

“It took my knowledge to the limits”: The edTPA teacher performance assessment and its implications for TESOL

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The use of performance assessments in pre-service teacher education is becoming increasingly popular across different countries and approaches to teacher education. The goal of performance assessment is to allow teacher candidates (TCs) to develop their reflective abilities and demonstrate growth in knowledge and skills over time (Bataineh, Al-Karasneh, Al-Barakat, & Bataineh, 2007; Imhof & Picard, 2009; Tanner, Longayroux, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2000). Performance assessments such as teaching portfolios are beginning to replace rigorous exit examinations that have traditionally been required of TCs in many countries (Kabilan & Khan, 2012; Klenowski, 2000). However, teacher performance assessments have also emerged as a way to measure teacher education programs' ability to produce competent teachers, who can in turn educate students in ways that meet the demands of global competitiveness (Klenowski, 2000). In this environment, performance assessments are in many cases morphing from a formative assessment and learning tool into a rigorous, summative measure of TCs' ability to meet the standards of their teacher education program. This development of the performance assessment into a high-stakes graduation requirement may bring about anxiety and frustration as TCs navigate the assessment, but despite these challenges, performance assessments can also continue to provide TCs with valuable opportunities for learning and reflection. In this article, we explore these issues as they emerged when our teacher education program adopted a new high-stakes performance assessment, with particular interest in how TCs perceived the new assessment and what this reveals about how closely the assessment models authentic teaching practice.

In the United States, K-12 education policy reform over the past two decades has become heavily focused on accountability, including increased measures for teacher evaluation. Many states initially focused on the implementation of in-service teacher evaluation measures, and have only recently applied accountability measures to pre-service teacher preparation. This lag has contributed to critiques that teachers in the United States are graduating from university-based teacher preparation programs with insufficient knowledge and experience to handle challenging classroom environments (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Zeichner, 2006). In language education, scholars have expressed concerns about teachers' ability to transfer theoretical knowledge into everyday classroom

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teaching practices (Johnson, 2009), and particularly new English as a Second Language (ESOL) teachers' general unpreparedness for the demands of the field (Baecher, 2012). Against this backdrop, many states have adopted performance-based assessments for preservice teachers as a way to quell criticisms regarding the quality of teacher education programs and to ensure that all novice teachers enter the classroom ready to teach (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Zeichner, 2006; Wang, Coleman, Coley, & Phelps, 2003). This study focuses on one such assessment used in the United States, the edTPA (which stands for Educative Teacher Performance Assessment, www.edTPA.com), a summative portfolio consisting of lesson plans, video recordings of teaching, student assessment, and the candidate's analysis and reflection of all these.

Theoretical Perspective: Authentic, Performance-Based Assessment

Teacher assessment has two main goals: formative evaluation that is intended for supporting teachers' development in identified areas of need, and summative evaluation that aims to measure a teacher's performance, typically as compared to a set of rigorous standards (Isoré, 2009). The latter also allows for consequential decisions to be made based on the result of the evaluation, such as decisions about hiring, tenure, and promotion in the case of in-service teachers, or graduation from teacher education programs and initial licensure in the case of TCs (Millman & Darling-Hammond, 1990). Performance-based assessments may serve either of these goals; however, used as summative evaluation in pre-service education, they often carry with them higher stakes for the TCs, especially if they are included as a graduation or licensure requirement for the completion of a teacher education program.

The term performance-based assessment can be assigned to a variety of measures; however, it can be broadly defined as attempting to measure TCs' abilities to enact the skills required of practicing teachers. The hallmark of performance assessment is that it takes place in an authentic or simulated teaching context, in an effort to capture the complexities of real teaching (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999). Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000) assign the label performance assessment to four types of assessments: case studies of teaching and learning, exhibitions of performance, portfolios, and problem-based inquiries (or action research). Though labeled a "portfolio" by its developers, the edTPA more closely resembles an exhibition of performance, which Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000) define as an assessment that allows teachers to demonstrate their abilities against rigorous standards through methods such as observations or video recordings of teaching.

In this study, we draw on a framework of key features of authentic, performance-based assessment put forth by Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000). The authors suggest a set of five criteria that authentic assessment of teaching should meet. First, authentic assessment needs to sample teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions in actual teaching and learning contexts. Second, assessment needs to incorporate multiple kinds of skills and knowledge that are needed in the practice of teaching. These, optimally, should be integrated across all coursework and learning experiences of a teacher education program. Third, multiple sources of evidence should be gathered from multiple contexts in order to make sound judgments about candidate competence. Fourth, candidate performance should be evaluated by experts in the field against relevant performance criteria. And finally, authentic assessment should include multiple opportunities for learning, feedback, and reflection. We wholly agree with these criteria and believe that performance-based assessment that fulfills them has great potential to help support the development of competent, skilled teachers. We believe that pre-service teacher evaluations we use, including performance-based assessments, need to be authentic, achievable, fair, and valid, and that TCs need to perceive them as such in order to

best learn from them. However, our study as well as others (Lunsford, Warner, Park, & Morgan, 2016; Meuwissen, Choppin, Shang-Butler, & Cloonan, 2014; Meuwissen & Choppin, 2015) raise concerns that at present, the edTPA is not fulfilling its potential in this respect.

As teacher educators, we have supervised TCs in a Master's level Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) program, taught some of the required classes in the program, and also scored edTPA assessments. Our work as teacher educators and scorers has offered us insights into TCs' experiences as they complete the edTPA for English as an additional language (EAL). Along the way, we have witnessed TCs struggle with many aspects of the edTPA, but we have also heard TCs express how the assessment has helped them grow into better teachers. Because the use of the edTPA to assess TC performance is so new, particularly with EAL teachers, and because it has quickly come to carry significant weight in TC evaluation in the United States, it is valuable to better understand how EAL TCs make sense of the assessment, what kind of difficulties are associated with its completion, and what benefits, if any, TCs feel they gain from the experience. Answering these questions will begin to shed light on bigger issues about how new, rigorous performance-based assessments can best be incorporated in pre-service teacher education, and how performance-based assessments should be structured to closely resemble actual teaching practice. To investigate the TCs' experiences further, we examined interview data from two cohorts of EAL teacher candidates (TCs). The research questions that guided our inquiry were: How do EAL TCs perceive the process of completing the EAL edTPA? What challenges and benefits do EAL TCs find with the edTPA?

The EAL edTPA

The edTPA was developed by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE, 2018a) in partnership with the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE). Over 600 teacher preparation programs in 40 states and the District of Columbia currently participate in the edTPA. Recently, teacher preparation programs within certain states have taken steps to adopt the edTPA as a consequential assessment for initial teacher licensure. As of 2018, 18 states (Alabama, Arkansas, California, Delaware, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin) have policies in place that make the successful completion of the edTPA a requirement for teacher certification (SCALE, 2018b). Several teacher education programs in other states (such as the one where our study took place) are also using edTPA to fulfill a licensure requirement, though not specified by state departments of education as the only portfolio to use for initial teacher licensure. These new state policies regarding edTPA have already begun to have an impact on teacher preparation programs, including changes to the curriculum and development of new edTPA-aligned assessments and courses (Fayne & Qian, 2016; Ledwell & Oyler, 2016)

This study focuses on the English as an Additional Language (EAL) edTPA, which is one of 27 subject-specific versions of the edTPA. All versions are based on a common architecture built around three tasks: planning, instruction, and assessment. Candidates submit a portfolio of materials during their student teaching, including: their commentary for each task; their lesson plans, instructional materials, and assessments for 3-5 lessons; two unedited video clips of up to 10 minutes of instruction each; and three students' assessments with written feedback or transcription of oral feedback from the TC. Each of the three tasks is assessed by five rubrics, for a total of 15 rubrics. The rubrics for the EAL version of the edTPA are as follows:

1. Planning for English language development within content-based instruction
2. Planning to support varied student learning needs
3. Using knowledge of students to inform teaching and learning
4. Identifying and supporting language demands
5. Planning assessments to monitor and support students' development of English language
6. Learning environment for English language development within content-based instruction
7. Engaging students' English language development within content-based instruction
8. Deepening student English language development within content-based instruction
9. Subject-specific pedagogy (promoting comparisons and connections between the content and student backgrounds)
10. Analyzing teaching effectiveness
11. Analysis of students' development of English language proficiency through content-based instruction
12. Providing feedback to guide students' development of English language proficiency within content-based instruction
13. Students understanding and use of feedback
14. Analyzing students' language use and content understanding
15. Using assessment to inform instruction of English language with content (SCALE, 2016).

Each rubric is scored on a scale of 1 to 5, with level 1 representing “the knowledge and skills of a candidate not ready to teach” and level 5 representing “the advanced practices of a highly accomplished beginner” (SCALE, 2016, p. 53).

Proponents of the edTPA assert that setting and assessing rigorous standards for TCs will lead to higher quality teaching and increased student achievement. Following the example of other professions such as law and medicine, the edTPA attempts to provide an opportunity for teachers to “define, transmit, and enforce standards of professional practice” (Darling-Hammond & Hylar, 2013 p. 12). Proponents believe that the widespread implementation of the edTPA will provide teacher education programs with useful data that will lead to continuous program reform (Sato, 2014) and contribute to the development of profession-ready teachers. However, critics of the edTPA have questioned whether the assessment is objective, ethical, and fair across contexts and teacher candidate backgrounds. For instance, Madeloni and Gorlewski (2013) argue that the edTPA narrows the focus of teacher education, restricts academic freedom, and takes attention away from issues of social justice and critical multicultural education. Dover and Schultz (2015) maintain that candidates' practice is artificially decontextualized through the completion of the edTPA, making student teaching unnecessarily high stakes and prematurely summative. Similarly, Greenblatt and O'Hara (2015) report that their work to prepare TCs for student teaching too often shifts to test preparation.

Pearson's involvement in the nationwide implementation of the assessment is troublesome to many scholars because it represents increased corporate involvement in teacher education (Au, 2013; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013). For example, Madeloni and Gorlewski (2013) purport that through the edTPA, Pearson can “enter teacher education, reap huge profits, exploit the privacy of students and teacher candidates, and outsource teacher educators' labor” (p. 17). The high scoring fee paid to Pearson by TCs (\$300 USD), the uncertainty revolving around the qualifications of Pearson scorers, and intellectual property questions related to TCs' submitted portfolios are some of the immediate, practical concerns related to Pearson's involvement discussed in the literature (Au, 2013; Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015; Parkes & Powell, 2015). More importantly, scholars have questioned Pearson's role

as the sole for-profit corporation shaping the values of the whole field of teacher education through the edTPA (Carter & Lochte, 2017; Hutt, Gottlieb, & Cohen, 2018), and raised concerns about its effect on social justice in teacher education (Picower & Marshall, 2017).

Because edTPA has been implemented on a national scale for only a few years, much of the available published research is exploratory, taking the form of conceptual, reflective, or self-study pieces by teacher educators as they struggled with the first years of edTPA implementation. Some of this work raised critiques of the edTPA's "illusions of objectivity and rigor" (Dover & Schultz, 2015, p. 95), its failure to address issues of race and multiculturalism (Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2015), the difficulties TCs face when placed in low-income schools where curricula may be highly scripted (Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015). Other work focused on how teacher educators have changed their practice to support TCs as they complete the assessment, for instance by designing course assessments aligned to the edTPA (Noel, 2014), offering a course to support TCs in their completion of the edTPA (Kleyn, López & Makar, 2015), offering a course to strengthen TCs' reflective writing abilities (Trojan & Kaplan, 2015), or making program-wide changes to better align with the goals of the edTPA (Lachuk & Koellner, 2015; Miller, Carroll, Jancic & Markworth, 2014). Several of these authors have raised concerns regarding TCs' difficulties with unfamiliar language in the assessment; difficulties that are sometimes shared by teacher educators (DeMink-Carthew, Hyler, & Valli, 2016). With the English as an Additional Language (EAL) Handbook, specifically, TCs have expressed confusion regarding jargon describing academic language and language competencies (Kleyn et al., 2015).

A related strand of research is now exploring TC perceptions of the edTPA experience. Meuwissen et al. (2014) conducted a survey of 104 students in New York and Washington after the first year edTPA had been consequential for initial licensure in those two states. They found that nearly half of the TCs reported not understanding the assessment criteria, and that a majority of TCs found the edTPA goals unclear, perceived it as unfair, found it time-consuming, and felt they had not been adequately supported in completing the assessment. Building on this study, Meuwissen and Choppin (2015) interviewed 24 of the survey respondents and identified three types of tension associated with edTPA's positioning as a state certification test: support tensions stemming from the dual formative and summative nature of the assessment and mentor teachers' and faculty members' uncertainty about how to help TCs; representation tensions regarding how to demonstrate "complex, contextualized, continuous teaching practice" (p. 3) within the edTPA format; and agency tensions resulting from the influence of external factors on teaching circumstances and practices. Similarly, Lunsford and colleagues (2016) found that agricultural education TCs perceived the assessment to be complicated by time constraints, the requirement to incorporate academic language in teaching content, and a lack of mentor teacher support; but TCs also commented that edTPA enhanced their ability to reflect on their teaching and served as a good measure of their teaching ability.

While previous work examined the experiences of TCs across subject areas, the only research that has specifically addressed the EAL edTPA, to our knowledge, is Kleyn et al. (2015), who approached the work from the perspective of bilingual education and focused on teacher educators' experiences with administering the edTPA. Using a collaborative self-study framework, the authors delved into their experiences as language teacher educators preparing TCs in an urban teacher preparation program. The authors found that edTPA provided opportunities for collaboration and rethinking of the teaching practice among faculty and students. However, they also found challenges, especially in relation to the needs of bilingual TCs who felt that edTPA did not

encourage the use of the home language or language mixing and were concerned about submitting bilingual lesson plans.

The research we report in this article focuses on the experiences of TCs in a TESOL program completing the EAL edTPA. We shed light on how TCs perceived this assessment in order to provide a better understanding of the challenges they encounter, the strategies they employ, and the benefits they perceive. We hope that our findings will be of use to teacher educators implementing or researching the edTPA and similar performance-based assessments both across content areas and specifically in TESOL and EAL programs.

Study Design

Participants were enrolled in one of two M.Ed. programs in curriculum and instruction at a large public research university in a major metropolitan area in the Mid-Atlantic US. Both M.Ed. programs led to K-12 state licensure in teaching English to speakers of other language (ESOL). The two programs had the same course requirements, but followed different scheduling models. The first M.Ed. program was an intensive, 13-month program that included an internship in an elementary school in the fall semester and in a secondary school in the spring. TCs took classes and completed signature assessments (an action research project, the edTPA, and a technology portfolio) while teaching up to 50% of their mentor's teaching load. The two-year M.Ed. program required students to complete a year of full-time coursework followed by a year of part-time coursework and an internship. They completed several signature assessments during their second year: a culminating paper, the edTPA, and a technology portfolio. The internship was full-time during the spring semester, and TCs were expected to take on their mentors' full teaching load at the peak of their internship.

The state where the participants completed their master's degrees and certification requires that TCs complete a teaching portfolio to earn their certification, but the state has not yet adopted the edTPA as the only acceptable portfolio, as many other states have. However, university faculty members who knew about the edTPA through their work with SCALE helped usher in the assessment at our institution, and it replaced a previous portfolio that had been used to fulfill the certification requirement. The leadership of the College of Education adopted the assessment after piloting it in 2010, and beginning in 2014, the College began requiring the edTPA as a signature assessment for all of its certification programs. The university allocated substantial resources to the implementation of the edTPA. Currently, the edTPA office employs one full-time staff member and two graduate assistants. Their responsibilities include hosting seminars to explain the assessment to candidates, and supporting and providing resources to candidates as they complete the assessment. This office also recruits and trains local scorers and manages the portfolio scoring process.

Participants

A total of 18 EAL TCs with a variety of backgrounds and levels of experience in teaching participated in our study. Overall, the TCs ranged from 20 to 35 years of age and had between 0 and 9 years of teaching experience. Data for this article come from the 2015 and 2016 M.Ed. TESOL cohorts, who turned in their EAL edTPA portfolios for local scoring in May 2015 and May 2016. Participant backgrounds are presented in more detail in Appendix 1.

Data Sources

We conducted a face-to-face, semi-structured interview with each participating teacher candidate after the TCs submitted their edTPA for evaluation as they were nearing the completion of their

M.Ed. TESOL degree. These 18 interviews were approximately 15 to 20 minutes each, and were audio recorded and transcribed, representing approximately 310 minutes of interview data. The interview protocol consisted of the following questions, crafted based on issues that had previously arisen in our work with the TCs while they grappled with understanding how to complete the edTPA:

1. What did you find challenging about edTPA?
2. How did you approach working on it?
3. From your point of view, what do you feel like the edTPA was assessing?
4. Do you feel like it emphasized or prioritized a certain type of teaching?
5. Do you feel like it captured your teaching abilities accurately?
6. Do you feel like the university coursework aligned with the edTPA, or prepared you well? Were there gaps where you wished you had been prepared better?

Follow-up questions were asked as needed in order to seek clarification or encourage participants to elaborate their answers.

Data Analysis

As we read and re-read the interview transcripts, we identified a set of initial codes that first emerged from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). For example, some initial codes we used were “confusing directions,” “peer support,” “reflecting on teaching,” and “time constraints.” As a team, we honed our coding scheme by going back to the data and discussing common trends (Creswell, 2013), and comparing these trends to findings from previous literature (Lunsford et al., 2016; Meuwissen, et al., 2014; Meuwissen & Choppin, 2015). Next, we created a set of axial codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2015) by collapsing together some of our initial codes, for example by merging together all initial codes related to reflection. At this stage, we also eliminated some codes that only appeared in our data once or twice, such as technical difficulties related to TCs’ video recording of the edTPA. We then checked these axial codes against the data in a recursive fashion (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), and after renaming some codes to better reflect our understanding of the data, we grouped these codes under three categories. We titled the categories as follows to illustrate the common trends we saw reflected in the codes: Challenges, Work-Arounds, and Benefits. The categories Challenges and Benefits were informed by earlier studies, which have utilized similar coding categories (e.g. “positive aspects” vs. “negative aspects” in Heil & Berg, 2017; “challenges” vs. “opportunities” in Kleyn et al., 2015), whereas codes in the category Work-Arounds drew from studies that have examined sources of support TCs have found for passing the edTPA (e.g. Brown, 2016; Suleiman & Byrd, 2016). Challenges included TC comments about the obstacles they encountered as they attempted to complete the edTPA; work-arounds included the ways TCs found to overcome these obstacles; and benefits were TCs’ perceptions of how the edTPA aided their development into better teachers. The final coding scheme is described below.

A. Challenges

1. The confusing language of the edTPA
2. The constraints of the edTPA

B. Work-Arounds

4. Finding peer and community support
5. Drawing on coursework that aligned with edTPA

C. Benefits

6. Learning to reflect on planning and teaching
7. Aligning planning, teaching and assessment
8. Professional growth

In this article we organize our findings based on categories A. Challenges and C. Benefits, while also weaving in these findings evidence from category B. Work-Arounds, or the ways our TCs found to overcome the challenges they encountered. In our discussion section, we return to the five criteria of authentic assessment proposed by Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000) and reflect on how well the edTPA is currently fulfilling some of these criteria based on TC perceptions.

Findings

TCs' Perceived Challenges in Completing the EAL edTPA

Overall, the edTPA proved to be a challenging assessment for the TCs - even for the top candidates in our program. Becca, an exemplary student who had won an award from the college as an outstanding master's student, felt the edTPA presented an entirely new challenge in her teacher preparation experience. She confided, "I haven't struggled like this. And then at the very end [of the program] I have this ginormous struggle with this thing I honestly have no idea how to tackle." When we asked the TCs whether the university coursework had helped them prepare for the edTPA, the responses were mixed. Some felt that the coursework helped them with deciphering specific content of the edTPA. For example, Sadie thought differentiation and different forms of assessment were well covered in her coursework, while Diana felt confident incorporating theory, aligning objectives, and writing a lesson plan. Specifically, what many TCs mentioned as helpful was a literacy methods class focused on teaching reading and writing in the elementary content areas, taught by the sixth author. This class included an assignment requiring TCs to complete a cycle of planning, teaching, video-recording, and critiquing a mock lesson (see Peercy, 2014; Troyan & Peercy, 2016 for more information about this assignment). This points to the potential of performance-focused learning experiences as a way to prepare candidates for completing performance-based assessments.

Despite receiving some support from coursework, the TCs expressed several concerns, which in their minds prevented them from exhibiting their best teaching on the edTPA. These included difficulties understanding the assessment language, obstacles caused by the video recording part of the assessment, and various contextual factors at their placement schools, which we describe in this section.

Several TCs mentioned the difficulty of interpreting the language of the directions and rubrics on the edTPA, which echoes findings by other authors (e.g. Kleyn et al., 2015; Lachuk, & Koellner, 2015; Meuwissen & Choppin, 2015). Despite spending considerable time preparing for the edTPA by reading the handbook and rubrics, Yuriko said, "It was only after we started to write that we realized what each of the rubrics actually meant." Likewise, Nadine commented, "It didn't really use the language of TESOL that I was familiar with from my coursework." Specifically, Nadine mentioned being unfamiliar with the terminology regarding competencies (discourse, grammatical, metalinguistic, and pragmatic competence), which was used on several of the edTPA rubrics. A number of the TCs identified the competencies as unfamiliar vocabulary terms, and Sadie expressed uncertainty as to whether the competencies were even conceptually familiar to them.

The edTPA provides candidates with resources such as an extensive handbook to alleviate concerns regarding understanding how to complete the assessment. However, for several candidates in our program, the language of the directions and EAL edTPA handbook served only to create confusion. Gabriela explained, “I didn’t really use it...I would go through it and I would be like, ‘what is this saying?’...I would just put it away and then continue with my work because it overwhelmed me.” For most of the TCs, talking to other candidates either face-to-face or online in a Facebook group the TCs had self-initiated was helpful, especially in understanding the language of the edTPA. Others looked at examples posted on the Internet by TC’s in other parts of the country. TCs found peer and community support – both in-person and virtual – to be an essential contributor to their success on the edTPA. However, in some cases seeking such support led to an uncomfortable sense of what Becca called “the blind leading the blind,” as TCs had differing interpretations of what the assessment was asking them to do. This situation is not ideal in the case of a high-stakes, standardized assessment such as the edTPA, as misinterpretations of the assessment language can have dire consequences for candidates who must pass the assessment in order to be licensed.

Many of TCs’ concerns were also centered on the video clips they were required to record as exemplars from their classroom practice. For example, the TCs felt that the two required video segments (each up to ten minutes long, demonstrating classroom teaching from one or two of three consecutive lessons) only offered a glimpse into their teaching practices, commenting that the final video-recordings did not accurately capture their skills. Even though the candidates were also required to write extensive lesson plans and assessments as well as commentary on their plans, implementation, and assessments, many felt that their success hinged on the videos. Sadie, for example, described the teaching seen on her videos as a “snapshot,” commenting:

You know, it’s supposed to represent so much, [but] I felt like it didn’t. When you look at the lesson plan you could see all the little things that I was trying to do, but...you’re just really focusing on those two tiny little clips.

For the TCs, capturing the right kind of moments of their teaching was also tied to timing the video recording well: early enough to allow adequate time to write the commentary, but late enough to acquire as much teaching experience as possible prior to recording. Not all candidates felt they had timed their video recording well. Nadine, who recorded herself during the early stages of her teaching internship in the fall, felt that she should have waited until she had gotten better at teaching, describing the teaching that she captured as “a hot mess.” She said, “At the time I thought it was really good. But when I started writing [the commentary]...I realized how bad it was.” Since the edTPA does not specify when during a candidate’s internship the video-recorded lessons are to take place, ill-timed recording can lead to candidates feeling that they are not showcasing what they perceive to be their best skills.

Other concerns were connected to contextual factors: in the opinion of some TCs, the assessment either altered the teaching context, or conversely, the teaching context did not allow them to fully meet the requirements of the assessment. Becca’s experience was an example of the former, as she felt challenged by the introduction of a video camera in her classroom. She reported that this new situation created an uncomfortable environment in her class and changed the dynamic of how students typically interacted with one another and with her. She felt this change prevented her from accurately capturing her teaching abilities: “I think because I was videotaping, it was definitely a different kind of a formality...everyone was just acting weird that day, and I [felt] this is not how our class normally is.” Others felt constrained by contextual factors at their schools. Gabriela mentioned

that the edTPA was difficult for her because she was bound by a fairly scripted curriculum (see Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015). Consequently, Gabriela felt that her edTPA portfolio did not reflect her preferred teaching style:

The county gives me a curriculum that I have to do and the days that I happened to be recording were just very vocabulary-intensive much like the rest of the curriculum, and...I don't think it was really a good reflection of what I would like to do in my classroom.

Grace, similarly, felt restricted in what she could realistically create for her edTPA lessons, because she recorded her lesson during a period of time when her students were being prepared to take standardized tests instead of following the regular curriculum. Given the short period of time TCs are in the classroom during their internships, as well as the multitude of other factors in the school (e.g., mentor teacher support, demands of the curriculum, scheduled standardized testing, delays or cancellations due to weather, scheduling of assemblies and field trips), it is understandable that TCs might feel that their teaching context did not allow them to showcase their teaching abilities.

Partially due to this mismatch that TCs perceived to exist between their actual teaching abilities and the portrayal of those abilities on the edTPA, TCs felt they had to become creative with their commentary. For example, Wesley said, "I just looked at what the rubric wanted...I feel like I was kind of playing to the rubric for part of it rather than demonstrating what I usually do as a teacher." Similarly, Elise explained, "Everything I wrote in my [commentary], most of it was like, creative fiction trying to explain how I did these things that I don't actually think I did." As evidenced by these types of comments, TCs felt that the edTPA made it difficult to genuinely demonstrate their teaching skills, so instead some of them resorted in writing their commentaries based on what they thought would give them a passing grade. Such actions on the part of TCs, of course, would undermine both the validity and the authenticity of the assessment.

The Perceived Benefits TCs Gained from Completing the EAL edTPA

Despite the challenges the edTPA presented for the TCs, some felt that the assessment was valuable: for example, Max called the assessment "a pain, but helpful." In particular, the TCs identified three aspects of the assessment that helped them grow as professionals, including increased reflective skills, the ability to align planning, teaching, and assessment, and incorporating theory into practice.

Because of the extensive commentary required on the edTPA, it is not surprising that TCs felt the assessment enhanced their reflective skills. For example, Hailey explained how the written portion of the edTPA helped her articulate her thoughts more clearly than before:

It did force me to break down my thought process more and articulate it because I think it's one thing to sort of think in your head...you say, 'oh sure I've done that,' but when you actually have to sit down and articulate it, I think that's kind of a different process, so that was helpful for me to see to kind of get a better sense of what I had done.

Max also agreed that the edTPA encouraged him to reflect on his practice more deeply than he otherwise would have, saying "I guess you could say it took my knowledge to the limits."

This finding echoes what has previously been revealed about the benefits of performance assessments on candidates' reflective skills (Okhremtchouk, Seiki, Gilliland, Ateh, Wallace, & Kato, 2009). What was significant in our study was that TCs mentioned not only reflection itself, but also

how reflecting on one's practice promoted their professional growth. For example, Kendra felt the edPTA helped her to delve deeper into an analysis of her own practice, which in turn helped her become better at lesson planning:

One thing it did for me was having to go through that and analyze my teaching painstakingly, like, minute by minute essentially, I think has helped me now when I write lessons to think about...including more of those things in every part of my teaching.

The development of reflective skills is an important outcome of the edTPA, given that reflection has been identified as a key part of a TC's development into professionals (e.g., Van Manen, 1977; Yost, Sentner, & Forlenza-Bailey, 2000). Reflection is also an important hallmark of authentic performance assessment, as discussed earlier in the theoretical framework (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000).

Another benefit TCs mentioned that was also connected to the expressed goals of the edTPA was the alignment of planning, instruction, and assessment. For example, when we asked Yuriko what she thought the edTPA was measuring, she mentioned the "ability to align instruction from planning to delivering the lesson and assessing it. The whole cycle." Some of the TCs felt that it was useful to look at these three as a cycle whose parts should be aligned to provide a cohesive and rigorous learning experience for students. Through this realization, candidates started making connections to edTPA's goal of promoting "teaching behaviors that focus on student learning" (SCALE, 2018a). Among the signature assessments of the M.Ed. program, the edTPA proved to be the only one that offered candidates an opportunity to see the interconnectedness of these three parts. This is significant because such coherence closely models what in-service teachers do every day in the field, which speaks to the fact that at least in this respect, the edTPA was viewed as an authentic model of practice by the TCs in our program.

The edTPA also helped TCs see the connections between the theories they learned in their coursework and the practical experiences that occurred in the internship. For example, Gabriela, who otherwise found the assessment exceedingly difficult, admitted in the end that the connections she made between theory and practice while completing the edTPA were beneficial: "It was nice to see how theory goes into practice with what I was doing and that it was actually relevant." Since performance-based assessments have been developed partially to bridge the widely criticized gap between prospective teachers' theoretical knowledge and their ability to apply that knowledge in practice (Baecher, 2012; Johnson, 2009), it is encouraging that the TCs in our program felt that the edTPA served that purpose in their preparation.

Though TCs found the edTPA quite challenging, they also found it to be a valuable learning experience thanks to the multiple opportunities for learning and reflection presented throughout the process of completing the edTPA. TCs felt that the edTPA had provided them opportunities to develop the practices of reflection, aligning planning, teaching, and assessment, and incorporating the theoretical aspects they had learned in their coursework into their nascent teaching practice.

Discussion

This study sought to portray the unique perspectives of eighteen TCs enrolled in our university's M.Ed. TESOL certification program as they strived to complete edTPA, a performance-based assessment that carried with it very high stakes, as its successful passage was a requirement for the TCs who wanted to graduate with teaching credentials. The findings of this study make a

contribution to research investigating high-stakes teacher assessment and reveal how TCs actually perceive an assessment that is described as being used to “emphasize, measure and support the skills and knowledge that all teachers need from Day 1 in the classroom” (Pearson Education, 2017). As discussed in our theoretical framework, we believe that TC perceptions matter because in order for an assessment to support candidates’ development, TCs need to *perceive* it as supportive. Our study revealed that TCs had several reservations towards the assessment, yet also found that it had some benefits for them, including making explicit the connections between the assessment, their coursework, and practice. In the following, we situate our findings in the five-criterion framework proposed by Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000), as we discuss whether edTPA fulfilled the promise of authentic assessment from the viewpoint of our TCs.

As discussed above, the first criterion proposed by Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000) is that performance-based assessment should sample teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions in authentic teaching and learning contexts. Because the edTPA requires candidates to video record actual lessons in their classrooms, this criterion would seem to be easily fulfilled. However, as some of our TCs remarked, the edTPA changed their teaching contexts in unexpected ways, especially because of the presence of a video camera in the classroom. Even when student consent for video recording is sought beforehand, the introduction of a camera remains problematic, especially in EAL populations with the potential of undocumented students being present in the classroom. On the other hand, TCs struggled with contextual factors at their schools such as standardized assessment of students and scripted curricula that in their minds prevented them from demonstrating the type of teaching they perceived as required on the edTPA. These concerns were strongly tied to the fact that TCs saw their success on the edTPA as hinging on the two video segments rather than the written commentary. This reveals the need to make TCs more aware of how they can demonstrate their skills and knowledge through thoughtful commentary and insightful reflection of what is seen – or not seen – in the video clips.

The second criterion is the incorporation of multiple kinds of skills and knowledge in the evidence. The edTPA is an extensive portfolio encompassing planning, instruction, assessment, and reflection, the variety of which the TCs in our study readily acknowledged. In this regard, the edTPA seems to be hitting the target. However, what the assessment still seems to be missing is the integration of the same skills and knowledge across both coursework and practical learning experiences of teacher education programs. While the TCs in this study did make connections between their coursework and the edTPA, they also felt that there were aspects of the assessment for which our teacher education program did not prepare them, including some of the central terminology used in the assessment. We will return to this point below. To address the misalignment between the edTPA and what is taught in teacher education programs, literature has suggested the need to make changes to coursework and programmatic foci (Kleyn et al., 2015; Lachuk & Koellner, 2015; Miller, Carroll, Jancic & Markworth, 2014; Troyan & Kaplan, 2015). However, as research on the edTPA accumulates, the assessment itself should also be modified accordingly to better match the realities in the field of teacher education.

The third criterion of authentic assessment is that multiple sources of evidence should be gathered from multiple contexts. The edTPA seems to be falling short in this respect, as our TCs almost unanimously declared the assessment a mere snapshot of all they knew and could do in the classroom. This is where edTPA strikingly differs from a more traditional, formative teaching portfolio, in which candidates collect artifacts and reflections over a long period of time and from many sources throughout their teaching internship. The fact that all of the assessment evidence is

gathered from a very short period of time, from three consecutive lessons, means that candidates must choose the right time to gather their evidence. As we saw from the comments of our TCs, this meant completing the assessment sufficiently far into the internship in order to gain as much teaching experience as possible, while also being mindful of assessment deadlines. For TCs, having to be concerned over when the best time to gather evidence is raises the stakes of this high-stakes assessment even higher. At the same time, the small window of time from which the limited evidence is gathered decreases the authenticity of the edTPA, and may tempt candidates to write “creative fiction” in order to meet the requirements of the assessment, as was seen with some of our candidates.

The fourth criterion put forth by Darling-Hammond and Snyder (2000) is that candidate performance should be evaluated by experts against criteria that are actually relevant to performance in the field. The edTPA can currently be evaluated either by local evaluators or Pearson employees; however, discussing the expertise of these two types of scorers is beyond the scope of this article (but see Greenblatt & O’Hara, 2015; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013). However, focusing on the latter part of this criterion, this study raises concerns that the assessment criteria on the edTPA may not represent the central concepts in the field. Based on TC comments, the “competencies” (grammatical, discourse, pragmatic, and metalinguistic) they were required to address on the assessment were particularly unfamiliar to them. Though these terms are grounded in the research (i.e., Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983), they are not terms in common parlance among practicing teachers. More research is needed to make connections between these and more widely used concepts in the field of TESOL.

Finally, authentic assessment should include opportunities for learning, feedback, and reflection. Based on our TCs’ comments, candidates did consider the assessment a learning opportunity, especially when it came to developing their reflective abilities. The opportunity to receive feedback on the edTPA again depends on the type of scoring candidates receive, and was not mentioned by the TCs in this study. (But for a detailed analysis of edTPA feedback provided to candidates, see Kidwell, Budde, Guzman, Tigert, DeStefano, & Peercy, 2018).

What is missing from Darling-Hammond and Snyder’s framework – perhaps because it should be self-evident – is a requirement that the directions, rubrics, and specialized terminology of an authentic assessment be readily understood by all candidates. In our study, TCs strongly expressed views that indicated that the edTPA was not easy to understand even by the strongest candidates in our program. We are not the first to reveal that the assessment seems to require fluency in “edTPAese” (Lewis & Morse, 2013), a form of discourse seemingly unique to the edTPA that has baffled both teacher educators and TCs across the country (DeMink-Carthew, Hyler, & Valli, 2016; Kleyn et al., 2015; Lachuk, & Koellner, 2015; Meuwissen & Choppin, 2015). However, it is worth reiterating here this especially worrisome finding, as it is vital for the validity and reliability of any assessment that the participants understand how the assessment is to be completed. The TCs’ comments in our study about the difficulties they experienced unpacking the language in the assessment prompts, rubrics, and resources point to the need to make the language of the EAL edTPA clearer and more aligned with central terminology and concepts used in the field. The comments also reveal a need for teacher education programs adopting the edTPA to better prepare their candidates for the skills and knowledge specifically required on the edTPA, while maintaining a coherent program structure that addresses best practices widely recognized in the field. More research is also needed to examine conflicting interpretations of the assessment language and how

specific misinterpretations ultimately affect the TCs' understanding of and performance on the edTPA.

As it is evident from our discussion here, the edTPA is at present falling short of fulfilling the potential to be a fair, valid, and authentic performance-based assessment. There is yet work to be done, both by teacher education programs and by the assessment creators, to make the edTPA into a performance-based assessment that reliably measures TCs' knowledge and skills in the field. In our conclusion, we shed light on some possible next steps.

Conclusion

Our findings show that, from the TC perspective, the EAL edTPA meets some of Darling-Hammond and Snyder's (2000) criteria for authentic, performance-based assessment, such as capturing teacher knowledge and skills in actual teaching and learning environments, incorporating multiple skills and knowledge needed in the practice of teaching, drawing on multiple sources of evidence, and providing multiple opportunities for learning and reflection. The benefits gained from participation in an assessment that meets these criteria lend great support to the use of the edTPA to assess TCs' readiness to enter the classroom. As the edTPA continues to be implemented more widely, however, it will be increasingly essential that all those involved with the edTPA have an understanding of the assessment's shortcomings as an authentic performance-based assessment, so that they can approach, supplement, and adapt the assessment accordingly. Below, we discuss recommendations for three major groups involved with the edTPA: individual TCs, university teacher education programs, and the assessments' developers.

At the individual TC level, professors and supervisors should encourage TCs to read the rubrics more closely, and ask for clarification of unfamiliar terminology early in their pre-service coursework. They should seek support from mentors and supervisors to plan well in advance for filming of their edTPA lessons at a time when they are able to showcase their best teaching. At the same time, TCs should recognize that few lessons go exactly as planned, and that the edTPA does not hinge solely on their video recordings. On the contrary, their planning, critical reflection, analysis of student learning, feedback to students, and plans for next steps all contribute to their overall edTPA score, and their commentary on those aspects need not connect directly to the lessons they recorded. TCs should also be routinely encouraged to practice critical reflection and analysis of their planning, instruction, and assessment both before and during their internships.

Recommendations at the local institutional level include developing a clear university-specific support structure and more training for those that instruct, coach, and mentor the TCs before and during the assessment (i.e., faculty, internship supervisors, and mentor teachers). From our own experience, and from the comments provided by TCs during interviews, we noticed that many teaching faculty, supervisors, and TCs were unclear where to turn for help and clarification. More research is needed to explore if and how more training and professional development for faculty, supervisors, and mentor teachers could support TC achievement on the edTPA. More empirical research is needed to identify the best way to scaffold the assessment for the TCs (e.g., orientations, help sessions online and in-person, addressing edTPA language and requirements during coursework). Additionally, teacher education programs should be aware that the edTPA presents constraints (such as the presence of a video camera) that limit the authenticity of the teaching environment and that it offers evidence from only one context. The edTPA, therefore, should be complemented by other formative and summative assessments that provide faculty with a wide range of evidence of TC progress.

At the national level, the developers of the edTPA should consider revising the handbook and assessment language (e.g., the repeated emphasis on the grammatical, discourse, pragmatic, and metalinguistic competencies) to better match the language used in the field. Doing so would increase the relevance of the criteria used to evaluate TCs' teaching abilities. Until such time, however, teacher educators should consider ways to weave "edTPAese" (Lewis & Morse, 2011) into coursework by unpacking what the unfamiliar terms mean and by presenting concrete examples of practices meant to develop the above-mentioned competencies in students. Additionally, handbooks and rubrics should be revised to offer TCs clearer guidance as they complete the assessment. Uncomplicated handbooks and language will also help support teacher educators and mentors who not only prepare TCs for the edTPA, but who also administer and score the assessment at the local level. An additional concern for assessment developers is whether the handbook and rubrics adequately elucidate the core of the assessment as the TC's critical reflection of his or her ability to plan, implement, and assess student learning – rather than encouraging candidates to overfocus on the video recording.

By examining TCs' experiences with the EAL edTPA, we have offered findings that illuminate their perceptions of the assessment, their use of strategies, and their views on the shortcomings and benefits of the assessment. Our analysis revealed that the edTPA meets many, but not all, criteria of authentic performance-based assessments. Teacher educators who are obligated to implement the edTPA should be aware of the assessments' shortcomings in order to modify the assessment and its uses as needed. Furthermore, more research is needed to continue examining how the edTPA's shortcomings affect the experiences of TCs while completing the assessment, as well as its ramifications as TCs begin their careers. High-quality standardized teacher assessments have the potential to hold teachers accountable as professionals who reflect on their practice and demonstrate fluidity in planning and implementing lessons and assessments for students with diverse learning needs. In the current context, where standardized testing is emphasized at all levels, new forms of assessment such as the edTPA may redefine our profession. However, researchers and practitioners alike should keep a watchful eye on the increased standardization in teacher education. Especially in the United States, where schools grow increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse, we need more research to understand how to prepare TCs for the unique and context-dependent work of teaching while also strengthening the field with performance assessments that measure widely accepted and clearly defined best practices in teaching. We hope that our study creates discussion and encourages others to carefully consider the implications of the edTPA across different contexts and content areas before adopting it as a high-stakes gatekeeping assessment for TCs..

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Appendix 1
Participant information

Participant	Program (TESOL)	Cohort	EAL teaching experience prior to M. Ed. TESOL
Catherine	1-year M. Ed.	2015	None
Nadine	1-year M. Ed.	2015	None
Yuriko	2-year M. Ed.	2015	9 years
Hailey	2-year M. Ed.	2015	<1 year
Diana	2-year M. Ed.	2015	None
Danielle	2-year M. Ed.	2015	1 year
Kendra	2-year M. Ed.	2015	4.5 years
Sadie	2-year M. Ed.	2015	2 years
Max	1-year M. Ed.	2016	3 years
Paola	1-year M. Ed.	2016	<1 year
Yvette	1-year M. Ed.	2016	1 year
Gabriela	1-year M. Ed.	2016	None
Yumi	1-year M. Ed.	2016	None
Grace	1-year M. Ed.	2016	None
Elise	1-year M. Ed.	2016	None
Becca	1-year M. Ed.	2016	None
Wesley	2-year M. Ed.	2016	2 years
Christina	2-year M. Ed.	2016	1.5 years