (Toom et al., 2014), with edTPA being one such occurrence during their preparation program. In fact, researchers examining TCs' experiences with edTPA found they lacked professional agency in decision making and negotiation within student teaching classrooms (Meuwissen & Choppin, 2015). Further, the findings of our study related to the TCs' inundation of stress and anxiety due to edTPA are deeply troubling. While programs should offer strong support for edTPA completion, another consideration is TCs' self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997) when navigating difficult tasks and engaging in productive struggle. TCs need constructive coping strategies for stress and obstacles that will serve them across their career span. They will traverse many dilemmas in their professional work, and strong self-efficacy that supports persistence and resilience is needed (Tait, 2008; Tricarico et al., 2015).

Research should continue to study the experiences of edTPA locally and broadly to assess its effects on teacher preparation and to determine if it leads to better prepared teachers. Inquiry should examine the demands associated with edTPA within and across teacher preparation programs with different subject emphases and contexts, such as this elementary program in an urban setting. Another area of focus should be examining the impact of edTPA once TCs become licensed educators. Is edTPA influencing the elementary classroom through the intended purpose of producing more effective elementary teachers? Additionally, inquiry should consider high stakes TPAs and teacher evaluation systems (e.g., pay-for-performance) largely based on extrinsic motivators and their impact on teacher morale, with mindfulness of intrinsic motivation of teachers so resilience and persistence and ultimately retention in the profession are fostered. As the body of knowledge continues to grow, policymakers and stakeholders alike should give careful consideration to the findings of research about the impact edTPA is having on teacher preparation programs across the United States.

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Appendix A

Teacher Candidate Survey

<i>Preparation and Understanding</i>	<i>Mean</i>
1. Overall, the experiences during my teacher preparation program prepared me for edTPA.	3.57
2. The goals of edTPA were clear.	3.77
3. The student teaching seminars prepared me for edTPA.	3.83
4. I understood the expectations for completing edTPA.	4.13
5. The goals of edTPA are consistent with the goals of my teacher preparation program.	3.72
6. I was prepared to write the commentaries for edTPA.	3.30
7. I was prepared to create the documents and artifacts submitted for edTPA.	3.87
8. I felt confident during the completion of edTPA.	2.67
 <i>Educative Value</i>	
9. edTPA influenced my developing classroom teaching practices.	2.78
10. edTPA made me a more effective elementary teacher.	2.30
11. edTPA improves teacher preparation programs in general.	2.52
12. edTPA improved my classroom teaching practice.	2.10
13. The children in my student teaching classroom benefited from edTPA.	2.27
14. edTPA is more of a positive step than a negative step	

for teacher preparation programs in general.	2.40
15. edTPA improved my classroom planning skills.	2.73
16. edTPA was useful for me as a future elementary teacher.	2.40
17. edTPA improved my use of classroom assessments.	2.77
18. edTPA was a useful assignment to prepare me for teaching.	2.17
19. edTPA is a fair measure of my teaching effectiveness.	1.80
20. Through edTPA implementation I supported the varying learning needs of students.	3.57
21. Through edTPA implementation I supported students who struggle to learn.	3.67
22. Through edTPA implementation I supported students whose first language is not English.	3.50
23. Through edTPA implementation I supported students who have gaps in academic knowledge.	3.60

Implementation in Classrooms

24. I was supported during edTPA by my university supervisor.	4.00
25. I was supported during edTPA by my cooperating teacher.	3.70
26. My student teaching classroom placement supported edTPA implementation.	3.67
27. My student teaching school supported edTPA implementation.	3.73
28. I had the necessary resources (materials and curricula) for edTPA.	3.93
29. In my student teaching placement, my cooperating teacher was knowledgeable about edTPA.	1.90
30. In my student teaching placement, I was encouraged by my cooperating teacher to try out innovative lessons for edTPA.	2.93
31. In my student teaching placement, I was encouraged by my cooperating teacher to plan my own lessons for edTPA.	3.98

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1. Across the U.S., many teacher preparation programs are requiring edTPA for graduation or teacher certification. Do you believe edTPA improves teacher preparation? If yes, how so? If no, why?
2. How would you describe edTPA?
3. How would you describe your experiences with edTPA during student teaching? Were you ready for edTPA during student teaching? Why or why not?
4. What did you learn through the process of edTPA during student teaching?
5. Think about your 2 years in the teacher preparation program. What experiences prepared you for edTPA?
6. Tell me about your preparation for edTPA. (prompt: how can it be improved)

7. Tell me about your implementation of edTPA during student teaching. (prompt: how can it be improved)

8. Do you think edTPA impacts you as a future teacher or not? If yes, how so? If no, why?

9. When thinking about the four edTPA tasks, were there differences in your preparation between the tasks? Did what you learned in your methods courses align with the expectations of edTPA? Also when thinking about the four edTPA tasks, were there differences in implementation during student teaching between the tasks?

10. Do you believe edTPA is a fair measure of your teaching effectiveness? If yes, how so? If no, why?

Any final thoughts you would like to share about your experiences with edTPA?