



# Diffusion in a vacuum: edTPA, legitimacy, and the rhetoric of teacher professionalization



Ethan L. Hutt <sup>a, \*</sup>, Jessica Gottlieb <sup>b</sup>, Julia J. Cohen <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of Maryland, College Park, United States

<sup>b</sup> Texas Tech University, United States

<sup>c</sup> University of Virginia, United States

## HIGHLIGHTS

- edTPA diffusion is attributable to distributed governance structures and flexible rhetoric.
- Researchers and professional associations were instrumental in facilitating adoption of edTPA.
- Advocates rhetoric drew on the indeterminate meaning of calls for “greater accountability”.
- Findings are organizational theory predictions on role of professional organizations.
- Findings suggest evolving meaning of “accountability” and “professionalization”.

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 23 September 2016

Received in revised form

23 August 2017

Accepted 6 September 2017

## 1. Introduction

Improving teacher quality has become a focal point of current educational reforms worldwide (e.g. Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007). Many countries have sought to implement more rigorous licensure processes to raise professional standards and improve the quality of the teacher workforce (Kim, Ham, & Paine, 2011; Leigh & Ryan, 2008; Sahlberg, 2011). Despite decades of use, licensure examinations in the US have been perceived as unsuccessful in ensuring teacher quality (e.g. Goldhaber & Brewer, 2000). Critics charge that pass rates are too high; that passing has limited predictive validity; and that scores—derived from multiple-choice responses—do not reflect the actual knowledge or work of teaching (Darling-Hammond, Berry, & Thoreson, 2001; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008). Yet, licensure examinations remain a central feature of both the legal apparatus of teacher certification and of new

policies aimed at improving the American teacher workforce. As a result, considerable resources have been expended to develop new and better teacher licensure examinations.

edTPA, a portfolio assessment of teacher artifacts (lesson plans, student work samples) including videotaped instruction, is a direct response to these. Billed as a “bar exam” for preservice teachers, edTPA attempts to address previous shortcomings by providing a more authentic and rigorous teaching assessment. Building on more than a decade’s use of portfolio-based performance assessments in new teacher induction in Connecticut (Wilson, Hallam, Pecheone, & Moss, 2014) and teacher preparation in California (Pecheone & Chung, 2007), edTPA is currently used in dozens of American states and hundreds of individual teacher preparation programs. The premise of edTPA and its state-based antecedent, the Performance Assessment for California Teachers (PACT), is simple: We can better assess “teacher readiness” by collecting materials teachers develop and use in real classrooms. By asking teachers to video tape and reflect on their instruction, performance assessments like edTPA are designed to provide early stage evidence of the expert teaching skills assessed in assessments of veteran teachers, such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (Goldhaber & Anthony, 2007).

Unlike prior efforts to reform teacher education that have been met by bitter political, ideological, and rhetorical battles (e.g. Cohen-Vogel & Hunt, 2007), edTPA’s embrace in the American teacher education community has been widespread, though not uncontested (Au, 2013; Dover, Schultz, Smith, & Duggan, 2015; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013a). Despite a variety of criticisms including that edTPA has an insufficient research base, reduces the complexity of teaching in the name of standardization, and crowds out other values in teacher education like social justice or diversity,

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [ehutt@umd.edu](mailto:ehutt@umd.edu) (E.L. Hutt), [jessica.gottlieb@ttu.edu](mailto:jessica.gottlieb@ttu.edu) (J. Gottlieb), [jjc7f@eservices.uva.edu](mailto:jjc7f@eservices.uva.edu) (J.J. Cohen).

in less than 10 years, edTPA has been adopted by 751 teacher preparation programs in 40 states and the District of Columbia (AACTE, 2017) with much of this expansion occurring in the last three years.<sup>1</sup>

Given the contentiousness and slow pace of prior reform efforts—for decades only a few states used performance assessments in teacher licensure—edTPA's adoption throughout the teacher education landscape in such a relatively short period of time is worthy of examination. The purpose of this study is to understand the process of policy diffusion of edTPA, and, in doing so, contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of teacher education reform. The fact that edTPA adoption has largely occurred in the absence of traditional policy actors—state legislatures, the Department of Education—or traditional policy levers—mandates or financial incentives—raises a basic, if puzzling, question: how did a major effort to reform both teacher education and teacher licensure manage to spread to hundreds of schools in more than two-thirds of states without the assistance of traditional players in education policy?

Considering the case of edTPA provides an opportunity to explore a different side of teacher education policy, its dynamics, and its rhetoric. Thus, our study seeks to answer two primary following research questions:

- (1) What factors (structural, political, organizational) supported edTPA's adoption?
- (2) What arguments were made and what rhetoric was used to support edTPA adoption in teacher education programs and licensure requirements?

While the specific context of this story is American, the issues raised are of broader interest and applicability. Governments worldwide have a great deal invested in teacher licensure processes and improving teacher training remains a major focus of policy (e.g. Akiba et al., 2007; Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005). At the same time, traditional teacher education programs are seeking to adapt to a global policy environment that is increasingly defined by commitments to accountability (Meyer, Tröhler, Labaree, & Hutt, 2014) and neoliberal management strategies—developments that can be seen in countries ranging from England (Bates, 2004) and Norway (Garm & Karlsen, 2004) to Hong Kong (Tang, 2015). Within this context, our research highlights the role of professional organizations in navigating this policy environment by using reform as a way to maintain the legitimacy of teacher education programs and by deploying arguments about the meaning of professionalization in teaching. Given the broad interest in improving teacher preparation as well as the efforts to reconcile calls for increased accountability by strengthening teacher professionalization and the work of teacher preparation programs, the case of edTPA in the US may offer important lessons and insights about balancing these tensions.

## 2. Background and theoretical framework

Teacher education has become a policy concern worldwide, with many countries exploring ways to improve teacher training and screening (Akiba et al., 2007; Wang, Coleman, Coley, & Phelps,

2003). Indeed, the growth of edTPA must be viewed as part of a broader international trend. For instance, beginning in July 2016, all teacher candidates in Australia are required to pass a written literacy and numeracy test for certification (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017)—a move that parallels recent government action in England to raise teaching standards (Department for Education, 2013). Likewise, preservice teachers in China must pass exams in pedagogy, psychology, teaching methods, and teaching ability in order to become certified, unless the candidate attended a university-based teacher education program (NCEE, 2017).

Key drivers of these concurrent developments in teacher policy are the sustained belief in the link between school quality and economic strength; the sense of a global competition among educational systems—reflected attention to international examinations results like PISA (e.g. Meyer & Benavot, 2013); and the belief—and growing empirical evidence—that high-quality teaching is a crucial in-school determinant of student achievement (e.g. Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014). In the U.S., these issues have become intertwined with long-standing questions about the quality of university-based teacher education programs and the creation of a variety of alternative certification routes (Grossman, 2008; Levine, 2006).

These concerns have also increased pressure on traditional teacher education programs to demonstrate that they are redoubling their efforts to train high-quality teachers. Though the field of university-based teacher education remains robust and by far the largest source of new teachers, even accounting for recent enrollment declines, the field remains in flux and under scrutiny (Zeichner, 2010, 2014).

It is within this context of system-wide policy pressures that we must consider the introduction of edTPA as a new aspect of teacher preparation and licensure.<sup>2</sup> We draw several insights from organizational theory to investigate the motivation and dynamics of edTPA adoption within this organizational landscape.

Understanding the pressures on teacher preparation programs as operating across the entire field of teacher education, we follow institutional theorists in asserting the importance of these external environment pressures—whether structural, political, or cultural—in shaping the behavior of organizations (e.g. Dimaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1998). In responding to these pressures, organizational theorists argue that the adoption of new practices may be motivated and influenced by a variety of factors ranging from the technological to the cultural or symbolic (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). Whatever the motivation, institutions are constrained and motivated by the desire to maintain their legitimacy as an institution (Suchman, 1995). Institutions try to make choices that their constituencies will view as consistent with the institutions' purpose and the broader value systems in which they are situated. In the case of edTPA, we would not expect such widespread adoption unless its values were perceived to correspond with those in the field and its particular form—a standardized assessment—could bolster the legitimacy of university-based teacher preparation.

While these factors may make adoption possible, they are no guarantee. Assessments of legitimacy often turn on the explanations and justifications developed to explain new practices (e.g. Dobbin, 2009; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004). The justifications may be rooted in a variety of arguments related to technical

<sup>1</sup> Of these forty states, sixteen states (covering 540 programs) currently have laws requiring teacher candidates to pass a state-approved assessment as part of program completion, licensure, or program accreditation and edTPA has approved by these states for this purpose. However, it should be noted, as we discuss below, that many of these state actions occurred after an initial period of voluntary participation by programs.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that given the decentralized America system, the extent of the novelty of edTPA varies by state and locale. As we note in the introduction, some states, like California, have a long history of portfolio and performance based assessments.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4941483>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4941483>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)