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Impact of the edTPA on teacher candidates' perceptions of preparedness to teach

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ABSTRACT

This longitudinal case study conducted at a private University in the northeastern United States explored the impact of the edTPA assessment and preparation process as an embedded component of the University's educator preparation program. The study tracked 59 graduate level candidates from entry into the program through candidate licensure. The researchers examined the impact of the edTPA preparation process on teacher candidates' perceptions of their readiness to teach in comparison to their actual readiness to teach as indicated by their edTPA portfolio passing score. The University's School of Education has an estimated 30% ethnic diversity population, thus a second research question compared perceptions of readiness to teach of candidates of color to those of Caucasian peers. Framed by Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, this study contributes to the research on the edTPA as an efficacious and inclusive evaluation tool, particularly within diverse schools of education.

Keywords: edTPA, candidates of color and edTPA, teacher candidates, self-efficacy in teacher candidates, teacher education

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Introduction

For the past two decades the concern regarding the preparation of highly qualified teachers for P-12 schools has been at the forefront in the minds of the public and education policy makers (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The Bush and Obama administrations both implemented federal legislation geared toward improving teacher preparation. These initiatives were part of a national focus aimed at raising the bar for teacher preparation and creating a national standard that would increase professionalization (Burns et al., 2015; Sato, 2014). Historically, in the United States, each state delineates its own teaching certification requirements that serve as a gatekeeper for teacher licensure. The federal reforms instigated a movement for performance-based assessments aligned to national standards that would evaluate teacher candidates for initial teaching certification, and provide states with a standardized and nationally-available tool (Pecheone & Whittaker, 2016). As a result, many states have turned to SCALE's Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). In the fall of 2018 the state wherein this study is situated, adopted and mandated the edTPA assessment as a new requirement for teacher certification.

The response to the edTPA by Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) across the country has been mixed at best. Petchauer et al., (2018) praised the assessment for moving teacher evaluation toward practice. Conversely, Ledwell and Oyler (2016) concluded that edTPA implementation did not result in substantial candidate gains or powerful curricular changes and may have even deterred candidates from choosing education as a career choice.

There are two goals and objectives to this project. First, the researchers would like to identify the impact of edTPA preparation within the preparation program on candidates' perceptions of their preparedness to teach in comparison to their actual preparedness to teach as indicated by their edTPA portfolio performance. Secondly, we would like to identify the impact of the edTPA on our candidates of color and their perceptions

of preparedness to teach in comparison to their peer Caucasian candidates. Petchauer et al., (2018) claimed implementation of the edTPA could negatively impact candidates of color from entering the profession and called for additional research on the issue. The selected institution is the most diverse educator preparation program in the state with as much as 30% candidates of color enrolled at any given time. As such, the researchers are aimed at continuous programmatic improvement with an emphasis on providing ongoing and focused support throughout candidates' preparation. With those goals in mind, the research questions addressed in this study were:

1. What is the impact of the edTPA performance assessment on preservice teachers' perceptions of their preparedness to teach (self-efficacy) versus their actual preparedness as determined by their passing the edTPA?
2. What is the impact of the edTPA performance assessment on candidates of color's preparedness to teach (self-efficacy) in comparison to their peer Caucasian candidates as indicated by their passing the edTPA?

It was hypothesized that candidate perceptions of their preparation would correlate with their passing of the edTPA. It was also hypothesized that our candidates of color would score equally as well as their Caucasian peers because of receiving the same program preparations and support from the EPP. The results of this research are valuable to the literature as the implementation of the edTPA is still in its early stages across the country. Results also contribute to the literature related to edTPA as a gatekeeping tool that limits access to the profession to candidates of color.

Literature Review

EdTPA and Teacher Preparation

The Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) is a relatively recent addition to the cache of standardized assessments used to evaluate teacher candidates' readiness to teach. The edTPA is unique in its design as a portfolio assessment requiring candidates to submit

video evidence, lesson plans and artifacts, and narrative commentaries to support their competency in three tasks: planning, instruction, and assessment. Developed by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE), the edTPA was born out of the need to prepare our nation's young teachers to meet the needs of diverse student populations on their first day of teaching (edTPA.aacte, 2021). Rather than paper and pencil licensure tests that do not require candidates to translate their earned credits into classroom practice, the edTPA offers a support program and authentic assessment measure that allows candidates to demonstrate real-world application of their learning. Currently, edTPA is utilized in 41 states and the District of Columbia; some states require the assessment as part of initial licensure or program completion while others are still in the exploratory stage (edTPA.aacte, 2021). SCALE's stated goals and outcomes for the implementation and use of edTPA as an evaluative measure include: expanding the information base for accreditation and providing a means of program evaluation for Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs), assist candidates in acquiring the efficacy and skills needed to be effective and confident classroom teachers of diverse learners, and to provide an objective and reliable measure that establishes a national standard for rigorous and relevant practice (edTPA.aacte, 2021).

While these goals and outcomes are laudable and necessary for perpetuating a professional community based on a gold standard for education, the assessment has been developing into "one of the more polarizing education initiatives of the early twenty-first century" (Petchauer et al., 2018, p.325). Colleges and universities with EPPs have had to overhaul their curriculum and provide extensive training for their faculties as a direct result of this movement. These changes come with a hefty price tag that has left some institutions, and the edTPA scores of their candidates, lagging far behind others with more generous endowments or resources that can be directed to the effort (Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2016; Petchauer et al., 2018). Some wonder whether

this externally developed teaching assessment can effectively measure teaching abilities that teachers must master in order to be successful on day one and whether the over-standardization of the professions would detract from the robust and responsive learning environments that result when local contexts are prioritized (Bernard et al., 2019). Bernard et al., (2019) questioned the application of developmentally inappropriate standards, through the evaluation of candidates' readiness to teach without accounting for the student teachers' development across the years of the program.

The voices of teacher candidates came through loud and clear in their objection to the timing of the assessment. For most, edTPA is completed concurrently with clinical placement, and candidates overwhelmingly report the distraction and detraction that results. Candidates feel distracted by the extensive and redundant tasks necessary to complete the portfolio and at the same time, that distraction is detracting from the robust and rich learning experience that should be the essence of student teaching (Wallace, K., 2020; Bernard et al., 2019; Greenblatt, 2016). The experiences, mistakes, meaningful feedback, and reflection that occur during student teaching is where candidates develop the confidence and skills needed for the classroom. When candidates are stressed and distracted during this critical period, learning and efficacy may suffer; and ultimately, so can the future students of these novice teachers.

Self-efficacy and Novice Teachers

As new teachers enter the classroom for the first time, their perceptions of their own abilities vary widely (Chong et al., 2014). Research reveals that for novice teachers, student teaching experiences such as location of field placement to mentor feedback, greatly impact new teachers' skills and self-efficacy (Moulding et al., 2014; Ng et al., 2018). Efficacy is the belief in one's ability to successfully perform a given task (Bandura, 1977). Albert Bandura (1977) gives us four sources for developing and enhancing personal efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physical /

emotional arousal. The most impactful of the four in terms of influence on efficacy is mastery experiences. Mastery experiences are defined as authentic opportunities for individuals to partake in a scenario that closely aligns to real-world performance, and they result in the most powerful and transferrable feelings of efficacy. Certainly, candidates' field experiences would be considered mastery experiences; consequently, these along with the other sources identified by Bandura would play an enormous role in shaping candidates' confidence in implementing the tasks of the edTPA. This study utilizes the edTPA Efficacy Survey to ascertain candidates' perceptions of preparedness to teach versus their actual preparedness as determined by their edTPA performance.

edTPA: Does it measure what it intends?

The edTPA is an educative and summative assessment designed to measure teaching readiness; thus, it is a tool that evaluates candidates on their ability to plan for, instruct, and assess students. A point of consideration that has created a stir among educators is *who* defines and assesses what good teaching should look like among the various educational contexts that exist in our country (Dover & Schultz, 2016; Kuranishi & Oyler, 2017; Paugh et al., 2018; Souto-Manning, 2019). Critics argue that the edTPA white-washes teaching and boils the art down to a mere series of task-oriented steps that virtually ignore a schools' contextual elements and students' cultural and personal assets (Dover & Schultz, 2016; Kuranishi & Oyler, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2019). The submitted portfolio is then scored by third-party contractors hired and trained by Pearson. Many candidates, preparing faculty, and researchers argue that this third-party process compromises assessment objectivity and validity and takes away all contextual understanding of the candidates' rationales for instructional decision making and even impacting where candidates would be willing to complete clinical placement (Bernard et al. 2019; Dover & Schultz, 2016; Hobbs, 2015; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016).

The consequential nature of the edTPA could

cause students, particularly in more challenging school districts or classrooms to think twice about utilizing pedagogical techniques that may skirt the fringe but would better meet students' needs than the routine approaches delineated within edTPA. SCALE (2019) reported that candidates in suburban settings outperform their peers who complete clinical placement in rural, city, or town areas. Additionally, there are statistically significant differences in candidates' mean scores related to clinical placements in classrooms with student characteristic variables including English Language Learners, economically disadvantaged, and student qualified for special education (SCALE, 2019). Though SCALE downplays the gap among performance based on these variables, studies have shown that candidates are reluctant to complete their clinical placement in urban classrooms where students of color and economically disadvantaged students are more prevalent (Behizadeh & Neely, 2019; Dover & Schultz, 2016; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016).

Kuranishi and Oyler (2017) illustrate this potential for failure when stepping outside the box by examining the edTPA failure of Kuranishi, a man of color and a high school special education intern in a co-taught urban classroom. Kuranishi was observed 12 times during his clinical placement and was also assessed in four different three-way evaluations. He passed all of these evaluations, yet he ultimately failed the edTPA. Kuranishi utilized inclusive practices of culturally sustaining pedagogy and Universal Design for Learning, and ultimately questioned whether the failure was a reflection of the dichotomy between the expectations of the edTPA and Pearson scorer and the approaches he used (Kuranishi & Oyler, 2017). One hopes that future candidates would not view Kuranishi's experience as a cautionary tale and choose a more mainstream path for their clinical placement and future employment.

A final theme amongst candidates and teachers who took the edTPA is the perception that the edTPA is not measuring what it intends to measure: good teaching (Behizadeh & Neely, 2019).

To illustrate this concern, evidence from one study reveals that test-takers aim to create a narrative that aligns to edTPA rubrics as opposed to authentic reporting (Huston, 2015). Huston (2015) noted that two participants in his study "admitted to tailoring their [commentary] answers based on the concept of audience, and that their answers did not necessarily reflect what they might consider as best practice" (p. 107). Many who took the edTPA or prepared candidates to take it pointed out that the assessment leans heavily on the ability of students to write well and accurately incorporate edTPA jargon within their commentaries (Wallace, K., 2020; Behizadeh & Neely, 2019; Goldhaber et al., 2017; Ledwell & Oyler, 2016). In sum, perceptions of those who previously took the edTPA indicate a focus on one's ability to jump through the many hoops associated with the assessment (Wallace, K., 2020).

edTPA Impact on Candidates of color

There is very little empirical research focused on the long-term effects of the edTPA assessment on the teacher workforce specifically related to teachers of color. The literature that does exist, however, indicates that the edTPA could prove to be a barrier to the profession for reasons other than candidates' ability to be an effective educator. Researchers have found that factors such as financial status, ethnicity, writing capacities, and candidates' ability to perform under extreme pressure seem to play into the passing rate for edTPA, particularly for candidates of color (Goldhaber et al., 2017; Hobbs, 2015; Huston, 2015; Ledwell & Oyler, 2016; Luna, 2016; Souto-Manning, 2019). As a preparing institution with a diverse student population reporting as 30% students of color, we seek to understand any potential challenges the edTPA presents for our candidates so we can better assist them in navigating the preparation process. Our goal is to identify areas for programmatic changes that will eliminate barriers, build instructional efficacy, and create a socially just experience for all candidates.

Standardized assessments and licensure exams have long-served as gatekeepers (Ledwell &

Oyler, 2016) to institutions of higher education and to the teaching profession itself. However, these standardized tests tend to perpetuate systemic inequities and leave ethnic candidates of color struggling to gain access to opportunities that should be fair game to all (Bernard et al., 2019; Petchauer, et al., 2018; Souto-Manning, 2019; Taylor et al., 2017). The edTPA boasts smaller racial/ethnic gaps than other assessments (Taylor et al., 2017), yet the result is still the same: individuals are being denied admission, licensure, additional certifications, promotions, and potentially improved quality of life based on results from what boils down to a single high-stakes consequential examination (Petchauer et al., 2018; Souto-Manning, 2019). In its 2019 Administrative Report, SCALE revealed that the nagging gap between edTPA mean scores of White teacher candidates and Black teacher candidates continues to narrow, and that there is no longer a statistically significant difference between mean edTPA scores of White and Hispanic candidates nor between Asian and Hispanic candidates. Yet, a study by Goldhaber et al. (2017) found that once the edTPA became consequential in Washington state, Hispanic candidates failed at a rate three times greater than their White counterparts. A study by Williams et al. (2019) corroborated SCALE's findings that, indeed, there is a statistically significant difference between mean scores of White candidates and candidates of color. Conversely, other studies that have explored the ethnicity variable and edTPA performance did not show a significant relationship (Wallace, K., 2020), and point to the possibility that despite ethnicity, candidates who took advantage of program supports aimed at edTPA preparation scored higher than peers who did not or demonstrated high levels of efficacy related to their edTPA readiness and their preparedness to teach (Wallace, K., 2020; Williams et al., 2019). As in their previous reports, SCALE (2019) continues to caution that the overwhelmingly disproportionate representation of White candidates (73.9%) compared to all other ethnic groups and those who chose not to identify should preclude

one from generalizing. Yet, SCALE does urge preparing institutions to explore the role that ethnicity may play in a candidate's edTPA preparation and performance.

In addition to the challenges raised by the design of the edTPA, there are practical and emotional factors creating barriers for candidates. All teacher candidates are faced with the reality that there are costs associated with the process of licensure exams; yet, the introduction of the \$300.00 edTPA fee on top of several other exams with fees compounds the financial hardship, particularly for first-generation college students and students with financial needs (Behizadeh & Neely, 2019; Williams et al., 2019). Other studies have shown that completion of the consequential edTPA during candidates' clinical placement has skyrocketed anxiety and stress to new levels (Wallace, K., 2020; Behizadeh & Neely, 2019; Bernard et al., 2019; Hobbs, 2015).

Though there are many questions surrounding the use of the edTPA as a consequential assessment, there is also a great deal of positive feedback related to the benefits of implementation. Candidates report enhanced understanding of effective instructional strategies & best practices highlighting reflection for personal and professional growth (Campbell et al., 2016; Kissau et al., 2019; Seelke, 2020). P12 partners and EPPs are provided with an objective, valid, and reliable tool that measures a candidate's effectiveness. The edTPA can be used as a tool for evaluating EPP's program of preparation (edTPA.aacte, 2020; Seelke, 2020). Lastly, candidates report that their shared experiences during portfolio completion led to feelings of collegiality and collaboration, which fostered self-efficacy as students grappled and succeeded with the portfolio assessment (Lin, 2015). In sum, the edTPA is a multi-faceted assessment that poses a variety of points for consideration as we guide our candidates through the teacher preparation process.

Study Methodology

Setting

This longitudinal case study was conducted at a mid-sized private university in the northeastern part of the United States. The university is

located in an urban area and ranks as having one of the most diverse student populations in the northeast. The School of Education (SOE) housed within this university offers only graduate level programs at both the initial licensure and advanced levels. The SOE typically maintains a diverse study body reporting as 30% candidates of color in any given semester across seven initial licensure programs spanning both elementary and secondary education. The initial licensure program candidates typically complete their certification Master's program in 18 months, with coursework and early field experiences taking three semesters followed by a final semester of student teaching.

Participants

This longitudinal case study followed one entire cohort of graduate level initial licensure candidates from entry to exit and licensure. The cohort consisted of 119 candidates beginning the teacher preparation program in the fall of 2019. Out of those candidates, 74 agreed to participate in the study, signing the IRB approved letter of consent. Unfortunately, this study began just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and was impacted by the challenges of the pandemic with only 59 of those 74 participating candidates completing their licensure programs by the end of the fall 2020 semester. Twenty-two percent of participant candidates in the study were candidates of color identified as African American, Hispanic, or Asian descent, and 78% identified as Caucasian. Of the 59 participating candidates, 41 identified as female and 18 identified as male.

Data Collection

In order to research question one, the data collection involved voluntary pre and post edTPA Efficacy Survey of the teacher candidates' knowledge and skills regarding the edTPA preparation and their perceived self-efficacy in their preparedness to teach as a result. The pre and post electronic surveys of the participating teacher candidates questioned their knowledge and skills of their preparedness to teach reflecting the concepts and skills represented in the edTPA. The electronic survey was done using

LiveText, an external learning platform, through which a link was provided for candidates to access on their personal electronic devices. LiveText does not access survey results unless the survey creator gives permission, in which permission was not granted. The electronic survey consisted of 26 questions asking candidates about teaching concepts represented within the edTPA. Candidates were asked to rate their self-

efficacy teaching confidence levels on a 5-point Likert scale consisting of 1-not at all confidence, 2-slightly confident, 3-moderately confident, 4-pretty confident, and 5-extremely confident. The participants were asked to identify their ethnicity on the pre and post survey in order to address research question two regarding candidates of color perceptions of preparedness to teach. The survey questions can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 *edTPA Efficacy Survey – Pre & Post*

| # | Questions – Pedagogical Knowledge |
|----|--|
| 3 | How well do you feel prepared to engage students in the chosen language function to develop and practice the identified learning strategy for lessons? |
| 4 | How well do you feel prepared to implement instructional supports to help students understand, develop, and use the language demands in lessons? |
| 6 | How well do you feel prepared to craft meaningful lessons that build on one another to help students make connections? |
| 7 | How well do you feel prepared to engage students in deeper thinking through effective questioning techniques within the content instruction? |
| 8 | How well do you feel prepared to plan assessments that effectively monitor student learning growth? |
| 9 | How well do you feel prepared to engage students in high leverage instructional practices? |
| 10 | How well do you feel prepared to connect your practice to research and/or theory? |
| 11 | How well do you feel prepared to use student assessment outcomes to guide next steps and instructional pathways? |
| 12 | How well do you feel prepared to incorporate instructional syntax and discourse to fully address all aspects of content instruction? |
| 13 | How well do you feel prepared to provide meaningful feedback to students in order to guide their learning growth? |
| 14 | How well do you feel prepared to differentiate and modify instruction in order to meet the learning needs of identified students? |
| 15 | How well do you feel prepared to differentiate and modify assessments in order to meet the learning needs of identified students? |
| 16 | How well do you feel prepared to identify student assets to determine beginning points for instruction? |
| 17 | How well do you feel prepared to implement effective teaching practices? |
| 18 | How well do you feel prepared to provide instruction on content vocabulary for your students? |
| 19 | How well do you feel prepared to lead whole group instruction for students? |
| 20 | How well do you feel prepared to lead small groups with leveled instruction for students? |
| 21 | How well do you feel prepared to justify that your learning tasks are appropriate for students? |
| 22 | How well do you feel prepared to connect your instruction and materials to your students cultural and language backgrounds, practices, and interests? |
| 23 | How well do you feel prepared to analyze and reflect on your teaching craft for continuous improvement? |
| 24 | How well do you feel prepared to plan re-engagement lessons for students who do not meet the targeted learning objective/goal? |
| 25 | How well do you feel prepared to engage students in utilizing the academic language to develop content understanding? |
| # | Questions – Knowledge & Skills |
| 1 | How well do you feel prepared to teach the content of your discipline? |
| 2 | How well do you feel prepared to teach your students the academic language of the discipline? |
| # | Questions – Learning Environment |
| 5 | How well do you feel prepared to engage students in a positive learning environment? |
| 26 | How well do you feel prepared to effectively manage a classroom of learners? |

The survey was analyzed by a panel of experts (N=21) to establish face validity and content validity using the Lawshe (1975) method. The experts in teacher education reviewed the survey questions and rated each as *essential*, *useful but not essential*, or *not necessary*. The content validity ratio (CVR) was calculated for each item using the formula referenced in the article (Gilbert & Prion, 2016). CVR needs to be above .429 to be considered valid or greater than 51% essential per item. For this survey, each of the items met the threshold with the lowest CVR being 71% for any item.

Research question one data collection also involved voluntary participant teacher candidate focus groups that were conducted during the student teaching seminars in their final semester. The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed for accuracy and used member checks for reliability.

Teacher candidates' final edTPA portfolio scores, identified only as pass or not pass, were tracked by the first researcher who serves as the SOE edTPA coordinator. Participants agreed to the access and use of their scores within the IRB letter of consent completed prior to start of the study. The candidate scores were analyzed with the post survey and the focus group response themes in order to enrich the narrative findings. Research question two explored the impact of the edTPA on candidates of color' preparedness to teach in comparison to their peer Caucasian candidates as indicated by their edTPA score and perceptions. The pre and post survey data were filtered to compare the responses of the candidates of color to the Caucasian candidates. In addition, the edTPA scores were also filtered in the same manner for analysis.

Data analysis

The pre and post survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Likert scale data is considered ordinal data and thus means are not appropriate. Instead, the number of candidates who identified each confidence level rating is provided for comparison sake. A comparison was made between the number of candidates self-rating for each level of the scale from pre to

post survey. Generalizations then were made in the comparison of the pre-survey and post survey regarding candidates' perceived self-efficacy in their preparedness to teach as a result of the edTPA training they received within their teacher preparation program.

The candidates' responses from the focus groups were analyzed using the transcriptions from the recordings. Responses were coded according to identified themes across the protocol questions. The data was analyzed to identify similarities and differences among the participants' responses, then codes were assigned to similar words or wording expressed by the participants, which led to identified themes (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Candidates' scores were compared to other data collected during the study and analyzed for results. edTPA score reports are confidential and were kept confidential being viewed only by the first researcher connected to this study who has authorized access to candidate's score reports as the edTPA coordinator. Shortly after the researcher received the candidates' scores, they were entered into a database where it was paired with their survey responses and given a code number. Participant names were not used for data analysis, but only the coded numbers to maintain confidentiality.

Findings

Research Question One

Survey

The pre and post survey questioned teacher candidates about their self-efficacy regarding their preparedness to teach as a result of completing the edTPA performance assessment during their teacher preparation program spanning four semesters. The edTPA Efficacy Survey questions were categorized into three different topics: 1) pedagogical knowledge [21 questions], 2) knowledge & skills [3 questions], and 3) learning environment [2 questions]. Eighty percent of the candidates who volunteered to participate in the study completed the pre-survey and 34% completed the post survey 18 months later. The difference in all candidate perceptions of teaching efficacy from the pre survey to the

post survey is drastically different. Figure 1.1 displays all candidate perceptions regarding their pedagogical knowledge efficacy on the pre-

survey and Figure 1.2 displays candidates' efficacy results on the post survey.

Figure 1.1 All Candidates– Pedagogical Knowledge – Pre (N = 47)

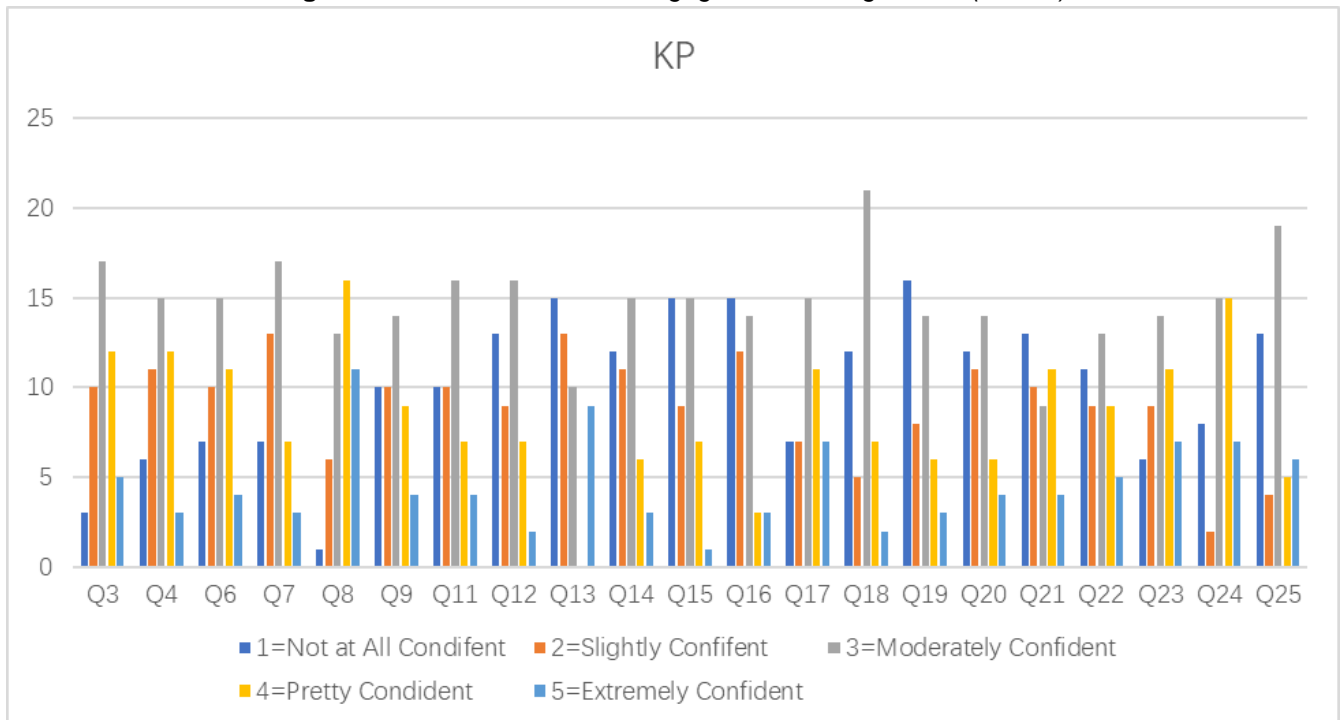
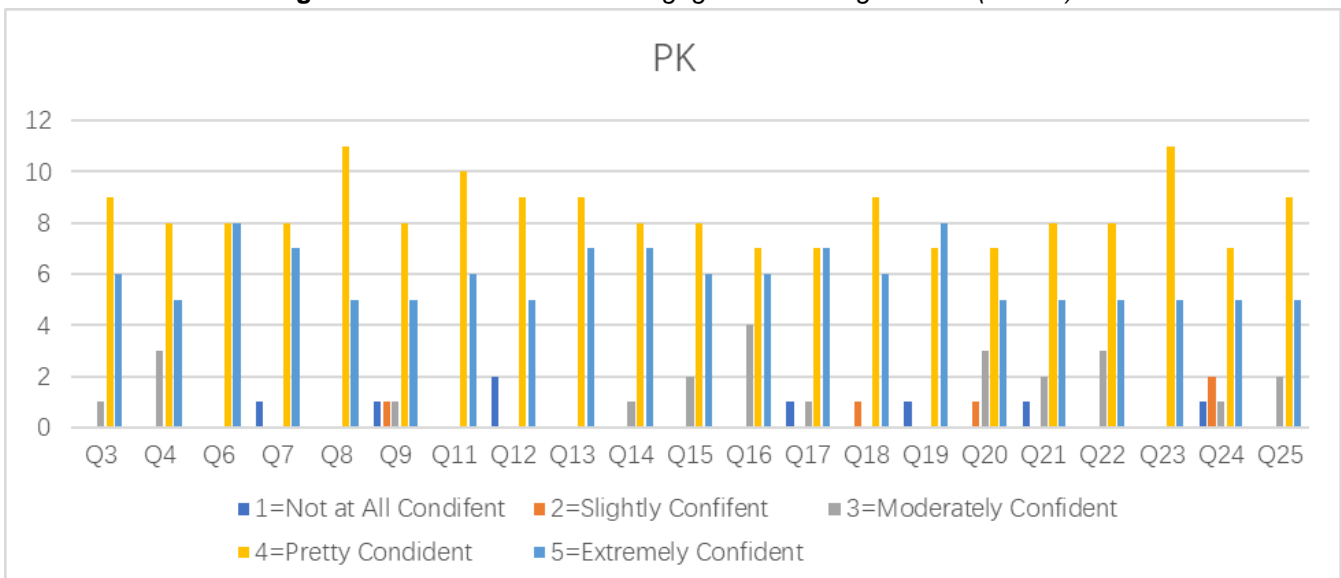


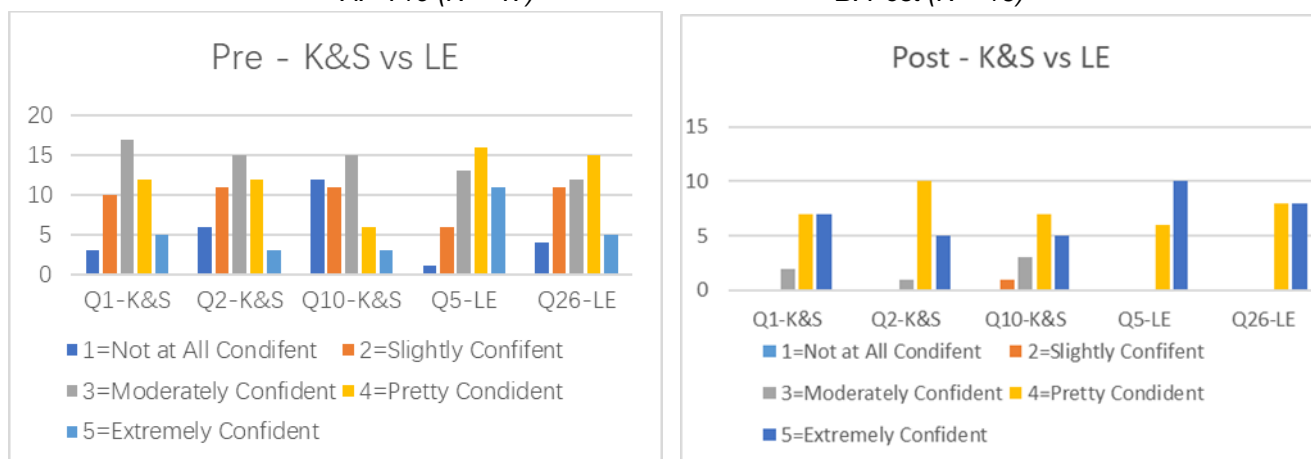
Figure 1.2 All Candidates– Pedagogical Knowledge – Post (N = 16)



On the pre-survey the candidates chose levels 1-3 the majority of the time indicating a lack of confidence. On the post survey candidates chose levels 4-5 the majority of the time indicating strong efficacy levels. Differences can be seen in the colored bars.

Figure 2.A displays pre-survey data on candidate perceptions about their efficacy regarding their knowledge and skills (3 questions) combined with their ability to establish a learning environment (2 questions). Figure 2.B displays the post-survey data.

Figure 2 All – Candidates - Knowledge & Skills, Learning Environment –
 A. Pre (N = 47) B. Post (N = 16)



On the pre-survey the candidates chose levels 1-3 the majority of the time indicating a lack of confidence. On the post survey candidates chose levels 4-5 the majority of the time indicating strong efficacy levels. The graphs reveal an increase in candidate efficacy levels over time as a result of the preparation they received.

Focus Group Data

The researchers led six separate focus groups across three different days. The focus groups were conducted during the candidate's final semester of student teaching while they were in the

process of completing their edTPA portfolio. A total of 30 candidates participated in the focus groups consisting of 15 Caucasian candidates and 15 candidates of color. The focus group protocol consisted of 11 questions developed around candidates' perceptions of how well the edTPA implementation within their teacher preparation program effectively helped prepare them for various concepts/themes of professional teaching. Table 2 displays the coded responses and themes of the candidates' responses during the focus groups.

Table 2 Identified themes from focus group data (N = 30)

| | Theme Concept | Participant Statements & Phrases |
|---------|--|---|
| Theme 1 | Program preparation for edTPA that inspired confidence | <i>During my methods' courses</i> <i>During specialty courses such as the Differentiation course, Special Ed course, Content area literacy course, and Ed Psych course</i> <i>Professors, Supervisors, and School faculty helped prepare me as well</i> |
| Theme 2 | Missing content that would have helped to prepare you more for the edTPA | <i>Questioning strategies</i> <i>Planning assessments (Task 3)</i> <i>Connecting practice to research</i> <i>Aligning courses to edTPA more</i> |
| Theme 3 | edTPA Task that you felt most confident | <i>Task 1 – lesson planning and academic language</i> |
| Theme 4 | edTPA Task that you felt least confident | <i>Task 3 – Assessment</i> <i>Analyzing student progress</i> <i>Providing student feedback</i> |

| | | |
|----------|--|--|
| Theme 5 | edTPA implementation effectively helped prepare for professional teaching | <p>Yes!</p> <p><i>Lessons planning</i></p> <p><i>Assessment of student learning</i></p> <p><i>Academic language</i></p> <p><i>Differentiation</i></p> <p><i>High standards</i></p> <p><i>Deeper focus on teaching</i></p> |
| Theme 6 | edTPA implementation effectively helped prepare for planning instruction for learners | <p>Yes!</p> <p><i>Breaking down the lesson plan</i></p> <p><i>Deep dive into planning and theory</i></p> <p><i>Planning for differentiation</i></p> <p><i>Pay attention to details</i></p> <p><i>Made me more prepared</i></p> |
| Theme 7 | edTPA implementation effectively helped prepare for planning content instruction | <p>Yes!</p> <p><i>Examples and modeling provided in the courses</i></p> <p><i>Department lesson plan template provided a guide</i></p> <p><i>Deep dive into the content and academic language</i></p> <p><i>Instructional strategies</i></p> |
| Theme 8 | edTPA implementation effectively helped prepare for planning assessments to monitor student learning | <p><i>Methods courses helped prepare for choosing assessments</i></p> <p><i>Identified the importance of assessment and alignment to objectives</i></p> <p><i>Activities in class provided modeling and practice</i></p> <p><i>Forced me to clarify knowledge of assessment</i></p> <p><i>Analysis of student learning</i></p> <p><i>Learning to plan assessments and write rubrics</i></p> <p><i>Learned how to differentiate assessments to meet student needs</i></p> |
| Theme 9 | edTPA implementation effectively helped prepare for differentiating instruction for various learners | <p><i>Course work and methods courses provided models and practice</i></p> <p><i>Differentiation course and Special Ed course provided instruction and modeling</i></p> <p><i>Consistent focus on providing challenge as well as accommodations to support the needs of all students on both sides of the spectrum</i></p> |
| Theme 10 | edTPA implementation effectively helped prepare for connecting to research and best practice in the literature | <p><i>Course work and methods courses provided models and practice</i></p> <p><i>Ed Psych course provided theory and theorists</i></p> <p><i>Connection to research required within lesson plans</i></p> <p><i>Examples were always provided</i></p> <p><i>edTPA forced us to connect to research – valuable!</i></p> |
| Theme 11 | edTPA experience during the teacher preparation program was valuable | <p><i>Identified what good teaching involves</i></p> <p><i>Stressful, but well prepared</i></p> <p><i>Raises the bar!</i></p> <p><i>Makes us better teachers in the long run</i></p> |

According to themes three and four, candidates were in unanimous agreement regarding which edTPA task they felt most confident with and which task they felt the least confident. This is surprising since the 30 candidates were part of six different focus groups across three different evenings with two different researchers. Keep in mind that as a result of the pandemic, the state only required candidates to complete edTPA tasks one and three for the 2020-21 academic year, and candidates' portfolios were scored locally. Themes five, six, and seven also had unanimous positive responses from candidates regarding the value and purpose of the edTPA performance assessment. A consensus that is consistently displayed across themes is that candidates felt prepared and confident in their completion of their edTPA portfolios as a result of the instruction and modeling they received across multiple courses within their programs. One final theme to highlight is theme 11 where candidates admitted that the edTPA experience was extremely stressful and taxing, however, they acknowledged the value of completing it as it would improve their professional teaching in the long run. One candidate stated, "Being able to plan, instruct, and assess students is what good teaching requires!"

Candidate edTPA scores

This longitudinal case study began upon candidates' entrance into their teacher preparation programs in the fall of 2019. In the spring of 2020, the nation faced the COVID-19 pandemic where all schools were shut down. These candidates faced numerous challenges during the course of their preparation programs and varying early field experiences as a result. Of the original 74 teacher candidates who volunteered to be a part of the case study at the beginning of their teacher preparation program, a total of 59 submitted completed portfolios at the end of their program 18 months later in the midst of a pandemic. Of those 59 candidates, 18 were male and 41 were female. 78% of the candidate participants were Caucasian and 22% were ethnicities consisting of African American, Asian, and Hispanic. 93% of all participating candidates

passed the edTPA during their final semester of student teaching. A limitation to the study is that prior to the pandemic, candidates were required to submit their portfolios to *Pearson* for official scoring and they had to meet the state specified cut scores in order to pass. In the fall of 2020 when these candidates did their student teaching, the state only required them to complete Tasks one and three and their portfolios were scored locally by their Supervisors. Supervisors were trained by the first researcher and inter-rater reliability was conducted through the use of anchor samples. Because of this change in scoring practices, the researchers focused only on scores of pass/not pass instead of actual official numerical scores.

Research Question Two

Surveys

A secondary investigation focused on the equality of the assessment and candidates of color' performance on the assessment and perceptions of their efficacy on preparedness to teach as compared to their Caucasian peers at one urban university. Petchauer, Bowe, and Wilson (2018) present that the implementation of the edTPA could actually negatively impact candidates of color from entering the profession, but call for additional research. This University's School of Education is the most diverse educator preparation program in the state with as much as 30% candidates of color enrolled at any given time. Since we have a more diverse candidate population, we had hoped to provide some valuable data on this topic.

Figure 3 displays the pedagogy and content knowledge concepts from the survey questions filtered by Caucasian candidates and candidates of color. This is the same data set from the previous narrative in Figure 1.2, only filtered by ethnicity. For the sake of conciseness, only the post data is presented to show the comparison between candidates' ethnicity.

In the post survey results, there were 11 Caucasians and 5 candidates of color who responded to the survey. The post survey was completed an estimated 18 months after the candidates took the pre-survey. The data reveal that the

candidates of color were slightly more confident in their preparedness to teach as a result of completing the edTPA during their program. The Caucasian group had a few ratings in the 1-2 level range indicating lack of confidence whereas the minority group did not have any lower level ratings.

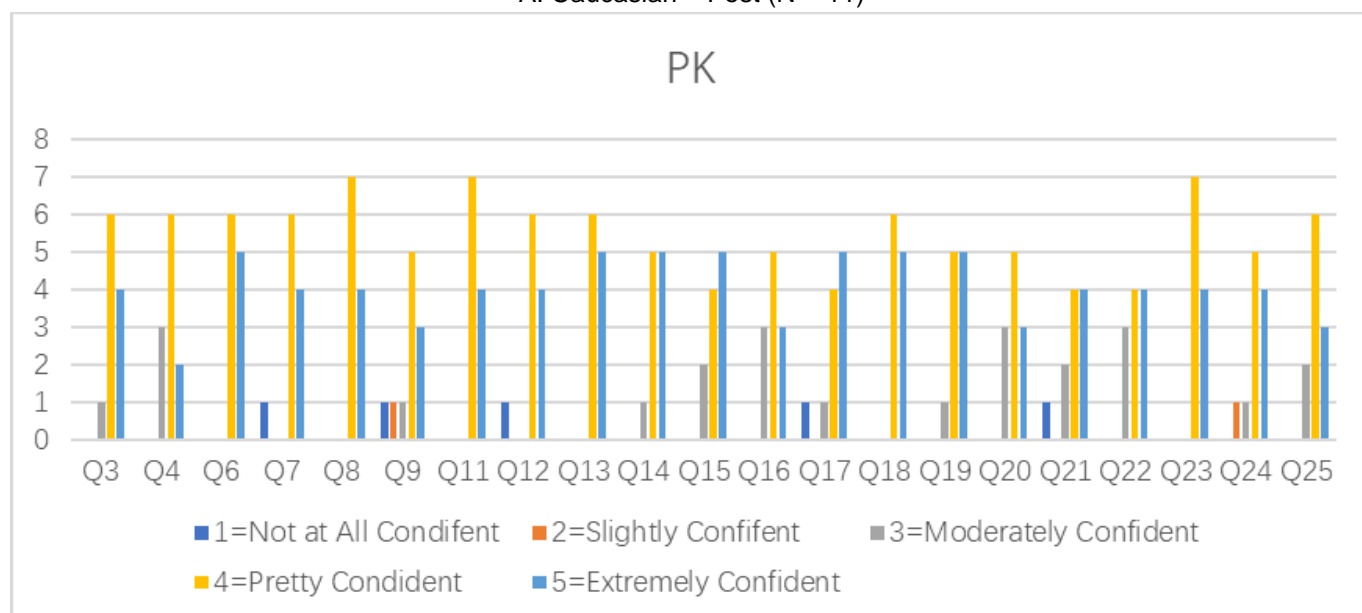
The survey questions regarding knowledge and skills and establishing a learning environment were also filtered by ethnical groups in order to

make a comparison. Figure 4 displays the post survey data for the two groups. Again, only the post data is presented for the sake of brevity.

The data reveal once again that the candidates of color (graph B) who responded to the post survey present slightly higher self-efficacy ratings compared to the Caucasian candidates (graph A) on the questions regarding knowledge and skills and the learning environment.

Figure 3 Candidate responses – Pedagogical Knowledge

A. Caucasian – Post (N = 11)



B. Candidates of Color – Post (N = 5)

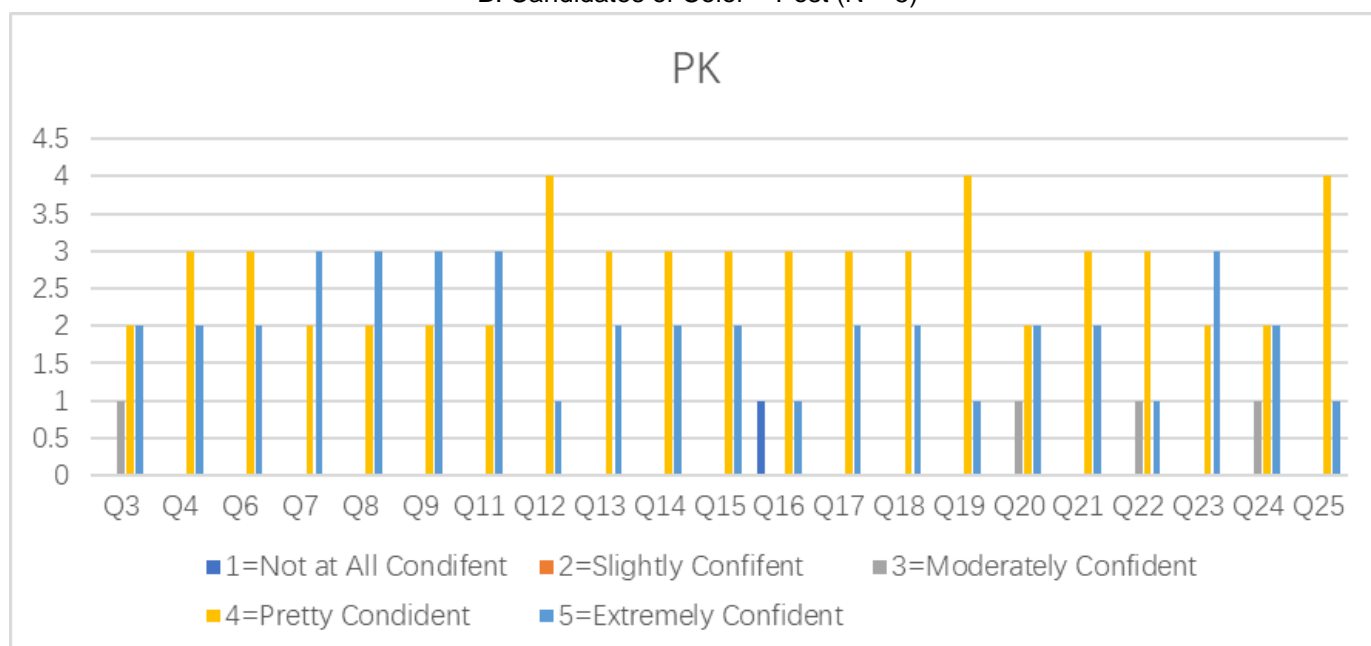
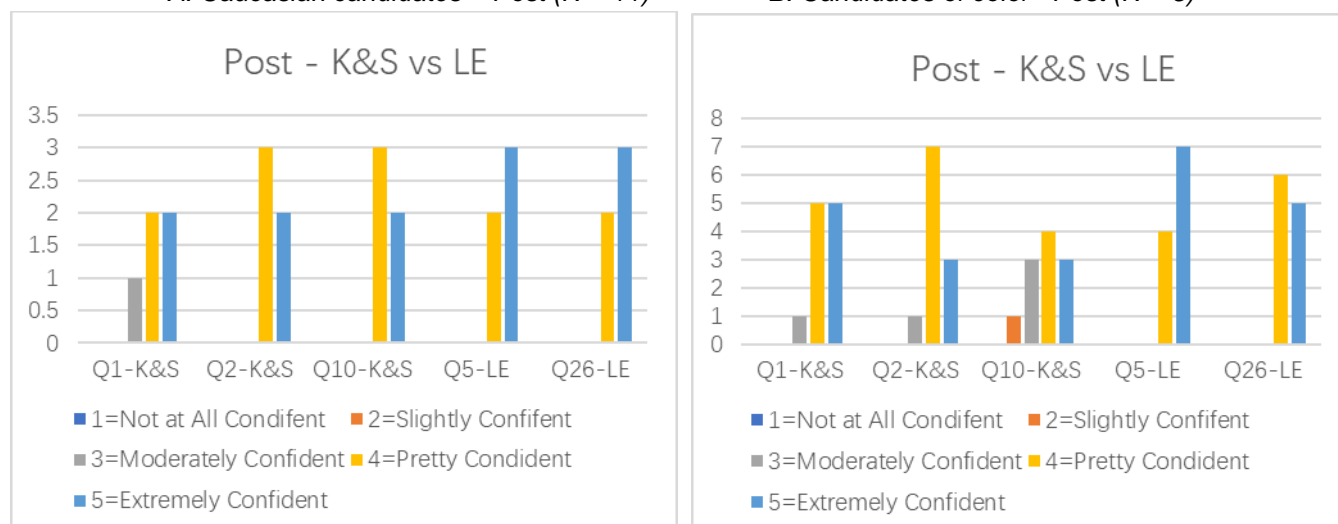


Figure 4 Candidate responses - Knowledge & Skills & Learning Environment
 A. Caucasian candidates – Post (N = 11) B. Candidates of color– Post (N = 5)



Focus Group Responses by Candidate Ethnicity

In order to provide additional correlation with the survey responses, we examined the focus group comments made by students who identified as candidates of color in order to ascertain some common themes. Out of the 30 candidates who participated in the focus groups, half of the candidates (N=15) were candidates of color. During the transcription process of the recording, a different color font was used to identify that a candidate of color was speaking. Themes may be identified by referencing Table 2 provided earlier in this narrative.

For theme one, a candidate of color stated, “*The mock edTPA you (researcher) had us do in class as well as the feedback you provided really helped to make my edTPA submission better.*” This candidate indicated that they felt supported within the methods courses with the edTPA instruction and practice that was imbedded.

For theme five, a candidate of color shared the following, “*The questions that are asked in the edTPA really helped me to focus deeper on my teaching. Topics such as academic language is highlighted in the edTPA and helped to improve my teaching. These things are really effective when standing in front of the classroom.*” This candidate indicated that they valued the content of the edTPA assessment in preparation for professional teaching.

For theme six, one candidate of color described the value of completing the edTPA during student teaching as such, “*Yes – The focus of the edTPA during student teaching was helpful because it made me plan detailed plans. This will help me when applying for jobs as all schools require something different. On the edTPA you have to be able to articulate what you did and what you planned for the lesson. It helps be a more prepared teacher as a result!*”

In theme eight, one candidate of color stated, “*It was extremely helpful! When you are planning assessments you need to be able to differentiate your instruction and assessments for students. Task 4 required us to modify our assessments and instruction to help student learning. This was good practice!*” This candidate acknowledged the value of focusing on assessment as a tool for monitoring student learning.

The final theme 11, another candidate of color shared, “*I would say the program would have been easier if it had not been a part of my program, however, I think it was extremely valuable for my personal learning! I had peers say how lucky I was to have done a Mock edTPA in class because they did not have that experience and they were frustrated. I had so much support from you [researcher] and [SOE] to complete my edTPA and get it submitted on time. Some of my peers from other schools did not have that support.*” The responses from the candidates of color consistently mirrored the comments from

the Caucasian candidates across the six different focus groups.

Candidate edTPA Scores by Ethnicity

Of the 59 candidates who successfully submitted completed edTPA portfolios in the fall of 2020 during their student teaching semester, 46 were Caucasian (78%) and 13 were candidates of color (22%). Of the candidates of color, only 1 candidate did not receive a passing score on their first attempt (8%) and 12 candidates received passing scores (92%). In the Caucasian group, 3 candidates did not receive passing scores (7%) and 43 received passing scores (93%). This data indicates that there was no difference in passing rates between Caucasian candidates and candidates of color.

Within this particular School of Education, candidates receive strong instruction and support throughout their programs in order to adequately prepare them for the completion of the edTPA in their final student teaching semester. The data reveal that regardless of ethnicity, candidates receive the same level of training and support that is needed to build their confidence and efficacy for completing the edTPA and professional teaching. This conclusion is supported by the survey data, focus group data, and candidate final scores on their edTPA portfolios.

Discussion & Conclusions

Data for research question one revealed that the Educator Preparation Program was a key factor in building candidates' overall confidence. Responses indicated that candidates felt confident and prepared to teach in 1) Knowledge & skills, 2) Pedagogical knowledge, and 3) establishing a positive learning environment. Candidates were also largely successful on the completion of their edTPA portfolio with an overall pass rate of 93%. This research question explored preservice teachers' *perceptions* of readiness to teach versus their *actual* preparedness as determined by their edTPA score. With a 93% passing rate, we can conclude that perceptions matched realities for almost all candidates.

In focus group discussions, candidates stated that the quality of the coursework within their program and the variation of instructional

practices related to edTPA preparation were influential in building confidence and ultimately on their edTPA success. Many participants credited the methods courses at the EPP as a determining factor citing instructor modeling, "deep dives" into the edTPA rubrics, and opportunities to practice implementing the assessment tasks as pivotal learning experiences that grew confidence and bred success. Candidates view that the edTPA portfolio process was extremely stressful and taxing aligned with the current literature (Wallace, K., 2020; Burns et al., 2015; Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2016); yet candidates in this study agreed that the experience was a valuable one in developing them as professional teachers.

Interestingly, all participants indicated that they were most confident with Task 1, which is planning for instruction. The EPP provided a great deal of support with the task and candidates had opportunities in almost every course to practice developing lesson plans using a common template aligned to edTPA rubrics 1 – 5. In contrast, Task 3 Assessment is where candidates felt least prepared. This is likely due to the impact of COVID-19 on in-person instruction. It became nearly impossible for candidates to obtain student work that could be used for practicing assessment techniques and providing specific and authentic feedback. Thus, of the three tasks, the least amount of course time was spent on Task 3. Candidates did not benefit from mastery experiences wherein they would have had the opportunity to implement and experience assessing students in a real-world setting. Bandura (1977) pinpointed mastery learning experiences as the most influential in building efficacy. The lack of experience with assessing students also resulted in a loss of robust class discussions that would follow such an experience. So, the opportunity to build shared knowledge and learn from peers was also more limited than it was with Task 1 Planning; consequently, participants reported decreased levels of confidence.

Research question two explored the efficacy perceptions of candidates of color related to preparedness to teach in comparison to their peer

Caucasian candidates. As with research question one, this question was explored using the edTPA passing rate. Our study had 22% candidates of color, and the data revealed that there was no significant difference in candidate perceptions of preparedness to teach nor was there a significant difference in the passing rates between the two groups. In fact, candidates of color had somewhat higher efficacy perceptions than Caucasian peers and noted that the coursework prepared them well. This readiness perception mirrored findings by Williams et al. (2019) wherein students of color were more likely to say that the courses prepared them well and African American candidates reported the edTPA was easier to complete; however, our results did not reflect the converse trend found in the Williams et al. study. We did not note a difference in the passing rates between candidates of color and Caucasian scores (Williams et al., 2019).

Candidates of color largely contributed their edTPA success and efficacy to the instruction and support received within their Educator Preparation Program as opposed to published resources (Wallace, K., 2020; Lin, 2015). Overall, candidates of color rated their efficacy regarding pedagogical knowledge in a very similar fashion to the Caucasian candidates. It is likely that a well-defined, structured, and supportive program is the key to candidate success rather than ethnicity, which was not an influential variable in this study. Overall, results support SCALE's most recent administrative report that indicates a narrowing or elimination of the gap between White candidates and other ethnic groups (2019).

Contributions to the Field

The edTPA, with its focus on student-centered teaching and an emphasis on culturally responsive practice, has created a positive shift in the way that we prepare candidates for professional teaching. The assessment spurs educator preparation programs to raise the bar and align curriculum with the high leverage teaching practices espoused by the edTPA. Continuous and repetitive practice with these excellent pedagogical approaches throughout their preparation program results in candidates who display

heightened self-efficacy, which in turn cultivates successful educators (Bandura, 1977).

Additionally, this study provides a voice for candidates of color who reveal a different perspective than what is widely reported in the literature. Namely, that they are performing equally as well as their peers when receiving the benefits of a supportive and comprehensive preparation program. The perspective of candidates of color in this study indicate that when an educator preparation program embodies a commitment to candidate success via caring and committed faculty and supportive programming aligned to edTPA and student-centered best practices, candidates will be successful regardless of ethnicity. This suggests that the hotly debated question of edTPA bias toward candidates of color may be moot; perhaps the real question is how responsive and supportive are EPPs in preparing diverse candidates? Discussion amongst those who participated in the six different focus groups in this study pointed to specific programmatic strengths such as detail-oriented and knowledgeable professors who provided modeling and opportunities for practice with edTPA rubrics and academic language usage. Additionally, candidates noted the benefits of having professors utilize a common edTPA-aligned lesson plan template across courses. Candidates appreciated that the University lesson plan template requires candidates to connect theory and research to practice just as they are required to do on the edTPA. Most importantly, participants pointed out that the edTPA identified what good teaching involves and despite the anxiety that the process induced, candidates realized that they would be better teachers in the long run. It seems clear that participants in the study feel that the EPP is providing a strong foundation that will build teachers who are student-centered and who practice elements of effective instruction. In sum, this study's reinforces SCALE's (2019) claim that the edTPA is an educative assessment that fully prepares candidates for the classroom and evaluates them on their ability to implement successful teaching practices. Candidates report enhanced understanding of

effective instructional strategies and best practices highlighting reflection for personal and professional growth (Campbell et al., 2016; Kissau et al., 2019; Seelke, 2020). Our study bolsters this position and furthers the field by offering contrasting perspectives related to ethnicity. Clearly, more work must be done in an effort to bring the voices of educational stakeholders from various backgrounds to the discussion.

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