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TEACHER PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS: EXPLORING STUDENT PERSPECTIVES of the
edTPA

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

University of North Dakota

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

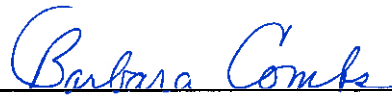
Grand Forks, North Dakota

May

2015

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Dr. Barbara Combs, Chairperson



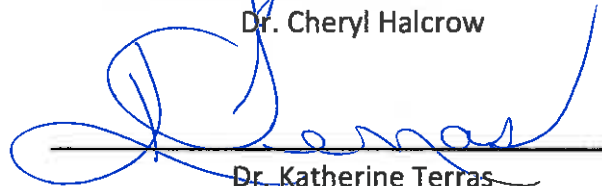
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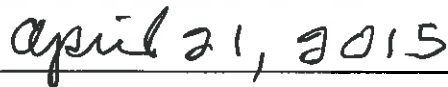


Dr. Katherine Terras

This dissertation is being submitted by the appointed advisory committee as having met all of the requirements of the School of Graduate Studies at the University of North Dakota and is hereby approved.



Dr. Wayne Swisher
Dean of the School of Graduate Studies



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Teri J. Langlie
March 9, 2015

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ABSTRACT

At least 34 states require teacher candidates to complete a comprehensive teacher performance assessment (edTPA) during their student teaching experience. Teacher candidates are assigned the edTPA during this critical time in their preparation. One state—Minnesota—uses the edTPA portfolio exclusively for teacher preparation program approval. Teacher candidates in Minnesota thus devote considerable effort, during a critical time in their teacher preparation program, in the completion of an assessment where the results do not affect their ability to obtain a teaching license. This study explored the impact of the edTPA's timing and perception of personal benefit on the level of effort teacher candidates were willing to invest. Twenty-two teacher candidates, from three Midwestern colleges and universities participated in semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings. A grounded theory, qualitative study revealed teacher candidates' perspectives and the meanings they ascribe to the process of completing an edTPA. Findings indicate that many teacher candidates were willing to devote time to the assessment despite the challenges they faced during the process; however, they did not perceive the edTPA to be an accurate reflection of their readiness for teaching. Most participants were also able to recognize personal benefits gained from completion of the edTPA. An additional finding revealed that most teacher candidates believed that if the due date were later in the student teaching semester,

their readiness for teaching would be more accurately reflected. As a result of this study, teacher education programs, particularly in Minnesota, may wish to consider implementation decisions that are responsive to teacher candidates' perspectives.

Keywords: teacher performance assessment, student teaching, effort, edTPA

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Teacher Performance Assessments: Exploring Student Perspectives of the edTPA

“Teacher education is a disaster,” according to Mike Rose who is quoted by Strauss (2014) in a *Washington Post* blog post, (para. 3). This bold pronouncement is one example of the attacks on teacher education. The media is not alone in criticizing teacher education. Federal and state policy makers have also been vocal in their criticism. In a press release on November of 2014, U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan commented, “It has long been clear that as a nation, we could do a far better job of preparing teachers for the classroom. It’s not just something that studies show – I hear it in my conversations with teachers, principals, and parents” (para. 3).

Staunch condemnation at a very high level of government has occurred, and as a consequence, legislation has been passed in attempt to improve education (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Johnson, 2009, p. 614; Peck, Singer-Gabella, Sloan, Lin, 2014, p. 8). Recently, many state legislators have mandated the completion of a teacher performance assessment (Fusco, 2012; Zeichner & Wray, 2001). Performance assessment is considered an authentic form of evaluating a teacher candidate and typically captures evidence of a candidate’s actual instruction. Video recordings of

lessons, lesson plans, and artifacts of student work illustrate a teacher candidate's readiness for teaching (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2013). In the past decade, the use of performance assessment through portfolios has greatly increased in an effort to determine and evaluate teacher candidates' preparedness for the field (Chitpin & Simon, 2009). The edTPA is one teacher performance assessment currently being used in 34 states and is the focus of this study (SCALE, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

In response to the need for a teacher performance assessment that reflects teacher candidates' readiness for teaching, Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) developed the edTPA. Aligned with state and national standards for teaching, the edTPA is a multiple-measure performance assessment that is intended to demonstrate a teacher candidate's teaching competency (edtpa.aacte.org). In consultation with teacher educators, K-12 teachers, and national subject-matter organizations such as the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE), subject-specific assessments were created for 27 teaching fields (e.g., Math, English, Social Studies, Science, Special Education). The assessments are also specifically adapted for Early Childhood, Elementary, Middle Childhood, and Secondary students (edtpa.aacte.org). A more detailed description of the edTPA will be coming in Chapter II.

The edTPA is a time-intensive evaluation process (Montecinos, Rittershausen, Solis, Contreras, & Contreras, 2010) used for licensure purposes in many states.

However, little is known about the ramifications of such an assessment when it is used for program review but not for licensure. One state—Minnesota—uses the edTPA portfolio exclusively for teacher preparation program approval. The purpose of the study was to examine whether the quality of candidate work on the edTPA is dependent on the timing of the assignment, and/or whether the quality of candidate work is dependent on teacher candidates' perceptions of the personal benefits of the edTPA. It is hoped the findings will inform teacher education faculty as to the ideal time for teacher candidates' edTPA completion to ensure candidates' best efforts. Additionally and ideally, it is hoped that lawmakers may consider the findings as decisions are made regarding the use of this assessment developed by researchers at Stanford University.

My desire to conduct this study is connected to my experience with the edTPA. In recent years, the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) conducted a pilot study of the edTPA with 12 states and approximately 1500 teacher candidates. Two nationwide field tests with 12, 000 teacher candidates studying the assessment's reliability and validity were completed in the spring of 2014 (edtpa.aacte.org). Throughout the pilot and field tests of the edTPA, I have had several opportunities to participate in the national implementation process working with the developers from SCALE.

In 2010, I began my journey with the edTPA national implementation process. After being chosen to train Elementary Literacy scorers for the state of Minnesota, I attended a train the trainer session led by some members of the edTPA design team,

Andrea Whittaker, Kendyll Stansbury, and Nicole Merino. Despite the arduous training, I was enamored with the possibilities for our teacher candidates to become even better teachers. The potential for our teacher preparation program to move into authentic assessment was also intriguing. The train the trainer event was just the beginning of several edTPA implementation opportunities.

The first national level opportunity came with an invitation to participate on a bias review team. This involved reviewing all edTPA documents to identify and eliminate potential bias in vocabulary, word choice, and formatting (based on areas such as ethnicity, religion, ability, gender). The bias review team was assigned the task to review all content area handbooks that had been developed at the time (Elementary Literacy, Elementary Math, Secondary Social Studies, Secondary English, Secondary Science, Secondary Math and Special Education). Therefore, I was able to gain insight into other content areas—not just Elementary Literacy. The opportunity to participate in a bias review committee was extremely informative; however, this was not the only opportunity I enjoyed. Participation in benchmarking activities and scorer training, as organized by SCALE, also contributed to my enhanced understanding of the assessment.

Representatives from all content areas gathered together in the Fall of 2011 to conduct benchmarking activities. As a member of the Elementary Literacy team, I read and scored several edTPA portfolios. In collaboration with a partner, we determined a common score and identified evidence to support the score. These portfolios, scores, and evidence were going to be part of a repository of portfolios to be used for national

scoring training. On a national level, the project was so monumental that some involved in the initial benchmarking process were asked to continue independently. The following year, I was invited back to benchmark the next version of the edTPA since it had been revised. These benchmarking activities confirmed my support of this performance assessment and led to another opportunity with the national implementation.

In the spring of 2012, I was recruited to serve as a national trainer for Elementary Literacy. It was through this experience that I truly began to see the depth of the assessment. It was also a format that allowed me to view the assessment through new scorers' eyes, which I believe has given me greater insight and cognizance of the tool. I served as a trainer for three testing seasons, ending in the spring of 2013. Since that time I have been working as a scoring supervisor to support scorers who have questions as well as monitor their scoring accuracy. The edTPA has afforded me many experiences that have allowed me to understand the assessment at a deep level.

These experiences have influenced my attitude and understanding regarding the edTPA. First, the edTPA provides a description of effective teaching (Sato, 2014, p. 9). This description has the ability to influence teacher education curriculum and instruction, allowing teacher educators and supervisors to view teaching through the same lens. Second, teacher candidates must articulate their rationale, instruction, and assessment practices by responding to a series of prompts that compel them to consider their students' instructional needs (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2013; Sato,

2014, p. 6). The focus of the lessons is on the students and not the teaching. Teacher candidates, to be successful, must plan appropriate differentiation to accommodate needs of a students of diverse populations. My experiences with the edTPA helped me to identify its strengths but there is a concern regarding its implementation.

I developed a concern regarding the timing of the edTPA within the student teaching semester; this is a concern shared among teacher educators, particularly in Minnesota where teacher education program approval will be based on teacher candidates' scores (Langlie, 2014). Teacher performance assessments may have value in determining teacher candidates' readiness for the profession. However, little is known about candidates' perceptions of personal benefit and the timing of edTPA and how this relates to their willingness to invest time to do quality work in completing the assessment when a minimum score is not required to obtain a teaching license. For this reason, I conducted a pilot study on this topic during the academic year prior to this study. In the pilot study, both teacher candidates and teacher educators were participants. Due to the differing viewpoints of the two groups, I decided to focus solely on the teacher candidates for this study. I believe that it is their efforts, attitudes, and behaviors that are essential to understanding their experiences.

Research Questions

As they work with teacher candidates, teacher educators influence candidates' attitudes and perceptions around many issues, including the edTPA. Understanding the experiences of teacher candidates may allow teacher educators the opportunity to

consider their own influence and how to support teacher candidates in accurately demonstrating their readiness for teaching through their performance on the edTPA. It would be helpful for teacher educators in supporting teacher candidates to understand how factors such as the timing of the assessment or the perceived personal benefit impact candidates' willingness to invest time to achieve quality work on the edTPA. In an attempt to inform teacher educators, the research for this study focused on the following questions:

1. How does the teacher candidate's perception of personal benefit of the edTPA impact his/her willingness to complete the assessment to the best of his/her ability?
2. How does the timing of the edTPA, impact the teacher candidate's willingness to invest time to achieve quality work?

Theoretical Framework

This study employed social constructivism as a theoretical framework. Social constructivism is a framework where researchers strive to understand the world being studied (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Social constructivism brings people with common experiences together to construct meaning of the shared situation. The researcher seeks to understand the experiences through the participants' perceptions (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). With the unique process in place in Minnesota, it is especially important to listen to the teacher candidates. It is through their experiences that we can determine the benefits and issues with the particular edTPA process that Minnesota has chosen.

Researchers using this lens form their interpretations based on the views of the participants. Upon examination of individual experiences, a new reality is co-constructed by the participants and researcher (Creswell, 2013). For this study, teacher candidates' perspectives on the edTPA revealed through semi-structured interviews and focus group meetings, provided insight into "lived experiences" (Creswell, 2013, p. 121) of teacher candidates on the completion of an edTPA portfolio.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study have the potential to inform faculty in the teacher education program at the institution where this study was conducted as well as other institutions requiring this assessment. By assigning the edTPA to be completed at a time that is conducive to teacher candidates' willingness to invest time to achieve quality work, the teacher candidate and teacher preparation program may both benefit. The teacher candidates may be better able to accurately represent readiness for teaching when this task is done at an optimal time. Teacher educators may be able to use accurate representations of readiness to obtain program approval and make decisions that will improve teacher preparation at their institution.

Delimitations of the Study

The scope of the study was limited to the perceptions of teacher candidates in their student teaching semester from three teacher preparation programs in Minnesota where teacher licensure is not attached to a minimum score earned on the edTPA. Generalization of findings to teacher candidates from other states may not be possible.

Definitions

Artifacts: Authentic student and teacher candidate work. These may include student work samples, lesson plans, and video clips.

Assessment task: The third and final task of the edTPA where teacher candidates evaluate and analyze their students' achievement of the objectives they were working toward through assessment materials and student work samples. Also referred to as the Assessing Student Learning task.

Clinical experience: The time spent in an actual classroom where cooperating teachers serve as mentors to guide teacher candidates in their development as a teacher. Also referred to as field experience.

Commentaries: Teacher candidates respond to prompts and describe the rationale for and analysis of the teaching event in writing.

edTPA: A multiple measure, performance assessment designed for teacher candidates to complete during the student teaching semester. This assessment addresses planning, instruction, assessment and analyzing of teaching. Originally referred to as TPA. The purpose of this assessment is to measure a teacher candidate's readiness for teaching.

Formative assessment: methods used to assist teachers and students to evaluate learning during a lesson or unit of instruction. Assists teachers in identifying students' needs and teaching areas in need of improvement.

Instruction task: The second task of the edTPA where teacher candidates video record their teaching and choose a clip to submit as evidence of their readiness for teaching. They also analyze their effectiveness as a teacher in this task. Also referred to as the Instructing and Engaging Students in Learning task.

InTASC Standards: A set of model core teaching standards describing what teachers should know and be able to do as a teacher in their content area developed by CCSSO's Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium.

PACT: A consortium of teacher preparation programs in California make up the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT). A performance assessment by the same name was developed for teacher candidates in California and successful completion is required to earn a teaching license.

Performance assessment: an assessment that requires students to perform a task. Also referred to as authentic assessment.

Planning task: The first cycle of the edTPA where teacher candidates plan the teaching event with attention to students' needs, academic language, and assessment. Lesson plans, assessments, and rationale for instructional plans comprise this task. Also known as the Planning for Instruction and Assessment task.

Race to the Top (RTT): A federal initiative that provides funding to encourage innovation and reforms in K-12 education.

Rubrics: A grading tool that describes the criteria used to score an authentic and/or performance assignment.

Samples of Teaching Performance (STP): An assessment instrument used for evaluation of teacher candidates' teaching ability.

Summative assessment: An assessment conducted at the end of a unit of instruction or at the end of a program.

Teacher candidate: A student in a teacher preparation program.

Teaching event: Three to five consecutive lessons or three to five hours of connected instruction in a specific content area. The teaching event is comprised of three tasks: planning, instruction, and assessment tasks.

Teaching identity: A dynamic view and understanding of self in the role of a teacher. Included in teacher identity is the sense of how to teach, how to grow as a teacher, and where the teacher sees himself/herself in their work.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I provides an overview of a portfolio assessment for teacher candidates, the edTPA. The chapter also describes the researcher's background and involvement with the assessment that is mandated in the state where the researcher is employed as a teacher educator. The statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study are presented along with the delimitations in this chapter. Through this information, the need for a qualitative study on the experiences of teacher candidates' completion of the edTPA is established.

A comprehensive review of the literature surrounding the topic of portfolio assessment and in particular, the edTPA, is the focus of Chapter II. A description of the

methodology utilized for this study is the focus of Chapter III. The rationale for a grounded theory study and the process of data analysis is also discussed in Chapter III.

Chapter IV outlines the themes, assertions, and the theory that emerged from the voices of the participants. Chapter V provides a discussion of the findings, the implications, and the need for further research aligned with the grounded theory design employed in this study.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The use of teaching portfolios has become commonplace in teacher preparation programs and has continued to evolve since its inception in the 1980s (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Denney, Grier, & Buchanan, 2012; Sato, 2014). Teacher candidates can demonstrate their readiness for teaching in an authentic manner through portfolio assessment. Stolle, Goerrs, and Watkins (2005) suggest, “As highly individualized expressions of the teacher they represent, portfolios exemplify authentic assessment” (p. 26). This literature review will describe formative and summative portfolios and their use as well as examine implementation of portfolios in teacher education. A discussion of one particular portfolio assessment and the focus of this study, the edTPA, will conclude the chapter.

Types of Teaching Portfolios

To assess teacher candidates’ competencies, teacher preparation programs have integrated the use of portfolios. Portfolios are a mechanism for teacher candidates to collect evidence of their teaching performance with artifacts of student work and classroom instruction (Denney, Grier, & Buchanan, 2012). Depending on their intended use, portfolios may be formative or summative in nature. Caughlan and Jiang (2014) state, “In the past decade, teacher performance assessments (TPAs) have gained

popularity as both formative and summative assessment instruments in the process of teacher education and certification” (p. 376). The following sections will define and describe both types of teaching portfolios.

Formative Assessment

Black and Wiliam (2009) define formative assessment in the following manner: Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited. (p. 9)

Constructing a portfolio requires teacher candidates to analyze and reflect on the artifacts and contents of the portfolio. In the process, teacher candidates are able to make improvements to their teaching (Peck, Singer-Gabella, Sloan, & Lin, 2014).

Portfolios that are formative in nature, allow teacher candidates the opportunity to develop their personal teaching identity and encourage the development of reflective practice.

Teaching identity. Through the construction of a portfolio, teacher candidates are able to develop their personal teaching identity and document their growth on the route to becoming an educator (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Stolle et al. 2005; Van Tartwijk, Van Rijswijk, Tuithof, & Driessen, 2008). With the contents of the portfolio, teacher candidates have tangible evidence (video recordings of the candidate teaching, lesson

plans, analysis of student work, etc.) of their teaching competence, and through comprehensive reflection, are able to determine goals as well as areas of strength (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Van Sickle, Bogan, Kamen, Baird, & Butcher, 2005). Budak and Budak (2011) assert, "...teachers' perceptions of their own professional identity affect their efficacy and professional development" (p. 1377). Thus, the portfolio can become a vehicle for professional development.

Reflection. Portfolio integration in teacher preparation programs establishes a more authentic and meaningful condition for teacher candidates to engage in reflection (Draves, 2009). Careful analysis of each artifact chosen for inclusion in the portfolio allows teacher candidates the opportunity to evaluate their own teaching performance.

Moss (2008) stresses:

If portfolio assessment provides one set of standards for teaching development, they must be examined through multiple lenses, including a critical lens. The process may move portfolio assessment toward the intended goal of developing preservice teachers into reflective practitioners. (p. 155)

The reflective nature of this process is powerful. In fact, according to Berrill and Addison (2010) self-reflection is "critical" in the process of portfolio construction. Reflection and evaluation of one's teaching competence often leads to improvement in teaching practices (Chitpin & Simon, 2009; Zeichner & Wray, 2001). Some teacher education programs have integrated portfolio use for this very reason (Berrill & Addison, 2010).

Teachers in the field also acknowledge that reflective practice is possibly one of the best outcomes of portfolio use (Stolle et al., 2005). Teachers who engage in reflective practice for continuous improvement are among the most effective teachers (Stolle et al., 2005; Van der Schaaf, Stokking, & Verloop, 2008). With this perspective, it follows that reflective practice, which begins during the teacher preparation program, can prepare teachers for continued practice through their teaching lives. Stolle et al., (2005) assert, “The value of a pre-service teacher’s development as a reflective scholar through the portfolio process cannot be underestimated” (p. 38). Therefore, the reflective nature of portfolio assessments can be a significant benefit to a portfolio’s integration in teacher preparation programs.

Summative Assessment

An assessment that evaluates student learning at the end of a lesson cycle is summative. It is the “sum” of the learning that has taken place for individual students and for the class as a collective unit (Qu & Zhang, 2013). Through summative assessment, teachers are able to examine the effectiveness of their teaching and identify areas of achievement and needs for support. With data from a summative assessment, teachers can make future instructional decisions that are appropriate for their students while improving their teaching practices (Qu & Zhang, 2013).

Teacher performance portfolios are a form of summative assessment. Summative use of teacher performance portfolios (TPAs), are gaining prominence as evidence of teacher candidates’ readiness for teaching *and* as a requirement for

acquiring a teaching license (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Moss, 2008; Wray, 2007; Zeichner & Wray, 2001). Teacher candidates' competencies, knowledge, and readiness for the profession of teaching are assessed in an authentic manner through the materials included in the portfolio (Brew, Riley, & Walta, 2009; Meeus, Van Petegem, & Engels, 2009; Montecinos et al., 2010; Stolle et al., 2005). TPAs are an assessment mechanism by which teacher candidates present actual artifacts of their teaching and evidence of student learning as proof of their teaching competence. Similar to formative portfolios, teacher candidates showcase lesson plans, student work, analysis of student achievement, and video recordings of teaching as documentation for determining competence (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Denney et al., 2012; Meeus et al., 2009).

Summative evidence of a teacher candidate's competence is a response to the criticism and concerns of stakeholders that teacher candidates are not prepared adequately nor ready for teaching (Duckor, Castellano, Téllez, Wihardini, & Wilson, 2014). There is the belief that some teacher candidates who have not demonstrated readiness for teaching, are receiving endorsement from their teacher preparation programs. Duckor et al. (2014) report that it has been found that "...far too many student teachers receive low-level formative evaluations throughout their program and yet earn a teaching degree and license because these formative evaluations fail to coalesce into a negative summative appraisal" (p. 404). Summative assessments, when evaluated with integrity, have the capacity to reveal concerns regarding a teacher candidate's teaching performance or a teacher candidate's ineffectiveness that should

result in their inability to receive a teaching license without remediation (Duckor et al., 2014).

Dual Purpose

Though the two types of portfolios have separate purposes, Berrill and Addison (2010) argue that it is possible for a single portfolio to have multiple purposes in teacher education (Meeus et al., 2009; Moss, 2008). Teacher candidates may be required to create a portfolio as a component of coursework to document teaching development and also as a final assessment (Berrill & Addison, 2010). Knight, Lloyd, Arbaugh, Gamson, McDonald, Nolan, & Whitney (2014) assert:

In general, calls for performance assessments of teaching to provide both formative and summative information about the quality of teachers, teacher candidates, and teacher preparation programs pervade the current discourse on education at every level, including schools and districts, institutions of higher education, state and national policymaking entities, and professional organizations. As a result, a number of performance assessments have emerged that can provide feedback to teacher education programs about the strengths and weaknesses of their candidates as well as evidence for licensure and certification of teachers” (p. 372).

The dual purpose of a portfolio allows teacher educators and teacher candidates to benefit from the effort required to construct such an assessment. How can a portfolio serve both formative and summative purposes?

Lin (2008) defines a portfolio as a collection of evidence that demonstrates a person's "knowledge, skills, and dispositions" (p. 194). And so, artifacts that demonstrate those characteristics along the path of teacher preparation may also be evidence of teaching competency. In fact, Berrill and Addison (2010) believe that "identity and competence are not exclusive but rather fluidly interdependent" (p. 1184). Moss (2008) would concur as she believes that teacher candidates are providing evidence of their continually developing teacher identities up to the point of portfolio submission, thereby intersecting both formative and summative purposes of portfolio use. The ability to document the progression of teacher development as well as showcase teacher competencies is a benefit for teacher candidates and teacher educators. The progression of teacher development culminating with evidence of teacher competency at the conclusion of a teacher education program permits both parties to examine and evaluate the strengths and needs of the individual *as well as* the effectiveness of the program (Duckor et al., 2014).

Benefits of Portfolio Assessment

The previous section examined types of portfolio assessment: formative, summative, or both. The intended use of a portfolio assessment determines the type of portfolio that will best meet the needs of a teacher preparation program. To maximize the potential of portfolio assessment, it would be helpful to know the benefits of its use.

Reflection

One clear benefit of portfolio assessment is its value as a professional development exercise. The portfolio supports a process of analyzing and reflecting on one's teaching and can provide an awareness of teaching strengths and the development of goals that lead to improved teaching practices (Brew et al., 2009; Chitpin & Simon, 2009; Montecinos et al., 2010). The assessment of the resulting portfolio may ensure the continuation of reflective practice. Loughran (2002) states,

The danger for reflection is that if practice is limited to understanding it backwards, then forward practice may remain uninformed. If learning through practice matters, then reflection on practice is crucial, and teacher preparation is the obvious place for it to be initiated and nurtured. (p. 42)

The reflective nature of a portfolio is not the only benefit of portfolio assessment.

Authentic Assessment

An additional benefit of portfolio assessment is the authentic nature of the assessment (Van Sickle et al., 2005) that allows teacher candidates to examine their teaching in an authentic manner because it measures teaching abilities through actual teaching (Brew et al., 2009; Meeus et al., 2009; Montecinos et al., 2010). Rather than take a paper and pencil test where teacher candidates indicate understanding of teaching through multiple choice questions, they can demonstrate their understanding in an authentic setting with actual students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). The real-life application of pedagogy and content knowledge provides the teacher candidate and

college supervisor with authentic evidence of readiness for teaching (Clark & Rust, 2006).

As a result of portfolio construction, teacher candidates become more aware of their instructional decision-making and teaching ability since they are required to articulate the rationale for their decisions and the impact of those decisions on their students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Denney et al., 2012; Zeichner & Wray, 2001). Analysis of video recordings of their teaching and student work provide teacher candidates with evidence of the impact of their teaching. Teacher candidates are then able to make informed instructional decisions. The authentic nature of portfolio assessment moves the teacher candidate from a focus on themselves to a focus on the learners (Ward & McCotter, 2004), making portfolio assessment a learner-centered assessment (Clark & Rust, 2006).

Student Achievement

Teacher candidates reflect not only on their teaching performance but also on the effects of their teaching on students. Did the students actually learn the objectives of the lesson that the teacher candidate was working toward? Ward and McCotter (2004) state, "We are perpetually challenged to get our students to reflect on their practice in meaningful ways, to consider the effect their teaching has on student learning, and develop habits that will stay with them" (p. 244). Analysis of student work and assessments places the learners at the center of teaching. Teacher candidates gain greater knowledge of their students, allowing them to make better instructional

decisions and develop lesson plans with the students' needs at the forefront. Portfolio assessment that requires this analysis is guiding and supporting teacher candidates' development in a learner-centered approach to teaching (Clark & Rust, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

Challenges of Portfolio Assessment

Teacher performance assessments have value in determining teacher candidates' readiness for the profession. However, they are not without their challenges. Understanding the experiences of teacher candidates may help those who develop procedures and policies for performance assessments maintain the benefits while reducing the challenges. In this way teacher candidates will be better able to demonstrate their readiness for teaching. Challenges of portfolio assessment will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Artifacts

Artifacts to document the development of teacher identity (formative use) may differ from artifacts for a summative portfolio that is meant to document teacher competence (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Stolle et al., 2005; Tillema & Smith, 2007) creating a challenge for both teacher candidates and teacher educators. According to Berrill and Addison (2010) the purpose of the portfolio may significantly alter its contents. Therefore, it is incumbent on teacher educators to clearly define the criteria and purpose of the portfolio (Berrill & Addison, 2010), thereby removing the ambiguity for teacher candidates.

Scoring Criteria

Teacher educators face a similar dilemma when assessing or reviewing portfolios (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Denney et al., 2012; Van Sickle et al., 2005). Scoring criteria could be quite different depending on the formative or summative nature of the portfolio. For that reason, it is also essential that the portfolios' purpose be explicitly identified prior to scoring or review (Tillema & Smith, 2007; Van Sickle et al., 2005). Teacher educators must be able to differentiate the criteria between formative and summative portfolios (Denney et al., 2012; Van Sickle et al., 2005) in order to be able to provide valuable, appropriate feedback and as required, summative scores.

Personal Benefit

An additional challenge of portfolio assessment is a lack of a common understanding of personal benefit by candidates and teacher educators (Berrill & Addison, 2010). Teacher candidates, already under pressure to do quality teaching in their student teaching clinical, are assigned portfolio assessment to be completed synchronously. Given an assessment of this magnitude, teacher candidates need to know the personal benefit (Berrill & Addison, 2010; Breault, 2004; Montecinos et al., 2010). Without any perceived personal benefit, the assessment could cause undue stress and create an unwillingness on the part of candidates to put forth their best effort (Okhremtchouk, Seiki, Giilliland, Ateh, Wallace, and Kato, 2009). Lack of personal benefit is one area of concern, and the amount of time to complete the assessment is another.

Time

Portfolio assessment, in particular the PACT (precursor to edTPA) creates a challenge for teacher educators due to the amount of time required by candidates to create and develop a quality portfolio (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009). The assessment takes considerable time to complete, as teacher candidates must write detailed commentary with supporting evidence to describe their rationale for instructional decisions, video record their teaching, assess student performance, analyze student achievement, and reflect upon the teaching process from start to finish (Sato, 2014). Montecinos et al. (2010) quote one of their study participants, “The idea of the STP [Samples of Teaching Performance] is that we reflect but the problem is that we have so little time, that we do not have time to reflect, and reflecting under pressure is kind of ironic” (p. 295). In such circumstances, a negative impression of reflective practice may be cultivated. The edTPA faces similar challenges because of the time requirement involved in its completion.

Teacher candidates whose licensure is impacted by their score on the performance assessment portfolio face constraints on their time to address personal, professional, and academic responsibilities while in the midst of their student teaching experience. Students report that the time involved in assessment portfolio preparation affected their personal, professional, and academic lives in a significantly negative way (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009). According to Okhremtchouk et al. (2009), it would be prudent for teacher educators and state licensing boards to consider the timing of the

assessment, so as to provide candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their teaching abilities with quality on the performance assessment portfolio. This issue is particularly significant for teacher education programs in Minnesota where the edTPA is used solely for program approval and improvement. At this time, Minnesota is the only state that does not use the data for licensure requirements (O.R. Davis, personal communication, October 17, 2014), which may make it less meaningful to candidates.

Timing

Finally, the timing of portfolio assessment is an additional challenge. Student teaching is a demanding experience that requires teacher candidates to meet the needs of the students, their classroom supervisors, and college supervisors. According to Malik and Ajmal, (2010), students reported high levels of stress created by the heavy workload during student teaching. The student teaching clinical experience requires the classroom supervisor and college supervisor to observe and provide feedback to the teacher candidate (Malik and Ajmal, 2010). Teacher candidates are expected to perform at their highest level. Requiring a teacher portfolio assessment to be completed during this experience creates concern regarding the ability to also do quality work as a student teacher *as well as* on the assessment (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009).

Also, teacher candidates may not consider the rationale for completing the assessment a priority during a demanding semester where their teaching performance is critical in order to receive stellar recommendations from classroom and college supervisors. Therefore, the issue of timing is critical (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009).

Portfolios and Their Use in Teacher Education

Federal and state legislative bodies have placed a spotlight on teacher education. The National Research Council Report in 2001 with its examination of teacher licensure tests led the charge by appealing for performance-based evidence of teaching effectiveness with students of diversity and a focus on student achievement (Knowles, Plake, Robinson, & Mitchell, 2001). The 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required states to hire “highly qualified teachers.” In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act instituted a program, Race to the Top (RTT) that linked teachers with their students’ academic achievements. Both legislative actions linked funding to teacher evaluation (Wilson, Hallam, Pecheone, & Moss, 2014). Thus, teacher education has been and continues to be in the public eye (Wilson et al., 2014).

Licensure decisions are regulated by state legislation. They hold the authority to decide what evidence is *required* to demonstrate teaching competency that will result in the ability to obtain a teaching license. Student achievement should be of utmost consideration. It follows that evaluation of teacher candidates should include evidence of teacher effectiveness in relation to student learning (Wilson et al., 2014).

Among the many factors (i.e. class size, family support, school attendance) contributing to student achievement, teacher quality is considered to be the most significant factor (Caughlan & Jiang, 2014; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2014; Strong, Gargani, & Hacifazlioglu, 2011). Teacher education programs are accountable for the preparedness of their teacher candidates (Lys, L’Esperance, Dobson, & Bullock, 2014). In

an effort to “prove” readiness for teaching, state governing agencies and teacher education programs must provide evidence that candidates are prepared and this is often accomplished through standardized tests (Diez, 2010; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2014; Lys et al., 2014).

Standardized tests measure a teacher candidate’s “knowledge of basic skills (i.e. Praxis I), subject matter, and professional practice” (i.e. Praxis II) (Lys et al., 2014). However, many of these standardized tests lack a performance component. There is no evidence that teacher candidates are able to put content and pedagogy into practice (Diez, 2010). As a result, without a performance component, the score may not be an accurate reflection of a teacher candidate’s competence or readiness for teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Duckor et al., 2014; Lys et al., 2014). Therefore, the need for performance assessments, embedded in teacher education, is essential.

To demonstrate compliance with legislative mandates and effectiveness, teacher education programs may use multiple measures that provide evidence of their teacher candidates’ readiness for teaching. As previously mentioned, standardized assessments of both content and pedagogical knowledge (i.e. paper and pencil tests) do not have a performance component (Diez, 2010). Portfolio assessments have the performance component; however, they do not measure basic skills or content knowledge. Thus, multiple measures are necessary to provide comprehensive evidence of teaching competency. Peck et al. (2014) state, “...we follow others in observing that no single measure is by itself an entirely adequate means of evaluating the effectiveness of

individual teachers, much less the quality of a teacher preparation program” (p. 9). A protocol that consists of data from multiple sources, as well as portfolio assessment should provide appropriate and necessary evidence regarding teacher and program effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2010; Duckor et al., 2014). For this reason, many states have currently passed legislation requiring teacher preparation programs to implement the edTPA as one measure of teacher competency.

edTPA

The edTPA, the focus of this study, is a performance assessment that is growing in popularity. Developed by the Stanford Center for Assessment Learning and Equity (SCALE, 2012), the edTPA, has been chosen by at least 34 states as one step toward teacher licensure.

Background

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) set the stage for authentic, performance assessment for teachers (Sato, 2014). Experienced teachers use this assessment for educative purposes as they evaluate their teaching practices through video evidence, student work samples, testimonials regarding leadership and professional work, and through an exam (Sato, 2014). Using the NBPTS as a model, numerous states (California, Connecticut, and Oregon) developed versions of performance assessments for teacher candidates (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2013). In 1998, California legislated the use of a summative performance assessment for teacher candidates. In response to this legislation, the Performance Assessment for

California Teachers (PACT) was created in 2002 (Darling-Hammond et al., 2013; Sato, 2014).

Similar to the NBPTS, teacher candidates completing a PACT portfolio examine video evidence, submit student work samples, and write detailed commentary on his or her teaching (Sato, 2014). Throughout the course of the assessment, teacher candidates submit evidence of their teaching from planning to instruction to assessment. The PACT continues to measure teacher candidates' readiness for teaching at several institutions in California (Darling-Hammond et al., 2013; Peck et al., 2014; Sato, 2014).

Drawing on the PACT model, the teacher education community recognized the need for a performance assessment that could be embedded within the expectations of teacher candidates seeking licensure that would also have a reliable scoring mechanism (Sato, 2014). Contributing to the creation of the edTPA were 100+ university faculty, national subject-matter organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and K-12 educators (edtpa.aacte.org). Thus, Price (2014) is accurate in his description: "EdTPA was built by the profession and for the profession" (p. 220).

Description

The edTPA is a summative performance assessment completed by a teacher candidate during the student teaching semester. In completion of this assessment, Peck et al. (2014) describes the task as he states, "...candidates must integrate and enact their knowledge of students, curriculum, and instruction in the context of the kinds of

complex and dynamic conditions that resemble those they will be expected to manage once they are licensed” (p. 15). Comprising the edTPA are three tasks: the planning task, the instructing and engaging students task, and the assessment task. Embedded throughout all of the tasks is academic language. Academic language is the language of school (Hundley, 2013). Academic language is the specific language that students will need in the discipline and in the lesson. For example, in a social studies lesson comparing cultures, students need to understand the use of a Venn diagram. Students also need to understand the terms compare and contrast to be able to participate. The teacher candidates choose a three to five lesson or unit of study in their content area which is referred to in the edTPA as the teaching event. They must plan the event, teach the lessons, and then evaluate student achievement of the content in the teaching event. Teacher candidates submit evidence in the form of written commentaries that address specific prompts for each of the three tasks, a video recording of a lesson taught during the teaching event, artifacts of student work, and evaluation criteria used to assess student achievement (SCALE, 2012). The entire portfolio is uploaded to Evaluation Systems, an affiliate of Pearson Company, to be scored.

Each edTPA portfolio is scored against 15 rubrics on five dimensions of teaching which include: planning instruction and assessment; instructing and engaging students in learning; assessing student learning; analysis of teaching effectiveness; and academic language development (SCALE, 2012). Evaluation Systems is the operational partner that is responsible for the scoring of the portfolio. In consultation with SCALE, Evaluation

Systems is responsible for recruiting, training and qualifying scorers for each content area. Scorers progress through a rigorous training which involves online training and a qualification component (edtpa.aacte.org).

For each of the three tasks of the edTPA, there are five rubrics. A score of 5 on any of the rubrics is difficult to achieve as it is considered to be indicative of a “highly skilled accomplished beginner” (edtpa.aacte.org). A score of one indicates that a candidate is not ready for the field on that particular topic. A perfect score for each task would be a 25, with a total score of 75 possible for the entire portfolio. Pass rates have been set at a score of 37 which is 78 percent (edtpa.aacte.org).

A distinctive feature of the edTPA is the attempt to define the concept of good and effective teaching for the whole field of teaching, not just for a specific area (Sato, 2014). Education has been guided by standards, most recently the InTASC Standards, of what teachers should know and be able to do (CCSSO’s Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 2011). However, these standards have not specifically determined quality of performance. The premise behind the work of the edTPA is that it will help to “define” the skilled performance of a beginning teacher (Sato, 2014). The edTPA is working toward that end (Peck et al., 2014; Sato, 2014).

Validity of the edTPA

Validity is the ability of an assessment to measure the content it purports to measure (William, 2014). The onus is on the test developer *and* the test user in determining evidence that the assessment is valid—that is, measuring what it is

intended to measure (Wiliam, 2014). According to Duckor et al., (2014) et al., “We have a professional responsibility to engage with and monitor the validity evidence for any large-scale testing and examination system” (p. 403).

As a portfolio assessment that has gained prominent attention and is being implemented in 34 states, the edTPA is thought to be a valid assessment. Its tasks are aligned with characteristics of effective teaching. Sato (2014) emphasizes, “The edTPA is designed to align with the authentic teaching practice of the teacher candidate” (p. 9). PACT having been deemed valid (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2013; Duckor et al., 2014) and serving as a model for edTPA, provides further evidence of the validity of this assessment. Sato (2014) determined that “the conception of teaching of the edTPA is one of professional practice, not only at the individual level but also at the level of teaching as a collective enterprise” (p. 1). She comprehensively discusses the face validity, content validity, and construct validity of the edTPA, concluding that despite threats, content and construct validity are established (p.13). However, she believes that in the area of face validity, questions will continue by those who hold differing views of education.

Due to the increased accountability and attention on teacher preparation and with the increasing numbers of institutions using edTPA, PACT and similar assessments, it is necessary for validation studies to continue. In doing so, stakeholders (i.e. teacher educators, state licensing boards, school administrators) can be assured of the dependability of the results (Darling-Hammond et al., 2013; Duckor et al., 2014).

Implementation

The American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE), a professional organization of teacher education institutions in the United States supported the development of the edTPA. The design team from Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) partnered with AACTE and began a four year project (edtpa.aacte.org) that has resulted in the new edTPA (Sato, 2014). (The edTPA was originally known as the TPA and was renamed after the field test in 2012.) Upon completion of the pilot test during the 2010-2011 academic year and field tests in the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 academic years with approximately 12,000 teacher candidates, the edTPA became operational in many institutions across the nation (edtpa.aacte.org).

Summary

In response to national attention and criticism of teacher education in the United States, summative performance portfolio assessments are being implemented in teacher preparation programs throughout the country. Peck et al. (2014) states:

Records of performance produced in actual classroom teaching events, such as lesson plans, video clips of teaching, and samples of P-12 student work, provide concrete and richly contextualized documentation of teaching practice that may be directly related to the goals and processes of instruction within programs of teacher preparation. (p. 10)

The goal of portfolio assessment is the presentation and assessment of an authentic tool for individual teacher candidates and teacher preparation programs. One particular portfolio assessment gaining prominence in teacher preparation across the nation, the edTPA, is the subject of this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

In Minnesota, scores on the edTPA are used strictly for program approval of all teacher preparation programs in the state not for licensure (edtpaminnesota.org, 2014). Consequently, teacher candidates are required to complete an intense assessment (Montecinos, Rittershausen, Solis, Contreras, & Contreras, 2010) during a critical time in their teacher preparation even though it does not directly affect their ability to obtain a license. Still, edTPA scores are critical for teacher preparation program approval. For this reason, I used a qualitative approach to examine the perspectives of 22 teacher candidates who had recently completed or were near completion of an edTPA to better understand their experience.

Methodological Framework

Qualitative studies allow researchers to gain insight into the lived experiences of the participants involved in the study (Moustakas, 1994). This study employed a grounded theory approach. In a grounded theory methodology, the experiences of participants are used to develop a theory that will explain a “process or action” (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). It can also be described as a method in which the data leads to the revelation of a new theory (Dunne, 2011). Researchers using this approach generate a theory that emerges from the data provided in the participants’ interactions

(Creswell, 2013). Given that the purpose of the study was to examine teacher candidates' perceptions related to issues around the edTPA requirement in Minnesota, a grounded theory study was most appropriate. The perspectives of teacher candidates of three teacher preparation programs were the foundation for the theory developed during this research.

Prior to data collection, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the University of North Dakota (UND). Participants were recruited from four Minnesota institutions and approval from the IRBs of each of these institutions was gained prior to the first focus group or interview meeting. In the first week of the data collection process, an unexpected situation occurred requiring a protocol change which was subsequently approved by the UND IRB. Some participants were unable to attend a focus group session yet were willing to share their perspectives in an individual interview. Therefore, there were six interviews that had no link to a focus group meeting.

Focus group meetings with participants explored candidates' perspectives on the edTPA. Semi-structured focus group meetings were conducted at each of three institutions to gather data on the impact of the timing of the edTPA as well as its perceived personal benefit to teacher candidates. Focus group meetings are appropriate and beneficial for complicated topics where there is "multifaceted behavior or motivation" (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 24). Conducting focus group meetings with teacher candidates from the same institution, allowed them to draw on a shared

experience and understanding of the edTPA process at their institution. Also, a focus group setting allowed participants an opportunity to share their experience and respond and react to others' thoughts on the topic (Seale, 2004). All participants in each group were at the same stage of student teaching thereby eliminating any potential "power differential" (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 27). The dialogue during the focus group meetings provided an enhanced understanding of the teacher candidates' experiences during the edTPA process and revealed complex and diverse attitudes regarding the assessment.

In addition to focus group meetings, individual interviews were held with teacher candidates who were willing to discuss the edTPA process as well as to expand on or clarify comments drawn from focus group meetings. Individual interviews permitted participants to extend the conversation without fear of reprisal or reaction from other participants, particularly if there were personality conflicts or status issues (Seale, 2004). Gaining understanding and information regarding situations or events not experienced by the researcher is a strength of using interviews to collect data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995).

Because all of my involvement with the edTPA has been with the administration of or scoring of the assessment, the experiences of teacher candidates completing the assessment were especially valuable. It is through the participants' voices during the focus group meetings and individual meetings that I was able to develop a meaningful and deeper understanding of teacher candidates' experiences completing the edTPA in Minnesota.

Site and Participants

Volunteers were solicited from the pool of candidates currently enrolled at four diverse Minnesota colleges and universities. One of the four institutions was unable to recruit willing participants. Hence, all data collected were from participants at three institutions. All participants were in the student teaching clinical experience and had recently completed or were near completion of the edTPA. Twenty-two teacher candidates from three teacher preparation programs in Minnesota participated in a focus group session and/or an individual interview. Of the three institutions, participants represented one private college, one private university, and one public university, all of varying sizes. See Table 1.

The only private college, Institution A, a small Midwestern four-year, residential, liberal arts college graduates approximately 100 education majors each year (title2.ed.gov, 2013). All teacher candidates in both the elementary education and the secondary education programs were invited to participate through a letter of invitation (Appendix A). Eleven teacher candidates chose to participate. The elementary education program was represented by five teacher candidates of which five were female and one male. The other six participants were from the secondary education program representing world language, English, physical education, and social studies. There were two male and four female teacher candidates from the secondary programs.

Table 1. Description of Participants.

Institution	Gender	Program	Type of Participation
Institution A	Male	Elementary Education	Focus Group
Institution A	Male	Secondary Social Studies	Focus Group
Institution A	Male	Secondary Physical Education	Focus Group
Institution A	Female	Elementary Education	Focus Group
Institution A	Female	Elementary Education	Focus Group
Institution A	Female	Elementary Education	Focus Group
Institution A	Female	Elementary Education	Focus Group
Institution A	Female	Secondary English Education	Both
Institution A	Female	Secondary Social Studies	Both
Institution A	Female	Secondary World Languages	Both
Institution A	Female	Secondary English Education	Interview
Institution B	Female	Visual Arts	Focus Group
Institution B	Female	Elementary Education	Focus Group
Institution B	Female	Early Childhood Education	Focus Group
Institution B	Male	Physical Education K-12	Focus Group
Institution B	Male	Secondary Math	Focus Group
Institution C	Female	Elementary Education	Interview
Institution C	Female	Secondary Social Studies	Focus Group
Institution C	Male	English Language Learners	Focus Group
Institution C	Male	Secondary Social Studies/Special Education	Interview
Institution C	Female	Elementary Education	Interview
Institution C	Female	Elementary Education	Interview

Note. Participants had the choice to participate in a focus group session, individual interview, or both.

It is important to note that while I serve as edTPA coordinator for the department at Institution A, teacher candidates were assured that I would not be evaluating and assigning scores to their edTPA portfolios to assure them that participation in the study would not have any adverse effect on their work. Also, participants from the elementary education program at Institution A have been my students and two were assigned to me for supervision of student teaching. Grades for

coursework were already determined, so there was no risk or worry related to participation impacting any grades. Grades for student teaching are pass/fail and require input from the classroom supervisor, so participation in the study had little to no impact on the final student teaching grade. As a college student teaching supervisor, I completed most clinical experience observations by the time interviews were conducted, so candidates' participation in the study did not have an impact on the outcome of their student teaching experience.

Institution B is a private, four-year liberal arts Midwestern university that graduates almost 90 teacher candidates each year (title2.ed.gov, 2013). An education professor at this institution agreed to assist in recruiting participants. Teacher candidates were invited to participate immediately following a student teaching meeting that was being held for all current teacher candidates at this institution. Five of them agreed to participate in the study. There were three females and two males representing the early childhood, elementary education, and secondary education programs. None of these participants elected to take part in individual interviews.

Not all of the teacher candidates at this institution had completely finished their edTPA at the time of the focus group. The due date at that institution was originally set for the week of the focus group meeting but had only recently been changed. Therefore, two of the participants had not yet submitted their edTPA. Both participants indicated that they were almost done. Their responses to the questions confirmed the near completion status. I chose to include their comments in the

data. Their comments were poignant and articulate making the data valuable to the study. As I discovered in the pilot study I had conducted previously, there was greater emotion attached to candidates' comments and responses when the focus group meetings and interviews were close to the completion of the edTPA making their contributions even more valuable.

The third and final institution, Institution C, is also a four-year public, residential Midwestern university. Approximately 250 teacher candidates graduate from this institution annually (title2.ed.gov, 2013). A member of the education faculty and the field placement director assisted me in recruiting teacher candidates to participate in the study. The letter of invitation resulted in zero participants at the first focus group meeting. In consultation with the education faculty member and the field placement director, a booth was made available outside a student teaching meeting where teacher candidates were informed of the opportunity to participate. As they left the meeting one participant was willing to be interviewed. Two more participants shared their experiences and viewpoints during a small focus group meeting. Eager to glean more perspectives of teacher candidates from a public institution, the education faculty member assisted with the recruitment of three additional participants for an individual interview. Of the six total participants, two were male and four were female and represented elementary education, special education, secondary social studies education and the English Language Learning programs.

Data Collection

To examine the experiences of teacher candidates, I conducted semi-structured focus group meetings and individual interviews with willing participants (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) during the student teaching clinical experience and following completion or near completion of the edTPA. By scheduling the interviews and focus group meetings close to the completion date, it was hoped that teacher candidates would be able to recall the experience in great detail. After developing the initial questions for both the focus group and individual interviews, I asked an experienced qualitative researcher and other teacher educators with varying degrees of support for the edTPA to review the questions for bias. Teacher educators have differing opinions on the value of a performance assessment such as the edTPA (Sato, 2014); therefore I asked proponents and opponents of the edTPA to review the questions and make suggestions to minimize and/or eliminate any possible bias in the questions. Modifications to questions were made based on their recommendations. In general, participants were asked to reflect on the amount of time required to complete the edTPA, their level of teaching responsibilities at the time of the assessment, and the effort that they put forth. See Table 2 for individual interview questions and Table 3 for focus group questions.

Table 2. Interview Questions.

Interview Questions
1. How many hours did it take to complete the edTPA?
2. On a scale of one to five, where 5 indicates your best effort and one indicates just doing it to get it done—where would you rate yourself? Why?
3. What factors might cause you to change your level of effort on the edTPA?
4. What would be your recommendation for an ideal time during student teaching to complete the edTPA? Why?
5. How did the completion of the edTPA affect other areas of your life? Did the timing have an impact? Why or why not?
6. What could be done to support your efforts in completing the edTPA?
7. What personal benefits did you receive from completing the edTPA—if you indeed did have personal benefits?

Table 3. Focus Group Questions.

Focus Group Questions
1. If you were able to schedule the due date for the edTPA, when would you schedule it? Why?
2. What effects did the completion of the edTPA have on your teaching in the clinical experience?
3. Currently, the edTPA is not used for licensure in this state—what are your thoughts about this?
4. The edTPA is designed to be an assessment of your readiness for teaching; do you feel that it is an effective tool to make that determination? Why?
5. In an ideal world, please describe what would be the most effective tool to measure readiness for teaching or a culminating activity to demonstrate readiness for teaching.

The focus group meetings and individual interviews were conducted on the campus of each participating institution. Participants from Institution A met in an empty classroom in the Department of Education at the end of their teaching day. The focus group meeting at Institution B was held in a meeting room in the same building that houses the Department of Education on this campus. There were no individual interviews at this institution. Participants from Institution C met in quiet hallways of the

Education building. There were no available open rooms. Those participants were willing to conduct the meetings in hallways. All meetings (focus group and individual interviews) were digitally recorded with permission from each participant.

The focus group meetings lasted approximately 30 minutes. The largest focus group (Institution B) had the longest meeting which was about 45 minutes long.

Individual interviews were of varying length, ranging from 10 to 20 minutes. At the end of the prepared questions, I asked participants if they had any additional comments.

The longer interviews were the ones where participants wanted to emphasize or make further remarks on their perspectives of the edTPA.

Analysis

Validation Strategies

To strengthen trustworthiness and credibility of the data, Glesne (2011) described several procedures, many of which were applied to this study. First, I strived to create an environment of trust and collegiality. Serving as edTPA coordinator for my institution, I have had “prolonged engagement and persistent observation” of the participants over the past three years of implementation (Glesne, 2011, p. 49). In the course of the implementation process, where many modifications were made at the national and state levels, I have attempted to accommodate and support teacher candidates and teacher educators at my institution to minimize any adverse effect and reaction to the changes. At the other two institutions, during the introduction of myself and the project, I chose to discuss the purpose of the study only and not share my

experiences with the edTPA. It was an intentional decision made to avoid the teacher candidate's perception that I may have bias toward the assessment which would possibly create an atmosphere of doubt and mistrust regarding my responses and purpose of the study. In the introduction, I emphasized my desire to hear their voices regarding the edTPA. Teacher candidates were also informed of my hope that future administrative decisions of the assessment responsive to their needs may then be possible. By gaining the trust of participants early on, the reality of the edTPA experience is represented in the rich detail of the participants' responses shared in focus group sessions and individual interviews.

Second, the study design as well as the interview and focus group questions included in this proposal were evaluated by an experienced qualitative researcher during the pilot of this study to reveal and minimize any possible bias, further increasing the credibility of the study. Suggestions for revision were offered and those corrections are reflected in the list of questions used in this study (see Tables 2 and 3 above).

Third, to ensure the accuracy of the data, member checking was employed. Transcripts were shared with interested participants for validation of their comments. Five participants reviewed the focus group transcripts. Additionally, an experienced researcher conducted an audit of the records by reviewing the focus group and individual interview transcripts, my analytic memos and my analysis of the data to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the findings. An external audit is one process to promote trustworthiness in a study. In an external audit, an auditor or consultant

with no ties to the study inspects the data collection process and data for accuracy (Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2011).

Fourth, I addressed primary ethical considerations with participants in the focus group meetings and individual interviews. My roles as an instructor, supervisor of teacher candidates, and edTPA coordinator could cause concern for participants regarding my response to their comments. Therefore, when reviewing informed consent documents, I was explicit about my role and purpose for the study. To eliminate any possible ethical concerns that might have impacted the findings of the study, participants were assured of my role as a beginning researcher seeking to understand teacher candidates' experiences with the edTPA.

Analysis Procedures

In grounded theory studies, coding begins as the first data are collected and continues concurrently throughout the entire data collection and analysis process (Dunne, 2011; Thornberg, 2012). Immediately upon completion of each interview and focus group session, audio recordings of those meetings were sent to be transcribed verbatim by an off-site transcriptionist. While the recordings were being transcribed, I listened to the audio recordings of the focus group meetings and interviews several times. As each transcript was completed, I reviewed it for accuracy while listening to the audio recording. This process also helped to deepen my familiarity with the data. Coding, in grounded theory studies, is not a linear process; it is essential to cycle through the data multiple times (Dunne, 2011; Saldaña, 2013; Thornberg, 2012). Thus, I

utilized a multistep, recursive process. The coding of data was done in three recurrent cycles (Thornberg, 2012).

During the first cycle, after each transcript was reviewed for accuracy, significant statements were identified. Grounded theory studies often employ In Vivo coding. The In Vivo coding process uses participants' own words and phrases as codes. Therefore, I conducted line by line coding and assigned each significant statement an In Vivo code (Saldaña, 2013). To preserve the integrity of the participants' voice, each In Vivo code was reviewed in its original context during the coding process. This occurred electronically as transcriptions of interview and focus group sessions were uploaded to Atlas.ti, a qualitative data analysis software.

Additionally, throughout the first cycle of coding, I wrote analytic memos (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). Analytic memos are a fundamental component of grounded theory (Dunne, 2011; Saldaña, 2013) and serve to record the researcher's reflections that occur during the data analysis phase. According to Richards (2009), "Qualitative data are not collected, but made collaboratively by the researcher and the researched" (p. 49). To mentally process the data and make connections with prior experiences, I wrote analytic memos and recorded thoughts, issues, and discoveries made during the coding process. Memos are also a source of data and were coded and analyzed (Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013) as well. There were 1832 codes created in the first cycle. Examples include: "I didn't have time."; "I've not cared one bit about it.";

“How does this reflect me?” Upon completion of the first coding cycle, the transition to second cycle coding began with code mapping.

Code mapping is a strategy that is used to organize the codes identified in the first cycle (Saldaña, 2013), and is done to prepare the data for recoding in the second cycle. Therefore, I returned to the entire collection of data and organized these into a list of categories. Again to preserve the intended message of the participants, I reviewed the data in context prior to and again after being placed in a category.

During the second cycle, I employed the focused coding method. Focused coding is a “streamlined” version of axial coding (Saldaña, 2013, p. 213). Unlike axial coding that specifies properties and dimensions as categories, the purpose of focused coding is to determine recurrent or significant codes from the first cycle (Saldaña, 2013, p. 246). Groupings of similar codes were constructed and analyzed to create tentative codes (Saldaña, 2013; Thornberg, 2012). As during the first cycle of coding, I reviewed the data again by going back into the transcripts to maintain the intent of each piece of data and used tentative codes to ensure a clear alignment of codes to data (Thornberg, 2012). Next, in the process of focused coding I examined the tentative codes to create prominent categories from the collection of first cycle codes (Saldaña, 2013). During this process of categorization, the data in each category were again reviewed in context of the transcript to make certain that the participants’ intended message was maintained. Following the identification of categories, the final phase of coding began.

Theoretical coding is the third and final cycle of the coding process. Saldaña, (2013) recommends identifying interrelationships among the categories to produce a theme representing the data in those categories (p. 250). In this cycle, the categories and codes were analyzed to determine a relationship among them that suggested a theme emerging from the data (Saldaña, 2013; Thornberg, 2012). I searched for interrelationships and assigned appropriate thematic codes using this process. Still mindful of the participants' voice, I reviewed the thematic codes with the transcripts to preserve the intended message. Four themes were identified which work together to form the grounded theory emerging from this study. Figure 1 provides a graphic detailing the process of coding that led to the development of major themes and an emerging theory for this study.

The painstaking process of determining the elements of grounded theory was the most challenging component of the entire study. Using the model template for grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998), I revisited each category, theme, and assertion in this study several times as I struggled to define each element of the model. The central phenomenon, context and intervening conditions were the easiest to determine. To complete the model, I did further research on the elements of grounded theory in textbooks, journal publications and previous coursework. Once I was able to pinpoint the strategies, the causal conditions and consequences became clear. I sent the draft of the model to the reviewer for feedback. This iterative process led to a clear and concise grounded theory model of the study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the methodology used in this study to examine teacher candidates' perceptions related to issues around the edTPA requirement in Minnesota. Through focus group meetings and individual interviews I developed an understanding of the participants' experiences while completing an edTPA. Employing a three cycle approach to data analysis, I analyzed the data with the participants' intended message at the forefront through continual review with original transcripts. In Chapter IV, the findings of this study will be presented in greater detail with a discussion of each of four themes that generated from the data. The chapter will conclude with a thorough discussion of the grounded theory that emerged from the voices of the participants.

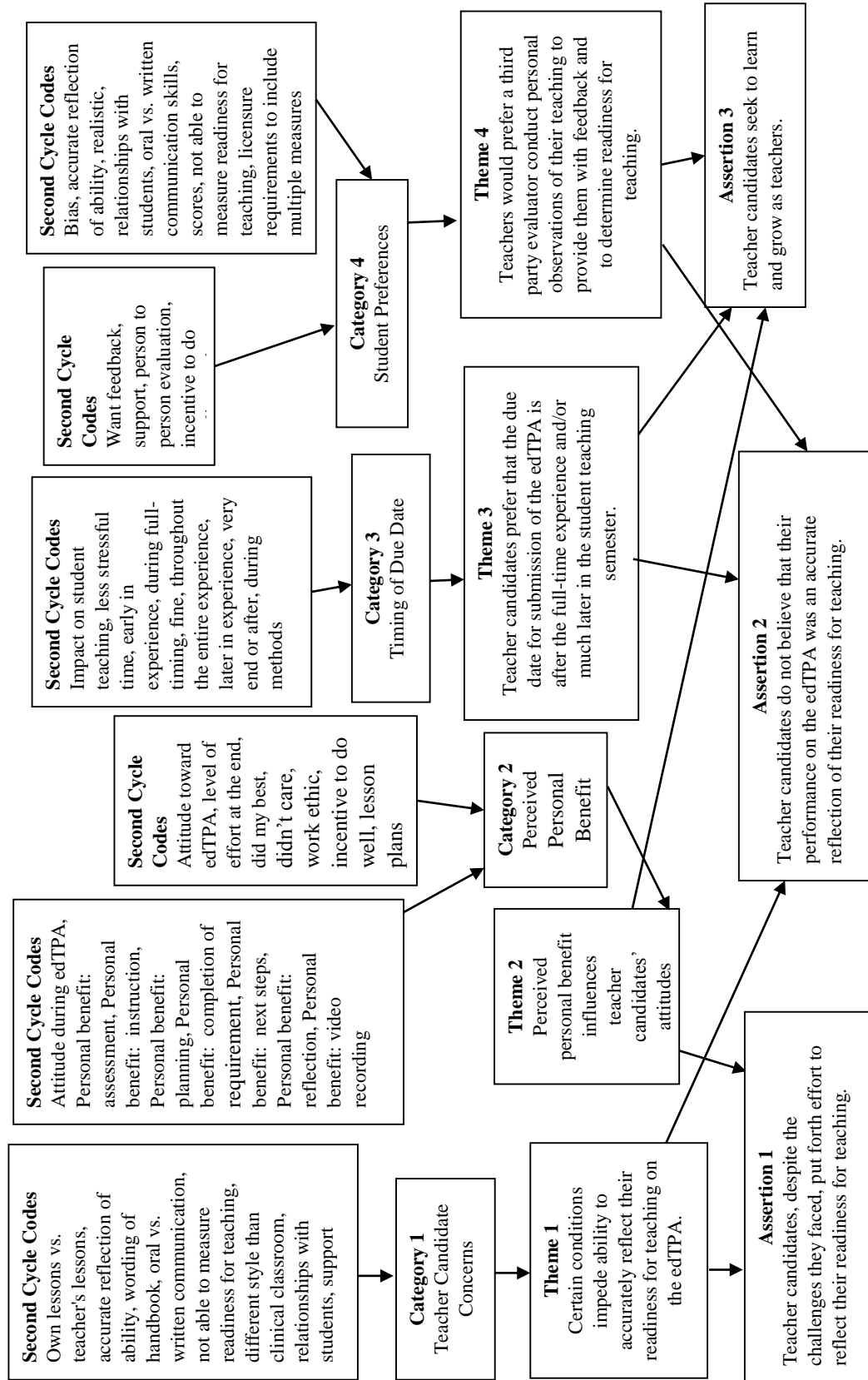


Figure 1. Model Showing Categories and Themes that Lead to the Theory.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

One purpose of the study was to examine whether the quality of candidate work was dependent on the timing of the assignment. Equally important, the study examined whether the quality of candidate work was also dependent on teacher candidates' perceptions of the personal benefits of the edTPA. The aim of this chapter is to present the results of the qualitative data gathered from teacher interviews to answer the research questions which led to the formation of an emerging grounded theory.

This chapter is organized around four themes that emerged from data analysis. As discussed in the previous chapter, data analysis occurred in a multistep, recursive process where the data were coded with the In Vivo method. As a result of the coding process and data analysis, four themes emerged:

- Teacher candidates believed that certain conditions impacted their ability to accurately reflect their readiness for teaching on the edTPA;
- Perceptions related to personal benefit influenced teacher candidates' attitudes regarding the edTPA which in turn affected their willingness to put forth effort to do quality work;

- Teacher candidates preferred that the due date for submission of the edTPA be after the full-time experience and /or much later in the student teaching semester;
- Teacher candidates preferred that a third party evaluator conduct personal observations of their teaching to provide them with feedback and to determine readiness for the field.

Each theme will be discussed in this chapter. A discussion of the theory emerging from the themes will conclude the chapter.

Theme One: Certain Conditions Impede Ability to Accurately Reflect their Readiness for Teaching on the edTPA

The first theme reflects the data associated with the concerns participants had regarding conditions that could have an impact on their ability to reflect their readiness for teaching on the edTPA. This theme has four main components describing the conditions that concerned participants. The four components include:

- accurate reflection of ability
- wording of the handbook
- different style of teaching
- support before and during the edTPA.

Accurate Reflection of Ability

Teacher candidates expressed serious doubts about the effectiveness of the edTPA to be an accurate reflection of their ability to teach or their readiness for the field. The doubts expressed by the teacher candidates can be organized into four main

areas of concern: using their own lesson plans instead of the lessons prepared by their cooperating teacher, oral and written communication skills, relationships with students in the classroom, and the unrealistic nature of the assessment. In this section, the teacher candidates' words will describe their concerns regarding these areas.

Own lessons vs. teachers' lessons. The edTPA is an assessment designed to measure the readiness of teacher candidates' readiness for the field. However, one concern expressed by participants is that depending on the timing of the assessment, some teacher candidates were actually teaching lessons that were not their own. Teacher candidates that complete the edTPA early in the student teaching experience may have been given pre-planned lessons to teach. Pre-planned lessons do not allow teacher candidates to demonstrate the same level of planning and preparation as lessons they create themselves. Teacher candidates believed that since they were not teaching their own lessons, their readiness for teaching could not be accurately reflected on the edTPA. Of the 22 participants in the study, five experienced this situation. Megan reported, "I was very much still teaching my cooperating teacher's units. It was already scripted." Tony added further support to this idea by saying, "My lesson plan was so set by the curriculum already that I didn't really change a lot. A few of the things I tried to change to kind of make it fit what the edTPA was looking for."

Megan discussed the reality of her situation. She completed her edTPA with lesson plans given to her by her cooperating teacher. However, she was able to plan her own lessons during her full timing experience. She remarked, "I actually had to plan this

unit [during full timing]. Rather than, oh here you can have these three lessons in this unit that I've already planned because it's my classroom [lessons completed for edTPA]."

Oral and written communication skills. Teacher candidates expressed concern regarding written and oral communication skills. All three edTPA tasks require teacher candidates to articulate—in writing—their readiness for teaching through written responses to prompts. As an example, the planning task of the Elementary Literacy handbook has five categories (planning for literacy learning, planning to support varied student learning needs, using knowledge of students to inform teaching and learning, identifying and supporting language demands, planning assessments to monitor and support student learning) with several prompts for each category. The candidates must respond to all prompts (some with multiple questions in the prompt) in no more than nine single-spaced pages. The page limit requirement also acts as a guide for the teacher candidates.

Four teacher candidates believed that with the intensive writing requirement of the edTPA, those who were not strong writers were at a disadvantage in displaying their readiness for teaching. This was a particular concern for Alex:

I would gladly talk about my lesson, talk about what I could do better, talk about my rapport with students, talk about the assessment even, because my ideas don't go to my fingertips very well. I'm a lot better with my voice than with writing things down.

An additional concern regarding writing was that good writers had an unfair advantage over poor writers. The edTPA's requirement for extensive commentaries may be an advantage for good writers and possibly even allow teacher candidates to mask poor teaching. Two participants expressed concern about the possibility of good writers to conceal their lack of teaching ability. Joy conveyed this concern when she said:

It's hard because I could imagine my roommate who is not education-inclined doing well on the edTPA. She can write up a storm. She could write everything she wanted. But is that going to make her a good employee? No, not in a school. There's no way to measure this, that un-nameable value that makes good teachers.

Aubrey concurred, "You could pass all that writing junk and you could look fine in the video and you could teach, treat your students like crap. So, that should pass you?"

Relationships with students. Out of 15 rubrics on the edTPA, one addresses classroom environment. The criteria in the rubric describes rapport with students as an indicator of good teaching. Teacher candidates are prompted to describe the positive learning environment that would be supported with evidence on the attached video recording. This is the only prompt and rubric that examines the relationship between teacher candidates and their students. According to eight participants, one video clip and three written commentaries could not fully indicate relationships built with students. Participants believed that without substantial evidence of their relationships

with their students, the edTPA was not able to accurately reflect their readiness for teaching.

One reason that participants felt that the video clip did not reflect their relationships with students was that the students were not featured in the video clip that was submitted. The edTPA requires the submission of one video recording with a maximum length as evidence of readiness for teaching. Teacher candidates choose the best video clip to reflect their teaching as defined by the rubrics. The guidelines for the video clip do not require that the students' faces be included in the video clip. The submitted video clip may or may not make it possible for the scorer to see the teacher candidate's students' reactions and expressions during the lessons. Lauren stated, "You have to see the expression on the children's faces. You have to see how they act around you." Aaron also mentioned the need for evidence of "how well the students respond to you."

Another reason that participants felt that the edTPA did not reflect their relationships with students was that relationships with students often occurred outside of the actual lesson time. There were many opportunities in a school day to interact and build relationships with students that are not attached to a specific lesson. In fact, Joy said, "Half the time my rapport with students is not when I'm teaching. I have forged relationships with my students outside the classroom."

For five participants, the edTPA did not assign value to the relationships that teacher candidates have with their students. Teacher candidates do not respond to any

specific prompts that measure relationships with students. For example, Megan commented, “I don’t necessarily think that they had questions about interacting with students.” Amanda illustrated this idea with her comment:

It’s trying to quantify something that isn’t easy to quantify. It’s hard to put a measure on some of these things and they are trying to say what are the statistics that go with it. Teaching is so much more. It’s all about the relationships and the management of the classroom, and the how are you interacting. [It is] much less about the quantitative piece, because without that other stuff you can’t teach anything.

Chris added further support to this idea when he said, “It [the edTPA] takes like the human aspects out of it.” Aaron affirmed this sentiment, “I feel like it’s dehumanized and when you dehumanize it then you’re missing half of what teaching is.”

Finally, Emily had this to say, “Who’s determining what’s a good teacher? Is it the teacher that scores a five on the edTPA or is it the teacher that can connect with their students and you know cares about them as human beings?”

Unrealistic. The edTPA examines and evaluates readiness for teaching based on evidence in three specific areas: planning, instruction, and assessment. Teacher candidates are given guidelines and rubrics to aid them in their responses and choice of video clip to submit. There was an impression among teacher candidates that the written commentaries and chosen video clips are not realistic because they themselves ultimately have control of the presentation of the evidence. Six participants took

particular issue with the video recording requirements. Ann questioned the realistic nature of the edTPA by saying:

We all knew that this was coming. We prepared for this. When we videotaped we made sure this was the best lesson plan we could ever write. I'm sure some of us even said, "Kids, I'm videotaping. Let's be on our best behavior."

Similarly, Lauren stated, "You can just doctor the time that you've done the video and also the articulating of your stuff." Aubrey agreed, "I think, it's a video tape. You could act your way through that. People can fake their way through that." On a related note, Lauren shared this perspective:

It's that video clip that kills me the most. I don't think that could show how well of a teacher I could be. Maybe it makes me look worse than I actually am. But I also think that that could make me look better than I actually am.

Aside from the issues regarding the video recording, four participants expressed concerns over the unrealistic nature of the written commentaries. Tony made his case when he said, "[I] just tried to answer the questions the way they seemed to want it answered." Aubrey illustrated the point with the following comment:

That's another thing, too, is this assessment piece. I did a rubric. I did a paragraph on each student on how they did. Oh I see you know what a right angle is, even though you didn't label it 90 degrees. You must have known that because you found the other angles, and then I formed groups afterwards and did small groups and I still scored terrible on my assessment. How realistic is it?

They have to be realistic. You can't have this perfect assessment where you're sitting down for 5 minutes with each child going over how they did. It's not realistic. It's just not.

To meet the criteria on the edTPA assessment rubrics, Aubrey believed she needed to provide very extensive feedback. It was her interpretation of the criteria and expectations of the assessment. As stated above, she did not consider it to be a realistic expectation of teachers.

Wording of Handbook

The edTPA handbook is the guide to the completion of the edTPA. All of the requirements, technical specifications, definitions, and guidelines are included in one document. For example, the elementary literacy handbook is 46 pages long. The secondary social studies handbook has 49 pages. The other content area handbooks are in the same range. Included in the handbooks for all content areas are 15 rubrics by which the teacher candidate's work is evaluated. Teacher candidates found the handbook and rubrics difficult to navigate. For example, Ann commented on this idea with her statement:

I think the number of prompts per section, it made me second guess myself more than anything because I felt like I didn't have enough to say almost because you were kind of rewording stuff. I didn't want to just regurgitate what I had said.

Chris expressed similar concern, “It’s very confusing wording and there’s like 80,000 rubrics, so half of my time was spent decoding this packet and not necessarily decoding my teaching.” Tony illustrated his situation when he said, “The questions, I felt like, were written with so much academic wording. I honestly sometimes read the question 15 times and wasn’t sure what they were asking for.” Aubrey illustrated this point with this description: “You didn’t know you need to be NASA smart to figure out the instructions.”

Jackie also agreed as she stated, “The edTPA is so wordy.” The wordiness and length of the prompts for each section was of particular concern for this participant. She continued, “I just felt like I was being so redundant, which I know you said that it was supposed to be like. As an English major, I just disagree with that on so many levels.” However, she wasn’t the only participant that took issue with the redundancy of the edTPA. Other participants concurred. Echoing the same sentiment, Amanda remarked, “The fact that the instructions are so dense, does it really take 90 pages to explain how to do this? I don’t know. They just repeat themselves over and over again.”

One participant shared her solution to the difficulty with the handbook. Monica recounted, “I rewrote it all because it was very complex. For us to receive 15 rubrics that we are going to be graded on is just very overwhelming when it’s written in the way that they’re written in.”

Different Style of Teaching

According to the outcomes described on the edTPA official website, the edTPA will, “Create a body of evidence about teacher performance that will ultimately establish a national standard for relevant and rigorous practice that advances student learning” (<http://edtpa.aacte.org/about-edtpa#Outcomes-4>, para. 1). Some teacher candidates are placed in situations where teaching practices may not be in accordance with edTPA rubric descriptions. Megan illustrated this idea when she said:

Well, I struggled because, and you know this, what the edTPA wanted from me was completely not what I was being, seeing in my classroom. My classroom was just not the way I wanted to present myself to the edTPA. Now I need to shift my instructing from what they’re used to, to fitting what the edTPA wants from me. Now here I am thinking on how I’m teaching and not how they’re going to learn from this.

Likewise, Ann asserted, “I think that was hard because I don’t know if it was necessarily a true measure of my teaching because it’s not how I would have done it.” In agreement, Tyler said:

“I had to kind of change it to fit their rigid structure of the edTPA to make it how they wanted it. I feel like it takes away from your effectiveness of your teaching. You’re always thinking about it because there is so much importance and weight put into it. I feel like it takes away from more rewarding, more authentic [teaching]. It’s more important to teach those students and make sure that they

know that you care and you're teaching them than it is to these Pearson people knowing that you can think this way."

Ann further commented on this issue:

I felt like I was guiding my teaching more towards that so I could write about it and I didn't know if I was necessarily hitting on everything. I only had 50 minutes a day to try and hit on everything but I had to make sure that I had enough time for this edTPA task and still kind of stay with the little bubble that our team had already put together.

Not only did teacher candidates face style differences in teaching with the classroom supervisor and the edTPA, they also expressed concern regarding their own style differences. For example, Lauren said, "The edTPA just didn't, it wasn't just my style at all for the majority of it. How could I grow from that?" Adding further support, Ann remarked, "I think I would have chosen the same strategy, the same skill but done it more my style."

Support

A comprehensive assessment, such as the edTPA, expects teacher candidates to have the knowledge and skills necessary to demonstrate readiness for teaching. Underpinning this expectation, teacher preparation programs must prepare their candidates with the knowledge and skills needed to demonstrate their readiness for teaching as the edTPA has defined it. Additionally, as previously discussed, the edTPA handbook is extensive. Monica lamented, "It was a lot of questions and there were 15

rubrics to go by.” There are several components teacher candidates are required to consider as they complete the assessment. Technical specifications, 15 rubrics, guidelines for each of the three tasks, and vocabulary that may be unfamiliar to teacher candidates. For example, Megan shared, “I didn’t really know what I was looking at.” Navigating through the process and handbook can be overwhelming and confusing. Nicole stated,

It was a lot of information. I read through it. But I was still kind of like I don’t really know what this looks like. I still don’t quite understand it. So I think maybe just prior to it I would have been a little more prepared on the format.

Similarly Tony reported, “Every question has like five parts in it. You have to discern what part to put where.” Participants addressed both the need for support prior to the completion of the edTPA as well as during student teaching.

Prior to student teaching. Coursework prior to student teaching is intended to provide teacher candidates with knowledge and skills to be a good and effective teacher. Five participants felt that there was insufficient exposure to and preparation for the assessment. Tom illustrated this point as he stated, “I feel like we just dove off the deep end with it and it was very nerve-wracking for us social studies teachers.”

Tyler concurred:

That was the first time I heard of the edTPA [student teacher meeting held the week prior to the start of student teaching]. That was the first time I had been introduced to anything about it. It would have been nice to be able to go

through this. Maybe not the whole thing, but do a simulation and get feedback on it. Because it's kind of like our first time doing something like this and with the integrity, you can't give quite the feedback that you would be able to if you simulated this in class prior to the student teaching experience. That way you kind of have like a practice or a warm-up to doing it because it's kind [of] a new way of thinking. I feel like that was new to me.

Joy expressed a similar opinion on the preparation for the edTPA, "I also think that we were not adequately prepared for the process of what the edTPA looks like or any of that nature until we got to the edTPA." Nicole reported the same perspective, "I think if I would have been a little more prepared [prior to student teaching]. I think what took me so long to get started and really to like hunker down was that I didn't really know what I was looking at."

During student teaching. SCALE has strict guidelines for ethical coaching during edTPA completion. According to the edTPA Guidelines for Acceptable Candidate Support (2014), examples of ethical coaching allow college supervisors to provide support by explaining edTPA tasks and scoring rubrics, provide support documents, and to ask probing questions about candidates' drafts, video recordings with no direct edits (SCALE, 2014). As a result, college supervisors and teacher educators may be guarded about the support they provide so as not to violate the ethical coaching policies of SCALE. Indeed, participants were concerned about inadequate support during the process of edTPA completion for such an important and monumental assessment. Joy

shared her frustration when she said, “I’m like, I need answers. Like I actually have like tangible questions [during edTPA completion]. Jon agreed:

I couldn’t seek support from my cooperating teacher or anything. If I was a real teacher and was having issues with lesson planning or assessment or anything like that, I could go to other teachers in my district or administration and ask for help.

Likewise, Joy stated, “It’s difficult because I can’t ever ask any questions of the edTPA.”

Teacher candidates were aware of the edTPA’s purpose in assessing their readiness for teaching. However, they believed that several conditions impeded their ability to accurately reflect their readiness for teaching. Among these conditions were the wording of the handbook, differing styles of teaching, and the lack of additional support.

Theme Two: Perceptions Related to Personal Benefit Influenced Teacher Candidates’ Attitudes Regarding the edTPA which in Turn Affected their Willingness to Put Forth Effort to do Quality Work

This section will discuss the data that relate to teacher candidates’ perceived personal benefit of edTPA completion. There are four components within this theme that include:

- Attitude during the edTPA
- Reflection
- Planning
- Instruction
- Assessment.

Attitude During edTPA

Frustration and anxiety were experienced by many participants during edTPA completion. Of the 22 participants, nearly all (20) reported a negative attitude regarding the assessment. They clearly expressed that teaching was their priority and were disturbed by the time commitment required to complete the edTPA. Jon illustrated this point as he said:

I was just really frustrated with the TPA. Like why am I doing this? Like, here I feel like I'm a great student. I've always loved doing school and taking classes and, but that just felt so time-consuming to me.

One participant, Emily, similarly described her experience:

Well, I focused less on the edTPA when I'm in my teaching clinic, because I care more about the clinical because I'm getting more out of it. I care more about that so, actually I think completing the edTPA is the farthest thing on my mind when I'm trying to write lessons and actually teach.

Aaron conveyed his attitude with one succinct statement: "It was never important to me, ever." Citing the reason, Lauren reported her attitude during the edTPA, "I've heard so much negative about it beforehand [from former teacher candidates]. Put me in the wrong mindset before I even started."

Finally, Aaron expressed this perspective:

I love everything about that [score not attached to ability to be licensed] because I don't care about it. I'm not going to put all my effort into it because it doesn't

matter at all. I would rather focus on my teaching skills and what I'm doing in the classroom than writing a paper and wasting my time.

Two participants indicated that due to their work ethic and personal responsibility, they put forth their best effort on the edTPA. Two participants believed in their ability to earn 5s and therefore, put in many hours and great effort to achieve the elusive 5. A score of 5 on any of the rubrics is difficult to achieve as it is considered to be indicative of a "highly skilled accomplished beginner" (edtpa.aacte.org, 2014).

Twelve participants described a lower level of effort on the assessment since the edTPA does not require a minimum score to obtain licensure. To illustrate this point, Joy said, "I mean like when your butt's not on the line you're not going to work nearly as hard." Tom indicated agreement as he stated, "I honestly think I would have focused more [if a minimum score was required to obtain licensure]." Tom reported his view on the issue: "[the edTPA does not require a minimum score] lowers the motivation to work."

Personal Benefit: Reflection

Throughout each of the three edTPA tasks, teacher candidates reflect on their instructional decisions, the results of those decisions, and the achievement of their students in relation to the objectives of the teaching event. For example, teacher candidates are prompted to describe proposed changes to their instructional practices, including the rationale behind those changes. Consequently, reflection is a major component that is woven throughout the entire assessment. Of the 22 participants, 13 expressed the reflection component as a personal benefit of the edTPA. For example,

Megan reported, “I do think the reflection part, going back and talking about it and seeing how you can grow, I think that is the most beneficial part of the edTPA.” Nicole expressed agreement: “The most beneficial part of the edTPA was the reflection portion for me.” Joy described her experience with reflection on the edTPA:

It really forced me to reflect on my individual lessons because it’s really easy to do a lesson and be like, well that worked or well it didn’t work. It’s really hard to go back and be like, did this informal assessment actually tell me something or did it help them instead of doing it for the sake of doing it. So it really forced me to wonder why I’m doing the things I am doing and the process in which I do them.

Lastly, Jon added further support, “I was able to look at it and examine it more closely, I guess and understand why I was doing things and how it was going to help the students.”

While there were no reports of participants in disagreement with the benefit of the edTPA’s reflection component, one participant held the view that the edTPA did not develop that benefit for him. Chris stated, “...the introspection portion of it can be helpful moving forward, but that’s all my own doing.”

Personal Benefit: Lesson Planning

The planning task of the edTPA requires teacher candidates to be explicit and deliberate in writing the commentaries regarding the planning of the teaching event. The planning task requires submission of several items, including detailed lesson plans,

responses to prompts where teacher candidates articulate a rationale for the chosen instructional strategies, planned support for students' needs, and assessments that will show students' progress toward the central focus of the teaching event. Five participants felt that this task was a personal benefit in their development as a teacher. For example, Joy reported, "I was able to improve my analytical skills in terms of lesson planning. It's probably the biggest benefit that I got." Tom supported this idea when he said:

I would completely agree with having to choose a central focus right off the bat [lesson planning]. The edTPA really drove home the fact that you need a theme or you need some kind of connecting question that you can go back to at the end of every lesson.

Chris expressed a similar perspective:

Then I was able to kind of practice planning a lesson with all the parts I need instead of just saying we're going to do a lecture today, and then I am going to show a video. Then we're going to break into groups, I was able to look at it and examine it more closely.

Likewise, Jackie described a personal benefit she received from the planning task, "Break it down, think what you're doing, think about why you need to do this, what's the research and theory behind it, but more importantly, it was the what are you going to do about it."

Five participants specifically identified planning as a personal benefit. The other 17 participants did not. On the other hand, no participants opposed the possibility of planning as a benefit.

Personal Benefit: Instruction

Similar to the planning task, the instruction task requires teacher candidates to demonstrate their readiness for teaching through explicit and detailed responses to prompts in the commentaries. The instruction task has an additional requirement. Teacher candidates submit a video recording of themselves teaching the lessons associated with and developed in the planning task. There are specific length guidelines as well as technical specifications that teacher candidates must consider. Specifically, the value of the video recording was discussed.

Even though participants did not feel that the submitted video clip was able to reflect relationships with students, they did feel that the video recording portion of the assessment was valuable. Eight participants indicated that the video recording component of the instruction task was of personal benefit to them. For example, Jon said:

The part that I felt that was most beneficial for me was the videotaping. Even though I hated watching myself and listening to myself, that was the most effective thing [video recording] because you do and say so many things you have no idea that you do when you're actually doing them."

Jackie concurred as she stated:

It was really helpful to watch myself teach as much as I hate it. It's completely necessary and it's definitely changed the way that I teach. I try to slow down when I speak and I try not to like use my hands.

Even though 14 participants did not identify the video recording as a personal benefit, there were no opposing views on the benefit of the video recording as a benefit.

Personal Benefit: Assessment

The assessment task is the final one on the edTPA. As with the planning and instruction tasks, teacher candidates must respond to prompts that describe student achievement in relation to the teaching event in an explicit and detailed manner. The assessment task requires teacher candidates to submit artifacts of student work, as well as evaluation criteria with a description of whole class and individual achievement. Upon analysis of student achievement, teacher candidates describe next steps that relate to the objectives of the teaching event and student performance.

For example, Jackie stated, "It was actually really helpful to focus on the assessments." Samantha expressed agreement, "The assessment part, the other two parts were kind of like, 'hmmm', but that assessment one I feel like was most helpful to me." Alex reported a change in his thinking after completing the assessment task as he said, "Am I thoroughly assessing them on what they're doing? I think I thought more about that now that it's done." In agreement, Joy stated, "Now I understand what it

means to look at a test and decide like how many kids got it right or wrong and why, what kinds of responses, or things like that.”

Similar to the benefits of planning and video recording, no participants opposed the possibility of assessment as a personal benefit.

Despite frustration with the time-intensive process of the edTPA and concerns regarding the assessment’s ability to accurately reflect their readiness for teaching, teacher candidates were able to describe personal benefits resulting from the assessment. There were, however, diverse opinions regarding which components were of personal benefit.

Theme Three: Teacher Candidates Prefer that the Due Date for Submission of the edTPA is After the Full-Time Experience and/or Much Later in the Student Teaching Semester

Faculty in teacher education programs must assign a due date for teacher candidates to electronically submit their edTPA portfolio to Pearson for scoring. The teacher education program is dependent on students’ scores to obtain program approval (edtpaminnesota.org, 2014). Therefore, the timing of the due date needs to be at a time conducive to teacher candidates’ willingness to put forth a good effort to reflect their readiness. Participants were articulate in expressing their views on this topic. This section will consider the impact that the edTPA had on student teaching, assigning the due date early in the experience, and assigning the due date later in the experience.

Impact on Student Teaching

According to participants, the edTPA had an impact on their student teaching experience. The amount of time required to complete the edTPA is extensive. There was a range of hours for completion among the participants. On the low end, one participant, Jackie, reported “between eight and 12 [hours]. It’s hard to say because so often I would be working on it and then get distracted by something else.” Similarly, Sarah stated, “It probably took me about 2 hours for each task, just the commentary or the typing and then probably another 2 hours for my video editing and touching everything up. So that would be 8 total.” Alternatively, one participant, Chris estimated his completion time as he said, “100 [hours] easily with all of the stuff I had to figure out just to get it done.” Another participant, Monica reported, “It took me probably 80 hours to complete it. Yeah, a lot of time.” Of the 22 participants, nine indicated their time commitment was in the 30-60 hour range. Several participants expressed frustration of the time commitment’s impact on their student teaching experience.

Participants reported the edTPA negatively impacted their ability to plan future lessons. Opportunities and time to look forward, plan upcoming units and innovative lessons may have lessened due to time spent on the assessment. For example, Emily said, “I think it absolutely took away from my planning time.” Tom agreed as he stated:

I agree it took away a little bit from how much time I could spend on trying to get creative with lessons or putting stuff up in the classroom and that kind of stuff.

My energies were devoted to something that was not directly related to helping my students.

Joy reported, "I felt like I put so much into edTPA that I didn't have the stamina to sit down and go 'okay, let's do two full units for both the classes that I teach.'" Aaron stated, "I wasn't teaching with this in mind ever. It just more so took time out of my planning." Monica concurred, "I found a lot of time that I could have used planning lessons and making lessons very effective were spent doing my edTPA."

Another negative impact reported by participants was the need to focus on the classroom, rather than the edTPA. Participants reported that their primary focus was on edTPA completion during a portion of their time in the classroom; rather than concentrating on their student teaching responsibilities. For example, Mike asserted:

I think having the edTPA done really helped me just to be able to focus on my classroom. I can focus on what I'm going to do every single day, how it's going to change what I do tomorrow, how it's going to affect what we did yesterday.

A similar sentiment was shared by Emily, "You are thinking about it all the time;" Taylor remarked, "You have to focus so much on the edTPA instead of focusing on your student teaching classroom;" Lauren stated, "I think that it consumed more of my thoughts and didn't allow me to you know, stretch my creativity here and there;" and Nicole said, "The Monday that we turned in the edTPA, which I didn't turn in on time, but that whole student teaching that week was day to day. 'Oh, crap, what am I going to do? Oh crap, what am I going to do?'" Finally, Monica who reported spending 80 hours

completing her edTPA stated, “I think it severely interfered with growth I could have made during that time.”

Early in Student Teaching Experience

Should the due date for edTPA submission be early in the experience? There were six participants in agreement with an early due date. They had different perspectives regarding an early due date.

The participants who supported an early submission date believed there would be less of an impact on their student teaching experience if done early. For example, Monica remarked, “I think it would be beneficial to do it at the beginning so that then you can focus more on student teaching.” Megan made a similar comment, “Doing it earlier, that’s great. You can get it out of the way.” Joy agreed as she said, “I would suggest a little bit earlier, just so we can move on from it and start strong with student teaching instead of feeling like you’re tired in mid-November.”

An alternative perspective was shared by three participants. Those participants alleged that the knowledge gained during the edTPA would improve their teaching during the remainder of the experience. For example, Taylor stated:

I know that looking back, starting student teaching, I was doing those things because we talked about them in methods and stuff. But having going in deeper and making myself look at how I’m teaching and how I’m reaching to the kids, that I think it does help a lot [throughout the rest of the experience].

Alex agreed, "Like after the edTPA I've become such a better teacher." Ann also indicated agreement as she stated, "I think it was nice to see that there are multiple ways to teach it...so I think that's been nice to think about for the rest of my teaching."

Late in Student Teaching Experience

The majority, (15) of the participants preferred a submission due date late in the student teaching experience. They believed that by waiting until late in the experience there is a greater likelihood that their readiness for teaching will be more accurately reflected in the score. For example, Chris announced, "It is the most accurate portrayal of our readiness at the end." Taylor concurred, "If you want to pass and get a good score obviously, it's better to take it at the end because you're a better student teacher by the end." Similarly, Megan stated:

I think that I would turn out a much better product or a more accurate product that would reflect what I can do. You know, I feel like you wouldn't be so crunched into that time frame. You could give it and your full time teaching equal amounts of attention and I think that it would better portray your readiness.

An additional recommendation was provided by Lauren as she stated:

I think if you had half a week and that was the only thing you were doing you could easily get this done. So if that was your one right thing and maybe it's more like a finals type deal where hey you finished this one week off and when

everyone else on campus is doing finals during that three to four days is your edTPA time.”

Another suggestion was offered for an edTPA submission due date. There were two participants who thought the due date should be after the conclusion of student teaching. The impact on student teaching would then be eliminated. Amanda rationalized, “...so that you can gather all of the information that you need to not worry about student teaching and not planning lessons and then focus on it. I would do that.” Monica concurred, “You could do the planning and practicum setting [Context for Learning portion of the edTPA], but I would say for the due date, definitely wait at least a month after you’re done student teaching.”

Due to the time-intensive nature of the edTPA, teacher candidates believed that it negatively impacted their teaching during the days and weeks of completion. For that reason, the timing of the assessment is of utmost concern for teacher candidates.

Theme Four: Teacher Candidates would Prefer a Third Party Evaluator Conduct Personal Observations of their Teaching to Provide them with Feedback and to Determine Readiness for Teaching

The fourth and final theme that emerged from the voices of the participants was a preference for a third party evaluator to determine readiness for teaching. It was their view that a third party evaluator would be best able to make that determination. Currently, the edTPA requires teacher candidates to submit their written commentaries, artifacts, and video recording to a Pearson website. There is no personal interaction with the scorer. Therefore the quality of their written commentaries and video

recording is of great importance. This section will examine the candidates' belief that a third party evaluator would allow a more accurate reflection of readiness for teaching and the participants' desire to receive feedback from an unbiased third party evaluator.

Accurate Reflection

One major complaint that participants expressed was the skepticism regarding the edTPA's ability to be an accurate reflection of their readiness for teaching. There were two reasons for the skepticism. They believed that multiple personal observations over time would be a better representation of their readiness for teaching. They also expressed concern about the capability of a written assessment to be an accurate reflection of teaching ability. Both issues will be examined.

Teacher candidates are observed by their classroom supervisors and their college supervisors. Conversations following those observations allow teacher candidates to articulate their rationale for instructional decisions. Classroom and college supervisors are able to observe the growth and development of teaching ability throughout the entire student teaching experience. Participants indicated their value and appreciation for this structure. For example, Aaron said:

I had a really good relationship with my university supervisor. He was able to see me in the classroom and how well I could work with the students and communicate with them and kind of just, how my teaching quality was overall.

Similarly, Tyler reported:

Articulation vs. the performance thing is my big thing. I think if these Pearson people were to send somebody in for a week at a time or like a certain day of the week, every week and they would stay for the day or even half of the day because I understand that with all the different student teachers that would be very hard to do, but I think it's more important to go see them in their environment and throughout a day more than a 20 minute period. I feel that you can just doctor the time that you've done the video and also the articulating of your stuff.

In support of this idea, Lauren stated:

I don't feel like someone fully knows who I am and knows me as a teacher unless they are in my classroom or they're sitting down with me talking with me. So, personally I would love to see some sort of, maybe there is a higher board, someone who you need to interview with or you need to meet with or they need to come and observe you teaching. They come into the classroom and watch your whole lesson or something like that.

Emily concurred:

My students have a total class meltdown and I have to dump the lesson and do jumping jacks for 10 minutes. That is real teaching. That is the reality of what we are. The reality is not this, the edTPA. That is something that you throw together. I think you can only assess it in real life. I don't think you can assess it on a piece of paper.

Ann emphasized the need for a personal observation as she commented, “You have to see the expression on the children’s faces. You have to see how they act around you.”

Within each lesson, teachers react to their students’ responses, behaviors, and understanding of the lesson’s objective. Modifications to lessons may be made instantaneously to respond to students’ needs. For this reason, five participants questioned the ability of a written assessment to accurately reflect readiness for teaching. They believed that effective teaching cannot be measured through writing. Jon illustrated the point as he said, “How can pieces of paper, and numbers, and a ten-minute video clip show who I really am? I do not think that it is an effective way to measure my ability of teaching.”

As previously discussed, teaching is multi-faceted and encompasses much more than one teaching event. Lauren commented on this issue: “There’s just so much that you need to like have to be ready for teaching that it’s so hard to put an assessment to it.” On a related note, Aubrey said, “There’s a lot of variables that go into that one moment.” Similarly, Mike shared his concern, “It’s too sterile and like rigid to properly assess something that’s always changing. It’s like a fluid thing and then you try to contain it into some cage with this.”

The edTPA examines one teaching event with a focus on planning, instruction, and assessment. Other facets of teaching are not addressed on the edTPA. Tony emphasized that point as he stated, “There is so much out there that like how’s your

relationship with your cooperating teacher, what does your principal think, what do you know? Even how your teachers in that grade think that you're doing."

Tom acknowledged another perspective on the issue as he stated, "The way I look at this is it's more so of you being able to articulate what you're going to do teaching. Not so much of how able, how well you are able to actually teach."

Ability to Receive Feedback

The edTPA portfolio is submitted electronically and a numerical score is sent via e-mail approximately one month later. Teacher candidates receive a score of one to five on each of 15 rubrics. They also receive an overall score with 75 maximum points. There are no comments to explain the scores earned. The participants believed that with personal observations, the opportunity to receive feedback would make the assessment valuable to them. They would prefer to receive qualitative feedback that would allow for their personal growth as a teacher. For example, Chris stated:

All of the things that I wrote in the edTPA, I could have had a conversation with someone over like a half an hour about my teaching and I would have been fine and actually learned something from the conversation. I could have that with another teacher or someone else, rather than me trying to analyze it and be like, well this is what I would do but I don't know if what I think I want to do is even a good thing or if it's just completely not going to work at all.

Likewise, Tony said, “You go and have a conversation with that person because when my teacher does a formal assessment on me every week, like we always have a conversation and I grow so much from that conversation.”

Jackie expressed a similar perspective with a modification. She proposed an alternative structure that would also provide the desired feedback from third party evaluators. Jackie described her example as she said:

Different people each time or three people, they do five visits a piece. You’re getting different viewpoints on different aspects of your classroom, everyone’s got their own opinions. They can give you feedback, and they will decide your readiness for your teaching licensure.

To summarize, the teacher candidates who participated in this study were charged with completing a time-intensive assessment, the edTPA, during the student teaching semester where they were also required to meet the expectations of classroom and college supervisors. During this time, they faced conditions they believed impeded their ability to complete the edTPA in a manner that accurately reflected their readiness for teaching. Additionally, they perceived that the edTPA also had a negative impact on their student teaching performance and ability to give an accurate portrayal of their preparedness for the field.

Assertions

The purpose of this study was to answer two questions. The first was, how does the teacher candidates’ perception of personal benefit of the edTPA impact his/her

willingness to complete the assessment to the best of his/her ability? The second was, how does the timing of the edTPA impact the teacher candidates' willingness to invest time to achieve quality work? The coding process led to four themes that in turn lead to three assertions that help to answer these questions.

The first assertion is that teacher candidates, despite the challenges they faced, put forth effort to reflect their readiness for teaching. Evidence of the effort given for the assessment is based on the number of hours teacher candidates dedicated to completion of the edTPA. Participants reported conditions that impeded their performance on the edTPA. Yet, they persevered to meet the challenges and gave effort to the process.

The second assertion is that the participants did not believe their performance on the edTPA was an accurate reflection of their readiness for teaching. There were extenuating conditions that influenced their work. For example, candidates chose the particular video recording that was submitted and this may not have reflected their actual teaching ability.

The third assertion is that participants wanted to learn and grow as teachers. Their preference for a third party evaluator to observe their teaching over multiple visits and to conference with them was evidence of their desire to develop their teaching skills. They also were able to identify personal benefits of the edTPA which they felt contributed to their growth.

Grounded Theory

The focused coding process led to the development of categories, then themes, and finally assertions. In this section, the identification of the central phenomenon, causal conditions, intervening conditions, context, strategies, and consequences will be presented and will ultimately lead to the emerging grounded theory related to this study. Figure 2 provides a graphic of the model and can be found at the end of this chapter.

Central Phenomenon

In a grounded theory study, the concept at the center of the paradigm is the central phenomenon. All codes are connected to the central phenomenon. The central phenomenon of this study was the edTPA which is assigned during the student teaching experience.

Causal Conditions

Occurrences that influence the central phenomenon are considered causal conditions (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Emerging from the data and related to the central phenomenon were two causal conditions. The first causal condition was that the edTPA is a time-intensive assessment. The participants' comments in this study were evidence of this. There were reports of eight to 100 hours devoted to edTPA completion. The second causal condition was that teacher candidates were expected to meet the expectations of the classroom supervisor and the college supervisor during the student teaching experiences as well as complete the edTPA. Classroom and college

supervisors expected teacher candidates to plan and execute innovative and creative lessons that meet the needs of their students. These lessons did not always align with edTPA requirements or time demands.

Context

The context of a grounded theory study are the conditions that interconnect to create a set of situations that require people to respond (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this study, teacher candidates were in their student teacher semester of their senior year. They were placed in a K-12 classroom with a classroom supervisor and assigned a college supervisor. During this time they were also required to complete a portfolio assessment, the edTPA, to demonstrate their readiness for teaching.

Intervening Conditions

Factors that influence the strategies used in response to the central phenomenon are known as intervening conditions (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For teacher candidates completing an edTPA, this study identified four intervening conditions. These include: timing of the assessment, lack of support, written communication, wording of the handbook, and unrealistic situations.

The timing of the assessment was the first intervening condition. Teacher preparation programs assign a due date for the edTPA during the student teaching semester. Candidates are expected to demonstrate readiness for teaching through the quality of their work on the edTPA. The timing of the due date may impact the efforts that teacher candidates are willing to put forth to do quality work.

The second intervening condition was that candidates were allowed minimal support during the completion of the edTPA. It is expected that they are sufficiently prepared to independently complete the assessment. College supervisors and teacher educators are given specific guidelines for ethical coaching while teacher candidates are working on the edTPA.

A third intervening condition related to written communication skills. Those with poorer skills may have negatively impacted a teacher candidate's ability to accurately reflect their readiness for teaching. Alternatively, written communication skills may conceal a teacher candidate's need for additional support.

A fourth intervening condition was the length and wording of the edTPA handbook. The extensive questions, unfamiliar terminology, and number of rubrics were challenging for teacher candidates. Teacher candidates may not have fully understood the questions or rubric criteria. The length of the handbook and specific technical requirements were difficult for teacher candidates to navigate.

The final intervening condition was that teacher candidates believed there were unrealistic situations that impeded an accurate reflection of their readiness for teaching. For example, the video recording was a snapshot of their teaching. The lesson was planned to meet certain criteria prior to the recording and then a clip was selectively chosen to submit as evidence of their teaching. Teacher candidates could control the quality of the evidence that was submitted.

Strategies

Actions taken in response to the intervening conditions are identified in grounded theory as strategies (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This study identified three strategies that teacher candidates employed as they responded to the intervening conditions that impacted their ability to complete the edTPA, which is the central phenomenon.

The first strategy identified was that some teacher candidates taught lessons that they did not create and therefore, were not indicative of their ability to plan lessons. Depending on the timing of the edTPA, teacher candidates taught lessons that were planned by their classroom teacher. Classroom supervisors directed teacher candidates to specific lesson plans and/or curriculum early in the experience which were then used for the teaching event of the edTPA. Tony provided an example of this strategy: “My lesson plan was so set by the curriculum already that I didn’t really change a lot.”

The second strategy identified was that to achieve higher scores on the edTPA, some teacher candidates had to teach in a style that was different from their normal style or from that of their classroom teacher. An example of this strategy is described by Tyler, “I had to kind of change it to fit their rigid structure of the edTPA to make it how they wanted it.”

The third strategy was that teacher candidates spent considerable time to complete the edTPA. Due to the considerable amount of time to complete the edTPA,

they had less time to devote to lesson planning. They reported a range of eight to 100 hours to complete all of the tasks on the edTPA. As an example of this strategy, Chris said, "I would say, easily 100 [hours], I didn't quantify it. Downloading stuff, it was crazy. I would say 100 easily, with all the stuff I had to figure out just to get it done." The time allocated to the edTPA negatively impacted their ability to plan future lessons to the satisfaction of their classroom and college supervisors. Tom provided an example of this as he stated, "So I had three great lessons. And then a couple before and a couple after were not as good as they should have been, because of the work I put into the edTPA." There are a finite number of hours available for teacher candidates. Consequently, they used planning time to work on the edTPA.

Consequences

In grounded theory, consequences are the outcomes or results of the strategies taken to influence the central phenomenon in consideration of the causal and intervening conditions (Creswell, 2013; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As the teacher candidates employed the aforementioned strategies resulting from the central phenomenon, context and intervening conditions, there were three resulting consequences.

First, the performance on the edTPA was likely not an accurate reflection of the teacher candidates' readiness for teaching. According to Samantha, "I feel like that in some ways it measures your ability to like be able to do something in a very detailed way more so than it really measure your teaching ability." An additional perspective on

this topic was stated by Chris, “I think it’s a snapshot, just like standardized tests for kids. Snapshot of that day, and that time, and you know you might not have been on your game that day.”

A second consequence identified by the study was that the participants were frustrated and anxious during the completion of the edTPA. An example of this was expressed by Joy, “It was incredible, the amount of stress we were put under for like a month.” Nicole provided another example, “I think that the edTPA...isn’t always going to be the best judgment of what you can do or the best assessment of what a teacher is capable of because of the anxiety portion of it.”

A third consequence, teacher candidates perceived that they did receive personal benefits from the edTPA. Three components of the assessment were identified as personal benefits to the teacher candidates. The planning and video recording as well as the assessment task were reported as personal benefits. Tom commented on the planning task, “It really helped with planning the unit I did in my Social Studies room.” Jackie also identified planning as a benefit of completing the edTPA as she stated, “The day to day planning [was a personal benefit]”.

The video recording was perceived as a personal benefit to participants as well despite the concerns that the video clip did not accurately reflect relationships with students. When discussing the video recording, Jackie reported this as a personal benefit as she commented, “It was also really helpful to watch myself teach as much as I hate it. It’s completely necessary.” Ann reported the impact the video had on her

teaching, “I find myself now just kind of popping the iPad up just so I can see how a lesson goes.”

Finally, the assessment task was also perceived to be of personal benefit. Participants indicated a better understanding of the connection between planning, instruction, and assessment as a result of the edTPA. Tom expressed his perspective as he made this comment, “It helped me see the big picture like when students look back at this class what are they going to learn? They are not going to remember the activity. But if they could learn something.”

An Emerging Theory

The participants in this study were articulate in describing their experiences and perspectives regarding the process of completing an edTPA. Most participants expressed frustration and stress while working on the assessment during student teaching, a capstone experience. Nearly all of the participants voiced that they faced challenges that made it difficult or even impossible for their work on the edTPA to accurately reflect their readiness for teaching. However, despite the challenges faced during edTPA completion, most were able to recognize personal benefits. It is noteworthy, too, that despite frustration and anxiety during the edTPA, many participants devoted considerable time to complete the assessment. They may have perceived that the edTPA was not an accurate reflection of their readiness for teaching, but they were willing to devote time to complete the assessment.

Finally, most of the participants believed that if the due date of the edTPA were later in the student teaching experience, their readiness for teaching would be more accurately reflected. By completing the edTPA later in the experience, they would have had more time to develop their teaching skills, prepare their own lessons, and the work load would decrease which would allow for more time for quality work on the edTPA.

Chapter Five will discuss the findings from this study in relation to the current literature. Researcher conclusions, recommendations for further study, and the implications of the study will also be presented and discussed.

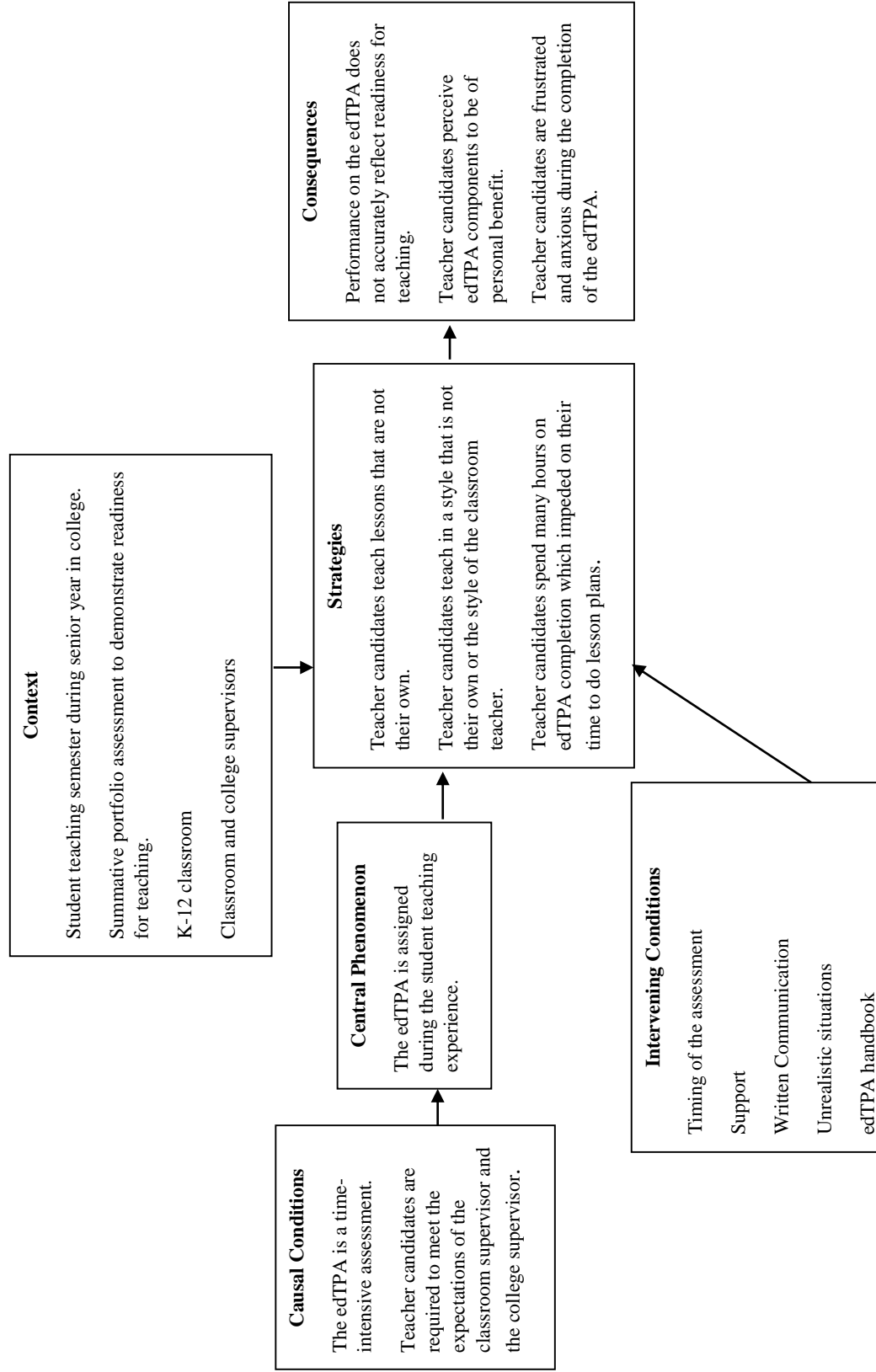


Figure 2. Grounded Theory Model.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

The purpose of the study was to examine how the teacher candidates' perceptions of personal benefit of the edTPA impacts their willingness to complete the assessment to the best of their ability. Of equal importance, the study examined how they perceived the timing of the ed TPA impacted their willingness to invest time and energy to do quality work. Analyzing participants' perspectives of the edTPA, the study revealed that participants perceived the edTPA was not an accurate reflection of their readiness for teaching, yet they were willing to devote time to complete the assessment. The study also found that participants believed their edTPA performance would be a better reflection of their readiness for teaching if it were due later in the student teaching semester.

The objective of this final chapter is to integrate the findings of the study with current research on portfolio assessment, in particular the edTPA. While there have been some studies on the edTPA as an assessment tool, this study may contribute to the conversation on how to support teacher candidates and teacher preparation programs with edTPA implementation. Other sections of this chapter will discuss conclusions, recommendations, and implications. Reflections on the research process will conclude this chapter.

Summary of Findings in Relation to Current Literature

The objective of this section is to present the findings of this study in relation to current research on portfolio assessment, and in particular, the edTPA. The emerging theory will be addressed in relation to the literature on this topic. This section is organized around each of the themes that emerged during the study.

Theme One: Teacher candidates believed that certain conditions impacted their ability to accurately reflect their readiness for teaching on the edTPA.

The findings of this study are in agreement with the research of Okhremtchouk, Seiki, Giilliland, Ateh, Wallace, and Kato (2009). In a very similar study, the researchers investigated the impact of the PACT on the personal and professional lives of teacher candidates. It is noteworthy that participants in both studies commented on similar issues related to performance assessment completion. The participants in the current study referenced several conditions (writing ability, own vs. teacher's lessons, different teaching style, etc.) that impeded their efforts. Okhremtchouk et al. (2009) reported a similar finding, "Many expressed concerns with the redundancy of the reflection prompts, a lack of technical support, issues with timing, and conflicts with pre-service teaching placements" (p. 53). Participants in both studies found it a challenge to meet the expectations of the performance assessment portfolio. Nearly all participants in the current study reported frustration with the process and concern regarding conditions in which they were expected to perform.

Due to these conditions, participants in the current study did not believe their performance on the edTPA assessment was an accurate reflection of their readiness for

the field. In another study on the process of performance assessment implementation, the authors report that some teacher candidates may not be able to “adequately express their skills as a teacher” (Stolle, Goerss, & Watkins., 2005, p. 41). Both of these studies found that an accurate reflection of teacher competency may not be achieved through a portfolio assessment such as the edTPA.

Theme Two: Perceptions related to personal benefit influenced teacher candidates' attitudes regarding the edTPA which in turn affected their willingness to put forth effort to do quality work.

Teacher candidates, in this study, expressed significant irritation that they were required to complete a time-intensive, comprehensive assessment during a critical time in their teacher preparation. They perceived that the assessment had no personal benefit for them and yet it was a requirement. This was their initial view, however, with follow-up questions many were able to identify personal benefits. Berrill and Addison (2010) asserted that teacher candidates need to be aware of the personal benefit of an assessment of this size and importance. According to Okhremtchouk et al., (2009) stress and apprehension develop when candidates do not have a clear purpose and perceived personal benefit. Participants in my study echoed that statement as they reported frustration, anxiety, and sleeplessness during the completion of the edTPA. Fives and Buehl (2014) stated, “Intrinsic value refers to the perception that the task is of interest to the learner. Finally, cost refers to what must be given up to engage in the identified task” (p. 438). Participants in my study exemplified this concept as several of them revealed that they would have had greater motivation to do the work if their ability to

obtain a teaching license were dependent upon a certain score. In essence, greater effort would have been given to the assessment had they perceived a personal benefit.

Theme Three: Teacher candidates preferred that the due date for submission of the edTPA be after the full-time experience and /or much later in the student teaching semester.

Participants in the current study reported a negative impact on their student teaching experience. Time was spent on completion of a time-intensive, comprehensive portfolio when they believed time should have been devoted to planning future lessons. Okhremtchouk et al. (2009) reported the same findings in their study. They report that the PACT took teacher candidates' attention from their students as they focused on the assessment (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009). In my study, participants indicated that a due date late in the student teaching experience would allow them to complete the edTPA when they had less teaching responsibilities and more time to devote to the assessment. In that way, they believed that the focus of their efforts would be on their students and there would be less of an impact on their student teaching performance. The findings of the current study and that of Okhremtchouk et al. (2009), suggested that the timing of the assessment is an important factor to be considered in supporting teacher candidates.

Theme Four: Teacher candidates preferred that a third party evaluator conduct personal observations of their teaching to provide them with feedback and to determine readiness for the field.

My study participants made an ardent request for direct observations and feedback on the edTPA. Caughlan and Jiang (2014) would agree with that request as they state, "We consider evaluative observation of teacher candidates an essential

component of performance assessment of preservice teachers” (p. 376). Feedback, from multiple sources, that is directly associated with a teacher candidate’s lesson has more meaning and is more likely to be valued by that teacher candidate (Peck et al., 2014).

However, the edTPA is a summative assessment. Its intended use is to evaluate teacher candidates’ readiness for teaching at the end of a teacher preparation program (edtpa.aacte.org). Teacher candidates should not be expecting to receive formative feedback from a summative assessment. Still, rubric constructs allow a teacher candidate to view the criteria that determined their score. In that way, they are indirectly receiving feedback. The feedback does not reference a specific activity or lesson within the teaching event, but does give an indication of where the teacher candidate performed overall according to rubric criteria (Caughlan and Jiang, 2014). Black and Dylan (2009) asserted, “Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers...” (p. 9). With that perspective, teacher candidates are gaining feedback by virtue of completing the edTPA. As implementation continues and programmatic changes are made, it is my hope that teacher candidates will have received substantial feedback (e.g., classroom and college supervisors’ observations) prior to the edTPA so that when they receive their edTPA score, they are able to view it with a formative perspective.

Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to examine teacher candidate's perceptions of the edTPA, in particular whether their perceptions of personal benefit and the timing of the assessment had an impact on their willingness to devote time to do quality work. Findings from this study led to the conclusions that will be discussed in the following sections.

Teacher Education Curriculum

The edTPA is a tool to measure a teacher candidate's readiness for teaching at the end of their teacher preparation program (edtpa.aacte.org). To ensure successful completion of the assessment, it is necessary and essential for teacher preparation programs to integrate and embed the skills, terminology, and expectations that are expected (Stolle et al., 2005). As a result of this study, and in particular, the conversations with participants led me to the conclusion that the elements of the edTPA need to be an explicit and embedded part of the teacher education curriculum. As well, all teacher educators need to be intentional in their efforts to support teacher candidates during the completion of the assessment. Tom stated the need for this when he said, "Having some kind of preparation sophomore and junior year to say this is what the edTPA looks like. These are the different components. This is what we are going to be graded on." A curriculum that has been backmapped with edTPA concepts is necessary to build a foundation of skills that is expected of a teacher candidate preparing for teaching.

Support for Teacher Educators and Teacher Candidates

Both teacher educators and teacher candidates need support in understanding the edTPA. Teacher educators and college supervisors must be provided with ample opportunities to learn about the assessment, the terminology, and the rubrics (Lys, L'Esperance, Dobson, & Bullock, 2014; Stolle et al., 2005). In doing so, coursework will reflect the concepts needed for teacher candidates to learn “good and effective” teaching as defined by the edTPA. In a study of the effectiveness of the PACT, participants were explicit on their desire for teacher educators to be experienced with the edTPA. Joy remarked, “He [college supervisor] has no knowledge of the edTPA.” Tom concurred, “I just think we need something where more people are they feel as confident like you do with this.” Having edTPA constructs woven throughout the curriculum would ensure that each teacher candidate has had appropriate exposure and preparation for the edTPA. It would also allow for every teacher educator to be a source of support for teacher candidates.

Despite the summative nature of the edTPA, teacher candidates have a need for support. As mentioned earlier, coursework should provide support prior to the edTPA. During edTPA completion, additional support is needed and welcomed. This study’s findings revealed that teacher candidates are willing to do the time-intensive work—but they want support to do it. Lauren remarked, “Had I been trained on the format, I think that is something that would have helped me.” Nicole was more general in her statement, “I think just something a little bit more to help us would have been nice.”

Jackie commented, “I was like trying really hard to meet those expectations.” According to Stolle et al., “Guidelines containing suggestions for organization, artifact selection, and layout were developed to help pre-service teacher through the portfolio process” (p. 32). Consequently, support tied to those guidelines during edTPA completion process will allow teacher candidates to do the work that is expected of them. This will hopefully result in their demonstrating an accurate reflection of their readiness for teaching.

In summary, the findings of the study led to the two conclusions. First, the edTPA needs to be embedded throughout the teacher education program. Secondly, support is needed for both teacher candidates as well as teacher educators to understand the components of the edTPA. Derived from this study, these conclusions are the basis for the recommendations that follow.

Recommendations

Several recommendations are warranted due to the findings of this study. The following sections will describe the resulting recommendations.

Timing of the Assessment

It is incumbent on us to consider the perspectives of teacher candidates as these important timing decisions are made (Lin, 2008). These findings have potential to make recommendations on an optimal time to assign the assessment. An expected implication of the study is that teacher candidates will be able to do their best work on the edTPA because it will be assigned at a time that is conducive to proper conditions for a high stakes assessment. According to Chitpin and Simon (2009):

The labour and time-intensive commitment involved in adopting a professional portfolio remains a powerful force that plays against its sustained, long-term use, particularly in a fast-paced and complex teaching context. (p. 287)

Therefore, it is incumbent on teacher educators to consider the timing of the assessment to increase the opportunity for teacher candidates to give an accurate portrayal of their preparedness for the field. See Figure 3 for a graphic representation of the recommended sequence of student teaching responsibilities. As a result of this study, I strongly recommend that the due date of the edTPA be placed at the end of the student teaching experience. After fulfillment of full-time responsibilities and with fewer teaching obligations, the edTPA teaching event would conclude the student teaching experience. Hence, the edTPA would be a true summative assessment completed at a time when teacher candidates can devote time to the assessment without having a negative impact on their student teaching experience.

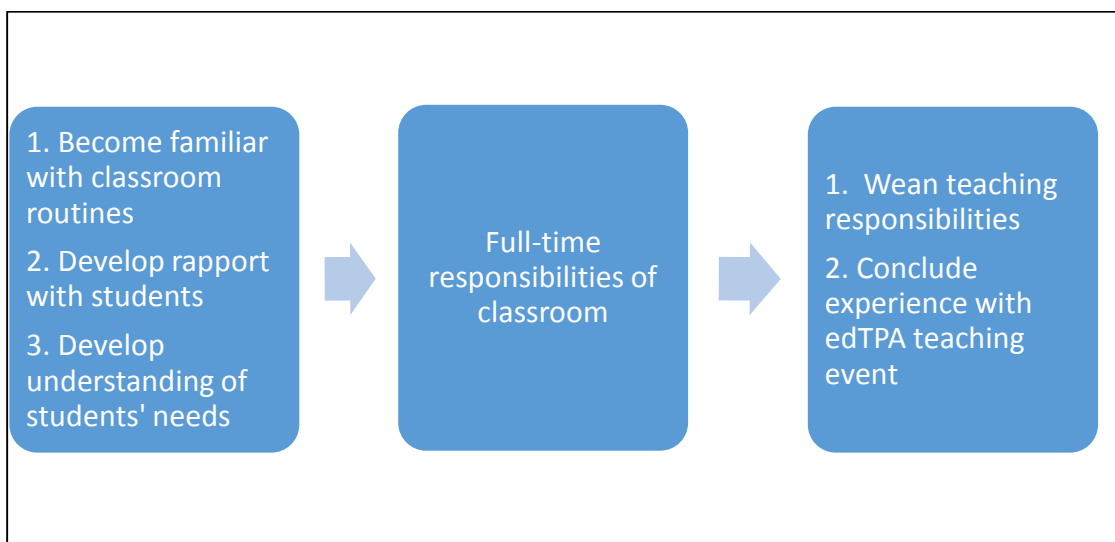


Figure 3. Recommended Sequence of Student Teaching Responsibilities.

Embedded Signature Assessments

Participants want feedback. They were explicit in their desire to receive feedback that will allow them to learn and grow as teachers. Amanda lamented, “There’s just no feedback to say that you could do these things better.” The edTPA is a summative assessment and is not designed to provide specific feedback on the results of that assessment (edtpa.aacte.org). Nevertheless, teacher candidates should have opportunities to learn and grow as a teacher during their journey into the profession. Embedded signature assessments (ESA) are one solution to the problem.

Embedded signature assessments are “campus-specific assignments chosen from standard criteria that track a teacher candidate’s growth over time” (Larsen & Calfee, 2005, p. 151). To be classified as an embedded signature assessment, the assessments must be a required component in coursework. The assessments must also paint a picture of a teacher candidate’s competency over time as well (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2010; Larson & Calfee, 2005; Sandholtz & Shea, 2012). ESAs may include interviews, case studies, video recordings, and lesson plans. The assessments are chosen to meet certain requirements in a teacher preparation program (Larson & Calfee, 2005) and have specific scoring criteria that are applied by multiple professors (Sandholtz & Shea, 2012). If the edTPA is a demonstration of effective teaching, then its concepts and terminology should be designed as ESAs. Teacher candidates will then be assessed on good and effective teaching as defined by the edTPA throughout the entire program.

Embedded signature assessments woven throughout the curriculum of a teacher education program allow teacher candidates to receive feedback that will contribute to their growth as a teacher over time (Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2010; Sandholtz & Shea, 2012). ESAs assess assignments that are directly related to teaching and the development of teacher competency. For example, teacher candidates may receive specific feedback on lesson plans, and video recordings of actual teaching. Embedded signature assessments are an essential component for teacher education. For that reason, I recommend the integration of ESAs in teacher preparation programs. Through collaborative efforts of all teacher educators in a program, the results will have potential to make a significant impact on teacher candidates' readiness for teaching.

Video Recording

Participants expressed the value of the video recording. In fact, Tyler remarked: I never did that in methods or any other course that I videotaped myself. I wasn't taken aback as I thought I was going to be. I thought I was going to hate it, but I know I kind of liked it honestly to see what I looked like. Because you can't really see what you look like through your own eyes. I thought that was both helpful and kind of enjoyable.

Video recordings provide authentic evidence of a teacher candidate's mannerisms, facial expressions, tone, and instructional practices. Video recordings allow teacher candidates to see themselves as the students see them (Zhang, Lundeberg, Koehler, & Eberhardt, 2011, p. 458). Therefore, I recommend video recording assignments be

integrated throughout the curriculum of a teacher preparation program. The results would be of great value to teacher candidates.

Support

Prior to student teaching. Coursework in teacher education programs should provide the foundation for the edTPA, with a scaffolding of skills and concepts throughout the curriculum. As “architects” of teacher preparation at their institution, teacher educators should consider backmapping skills into existing courses that will allow for a common language, as well as lesson plan and observation formats to be aligned with edTPA terminology (Lys et al., 2014). In this way, teacher candidates are exposed to and learn “good and effective” teaching as defined and measured by the edTPA throughout the entire program. See Figure 4 for a graphic representation of this recommendation.

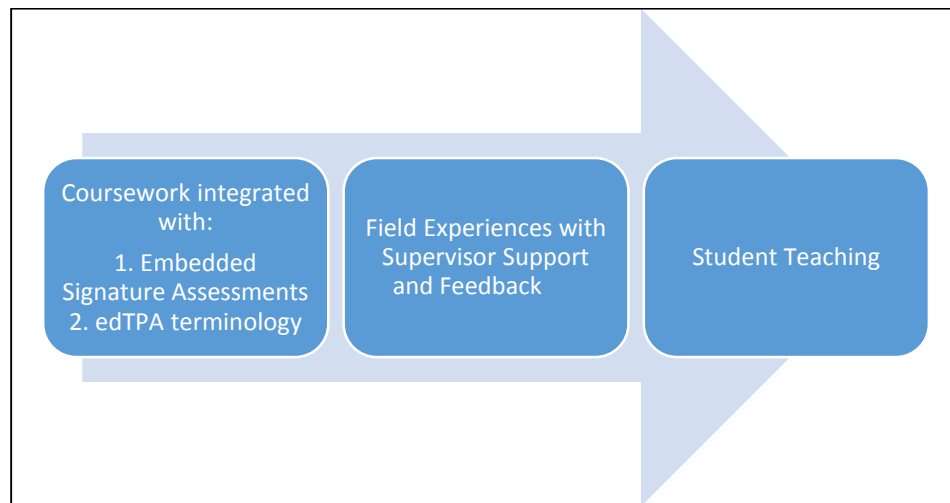


Figure 4. Recommended Teacher Preparation Curriculum.

Participants in this study believed that prior awareness and instruction of the edTPA would have been beneficial. Monica remarked, “Integrating other parts into other classes would be helpful.” The sentiment continued as Emily stated, “It would have been more effective if we were doing it with the guidance of a professor.” In addition to the ESAs recommended earlier, it is my recommendation that teacher educators work collaboratively to backmap skills into the curriculum. Skills, content knowledge, and pedagogy should be woven throughout the entire curriculum to ensure that all teacher candidates have had the opportunity to develop readiness for teaching.

During student teaching. Support that is provided during the student teaching semester, prior to and during edTPA completion needs to be mindful that the edTPA is a summative, standardized assessment. Hence, the support cannot assist teacher candidates with editing of their written work, discussing candidates’ specific responses to prompts, or assisting in choosing video footage for submission (SCALE, 2014). Ethical support, however, is valuable for teacher candidates. Participants in the study acknowledged the benefits of various support provided during student teaching. Samantha mentioned, “The free workshops that we had here was a lot of support.” Jackie concurred, “You have those classes, like those mini-sessions, and those were really helpful.”

Individual and group support is valued during a time-intensive, comprehensive assessment. It is my recommendation that workshops, seminars, and individual office hours be scheduled during the student teaching semester to assist teacher candidates

through the edTPA process. Jackie would concur. She suggested, “I’m wondering if it would be beneficial to take time like three hours on a Monday night where people come in and just work on their edTPAs.” Ethical support may increase the likelihood of an accurate reflection of teacher competence on the edTPA by eliminating or at the very least, minimizing process errors.

Local Evaluation

Several issues raised by the participants may be resolved with the benefits gained from local evaluation that is focused on student achievement. Local evaluation is a process where teacher educators in a teacher preparation program examine the edTPA performance for each of their teacher candidates. In doing so, teacher educators are able to gain first-hand knowledge of their teacher candidates’ performance in relation to edTPA criteria. The data can be analyzed by all stakeholders in the program in an effort to make institutional and program changes as well as to acknowledge the areas of strength identified by the teacher candidates’ performances. Additionally, a common language and a common understanding of edTPA criteria and scoring can be built into the teacher preparation curriculum (Sloan, Merino, Harvey, & SCALE, 2013; Sato, 2014).

A common language and understanding of the edTPA may provide greater opportunity for teacher candidates to receive feedback aligned with edTPA language and criteria. It will also be a common thread throughout coursework, assessments, and field experience observations. One participant, Joy, commented, “We need more

people to be almost at the level of where you're [me] at with this." This may happen as a result of local evaluation. Therefore, I strongly recommend that teacher preparation programs participate in the local evaluation process as developed by SCALE.

Minnesota Board of Teaching

By law, teacher candidates must complete a performance assessment as one component of the approval process for teacher preparation programs in Minnesota. The edTPA was adopted by the Minnesota Board of Teaching and the Minnesota Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (MACTE) in 2011 (edtpaminnesota.org, 2014). Pass rates were recently established for teacher candidates. The expectation for program approval is that 70 percent of the teacher candidates from a teacher preparation program in Minnesota earn a minimum score of 38/75 (Pickle, 2014). Thus, programs are dependent on teacher candidates to perform at a certain level.

Overall, participants were happy that minimum scores on the edTPA were not a requirement to obtain a teaching license in Minnesota. Aaron emphatically stated, "I love everything about that [no minimum score required for licensure] because I don't care about it. I'm not going to put all my effort into it because it doesn't matter at all."

Alex concurred,

I agree that it shouldn't be based or like it shouldn't be required for licensure.

But it makes it harder to feel like you're really committed to it and that it's

almost like it, it takes away the legitimacy of it sometimes.

They sent a clear message. Their performance on the edTPA is not the result of their best efforts. I am concerned about the effect that has on the scores. Are scores truly reflective of teacher candidates' readiness for teaching if they are not putting forth effort? How can their performance identify areas of strength and goals for a program when the data is not accurate?

Program approval for teacher preparation programs in Minnesota is then based on data that is not an accurate portrayal of readiness for teaching. Individual programs may be making programmatic decisions based on inaccurate data. Additionally and more importantly, if programmatic decisions are made on inaccurate data, will teacher candidates receive the training and preparation required to make instructional decisions for their students? For that reason, I strongly recommend that the Minnesota edTPA Steering Committee consider the perspectives of teacher candidates as they make edTPA implementation recommendations to the Minnesota Board of Teaching.

Limitations and Need for Further Research

The study is expected to support teacher education programs and teacher candidates with successful implementation of the edTPA; however, there are limitations of the study that must be considered as well. The study was conducted at only three institutions. Teacher candidates were the only participants in the study. Inservice teachers and teacher educators mentoring teacher candidates may have perspectives with potential to inform recommendations regarding implementation of the edTPA in teacher preparation programs. Data collected from a larger, more diverse sample from

higher education institutions would provide significant findings for consideration. A longitudinal study that evaluates teacher candidates' experiences over the course of years would account for the transition to a new form of assessment and the modifications made in response. Data gathered from teacher education programs in multiple states would also provide a more comprehensive perspective. Findings from such a study would have far-reaching effects with several states requiring completion of the edTPA.

Although previous research has examined portfolio assessment in general and the edTPA, in particular, additional research is necessary. Further investigations to explore the experiences and perceptions of teacher candidates completing the edTPA are needed to answer additional questions, such as the following:

1. Does the edTPA have an impact on teacher identity? If so, is it a positive or negative effect?
2. There is some discussion that K-12 administrators are beginning to inquire about edTPA performance during job interviews. Do you feel that the edTPA has prepared you to discuss your teaching competency in interviews? If so, how? If not, why?

Also, further research on the impact of the edTPA after graduation would be valuable. For example, it would be important to know to what extent the completion of the edTPA had an impact on beginning teachers.

Implications

Teacher education programs, particularly in Minnesota, may find the results of this study significant in the planning and scheduling of the edTPA. It is imperative for program approval that teacher candidates complete an edTPA portfolio that is truly reflective of their readiness for teaching.

The implications of this study may provide teacher educators with data to support timing and deadline decisions that will yield the greatest probability of success for teacher candidates. Success on the edTPA will ensure that state-approved teacher education programs will continue the important work of preparing the next generation of educators.

Recently edTPA pass rates, or target scores, were established. On each of the 15 rubrics, scores will range from a one, which indicates that the candidate is not ready for the profession to a five, which indicates that the candidate is a highly accomplished beginner. An overall score is assigned after all 15 rubrics have been evaluated. An overall score of 37 has been established as a passing score upon analysis of field test data by the developers at SCALE (edtpa.aacte.org). In Minnesota, pass rates are slightly different. Pass rates for the planning and instruction tasks are 13 each. The pass rate for the assessment task is a 12. An overall pass rate in Minnesota is 38 (Pickle, 2014). Teacher preparation programs are expected to have at least 70% of their teacher candidates achieve the specified pass rate (Pickle, 2014). Teacher candidates' voices must be heard if we expect them to earn passing scores. Consequently, the implications

of this study may reinforce the need to examine state mandates as well as program curriculum, policies, and procedures to assist teacher candidates in earning passing scores.

Passing scores are important. However, they are only important if they are an accurate reflection of the teacher candidate's readiness for teaching. The participants in this study sent a very clear message that they did not feel that the edTPA was an accurate reflection of their competency. This message should be taken seriously if teacher candidates and teacher preparation programs are going to reap the benefits (knowledge of individual and program strengths and goals) of the edTPA. Overall, the participants indicated that they had devoted considerable time toward edTPA completion. Yet, they did not feel that it was an accurate reflection of their teaching competence. If programmatic decisions are determined based on edTPA data, it is essential that the data are reflective of the program and its teacher candidates' competencies. Therefore, their perceptions regarding the assessment or the process are critical moving forward in the implementation process. Teacher educators and the Minnesota edTPA Steering Committee would be wise to listen to their teacher candidates to make informed policy and programmatic decisions that will strengthen the value of the edTPA in determining a teacher candidate's readiness for teaching. It is necessary to listen to the teacher candidates before, during, and after completion of the edTPA to identify areas strength, of further support and at times, wrong information.

Some participants had wrong information about the edTPA. For example, Emily remarked, “When it asked for me to fill in a table at the end with identifying students and their particular needs, my school district won’t even let me release that. They’re not even allowed to tell me because of disclosure and privacy laws.” The edTPA does not ask for identifying information. Teacher candidates are to describe the demographics of their class. The directions in the Elementary Literacy Handbook (SCALE, 2014) stated, “Complete the chart below to summarize required or needed supports, accommodations for your students that will affect your instruction in this learning segment (p. 2). Misinformation can create numerous problems, including perceptions regarding the edTPA that may have an effect on the quality of their work. Taking a critical look at program policies and procedures can possibly identify source(s) of misinformation. The implications of wrong information is great. Therefore, it may be imperative for teacher educators to have frequent and detailed conversations with their teacher candidates on the edTPA.

Current studies indicate a significant challenge faced by teacher candidates in completing a teacher performance assessment, such as the edTPA, while striving to meet the needs of their students, classroom supervisor, and college supervisor (Breault, 2004; Chitpin & Simon, 2009; Lin, 2008). Ann, in a focus group session confirms that challenge as she stated, “I feel like it takes away from more rewarding, more authentic, more, it’s more important to teach those students and make sure they know you can

and you're teaching them than it is to these Pearson people knowing you can think this way." This perspective should not be ignored.

Reflections

This study is relevant to my work as a teacher educator. My students—teacher candidates—are required to complete the edTPA. Furthermore, as a result of my work with the national implementation of the edTPA over the past few years, I have great respect for the assessment and believe in its potential to make a difference in teacher education. With that perspective, I chose this dissertation topic due to my growing concern regarding teacher candidates' perceptions of the edTPA and the impact those perceptions have on their willingness to devote time to do quality work on the edTPA. The findings are fascinating and will guide the work that I do to support the teacher candidates at the institution where I am employed.

To find that participants indicated a due date later in the student teaching experience as a better time to accurately reflect their readiness for teaching was not surprising. An unexpected finding was the considerable amount of time participants reported to completion, despite their frustration with the edTPA. Another unexpected finding was that the participants indicated personal benefits, in a variety of areas, were gained from completing the assessment. Participants were expressive and articulate as they shared their concerns and thoughts. While some comments were disappointing (i.e., "I didn't care one bit."), it was reassuring to hear their perceptions of personal benefit. For example, Joy shared, "Overall, I think it helped me see the bigger picture." It

was equally promising to hear participants identify the importance of relationships with students as one of their issues with the edTPA. Chris emphasized that point when he stated, “It’s [teaching] all about the relationships and the management of the classroom.”

It is through the words of the participants that I have gained a better understanding of teacher candidates’ experiences with the edTPA. By virtue of that understanding, I intend to revise the courses I teach as well as the observations of practicum and student teachers I supervise. It is my hope that the findings will guide the decisions of the teacher preparation program at my institution. I anticipate that we will “listen” to the participants as we examine curriculum, field experiences, and assessment in our program to better prepare teachers for the field.

Data from this study is relevant to other institutions as well. I intend to share the findings with teacher educators at other institutions in Minnesota. Teacher educators will benefit from learning more about teacher candidates’ experiences and perceptions of portfolio assessments to take advantage of the potential of portfolios to promote meaningful teacher development. It is my expectation that the findings may be beneficial in making informed decisions for their teacher candidates as well.

The impact does not end with the changes made to teacher education programs. It is for that very reason I value and support the edTPA. I believe that the edTPA will help us better prepare future teachers. The greatest possible impact will result from

future teachers entering the field ready to meet the challenges, needs, and expectations of the students they serve.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

Fall 2014

Dear Teacher Candidate,

I hope this finds you enjoying student teaching! It has already been a few weeks since the beginning of the experience.

As you may know, I am in the doctoral program at UND. This semester I am conducting a study of my dissertation topic, Teacher Performance Assessments (edTPA): Exploring Student Perspectives. To collect data for this study, interviews (one individual interview/person) and focus group sessions (one for teacher candidates) are needed. Would you please consider participating in this study? At the first meeting an informed consent form will be distributed and explained that will provide you with more information and specific details regarding participation in the study.

This is a busy time in the semester. I will be respectful of the time during the interviews and focus group sessions so that participation does not become a burden. If at any time you decide to discontinue in the study, you may withdraw with no penalty or questions asked.

If you are interested in learning more about the study and/or participating in the study, please come to the Old Main 231 on November 18th at 6:30 p.m. The details of the informed consent form will be explained in detail and any questions answered at that time. Upon receiving signatures of willing participants, the focus group session will begin. A time for a private interview will be decided on that night as well.

Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Teri Anglie

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