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**Storying Teacher Education Policy: Critical  
Counternarratives of Curricular, Pedagogical, and Activist  
Responses to State-Mandated Teacher Performance  
Assessments**

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**Abstract:** The rise of high-stakes, standardized, teacher performance assessments (TPAs) is central to the industry being created out of the regulation, policing, and evaluation of university-based teacher education. In addition to reinforcing a narrow and counter-critical framework, TPAs can shift responsibility for the evaluation of teacher candidates from university-based teacher educators with a comprehensive and nuanced fluency in candidates' preparedness to external scorers trained to standardize and depersonalize effective practice. In this article, four social justice-oriented teacher educators from three different states examine the practical and political effects of TPAs in their local contexts. By analyzing the curricular, pedagogical, and political implications of this high-stakes standardization of their field, they speak back to a policy landscape that too often marginalizes the voices of the teachers and students it purports to serve. Throughout, they examine the dilemmas of practice created by TPAs, as teachers and teacher educators seek to redefine what it means to enact justice-oriented professional agency in an increasingly regulated context. A critical counternarrative methodological approach was used to collect and process the authors' lived stories and then to collaboratively reflect upon each other's personal/professional experiences with TPAs. Several strategies are identified for enacting agency in response to TPAs, including curricular acts of resistance, resistance through participation in state legislative processes, policymaking within teacher education programs, the production of activist scholarship, and refusal to participate at all. Ways are suggested for teacher educators to minimize, mitigate, and resist unjust policy through curricular, political, and scholarly activism.

**Keywords:** preservice teacher education; teacher performance assessments; teacher education; educational policy; activism; social justice; standardization; professional agency; critical counternarrative; resistance; activist scholarship

### **Narraciones sobre normativas en la formación de maestros: Respondiendo de un modo dialéctico y activista a los aspectos curriculares y pedagógicos de las pruebas estatales de magisterio**

**Resumen:** Uno de los aspectos centrales de la industria que se ha creado alrededor de la regulación, normativa y evaluación de la formación de maestros es el incremento de herramientas estandarizadas y tasadas en un criterio unívoco tales. Un ejemplo de estas herramientas son las TPAs. Estas TPAs se basan en una visión cerrada y carente de pensamiento crítico. No solo eso, estas herramientas restan de algún modo validez a las evaluaciones que hace el profesorado que trabaja en los programas de formación de maestros. Este profesorado tiene la capacidad y competencia para determinar si los candidatos están preparados para iniciar su carrera como maestros. Antagónico al criterio del profesorado, las TPAs se califican desde una perspectiva estandarizada, impersonal y carente de contexto. En este artículo, cuatro educadores que comparten una visión de justicia social analizan el impacto tanto político como educativo de las TPAs en cada una de sus demarcaciones. Al analizar, desde un punto vista curricular, pedagógico y político, el impacto que tienen estas herramientas en la estandarización de la formación de maestros, los cuatro educadores refutan un marco normativo que a menudo ha marginado las voces de los maestros y de los estudiantes a los cuales debería proteger y valorar. Se analizan los dilemas de enseñanza impuestos por las TPAs. Este análisis es una búsqueda que maestrxs y educadores inician para apoyar la idea de un maestro comprometido, activista y agente de cambio dentro de un contexto cada vez más regulado. Utilizando una metodología de tipo crítico y dialéctico se colectaron y procesaron las experiencias de cada uno de los maestrxs y educadores. Trabajando en equipo analizaron y reflexionaron en cada una de sus narrativas.

Todo este proceso ayuda a identificar una serie de estrategias para impulsar activismo como respuesta a las TPAs. Entre estas estrategias se enumeran: actividades de resistencia al curriculum, resistencia al participar en los procesos legislativos establecidos por el estado, creación de normativas que regulen los programas de formación de maestros, producción de artículos que fomenten el activismo, y la negación a participar en las TPAs. Desde una perspectiva curricular, política y académica se sugieren modos de minimizar, mitigar y resistir normativas, TPAs, que se presentan injustas.

**Palabras-clave:** magisterio; evaluaciones de prácticas pedagógicas; formación de maestros; normativas educativas; activismo; justicia social; estandarización; agentes de cambio educativo; narrativas dialécticas y críticas; Resistencia; activismo académico

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**Palavras-chave:** educación de profesor de pregrado; evaluaciones de desempeño docente; educación docente; política educativa; activismo; Justicia social; normalización; agencia profesional; contranarrativa crítica; resistencia; activismo académico

## Introduction

Teacher education is under attack and, as teacher educators, so are we. Politicians, self-appointed and privately funded organizations like the National Council on Teacher Quality, and federal and state accrediting bodies like NCATE (now CAEP) have recently made a profitable industry out of the regulation, policing, and evaluation of university-based teacher education. Through neoliberal emphases on accountability and standardization, these bodies advocate educational policies that undermine our professional expertise, autonomy, and ability to foreground the unique needs, assets and priorities of our students, communities, and institutions. These policies also enable a de facto shift in the locus of teacher preparation from university-based teacher education programs (TEPs) to private entities ready to take advantage of the growing “cottage industry” of teacher evaluation (Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015a). Among the most hotly contested aspects of this shifting terrain is the rise of high-stakes, standardized, and state-mandated, teacher performance assessments (TPAs).

Framed as a way to hold TEPs and pre-service teacher candidates accountable for meeting the academic needs of all K-12 students (e.g., American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education [AACTE], 2014), TPAs have rapidly become part of the national landscape of teacher education. First piloted in 2013, one such TPA, edTPA, created by the Stanford Center for Access, Learning and Equity and operated exclusively by Pearson Education is, as of May 2017, being used by 737 TEPs across 39 states (AACTE, n.d.-b). Other state-mandated standardized TPAs include CalTPA and the PACT (both used exclusively in the state of California) and Educational Testing Service’s PPAT, which is being marketed as an alternative to Pearson’s edTPA (see ETS, n.d.).

While the requirements of each TPA vary slightly (see our counternarratives, below, for more detail on these variances), their basic premise requires teacher candidates to complete a series of pre-defined “tasks,” to curate video, curricular, and student work artifacts associated with those tasks, and to respond to narrative prompts regarding their curricular and pedagogical rationale. Candidates’ portfolios are evaluated according to standardized processes, which range from scoring by trained faculty at the candidates’ university (as is the case for CalTPA and PACT) to virtual, anonymous scoring by contracted employees of Pearson Education (as is the case for edTPA). In states with TPA policies, those candidates who do not pass their TPA are ineligible for teacher licensure, irrespective of other school- or university-based measures of their performance.

On the surface, TPAs offer the opportunity for deeper insight into candidate readiness than traditional pen-and-pencil exams. Their overarching structure centers candidates’ approach to planning, instruction, and assessment in actual classroom settings, features that are lauded by state policymakers and national accrediting bodies alike. Moreover, research regarding the PACT (which is widely described as a “precursor” of edTPA) indicates that teacher educators perceived it as a useful formative assessment of their TEPs (Pechione & Chung, 2006; Whittaker & Nelson, 2013), and two small scale analyses suggest that the PACT may be a predictor of K-12 pupil performance (see Goldhaber, Cowan & Theobald, 2017, for discussion). Other research (e.g. Troyan & Kaplan, 2015) suggests that edTPA’s emphasis on narrative writing may foster critical professional reflection by teacher candidates; additional analysis is necessary to see whether these results, which are based on a single subject case study, can be extrapolated to wider pools of pre-service teachers.

However, as TPA implementation has evolved from locally designed and controlled formative assessments to high-stakes national policy, a growing number of researchers have challenged the relatively small independent research base for TPAs overall, as well as the validity of using research on PACT as substantiation for wider TPA policy. Denton (2013) and Hébert (2017), for example, argue that significant differences in the design and implementation of the PACT and

edTPA render research on PACT inappropriate justification for the predictive validity of edTPA. Similar concerns are raised by Goldhaber et al. (2017), who note, “substantive differences between the edTPA and PACT in terms of scoring, implementation, and standards alignment” (n.p.). In their presentation of the first independent analysis of the high-stakes implementation of edTPA, Goldhaber et al. (2017) highlight the complexities of this research, noting that:

edTPA scores are highly predictive of employment in the state’s public teaching workforce, [but] evidence on the relationship between edTPA scores and teaching effectiveness is more mixed. Specifically, continuous edTPA scores are a significant predictor of student mathematics achievement in some specifications, but when we consider that the edTPA is a binary screen of teaching effectiveness (i.e., pass/fail), we find that passing the edTPA is significantly predictive of teacher effectiveness in reading but not in mathematics. (n.p.)

In addition to questions regarding the predictive validity of TPAs as measures of pupil learning—and the legitimacy of high-stakes TPA policies in light of these unanswered questions—critics also challenge the authenticity of TPA structures and scoring systems, arguing that their high stakes and standardized format artificially dislocates and decontextualizes teaching and learning (e.g. Au, 2013; Dover & Schultz, 2016), leading candidates to prioritize task-compliance over more nuanced responses to complex educational dilemmas (Berlak, 2010; Cronenberg et al., 2016; Greenblatt & O’Hara, 2015). Our own experiences, detailed below, lead us to echo this concern.

Other scholars explore ideological and practical tensions associated with TPA implementation (e.g. Meuwissin & Chopin, 2015; Reagan, Schram, McCurdy, Chang & Evans, 2016; Sato, 2014; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016), asserting that the dilemmas of mass implementation undermine or corrupt the educative potential of TPAs overall (e.g. Cronenberg et al., 2016; Dover & Schultz, 2016). Additional analyses examine the relative influence of university, state, and corporate stakeholders in crafting TPA policies (e.g., Reagan et al., 2016), with some scholars suggesting that national implementation has led TPAs to function more as lucrative instruments of privatization than authentic measures of candidate learning (e.g. Ayers, 2015; Dover & Schultz, 2016; Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015b). These scholars highlight the multimillion dollar TPA market (see below, and Ayers, 2015), and liken TPA policies to neoliberal accountability mandates requiring the use of high-stakes, standardized assessments in K-12 classrooms (e.g. Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016).

Nevertheless, the language of TPA policies utilizes the rhetoric of rigor and authenticity. AACTE, for example, lauds edTPA as “transformative for prospective teachers because the process requires candidates to actually demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to help all students learn in real classrooms” (n.d.-a). However, a growing number of teacher educators and scholars challenge this assertion, suggesting that these requirements are neither new nor transformative. Indeed, longitudinal analyses of classroom performance have been a part of national teacher accreditation processes since 1987 (see Moore, Hopkins, & Tullis, 1994). This history, however, is largely absent in contemporary conversations about teacher education policy, as is the situated expertise of teacher educators themselves. Ironically, even organizations like AACTE, which calls itself the “voice of U.S. educator preparation” (n.d.-c) has adopted a one-sided policy platform regarding TPAs. Rather than encouraging independent scholarly analyses of TPA policies and implementation, the organization has been accused of both conflicts of interest (e.g. Hébert, 2017) and using their resources to silence debate about the validity and implementation of TPAs (see Ayers, 2015; Dotson, Dover, Henning, & Agarwal-Rangnath, in press; Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015b).

As justice-oriented teacher educators, we find these trends profoundly troubling. In their critique of the racist underpinnings of neoliberal education policies, including edTPA, Tuck & Gorlewski (2016) call for “participatory policy analyses among faculty in Schools of Education about education policy, especially policies which affect our teacher candidates, their students, and the terms of our labor” (p. 214). In the following pages, we will offer the following critical counternarratives (see Picower & Kohli, 2017) of how three different TPAs (CalTPA, PACT, and edTPA) are shaping teacher education practices at four institutions across three states. Grounded in the traditions of Critical Race Theory (CRT), counternarratives offer educational scholars the opportunity to “complement, nuance, disrupt and counter storylines in teacher education” (Milner IV & Howard, 2013, p. 537) as we “*reinterpret, disrupt* or to *interrupt* pervasive discourses” in education (p. 542), especially those informed by unjust, racist, or colonial logic.

More specifically, we will frame a series of counternarratives exploring curricular, pedagogical, and political policy dilemmas associated with TPAs, in so doing “storying” teacher education policy and its effects. Collectively, these counternarratives challenge both the artificial sterilization and dominant rhetoric of objectivity that are characteristic of accountability reforms. Structurally, we first present a brief overview of the evolution of TPA policies in order to create a broader backdrop for each author’s unique teaching and policy context. Next, each author details the tensions created by their shifting institutional and state-level TPA policies, centering the multilayered impacts on teacher education, teacher candidates, and teacher educators themselves. Last, we reflect on the counternarratives to explore strategies for individual and collective acts of resistance on the parts of teacher candidates, teacher educators, and the community.

## Laying the Foundation: TPA-Based “Reforms” in California and Beyond

The TPA movement began in California, with the 1998 passage of Senate Bill 2042, a sweeping piece of legislation focused on the reform of California’s teacher credentialing system. In response to this bill, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) partnered with the Educational Testing Service (ETS) to create the first standardized TPA, known as CalTPA.

During the extended development period for CalTPA between 1998 and 2009, other California-based groups entered the TPA marketplace. Most notable was a consortium of 12 universities, led by Stanford University (other partners included eight University of California institutions, San Diego State University, San Jose State University, and Mills College) that hoped to develop a mandate-compliant alternative to ETS’ CalTPA (Cochran-Smith, Piazza & Power, 2013, p. 15). It was this group’s work that resulted in the creation of PACT.

Later, in an effort to build upon what they considered the success of PACT in California, members of this group would, as the Stanford Center for Assessment Learning and Equity (SCALE), partner with AACTE and “operational partner” Pearson Education, to develop edTPA, a nationally accessible “derivative” of the PACT (Reagan et al., 2016). However, unlike in California, where CalTPA and PACT were created and implemented over an extended period of time through a complex, negotiated process among local teacher educators, policymakers and other key stakeholders, edTPA would be marketed as a finished product with little opportunity for local influence.

While each of these TPAs vary slightly in format and scope, they share the requirement that candidates collect a series of teaching artifacts (lesson plans, student work, reflections and video), write commentaries in response to standardized prompts, and submit a multi-task portfolio of “evidence” related to instructional planning, delivery, and assessment. These tasks are then scored anonymously by “calibrated” scorers with limited knowledge of candidates’ teaching contexts or

development over time. TPAs are designed as high-stakes assessments, meaning that candidates who do not pass are not eligible for licensure.

In its current iteration, CalTPA requires candidates to complete a set of four Tasks throughout their teacher preparation experience. These Tasks (Subject-Specific Pedagogy, Designing Instruction, Assessing Learning, and Culminating Teaching Experience) increase in complexity, and are scored by faculty, mentor teachers, and other educators who have completed a state-sanctioned calibration training. These scorers are required to undergo re-calibration on an annual basis, and are paid by the individual TEP via student fees that are either paid outright per Task, or included in the cost of the program. Candidates must successfully achieve a passing score of either 3 or 4 (out of 4) on every Task in order to be recommended for a credential. Candidates who pass a Task receive a score, but no feedback; candidates who fail are eligible to receive limited feedback before undergoing a “remediation” process that requires them to enroll in and pay for another course in order to retake the Task.

Unlike CalTPA, both PACT and edTPA rely exclusively on a snapshot of candidates’ performance during their student teaching semester. The premise for these assessments is simple: student teaching candidates plan a 3-5 lesson instructional sequence, film themselves during the implementation of those lessons, and evaluate student work to determine how their teaching impacted student learning. They then answer a series of narrative prompts related to their curricular, pedagogical, and theoretical rationale, and upload their entire 50-80 page portfolio (including lesson plans, instructional materials, video clips, student work, and approximately 25 pages of narrative) for scoring by an anonymous evaluator. This evaluator is, according to SCALE and Pearson, a teacher or teacher educator somewhere in the United States who has undergone a 19-24 hour training and “calibration” process designed to ensure they can provide unbiased, standardized numerical scores for each of 12-18 rubrics (the exact requirements vary by level and discipline). Candidates receive their scores, but no feedback or justification for their scores, approximately one month after submission. In the states where passing is required for licensure, those candidates whose numerical score falls below the state “cut score” are not eligible to teach, regardless of other measures of their performance or the recommendation of school- or university-faculty.

Despite advocates’ repeated insistence that edTPA, like PACT, was developed “by the profession and for the profession” (AACTE & SCALE, 2014; SCALE, 2014) edTPA is owned and copyrighted by the Stanford Center for Assessment Learning and Equity (SCALE), administered solely by Pearson Education, and relentlessly advertised by the AACTE (see below, and Ayers, 2015). National data regarding edTPA is owned, examined, curated, and selectively released by test developers as suits their interests. There have been few studies of edTPA’s predictive validity, no published peer reviewed analyses related to a national data set, and no substantive response to widespread critiques of the resource intensity of edTPA’s structure and implementation. It has been institutionalized extremely rapidly, and in many cases, over the protest of university-based teacher educators (Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015b).

## **Methods**

The perspectives and voices of teacher educators are marginalized in teacher preparation as neoliberal priorities of standardization and accountability are upheld (Croft, Roberts & Stenhouse, 2016; Sleeter, 2009). Pearson, accrediting bodies, and powerful capitalist interests garner significant attention and publicity as they feed the false narrative that the current system of teacher education is failing and therefore producing teachers ill equipped for their work (Berliner & Glass, 2014; Dunn, 2013, Ravitch, 2013). To disrupt the silencing of teacher educators, we wrote and analyzed our own

counternarratives, a methodology based in CRT where researchers use counter-story as a tool for exposing, analyzing, and challenging historical narratives that center and privilege the powerful by instead highlighting the stories of people and groups who are usually marginalized (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This methodology allows us to analyze the ways in which our experiences relate to the assault of neoliberal forces in our TEPs. Our counternarratives also represent a way for us to collect and process our own lived stories and then to collaboratively reflect upon each other's personal/professional experiences with TPAs in the context that the neoliberal policies represent attempts to dominate our social justice framework in teacher education.

This article draws upon written counternarratives from each of the four authors. Through a critical self-study of our experiences and sense-making of state-mandated TPAs in our individual contexts, we seek to understand the choices we have made to resist TPAs in our professional lives. By centering the voices, perspectives, and professional expertise of teacher educators such as ourselves, we challenge and resist neoliberal policy while modeling the types of activism we strive to cultivate in our own candidates.

Three principal types of counternarratives are described by Solórzano and Yosso (2002): personal stories, other people's stories, and composite stories. For this project, we used personal stories that depicted each author's perspectives and lived experiences. We constructed the counternarratives from multiple data sources. For example, we collected artifacts from each author, including syllabi, lesson plans, personal journals, email communication, departmental documents, communication with national organizations, and statewide directives. These materials were then analyzed and coded to identify central themes by author and across authors. Each author's counternarrative addresses one or more of the central themes of curricular, pedagogical, and political resistance that emerged from our analysis (see Table 1 below).

Table 1  
*Themes of Counternarratives*

<b>Counternarrative Author</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Ruchi	Resistance via curricular choices Resistance via curriculum/framework for instruction creation
Nick	Refusing to devote instructional time to TPA Resistance via curricular choices Censure for refusing to implement TPA
Alison	Intentionally accepted service appointment as TPA coordinator with intention to implement it as justly as possible Resistance via legislative-based action Resistance via scholarship
Erica	Refusing to devote instructional time to TPA Refusal to participate in implementation of TPA in the TPP

## **Implications of TPAs as Policy**

In the following sections, we examine the implications of TPAs on our work as justice-oriented teacher educators, focusing on the complex curricular, pedagogical, and political implications of this high-stakes standardization of our field. Our critical counternarratives illustrate the many ways TPAs impact our work with candidates, and the multiple, overlapping, and varied ways that we as justice-oriented teacher educators respond to and resist this encroachment. Overall, our focus is on the dilemmas created by TPA policies, and the curricular, pedagogical and activist strategies we use to prepare justice-oriented candidates to meet, exceed, and resist the demands of TPAs.

### **Ruchi's Story: Justice-oriented Preparation in the Face of a Prescriptive Curriculum**

In 2008, I completed my doctorate in curriculum and teaching in New York and moved back to San Jose, California. I found a part-time lecturer position at San Jose State University and served as a supervisor and instructor in the Critical Research Academy, a strand of the department's elementary education program focused on social justice. It is in this context where I first learned of the PACT, as the assessment was being piloted that year. We were given a large handbook that we were told included everything our candidates needed to successfully pass the PACT, including support guides, tools for selecting a learning segment, copies of the rubrics, sign-off forms, and so forth. As an instructor, I was expected to attend multiple, unpaid, PACT trainings, to calibrate my scoring and learn the material. Even then, I found the handbook difficult to follow.

As instructors, we were expected to prepare students for the PACT, as well as provide students with the curricular and pedagogical tools they needed to be successful in the classroom. In my teaching seminar, co-taught with two instructors, we dedicated a large part of our planning time finding ways to dissect the handbook and adequately present information to our candidates in a way that was clear and accessible. Given the newness of the assessment, students were not held accountable for their scores but were still required to complete the lengthy teaching event.

For multiple subject candidates, the teaching events requires candidates to plan a learning segment of about one week (3-5 lessons) designed to develop students' abilities to comprehend and/or compose text. After planning and enacting the learning segment, candidates submit lesson plans, copies of instructional and assessment materials, one or two video clips of teaching, a summary of whole class learning, and an analysis of student work samples. They also write commentaries describing his or her teaching context, analyzing their teaching practices, and reflecting on what they learned about their teaching practice and students' learning. Each rubric defines four performance levels. Candidates receive a score based upon their performance across the tasks, which determines whether the candidate has passed the performance assessment. Scoring a 2 or better on most tasks is a passing score. In addition to completing the Teaching Event candidates complete a content area task (CAT) in Science and in Social Studies. For the CAT, candidates are expected to write two lesson plans with a 3-7 single-spaced commentary. The professor teaching the course scores the CATs. The CAT does not require the students to teach the lessons; the focus is more on the planning and assessment.

As a lecturer, my teaching was deeply impacted by the implementation intensity and force of the PACT. For my students, having the pressure to plan a week's worth of lessons, while collecting artifacts, writing reflections, and designing a 15-minute video clip was especially daunting and time-consuming. Consequently, my teaching seminar, which should be devoted to preparing teachers with the theoretical and practical knowledge they need to succeed in the classroom, became largely

devoted to the PACT, as I helped students create video-clips, work through their anxiety, and answered their PACT-related questions. I also spent multiple hours in PACT training, unpaid, being trained to score the assessments, time which could be devoted to planning for class or meeting with my students.

**Navigating the TPA.** I have aimed to successfully navigate the TPA in my courses while upholding my commitment to prepare justice-oriented educators, but this is not without struggle. My resistance has taken the form of restructuring and reworking TPA guidelines so that the expectations of the PACT/CAT are not removed from our discussions of what it means to be a justice-oriented educator.

In my case, decisions around the PACT were made without my input, even though these decisions directly influenced and impacted my ability to teach effectively. For example, as an instructor at San Francisco State University, my course, *Social Studies, Literacy, and Social Justice in the K-3 Classroom*, normally a 15-week course, was condensed to an intensive eight-week course in order to accommodate the PACT due date. The faculty were finding that students could not focus on their methods courses with all of the pressures they were facing with regard to the PACT, as students were missing classes and not completing assignments in order to finish PACT requirements. Berlak (2010) found similar results in her research, as students across California State Universities found PACT, “a serious and significant distraction from their coursework and student teaching, as it created unnecessary anxiety and exhaustion” (p. 114). By condensing the social studies methods course, the department hoped that students could complete their teaching event, and then re-focus their attention toward social studies methods at the end of the semester.

Given the revised course, I now had eight weeks to prepare students to teach justice-oriented language arts and social studies curriculum. Within those short eight weeks, there was also the expectation that four weeks into class students understand and complete the social studies content area task (CAT), also a part of the TPA. For the CAT, students wrote two lessons that aligned with the focus specified in the content-specific rubrics. The CAT would include a lengthy commentary describing their classroom context and the pedagogical or theoretical approach supporting the lesson’s creation and implementation, as well as the pedagogical approach supporting the plan. The commentary would also attention to the language demands of tasks and plans to support language development.

When students saw the syllabus on the first day of class, and that the CAT was due four weeks later, some were in tears, while others were completely angry. Although I hoped to help my students through the CAT, the rules and regulations attached to the TPA made clear that instructors could not help students with their lesson plans.

**Developing a framework.** As I could not provide my students with explicit feedback on their CAT, it was important to me to equip my candidates with tools that would help them create a literacy-rich, justice-oriented lesson plan. To support my students, I developed a framework for my students (Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013), drawing upon multiple multicultural education texts (Au, Bigelow, & Karp, 2007; Bigelow, Harvey, Karp, & Miller, 2001; Bigelow & Peterson, 1998; Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 2006; Oakes & Lipton, 2007; Sleeter, 2005; Wade, 2007). The framework was developed to provide candidates with a concrete, practical guide to creating and enacting a justice-oriented social studies curriculum. The framework consists of five tenets (see Agarwal-Rangnath, 2013): (1) Inspiring Wonder - Teacher facilitates curiosity and wonder in students; (2) Painting the picture - Students work to uncover the past and critically examine various sources of information from multiple perspectives; (3) Application - Teacher provides a space for students to students to process and synthesize content knowledge; (4) Connecting the past to the present -

Students draw parallels and connections between the past and the present; and (5) Facilitating change - Students investigate ways they can make change within their schools and communities.

The framework I present above is meant to be used as a tool to help teacher-candidates and classroom teachers adapt and restructure mandated curriculum to teach from a critical perspective. In addition to the framework, I provided my students with concrete strategies they could use to create a lesson plan. For example, some of the activities that fall under ‘painting the picture’ would be: literature circles (exploration of multiple texts from multiple perspectives), simulations, role-play, and dialogue poems. Although the framework can be used and adapted in different ways, for the purpose of this class and the requirements candidates were expected to meet, I offered the framework as a guide to help students develop a five-day justice-oriented social studies unit. The first two lessons would be used for the CAT, while the entire five-day unit would be turned in for their course final.

To prepare my students for the CAT and meet the objectives and goals of the course, I structured my class to integrate the ideals of critical literacy, social studies methodology, and the practical and theoretical components related to the TPA. Although the objectives of the course remained the same, the course structure was adapted to meet the demands of the TPA. Each course session was almost four hours, as I was expected to teach a 16-week course in eight weeks. I carefully planned each day’s lesson so that students received the theoretical and practical knowledge they needed to be successful in the classroom. I worked diligently to not “teach toward the test,” but instead, find ways that would allow my students to learn how to be justice-oriented teachers and successfully complete the CAT.

Day 1 was an introduction to the course and the CAT. We discussed topics and themes students may want to pursue for their CAT lessons. I also shared the framework I created, with teaching activity ideas, and discussed how it could be used to develop students’ unit plans. We also discussed the notion of critical literacy, as I shared how critical literacy can be the foundation to teach social studies and literacy as integrated subjects. On days 2-6, we explored a different tenet of the framework in sequential order. In classes, we would first discuss the tenet, what it means, and how it can translate into practice (e.g. Inspiring Wonder). Then, I would model a justice-oriented lesson around the tenet, sharing strategies that might be used with the tenet. Last, we would discuss how we could use the tenet to design and create a justice-oriented lesson plan that integrates literacy. Following the discussion, students would break out into literature circles to discuss their assigned reading and how it connected to their daily practice as student teachers. Last, we would go to the resource center to meet in groups. Students would have the opportunity to work on their CAT lesson plans and find resources to support their work. I would travel from table to table answering students’ questions.

In eight weeks, I tried to prepare my students with the theoretical and practical knowledge they needed to enact justice-oriented social studies content in their classrooms. I offered models of teaching and lesson plans that they could lean on, as well as a framework to support them in curricular design. We discussed ways social studies content could be incorporated into language arts through reading and writing workshop, as social studies is often a marginalized subject area. We also discussed the role of critical literacy, and the need to continually question the underlying messages and biases in texts. Additionally, I shared texts that represent the voices of groups that are often marginalized or silenced in textbooks that my teacher candidates could use to explore multiple perspectives with their students. I scaffolded the CAT process so that the assessment was not too isolated or removed from the overall goals and objectives of the course, but students felt adequately prepared to complete the assessment.

As a professor, I wish I did not have to structure my course around the PACT/CAT. The PACT/CAT served to limit the time I had with my students, influenced my assignments, and created unneeded stress and anxiety for my students. Additionally, the CAT provided me with no greater information about my students' ability to be successful in the program; the authentic assessments I had in place already served that purpose. Instead, the CAT served to divert time and resources from my teaching and create angst for myself and my students.

Given the situation I was in, I found spaces to uphold my commitment to social justice teaching. I found the framework to be extremely helpful in providing a guide for my students to create and enact justice-oriented social studies lessons. It allowed my students to complete the CAT in a way that was still connected to the rest of the course. Students were happy about the opportunity to receive explicit feedback on their CAT (I turned around their assignment in a week) and then use the feedback to build their five lesson unit. I also had students present their units on the last day. Outlines of the units were made available to each member in the class. This allowed my students to walk away from class with many lesson ideas for their new classrooms.

### **Nick's Story: "We Want You to Take a Break"**

Since 2003, I have been involved as a teacher educator in the support and training of candidates in, and the assessment of, the CalTPA and/or PACT in three different southern California TEPs: UCLA, Claremont Graduate University, and California State University-Fullerton (CSUF). The institution where I have been tenure-track and now tenured faculty since 2009, CSUF, chose the CalTPA as its required TPA, and is the first program where it has been consequential. Prior to CSUF, I was involved in six years (2003–2008) of implementing the CalTPA and/or PACT as a pilot; that is, as required parts of TEP coursework and assignments, but without all-or-nothing consequences on being recommended for a preliminary credential.

In this section, I will discuss a few key examples of how, in my most recent experience at CSUF, CalTPA has negatively impacted teacher preparation and the teaching profession as a whole, and has served as an unnecessary and excessive additional source of stress and focus for teaching candidates and teacher educators alike. Also, I will discuss the ways in which I have resisted the negative impact on the preparation of my teacher candidates in order to maintain my practice as a justice-oriented teacher educator.

**The Tasks of the CalTPA.** Over the last five years at CSUF, I have trained and supported candidates mostly in the completion of the Subject-Specific Pedagogy Task, sometimes called Task 1, in our multidisciplinary first semester pedagogical seminar course. This is a written Task that presents the candidate with four different hypothetical case studies that require the candidate to relate subject matter skills and knowledge (in accordance with present state content standards) to specific teaching methods and instructional approaches appropriate to the particular discipline and students being taught. The case studies depict, in order, (1) a class of students, (2) another teacher's assessment plan, (3) a student who is an English Language Learner, and (4) a student with special needs. These case studies have remained unchanged since 2009, and are publicly available. For each subject matter's Task 1, the content, lessons, or units are specific to the subject, but the core characteristics of the case studies are identical. As stated before, candidates must achieve a score of 3 or 4 on a four-point scale in order to move on the program, and to be allowed to submit the next Task.

**Resisting alignment and standardization.** Our faculty and program's response to CalTPA has been similar to those documented by other TEPs (Wendling & Chadwick, 2009). Soon after fully implementing it, our faculty began to feel that there was not enough time to meet the new state TPA mandate and uncover the depth of learning inherent in each course. Candidates were

frustrated with the added amount of high-stakes work and faculty were worried about maintaining the integrity of their courses. Like the program examined by Wendling & Chadwick (2009) our faculty program-wide were directed to modify and reduce assignments, developed specific lesson and unit plan templates compatible with the work required by the Tasks, and adjusted assignment and class meeting dates to avoid conflicts with the TPA Task due dates. At CSUF, as part of the TEP, a required course was added to the second semester strictly designed for TPA training and support. All of these changes were and are well-meaning, as without passing the CalTPA, our candidates cannot receive their credential, regardless of how successful they have been during the thousands of hours and having spent thousands of dollars while student teaching, completing course assignments, and being continually evaluated by multiple teacher educators and master teachers.

Since the official implementation of CalTPA in 2009, the pass rate in our program for first time takers has always been in the 95% plus range, and very rarely has anyone failed the CalTPA completely and been refused their credential as a result. What is interesting is that even though over time our pass rate has been consistently high, over the last six years there has been a continual increase in the class time we are expected to spend focusing directly on the TPA Task 1 in the pedagogical seminar course. Out of almost 32 hours of face-to-face individual cohort-based seminar class time, faculty are expected to devote eight hours of instruction focused on just Task 1. From the very beginning of my work at CSUF, after having trained, supported, and assessed students in completing the CalTPA in two other TEPs during the statewide piloting period, I reduced that amount of TPA training time to leave space for what I felt were more important topics, which I will detail later. I initially reduced it to four hours, and then to two hours, with no change in the percentage of students passing or receiving the highest possible score. I am quite confident, especially with the training, materials and support provided by our very committed and caring full-time TPA Coordinator, that other faculty could do this just as well (and likely they do). For me, it was important to resist such mandates and reclaim as much of the space that had been taken up by something that both myself and my students, and many colleagues, saw as a redundant imposition.

For me, in addition to the CalTPA being completely unnecessary, there were so many other things that class time could be used for, such as developing a teaching philosophy and metaphor, researching and viewing classroom video from successful teachers, developing and refining multidisciplinary lessons and units, and understanding the importance of developing partnerships with parents. I always feel that I do not have enough time with teacher candidates to prepare them for the classroom, and with the CalTPA even less time. So, I made a strategic and risky choice to exercise my own academic freedom and professional judgement to do the best I could do for both, by giving the CalTPA the least amount of classroom time I felt it required. Our students were already well prepared to do what the CalTPA asked of them. They took pre-requisite coursework focusing on English Language Learners and students with disabilities, methods instruction which supported and expanded upon effective lesson and unit planning instruction given in our pedagogical seminar course, and were provided with numerous resources compiled by our TPA Coordinator and program faculty. The little class time I gave it was used only to guide students in a close examination of the state-provided Task exemplar responses and rubrics, so they might know what assessors are looking for in a passing Task 1. They already had the resources and knowledge they needed to be successful.

Also, as I said before, the structure and organization of the CalTPA also increasingly influenced our class meeting schedule, and department-wide pedagogical materials. We did not plan any assignments near the due dates for Tasks 1 and 2 in the first semester, and in the second semester discipline-specific cohort seminars course, faculty were told to not hold their classes the weeks that Tasks 3 & 4 are due, instead to put them online. So, in addition to an imposition on the

availability of our most limited resource, time, the assessment also shaped how we organized our curriculum almost regardless of what students were experiencing/exploring in their student teaching at any point in the semester. Having said all of this, it is important to note that despite all of these well-meaning modifications, alignments, and standardizations, my students strongly disliked the entire CalTPA process. On my own course evaluations, it consistently came up as the one thing they would eliminate from the course and their program. The words most often used to describe are “useless”, “a waste of time and money”, “unnecessarily stressful”, “a burden”, and “demoralizing”, despite faculty’s good-natured efforts to convince them otherwise. The many other aspects of our program do not receive nearly this consistent level of negative feedback.

**Injecting social justice frames into standardized teacher assessment.** After my first semester of teaching this first semester pedagogical course, I was asked by two colleagues to develop and teach an “urban” version of the course, as a component of an Urban Teaching and Learning Partnership with a local school district. The ambitious plan was to (1) recruit teaching candidates interested in/committed to teaching in high needs urban schools, (2) provide them with student teaching placements in high needs urban schools, and (3) create an “urban” version of the existing course to support them in understanding and exploring what it means to effectively teach in a high needs urban school setting. This would be consistent with the approach employed by many justice-oriented TEPs across the country (Haberman, 1996; Henning, 2013; Murrell, 2001; Zeichner, 2003). Over the six semesters I officially taught the “urban” cohort, only the third item happened consistently, despite myself providing multiple resources to the numerous subject matter coordinators to assist them in identifying appropriate candidates, schools, and master teachers. Regardless of the inconsistency of recruitment and placements, the cohort could be considered a moderate success, as students consistently reported to me that, whether they thought about teaching in high need urban school before the course or not, they now were excited and felt well prepared to do so.

The curriculum that I developed followed the main texts, topics and schedule of that of the other cohorts who followed a boilerplate syllabus, but I added additional assignments like the development of a personal philosophy and metaphor for their teaching, added elements to existing assignments, added two books as required reading (Burant, Christensen, Dawson Salas, & Walters, 2010; Cushman, 2003), and shifted the gaze of the course towards effective justice-oriented pedagogies that are being enacted in many high need urban schools in all subjects (Coalition of Essential Schools, Annenberg, Teaching Tolerance). I also made an effort to center the strengths and experiences, indeed the voices (StoryCorps.org), of students and parents in high need urban schools and communities in our class resources and discussion. This centering was necessary to counter the many deficit-oriented views of “urban” schools and students I felt would be held by a number of my students (Valencia, 1997; Watson, 2011).

Last, through readings and assignments based in explorations of the enactment of transformational resistance in their classrooms (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001), the building of solidarity with their students (Duncan-Andrade, 2007), and the importance of critical hope (Duncan-Andrade, 2009), candidates were pushed to consider what a social justice orientation might look like in their own classrooms. This was initially a hard sell to candidates, who knew that their colleagues in other cohorts were not doing this additional work. According to my course evaluations though, most students were grateful for the opportunity to reflect via these lenses and to be pushed in their development.

As we began our work on CalTPA Task 1, these social justice frames informed our thinking, and student responses. For example, in this Task candidates are presented with case studies of two individual students; Elena, an English Language learner, and Alex, a student with special needs.

Although a candidate may get a passing score by modifying the hypothetical lesson or unit to address only the student's supposed deficiencies/challenges, I encouraged candidates to look for strengths first. By looking at the students' background information through a deficit lens, Elena is below grade level in her English grammar and vocabulary and is shy in whole class settings. Alex has a sound/symbol processing disorder, is self-isolating, and is also below grade level in reading and writing. When considering the same available data through the perspective of their strengths, Elena was a very successful student in Mexico, is a voracious reader of Spanish literature, is proud of her culture and family, interacts well with her peers in small groups, and in 1.5 years of being in the United States, has attained a relatively high level of English literacy in oral and written forms. In the case of Alex, even with a severe learning disability he has developed effective literacy strategies with teachers and on his own that have kept him within three grade levels of his peers.

Students were also pushed in how they might re-interpret details about the students that may be seen as positive attributes. For example, we are told that Elena was a successful student in Mexico with high grades, and her parents are professionals. Some students would identify this as an important detail to cite in their response adding that, "Well, Elena was successful in school because her parents are professionals, which means they likely got a college degree, which means they value education and have taught that to Elena". In a university like CSUF, with the majority of my students being first generation college-goers, my next step in this teachable moment is quite simple. I ask them to raise their hand if either one of their parents are professionals; very few hands go up. Then I ask how many of them had a parent or parents that encouraged and supported them to succeed in their education. Virtually all hands go up. So, why this connection that some are making between parents who are professionals and valuing education? The readings that follow this discussion over the next few class meetings (Abdul-Adil & Farmer, 2006; Lopez, 2001) give them further information, and a reframing for an ideology that would have them believe that if a student isn't as successful as others in school it is because of a lack of support and high academic expectations at home, and vice versa.

After six semesters, the partnership that had initially supported this cohort's approach was no longer funded. Regardless, I continued to teach my next two cohorts in the same way. I defended the minimization of the CalTPA training, the additional work, the "different" focus, as important and successful to a small group of vocally resistant senior colleagues. As a result of what was perceived as my continual resistance to the increased standardization and alignment of the multidisciplinary pedagogical seminar courses, I was told by my department chair to "take a break" from teaching the course for a year.

Despite overwhelmingly positive evaluations from students (many of whom were by their own admission initially skeptical, uninterested, and even annoyed by the focus and additional work of our "urban" version of the course), and always equal if not sometimes better results on Task 1 of the CalTPA compared to other cohorts, the "trouble" I was causing by straying from the rigid, lockstep approach of some department and program leaders was characterized as inexcusable. That one year has now turned into three, but in light of the lack of support and continual attacks by a few senior colleagues for my teaching approach in connection only with my work in this course, it has actually given me a much-needed respite and become a new form of my own individual resistance.

### **TPA-Based "Reform" in a National Context**

Unlike Ruchi and Nick, whose experience with TPAs spans multiple years, Alison and Erica taught in states where TPAs were recent additions to the teacher licensure landscape. As justice-oriented faculty in federally designated minority-serving institutions in Illinois and Georgia,

respectively, they are grappling with strategies for responding to new state mandates requiring their candidates to take—and pass—edTPA as a condition of licensure.

### **Alison's Story: On Becoming a Mockingjay**

In 2013, I relocated to Illinois from Massachusetts to join the faculty of a public, Hispanic Serving Institution with a deep commitment to preparing first generation candidates for careers as justice-oriented urban educators. That was the same year that the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) required all TEPs to begin phasing in edTPA, and passing edTPA became mandatory for Illinois teacher candidates seeking initial licensure on or after September 1, 2015. When I moved to Illinois, my knowledge of edTPA was limited to the experiences of Barbara Madeloni, a mentor and colleague from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. When UMass required teacher candidates to participate in an edTPA pilot, Barbara's students refused. She supported them, drawing national media attention (e.g., Winerip, 2012). Barbara's students met success, and to this day, Massachusetts does not require edTPA at the state level. She, however, was reprimanded for supporting their activism, and ultimately dismissed from UMass (see Carmichael, 2012; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013). Barbara's activism lives on, however; since her dismissal she was elected President of the Massachusetts Teachers Association and is a national role model for justice-oriented, grassroots education reform.

That's all I knew: edTPA was controversial, and some good people didn't like it. When I learned that it would be required in Illinois, I imagined edTPA would mirror other high-stakes teacher assessments; I expected it to be cumbersome, expensive, and distracting. I anticipated it would privilege white, middle and upper class candidates with fluency in dominant cultural and linguistic registers, and limit access among culturally, experientially, and academically diverse candidates. As a justice-oriented teacher and teacher educator, I was already intimately familiar with artistry of navigating hostile mandates, a process that inevitably requires a combination of strategic advocacy, critical analysis of the content and structure of required exams, targeted instruction related to areas of significant need, and explicit reinforcement of the absurdity of using high-stakes tests to evaluate anything of import. I figured edTPA would be just another hoop for faculty and candidates to jump through. I was wrong.

Since the beginning, edTPA implementation has been riddled with problems. There are reports that edTPA is undermining the ability of teacher educators to prepare their candidates to navigate contextually relevant educational dilemmas. Meuwissen & Choppin (2015), for example, analyze "tensions" associated with edTPA implementation in New York and Washington states, including those associated with the structure, implementation, and impact of edTPA. Despite their overall agreement with the importance of evaluating candidates' ability to effectively plan, implement, and assess instruction, they found that the tensions created by edTPA—unlike the curricular and pedagogical tensions typically experienced by early career teachers—"were not necessarily productive toward the ends of improving teaching and student learning" (p. 19). Ultimately, while all of the teachers in their study passed edTPA, they conclude that edTPA itself may be less reflective of candidates' readiness than their "abilities to navigate the complications associated with a high-stakes performance assessment" (p. 19).

**Becoming a justice-oriented cog in a neoliberal wheel.** It was against this backdrop that I was asked to serve as edTPA Coordinator for my College, and in so doing found myself entrenched in edTPA implementation, policy, and protest. At the time, I was nearing the end of my first year on the tenure track, and accepted this service appointment (which carries a one-course-per-year release) and the limited institutional power it carries, in order to foreground ideological, political, and practical implications of preparing our candidates—many of whom are themselves

from historically underrepresented and marginalized groups—to be justice-oriented educators within and despite an increasingly hostile profession.

In the years since, I learned more about edTPA than anyone would want to. I have supervised candidates going through the edTPA process, facilitated program-, college-, and state-level professional development sessions related to edTPA, and guided faculty in local evaluation training. I was instrumental in developing and implementing our college's curricular, programmatic, and policy responses to edTPA. Colleagues and I recently estimated that the first year of our edTPA pilot process required our faculty to invest more than 2,000 hours in edTPA-related training (Dover & Schultz, 2016), a number that has surely grown as edTPA became consequential. I now know edTPA intimately, and could not be more critical of its structure, implementation, and function as a weapon in the unparalleled neoliberal attack on teaching and teacher education.

Elsewhere, colleagues and I outline our many critiques of edTPA and its impact on the field (Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015a, 2015b, 2016). Here, however, I wish to focus not on edTPA itself, but rather the dilemmas of practice associated with being a justice-oriented teacher educator in accountability-driven times. On a daily basis, we are required to walk a tightrope between high-stakes, neoliberal mandates and our own commitment to cultivating justice-oriented agency. We have to prepare candidates to meet the particularities of edTPA—a process which devalues and undermines our professional autonomy and expertise—while simultaneously encouraging them to think and act in the best interests of their students. We coach candidates in writing philosophy statements, then require them to complete an assessment that—in the words of developers itself—“may require [a] teacher candidate to make compromises in his or her practice to be compliant with the assessment expectations” (Sato, 2014, p. 10).

The same compromises are required of us: despite our candidates' strong performance on edTPA itself (approximately 90% passed during the first semester of high-stakes implementation), only 11% of the 125 candidates who completed anonymous surveys about their experience described it as a positive learning experience. While 41% could identify both positive and negative elements of the edTPA process, 46% were extremely critical of the process. Their comments detailed the redundancy of the narrative prompts, the ways edTPA undermined their ability to focus primarily on the needs of their students, and the stress created by a premature high-stakes assessment. In response to a question regarding their advice for future candidates, several suggested they fight edTPA mandates at the state level or “change your major;” one student simply wrote “Fuck edTPA” 40 times. Nothing about teaching in this context is easy, or comfortable. Nor is resistance without risk: teacher candidates who opt out of edTPA are not eligible for licensure, and teacher education faculty report censure for challenging edTPA implementation (e.g., Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013).

**Redefining advocacy: Getting out of the frying pan and into the fire.** In Illinois, a state with a history of both intense educational injustice and justice-oriented activism, controversies surrounding edTPA have been especially fiery, drawing national attention (e.g., Ayers, 2015; Ravitch, 2015; Singer, 2015). Moreover, the “edTPA public relations machine” has been relentless in its advocacy of edTPA in the state (Ayers, 2015). For example, when colleagues and I published a high-profile edTPA critique (Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015b), a group of Illinois-based edTPA advocates responded rapidly with an essay entitled “Rebuttal to Dover et al.” (Adkins, Spesia & Snakenborg, 2015). That rebuttal, written by faculty and administrators with formal ties to SCALE, co-opted the language of CRT to position itself as a “counter-narrative” to our “one-sided view of the potential impact of edTPA” (Adkins et al., 2015). We responded with a follow-up essay providing additional context regarding our experiences with edTPA scoring, tutoring, and policy, and detailing our practical and ethical concerns regarding edTPA implementation in our state

(Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015a). We closed our piece with a call for a call for continued scholarship:

Indeed, the controversies surrounding edTPA are illustrative of the need for ongoing research regarding teacher preparation, assessment, and impact. In addition to local analyses of outcomes associated with edTPA, we also see a need for wider, independent scholarship that examines the impact of the privatization and corporatization of teacher preparation and evaluation. (Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015a)

However, rather than responding to our calls for independent analyses, SCALE and AACTE embarked on a public relations campaign. In a series of events chronicled by Ayers (2015)—and eerily similar to those described by Singer (2014)—in the days following the publication of this second commentary, the Adkins et al.'s (2015) “rebuttal” was retooled as a “member voices” testimony regarding how well edTPA was “working for Illinois.” This testimonial was then posted on the EdPrepMatters website (September 25, 2015), added to the SCALE edTPA resource library (September 25, 2015), tweeted by AACTE (September 28, 2015), broadcast to the AACTE listserv (September 29, 2015), and published in the AACTE edTPA Community Newsletter (October 5, 2015). The following excerpt is representative of how this public relations effort was framed by SCALE and AACTE:

Amee Adkins, Tracy Specia, and John Snakenborg have been immersed in edTPA implementation for several years as the lead administrators for implementation support in Illinois and as scorers and scoring trainers. In a recent blog post, they attest to the deep educative value of edTPA and address some common misconceptions about the assessment. They argue that access to a highly qualified and competent teacher is “a civil right that all students and parents deserve and should demand,” and that edTPA is the best way to prepare such teachers. (SCALE & AACTE, 2015)

Suffice to say, neither SCALE nor AACTE has ever publicized our edTPA scholarship.

As local controversies gained more press (e.g., Lyons, 2015) and legislative attention, edTPA advocates took their work to social media. In the days leading up to the November 2015 Illinois General Assembly edTPA hearing, edTPA advocates—including the original authors of the rebuttal—began a social media campaign to “smack down” the opposition (Adkins, in Ayers, 2015) to edTPA. In his analysis of tweets posted by Amee Adkins (of Adkins et al.), Senior Associate Dean of the College of Education at Illinois State University, the former president of the Illinois Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (IACTE), a member of the edTPA Implementation Support Steering Committee in Illinois, and a member of the Illinois State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board, Ayers noted that:

Recent social media posts regarding the upcoming Illinois General Assembly edTPA subject matter hearing (scheduled for November 10, 2015), are almost comical in their outrageousness... in subsequent posts, made in response to a November media report about edTPA controversies in Illinois, Adkins refers to Illinois scholars who oppose edTPA as “cranks” who lack expertise in the field, arguing that her “vast experience” working with edTPA invalidates the “opinions” of other scholars. (Ayers, 2015)

As a junior faculty member, nothing about being the target of this campaign felt “almost comical.” It was awful, and without the support of extremely supportive colleagues and administrators within and beyond my college, would have been unbearable. What I found especially troubling was that many of the actors involved were teacher educators fiercely advocating for a flawed policy that they had come to see as their only means of preserving and protecting the field. It seems that in the hotly contested, market-driven landscape of TPA policy, teacher educators are ourselves being repurposed as neoliberal weapons in the “war against teachers” (Giroux, 2013, p. 458).

### **Erica’s Story: Just Say No**

When I first learned about edTPA I was sitting in my living room having a conversation with another teacher educator (who also happens to be a dear friend) about the ways our social justice orientation in teacher education were being challenged by top-down, neoliberal policies disconnected from our teaching contexts. We had been trained in the now defunct Division of Educational Studies at Emory University to become critical scholars who would question so-called reforms designed to make teachers more accountable in a market-based style where teachers and the children they serve are reduced to tick marks on a balance sheet (Dunn & Faison, 2015). My friend had just attended a comprehensive half-day introductory edTPA seminar at the university where she taught. This session was organized by an entire staff responsible for the successful implementation of edTPA within the next few years as it became consequential in the state. I had previously heard about changes in preparation requirements via a few emails from my Chair where she urged the faculty to educate ourselves about it “in our spare time.”

By contrast, the institution where my friend taught is R1-aspirant and has hundreds of teacher education faculty and a well-supported staff structure to navigate the administrative requirements of the teacher certification process. In contrast, I am on faculty at a teaching institution where our seven Teacher Education faculty have a 4/4 teaching load as well as multiple administrative positions related to the state and national certification process, student advisement, and many other university service-related duties. Thus, it is understandable that my department chair (who also carries a 2/2 teaching load in addition to vast administrative responsibilities associated with being the certification officer of our TEP) had weighty and competing demands on her time, making it challenging for her to provide a similar edTPA introductory experience for faculty in our TEP.

Thus, from the outset of what Georgia’s teacher certification body, the Professional Standards Commission, has deemed the means to ensure that every new teacher is prepared to meet student needs on “Day 1” (AACTE, 2015), the disparities among well-resources programs and less-well funded ones, both charged with preparing teachers, are clear. While large institutions have significant administrative support to manage the new requirements of edTPA, at my institution, all of the heavy lifting is done by a single full-time faculty member who receives one course release and a stipend of less than the salary of a part-time faculty teaching a 3-credit course. Our coordinator is capable, intelligent and dutiful, balancing teaching duties and edTPA responsibilities with great finesse; however, this colleague is undoubtedly beleaguered. The coordinator is managing the workload of an entire office of administrators: the power that other universities have thrust behind this high-stakes assessment.

My institution serves first-generation college students and is designated a Primarily Black Institution (PBI) by the U.S. Department of Education, with approximately 62% of students enrolled in Fall 2014 self-identifying as Black. The student population also skews female (68.5%) and non-traditional student (average student age is 28). The non-traditional teacher-candidates served by our TEP often need to work while completing their certification requirements as they have financial

commitments and family obligations to care for children or aging parents. As a result, they generally do not receive assistance from their families in the ways that students at other traditional-age-serving institutions might throughout the state.

**Enter the edTPA albatross.** In the state of Georgia edTPA was piloted during the 2013-14 school year. Candidates in my TEP completed the assessments, though the results would not be consequential for receipt of teaching certifications for another year. Our seven faculty collectively spent countless hours learning about the new assessment and becoming familiar with the new requirements our candidates would soon need to meet. For me, this was an utterly miserable and demoralizing experience. With the pressing demands associated with my teaching load, administrative responsibilities and my earnest desire to pursue meaningful scholarly research, I found myself in multiple 4-hour Friday afternoon meetings mired in the minutiae of the endless rubrics and prompts of this assessment. A growing sense of bitterness and anger swelled as I believed that this new assessment, hailed by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission and AACTE as a means for raising the standards of teacher preparation in order to have the nation's most well-prepared teachers in Georgia's classrooms (French & Sarrio, 2014), would have disproportionately negative effects on teacher-candidates at my institution. For example, with the addition of edTPA, the costs of licensure would easily approach \$1000, depending on teacher-candidate success on program admission and content exams. Our non-traditional students, indeed more likely to have dependents and financial obligations and already unable to work due to their student teaching responsibilities would find it very challenging to pay an additional \$300 for edTPA.

I also wondered about the anonymous off-site scorers who would evaluate our students' work. They would not know our candidates, or our local schools. As an applied linguist, I wondered if our students would not be evaluated fairly because in their videotaped segments they speak with southern accents and/or use other varieties of English, albeit in culturally and pedagogically appropriate ways with their students. Knowing that my university's service area is primarily comprised of Title I schools in under resourced, underserved and marginalized communities, I wondered how SCALE could ensure that the scorers would be "uniform and impartial" (AACTE, n.d.-a) in the evaluation of our candidates if videotaped segments captured mostly black and brown students who are not sitting quietly in neat rows. As the National Association of Multicultural Educators (NAME) explains, "teacher educators must be knowledgeable about and attentive to the local, contextual, lived reality of the student teachers with whom they are working" (NAME, 2014). A benefit of our TEP's intimate size is that almost all faculty have multiple opportunities to work with students, to watch their growth and to understand their strengths and areas of challenge. Outsourcing the scoring of students' portfolios makes alien salient and relevant local contextual factors that our faculty understand. I worried that off-site scorers, who only see a brief snapshot of candidates' work, would, or could, not.

**My agency and my cool: Completely losing it.** More than anything I wanted to walk out of these meetings and decline to attend future ones; however, as a junior, as-yet-tenured faculty, I deemed it unwise. Also unwise, and now embarrassing, was a mini-rant I had during one of the marathon edTPA meetings. I am a reliably collegial faculty member, generally one to encourage, and support my colleagues. However, after one particularly taxing and depressing local scoring training session my attitude was toxic and my energy was uncooperative at best. Following hours of discussion about whether or not we thought students might have grounds for legal action if they successfully passed all of their classes and field experience requirements, yet did not complete edTPA with a passing score I interrupted the edTPA coordinator mid-sentence and blurted out how ridiculous I thought this entire enterprise was. In retrospect, I believe my uncharacteristically snarky

comments were a telling symptom of the degree to which I felt utterly stressed, frustrated and disempowered because I perceived my only option was to be complicit in this process which I truly believed would be detrimental to our students, to our TEP, and to my personal justice orientation as a teacher educator. Later that evening, while regretting my comments to my colleague, I sent her an email of apology because my interjection in the meeting did not meet my personal standards of courtesy and integrity. At the same time, I believe the source of my anger was justified and I stand beside the audacious critique I made in the meeting. This attack on my profession had created an ethical dilemma for me. As a result, I knew I had to direct my agency in a meaningful way to fight against the unjust system.

**“Did I get a Ph.D. for this”?** In one of our many edTPA meetings, a colleague wondered aloud to me in a side conversation about the value of his education and research if being a teacher-educator was increasingly becoming standardized via the corporatization of public education. We quipped that we would soon no longer be state employees, but Pearson’s agents. I perceive that a general malaise and sense of despair has set in around edTPA in my TEP and many of my colleagues have taken the approach to cede to edTPA because like many other education reform “fads,” it was here to stay for a while (Au, 2013).

Knowing that other states had opted not to adopt edTPA, I felt outraged that my TEP was participating in this scam. As justice-oriented teacher-educators we thrive on the nuanced relationships between teachers and students that cannot be easily be measured with a standardized assessment (Au & Tempel, 2012; Croft, Roberts & Stenhouse, 2015). Our TEP had not so long ago crafted a conceptual framework to guide our curricula, course offerings and ethos to produce teachers who would be competent, caring, culturally responsive, collaborative, and committed, all while engaging in reflective practice. edTPA didn’t support our theoretical framework. So, I decided I wouldn’t support edTPA.

**Finding my groove and re-discovering my agency.** I decided that I would not support my TEP’s involvement in edTPA. I made a conscious decision to opt myself out. As a faculty who teaches foundations of education classes and the coordinator of the endorsement in ESOL, I am somewhat buffered from the encroachment of edTPA into my courses in terms of instructional time and curricular choices, unlike my colleagues who teach methods courses and the educational seminars and who are directly involved in the implementation of this TPA in the TEP. I have decided to use my positionality to employ my justice orientation in the foundations classes to have students study, closely examine and directly critique TPAs in general. As Richmond, Bartell and Dunn (2016) describe, I feel a “distinct tension between providing students with the world that currently exists and the world that [I] wish existed” (p. 103).

I bear a certain weight related to the way I have decided to resist TPAs in my work context. I constantly consider how my lack of involvement in the implementation of edTPA affects my TEP and my colleagues. Since I do not attend edTPA strategy and planning meetings, I know that my justice-oriented perspectives and priorities are not represented in TEP-wide policy discussions. Also, due to the size of our teacher education department, my opting out means my colleagues are carrying more of the responsibility for this state-mandated requirement for certification.

My status as foundations faculty is also a form of marginalization and danger for me as I watch a market-based attack on TEPs to favor classroom management and student output over “educating teachers to become thoughtful, moral agents of change and social transformation” (Hartlep & Porfilio, 2015, p. 24). The social foundations of education course is disappearing from TEPs across the country. Further, I consistently hear rumblings of the desire to eliminate foundations courses in my state to make room for more methods courses (deMarrais, 2013). Thus,

my role as foundations faculty allows me the freedom to resist direct engagement with TPA while at the same time potentially allowing me to fall prey to the misguided technicalization of teacher preparation.

## Conclusion and Implications

In the recent context of neoliberal efforts to “professionalize” teaching, the voices of teachers and teacher educators alike are too often silenced. Our focus is on our classrooms as we seek to prepare effective, justice-oriented candidates to meet the complexities of teaching in schools that never have enough time, resources, or flexibility. We are called to respond to a seemingly unending barrage of rapidly changing accountability mandates, demands for (re)accreditation under a (yet again) new set of standards, and high-budget media campaigns designed to support the development of increased teacher training “choice” through privately run, fast-track teacher certification programs. These politics of distraction undermine our ability to participate fully in political discourse or policy creation, as policy decisions are made invariably behind closed doors by small groups of state actors, for-profit entities, and representatives from a subset of TEPs (see Reagan et al., 2016, for a comprehensive analysis of TPA policy development across six states). Teacher educators like us, and candidates themselves, are then left to reconcile the “tensions” (Meuwissen & Chopin, 2015) these policies create.

In this article, we challenged this trend by instead highlighting the voices, experiences and expertise of teacher educators directly impacted by neoliberal reform. Collectively, we work in very different institutional contexts, but are united by our efforts to resist market-driven hyper-accountability mandates presented under the guise of policy reform. Looking across our counternarratives, there is considerable overlap in how state-mandated TPAs have negatively shaped and impacted our work with teacher candidates, and also how we have responded and resisted their influence. In just four years, high-stakes state-mandated TPAs have dramatically altered the landscape of our field by shifting our focus, undermining our academic freedom, and covertly redefining what it means to be a professional educator. We worry about a world where evaluating teacher quality requires little knowledge of the candidate’s growth, values, context, or performance over time.

We wish we felt more optimistic about the current policy context. We don’t. At \$300 per submission, edTPA was a \$5.5m industry last year (Ayers, 2015), and the TPA market is skyrocketing. Recently released data (Pecheone, Whittaker, & Klesch, 2016) suggest that the 2015 edTPA market may have hit \$8.1m, with potential profits (after scoring) of \$6.1m. There is, however, no information regarding how many of the 27,172 candidates required to take edTPA in 2015 paid full price for their submission, nor the final profit margin for edTPA products. What we do know is that Pearson has a record of effectively lobbying for its bottom line (Simon, 2015), and organizations like SCALE and AACTE have shown themselves to be powerful marketers for Pearson’s products. In recent months other testing companies, including Educational Testing Services (ETS), have joined the TPA movement. We fear we are at the beginning of a rapidly snowballing mandate.

We do, however, see beacons of hope within the growing movement of justice-oriented educators engaged in edTPA scholarship and protest. There are multiple grassroots efforts advocating for policy change. For example, teachers and teacher educators in New York State and Illinois have been successful in provoking legislative hearings regarding TPA policies in those states. Parent groups, such as More than a Score, a parents’ advocacy group focused on the impact of high-stakes testing in Chicago, have entered the conversation (e.g. More than a Score, 2015), and at the

time of submission, several national teacher educational organizations were reviewing resolutions in opposition to TPAs.

We also see great promise in the increasing visibility of critical scholarship. With a few notable exceptions (e.g. Au, 2013; Berlak, 2010; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013), the vast majority of early edTPA scholarship was written or funded by scholars or organizations connected to the development of the assessment itself (e.g., Sato, 2014; SCALE, 2015). However, there is a growing body of independent TPA scholarship in peer-reviewed academic journals. While some of this scholarship focuses on practical aspects of TPAs themselves, thus inadvertently allowing TPA mandates to drive their inquiry, other scholars center the broader political and ideological implications of TPAs as a mechanism of neoliberal policy reform (e.g., An, 2015; Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015; Meuwissin & Chopin, 2015; Pullin, 2015; Ratner & Kolman, 2016; Reagan et al., 2016; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016). It is upon this foundation that we situate our analysis, as we collectively resist policies that silence the voices of our profession.

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