



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



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## 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

Available online 10 October 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,

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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.

considerations, moral claims, or, particularly relevant in the case of edTPA, the perceived legitimacy of certain practices like assessments (Scott, 1998). As Deephouse and Suchman (2008) conclude in their review of the legitimacy research, “the literature to date suggests a central position for rhetorical, discursive, and technical struggles over what is legitimate and who is authorized to theorize and certify” that legitimacy (p.68).

In applying this research to the teacher education context, we follow the approach taken by Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings (2002) who examined efforts to legitimize organizational change within professional communities and organizations. In the accounting profession, they find that professional associations played a key role in theorizing change—explaining the need for and providing justifications for change—within the profession. This is consistent with findings that specific organizations—like accrediting bodies—are capable of conferring legitimacy through their association with specific ideas or institutional forms (e.g. Durand & McGuire, 2005).

Professional organizations operate in a unique position in professionalized communities and perform specific work in the maintenance of professional legitimacy, though they are also subject to challenges to their authority from inside and outside their fields (e.g. Abbott, 1998; Dezalay & Garth, 1996; Hoffman, 1999). Professional organizations, such as Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants or the American Bar Association, can perform an important triple function. They provide space for internal debates among multiple constituencies and allow consensus to emerge; they can “enforce” new norms on member organizations as they emerge; and they provide a prominent platform for communicating to external audiences on behalf of these varied constituencies (Greenwood et al., 2002, 62). This allows them to manage the conversation around new practices with both internal and external audiences and to facilitate organizational change. To be considered legitimate, new practices must be considered an extension of existing practices that are already imbued with the profession's values or the organization must articulate an extended vision of the profession that justifies new practices and renders them a legitimate aspect of professional work (see also Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Meyer & Scott, 1983; Suchman, 1995; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005).

Though the professional status of teachers is not as well established or institutionalized as that of accountants, we consider teacher education programs' decisions to adopt edTPA to be the kind of change that generates debates about what constitutes legitimate work in teacher education and about whether the work reflects notions of teacher professionalization. This is especially true because edTPA bears directly on matters of developing professional identity, regulating entrance into the profession, and structuring early induction experiences for new teachers. Given the nature of these debates, we would hypothesize a prominent role for the variety of US organizations that seek to maintain the legitimacy and enhance the prestige of teacher preparation programs and the teaching profession, notably the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) and teachers unions, like the American Federation of Teachers and National Education Association.

Though Greenwood et al. (2002) limited their examination to documents produced within the professional organizations, given the public nature of the debates over teacher licensure and the myriad organizations engaged in these conversations—not just teacher education programs but also teachers unions, accreditors, think tanks, licensing boards—we also consider a variety of public texts produced to explain and justify edTPA adoption. As we describe below, we begin from the assumption that these arguments will draw from existing debates within the field of education but be put in service of justifying (or opposing) the recognition of

edTPA as a legitimate practice for establishing the “readiness to teach” of graduates of teacher education programs.

### 3. Methods

The goal of this study is to explore the mechanisms that have led to edTPA adoption. As such, we examine the narratives surrounding edTPA's diffusion, beginning with the Stanford Consortium for Assessment Learning and Equity (SCALE), and trace it from its initial field test in 2009 through the 2014–15 academic year. In doing so, we identify the role of key actors (organizations and institutions) who advocated for edTPA and the key arguments they made.

Our data sources consist of a wide array of sources including scholarly commentaries, professional reports, organizational newsletters, official presentations, the full universe of local and national newspaper articles (accessed via LexisNexis), as well as an array of publically accessible documents (e.g. official testimony, committee reports and exhibits) that preceded statewide adoption of edTPA in New York state. Our goal in collecting this data from various forums was to gather a representative sample of positions on edTPA, not to capture the entire universe of documents concerning edTPA adoption. These documents were collected in several steps. We did not place any restrictions on when the collected documents were published, since our goal was to examine the diffusion of edTPA from its inception. First, we used a LexisNexis search of US newspapers and trade journals (e.g. *Education Week*) with the following search terms: “edTPA” or “teacher performance assessment + Stanford”, in order to collect mentions of edTPA from newspapers and other news organizations. These searches resulted in 31 unique documents. We also searched for mentions of edTPA on the websites for *Inside Higher Ed* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and in academic search engines (Google Scholar, Jstor), which resulted in the inclusion of six additional documents. We also conducted searches for mentions of edTPA on the websites of the prominent organizations in education policy, such as both teachers unions (AFT and NEA), and policy think-tanks (e.g. Fordham Foundation, American Enterprise Institute) based on their identification in prior research as being influential players teacher education policy (Bulkley & Gottlieb, 2017; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Cohen-Vogel & Hunt, 2007). This search resulted in ten documents. Finally, we used these collected sources to identify additional sources to be included in our analysis, such as edTPA position statements from education organizations such as the National Association for Multicultural Education, resulting in three documents.

Based on these searches, we began our analysis with 50 documents. Once collected, we read through each document, and retained those that included statements of policy positions or direct quotes from actors and organizations advocating for or against the adoption of edTPA. Documents that did not contain statements of policy position or quotes from relevant actors, such as articles that summarized the state of the debate or simply provided information about the history and use of edTPA, were not included in our analysis. This reduced our data set to 34 documents.

Once these sources were compiled, our analysis plan involved multiple stages of independent coding and narrative identification (Bulkley & Gottlieb, 2017; Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Cochran-Smith, 2001; Harrison & Cohen-Vogel, 2012). We used directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), which has been used in similar studies that seek to explicate narratives around education policy developments (e.g., Harrison & Cohen-Vogel, 2012). In directed content analysis document coding begins with an initial set of codes, which are based in existing theory or prior research. Data that could not be coded initially is analyzed in order to determine the need to create sub-categories or new codes.

Our theoretical framework and prior research on policy diffusion guided our initial set of codes. Consistent with our theoretical framework we assumed that at the core of these arguments—pro and con—were issues about the extent to which edTPA as a performance based assessment would be considered a legitimate part of university-based teacher education. As scholars have noted, the variety of legitimacy arguments is considerable, ranging from the technical and pragmatic to the normative, historical, or symbolic (e.g. Deephouse & Suchman, 2008). We began our coding by using the professionalization and deregulation binary developed by Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001). In this framework, professionalization is defined by an effort to reform teacher education by developing high-quality standards for university-based teacher education and high-quality performance-based assessments at the point of teacher certification and throughout a teacher's professional career. By contrast, deregulation is defined by a commitment to remove the barriers of entry to the profession, including licensing and coursework requirements, and to develop alternative routes into the profession with high-stakes assessments serving as an important gatekeeper (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, p. 3). edTPA would appear to represent a blending of different aspects of these agendas—rooted in standards- and university-based teacher education but also a gate-keeping, high-stakes assessment. Given this correspondence, this framework served as the basis for our codes in identifying the content of edTPA rhetorics, and how those narratives might be understood as part of these broader national agendas around education. The initial set of codes can be seen in Table 1.

After the materials were independently coded by each researcher, we used those categories to develop profiles of emerging edTPA narratives. Excerpts from the coded documents were organized by element of form (problem-definition, target population, and policy solution) and by the professionalization and deregulation categories. To reach agreement, we discussed the outlined narratives, and then recoded materials where agreement had not been reached. This process continued until we reached a consensus about the identified narratives.

During this process, two sub-categories emerged. Within the deregulation category, it became clear that two different conceptions of accountability were present in the data. The first notion of accountability was internal—accountability within the profession—in which the edTPA was framed as a way for the teaching profession to hold itself accountable for the preparation of teachers. The second notion of accountability was external, in which the edTPA was described as a way for stakeholders outside of the teaching profession, such as state agencies, to hold colleges accountable for preparing quality teachers.

#### 4. Findings: the case of the edTPA

We find that professional organizations, notably the AACTE, framed the main rhetorical arguments in favor of edTPA adoption—ones that were amplified by other important players in the field, including national teachers unions. These advocates explicitly connected the idea of edTPA as a new and innovative practice with longer standing ideas about the need for teacher education to

follow other more established professions and the need for teacher education to hold prospective teachers to more rigorous standards. Crucially, advocates also drew on the rhetorical theme of accountability. This accountability rhetoric proved especially capacious. Advocates employed it to buttress ideas about professional identity while also using it to address critics' calls for more external forms of high-stakes assessments.

##### 4.1. Affordances of the organizational field of teacher education

It is clear from the available evidence that the spread of edTPA is a result of advances along multiple channels. The lack of centralized control over teacher education in the US has long meant that professional associations, teachers unions, and university-based researchers have a considerable influence over the content and framing of teacher policy (e.g. Ravitch, 2001; Strunk & Grissom, 2010). In addition to organizations like AACTE, which represents teacher education programs, and CAEP, which accredits them, individual university-based teacher educators play important entrepreneurial roles in reform efforts because they often operate simultaneously as teacher educators, researchers on teacher education, and advocates for teacher education reform. Given the low-status of the teacher profession, those teacher educators associated with prestigious universities can be particularly influential having the respect of educators in the field and policymakers and the public at large (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001; Labaree, 2004). Indeed, in their study of the discourse of teacher education reform, Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001) identified individual professors and professional organizations as key promulgators of the rhetoric of professionalization in teacher policy.

Our findings concerning edTPA are consistent with these earlier findings. In particular, we find that the AACTE and Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor at Stanford University, were particularly prominent in setting the terms of the debate around edTPA. Broadly speaking, these actors stressed the continuity between edTPA and existing institutional practices and goals within teaching and teacher education.

For instance, during an important period of expansion for edTPA in 2013, AACTE framed edTPA as explicitly in-line with existing calls from the two major teachers' unions the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). In March 2013, six months prior to an official edTPA "roll out" event in Washington, DC, the NEA ran an article on its website from a former member of the NEA Board of Directors entitled "How edTPA accelerated my preparation as a pre-service teacher" (Wittenbrink, 2013). Reflecting on her experience as a pre-service teacher, the author made the explicit connection between the NEA's official position and the edTPA experience, "More than ever, I agree with NEA's position that we need a classroom-based pre-service assessment that focuses on pedagogy, not just content" (Wittenbrink, 2013). Solidifying this strong rhetorical connection between edTPA and the NEA's position on teacher preparation, the then NEA President, Dennis Van Roekel, was a speaker at the official edTPA rollout event in 2013—an indication of the constituency building around edTPA prior to its launch.

Likewise, the AFT in December 2012 published a report from its

**Table 1**  
Codes based on Professionalization/Deregulation Framework.

Professionalization	Deregulation
Teacher education matters for student achievement	Teacher education does not make a difference in student learning
Outcomes of teacher education are teacher-focused, such as high-quality teaching	Outcomes of teacher education are student-focused, such as standardized test scores
Accountability measures focus on teacher professional performance	Accountability measures focus on results, such as student test scores

Teacher Preparation Task Force entitled “Raising the Bar – Aligning and Elevating Teacher Preparation and the Teaching Profession” (AFT, 2012). The report cites edTPA as an example of the positive progress being made in the area of “assessment for entry” (AFT, 2012, p. 12–13). Upon the report’s release, AACTE issued a statement praising the AFT’s position and making reference to the archipelagic state of teacher preparation. AACTE argued that edTPA represented an explicit effort to address teacher preparation in the absence of policy action, “In our current policy climate where incentives can ease standards for becoming a teacher and lower standards for preparation programs, the AFT’s report sends an important message to policy makers ... and a further reminder for preparation providers to step up their game” (AACTE, 2012). While noting the pressures exerted by the current policy climate, the statement implicitly rejects the pillars of the deregulation agenda—“incentives” and “eas[ing] standards”—while highlighting the opportunities for those in traditional teacher education to redouble their commitment to the hallmarks of professionalization: raising standards. Implying that the policy climate required programs to respond with action and innovation, the public exhortation to accept edTPA as a visible way to “step up their game” was clear and direct.

The AACTE had already largely accomplished this task by getting 160 institutions in 22 states to participate voluntarily in a pilot study of edTPA the previous spring. AACTE’s pitch, as we explore below, was explicitly based on the rhetoric of professionalism involving control over entry and of the core “knowledge” of the associated work. AACTE supported edTPA field tests, which ended in 2013 when edTPA was declared fully operational (AACTE, 2013). The fact that the AACTE was able to get so many schools to sign on to a pilot project speaks to the importance of the structure of the organizational field.

Equally important, during this crucial period when AACTE was working to secure buy-in from member institutions, edTPA received only limited institutional opposition. The AFT, while not necessarily a vocal advocate, refrained from making any negative comments about the initiative and none of the traditional institutional critics of colleges of education—Fordham Foundation, American Enterprise Institute, or the Manhattan Institute—produced white papers criticizing edTPA. Even the traditionally hostile critic of traditional teacher preparation programs (e.g. Greenberg, McKee, & Walsh, 2013), the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), responded to the spread of edTPA by raising a set of technical concerns but opting for a “wait and see” approach (e.g. Greenberg, Putman, & Walsh, 2014). Given these organizations’ traditional opposition to colleges of education and their tendency to dismiss developments in traditional teacher preparation as “more hoops,” this silence is notable—a finding we explore further in the next section.

These organizational efforts underscore how the governance structure of American teacher education provides degrees of freedom for the spread of new innovations like edTPA. Unlike legislation that requires a pitched argument and an up or down vote, edTPA’s pilot, facilitated by AACTE, allowed the reform effort to find the most hospitable institutional environments and use those places as a foundation for future growth. Indeed, there seems to be a strong circumstantial link between the state legislative action and participation in the pilot: between 2009 and 2014, six states had adopted and implemented edTPA (Reagan, Schram, McCurdy, Chang, & Evans, 2016) and all of these states participated in edTPA field tests. Of those six states, four made the decision to take up the edTPA at the state level, rather than at the teacher preparation program level.

Not only does the distributed structure provide opportunities for individual organizational adoption, but it also facilitates the

possibility of memetic isomorphism (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983)—organizations adopting a practice because other organizations have already done so and do not want to be perceived as out of step. Reagan and colleagues’ (2016) study of state actors’ justifications for adopting edTPA highlights both legitimacy considerations around specific practices and the pressure to stay-in step with evolving practices. Specifically, the study found that state actors selected edTPA due to its origination at Stanford University and development by Linda Darling-Hammond, as well as its potential to create and promote common outcomes across teacher preparation programs. Additionally, they found that there was a sense among state actors that when it came to edTPA “everybody is doing it, shouldn’t you join in, too?” (Reagan et al., 2016, p. 15). These justifications are consistent with the idea that program adoption was driven by attempts to shore up the legitimacy of programs by associating with the recommendations of prestigious researchers and bring institutional practices in line with the recommendations of leading professional organizations and peer institutions.

#### 4.2. Rhetorical strategies of teacher education reform

While Regan and colleagues (2016) note that the pervasiveness of edTPA was a significant influence on its subsequent adoption by states, the question of why individual institutions adopted edTPA in the first place is left unanswered. Given that organizations need to provide accounts—justifications—for new practices, we consider the narratives surrounding edTPA to be an important part of its diffusion story. edTPA advocates sought to encourage and legitimize the adoption of edTPA by simultaneously presenting it as consistent with efforts to improve teacher quality through increase professionalization *and* through increased accountability. By coupling professionalization with accountability, these narratives sought to bridge the gap between two arguments that scholars have traditionally viewed as diametrically opposed in teacher education reform (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001).

These twin narratives frequently co-exist within the same edTPA texts. Linda Darling-Hammond, consistently drew on both of these narratives in making her case for edTPA: praising the teacher education community as a professional community “holding itself accountable” (e.g. Darling-Hammond, 2012b). While some might consider this formulation tautological, as self-regulation is a key feature of professionalism including in teacher education (Yinger & Hendricks-Lee, 2000), the formulation hints at the multiple logics seeking to coexist in arguments for edTPA. The rhetoric around edTPA is productively vague: it allows the audience to hear their preferred conception of progress—either greater accountability or greater professionalization—as the heart of the reform.

##### 4.2.1. The edTPA and professionalization of teaching

The first edTPA narrative makes the claim that edTPA is legitimate because it is an extension of efforts to develop professionalism in pre-service teachers—a professionalism that will strengthen teacher identity and improve teacher quality. Proponents frequently describe how edTPA boosts the professional character of the teacher workforce. For instance, stating:

Like assessments in other professions, such as the bar exam or the medical boards, the edTPA is a peer-developed process that evaluates how well candidates have mastered a body of knowledge and skills (Darling-Hammond, 2012a,b, p. 2)

Here Darling-Hammond offers an analogy between other well-established professions and teacher education’s nascent efforts with edTPA. Darling-Hammond stresses teaching’s place among the archetypes of American professionalism—law and

medicine—while emphasizing that the basis for this professionalism is a mastery of codified knowledge, which has long been at the center of the arguments for teacher professionalism (Shulman, 1987). While the idea of a “bar exam” for teaching is not new, (e.g. AFT, 2012), Darling-Hammond, due to her reputation as a champion of teachers and her position at a prestigious university, is a credible bearer of this message. Simultaneously, her prominent standing as a critic of federal testing policies helps assuage concerns among those who might be inclined to view edTPA—as a high-stakes standardized test—as an instantiation of the wider outcome- and test-based accountability movement exemplified in NCLB or *Race to the Top* (Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013b).

Given recent accountability efforts involving standardized testing, it is notable that many sought to differentiate edTPA from other forms of external standardized testing. For example, in response to negative publicity and discussions of edTPA (e.g. Singer, 2014), a group of teacher educators from the City of University of New York (CUNY) took to Diane Ravitch's blog—a hub for practitioners seeking information about education policy—to pen a defense of edTPA. In its reply, the group characterized edTPA as a bulwark against external oversight:

“Ironically ... some who are reacting to these negative effects of the test and punish approach are including in their attack an initiative specifically designed to push back against it. They target a performance assessment for teachers designed by the profession for the profession – the edTPA – which calls on prospective teachers to demonstrate through performance (not multiple-choice tests) that they have professionally-agreed upon skills and knowledge to enter a classroom ready to teach.” (Falk et al., 2014)

Here we see how the intertwined logic of professionalism and accountability that is central to the edTPA argument requires disentangling and selective highlighting depending on the audience. The first rhetorical move categorically denies any connection between external, state supported test-based accountability—“test and punish” being a slogan in the US for opposition to NCLB accountability (e.g. Weingarten, 2015)—and edTPA. The second stresses the differences between edTPA and other forms of assessment, highlighting its origins and control (“by the profession for the profession”) and its particular form as a “performance” rather than a multiple-choice test. Lastly, the group places emphasis on traditional notions of professionalization: making entry contingent on the mastery of an internally defined set of skills and knowledge. The combination of these professionalization arguments invert the predominant accountability narrative as being primarily about external control arguing that, to the contrary, edTPA was “specifically designed to push back against it.”

The credibility of this professionalization narrative among key constituents is evident in its repetition by teachers unions. The AFT praised edTPA as a “promising example” of a performance assessment that could raise standards for teacher preparation (AFT, 2012) and the NEA president Dennis Van Roekel made clear the extent to which he viewed edTPA as consistent with its goals of elevating the teachers' professional status and its members' day-to-day professional duties:

It is the *professional responsibility* of practicing teachers – and the NEA – to be actively engaged in the preparation of candidates ... our members will be ready to serve as edTPA scorers, support preservice candidates, and collaborate with teacher preparation partners to ensure teacher candidates are profession-ready on day one (2013, emphasis added).

There is evidence that this narrative operated not only at the national level, but with state affiliates as well. When the Minnesota Board of Teaching made the decision to adopt edTPA as a statewide measure of the effectiveness of teacher education programs, the president of the state's teacher association endorsed the decision saying, “This is what education reform should look like, for practitioners by practitioners” (Williams, 2010). This “by and for” rhetoric of professionalism was frequently echoed by Linda Darling-Hammond who argued that edTPA's commitment to internal control was nearly unprecedented in American teacher education, “this may be the first time that the teacher education community has come together to hold itself accountable for the quality of teachers who are prepared and to develop tools its members believe are truly valid measures of teaching knowledge and skill” (Darling-Hammond, 2012b).

#### 4.2.2. Measure and punish redux: edTPA and high-stakes accountability

While the professionalism narrative was ubiquitous, it still left room for a robust and explicit accountability narrative. Depending on the speaker, an accountability narrative either dovetailed or diverged from the rhetoric of professionalism. In some cases, accountability was synonymous with internal control by the profession and in others it explicitly suggested that preparation programs would be held *externally* accountable for preparing high-quality teachers and for screening out unqualified teacher candidates before they could enter the classroom.

The tension between these narratives was perhaps most evident when elected officials found themselves arguing on behalf of edTPA adoption. For example, when New York made edTPA a requirement for teacher licensure, the State Education Commissioner John King frequently analogized edTPA with NCLB-style test-based accountability. King argued, “New York is raising standards for students to ensure they are ready for college and careers, but maximizing the success of that effort requires that we demand just as much excellence from the educators who will teach them” (New York State Board Education Department, 2014). By analogizing edTPA as an examination for teachers to NCLB as raising of standards for students, King's formulation directly contradicts those advocates who stressed edTPA's direct opposition to other test-based accountability efforts in schools. Likewise, NCTQ's response to edTPA drew the same explicit connection between edTPA and accountability policies stating that edTPA was a “commendable effort to insert greater rigor and accountability into teacher preparation” (Greenberg et al., 2014).

When highlighting edTPA as an external form of accountability, advocates noted edTPA's screening function: by creating a visible process that prevents unqualified or incapable people from becoming teachers in the first place, edTPA serves as an external check on teacher preparation programs while improving the quality of new teachers. As a standardized measure of teacher performance, edTPA has the capacity to reward the deserving and call out those who are not up to par. In the words of NEA president, Van Roekel, the implementation of edTPA would ensure that all students have “a ‘profession-ready’ teacher on day one” (Walker, 2013). Rather than stress the positive, additive dimensions of knowledge and skill-building prominent in the professionalization rhetoric, these narratives emphasize the elimination or reduction of harm. Hence the phrasing, used by Linda Darling-Hammond and others, that edTPA is necessary to ensure that teachers enter the classroom “safe to practice” (e.g. Darling-Hammond & Hylar, 2013). This invocation of a safety/harm dichotomy offers an allusion to the popularized view of the doctor's oath to “do no harm” as well as part of the legal test for professional “malpractice,” which involves

the recognition of a duty of care and a show of harm (Hutt & Tang, 2013).

While these arguments allowed advocates to present edTPA as in line with standard professionalization practices and consistent with a policy climate of increased accountability, the dual logic raised questions for many about whether teacher educators could enact this balance in practice or whether the external accountability would predominate. The possibility of shifting the locus of control outside the teacher education profession became a major line of critique for those who opposed the spread of edTPA (e.g. Cochran-Smith, Piazza, & Power, 2013; Dover et al., 2015). These critics frequently equated professionalism with localism and complexity, and accountability with remoteness and reductionism. For instance, one critic observed, “edTPA feels very much like what we already know about such tests. Someone outside of and far away from my classes and students is taking control of my curriculum and teaching,” (Au, 2013). Likewise, National Association of Multicultural Education's (NAME) position paper on edTPA expressed concern that edTPA's focus on exclusion would decrease the diversity of the teaching force, and that edTPA's reliance on both accountability and professionalization rhetorics was fundamentally incompatible:

As a high-stakes (gate keeping) instrument for teacher credentialing, the edTPA presents the same problems as high-stakes standardized tests do for K-12 students ... standardized assessment rubrics tend to be reductive, leaving out much of the complexity necessary to evaluate teacher performance on a multicultural scale (National Association for Multicultural Educators, 2014).

These concerns about the locus of control also came in the form of critiques about the involvement of Pearson, a for-profit company, in the administration of edTPA. Critics argued “Pearson's involvement reveals how edTPA, designed to answer questions posed by corporate education reformers instead of the questions of teacher educators, leads us dangerously astray” (Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013a; see also; Au, 2013; Dover et al., 2015; National Association for Multicultural Educators, 2014; Singer, 2014).

In placing the procedural and operational dimensions of edTPA—gate keeping, standardized assessment, corporate involvement—in direct opposition to professional judgement and control, these critiques call into question whether this formulation is realistic in practice. NAME essentially accepts the analogy of edTPA to other forms of accountability drawn by the New York Board of Regents but as a way of highlighting its potential detrimental effects (see also, Cody, 2014).

These critiques of edTPA did not go unnoticed by proponents who, in turn, sought to reframe these criticisms. For instance, Darling-Hammond responded to questions about control by drawing parallels to other professions and by stressing the continued involvement of educators, “Like assessments in other professions, [edTPA] was developed—and is guided—by a consortium of professional educators” (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2013, p. 2)—a retort that goes directly to the issue of professional jurisdiction. Darling-Hammond also responded to concerns that the high-stakes nature of the edTPA would reduce the autonomy of teacher educators. Echoing her narrative-theme that linked the edTPA to increased professionalization of teacher preparation, Darling-Hammond and Hyler argued that as a profession, teaching needed to embrace high-quality performance assessments for teacher preparation programs, and to “ensure that our candidates demonstrate they can meet professional standards before being permitted to practice” (2013, p. 2). While they acknowledged the concerns of edTPA critics, they argued that the profession must

“take charge of accountability and ensure it reflects our highest aspirations for ourselves and our profession” (p. 3).

This exhortation to be proactive—“take charge”—highlights at once the pressure of the policy climate that demands action and accountability and the delicate balance between individual, local identity and national professional standards—“for ourselves and our profession”. Other supporters echoed these sentiments by trying to suggest that localism, not accountability, was the value most incompatible with professionalization, arguing that the profession must not “privilege a parochial right rooted in local control to gauge candidate readiness over a uniform professional standard for markers of safe professional practice” (Adkins, Spesia, & Snakenborg, 2015). Though these views continue to divide those in the field (Cochran-Smith et al., 2013), this flexible accountability rhetoric allowed for arguments in multiple registers by differently situated actors to differently receptive audiences.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis highlights several important factors in facilitating edTPA adoption including the fact that edTPA was associated with a prominent researcher—Linda Darling-Hammond—a prestigious university—Stanford University—and promoted by a professional organization that had credibility inside and prominence outside the profession. This constellation of actors was able to develop a rhetoric around the legitimacy of edTPA by channeling long-standing desires for increased professionalization with external, education policy demands for increased accountability. These combined factors were key in bestowing edTPA with the legitimacy necessary to allow so many teacher preparation programs across the country to adopt the reform with only limited state action. These findings are consistent with those of Greenwood et al. (2002) who found that professional organizations were well positioned to manage discussions about change within a professional field. Our findings were likewise consistent with the themes of legitimation rhetoric found in the study of the accounting profession: the need for change, and the new practices this required, were largely justified in terms of their appropriateness and consistency with the traditional normative values of teaching and with a professional organization playing a key role in articulating those links. edTPA was explicitly linked to the idea that teachers—as professionals—should define and control the content of their professionalism and terms of entry into their field. Indeed, advocates stressed that as a performance assessment and not a multiple-choice test, edTPA embodied the core, authentic work of teaching.

In contrast with other professions, however, the professional status of teaching is still highly contested. Thus, while some scholars note that receiving professional endorsement is, itself, a powerful form of legitimizing new practices (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Meyer & Scott, 1983), establishing teaching as a profession was a desired outcome of edTPA adoption. The result was that much of the professionalization rhetoric became a language for analogizing edTPA with the already legitimated induction processes of other professions. Hence proponents' repeated references to the “bar exam” and “medical boards” as existing practices in other professions.

The salience of this professionalization rhetoric is evident not only in the language of edTPA advocates, but also in the rhetoric of its detractors. Beyond raising technical concerns about validity, critics of edTPA adoption framed many of their arguments in order to highlight how the reform is inconsistent with the values of teacher educators. The opposition statement from NAME argued that the complexity of teaching could not be captured by a standardized assessment like edTPA, nor was a nationwide examination administered by a for-profit company consistent with a localized

vision of professional governance. While advocates highlighted that edTPA was performance-based as opposed to multiple choice, critics stressed the standardized and numeric scoring aspects of the assessment.

Amid these rhetorical clashes, it is clear that the distributed structure of teacher education in the US and edTPA's association with a prominent advocate of teacher education, a prestigious university, and major professional organizations like AACTE created a nominal presumption that edTPA's values are consistent with those in the profession. While critics have successfully undermined these arguments to prevent or delay adoption in specific university programs—edTPA's adoption is still far from universal—other programs have viewed the professionalization arguments and associations as providing sufficient justification to adopt edTPA. Indeed, as Reagan et al. (2016) found, edTPA adoption became sufficiently visible that there was a sense that “everyone is doing it”. It may also be the case that when the political climate calls into question the legitimacy of an institution, the result is an action bias—a premium placed on action itself. Under these conditions, arguments in favor of a new reform may be subject to a different evaluative standard than those opposing reform: a variety of plausible arguments can serve to legitimize reform, while overwhelming evidence is required to reject it. In this case, arguments about edTPA need not be of equal strength in order to justify adoption by individual programs. Endorsement by professional organizations may further marginalize dissenting voices, characterizing them as rearguard actions rather than mainline critiques.

The contentious debates over teacher professionalization also help explain the prominence of accountability rhetoric in edTPA discussions. Given a policy climate that seeks greater accountability in all sectors of public education and, in particular, seeks to hold university-based teacher education programs responsible for the quality of their graduates, edTPA advocates clearly found utility in couching edTPA adoption as consistent with broader accountability trends. The correspondence with these broader policy trends served as a means of conferring legitimacy on edTPA. Though we were not able to test this proposition directly, we would hypothesize that lower status programs—ones whose institutional legitimacy was most in question—and programs operating in particularly hostile policy environments would be most likely to cite its accountability dimensions when adopting edTPA. We suspect that for many programs, the principled debates about professionalization are less salient than the pragmatic considerations about having an outwardly visible sign of their commitment to innovation and accountability (e.g. Dobbin, 2009). Even still, that the accountability rhetoric was distinct but not necessarily inconsistent with the rhetoric of professionalism—“a profession holding itself accountable”—was likely useful for building a broader constituency for edTPA. Depending on the audience, the accountability language could be leveraged in service of meeting the internal goals of the profession or the calls for external accountability.

The embrace of accountability rhetoric by edTPA proponents offers a possible explanation for the general absence of the other themes of deregulation rhetoric. Though prior research has characterized the professionalization and deregulation agendas as being in “direct opposition” (Cochran-Smith & Fries, 2001, p. 3; Cohen-Vogel & Hunt, 2007), we found little evidence of deregulation rhetoric—complaints about additional barriers to entry, for instance—in discussions of edTPA. This surprised us given that the incorporation of high-stakes testing and a “focus on outputs” is a hallmark of deregulation policy goals and consistent with the general structure of edTPA. One reason may be that in implementing edTPA, several states took steps to keep the deregulation and professionalization agendas from becoming entangled. For instance, in New York, teachers entering via alternative certification

routes (e.g. Teach for America) were given a grace period to complete the edTPA. In Washington, conditional certificates (like those for alternatively prepared teachers) do not require edTPA certification, though holders must subsequently enroll in a university-based program.

It is possible that those who support the deregulation agenda—and the decentering of university-based teacher education—see edTPA as consistent with their preference for creating “tight” outcomes-based accountability in exchange for increased flexibility around processes such as coursework. This might explain the general reticence of traditional critics of university-based teacher education to critique edTPA. Given that backers of deregulation are usually seen as hostile to university-based teacher education it is perhaps not surprising that teacher educators were less likely to make these arguments.

An equally plausible explanation is that the international landscape of teacher education and broader political climate around accountability has shifted considerably since this dichotomy was first conceptualized. In the intervening period, alternative certification routes have become well established parts of the teacher preparation landscape worldwide, and accountability measures have become part of the “master narrative” of schooling in the US and abroad (e.g. Meyer, Tröhler, Labaree, & Hutt, 2014; Biesta, 2009). As is often the case in education reform, new innovations rarely make old forms obsolete. Instead new reforms become established, get incorporated into, or exist alongside earlier organizational forms (e.g. Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Given these developments, the elements that defined the original dichotomies between those who support deregulation and professionalization may have blurred considerably. The resulting state of affairs requires that we abandon a zero-sum view of education reform agendas and recognize the flexibility of both organizational forms and rhetorics. If, indeed, the old rhetorical and ideological categories have blurred, then scholars would do well to develop more elaborated (e.g. Cohen-Vogel & Hunt, 2007) or entirely new categories in order to analyze future teacher policy developments in any national context. As foreshadowed in debates over edTPA, there is a debate looming over the relative importance of standardized assessment and the individual discretion of teacher educators as well as over the view of teaching as a discrete set of knowledge and performance practices and of teaching as a disposition towards an ever evolving task. In either case, hybridized understandings of both the discrete knowledge and pedagogical outcomes of prospective teachers' notions of professionalization, as internalized control, will need to be developed.

Future research might, in particular, explore the ways in which the blurring of traditional professionalization rhetorics confers greater legitimacy on the institutional practices of teacher education programs. To the extent that the professional identity of teacher educators differs across countries—varying in ethos, practices, status, level of security—and that their institutions have different histories and are subject to different kinds of political pressures, we would expect both different rhetorical dialectics and practices to emerge in response. Practices that confer legitimacy in one context—standardized testing, in the US for example—may not travel well. Likewise, the specific role for professional organizations in managing these debates may differ considerably in more centralized systems. It would be a useful development for scholars to understand the full repertoire of available practices.

Countries worldwide have become increasingly invested in how licensure requirements signal professionalism and readiness to work with students. As different countries and locales adopt different approaches to this common challenge, researchers and advocates need to understand more about the rhetoric and processes underlying dissemination and adoption of these efforts. Our



research suggests that researchers and advocates would do well to parse the perception of teacher preparation practices and the affordances of potential reforms. While the American context is potentially unique and the tenor of reform debates in the US often implies a defensive role for traditional teacher education advocates—defending the status quo—our research points to the possibility of a pro-active role in setting the terms of the debate and the blurring of traditional lines of critique in the service of increasing the legitimacy of traditional forms of teacher education.

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