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**The University Supervisor, edTPA, and the New Making of
the Teacher**

Martha K. Donovan



Susan O. Cannon

Georgia State University
United States

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Abstract: As university supervisors at a large, urban university in the southern US, we examined the ways that the Education Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) shaped the pedagogic relationships and decision-making processes of our students and ourselves during the spring of 2016. We situated this study of edTPA within the framework of critical policy scholarship (Grace, 1984, cited in Lipman, 2010) by reviewing the role of tests in licensing teachers in the context of the perpetual reform of U.S. education. We drew upon Biesta's (2009) notion that neoliberal accountability trades democratic relationships for consumer relationships and Attick and Boyles' (2016) argument that

edTPA resituated student teaching as a marketplace activity. Applying self-study methodology (Samaras & Freese, 2009), we documented our experiences of supervising preservice teachers as they underwent the edTPA submission process. We found the assessment strongly controlled our relationships with our candidates. As supervisors, we became part of our candidates' transaction towards certification. Likewise, our candidates viewed us as arbitrators who could help them align themselves and their work to edTPA's specifications. Nevertheless we found moments that superceded the control of edTPA. We conclude with recommendations that teacher education programs attend closely to their social justice missions and develop new critical pedagogies in the face of the pressure of edTPA.

Keywords: edTPA; university supervision; teacher education; critical policy studies; pedagogical relationships; self-study methodology

El supervisor de la universidad, edTPA y la nueva formación del profesor

Resumen: Como supervisores universitarios en una gran universidad urbana en el sur de los Estados Unidos, examinamos las formas en que la Education Teacher Performance Assessment (EDTPA) moldeó las relaciones pedagógicas y los procesos de toma de decisión de nuestros alumnos y nosotros mismos durante la primavera de 2016. En el caso de la reforma de la educación de los Estados Unidos, en el marco de la investigación de políticas críticas (Grace, 1984, citado en Lipman, 2010), revisó el papel de las pruebas en licenciar profesores en el contexto de la reforma perpetua de la educación de los Estados Unidos. Reclamamos la noción de Biesta (2009) de que la responsabilidad neoliberal negocia relaciones democráticas para relaciones con los consumidores y el argumento de Attick y Boyles (2016) según el cual la edTPA reafirmó la enseñanza de los alumnos como una actividad de mercado. Aplicando metodología de *self-study* (Samaras & Freese, 2009), documentamos nuestras experiencias de supervisar a profesores de preservación a medida que fueron sometidos al proceso de sumisión de edTPA. Creemos que la evaluación ha controlado fuertemente nuestras relaciones con nuestros candidatos. Como supervisores, nos convertimos en parte de la transacción de nuestros candidatos a la certificación. De la misma forma, nuestros candidatos nos vieron como árbitros que podrían ayudarlos a alinearse y sus trabajos a las especificaciones de la edTPA. Sin embargo, encontramos momentos que superaron el control de la edTPA. Concluimos con recomendaciones de que los programas de formación de profesores acompañan atentamente sus misiones de justicia social y desarrollan nuevas pedagogías críticas frente a la presión de la EDTPA.

Palabras clave: edTPA; supervisión universitaria; educación de profesores; política educativa; metodología de *self-study*

O supervisor da universidade, edTPA e a nova formação do professor

Resumo: Como supervisores universitários em uma grande universidade urbana no sul dos EUA, examinamos as formas em que a Education Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) moldou as relações pedagógicas e os processos de tomada de decisão de nossos alunos e nós mesmos durante a primavera de 2016. Nós situou este estudo de edTPA no âmbito da pesquisa de políticas críticas (Grace, 1984, citado em Lipman, 2010), revisando o papel dos testes em licenciar professores no contexto da reforma perpétua da educação dos EUA. Reclamamos a noção de Biesta (2009) de que a responsabilidade neoliberal negocia relações democráticas para relacionamentos com os consumidores e o argumento de Attick e Boyles (2016) segundo o qual a edTPA reafirmou o ensino dos alunos como

uma atividade de mercado. Aplicando metodologia de *self-study* (Samaras & Freese, 2009), documentamos nossas experiências de supervisionar professores de preservação à medida que foram submetidos ao processo de submissão de edTPA. Achamos que a avaliação controlou fortemente nossos relacionamentos com nossos candidatos. Como supervisores, nos tornamos parte da transação de nossos candidatos para a certificação. Da mesma forma, nossos candidatos nos viram como árbitros que poderiam ajudá-los a se alinharem e seus trabalhos às especificações da edTPA. No entanto, encontramos momentos que superaram o controle da edTPA. Concluimos com recomendações de que os programas de formação de professores acompanham atentamente as suas missões de justiça social e desenvolvem novas pedagogias críticas em face da pressão da edTPA.

Palavras-chave: edTPA; supervisão universitária; educação de professores; política educacional; metodologia de *self-study*

Introduction

The edTPA is a teacher readiness assessment developed by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) and managed and distributed nationwide by a branch of the for-profit corporation, Pearson Education. edTPA originated from a partnership between SCALE and the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). These organizations teamed up to power the expansion of edTPA. With the help of Pearson, the billion-dollar educational product corporation, the vision of edTPA as a national force in U.S. teacher education is being realized. As of 2016, edTPA was required for teacher certification in seven states (Sawchuk, 2014). As of this publication 16 states are requiring edTPA for accreditation or certification (AACTE, 2017). According to AACTE (2017), 40 states plus the District of Columbia are participating in the assessment in some way.

In order to complete edTPA, teacher candidates are required to “prepare a portfolio of materials during their student teaching clinical experience” (AACTE, 2017, para. 4). This includes lesson plans, videotaped evidence of instruction, and assessment materials, along with commentaries on all three elements ranging in length from five to 10 pages each. It costs \$300 for the assessment to be scored by Pearson. Some institutions ask students to pay the fee out of pocket; others incorporate the cost of the assessment into their institutional fees. In the state in which this study took place, edTPA was required of all candidates seeking initial teacher certification as of May 2016, and that year, our students paid the fee out of pocket.

At the time of the study, the authors were university supervisors¹ at the same urban university in the South. Our project spanned January-December 2016 in the first year edTPA was required for certification within the state. We asked how edTPA shaped the pedagogic relationships between university supervisors and teacher candidates during the student teaching and edTPA processes.

In collaboration with each other and with the participation of our teacher candidates, we applied self-study methodology (Samaras & Freese, 2009) to explore our pedagogic relationships with teacher candidates as they completed their edTPA portfolios. In this paper, we present our

¹ Though we agree with Burns, Jacobs, & Yendol-Hoppey’s (2016) suggestion that “to frame those who enact PST supervision as solely ‘university’ supervisors privileges one institution over another and neglects the integral role that school-based partners bring to PST supervision” (p. 422), we retain the nomenclature of University Supervisor because of the way our role is currently structured in a way that does privilege the University.

study in five parts. First, we explain our conceptual framework and then review a sample of the literature on the professionalization of teaching, edTPA, educative relationships in the culture of accountability, and the role of the university supervisor. We follow with a section explaining our methodology. Third, we detail our findings. The fourth section discusses the findings, and we conclude with policy recommendations.

Literature Review

Critical Policy Studies

We situate our research within the framework of critical policy scholarship. Grace (1984) proposed a critical policy scholarship that “illuminates the material and cultural struggles in which schooling is located and is generative of social action toward social justice” (cited in Lipman, 2010, p. 243). Policies push and pull from numerous directions and are driven by complex and often contradictory relationships (Vidovich, 2009). Critical policy scholarship aims to unpack these intersections of values and relations of power in order to make them intelligible (Gale, 2003), all with the goal of social action and change. The policies that galvanized edTPA intersect with test-based accountability policies. Students’ standardized test scores, especially those purportedly revealing the ‘achievement gap’ and ‘failing schools,’ are tied to the discourses of ‘teacher quality’ and ‘failing teachers’ (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016). Thus, edTPA was deemed necessary to bridge the gap, redeem the profession, and improve teacher education. As self-study researchers, we focused on how accountability policy in teacher education, which led to the development of edTPA, a standardized, performance-based assessment for teacher candidates, affected the relationships between university supervisors and student teachers. We were interested in critical approaches to our practices as educators in relation to our students (Samaras, 2011b). As an analytical framework, critical policy studies helped us clarify our positions as educators and researchers within the culture of accountability. Our theoretical understanding of how accountability functions within society to reconfigure the relationship between the state and its citizen (Biesta, 2009) into an economic relationship guided our investigation of how we, as educators influenced by accountability mandates, related to students undertaking the assessment.

Pre-service Teacher Licensure

Licensure assessment for student teachers is part of a long debate related to the status of teaching as a profession. Teaching has been called a semi-profession (Murphy, 1984) and pink-collar labor, a term illustrating its gendered limbo between blue and white-collar work (Apple, 2013). The push to improve teacher quality aligned with efforts to reform teacher licensure assessment (Mitchell, Robinson, Plake, & Knowles, 2001), which Zeichner (2006) referred to as “the professionalization agenda” (p. 327).

Mitchell, Robinson, Plake, and Knowles (2001) explained how the licensure landscape changed in the 1980s when standards for beginning teachers, such as those established by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC), defined teaching as a “collegial, professional activity that responds to considerations of subjects, content, and students” (p. 24). Zeichner (2006) described the shift to a performance-based system within colleges of education that required the alignment of national standards with accreditation portfolios. Though most teacher candidates complete licensure tests (i.e. PRAXIS, NYSTCE, etc.), studies showed that performance assessments have more predictive power when it comes to candidates’ future students’ achievement (Adkins, 2016; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond, Newton, & Wei, 2012).

Cochran-Smith (2005) pointed out that the outcomes-based approach to teacher education as a policy problem emerged within the two decades. This approach looks at factors like student achievement to determine the effectiveness of a teacher. Exams and performance assessments for teacher licensure are part of the larger regulatory system that attempts to ensure the legitimacy and quality, but also the hierarchy, of numerous professions. Using assessments to certify the preparedness of teachers aligns the teaching profession with the other professions. Mitchell, Robinson, Plake, and Knowles (2001) explained, “In deciding on specific education, experience, and testing requirements, professions evaluate the extent to which each element is likely to lead to public protection” (p. 34). Testing for beginning educators offers a level of quality assurance.

However, problems with licensure testing of teachers emerge. Mitchell, Robinson, Plake, and Knowles (2001) acknowledged, “licensure requirements reduce the supply of credentialed teachers” (p. 45). In modern capitalism, systems of closure limit access to economic and social power and property for some while expanding it for others (Murphy, 1984). Licensure tests for professions, Murphy (1984) explained, create closure because “academic and professional qualifications and credentials... restrict entry into the key positions in the division of labour” (p. 552). In the United States, the racialized achievement gap found in K-12 schools persists in teacher licensure exams (Graham, 2013). This is a significant problem, given the nationwide cultural mismatch between students, who are increasingly nonwhite, and teachers, who are majority white (Kokka, 2016). A 2016 report from Stanford showed a racial gap in edTPA scores as well (Garland, 2016). This is alarming, because early studies of California’s PACT, upon which edTPA is based, showed “no disparities in the outcomes of the assessment by candidate race or ethnicity” (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 10). This begs the question of what differs between the enactments of edTPA and PACT that may have influenced this disparity and suggests the need for close attention to ways in which we are *being* teacher educators and *doing* edTPA.

Controversies of edTPA

edTPA is believed to have the potential to improve teacher preparation programs through its rigorous portfolio-style assessment (National launch of edTPA, 2013). Teacher performance assessments (TPAs) were proposed as a solution to educational accountability mandates demanding more from teacher preparation programs (Coloma, 2015). Darling-Hammond (2010) explained validity studies of TPAs in Connecticut and California that concluded that beginning teachers’ scores on TPAs correlated with future students’ academic achievement scores. The positive association of TPA scores and candidates’ “value-added effectiveness when they later become full-time teachers” (p. 10) suggested that a nationally available TPA could lead to increased teacher effectiveness on the whole. Darling-Hammond believed in the assessment’s corrective potential for the teaching field and saw it as an opportunity to professionalize teaching.

Nevertheless, since 2013, members of the educational research community have addressed controversies related to edTPA. Researchers have investigated how teacher education curricula must shift to accommodate edTPA (Ledwell & Oyler, 2016); the role of for-profit Pearson Education (Attick & Boyles, 2016); edTPA as a neoliberal education reform (Coloma, 2015); and edTPA’s conception of teaching (Sato, 2014). Some of the potential effects of edTPA include the possibility that the assessment will become a disincentive for completing student teaching in low-income, high-minority schools (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2015) or applying for certification in states requiring the assessment (Ledwell & Oyler, 2016). Other researchers found that Pearson’s corporate role in the administration of the assessment created new tensions within teacher education programs (Attick & Boyles, 2016; Coloma, 2015).

Croft, Roberts, and Stenhouse (2016) pointed out that once teachers became the focus of the problem of students’ low achievement scores, teacher education followed as a site of interest for

policy makers. Under the umbrella of neoliberal ideologies favoring free-market management of public funds, policies aiming to integrate systems of accountability have emerged, all the while continuing to ignore oppressive environmental, social, and particularly racial forces that affect performance on standardized assessments (Au, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016).

Educational Relationships in Audit Culture

Biesta (2009) examined how educational accountability policy reconfigured the relationship between the state and its members and argued that the shift from the welfare state to the neoliberal state transformed the relationship between state and citizen from a democratic one to an economic one, with the state “as provider and the taxpayer as consumer of public services” (p. 653). This shift in relationship occurs on a macro-level, between state and taxpayer, and at the micro-level, for example, between school principals and parents or, in the case of this study, between university supervisors and preservice teachers. The culture of quality assurance, wrote Biesta, is “the corollary of accountability” (p. 653). As university supervisors in this study, we were responsible for teaching our candidates about edTPA, and our candidates expected us to provide the guidance that would enable them to pass.

Biesta (2009) theorized that the culture of accountability creates economic relationships while foreclosing the possibility of democratic relationships. Such democratic relationships, which are “mutual, reciprocal.... and based upon a shared concern for the common educational good” (p. 664), created what Attick and Boyles (2016) called “spaces for difference” (p. 12) in colleges of education. In a democratic space, heterogeneity, perspective, and diverse experiences as well as shared experiences are not just valued; they are essential. The culture of accountability necessitates a loss of difference in favor of homogeneity; quite simply, in order to achieve the highest scores, everyone must conform to the rubrics or risk failure. This is an economic relationship because for all parties involved, test scores act as currencies providing greater benefits as they increase. Biesta stated, “accountability is an apolitical and antidemocratic strategy that redefines all significant relationships in economic terms, and hence conceives of them as formal rather than substantial relationships” (p. 656). An assessment like edTPA, which leads to the ultimate success or failure of its candidates in their process of becoming teachers, affects everyone involved. This places a form of economic pressure upon the university, professors, candidates, and university supervisors.

The University Supervisor and Pedagogic Relationships

Student teaching relationships are often designed as a triad consisting of the student teacher, the cooperating teacher, and the university supervisor. Limited research has been conducted on the role and function of the university supervisor but much of this is focused on elevating the university supervisor to *more* than just someone who visits preservice teachers infrequently and checks the boxes for the university and the state certification board (Cuenca, 2012). Borko and Mayfield (1995) found that university supervisors seemed to have little influence on student teachers’ process of learning to teach. The authors concluded that university supervision should be characterized by active engagement in which supervisors provide extensive feedback during in-depth conferences. They did not suggest a pedagogy or set of pedagogical practices.

Burns, Jacobs, and Yendol-Hoppey (2016) conducted a qualitative meta-analysis to consider what tasks and practices university supervisors enact with preservice teachers. Two important parts of their research were their definition of supervision, which they called PST supervision, “as the enactment of multiple tasks and practices aimed at supporting PSTs’ learning in clinical contexts” (p. 420) and their theoretical perspective on supervision, which differentiated between supervision and

evaluation as two opposing practices, yet often assigned to university supervisors. In light of the high-stakes evaluative nature of edTPA, this distinction is particularly important for our study.

Within supervision literature, Ritter (2007) utilized self-study methodology as he developed a pedagogical framework for student teacher supervision. Ritter found that he needed to adopt an “inquiry stance” (Cochran-Smith, 2004, cited in Ritter, p. 7) to enable all those involved in the triad of teacher education to engage in learning as well as research. In Ritter’s conception, supervisors collaborate with preservice teachers as they undergo learning, bolstering the notion “that developing an identity and practices in [teaching] is a process of becoming” (p. 15). This inquiry model of university supervision shares similarities with Borko and Mayfield’s (1995) suggestion that supervision be characterized by active, in-depth feedback.

Byrd and Fogelman (2012) evaluated the development of an early version of edTPA, explaining:

linking preservice teacher preparation to inservice teaching success is a major change and makes the measures of success during student teaching more strongly related to the measures, which will be used to judge future effectiveness as a teacher. (p. 201)

Their paper suggests that universities might begin to assess the link between teaching candidates’ edTPA scores and the effectiveness of their university supervisors. Byrd and Fogelman believed in teacher education centered on reflective practice, but they stated that accountability mandates would force education faculty “to decide how to meet their stakeholders’ needs while maintaining allegiance to their core values” (p. 204). This suggests a tension between the transactional nature of accountability mandates and the social justice missions of many education programs.

University supervisors form a living link between preservice teachers and the university during field experiences, the “‘tip of the spear’ in terms of representing a program’s vision and goals to student teachers” (Byrd & Fogelman, 2012, p. 206). Supervisors facilitate pedagogic relationships between preservice and mentor teachers, students, and university professors. They are also required to facilitate the enactment of policies. Several decades of research recommend that university supervisors participate in student teachers’ synthetic process of merging classroom learning and “real” teaching. Now, supervisors are directly involved in a new form of test preparation. This study is concerned with the tensions we face as we navigate our desire to cater our advice to satisfy what we believe informs good teaching while we critically examine the demand that our students conform to what edTPA has normed as good teaching.

In this study, we consider how the university supervisor and her intimate connections to each student’s school placement, the university itself, and the policy enactments such as edTPA and course assignments come together to catalyze the “making” of the new teacher. According to Cuenca (2012), the process of “enacting a pedagogy that coheres with campus-based teacher learning experiences but also accounts for the situated realities of student teaching is an incredibly complex undertaking” (p. viii). We question whether edTPA has transformed the field experience process for everyone involved, shifting what should be a complex and creative experience into a procedural process that is “infiltrating interactions among candidates, mentor teachers, faculty supervisors, and college faculty” (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016, p. 203). As we entered this study, we knew that there would be many gray areas to navigate as we considered the multiple and sometimes conflicting priorities to which we would need to attend in our role as university supervisors within a large research university and urban school districts. We wanted to carefully consider how our actions could be best aligned to support our student teachers as they navigated this complex political, social, and emotional terrain.

Researchers' Histories and Methodology

An important aspect of self-study that is crucial in understanding this methodology is embedded in the desire of teacher educators to better align their teaching intents with their teaching actions. (Loughran, 2007, p 12)

Self-study, as defined by Samaras and Freese (2009), puts the self forward as a resource for research, problematizing it for the purposes of reframing “beliefs and/or practices” (p. 5). Scholars have noted the significance of self-study for teacher educators (Zeichner, 2009). Its value has been found in its ability to help teacher educators examine their beliefs about equity and justice, specifically related to “issues of race, gender, social class, sexual difference, and other aspects of difference in which the lack of justice prevails” (Zeichner, 2009, p. 95). In this study, we focused on our experiences as university supervisors and the experiences of the preservice teachers with whom we worked as they completed their fieldwork and submitted edTPA. We use self-study to examine the effects of edTPA on our relationships as supervisors with preservice teacher candidates.

Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) wrote, “self-study researchers also seek to make explicit and validate their professional expertise with the explicit intent of advancing the public knowledge base of teacher education” (p. 509). Given the typically low status accorded to university supervisors (Cuenca, 2012), we felt it was important to study our pedagogical decisions through self-study. We wanted to engage in what Dinkelman (2012) called the “serious intellectual work” (p. 49) of supervision; however, we knew that edTPA, given its complexity and consequences, would direct a significant portion of our focus throughout the semester.

We came to education research after lengthy careers as classroom teachers and program administrators within public and charter schools. Martha became a teacher in 2000 after completing an 18-month Masters of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) program at a southern, private university. As a beginning teacher, she was required to pass Praxis I and Praxis II and complete a portfolio of work demonstrating she had mastered the NCATE standards. It required her to document many of the same things that current students must document for edTPA but was evaluated by her professors. With far fewer technical requirements. Martha remembered this process as a time-consuming, yet honest reflection of what she had gained during student teaching. She was a provisionally certified, full-time teacher during her final semester of student teaching, and she felt the school and her professors supported her. She then taught for fifteen years in the same high school and appreciated opportunities to develop her English and theatre teaching practice using creative, culturally responsive, and student-centered methods.

After graduating with a degree in architecture, Susan worked as an architectural intern for two years before deciding she wanted to work in education. She was accepted into an alternative certification program in response to a teacher shortage in her state. She was given two weeks of training over the summer and issued a provisional teaching certificate before entering the classroom as a fourth-grade teacher with no other formal education training. Susan took coursework two nights a week for the next three years to obtain both her certificate and her master's degree in middle grades education. She did not have to complete a portfolio requirement though she wrote many lesson plans for her master's classes. Susan found the first year in the classroom extremely difficult and frustrating and had very little support from either her university supervisor or her school colleagues and administration. A representative from the certification program observed her only four times over the course of the year. She had no other contact with the evaluator other than the observations. In her second and third years of teaching, Susan appreciated the opportunities that being enrolled in her master's coursework while teaching every day afforded. She routinely was able

to try things out in the classroom and take risks in her learning. Susan taught for 13 years in 4-8th grade before becoming a doctoral student. In her last five years as a teacher, she had four student teachers in her classroom and served as a mentor teacher.

When Martha and Susan began supervising student teachers, Martha attempted to relate her experience with her portfolio to her students' edTPA requirements. She hoped that she would be able to encourage her students to find the usefulness she had found in her own portfolio-making experience, and she looked for parallels between her experience as a student teacher and her students' experiences. Susan had not created an assessment portfolio in the past. As she was being trained to supervise and edTPA either was mentioned or was the main focus at every training, seminar, and conversation, Susan quickly came to the realization that edTPA was at risk to become central in the experience of supervision.

As classroom teachers, we had experience negotiating the tension between state-mandated testing for students, value-added measures for teachers, and our own conceptions of what it meant to be a good teacher and student. Becoming supervisors as edTPA was being implemented and was consequential for our students reignited these tensions.

At our university, supervisors were required to attend training on edTPA. We attended a session in which we read the rubrics and practiced grading samples. We attended eight monthly meetings with our candidates, one hour of which was set aside for a group meeting during which we could discuss whatever issues we chose. All of the meetings had at least one or more sessions dedicated to edTPA preparation in addition to sessions on co-teaching, differentiation, and professionalism.

University supervisors were also required to evaluate teacher candidates across a variety of performances and assignments. Supervisors went to candidates' schools a minimum of three times per semester to conduct observations and meetings with cooperating teachers. Supervisors also graded teacher candidates' lesson plans and reflections and were responsible for making sure that candidates complied with requirements such as uploading their student video permission forms to the appropriate online platform. In addition, they signed off on time sheets and ethics exam completion, and they used rubrics to evaluate the teacher candidates' professional competencies. The faculty and staff at the university communicated across disciplines about rubrics, assignments, and student needs. Supervisors were appreciated and provided with guidance, with more available as needed.

edTPA was a central focus of the practicum. Assignments were graded with rubrics that varied according to subject matter and were aligned to the edTPA's fifteen rubrics. In spring 2016, Martha supervised two secondary history candidates and three middle-level English candidates, which meant that she needed to understand the similarities and differences between two sets of rubrics. Susan's candidates were varied as well; she supervised students from three areas.

We were both engaged in theoretical and policy research as we entered into this practical work with students. We worked weekly with our teachers either visiting schools, communicating via email or phone calls or giving feedback on written assignments such as lesson plans. We were reading theoretical and methodological pieces and discussing their impact on our thinking. As Loughran (2007) suggested, we were "cognizant of the continual interplay between research and practice within the practice setting (i.e., as the research unfolds so the learning through the research influences practice and, because the practitioner is the researcher, practice inevitably changes through this feedback, thus influencing what is being researched)" (p.16). We were continually reflecting on our practices as supervisors within the larger political and theoretical context. We felt the tensions and worked the interplay between research and practice, and our questions and thinking evolved.

Samaras (2011a) explained that self-study involves a critical examination of teachers' actions and contexts "as a way of developing a more consciously driven mode of professional activity, as contrasted with action based on habit, tradition, or impulse" (p. 43). Samaras (2011b) stresses that self-study should be a form of situated inquiry that is open to examining conflict and contradiction. This approach spoke directly to the spaces of conflict we faced as we embarked on this study. Samaras (2011b) wrote, "Self-study gives you the opportunity to examine your lived practice and whether or not there is a living contradiction, or a contradiction between what you say you believe and what you actually do in practice" (p. 10). Conducting self-study as we were both learning edTPA alongside each other and our candidates provided us with a systematic way to record our experiences and acknowledge the gray areas that presented themselves.

To attend to trustworthiness, self-study depends upon critical collaborative inquiry in which the community helps extend individual understanding. In our study, our community was comprised of our partnership as researchers and our groups of teaching candidates. Because self-study is both individual and collective, it relies upon the sharing of personal questions with others. It requires the cultivation of "critical friends" (Samaras, 2011b, p. 13), who engage in ongoing dialogue about the research and challenge each another to better understand it. Self-study is both private and public, and its legitimacy is gained through the sharing of the research with others, who function as the research "validation team" (Samaras, 2011b, p. 14).

Coming at the study from a critical policy frame, we were faced with the challenge of merging our critical policy focus with our inquiry into our teaching. We came to this study with knowledge of other researchers' critiques of edTPA. We were aware of the potential of this prior knowledge to influence our experiences as university supervisors. Yet, self-study is focused keenly on teaching, and for all of our critical perspective, for this study we were teachers. We understood our responsibility to provide our students with an enriching experience. Self-study methodology reflects our belief in looking at our own actions and approaches to being teachers in the midst of the early years of implementation of edTPA. Self-study is an appropriate match with the critical policy framework because of its emphasis on critical examination of the self.

Self-study is a systematic research process. It is an "open, honest, and clear description of the spiral of questioning, framing, revisiting of data, and reframing of a researcher's interpretations" (Samaras, 2011b, p. 11). It asks researchers to be open to outside views and critique. It is about teaching, and its goal is improved learning. The conclusions of the process, even if they are unfavorable, can lead to improved practice.

Data Collection and Analytical Methods

Samaras (2011b) wrote, "Dilemmas, tensions and disappointments tend to dominate data gathering in self-study" (p. 69, citing Loughran & Northfield, 1998). Our data collection methods included self-reflective journaling and shared reflection (Ritter, 2012). Additionally, our focus on edTPA required a way of engaging with a challenging reality within our supervision practices. Our efforts to remain authentic were often overcast by edTPA's tasks and our candidates' uncertainty about how to complete them. To enable us to study and unpack the meaning of this negotiation, we utilized focus groups and open-ended journaling with our candidates, so that we could gain knowledge of their impressions of the influence of edTPA on their field experiences.

Our shared self-reflection involved extended sessions of conversation during which we questioned each other and took notes on responses. "Self-study relies on interaction with close colleagues who can listen actively and constructively" (Russell, 2006, p. 5, as cited in Loughran, 2007, p.16). These co-interviews were open-ended yet purposeful in capturing our reactions to our

roles as university supervisors and researchers. We shared our impressions, observations, and beliefs. Placier, Pinnegar, Hamilton, and Guilfoyle (2005) identified professional dialogue as a useful component of self-study methodology, especially in this age of accountability, when discussion of best practices frequently supersedes considerations for justice and equity in the making of good teachers. Through these interviews in the summer following the semester, we were able to voice our concerns, questions, and wonderings. As the process shifted from data collection to analysis, our reviews of our co-interviews functioned as the collaborative inquiry in which self-study asks researchers to engage to clarify understanding.

Our student teachers' spring semester entailed a full-time placement at one school for approximately 10 weeks. During this placement, students assumed full time teaching responsibilities for at least four weeks, and within this time, they completed the data collection process for their edTPA portfolios. They submitted their portfolios in March, near the end of the full-time placement. Students earned two course credits for student teaching. They were advised not to take any other courses at this time, but this was not always feasible due to individual schedules and timelines as well as the timing of other course offerings at the university. In addition to observing their teaching, completing one-on-one conferences, and grading online writing assignments, we met with our small cohorts of five or six candidates four times over the course of each semester. These meetings were held during the cohort meetings held once each month.

For the study, we obtained informed consent (per IRB regulations) in advance of data collection. We met with students during our monthly cohort meetings over the course of the semester. All Martha and Susan's cohort members agreed to participate in the study. We journaled and took notes on those sessions. For three of the sessions we audio recorded the conversations. We asked students to complete written reflections at these small group meetings. Table 1 presents participants' demographic information.

Table 1
Study Participants

Pseudonym	Race	Gender	Degree Sought	Certification Sought	Primary Placement
Morgan	Black	Female	MAT	Secondary Social Studies	12 th Grade Economics
Kevin	White	Male	MAT	Secondary Social Studies	11 th Grade U.S. History
Bill	White	Male	MAT	Middle Level English	6 th Grade Language Arts
Sasha	Black	Female	BSE	Middle Level English	8 th Grade Language Arts
Adi	Asian	Male	MAT	Middle Level English	8 th Grade Language Arts
Jennifer	White	Female	BSE	Middle Level LA and SS	6 th grade LA
Anaya	Black	Female	BSE	Middle Level Math and Science	7 th Grade Science
John	White	Male	BSE	Secondary English	10 th Grade Language Arts
Shantay	Black	Female	BSE	Middle Level LA and Math	6 th Grade Language Arts
Arianna	Black	Female	BSE	Middle Level SS and LA	4 th Grade Social Studies
David	Hispanic	Male	BSE	Middle Level SS and Science	6 th Grade Social Studies

Note: All participants were in their early to mid-20s.

Data was analyzed using a hermeneutic approach described as appropriate for self-study (Samaras, 2011b), in which researchers shift back and forth through the data “with no predetermined assumptions to allow for the emergence of seemingly unrelated ideas and part-whole relationships” (p. 71). Rather than a linear process, this was circular in nature. Samaras (2011b) encouraged self-study researchers to “Trust the process and accept the messiness” (p. 198). We analyzed focus group and student reflection data using open coding followed by combining codes and theoretical impressions, similar to Saldaña’s (2009) “First Cycle coding” (p. 3). Descriptive codes allowed us to understand the recurrent themes that emerged. The process we used to narrow down our codes into overarching themes (see Findings) resembles Saldaña’s (2009) “Second Cycle coding methods” (p. 149).

The messiness emerged in our co-interviews as we shifted to data analysis. We often found that ideas and theories emerged about our work as we were talking. This data was interspersed with reflections on our reading; reading about teaching, reading about critical policy studies, reading about critical pedagogy, the standards-based reform movement, and poststructuralism. These fast-paced conversations fueled our thinking about our work and directed us back to our students’ testimonies and transcripts from the focus groups time and again. We asked ourselves how our concerns about their work informed our work, and how our work might be re-envisioned, even in the face of edTPA, to give future students a richer student teaching experience. In the next section, we offer an organized glimpse into what this self-study revealed to us.

Findings

The following section is organized around the main themes that emerged in our data. We begin with illustrating our awareness that our focus became split between what we valued as educators and what edTPA demanded. We then show how we felt increasingly responsible to edTPA as the submission deadline approached, but that we were able to generate discussion with our participants that set edTPA aside. This inspired us to reconsider our beliefs about supervision, which emerged as a theme in the study.

Teaching to edTPA

From the very beginning of the semester, we noticed that our conversations with our teacher candidates were bifurcated, with a boundary between two different types. On one side, we found ourselves delving into conversations about the daily and important rituals of teaching. This included attempting to connect students’ practice to their previous course work and beliefs about the underlying meanings of education, learning, and social justice. It also included addressing issues they faced in their personal lives. On the other side was edTPA. As the months progressed we found ourselves in conversations about all of the details of edTPA, often at the expense of the other type. It became a monolithic process everyone struggled to get through. The edTPA conversation was typically procedural, and for many candidates took on an urgency that threatened to subsume all else. In fact, we felt that our hopes for our teaching and our teacher candidates’ practice were suppressed by the urgency of the tasks of edTPA.

We saw this in the preservice teachers’ written reflections. We asked students to (1) reflect on the dilemmas and uncertainties they faced in their student teaching and (2) explain how they were feeling about their teaching and edTPA. We recognize asking the second question in the way that we did could produce a division between teaching and edTPA; however, most students read the question as asking how they were feeling about teaching and edTPA overall, not as two separate things. We did not anticipate how strongly edTPA would assert itself as a dilemma. For example,

Kevin, one of Martha’s students, consistently emphasized that he felt comfortable with his teaching. Yet his dilemmas, rather than being about his teaching, were about edTPA in both reflections (see Table 2). It seemed unlikely that Kevin had faced no teaching dilemmas as he developed as a teacher. Yet, he had a positive experience in his student teaching experience and took a job at the school the following year. Martha’s supervision, however, did not engage this positive process; instead, she helped Kevin resolve his edTPA dilemmas.

Table 2
Kevin’s Responses to Question 1 and 2, February and March 2016

	Question 1: Reflect on a dilemma or uncertainty you are facing right now?	Question 2: How are you feeling about your teaching and edTPA?
February	The biggest uncertainty that I have right now is whether or not my work is good enough to pass edTPA.	I am comfortable with my teaching so far. I have integrated myself into the classroom... Now that I am finishing up edTPA I feel better about it now.
March	Submitting back up materials for all three tasks is going to be a huge dilemma for me. I do not have the time nor the energy to complete [them] in a short amount of time.	As far as the teaching goes, I am happy with the way that it has gone. I feel as though I have complete control of my classroom and they look at me as their teacher. When dealing with edTPA, I am more relieved that it is done and awaiting submission. While it was frustrating and tiresome, I am excited to submit it for grading.

Kevin’s positive teaching experience might have been highlighted as a model for other candidates. However, because most students’ dilemmas were associated with edTPA, in our cohort meetings we talked about solving those problems instead of considering ways to share the positive work Kevin (and others) were doing in classrooms. What began as a split focus became an increasingly singular one. We were teaching to the test. Biesta (2009) wrote of how economic relationships replace democratic ones in the culture of accountability. Whereas democratic relationships are based in shared concerns and mutual exchange, economic relationships are based in individual gain. We were compelled to ensure that each candidate received answers to his or her questions about his or her edTPA submission. Ensuring students’ successful completion of edTPA, with its expense and high stakes, was prioritized in our teaching over more democratic processes.

Martha and Susan are both veteran teachers with over ten years of classroom experiences that we could have shared, yet we found that as the semester progressed, our conversations, email communication, texts and other interactions continued to be focused on edTPA and how to meet its requirements. Instead of finding balance between the demands of edTPA and the development of other aspects of teaching, we were learning the assessment alongside our students, so all of our experience meant very little when it came to guiding them through the maze of edTPA. Despite our intention not to focus on the assessment, we had to study it, and we were taken up as its advocates. We found ourselves in conversations with teacher candidates making statements such as: “I think that the edTPA would want you to...” or “for the edTPA, you might want to consider...” In such moments we gave in to the transactional, market-based exchange of edTPA; we wanted our students to get it right as much as we wanted our students to be successful teachers.

Responsibility to edTPA

Outside our meetings with our candidates, we faced our private dilemmas and deliberated about how to “do” supervision given the demands edTPA placed on us. We recognized we had become part of the transaction towards certification, but what were we to do with that knowledge? Susan’s journals best illustrate this deliberation.

As I think about my work as a University Supervisor through a social justice lens, I question how different this work might have looked and felt for me if I had been a supervisor a few years ago, prior to edTPA. As Zeichner (2009) points out, my efforts, and those of the other supervisors I have talked with are “now necessarily focused at the micro level on how to implement the various state mandates for performance based teacher education” (p.12). When I give feedback on lesson plans and after observations, I catch myself referring to what edTPA assessors would want to see or read. My focus on the edTPA comes out of concern for the teacher candidates’ successes on the assessment and their own focus on edTPA and how to do it right. However, I see that we are all playing a dangerous game not only because we are trying to predict (based on 120 pages of handbooks) what edTPA assessors “want” to see but more importantly because this distracts us from the larger ontological and epistemological questions with which teacher candidates should be grappling.

Susan, journal entry, February 7, 2016

Our professional judgment as experienced educators was usurped by pressure to meet the requirements of edTPA. Since our students were required to pass the edTPA in order to become certified, we felt responsibility to help them align their work and themselves with edTPA and in so doing we became part of their subjectification as consumers of Pearson’s product. Where we might have had nuanced conversations about ethics and decision-making in the classroom, we found ourselves pulled again and again towards edTPA.

It feels like I am always, always thinking about right and wrong. Which move would be most helpful now? To whom? For what purpose? How might I best serve conflicting priorities? How do I act in ways that are responsible and just? As I serve as University Supervisor, I have many masters: the students, the teacher candidates, the mentor teachers, the program director, the national assessment. I cannot serve them all at once. At times there are overlaps and layers that allow me to feel that I can serve teacher and student at the same time. In other instances, it seems that to serve the teacher candidate, I might need to stray from the other masters. The master that I can’t seem to shake whatever I think of it is edTPA. It haunts my work continually.

Susan, journal entry, March, 30, 2016

The assessment asserted profound control over the relationships we developed with our candidates and over how we enacted supervision during that semester. As supervisors, we did not feel we were in a position to question or challenge the supremacy of edTPA in the students’ process or within our university’s program. Nevertheless, these questions of pedagogy and supervision in the midst of edTPA did undergird our experience.

EdTPA and the Subversion of Students’ Teaching

At the midpoint of the semester, we asked students what supports had been helpful and what further supports they might need from us. The responses were mixed, but as shown in Table 3, almost all of the requests centered on navigating edTPA.

Table 3

Written Responses to Supports Question, March 2016

Student	What supports have been helpful/what additional supports might you need?
John	The academic language document was helpful.
David	I would need some probing questions about my materials that I have submitted so far, so I can fix them at the end.
Ariana	I need more information about where to put references for the lesson plans and how to format them.
Anaya	Really appreciate the feedback so far on edTPA and teaching techniques.
Shantay	Thanks for helping us during this tough time.
Kevin	You have been able to tell me my strengths and weaknesses, which have helped structure my teaching and classroom management.
Bill	Having a university supervisor to guide me through edTPA and a helpful advisor to help me with scheduling. I've also appreciated the one-on-ones.
Sasha	You've been helpful all around. If you do not know the answer to something, you will find the answer.

Of the eight students who responded to the question, five focused explicitly on how to please edTPA. We felt that our supervision seemed to consist of constantly referring to the handbooks trying to make sure that everything that we did conformed to edTPA. We answered a catalogue of questions: How many pages are allowed for this reflection? How many minutes can the video be? Have I fully answered all of the questions and subquestions? Will my response meet the requirements of the rubric? The result was conversations and interactions focused on procedure. We were trying to ensure conformity to the guidelines and rubrics.

Our supervision became more and more transactional and procedural, geared towards ensuring all our students passed edTPA. We felt that most of our students needed us to get them through the 'tough time' of edTPA. Unfortunately, the result seemed to be that our process became "static, self-replicating and sterile" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 344). We saw this as a subversion of the student teaching process we had hoped to undertake. We wanted to help our students find "the soul of teaching" (Zeichner, 2014, p. 552) and help them understand teaching as "complex and demanding intellectual work" (Zeichner, 2014, p. 559). While students like Kevin, as well as Bill and Sasha (as will be shown) demonstrated understanding and commitment to teaching as deep intellectual work, we felt so constrained by edTPA that we had difficulty finding ways to reach our students more deeply.

Personal Relationships Subvert edTPA

While we found that edTPA subverted the student teaching and supervision experiences we had envisioned for our students and ourselves, we also found some evidence of the opposite. In Martha's March focus group, students' dilemmas about teaching emerged in a verbal discussion that went beyond the dominance of edTPA. Bill, who was completing his practicum in a middle school,

told his group about a fight he witnessed in the cafeteria. He described how a male teacher in the school stopped the fight by running in and “hugging” the boy until he calmed himself down. Bill was confused and concerned about the right way to respond to a fight, and he had serious questions about this incident, both about his own inaction and what the appropriate response should have been:

I definitely hesitated, and kind of, maybe let that other teacher that's been at the school and been teaching for a long time to take action before me. I think seeing how that other teacher handled it gave me an idea of how I'd handle it. I think my first instinct would be to pull at him, but I think the hugging thing... you're just stopping it... I think it was a good thing for me to actually see a better teacher take care of the situation.

Bill (Focus Group Discussion, March 2016)

Sasha, who was placed in a high needs African American middle school, faced a different type of dilemma she shared in this discussion. Sasha felt strongly that her vision of what teaching could be and her creativity were stifled by *both* edTPA and a district-mandated instructional experiment her school had undertaken. The experiment in personalized learning (PL) was funded by a national grant, and Sasha had to learn how to teach according to the principles of PL. edTPA does not seem to have been designed to accommodate structures like PL, where self-directed learning comprises the majority of the schooling process and in which very little whole-group instruction ever occurs. Sasha spent the semester negotiating these issues, but, in our focus group, she revealed that neither edTPA nor PL was her largest concern:

It all conflicts with my creativity and my ideas. I don't think what my school is doing is working for the students. 60% of them are not motivated. The [academic program] required by the school does not work for students who are not motivated.

Sasha (Focus Group Discussion, March 2016)

Sasha maintained her passion for socially just education despite teaching under two initiatives that she felt compromised this goal. It was powerful to find that in the focus groups, where conversations like these took place and we were able to briefly set edTPA aside, our interactions with our candidates could become enriching and instructive and help all of us think deeply about our experiences as educators. By shifting the conversation away from edTPA, we found students were hungry to share other aspects of their experience. These opportunities, however, were rare.

Renewal of Beliefs

The summer after our students finished edTPA, as researchers we debriefed and attempted to frame alternative narratives in which we expressed our beliefs about what good teaching means. During these interviews with one another, we began to unpack what supervising and edTPA meant to each of us.

I have been so surprised about how the handbooks have “played on” me. I felt I had a lot to give and was excited to give more than I got. An opportunity to spread the good things. So much of the external (course) was about edTPA. In practice, I found myself torn between my conceptions of “good teaching” and my perception of how to support my students to do well on the assessment.

Martha's notes from interview of Susan, July 2016

I was excited to do supervision. I have a lot of experience to share with students and thought that I could serve in a fulfilling mentoring role. I had a fantasy about what it would feel like to do that job.

I thought I could be an asset to the students and share teaching practice like CRP [culturally responsive pedagogy] or empathetic classroom management. I came with holistic ideas about what I would be sharing. I put off reading the edTPA documents—but I noticed that all the information that I got as a university supervisor was about edTPA. I thought [student teaching] should be a time when you idealize good teaching and try out your ideas for how you want to teach or think you ought to teach. Then I realized that the edTPA bent them before they were able to try anything out.

Susan's notes from interview of Martha, July 2016

We both felt that edTPA foreclosed our ability to facilitate student teaching as an opportunity to explore teaching ideals. In this way, we felt the “tension between ideals and reality” (Sykes, Bird, & Kennedy, 2010, p. 468) that may assert itself in professional schools, with teacher educators situating themselves as “saviors of occupational competence against the weight of conventional practice” (p. 468). Perhaps our hopes were fantasy visions that also deserved more critical attention. What is the place of ideals in the face of supervising teaching candidates completing edTPA?

Discussion

We both hoped as supervisors to engage with our students around what it means to be a teacher, including the joys, the difficulties, and the “little gifts of error” (Britzman, 2003, p. 2). We hoped to inspire and think *with* the student teachers, to be in relation with them in ways that mattered. “An ethically empowering relation to others aims at increasing one’s *potential* or empowering force and creates joyful energy in the process” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 343, emphasis in original). Instead, we found ourselves part of a spinning machine of accountability. We experienced how the marketplace activity of edTPA subverted the educative process (Attick & Boyles, 2016). In most of our conferences with our candidates, the consequences of the test and the resounding anxiety students experienced usurped other concerns, which might have included “creativity, cultural relevance, and student-centeredness” (Dunn & Certo, 2016, p. 106).

At the end of the semester, we were left wondering, how we might ensure that more candidates, like Kevin and Sasha, emerged as teachers who understood a conception of good teaching that went beyond the procedural and transactional process that edTPA had turned out to be? In the making of the teacher under the regime of edTPA, students were taking up the notion that reading, following directions, and aligning themselves to 15 rubrics was the keys to becoming good teachers. Our candidates who passed edTPA showed they could perform good teaching because they fulfilled all the components of the portfolio: planning, instruction, and assessment, within the constraints, according to the rubrics. As supervisors we felt the urgency of ensuring our students would be able to pass edTPA, because their certification depended upon it.

The hardest part of this semester for me is navigating edTPA and the way that it claims to be able to define quality teaching as things that can be listed and checked off in a handbook or that can be shown in a 7 minute video. That is something that we are working through together, trying to balance the desire to do well on the assessment with the fact that we agree that the assessment cannot measure everything that is important.

Susan, journal entry, February 21, 2016

Nevertheless, data from our focus groups at times revealed that the rich complexity we had hoped would occur within the student teaching experience was happening. For example, Bill’s story illustrates how broad student teachers’ experience can truly be. A fight occurred one day, and he did not know what to do. He relied on a more experienced teacher and observed the methods used to

quell the fight quickly. However, edTPA had been so central to our process, it took effort to recognize this as a moment of learning to teach.

Bill was marveling at the excitement of the 6th grade observers [during the fight], but he didn't have a sense of what to do. He was the closest adult to the incident, but he could not act. He used the other teacher's actions as a model for how he might respond in the future, and he said he was glad to have seen it. This incident brought up so many issues we talked about that day. There are issues of physical liability- what do we do when kids fight? This is not a question edTPA deals with. What do teachers do to manage fights, to interfere with them, to keep kids safe? Aren't we at risk if we touch students? What are our physical boundaries? What makes those boundaries more pliable? Or maybe a better question to ask, a deeper question, might be how do we prevent fights? Is there space for peace education in edTPA? This brings to mind what Tuck and Gorlewski (2016) said about how edTPA "disincentivizes teacher candidates from seeking teacher placements in high-needs schools" (p. 202). Bill was not placed in a 'high needs school,' but it's a diverse school with a range of income levels, races, and conflicts in the suburban South. There are things he needed to learn to do good work there that edTPA did not address.

Martha, journal entry, November 22, 2016

Bill's experience raised questions about the claim made in the "National Launch of edTPA" (2013) that "because it asks teacher candidates to demonstrate performance in the classroom and focuses on student work, edTPA will help candidates develop the confidence and skills to succeed in urban, suburban, and rural schools" (p. 51). Bill needed more opportunities to discuss dilemmas like what to do during a fight. While we recognize that we cannot expect one assessment to address all areas of concern and that the other components and attention given to edTPA at other universities differ, claims about edTPA's usefulness in developing more successful teachers do not seem to recognize teaching as a holistic process that extends beyond curriculum. In fact, edTPA seems to erase many of the concerns teachers actually face in the social contexts of schooling.

Sasha maintained a desire to teach despite the gravity of the disconnections she faced struggling to reconcile two conflicting mandates. Ball (2015) explained that schooling, "built on the contradictory bases of uniformity and individuality" (p. 299), is characterized by tension between "differentiation and classification, and concomitantly of exclusion" (p. 299). Sasha's experience illustrated this contradiction: on the one hand, she had to be part of a policy experiment promoting PL, a practice emphasizing total differentiation, and on the other, she had to complete edTPA, part of the apparatus of examination, shaping the teacher according to the limits of its design. Sasha struggled to sustain a vision of what teaching meant to her.

We discussed how the school is 99% African American and most of the kids have few resources. Sasha talked about how some kids come to school for lunch or PE, and how difficult self-directed learning is for them. Yet, asked if she would take a job at the school if offered one, she said she would. She had ideas about how to help her students, and she wanted a chance to try them out. Ironically, this was a chance her student teaching had not provided.

Martha, journal entry, March 30, 2016

To complete edTPA, Sasha had to bend the structures in place in the school, but in addition, she bent herself, to her own detriment. This became clear in her written response to the question, "Is there anything else that I should know?"

I'm going to be a much better teacher/person when I'm finished with edTPA.

Sasha (Focus Group Reflection, March 2016)

This comment demanded follow-up. Would she be better because the process of edTPA would make her better at the work of teaching? No, in fact, it was the opposite. edTPA was a burden that made her “less than her best self” (Sasha, personal interview, November, 2016). It did not help that the format and structure of the assessment forced her to manipulate the learning environment, essentially to do a performance for edTPA.

[Sasha] Like for this edTPA, I told them, ‘Look, this thing costs \$300. We have to get it right the first time. If we don’t get it right, we have to do it again, and that’s \$300 out of my pocket. Don’t mess with my money.’ You would never think to tell a child that, but they understand money. If their moms said ‘Don’t mess with my money,’ they’d know exactly what that means.

[Martha] It sounds like you asked them to do a show?

[Bill, in the background] It felt like that.

Sasha and Bill (Focus Group Discussion, March 2016)

Such moments became representative of the ironies of our experiences as university supervisors. More importantly, they raise questions about claims that edTPA can enhance the quality of the teaching profession (Reagan et al, 2016); in Sasha’s case, edTPA represented what a quality teacher *was not*. As she discussed, she had to break the format of her classroom to create a learning situation that would accommodate edTPA. We had no other solution for her circumstance in her placement.

Nevertheless, with the exception of one student, all our students completed and passed edTPA, graduated on time, and accepted teaching contracts in time to begin work in August 2016.

Considerations for Educational Policy

While numerous scholars have investigated edTPA and its effects on teacher education (for example a search of ‘edTPA’ in the 2016 AERA program yielded 35 abstracts), few have focused on the particular ways in which university supervisors interact with preservice teachers as they undertake both field experiences and edTPA. Cuenca (2012) pointed out that supervisors’ roles in the process of teacher education are often overlooked or under-theorized. We believe a more complex consideration of the supervisor/teacher candidate relationship in the context of edTPA is especially important because supervisors interact with preservice teachers in all the locations of the process. Supervisors know the values and curricula of the teacher preparation program, they get to know the mentor teachers, they witness supervisees as they grapple with and come to understand teaching more deeply, and now, supervisors must ensure that their students’ teaching is effectively represented within their edTPA portfolios. We contend that a strong, empirically grounded understanding of how edTPA affects student teachers’ relationships with their supervisors must be included in research on how edTPA results in this new and problematic making of the teacher.

For example, Sasha’s story illustrates the impact that edTPA had on one African American teaching candidate. Sasha sincerely struggled with the fact that edTPA did not seem to support her values related to teaching African American students. The assessment challenged her personally, not in terms of its academic rigor, but rather in terms of its expense and minutiae (Focus Group Discussion, March 2016). We do not suggest that we should generalize from this one case, yet we think that it is an important example.

We believe that future research should attend to ways in which edTPA may contribute to systems of exclusion that could result in reduced access to the teaching profession for prospective teachers of color. Researchers have noted that further exclusion of teachers of color from the career would be detrimental to students of color and the development of a diverse teaching force (Graham,

2013; Mitchell, Robinson, Plake, & Knowles, 2001). We know that early findings reveal disparities, small as they may be, in edTPA results according to race. This is a serious problem, as among the beliefs about TPAs was that they reduced scoring discrepancies (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

We also recommend additional attention to pedagogy. As supervisors, we must promote a commitment to developing deliberate pedagogical strategies and methodologies that “support teacher learning in more lasting ways” (Cuenca, 2012, p. ix). We believe that critically reflective teacher supervision is possible and can be a part of critically reflective teacher education as a whole (Dinkelman, 2012). However, as we found in this study, supervisors may find the demands of edTPA subvert the supervision process. We recommend teacher education programs develop pedagogical strategies that subvert the edTPA. In this study, we found that our focus group discussions between the university supervisor and a small group of pre-service teachers were productive, but we recognize that there is more to explore related to this tool. Our discussions allowed our pre-service teachers to consider the specifications of the edTPA and reflect on the ways that they were going to align themselves with the assessment. We also found these discussions made way for other concerns besides edTPA and gave students chances to open up about their conceptions of who they wanted to become as teachers. We feel that more attention to ways that supervisors can recognize the assessment as intervening and simultaneously nurture students’ power to resist that intervention should be paid, as edTPA continues to become a part of teacher preparation.

Conclusion

In some ways edTPA has become a fourth member of the traditional triad “supporting” student teachers and following neoliberal logic. We found that edTPA became a frustrating factor or problem to be tackled during student teaching, and at worst it motivated student teachers to perform “good” teacher in ways that sometimes did not align with their values in order to meet the needs of the assessment. Their successful performance of what edTPA deems to be proficient teaching not only yielded a certificate for most candidates, opening the doors to employment in schools, but also resulted in favorable outcomes for the college of education, which must use candidates’ results to demonstrate its effectiveness. Therefore, a lot seems to rest upon edTPA. Yet the rationale that fed rapid growth of the use of edTPA—that it could yield improved student outcomes once its candidates entered the field (Darling-Hammond, 2010)—seems to be lost in the discourses and practices we undertook as supervisors. Though in theoretical terms, the approach to teacher education as “policy problem” (Cochran-Smith, 2005, p. 6) includes a vision of our candidates’ future students’ increased academic potential, in practical terms our vision was very narrow, extending only to the next deadline, submission, and finally the results. If edTPA is to be accepted as a legitimate assessment of teacher readiness, it cannot subsume so much of the learning process that we forget that we all serve a greater good: our candidates’ future students.

As university supervisors, edTPA narrowed our focus in ways we recognize we must try to deliberately control, unless supervision of student teachers is to become supervision of edTPA. Attick and Boyles’ (2016) argued edTPA homogenizes teacher education and wrote that as the teacher preparation experience is reduced to a marketplace activity, teacher candidates become consumers seeking payment for their work in the form of a grade and a teaching certificate. We found that we could be complicit in helping to develop teachers who were motivated by external rewards, incentives, and the threat of failure even though to us, teaching meant building relationships with students, with colleagues, and with parents and facilitating content knowledge, critical thinking, and academic growth upon that relational base. With edTPA, we saw that without

deliberate critical attention, the teaching career can begin as an economic relationship, where students become teachers through a barter system, trading the right phrases, behaviors, and file types for access to a certificate.

Prior to the adoption of edTPA, teacher education was already standardized and managed in many institutions according to the NCATE standards (Dover & Schultz, 2016). Schools of education under NCATE had to abide by their standards to be accredited, so in this way the system was formatted to enable current developments, whereby the push to standardize yields further standardization. In other words, this is not entirely new. But what does seem new is how intense the high stakes and the complexity of edTPA makes student teaching. With the adoption of edTPA, “Student teaching is no longer primarily a capacity-building experience; instead, it is immediately, and prematurely, high-stakes and summative” (Dover & Schultz, 2016, p. 99). Our process with our candidates placed emphasis on meeting high-stakes standards almost immediately when the practicum began.

We are compelled to ask how we might make room in this crowded quartet for a preservice teacher to take up and try on the ideas that would allow him/her to be an ‘authentic professional’ or (perhaps) ‘re-oriented’ professional, who absorbs and learns from but is not fundamentally re-made by reform. Such a professional exists ‘in a space of concerns’ (Taylor, 1989, p. 51). The work of the ‘authentic teacher’ involves ‘issues of moral purpose, emotional investment, and political awareness, adeptness and acuity’ (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 6). Authenticity is about teaching having an ‘emotional heart’ (Woods, 1996) or as Hargreaves argues, teaching, in this sense, is about desire because ‘without desire, teaching becomes arid and empty it loses its meaning’ (p. 12). (Ball, 2009, p. 677)

Licensure testing for teachers is situated as part of a strategy (among others) to imbue teaching with professional legitimacy. However, in our case, preparing students for edTPA did not feel like we were preparing legitimate professionals for success in their occupations. It felt like we were helping them run a race, fulfill a mandate, and win the prize of certification. This seems far afield from the professionalization perspective, in which

Outcomes are defined primarily in terms of teachers’ professional performance, including the alignment of teaching practice with curriculum standards, with teachers’ ability to have a positive impact on students’ learning, and with teachers’ skill at reflecting on and learning from their own work. (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001)

We are left wondering if there could be a way to support students completing edTPA and realize either of the above visions of professional teaching practice.

For all its technical complexity, edTPA threatens to strip teaching of its moral and emotional complexity and give the impression that teaching can be good if you follow directions. However, our data demonstrated that we, along with our student teachers, struggled with our drive to do edTPA right while maintaining our desires to explore the fullness of what it means to become a teacher. Our chances to do this well, however, were limited. As university supervisors, we were constrained by edTPA, yet Susan continued to supervise and consider how to make spaces for students to consider important questions while attending to edTPA. As we commit ourselves to self-study in the face of the dilemma of edTPA, we hope teacher educators and policymakers will fight for policies that allow student teachers to attend to the complex and important questions of teaching, so that we all can focus on building relationships within schools that serve the needs of learners.

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About the Authors

Martha K. Donovan

Georgia State University

Mdonovan7@student.gsu.edu

Martha K. Donovan is a PhD candidate in the Educational Policy Studies department, concentrating on Social Foundations, at Georgia State University. Her research interests include critical policy studies, ethnographic studies of preservice and veteran teachers, and social justice in urban schools. Her dissertation focuses on seven veteran educators within one urban elementary school and their experiences navigating students' needs, policy, and their conception of good teaching during the 2016-2017 school year.

Susan Ophelia Cannon

Georgia State University

Scannon5@student.gsu.edu

<http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3858-3603>

Susan Ophelia Cannon is a PhD student in the Department of Middle and Secondary Education, Mathematics Education Unit, in the College of Education and Human Development at Georgia State University. Her research interests include uncertainty in mathematics classrooms, qualitative research, counting practices and measurement, and teacher education.

About the Guest Editors

Elena Aydarova

Auburn University

eza0029@auburn.edu

Website: <https://elenaaydarova.com>

Elena Aydarova is Assistant Professor of Social Foundations at the Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Technology at Auburn University. Her interdisciplinary research examines the interactions between global social change and the work of teachers, teaching, and teacher education through the lens of equity and social justice. Her projects have explored teacher education reforms in Russia and the US, internationalization of education, teacher retention, as well as privatization of teacher preparation. She has recently completed a book manuscript "Teacher Education Reforms as Political Theater: Policy Dramas in Neoliberal Contexts." Throughout her career, Dr. Aydarova has taught in the United States, Ukraine, China, and the United Arab Emirates.

David C. Berliner

Arizona State University

berliner@asu.edu

David C. Berliner is Regents' Professor Emeritus of Education at Arizona State University. Dr. Berliner is a member of the National Academy of Education (NEA), the International Education Academy (IEA), a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and a past president of both the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the Division of Educational Psychology of the American Psychological Association (APA). He is the recipient of awards for distinguished contributions from APA, AERA, and the

National Education Association (NEA). Dr. Berliner is co-author (with B. J. Biddle) of the best seller *The Manufactured Crisis*, co-author (with Ursula Casanova) of *Putting Research to Work*, co-author (with Gene Glass) of *50 Myths and Lies that Threaten America's Public Schools*, and co-author (with N. L. Gage) of six editions of the textbook *Educational Psychology*. He is co-editor of the first *Handbook of Educational Psychology* and the books *Talks to Teachers*, and *Perspectives on Instructional Time*. Professor Berliner has also authored more than 200 published articles, technical reports, and book chapters. He has taught at the University of Arizona, University of Massachusetts, Teachers College and Stanford University, as well as universities in Australia, Canada, The Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland.

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