LEARNING TO TEACH IN TROUBLING TIMES:
A CRITICAL NARRATIVE ANALYSIS EXPLORING BECOMING A TEACHER
AMIDST A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

A Dissertation
by
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Abstract

LEARNING TO TEACH IN TROUBLING TIMES
A CRITICAL NARRATIVE ANALYSIS EXPLORING BECOMING A TEACHER
AMIDST A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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This study examines the process of becoming a teacher during the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic and the ways in which the participants navigated ever-changing expectations set before them as both student teachers and first-year teachers. Employing the use of Critical Narrative Analysis and through the lens of critical theory, this study explores how the state-mandated Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) impacted the participants' student-teaching experience, as well as the ways this assessment created various roadblocks to their becoming a teacher. This longitudinal study also explores the ways that the participants' experiences as first-year teachers were complicated by the global pandemic. This study is heavily influenced by Greene's (2007) concept of *becoming,* acknowledging that as we learn we continually reinvent ourselves and become something new. The voices of the participants are privileged throughout the analysis of the data, which was collected through journals and semi-structured interviews. Implications of this work include suggestions for educator preparation programs (EPPs), districts and schools working with beginning teachers, as well as departments of education that utilize edTPA as a part of their initial teacher licensure.

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First and foremost, I must acknowledge and thank my participants. Without you there would be no project. Thank you for entrusting your stories to me. I hope I did them justice. Secondly, a huge thank you to my Chair, Dr. Bellows. Your support and candor have done more for my psyche throughout this process than you will ever know. Your willingness to dive into edTPA and embrace our critical theory work makes you a true rebel and that title coveys to the rest of my committee as well. Dr. Min, you have taught me so much about how to be a researcher. Your dedication to the academy is unmatched. I can't thank Dr. Nelsen enough for answering the phone when a crazy doctoral student called to talk about edTPA. Thank you for being part of my journey and for providing much-needed mindfulness to our doctoral program. Finally, Dr. Shear, thank you for coming along for the journey and for pushing me outside of my box. Your support has meant the world.

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I also have to recognize the unwavering support of Gus and Jerry aside from mandatory outsides and treat breaks. The office would have been a much lonelier place without you both. Lastly, I want to acknowledge how privileged I am to have an amazing partner who has been by my side every step of the way. Justin, I could not and would not have done this without you. I promise you we don't have to talk about edTPA ever again. Thank you for taking the first step towards our new life so many years ago. I love you more than words can tell.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to all of the teachers who show up for their students every day as well as anyone who has ever been told to stop asking questions. However, most importantly, this dissertation is dedicated to my favorite teacher, Susie Rickman. Thank you for teaching me how to question. Your students were lucky to have you; I am blessed to call you my Mom.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

The teaching profession is often romanticized in movies and television, depicting teachers as *saviors* for their students. However, these representations fail to accurately depict the shifting expectations placed on those who do the important work of teaching. These stories play well for cinema and shape our cultural understanding of teaching as both meaningful and yet a profession in which anyone can be successful. After all, good teachers make their work look easy (Britzman, 2003; Labaree, 2000). There is also a belief that the content of elementary school "isn't rocket science; it's common knowledge" (Labaree, 2000, p. 232). If anyone can teach, then why is it that the United States is currently experiencing an unprecedented teacher shortage (Natanson, 2022)?

Perhaps part of the answer is evident in a recent survey aimed at exploring the state of teaching during the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic that began in 2020. This survey conducted in 2022, reveals only 46 percent of current teachers report feeling respected as professionals by their communities, compared to 77 percent in 2011 (Merrimack College, 2022). There has been a cultural shift taking place in recent years, slowly eroding the respect society has traditionally held for teachers and their work. Coded language such as 'failing schools' and 'liberal agendas' have fueled the nation's growing political divide, capitalizing on the fear of failure, ultimately causing society to blame the teachers (Kumashiro, 2012; 2020).

It is clear that the original democratic aims of schooling have been forgotten. Dewey (1937/2021) had hoped that education could serve as a place for conversations to be had about shifts in society: "Only as the schools provide an understanding of the movement and direction of social forces and an understanding of social needs and of the resources that may

1

be used to satisfy them will they meet the challenge of democracy" (p. 34). Schooling was established with the goals of creating an educated public to sustain a democracy. Since the inception of formal schooling, teachers were always intended to be agents of social change. However, recently, our society has found new ways to control teachers, their curriculum, and eliminate teacher autonomy. Recently, through the passing of the Parental Rights in Education bill, Florida teachers are now controlled through threats of prosecution brought against them by parents if they discuss anything parents deem "inappropriate" (Langer, 2022).

With debates about education seemingly at a boiling point, along with working through the trauma of enduring a state of normlessness and demoralization throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, I ask: what does it mean to *become* a teacher within our current cultural context? This study is a critical narrative analysis that privileges the stories of six individuals who chose to become educators during this difficult time in public education. I will introduce the participants as they were when I met them in the final semesters of their Educator Preparation Program (EPP). During this time they were completing a state-mandated Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) to earn their state licensure. This longitudinal study also includes interviews with the participants as they transitioned to first-year teachers. Exploring the process of *becoming* a teacher amidst a global pandemic provides us with voices from the field to remind us that these teachers (turned *front-line workers*) were not trained for what came their way. Rather, these individuals literally put their lives on the line for their students as they fought against the demoralization of their work and attempted to keep themselves and their families healthy (Santoro, 2016, 2020).

Context of Study

This study focuses on two components of *becoming* a teacher that the participants experienced. The first aspect focuses on the ways that the state mandated assessment, edTPA, interacted with their student teaching experience. Secondarily, I explore participants' experiences as first-year teachers during a global pandemic through semi-structured interviews. There are many pathways to *becoming* a teacher but the most common is through enrolment in and completion of a university's Educator Preparation Program (EPP).

It is believed that strong teacher training and preparation is key to creating effective teachers who stay in the workforce and is even more crucial during the Covid-19 pandemic due to the shifting demands and extraordinary pressure placed on teachers (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Podolsky et al., 2016). EPPs provide foundational coursework, the study of theory, mentorship, and classroom experience (AACTE, 2018). The teacher candidates' classroom experience, also known as clinicals or field work, provides "a lens through which to understand the problems of practice that currently face the profession" (AACTE, 2018, p. 8). Unfortunately this could not have been any truer than for those teacher candidates working towards initial licensure in the Spring of 2020 during which the novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic began. The participants in this study watched helplessly as their schools closed and they were left to wonder if they would still be able to *become* a teacher.

For most teacher candidates enrolled in an EPP, this final field work experience known as student teaching, takes place in the last semester of their program. Their cooperating or mentor teacher slowly hands over the classroom responsibilities to provide a structured way to begin to understand the demands of full-time teaching. However, any

teacher will tell you that the demands and expectations of teachers are ever-changing. To mirror this experience in the classroom, the demands on teacher candidates have increased as well (AACTE, 2018). One example of the increased demands on teacher candidates is the adoption of edTPA.

I was first introduced to the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) through my work as a university supervisor at Private Rural University (PRU) in the fall of 2019. Transitioning out of the classroom and into higher education, I was excited to learn everything I could about teacher education. I was personally introduced to edTPA through a required training in the summer of 2019. A novice to this work, I sat in the training session questioning if what I was hearing was correct. It was my understanding that student teachers were now being asked to forgo authentic classroom experience in order to prove their competence as a teacher to Pearson Education rather than their professors and clinical educators who know them well.

EdTPA is a performance-based assessment created to assess pedagogy, student learning, and teacher readiness (Fabrikant et al., 2018; Pearson, 2021a). The assessment itself is a portfolio of evidence collected throughout the student teaching experience including lesson plans, videos, reflections, and student work to document the cycle of learning (SCALE, 2019). Having only recently been fully adopted in September of 2019, the cohort of Spring 2020 were only the second group mandated by North Carolina to submit their edTPA portfolios in order to fulfill state licensure requirements.

By the Spring of 2020 I had grown so interested in edTPA and how it was affecting preservice teachers that I began asking student teachers about their experiences. To provide context for the inception of this study, I share a journal entry I wrote after my initial

recruitment of student teachers for a pilot study exploring what it was like to complete edTPA. It was early February 2020, before our worlds were forever changed, and the most pressing issue on my mind was recruiting teacher candidates for my pilot edTPA study.

Having never done this [recruitment] before, I was unsure if any of the candidates would be interested or willing to share their stories with me. I attended Private Rural University's (PRU) weekly student teaching seminar where I was given about 15 minutes of time for recruitment. When it was my time to share information about my study, I got up in the front of the lecture hall and said, "I am interested in your experience with edTPA," the teacher candidates immediately groaned. I ignored their reactions and continued, "I want to know the truth. Tell me what it is like. I've never had to do edTPA and neither have any of your professors." Their demeanor immediately changed and I actually heard a smattering of applause. This group of 30 or so teacher candidates had assumed I wanted a formal reflection or was asking for more work. They had never been asked for their opinions about their experiences. Once I was able to convey to them this was their story to tell, they seemed excited to participate.

After I closed my recruitment speech and the seminar ended, I was cornered in the hallway by two special education majors. With tears in their eyes, they said "Thank you. No one knows what this is like for us. We can't wait until this is published." Unsure how to respond, I hugged them both (again, this was pre-Covid 19) and explained this was only the beginning of my research but that I will do my best to tell their stories. It was obvious to me that this was important research that needed to be done, and I was the one to do it. EdTPA was their reality, their experience to share, and I wanted to help share it. Later, I began going through the interest forms and noted one particular submission.

One teacher candidate, Jordy (Pseudonym) wrote on his interest form:

> *Please send this to every NC legislator that permitted this atrocity to exist and permeate into the very fabric of our society...I would personally enjoy if you can guarantee that those NC legislators will read your dissertation of how much this plagues my very soul into continuous torment (Interest Form Post, February 22, 2020).*

Clearly, Jordy has some thoughts on the issues so I knew I would certainly gain some insight into his experience. To Jordy, and many of the teacher candidates, edTPA had become way more than an assessment of their teaching, it was an assessment of their lives and the way they managed their semester.

EdTPA also became more than one thing, it had become an assemblage with real effects such as physical and emotional distress. In about four weeks, these teacher candidates' lives would be changed yet again as their schools were shut down and they were asked to move back home and away from their campus. No graduation would be held, no ceremonious move-out day from the dorms, but rather a panicked exodus from a campus where they were promised they would become teachers. This all became part of their story, their assemblage of *becoming*.

Very shortly after my recruitment experience in February, as the student teachers were completing their field work in Home County (pseudonym) schools, they witnessed a county-wide school closure due to Covid-19. Unsure of when they would see their students again, the teacher candidates placed in Home County quickly said good-bye. New territory in both teacher education and K-12 education was about to be charted. How does one continue student teaching and schooling during a global pandemic? Educational leaders were forced to

make difficult decisions about instruction for the safety of their students and teachers, oftentimes with little or no guidance from district and state officials. This was a stressful time for all of those in education but especially the classroom teachers (Lynch, 2021).

Without classrooms to learn how to teach in and questioning if they would be able to earn their teaching license on the timeline they imagined, teacher candidates in the Spring of 2020 were left to wonder what was next. Uncertainty abounded for not only the present future but the years to come. When teacher candidates enrolled in their EPP's, teachers were not considered front-line workers in a global pandemic (Jansen & Farmer-Phillips, 2021b; Logan et al., 2021); nor were teachers expected to teach in-person, online, and in hybrid settings all in one day without having acquired any training in online pedagogy (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020; Burns et al., 2020; Soncini et al., 2021). While teachers with multiple years of experience struggled to pivot instruction during the pandemic, this cohort of six teacher candidates from Home County were working diligently to join them. However, their student teaching experiences ended abruptly and graduations were canceled. The closure they anticipated was not provided as they entered a career that was being continually redefined by local and state administrative decisions.

Combined with the current teacher shortage, a recent survey conducted by the National Education Association (NEA) found that 25% of current teachers surveyed with less than six years of experience plan to retire or leave the profession earlier than previously planned and that number rose to 55% for all teachers surveyed (Jotkoff, 2022). With teachers leaving in record numbers and positions remaining unfilled, it is clear that the teaching profession is in crisis. One way to better prepare teacher candidates for the classroom is to

attend to the stories and learn from those who experienced first-hand the transformation from *traditional* education to pandemic teaching.

Rationale and Significance of Study

Even though we are still in the midst of the pandemic at the time of this writing, much research has been conducted around teacher education and the changes EPPs have made because of the pandemic (Darling-Hammond & Hyler, 2020; Ellis et al., 2020; Flores & Swennen, 2020). Attention has also been given to the student teaching or practicum experience throughout Covid-19 (Bacevich, 2020; Burns et al., 2020; Kidd & Murray, 2020; Norviliene et al., 2021; Tosun et al., 2021) and more specifically how EPPs moved student teaching and practicum online (Kidd & Murray, 2020; Quezada et al., 2020). VanLone et al., (2022) focused their research on those becoming teachers as they moved from teacher candidates to first-year teachers. A survey was used to analyze teacher-candidates' turned beginning-teachers' sense of self-efficacy throughout the pandemic. Norviliene et al. (2021) explored teacher candidates' experiences with teaching and online assessment throughout their student teaching placement. Working with pre-primary students, Norviliene et al. (2021) did note that for fully-online assessments to take place "a high level of parental involvement" was needed.

Researchers have noticed and studied teachers' mental health and well-being during the pandemic (Allen et al., 2020; Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021; Li et al., 2021; Lynch, 2021; Pressley, 2021). Other prevalent research within the Covid-19 literature centered around technology adoption (Jain et al., 2021) and the move to remote or online teaching (Assunção Flores & Gago, 2020; Doucet et al., 2020; Jain et al., 2021; König et al., 2020; Tas et al., 2021).

Two studies were found that focused on the voice of teachers through the use of stories or narrative. Jansen and Farmer-Phillips (2021) collected and documented stories from individuals teaching in South Africa during the Covid-19 pandemic and highlighted the inequalities in their education system that were exacerbated by the disruption to normal schooling. Glenn et al. (2020) held a conversation with pre-service teachers about their experiences teaching during the start of the pandemic. One teacher candidate in this study shared "I wonder how we can hold those two things at once–supporting student mental health after this trauma and also focusing on learning" (Glenn et al., 2020, p. 5). Lastly, Mecham et al., (2021) conducted interviews with first and second year teachers (n=25) about their experiences throughout the pandemic and provided a list of themes that helped provide guidance for analysis in this study. Their themes included: "teachers feeling overwhelmed; inconsistent levels of support; and changing instructional requirements" (Mecham et al., 2021, p. 91). These emerging themes are important to hold in mind with my own data while also recognizing the authors did not aim to critically assess their findings or explore the ways these themes complicated the work of the teachers.

What is not seen in the literature is a specific focus on the process of *becoming* a teacher while experiencing a global pandemic. Absent from the literature are any studies investigating teacher autonomy regarding this transition between student teaching and first-year teaching, and the ways they experienced power and control. This study adds to the literature that explores the phenomenon of both teaching and completing edTPA during a global pandemic, and highlights the need for increased field experiences. This work also gives voice to the impossible tasks that first-year teachers were asked to achieve throughout

their first year in the classroom. I privilege the participants' narratives so you can experience stories from the field of education during this most difficult time of *becoming*.

It was my positionality as both a doctoral student and university supervisor that drove my inquiry of this topic. In the Spring of 2020 it was my job to advise and supervise teacher candidates for Private Rural University (PRU). I saw firsthand the uncertainty on teacher candidates' faces as they lost access to their schools and tried to find teaching jobs during the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important to explore these experiences so we are better prepared for not only the next global pandemic or emergency situations. This work also raises awareness for the need to support all current and future teachers as the requirements surrounding educational expectations continue to shift.

Conducting a critical narrative analysis (CNA) exploring the experiences of teacher candidates graduating in Spring of 2020 and *becoming* first year teachers in 2020-2021 school year can provide us with a better understanding of the difficulties these participants navigated throughout the pandemic. While the participants' experiences cannot be generalized, they do provide a window into how we can better prepare teacher candidates for their own process of *becoming* and the ways in which they may or may not have autonomy over their situations.

Research Questions

This study provides insight into six teacher candidates' journeys to *becoming* first-year teachers amidst a global pandemic. At every turn in their journeys, participants were met with power dynamics that impacted their experiences and their own degree of autonomy. Their experiences included earning teacher licensure through both an external evaluator (hired by Pearson Education) and the state, navigating evaluations of their teaching and

applying for jobs, unsure if schools would reopen in the fall. Participants were also engaged with their own examination of self, exploring and creating their teacher personas despite having limited exposure to full-time teaching (Palmer, 1998). All of these experiences were part of their assemblage of *becoming* and added to their unique journeys (Strom & Martin, 2017).

In a Deleuzian sense, *becoming* means to create something new, an alternative or experimental state of being or continual move towards difference (Deleuze, 2004; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012; Stagoll, 2010; Strom & Martin, 2017). The participants in the study have consistently been engaged with the complicated process of *becoming* throughout the pandemic in particular ways. First, their encounters as teacher candidates completing edTPA along with other licensure requirements while navigating life in a pandemic, and secondarily, the shifting expectations of their performance as inexperienced teachers becoming novice teachers, attempting to launch into a career during such uncertain times.

In this qualitative study, I interviewed and collected journal reflections from six individuals transitioning from teacher candidate to first-year teacher during the Covid-19 pandemic. I thought about my research through the lens of critical theories, and utilized a critical narrative analysis in order to learn more about the process of *becoming* a teacher and degrees to which they have autonomy over this process. Secondarily, I was interested in their experiences navigating first-year teaching during a global pandemic.

The following research questions guide the study:

1. What role does edTPA play in the process of *becoming* a teacher?

2. How much autonomy do student teachers have in their process of *becoming* a teacher in the era of edTPA?

3. How did the Covid-19 global pandemic complicate the process of *becoming* a

    teacher?

Methodology Informed by Theory

I adopt the use of critical theory to share in its common goal of liberation. In most

cases this is liberation from our own beliefs and notions of *common sense* that have been

socially constructed. Critical theory implores us to focus on how one's lived reality takes part

in a constant struggle for power because "social relations are inherently power relations"

(Collins, 2019, p. 63). It is the push and pull between privilege and oppression that

determines which voices are represented in research. By using a critical methodology I

approach my research with the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and

changed only through criticism. My research therefore is produced to impart social change

and liberate from common sense (Freire et al., 2018). Critical theory also allows me to

explore the ways that my societal consciousness and self-reflection are at play with one

another as I reflect on our own realities through this process (Dell'Angelo et al., 2014;

Langdridge, 2007). I "reject the radical distinction between theory and practice" as I work to

infuse critical theory in all that I do, no matter the methodology (Leonardo, 2009, p. 13).

When researchers adopt the use of a theoretical perspective, they must immerse

themselves within it. The theory drives the research with/in the selected methodology. In the

case of critical theory, it drives me to question the *status-quo*. To reach these goals I will use

a Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) methodology in order to construct knowledge in

response to the research questions. Largely used in psychology (Emerson & Frosh, 2009) and

more specifically phenomenological psychology (Langdridge, 2007), CNA is often used as a

method. However, Souto-Manning's (2014) work has positioned it as a methodology as well.

Souto-Manning (2014) situates CNA as an amalgamation of the macro-level analytical tool of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and micro-level by analyzing conversational narratives, hence defining CNA for their work. This marriage between methods allows for the creation of a methodology that allows for the researcher to bring their assumptions of the world with them into analysis (Crotty, 2012). Ultimately the goal of CNA is to "foster critically meta-aware individuals who question institutional discourses as opposed to uncritically embracing and being colonized by such discourses" (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 177). Combining Souto-Manning's (2014) use of CNA and the six stages of analysis presented by Langdridge (2007) I utilized these stages in my analysis:

1. Critique the illusion of subjectivity

2. Identify narratives and tone

3. Identify identity work

4. Recognize thematic priorities and relationships

5. Destabilize the narratives

6. Synthesize the results (p. 134)

Chapter three will outline in more detail the steps taken to align myself with this methodology as I continually returned to the data and sought to prioritize the narratives presented by the participants.

What came to light through my analysis is how the participants were situated within various institutions or organizations and how their discourse and actions have all been subjected to flows of power. Analyzing the narratives of someone *becoming* a teacher can provide a lens through which to identify the multiple institutions they must navigate in order to be fully-licensed teachers. The analysis will also identify discourses that the participants

are apprenticed into, and how the institutions and discourses possess power over them and remove their autonomy (Fairclough, 2001).

Definition of Terms

The field of education is often criticized for having a coded language all its own (Apple, 2004), so I provide definitions of the following terms to ensure clarity. Please note that some of these terms are quite common in our everyday life, so it is useful to interrogate your own use of these words as you reflect on the definitions provided.

- **Autonomy -** For this study, I will be focusing on the concept of autonomy at the macro level using the definition of autonomy as "a basic tendency and desire to be free to control the self" (Corsini, 2016, p. 86). This application will be demonstrated in chapter five as I present the ways in which my participants were controlled by edTPA. Ingersoll (1996) aligns the concept of autonomy with the "distribution of power in school systems" (p. 159). Autonomy can also be studied at the classroom level as Lawson (2004) points out that an autonomous teacher "would be more willing to pass control over the learning process to those engaged in it". An increase in teacher autonomy purportedly leads to an increase in student collaboration and self-directed learning. More recently, Tran and Moskovsky (2022) find that to promote teacher autonomy "it is not necessary to provide teachers with complete freedom from external control…rather, leaders should provide teachers opportunities to raise their voices and expectations before the decisions related to teachers' tasks and duties are made" (p. 775). This highlights the fact that teachers wish to be heard, to be seen, and ultimately respected.

- **Becoming** – Greene (2007) imparts to us the following: "To learn, I believe, is to become, to become different. It is to continue making new connections in experience, new meanings, if you like" (p. 1). The term becoming is a journey or a continual move towards difference. Often, we view the idea of becoming as traveling between two events or points, "rather becoming is the very dynamism of change" (Stagoll, 2010, p. 26). In relation to this study I view the act of becoming a teacher as a constant state. No teacher has ever stepped foot into a classroom their first day and said, "I have become a teacher!". If you are engaged with your craft and wish to grow you are always *becoming* a teacher.

- **Beginning Teacher or First-Year Teacher** – The state of North Carolina Board of Education (2020) defines Beginning Teachers as teachers with three or less years of experience in the classroom. Often, they are referred to as BTs with the number associated with their years of teaching attached. A first-year teacher would be considered a BT1 while a second-year teacher would be a BT2. For this study we will use the term first-year teacher but they are often used interchangeably. This distinction is based on years of teaching and not by location. For example, I moved to North Carolina with 10 years of teaching experience and was not considered a BT because of that experience.

- **Discourse** – A discourse is a way of being within the world. We use our knowledge of various discourses every day to navigate our daily lives. Discourses are often invisible and one will not recognize that they are part of a discourse until they travel outside of their norms or if at all. (Take for instance the vastly different experience of

traveling to New York City vs. Rural United States[1].) One does not recognize the way that you use "words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" to define your discourse in life until it may be pointed out by others (Gee, 2014, p. 83). Just as a discourse determines who is *inside* a group, it also works to identify who is *outside* of a group. In this study we will examine how edTPA and the education system create and perpetuate a discourse around what it means to be a teacher. A first-year teacher will be *apprenticed* into a discourse as they embark on their professional journey.

- **Educator Preparation Program (EPP)** – An Educator Preparation Program is any higher education educator preparation program licensed by the state to facilitate programming and licensure for teacher candidates. North Carolina Department of Instruction (NCDPI) recognizes 55 programs in the state of North Carolina as EPPs (2022). EPPs often focus on serving traditional undergraduate programs but have also begun to offer alternative licensure programs for individuals seeking state licensure. The participants in this study were all students in an EPP as traditional undergraduates and were granted licensure through their programs.

- **Narrative** – Most often we think of a narrative as a story but here we define it as much more. A narrative "is a primary mode of human knowing, offering a seemingly effortless way for the mind to intrinsically code human actions, concerns, and values" (Hiles et al., 2017, p. 157). The words we use and the stories we tell are shaped not only by our beliefs but also the society in which we live (Torrissen & Stickley, 2019).

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[1] In recognition that both the writing of this document and this study takes place on indigenous land stolen from the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation and Tuscarora people, I will use the term United States throughout this study.

In this study we will investigate the narratives of the participants and work to identify how the language they choose to use to construct their stories align with or work against the institutions or organizations of which they are a member.

- **Power** – It would be almost impossible to define "power" for use in this study without the work of Foucault (1980, 1997, 1999, 2008, 2019). While Foucauldian analysis is common within psychology and sociology it is not used as often in educational research. We are warned by Popkewitz and Brennan (1998) to embrace Foucault's ubiquitous definition of power in our society and to not limit it. The term power "covers a whole series of particular mechanisms, definable and defined, which seem likely to induce behaviors or discourses" (Foucault, 1997, p. 51). There is no single power but rather multiple and all around us. Power is also something that inhuman objects can possess. In the spring of 2020 and beyond, the Covid-19 virus had power over us and shaped our thoughts and actions. This study will investigate the effects of power rather than its origins, all while identifying how power can be held over teachers through curriculum, by parents, and by administrators (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). I will also explore how power and language work together because "language is the vehicle for identifying, manipulating, and changing power relations between people" (Corson, 1995, p. 3).

- **Teacher Candidates**– The term teacher candidate is traditionally reserved for those students who are enrolled in an EPP in order to obtain state licensure (AACTE, 2018). For this study, anyone who is actively teaching in a classroom during their final semester of coursework will be referred to as a teacher candidate. Completing student teaching is the last step towards becoming a teacher at the university level.

The requirements to pass student teaching vary by EPP but most often they consist of demonstrating competence in the classroom through observations, and now through the completion of edTPA (see below). For traditional undergraduate students, student teaching takes place during the last semester of a four-year program. Teacher candidates are also called student teacher interns, student teachers, and pre-service teachers.

- **Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA)** – As stated in the overview given by edTPA on their website, "edTPA is intended to be used as a summative assessment given at the end of an educator preparation program for teacher licensure or certification and to support state and national program accreditation" (Pearson, 2021b, para. 4). This assessment was created to be the culminating event in a teacher candidate's journey toward becoming a teacher. The intention is that teachers will have demonstrated a strong base of content knowledge, instruction strategies, and assessment of student learning all within a short video clip and portfolio submission. However, just as with any assessment there are unseen consequences to the adoption of edTPA. In September of 2019 the State of North Carolina adopted edTPA as mandatory for teacher licensure (Pearson, 2021a). Anyone seeking initial state licensure for the state of North Carolina will need to complete and pass edTPA.

Organization of Study

This study includes five total chapters. In chapter two I identify the plethora of ways that teachers and students are controlled by the education system while also highlighting seminal research that has been conducted within each theme. Beginning with a brief overview of how the concept of *teacher* was originally constructed, I situate the ways

teachers are controlled through curriculum and testing initiatives. The second chapter also expounds upon edTPA explaining not only more about what it *is* but what it *does*.

Chapter three elaborates upon my chosen methodology of critical narrative analysis (CNA) and how it guides my analysis of the data collected for this study. CNA affords me the opportunity to not only explore my own positionality but also the ways my participants speak of their own identity construction throughout their experiences. This chapter also identifies how I interacted with the data and the processes that guided my analysis and thinking.

I will introduce my presentation of findings in Chapter four. However, because I do not purport to have *found* anything that was not already there, I have decided to utilize the term *becomings* to identify what the data has shown us. The experiences shared in this chapter speak to the multiple ways in which we ask both teacher candidates and teachers to give of themselves and continually reinvent their being even in the face of outrageous expectations.

Lastly, Chapter five summarizes the *becomings* shared in chapter four in relation to this study's research questions as well as outlines proposed implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research. I conclude my work with my final thoughts about my journey, and this experience.

This study has been created with a love of teachers and critical theory in mind. I question the ways in which teachers are controlled through seemingly harmless mechanisms like language and curriculum. As you read I ask you to keep in mind the words of Eisner, (2002) "not everything that matters can be measured, and not everything that is measured matters" (p. 178). Let us focus on those things that matter but are unable to be measured, like

the ways that teachers work every day for the betterment of their students and in turn, our democratic society.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Public education in the United States is not a neutral enterprise and is often manipulated by interested parties. Due to the capitalist nature of the U.S. economy, many companies and foundations take a special interest in education only to take advantage of funding opportunities; this was especially true during the Covid-19 pandemic (Kumashiro, 2020). Klein's (2007) book *The Shock Doctrine* exposes how those in power often use a crisis to their advantage. She identifies these times of crisis as "malleable moments, when we are psychologically unmoored and physically uprooted" (Klein, 2007, p. 25). It is during these times that changes can be made in the name of *good for students* while only benefiting those in power. Kumashiro (2020) cautions how the Covid-19 pandemic is mirroring the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Both crises allowed for a rebirth of voucher programs and microgrants to perpetuate the privatization of schooling, including the allowance of federal stimulus funds to be used for charter schools (Kumashiro, 2020). Funding provided to schools in order to ease the pain of the pandemic "were likely to be spent on education technology" (Kumashiro, 2020, p.6). While technology and internet access were sorely needed throughout the pandemic, these same tools exacerbated the stark inequalities that already existed.

Ross and Vinson (2014) issue a call to educators stating: "It is imperative that educators challenge the dominant neoliberal frames that would define education as just another commodity from which profits are to be extracted" (p. 97). The concept of neoliberalism embraces capitalism under the guise of bettering schools through various reforms (Apple, 2006). These reforms often benefit corporations such as Pearson Education as state testing is increased to *raise the standards*.

In this literature review I work to identify how seemingly benign educational components such as student testing actually control teachers. Teachers are most often controlled through curriculum (Apple, 2004; Gillborn, 2005; Leonarodo, 2009) and high-stakes testing (Au, 2012; Kumashiro, 2004; Taubman & Savona, 2009). A large portion of this literature review is dedicated to critically assessing the teacher performance assessment (edTPA) described in the previous chapter. Understanding the discourse that edTPA creates is imperative to this study, as this assessment standardizes what it means to be a teacher for teacher candidates who must complete it (Behizadeh & Neely, 2018; Carter & Lochte, 2017; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016). I begin this literature review by investigating teacher education and how the term *teacher* has been historically constructed in order to establish that the work of teachers has always been peripheral to our society except when society wishes to blame teachers for whatever "ails the nation" (Taubman & Savona, 2009, p. 138).

The Origins of Teacher Education in the United States

The sordid history of teacher education begins with the creation of normal schools which would be considered the equivalent of today's high schools. Normal schools were developed specifically to train future teachers. These schools were developed in the early 1800s with intent to "serve as the model for public school teachers throughout the country" (Labaree, 2000, p. 71). It did not take long for the role of the school teacher to be imparted to young, white[2] females. Even as early as the 1850s the ideal school teachers were considered to be models of femininity (D'Amico Pawlewicz, 2020). Contrary to popular belief, women did not originally flock to this work because of their love of children but rather it was due to the fact that teaching was one of the only professions of which a woman could be a part

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[2] I recognize that APA 7 requires the term "white" to be capitalized but I feel strongly that the designation is already afforded much privilege in our society. I will only capitalize this term if capitalized in direct quotes.

(Apple, 1985). Because of the perpetuation of these falsehoods and stereotypes about what teachers *should* look like, even today teaching in the United States is largely done by white women. The National Center for Education Statistics stated that 79% of teachers in the United States are white and nearly 75% of all K-12 teachers identify as female (2021). Nation-wide educator preparation programs (EPPs) currently report that 64% of their teacher candidates identify as white while the nation's public school students are 47% white (*The New Teacher Project*, 2020). This means that the future work of public education will still be done by white women unless changes are made to increase the recruitment and retention of teachers of color.

Within this history it is also important to discuss how the normal schools constructed whiteness and were exclusionary towards people of color. While young white women were being trained as teachers, in 1831 a law was passed in North Carolina "that made it illegal to teach enslaved people to write or to provide them with books" (Gorlewski & Tuck, 2019, p. 91). Another important piece of history that helps contextualize this period of time was the Indian Removal Act, which removed Indigenous people from their land and solidified white settler colonialism as law (Gorlewski & Tuck, 2019). It is through these multiple timelines of existence that we see the perpetuation of systemic racism and how it impacts *who* gets to be a teacher. These events in history demonstrate that whiteness has been embedded in what it *means* to be a teacher even from the very beginning (D'Amico Pawlewicz, 2020).

After the creation of normal schools, over the course of several decades these teaching programs slowly transitioned into state universities. One example of this transition is Appalachian State University which was originally founded as Watauga Academy and became the Appalachian Training School for teachers (Appalachian State, n.d.). Originally

focused on teacher training, these institutions began offering other programs of study. Teaching was no longer the focus for these newly chartered universities and teacher education was pushed to the margins. The responsibilities of teacher education were distributed to other departments for instruction on content knowledge (math, science, literature) leaving teacher education to focus on pedagogy alone (Labaree, 2019). In some ways this was the beginning of the de-professionalization of teaching. It was during these institutional transitions that teacher education began to see a stigma formed around what it meant to *be a teacher* and how even teacher educators were not given the same respect as their counterparts in other departments. We still see remnants of this model of teacher training employed today in higher education when general education courses are taught in varying content areas and only later during one's course of study are teacher candidates exposed to education courses.

Alternative licensing programs outside of traditional four-year degree programs work to diversify what it means to be a teacher by recruiting diverse teachers, as these programs only consist of 47% people who identify as white (*The New Teacher Project*, 2020). However, programs such as Teach for America (TFA) only provide short-term solutions to teacher shortages and diversification because teachers certified through the programs normally only teach for a few years (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). These TFA teachers also are only exposed to a few weeks of training in the summer to provide them a pedagogy bootcamp of sorts (Schneider, 2018). Teacher residency programs have also been created to provide licensure opportunities to college graduates not trained in education. These individuals work with EPPs or other entities to earn licensure by working in one or two years (Mourlam et al., 2019).

Friedrich (2014) discusses that due to the de-professionalization of teaching, even within EPPs, these alternative licensure programs were inevitable. "The benefit of carefully examining teaching and teacher education is the ability to fight against new trends and old habits in a more thoughtful and discerning way" (Friedrich, 2014, p.4). It is through this study that I examine how some EPPs develop a discourse around traditional teaching and work to indoctrinate their students into it. One way to perpetuate discourse, which is a way of using language to establish a state of being, is by controlling both students and teachers through state-mandated testing and curriculum selection.

Control in the Classroom

School is the place where teachers should introduce the idea of critical discourse to "critically examine the content of their own assumptions in each of these three areas - world, society, person" (Joldersma & Crick, 2009). Once students see themselves as social beings within a society, they can begin thinking critically to foster the ability for self-emancipation and social change (Giroux, 1982, p.21). These foundational aims that allow the educational system to inform students about the society in which they live in order to create an informed republic have always been highly politicized. If we embrace the notion that education is indeed political, we recognize the interconnectedness of schooling and society (Giroux & McLaren, 1989, p. xxi), and can currently see the hyper-politicization of teacher decision making.

Because our education system aligns with our society it is imperative to acknowledge that while well-intentioned, the system is steeped in racism and white supremacy. Along these lines, Kumashiro, (2020) boldly states:

The stated purpose might be equity, democ-ratization, or liberation, but the function

has never reached those lofty goals— and -was never meant to do so— which -is why

the so-called achievement gap is not necessarily a sign that schools are failing, but a

sign that schools are succeeding at doing -exactly what they were -set up to do. (p.

20)

The tools that have helped create the *achievement gap* within education are also the tools that

supposedly help students. National policy, state testing, and curriculum are all controlled by

those in power leaving teachers to internalize the discourses they create and perpetuate,

interpret, and enact these orders the best they can.

Control in the classroom can also be seen more literally through the ways that student

behavior is addressed in schools. Morris' (2016) work discusses the policing of Black

students and how young Black girls are more likely to be prosecuted for simple children's

behavior than young white girls. Examples of control are everywhere in elementary schools

as we ask students to conform, walk in line, and repeatedly play by the rules.

National Policy as Control

Teachers and students may be subjected to these forms of control because of the

shock and awe report commissioned by the United States government and published in 1983

entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. This report provided a

grim outlook on schooling in the United States and prompted many reforms at both a national

and local level with a call to arms: "Thus, we issue this call to all who care about America

and its future: to parents and students; to teachers, administrators, and school board

members…to concerned citizens everywhere. America is at risk" (National Commission on

Excellence in Education, 1983). Instead of this report providing guidance to the nation,

Feinberg (1989) states that the report "offered a series of rhetorical slogans which lead not just to oversimplification, but to misrepresentation" (p. 74). These misrepresentations, like decreases in test SAT scores and literacy rates identified in this report, are still prevalent issues being used as ominous warnings today. This report also set in motion the creation of new types of curriculum that would set the country *back on track* left the door open for the power elites to dictate what schools will teach for years to come (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014, p. 14).

Most often, the response to decreasing test scores is to increase testing (Au, 2009; Taubman & Savona, 2009). Only a decade after *A Nation at Risk* was published, mandatory state testing was implemented in 43 states for K-5 students (Au, 2009, p. 53). When No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed into federal law in 2002 high-stakes testing was here to stay. While the intention was to provide students with rigorous schooling and testing to verify progress, ultimately NCLB became "whiteness as policy" (Leonardo, 2009, p. 127). There was no specific care taken in the implementation of this policy that would work to counteract the systemic racism and inequality that already exists in our society. Funding was directly tied to how "subgroups" (race, socioeconomic status, English language proficiency) performed on their tests and if consistent growth was not shown, funding would be lost (Au, 2009, p. 54).

Yet another consequence was the windfall that testing corporations experienced under NCLB. Testing companies began to dictate the content of the tests and collect countless amounts of student data. Teachers and districts began to rely on these same corporations for training and test-preparation content as well (Leonardo, 2009). NCLB was billed as good for education and students, which created a narrative to help receive bipartisan support. Fast

forward to 2010, and we see how the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative encouraged states to adopt the Common Core Standards. These Common Core Standards were not mandated by the government, but rather incentivized through the grant funding that could be obtained through state adoption (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). Value-added measures for teacher evaluation, which are composed of data that claims to be able to predict a teachers' impact on student scores, were also adopted through this policy change (DeMoss, 2017). There was a large push for teacher personnel decisions (hiring and firing) to be tied to student test scores (Ross & Vinson, 2014), affecting the nature of what it means to be a teacher, and what it means to be a "successful" teacher.

During this era of standardization the test became king. Now the four major testing companies—Pearson Education, Educational Testing Service, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and McGraw-Hill—make a combined $2 billion a year and spend $20 million a year lobbying government official to increase student testing (Love, 2019). Once we examine the interconnectedness of testing and policy it is certainly hard to view education as a neutral enterprise. Public education is inherently political, and therefore so is the act of teaching, so it makes sense that these companies would attempt to become a part of curriculum creation and teacher certification as well (Apple, 2004).

Curriculum as Control

Education "is the process of learning to create ourselves" (Eisner, 2002, p. 3). This means that the curricula adopted through policy by states and schools across the country work to define how students see themselves within the world and what kinds of thinking will be accepted in their classrooms (Eisner, 2002, p. 148). Au (2012) elaborates on Eisner's (1994) concept and states that there are three types of curriculum. 1. "Explicit curriculum",

which are the content learning goals; 2. "Implicit curriculum", or how we transfer values and prescribed behaviors; and 3. "The null curriculum, or, what schools do not teach" (Eisner, 1994, as quoted in Au, 2012, p. 31). Oftentimes, what Eisner (1994) labels the explicit curriculum, is viewed as the official knowledge and is legitimized through its adoption by states and schools. Apple (2003) raises questions critical educators should ask about curriculum including: "who should select it, how it should be organized, taught, and evaluated, and once again who should be involved in asking and answering these questions" (p.7).

Anyon's (1981) research exposes how curriculum selection coincided with the social class of the students attending the school that participated in her study. In working-class schools, a priority was placed on making sure students were controlled rather than engaged in their learning using topics of interest. These same students were also not taught their own history of the working-class (Anyon, 1981, p. 32). Conversely, middle-class schools positioned knowledge as something "external" and produced by "experts" for example, in textbooks (Anyon, 1981, p. 33). Lastly, wealthy-class students are taught "their own history", which is that of the ruling and wealthy class, along with the knowledge that their class is "socially prestigious" and able to create knowledge (Anyon, 1981, p. 35). Kozol's (1991) book entitled *Savage Inequalities*, echoed the findings of Anyon as they elaborated on the inequalities between schools and access to equitable educational opportunities across The United States.

Sleeter and Stillman (2005) ask as they examine California state standards, "how has the content standards movement reconfigured codes of power and in whose interests?" (p. 42). Their study found English language learners are not afforded the same opportunities to

engage with higher-level thinking. Compliance is also demanded of teachers if they are to help their students succeed. This management and control do not allow for teachers to examine how their students see themselves within the curriculum, which is an important aspect of creating one's identity within the process of learning.

Representation in Curriculum

Much current research has pointed to the necessary inclusion of diverse perspectives and called for the most accurate representation of diverse identities in children's literature, textbooks, and classroom curriculum. When it comes to curriculum and representation Reese (2000) reminds us that "books do not exist in a vacuum" (p. 53). Reese (2000) examines how children's literature portrays Native Americans and perpetuates stereotypes. Even within the world of children's literature, critical critiques of books are also silenced. Children's literature as curriculum works as a hegemonic device in education, often going unquestioned and contributing to the "status quo" through a lack of representation of diverse characters (Sharp, 1980, p. 103).

Leonardo and Grubb (2014) put it bluntly, "Racism in the curriculum is first and foremost a question of representation" (p. 13). Accurate representation of people of color must exist on multiple levels as well. Counter-narratives (Crenshaw, 2011) should be included to provide a non-trivialized portrayal of the heroes of history that are often left out. If students of color and marginalized groups do not see themselves portrayed in their textbooks and curriculum, it works to other and silence their own lives as well as present a distorted view of history (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Leonardo and Grub (2014) also explain how curriculum is part of "race creation" (p. 16) because of how students see themselves portrayed (or not portrayed) throughout history. Changes in curriculum happen slowly but

often the changes regarding representation are superficial, focusing on tokenizing efforts such as Black History Month or taking time *away* from the curriculum to read a book written by an author of color.

To explore the question of implicit or hidden curriculum and who is using education to change society, look no further than the textbook companies and their ability to de-skill the work of teachers. With the adoption of "canned and planned" or "teacher-proof" (Postman & Weingartner, 1969) curriculum, districts and schools are taking away a teacher's ability to teach. Often adopted under the guise of equity, these curricula are created to ensure that students have the same experience despite the teacher's ability to teach. However, scripted curriculum does not provide equitable experiences because it ignores the already existing inequalities within the education system and does not address them (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020). The standardization of teaching also "increases ease of surveillance for purposes of teacher control and accountability" by claiming that the use of the same curriculum should create similar testing outcomes without considering the individual students who make up the class (Fitz & Nikolaidis, 2020, p. 201). One small example of these embedded inequalities that I have witnessed is a standardized test question that asked students to infer what it would be like to go to the beach. Many of the students being asked had never left their rural county before and could not answer the question correctly.

Curriculum also works to control our students through what is selected as official knowledge. When students "meet standards" they are being forced to comply by internalizing what has been deemed "common sense" (Kumashiro, 2004, p. 25). This hegemonic knowledge has been selected by those who set the standards and make the tests, not necessarily judging what students need to know to be critical thinkers. When these curricula

are adopted, states, districts, and schools are deferring decisions about pedagogy to textbook companies as well. Many of the editors who create the textbooks that are viewed as official knowledge are male, and often come from a sales background rather than education (Apple, 2012, p. 158). Within this work of critical curriculum studies we can see a critique of the way capitalism lords over our schools. States now feel pressure to increasingly adopt scripted curriculum because it is simply the easiest way to manipulate and control teachers forcing them to *teach to the test.*

Representation in the Classroom

Promoting a culturally responsive teaching practice or pedagogy in one's classroom means validating students' prior experiences and cultures in ways that draw them into the classroom community and make learning relevant. A focus is placed on being inclusive through both language and action (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2009). It is also through culturally responsive teaching that teachers actively seek what is right with their students instead of using deficit language (Ladson-Billings, 2014). The term culturally responsive is far-reaching but is also often misinterpreted and trivialized. Focusing on Kwanzaa celebrations or having diverse photos in the classroom is often what "the pedagogy has been reduced to" (p. 82) according to one of the original creators of the pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (2014). Another founder, Gay (2002), argues that misconceptions about culturally responsive teaching often arise because "teachers do not know enough about the contributions that different ethnic groups have made to their subject areas" (p. 107). As discussed previously in this paper, adopted curricula often do not have resources that focus on including counter-narratives or represent multiple cultures (Leonardo & Grubb, 2014).

To fully embrace culturally responsive teaching, teachers need to move past surface-level inclusion and actively work to guide their students through the critique of society and how identities shape our education. Without recognizing the sociopolitical context of culture within society, this critical work in the classroom will not live up to its full potential (Hammond, 2015, p. 28). This work largely depends on the teacher and their willingness to embrace the unknown, because "not knowing is one of the most powerful tools and motivators for doing more and doing it better" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82). Teachers are often not trained for this work in their teacher preparation programs so providing learning opportunities for in-service teachers is key (O'Keeffe et al., 2019). Lastly, this work comes down to caring about students. "Caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity" (Gay, 2002, p. 109). If our students are not able to recognize that we care, then no pedagogy will be able to bridge that relationship gap.

Student Testing

As discussed earlier in this work, the era of standardization in education largely began during the 1980's following the report A Nation at Risk. However, examinations attempting to measure student knowledge have been around since the creation of public education. It is through this research focused on the way high-stakes testing has been weaponized against both teachers (Kohn, 2000) and students that we can begin to identify how this form of control works to hold teacher licensure in check.

Scores from the end of year and progress testing are not only used to rank schools, the results can also be tied to funding and the amount of resources a school will have for the following year (Madaus, 1998). Not to mention, testing can also be tied to teacher pay, and in the case of edTPA, teacher licensure (Au, 2007). Ultimately, no matter the result, the teacher

is often the victim. "If test scores are low, we haven't taught; if they are high, we are guilty of grade inflation" (Taubman & Savona, 2009, p. 138). Martin et al. (2020) conducted a Foucauldian analysis of novice teachers' experiences during a testing crisis, documenting how power and control move beyond students and focus on teacher behavior during state testing. Teacher stress, distrust, and anxiety were well documented within their work.

Schools often determine how much time is given to each subject based on whether it is tested or not (Au, 2009). This is how schools defend eliminating fine arts programs or pull students who are failing out of physical education. Instead of working to create a well-rounded child, the testing drives their daily routine. The students feel it, becoming "hyper-obsessed about tests, contributing to a lack of intellectual curiosity and physical and psychological harm" (DeMoss, 2017, p. 29). How often do students ask if their answer is right? A binary (pass/fail) way of thinking has been deeply embedded into our education system.

In his work, Madaus (1988) examines how high-stakes testing "can directly and powerfully influence how teachers teach and students learn" (p. 30), outlining a variety of ways that teachers align with or teach to the test often due to stress and pressure to have students perform. This research again points out how students who do not succeed on these sole indicators are often labeled as *underachieving*. Madaus (1988) suggests that accountability testing should only be used as data sampling. We must continue to ask why so often we measure students with tests that occur on one day of the year and allow them to predict so much of a student's educational journey.

Testing and Inequality. These labels of pass or fail are also placed on students as they are ranked and tracked according to test results (Cochran-Smith et al., 2017). The use of

"ability tracking" is taking place earlier and earlier every year in K-12 systems. In one local county as early as kindergarten, students can be labeled as Gifted and Talented (GT) and are given special course work or opportunities (Wake County Schools, 2019). Leonardo and Grubb (2014) remind us that these labels and tracking systems are highly racialized as well. Largely based on standardized test results, students begin to recognize their *place* in schools.

Through the adoption of NCLB and RTTT, mandatory high-stakes tests and the resulting data were supposed to work to close the race-based gaps in K-12 education. However, these tests "not only failed at achieving racial equality, its proliferation has only exacerbated racial inequality and worsened education for students of color" (Au, 2018, p. 243). The use of data and "bell curve logic" assumes that some students will fail. These gaps are often labeled "achievement gaps" but Ladson-Billings (2006) more appropriately labels them as an "educational debt" (p. 3). Educational debt is multifaceted and includes a moral debt that reflects the disparity between "what we know is right and what we actually do" (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 8). This debt is owed to generations of students who were failed by their educational institutions and in turn, by society.

One way to work against the perpetuation of this education debt is to better prepare our teacher candidates for the realities of the classroom. As outlined previously in this paper we know that teachers who are better prepared for the classroom not only stay longer (Podolsky et al., 2016) but are more effective (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Measuring teacher effectiveness in the classroom is errantly done through standardized testing, and this concept has now reached teacher preparation through the creation of the teacher performance assessment (edTPA).

Control of Teacher Candidates through edTPA

The teaching profession is scrutinized by the general public because there has always been "a deeply rooted belief that teaching was something that most adults could do" (Angus, 2001, p. 11). There has also been an ever-present battle for the control over who determines who can become a teacher (Gorlewski & Tuck, 2019). As early as 1835 Pennsylvania began requiring teacher candidates to pass exams to earn their positions (Angus, 2001). However, at that time many other states and schools were still employing teachers with no certification or normal school experience. This state-by-state credentialing system persists today causing great turmoil for teachers attempting to move states and often raises the questions of equitable credentialing. These inconsistencies and criticisms have opened the door for corporations to insert themselves into the credentialing of teachers by feeding off the public's greatest fear "that our students are in danger" (Carter & Lochte, 2017, p. 20). Harkening back to the government report *A Nation at Risk*, these generalized fears include fear of failure and also the fear of a difference in opinions as we see in today's classrooms. Nevertheless, these fears have allowed for companies to insert themselves into the education system bringing with them increased standardization, earning money based solely on constructed fears.

The perpetuation of these fears gave way to the creation of the Stanford University's Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) as a measure of teacher readiness for state licensure. The era of standardization for higher education has begun. Educator preparation programs (EPPs) used to encourage teacher candidates to take risks and learn from their failures to help them become better teachers, but now they have been reduced to teaching to the test (Kleyn et al., 2015). Partnering with Pearson Education, and charging each candidate

or EPP $300 for every portfolio submitted (Pearson Education, 2022), Pearson has now become part of the teacher credentialing system all while turning a profit.

Popkewitz (1991) shares "evaluations are typically commissioned by those with power but in the name of a common good" (p. 287). The *common good* intentions of edTPA include its attempt to *raise the bar* for incoming teachers. This exam created by Stanford University and graded by an employee of Pearson Education, edTPA takes the decision to grant a teacher licensure out of the hands of education faculty and university supervisors and places the decision in the hands of a single scorer, someone who does not know the teacher candidate or context of the community they are filmed in. The student teaching experience is no longer focused on becoming a better teacher but rather with the goal of passing edTPA to obtain licensure (Donovan & Cannon, 2014).

In order to create a strong foundation for teacher preparation, Darling-Hammond (2012) identifies that performance-based assessments like edTPA have the "power and potential" to have a positive impact on teacher education (p. 10). However, Darling-Hammond also shares that these types of assessments, "when used for licensure and accreditation, can transform their teacher education programs" (p.10). Any changes in EPPs occurred because of the state adoption of edTPA, therefore promoting edTPA from a policy to a curriculum that guides individuals towards passing and complying with this policy. EdTPA's creation "serves as the next attempt to deprofessionalize teaching" by focusing solely on the role of teacher as the problem (Carter & Lochte, 2017, p. 13). For it is teachers who often bear the responsibility of whatever "ails the nation" (Taubman & Savona, 2009, p. 138). Rather than exploring and working to remove the multiple external barriers that impact student learning and the creation of our *educational debt* (Ladson-Billings, 2006), edTPA

restricts what it means to be a *good teacher* in the same ways standardized testing has restricted what it means to be a *good student*.

What exactly is edTPA?

EdTPA was brought about through a partnership between Stanford University's Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) and American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). These two institutions created edTPA based on the California state-approved teacher performance assessments, or TPAs, which have been a state requirement since 2006 (Ledwell & Oyler, 2016). EdTPA is also based on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) assessment, an optional assessment open to fully-licensed teachers with 3 or more years of experience to earn credentials for higher pay in some states (Heil & Berg, 2017). The NBPTS is held in high regard so "teacher educators began to consider how they might adopt this model to formalize existing approaches to the less formal portfolio assessment of teaching candidates" (Gitomer et al., 2021, p. 6). However, it was not taken into consideration that the NBPTS is used to evaluate those who have been in the field, not teacher candidates seeking initial teacher licensure.

SCALE (2019) names edTPA as "the first nationally available, educator-designed support and assessment system for teachers entering the profession" (p.1). The literature provided by both the edTPA website and AACTE claim the assessment identifies teacher readiness for *day one* of classroom teaching through their use of the assessment's grading rubrics. The multiple rubrics are subject-specific and promote a "common set of teaching principles and teaching behaviors as well as pedagogical strategies that are focused on specific content learning for P-12 students" (SCALE, 2019). These rubrics are used to assess

a video clip, lesson plans, commentary, and student works submitted by the teacher candidates.

The edTPA assessment portfolio is designed to evaluate a teacher candidate's effectiveness in three areas: planning, instruction, and assessment. These three steps are referred to by the term "cycle of effective teaching" or "teaching cycle" (SCALE, 2019). This cycle is the focus of the 3-5 lesson "learning segments" the teacher candidate chooses to use as their submission (SCALE, 2019). Once lesson topics are selected, the planning stage begins.

As outlined by Stanford's Assessment Handbook for Middle Childhood Mathematics (2019), teacher candidates will create a "context for learning" document that can be up to 9 pages (single-spaced) in length. The context for learning includes questions about the lesson, student prior-knowledge, justification for lesson decisions, language supports for students, and examples of student monitoring. In-depth prompts are given for students to work from (SCALE, 2019). Teacher candidates must also include lesson plans for each lesson of the learning segment. Each lesson plan can be a maximum of four pages in length. These plans are submitted along with the context for learning document to complete the planning assessment area of the assessment. The context for learning document and lesson plans are graded using 5 separate rubrics by the scorer. For the Elementary Education assessments these first five rubrics include: Planning for Literacy Learning, Planning to Support Varied Student Learning Needs, Using Knowledge of Students to Inform Teaching and Learning, Identifying and Supporting Language Demands, and Planning Assessments to Monitor and Support Student Learning (SCALE, 2015). The instruction stage not only includes recording video clips of lessons in the classroom but also an instruction commentary (SCALE, 2019).

The teacher candidate will need to be recorded in 1-2 video clips not exceeding 20 minutes of lesson time. These videos are meant to express conceptual understanding along with content-specific criteria depending on the intended edTPA submission category. The commentary document has a limit of 6 pages (single-spaced). This document is intended to guide the viewer through the video clips and reflect on the lessons. Again, this will be graded using another set of 5 separate rubrics including: Learning Environment, Engaging Students in Learning, Deepening Student Learning, Subject-Specific Pedagogy: Elementary Literacy, and Analyzing Teacher Effectiveness (SCALE, 2015; SCALE, 2019).

The final step in the cycle is the assessment of student learning. Here teacher candidates will select an assessment and three samples of student work. The assessment commentary document has a limit of 10 pages (single-spaced) and is meant to speak to the teacher candidate's analysis of student learning, feedback given to students, and how the chosen assessment can inform instruction. This final step is also assessed using 5 rubrics. The last 5 rubrics for the Elementary Education Assessment are: Analysis of Student Learning, Providing Feedback to Guide Further Learning, Student Use of Feedback, Analyzing Students' Language Use and Literacy Learning, Using Assessment to Inform Instruction (SCALE, 2015, SCALE, 2019).

It would be safe to estimate that a teacher candidate's edTPA submission could be close to 50 pages in length when lesson plans, materials, planning, instruction, and assessment documents are totaled. The original submission of the assessment portfolio costs the teacher candidate $300. In some cases the EPP will cover the cost of the initial submission. It is only after creating this portfolio over many weeks or even a semester of work, teacher candidates receive a numerical score based on the 15 (18 or 13, depending on

the program selected) rubrics they are scored with. Scorers do not give any feedback with critiques or suggestions for improvement, which is in direct opposition to how we train teachers to provide feedback for their own students (Parkes & Powell, 2015).

How is edTPA Scored?

There are 28 edTPA subject area assessments used nationwide. Each program handbook is focused on a specific discipline such as: middle grade science, secondary math, etc. It should be noted that not all disciplines are acknowledged by an edTPA test, including elementary social studies and science. In these cases the EPPs often get to select which edTPA portfolio they will submit even though the teacher candidate has not been focused on those content areas. Each content-specific program handbook provides feedback for creating the individual planning documents needed for submission.

Originally, edTPA was scored by multiple scorers employed by Pearson. However, as the number of applicants and state adoptions rose, the grading demands became too much (Jordan & Hawley, 2016). Each edTPA binder is now scored by one person. Greenblatt and O'Hara (2015) share "the scoring is now done remotely and scorers are recruited from across the country, even if their state does not use the edTPA" (p. 61). After the original scorer has evaluated the portfolio, if the total score is within a predetermined range bracketing the pass/fail score, it will be scored by a second evaluator to ensure quality assessment.

In order to become an edTPA scorer one must have P-12 experience, a bachelor's degree or higher, a state teacher's license or be National Board certified. Once the initial self-paced online training of close to twenty hours is complete, each scorer will need to commit to scoring one portfolio a week. EdTPA Scorer Expectations state that each portfolio should take "2-3 hours to grade" (Pearson Technology, 2019). Compensation is based on the number

of edTPA assessment portfolios that are graded, not the time spent assessing the work. The scorer receives $75 for each completion and determination if the submission is worthy of a teacher's license (Attick & Boyles, 2016).

Upon receiving a failing score of edTPA, teacher candidates do have the option to resubmit the entire portfolio for another $300, or they can choose to resubmit individual parts of the assessment (planning, instruction, or assessment of student learning) which cost $100 each. There is also an option of opening an appeal however, appeals cost $200 (Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015). While some EPPs allow for resubmission time, some teacher candidates have found themselves out of their student teaching classroom or having graduated already with little to no support for their resubmission (Greenblatt, 2016). A failing score can mean different things depending on the EPP – some tie the edTPA results to student GPA. At the very least, in North Carolina, the teacher candidate would not receive their initial teacher's license.

edTPA as High-Stakes Testing

EdTPA is considered a standardized test because the results are generalized across multiple locations. Au (2009) states that standardized tests are "considered objective because they supposedly measure all individuals equally and outside of any potential extenuating circumstances" (p. 40). Because edTPA requires a video component, lessons are filmed in individual classrooms across the country, and it would be difficult to claim these videos can be evaluated equally. While edTPA is not a multiple-choice test, its creators claim that the test's results are generalizable. The *official knowledge* edTPA perpetuates is that there is a way to be a *good* teacher along with the belief that demonstrating this can be done in video clips and a score on a multitude of rubrics.

EdTPA is also considered a high-stakes test because it is created through policy focused on accountability and has real implications for those who fail (Au, 2009, p. 6). Failing edTPA means dedicating more time and money towards compliance. High-stakes testing also leads to the possibility of cheating (Martin et al., 2020). This is true for both K-12 testing as well as edTPA. Ratner and Kolman's (2016) "experiences suggest that there are few, if any, accountability mechanisms in place currently to ensure faculty adherence to the Guidelines" (p. 5). Faculty can assist students in completing edTPA as outlined in their document *Guidelines for Acceptable Candidate Support* (SCALE, 2016) but there is no real way to know whether teacher candidates received acceptable support or not.

In their work, Schultz and Dover (2017) explore ways that teacher candidates can circumvent completing edTPA at all. They share a chat between themselves and an edTPA *tutor* who will work to complete your submission for you. For $885 you can pay for a "FULL review" with the guarantee that you will pass because they will do it again for you for free (Schultz & Dover, 2017, p. 109). Those who have the money can pay for someone to complete the portfolio for them. We must begin to ask if this is truly a valid assessment of a teacher candidate's teaching ability if someone else can complete this assessment for them - if one can afford to pay.

Pearson Education and edTPA

Stanford University, through SCALE, formed a relationship with Evaluation Systems to provide "operational support for the national administration of edTPA" (SCALE, 2021, p. ii). Evaluation Systems is a branch of the billion-dollar corporation, Pearson Education. EdTPA preparation content and the test itself is owned by Stanford University which is demonstrated by their branding on all materials, documents, and websites. Over 920 EPPs in

32 states have adopted edTPA as a measure of teacher candidates and their performance in the classroom (SCALE, 2021). Currently, of the 32 states involved, 21 states have adopted policies linking a teacher candidate's edTPA score to their ability to obtain initial teacher licensure.

As of September 1, 2019, North Carolina adopted edTPA as part of their licensure system. Therefore, "all candidates seeking initial licensure in North Carolina will be required to submit qualifying scores on the appropriate edTPA performance-based, subject-specific assessment" (Pearson, 2021b, para. 2). This state adoption means both state and private universities are now part of this chain of data collection, demonstrating that the test has become the curriculum of EPPs. Pearson will now have data regarding EPP's pass/fail rate for education departments across the country. I believe that the data will be used to identify EPPs who have not adopted edTPA's full suggested curriculum. EdTPA has a language unto itself and it will be apparent if students are not trained to use it.

Yet another layer to this policy enactment is Stanford's partnership with Pearson Education. If you have spent any time in K-12 education, you know that Pearson dominates the enactment of high stakes testing. Albeit self-anointed, the for-profit company makes money when states increase their testing. Pearson even goes so far as to have lobbyists pushing state and national officials to increase state testing with their company's help (Love, 2019). In the case of edTPA, Pearson profits from not only the cost of the test, but also from training sessions mandated for EPP faculty to attend.

It appears that "Pearson's role in edTPA is mandating specific standards and behaviors for how teachers teach" (Attick & Boyles, 2016, p.12). Embracing this neo-liberal reform, university faculty and staff are trained by edTPA for the sole purpose of helping

students pass the test. Some EPPs have created specific positions such as *edTPA Coordinator* to help students comply and submit their portfolios and train faculty (Attick & Boyles, 2016). In some cases, these faculty members are also being paid by Pearson for their work as liaison and to increase edTPA buy-in (Gorlewski & Tuck, 2019).

One document produced by edTPA that causes concern is the "edTPA myth busters" document. While it is now under secure log-in on the edTPA website, the document has been distributed and posted on a variety of EPP websites and can be found by doing a simple Google search. The document addresses many of the concerns I have come across throughout my edTPA research journey and serves as a FAQ resource. However, all the answers provided reference their own resources and documents. One "myth" is: "edTPA ignores/restricts culturally relevant pedagogy." The article used to refute that myth is written by Lynn (2014) who is a board member of the edTPA Policy Advisory Board.

Another resource created and promoted by edTPA is the document named "Making Good Choices". This series of "Good Choices" documents directly refer to how to best pass the individual curriculum tests. This document was previously available to the public but as of September 2022, it now requires an edTPA log-in. The use of the term "making good choices" alone introduces the concept of a good vs. bad narrative. Apple (2004) warns against this very thing when he stated, "It [knowledge] is selected and organized around a set of principles and values that come from somewhere, that represent particular views of normality and deviance, of good and bad, and of what 'good people act like'" (p. 61). If you don't pass edTPA that means you made *bad choices*? The language used within these documents was well-constructed by Pearson to create a feeling of accomplishment or *good*

behavior if you complete their assessment appropriately. This construct of *good* also works to create one way to teach and to perpetuate the idea that there is one right way to be a teacher.

This oversimplification of teaching threatens to reduce teaching to a "technical and apolitical act" (Gorlewski & Tuck, 2019, p. 14). EdTPA is inherently political and works as a tool of hegemony, forcing EPPs to make changes to their curriculum. When changes are made to curriculum, they often refocus on language that will impress the Pearson Education portfolio scorer. Ultimately edTPA can "give the impression that teaching can be good if you follow directions" (Donovan & Cannon, 2014, p. 21). Restricting the language used in the classroom and tailoring the lesson plans to Pearson's expectations creates a single narrative of what it means to be a successful teacher.

edTPA: Ignoring Social Justice and Narrowing Diversity

The United States is becoming increasingly diverse and will continue to do so throughout the lives of the next generation of teachers. Currently, less than half of school-aged children are non-Hispanic white students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022). However, our teacher pool mostly consists of white women (NCES, 2021). When one compares the growing diversity of our students with the lack of diversity in our educators, one would assume that there is a great deal of training happening in EPPs to prepare our overwhelming white teacher pool for a racially diverse classroom. Sadly, this is often not the case.

Because EPPs have been forced to shape their curriculums around preparing teacher candidates for the edTPA final submission, they do not need to address race in the classroom for their candidates to pass. Even within edTPA's section entitled "context for learning", where teacher candidates are asked to reflect on their classrooms and students, they do not

specifically speak about race (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016). By ignoring race, class, and gender, edTPA does not promote this type of reflection for teacher candidates, effectively eliminating these topics from conversation. The color-blind racism and white teacher, "I don't see color" response will be perpetuated unless it is addressed (Leonardo, 2009).

This blind eye towards social justice can lead to the perpetuation of systemic issues both in the classroom and in EPPs. Discussions of race, class, and gender should be woven throughout the EPP curriculum allowing for the conversations to take place in a variety of different contexts. EdTPA plays no role in supporting these discussions, but rather disincentivizes them from happening. Also, "edTPA presumes that the "problems" associated with educating Black and Brown learners can be addressed by raising the standards for their future teachers" (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016, p. 205). Passing edTPA may earn our teacher candidates a teacher license, but it certainly does not mean that they have any knowledge of diversity in the classroom. EdTPA does not recognize the multiple hurdles historically marginalized students have to overcome, and no time is taken to address how inequalities are reified if we think uncritically about edTPA (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2019).

The United States has created and adopted a coded language for discussing our education system. Largely, the tone for these conversations has been set by conversations about *failing* schools. This narrative leads to the public's perceived ability to question teachers' knowledge and authority in the classroom. Often, the remedy for these constructed failures is simply to increase testing, and edTPA is part of that playbook. However, another unintended consequence of the creation and adoption of edTPA is how it works in "narrowing the diversity of teacher candidates, it also promises to exacerbate teacher shortages" (Gilbert & Kuo, 2019, p. 4). EdTPA also dissuades teachers from working in

classrooms and areas where they are greatly needed because the look of the classroom may not be what edTPA scorers want (Henning et al., 2018). An assessment intended to "raise the standard for teachers" is reifying whiteness both for teachers and students and disincentivizing teacher candidates from teaching in high-need settings.

One final way that edTPA ignores social justice is the way this assessment is enacted through many EPPs. Teacher candidates are forced to comply and do as they're told in order to navigate their way towards both graduation and licensure (Jordan & Hawley, 2016). Behizadeh and Neely's (2018) critical case study uncovers how "teacher candidates' desires to promote equality and social justice and build relationships in their classrooms were overshadowed by edTPA" (Behizadeh & Neely, 2018, p. 257). If future teachers are not taught in the spirit of social justice, we cannot expect them to promote it in their own classrooms. These students are taught how to "comply, rather than critique" (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2019, p. 30). Limiting the conversations with students around edTPA to "how best to capture our students on video, how to interpret and answer the edTPA questions to receive a top, or at least passing, score on the rubrics" is quite dangerous (Chiu, 2014, p. 28). Chiu (2014) shares her experience completing edTPA and how her teaching was reduced to numbers on a rubric. The lack of feedback in relation to the amount of time and effort students put into their portfolios again situates them as powerless as they wait to find out if they have been labeled as good.

Look at the Numbers - edTPA's Results

Goldhaber et al., (2017) share that at the time of their study, Hispanic teacher candidates in Washington State were three times more likely to fail edTPA than non-Hispanic white teacher candidates. This statistic alone raises red flags regarding the impact

48

this assessment will have on increasing the diversity of our country's teachers. Aside from issues noted in Washington, SCALE's own administrative report published in 2021 reporting 2019 data, shows that African American and Black teacher candidates have the lowest mean score (42.74). SCALE is quick to note that the African American/Black candidate pool was only 6.5% of submissions and generalizations should not be made about these results. The report states that the sample sizes for teacher candidates of color are too small, so the results are to be "interpreted with caution" (SCALE, 2021, p. 17).

At no time when schools are reviewing testing data for students that represent 6.5% of their school population do schools choose to dismiss the findings. When we speak of equality for all people in our schools and country we do not dismiss populations that only make up 6.5% or less of our communities. The difference between African American/Black teacher candidates' and white teacher candidates' scores are statistically significant, so these findings are saying a lot more than SCALE is willing to discuss (Williams et al., 2019).

Even more worrisome is the impact of this test dissuading teachers of color from entering the field of education when they are exposed to these statistics. It is alarming that 73.9% of the test submissions are from white candidates (SCALE, 2019). Gillborn (2005) powerfully states, "The racist outcomes of contemporary policy may not be coldly calculated but they are far from accidental" (Gillborn, 2005, p. 499). I agree that the consequences of edTPA have begun to outweigh the benefits (Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015). It is evident that rather than working to foster reflection and raise the bar for teacher education, EdTPA is just another roadblock on the road to becoming a teacher (Gilbert & Kuo, 2019; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019; Jordan & Hawley, 2016).

Gitomer et al., (2021) have recently examined edTPA and state that the "proposed and actual uses of the edTPA are currently unwarranted on technical grounds" (p. 4). Their research focused on the "interpretations and uses" of edTPA scores for licensure and utilization of this test as a high-stakes assessment. Gitomer et al. (2021) call for a review of edTPA by an expert panel to assess if it does indeed do its job of evaluating teacher candidates and EPPs accurately. One specific concern about edTPA is that many of their documents and test results are not able to be accessed without an EPP log-in. Users must be registered with an official EPP to access many of these documents. Meaning that unless you work for or are a student within an EPP, you can not see full data or access documents intended to help students pass. The scoring process is also called into account because "the precision of edTPA scores (either single-or double-scored) currently remains largely unknown" (Gitomer et al., 2021, p. 25). Much is left to be desired when it comes to Pearson's score reports.

Lalley (2017) echoes the concerns of Gitomer et al. (2021) when they speak of how reports and resources are password protected and stored behind a nondisclosure agreement on edTPA's website. "Limiting access to edTPA documents to those directly involved in candidates' completion of edTPA inhibits, or more accurately prohibits, conducting research on the implementation and effectiveness of edTPA" (Lalley, 2017, p. 54). If edTPA is billed as an assessment created by teachers, for teachers, then research should be built into its measure of effectiveness, and should not be cloaked in secrecy. Lalley (2017) also highlights how open-ended assessments (rather than multiple choice) are much more prone to subjectivity. This should cause great concern given the information we do have about how reported edTPA mean scores are lower for teacher candidates of color.

Front-Stage Filming of edTPA

The anticipation for a student teaching placement should be an exciting time in one's journey towards becoming a teacher. It should not be shrouded in doubt and concern if the classroom which you will be assigned will help or hinder your edTPA scores. Teacher candidates who are placed in high-poverty schools are often concerned with the look of the classroom. This can include the lack of resources or the students of color which they are serving. The uncertainty of the placements revolves around "knowing they must submit videoclips as part of their edTPA portfolio and that scorers will judge them based on the behaviors and achievement of their learners" (Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016, p. 203). Teacher candidates go as far as removing students from instruction to portray a more hospitable learning environment rather than record their reality and how they teach every day. (Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015; Ledwell & Oyler, 2016; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016)

The required twenty-minute video clip is designed to give the edTPA scorer a snapshot of teaching. Teacher candidates are encouraged to video entire lessons and then go back through the footage to select the twenty minutes of unedited video that best demonstrates how they "interact with young adolescents in a positive learning environment" (SCALE, 2019, p. 19). The video should also capture specific look-fors within each content area. EdTPA assumes that all teacher candidates have equal access to the technology that would allow them to make recordings of full lessons. Many EPPs have had to purchase new technology to allow teacher candidates to record full lessons and upload them according to edTPA standards (Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015).

Teacher candidates are told to begin recording lessons early on during their student teaching experience to normalize the camera in the back of the classroom. Before recordings

can take place, teacher candidates are instructed to collect guardian signatures for student permission. These videos are uploaded to Pearson Education and hosted by their online server, this brings both the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and Children's Online Privacy Protection Rule (COPPA) into play. When the teacher candidate's portfolio is scored, a stranger will be accessing these videos of the classroom and in turn, seeing these students. (Gilbert & Kuo, 2019).

EdTPA posts multiple privacy statements but one particular confidentiality document does state that they will release videos "in response to a subpoena", "in connection with a sale", or "to organizations who are working as contractors or agents of Pearson" (Pearson, 2017, p. 4). By uploading documents and videos to the edTPA eportfolio website teacher candidates are giving consent to these releases even if they are not aware of it.

Yet another level of concern about these videos recorded in the classroom are the fact that there are children present. Oftentimes, if parents do not return the permission sheet that teacher candidates need to get signed or opt out of their student being recorded, the student will either be placed in the back of the room, where the camera will not see them, or will not participate in the lesson. The need for recording lessons supersedes student participation and inclusion and causes a great deal of stress for teacher candidates (Cronenberg et al., 2016).

The pressure of creating the perfect twenty-minute snapshot can be overwhelming. Teacher candidates prepare hours of film in preparation of submission. In some cases, this may mean manufacturing a space in which the teacher candidate can record a whole or small group lesson. When teacher candidates enter a classroom (especially in spring semester) norms have been established by the clinical teacher. Teacher candidates are often coerced into adopting those norms and filtering edTPA through them. This includes creating separate

lesson plans specifically for edTPA when the school is using scripted or mandated curriculum (Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015). This dance between edTPA requirements and their real-life classroom experience can prove to be incredibly stressful on teacher candidates because their licensure rests on their performance (Greenblatt, 2016; Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015; Hildebrandt & Swanson, 2019; Parkes & Powell, 2015).

The Gaze of edTPA

Drawing from the work of Foucault (2008), specifically his analysis of Bentham's (1843) Panopticon, I argue that the use of video recordings within the edTPA assessment is a form of control. The Panopticon has become widely understood as a surveillance system employed in prison systems. The ever-watching eye of the Panopticon maintains power and control over individuals because it impacts individuals' behaviors.

When teacher candidates are asked to film themselves teaching, they are creating a learning space and a lesson that complies with what Pearson has deemed good teaching. It is through this compliance that the Video Camera turned Panopticon "makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power...it can reduce the number of those who exercise it, while increasing the number of those on whom it is exercised" (Foucault, 2008, p. 9). Over 40,000 edTPA portfolios were submitted last year with only about 3,100 individuals scoring the portfolios (SCALE, 2021). EdTPA's power and hegemonic definition of good teaching is controlled through the score reports created by only a few scorers. Utilizing video to capture the actions of the teacher candidates verifies that they are in compliance with Pearson's definition of "good teaching", at least during that moment of time and situates Pearson Education as the one in power (Kessler et al., 2020).

Another way edTPA controls classrooms using video, is how it acts as a mechanism of *othering*. Gillborn (2005) states that "whiteness draws much of its power from 'O*thering*'" (p. 489). This speaks to how whiteness is privileged and this is no different in the case of edTPA. Souto-Manning's (2019) research with women of color seeking state licensure through the completion of edTPA uncovered how this assessment worked to "racialize the teaching profession" (p. 1). Asking what good teaching and good teachers look like, she troubles the discourse created around edTPA. One specific way that the video recording works to *other* is by identifying students who cannot be recorded. Three participants in Souto-Manning's (2019) study "decided not to complete their edTPA portfolios, not because of its difficulty or because they could not pass it, but because they did not want to further vulnerablize the children they taught by making and submitting videos" (p. 19). Working with students who were experiencing difficult custody or immigration situations, these brave women decided not to comply with edTPA's gaze.

Because of their refusal to comply, they did not earn licensure at that time in the state of New York. Souto-Manning (2019) also points out how Pearson Education is bound by law to release videos if they were to be subpoenaed through a court order (p. 18). This study is not the only example that has highlighted the issues with video recording minors in their classrooms. The state of Illinois is very concerned with how the videos of their students are being protected, and that is why they have put a stop to edTPA's gaze in their classrooms (Murphy, 2021).

edTPA Refusals

As of June 2020, Georgia unanimously voted to remove the edTPA portfolio requirement for teacher licensure (Downey, 2020). Citing the issues of a one-size-fits-all

assessment approach during a global pandemic, they have decided to make the path towards teacher licensure less stressful and less expensive for teacher candidates. The state also recognized the unprecedented requirements that have been placed on educators throughout the pandemic. EPPs have shifted their own teaching so in turn, the assessments should not remain the same (Downey, 2020). Another state that has made changes to their requirements due to Covid-19 is Washington.

Takahama (2021) shares that Washington has postponed the use of edTPA for two years due to the pandemic. The bill initially removed edTPA permanently but was amended and passed with the edTPA temporary removal instead. Through this bill Washington also recognized that it was difficult not only for teacher candidates to find placements during the pandemic, but that it was equally as difficult for veteran teachers to adapt to new realities and provide mentorship for their teacher candidates. Removing access to the classroom for teacher candidates eliminates the opportunity for on-the-job training. While Pearson was quick to create a *teaching virtually* version of edTPA, close to none of the teacher candidates have been trained in online pedagogy.

The most recent state to make changes to their edTPA requirements is Illinois. Citing concerns with Pearson's privacy requirements and their compliance with FERPA and COPPA, Illinois will no longer allow teacher candidates to record their teaching and upload the video to a third party (Murphy, 2021). This refusal to comply with the will of Pearson is allowing EPPs to once again be the ones that determine if their teacher candidates are ready for licensure, instead of putting that decision in the hands of an unknown scorer.

Calls for changes in the use of edTPA have been made in North Carolina as well. Journell (2020) states, "in theory, the mission of edTPA is admirable; in practice, it too often

creates a situation in which preservice teachers are unable to accurately demonstrate their instructional competence due to factors outside of their control" (para. 12). This includes the entire past year and a half during which teacher candidates had to complete edTPA during a pandemic. Teacher candidates have to rely heavily on the classroom in which they were placed to provide them the right backdrop, access to lesson creation, and support for their portfolio submission. This classroom access was not always available throughout the last three semesters. The list of reasons to end the use of edTPA continues to grow and the states that have opted out, show us that there is hope for those of us who continue to experience the far-reaching negative impacts of its use.

Conclusion

Language is powerless on its own, it is the people who employ it within society that give it meaning and power through the stories we tell (Corson, 1995). This chapter has worked to outline the myriad of obstacles that have been placed in front of teacher candidates seeking to *become* teachers, as well as the control that is enacted on classroom teachers daily through mandated curriculum and testing. Identifying the ways power and control manifest themselves within the education system as well as how educators work against it will aid in my critical narrative analysis focusing on the connection between power, language, and the creation of discourse. We must first identify discourse in order to work against the way institutional discourses seep into our everyday lives (Souto-Manning, 2014), and Chapter three will elaborate on how critical narrative analysis methods work to not only identify language and discourse, but also aid in the construction of identity.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The forces that work to assimilate teachers into the field of education are numerous. In society teachers are often overlooked and underappreciated for the work that they do (Santoro, 2020). This was especially true throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. In the spring of 2020 we heard rallying cries for teacher support from families learning how to home school their children. That same fall teachers began voicing their opinions about safety concerns for themselves and their families. Their concerns were met with angry school board meetings and yelling parents. Teachers were now framed as weak or inconsiderate for questioning if it was truly safe to return to the classroom.

This whiplash of support most certainly added to the emotional exhaustion of both teachers and teacher educators. We know that the self-reporting of trauma exposure for classroom teachers was significantly higher than in administrators serving in North Carolina (Lynch, 2021). This points to the fact that teachers have shouldered the emotional burdens of teaching all while working to be a guiding, supportive adult for their students (Miller, 2021). Research has pointed towards a need for increased mental health support for our teachers as well (Soncini et al., 2021). This research highlights that despite teachers having taught during an unprecedented time in our society, they are still not being supported the way they should.

To compound the traumatic event of teaching amidst a pandemic, the newest state-level data presented in North Carolina still insists on using binary language to describe the supposed outcomes of this experience for students. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction released data showing that test scores were down across every test given for the 2020-2021 school year. Labeling with pass/fail language we see

that less than half of North Carolina students "passed" state tests for reading or math (Schlemmer, 2021). These labels legitimize the ways society constructs the pass/fail binary. Labeling students through testing legitimizes the language and power that will be used to describe them (Koro-Ljungbeg, 2015). This dichotomous language is so deeply embedded into our education system that even a global pandemic can not reframe our thinking.

This study utilizes a critical narrative analysis methodology to explore how teacher candidates *became* first-year teachers during the pandemic. In the spring of 2020 I witnessed teacher candidates navigating the unknown expectations of *becoming* a teacher. Traditionally in their final semester, teacher candidates follow strict guidelines that outline what needs to be completed in order to earn teacher licensure. This includes teaching hours and now the completion and passing of edTPA. In the spring semester of 2020 we found ourselves without precedent. As schools closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, teacher candidates were unsure of how they would fulfill their licensure requirements.

Throughout this experience it became increasingly clear just how many power dynamics and institutions of power these students were forced to navigate in order to *become* a teacher. In this study, I worked with six individuals to capture their experiences through journal entries as well as semi-structured interviews. All six of these participants were successful in becoming licensed and procuring a teaching position, meaning they were now considered first-year teachers.

However, the uncertainty of their titles and roles did not end there. These teachers now found themselves on school campuses navigating new discourses around what it

meant to be a teacher, including a new and undefined discourse of what it meant to be a teacher during a global pandemic. It is through their narrative stories that we are provided insight into the various ways they are asked to conform and *become*. I believe that by learning more about their challenges, successes, and the ways their identities were shaped, we can better prepare other future teachers for this experience of *becoming*.

In this chapter I will outline how critical narrative analysis (CNA) works to identify the ways that this binary language has been deeply embedded into the education system. This way of thinking has also crept into educator preparation programs through the adoption of the teacher performance assessment (edTPA). This adoption is an example of how discourse is the embodiment of "social conditions" (Fairclough, 2021, p. 20). The way that power, language, and society work together is through the creation of a discourse (Fairclough, 2001). Working to uncover the ways that discourse seeps into our every-day lives, I will draw from the work of Souto-Manning (2014) while guided by the CNA framework created by Langdridge (2007). I will begin by detailing my methodological approach and how CNA aligns with the aims of this study examining how teacher candidates worked to *become* teachers during a global pandemic. Next, I will provide context and background for this study along with an overview of recruitment and the participants. Lastly, I will expound upon the technical aspects of my interview protocol and IRB determination.

Role of Researcher and Methodological Approach

Before I introduce my methodology, I purposely acknowledge my role in this work as a white woman and how qualitative research was established within a settler colonial and racist framework. Paris and Winn (2014) share:

The history of qualitative and ethnographic work seeking, at worst, to

pathologize, exoticize, objectify, and name as deficient communities of color and

other marginalized populations in the United States and beyond, and at best, to

take and gain through research but not to give back, stretches back across the 19th

century and forward to the current day (p. xvi).

Early ethnographic research worked to *other* individuals whose cultures were considered *different* from the dominant culture. Racism has flourished in research spaces because of the dichotomy between the *researcher* and *object(s) of research*. Sium and Ritskes (2013) remind us that there is no such thing as *objectivity* in research for "it has been White settlers who have been in the position of power to wield it [objectivity] with impunity" (p. IV). Similar to the ways that early explorers claimed to have *found* the new world, researchers have reported findings within data that was not their own. This is why I will use the term *becomings* instead of findings throughout this study.

I also recognize that research is a reflection of both our society and our social structures so I attend to Brayboy's (2006) work stating that the first tenet of TribalCrit is recognizing that "Colonization is endemic to society" (p. 429). Because of the sordid history of qualitative research, it is important for me to recognize my place as a white woman within my research. My family ancestry traces back to European descent. My ancestors sought their new start on stolen land sometime in the 1800s; land that had been stewarded by indigenous people since time immemorial. The whiteness that was brought with them to this place and speaking the German language afforded them great privilege as they were encultured into the society of the times, assuredly embracing their honorary whiteness. It is because of this family history that I am able to complete this work. My

family's whiteness allowed both of my parents to become college graduates and in turn, adopt the middle-class white folks' expectation for their child to also earn a college degree. I recognize the ways in which others have not been afforded these same opportunities.

The recognition of the researchers' positionality is not only encouraged in CNA work, it is built into the framework for analysis. CNA "requires a personal and professional commitment to theory, method, and topic if the full power is to be realized" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 136). It is my commitment to critical theory, CNA, and teacher education that drives this study. It is also paramount to recognize that research is not done in a vacuum for "we always start in the middle of things" (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2018, p. 469). Within this study I also work to recognize that "language is always already contaminated by meaning" (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014, p. 716). Souto-Manning (2014) also recognizes this *contamination* of language through her use of CNA, identifying how to approach "both every day stories and institutional discourses simultaneously" throughout her analysis (p. 177). Driven by the work of positive social change, I employ Langdridge's (2007) framework for CNA in my study exploring the experiences of teacher candidates experiencing both student teaching and first-year teaching during a global pandemic.

I have chosen critical narrative analysis as my methodology because it encourages the researcher to destabilize and critically analyze the narratives presented throughout the data analysis process. CNA allows me to explore the participants' narratives without dissecting or critiquing their experiences like the use of a traditional discourse analysis would encourage. While I am interested in the ways that language works, I want to focus

on the adoption of such language within the narratives rather than purport to understand the meaning of the use of language at the time of data collection.

Lately, I echo Kuntz's (2015) recognition that "whether we reinscribe the normalizing process of our present or challenge the legitimacy of common-sensical inquiry, methodological work is inevitably political" (p. 12). For it is impossible to do any research that critiques in the name of social change without bringing your beliefs and entire being along for the journey. For this is what methodological work is, an exploration of ourselves, the unknown and what is yet to be. I will now elaborate on the stages of analysis in CNA.

Stages of Analysis In CNA
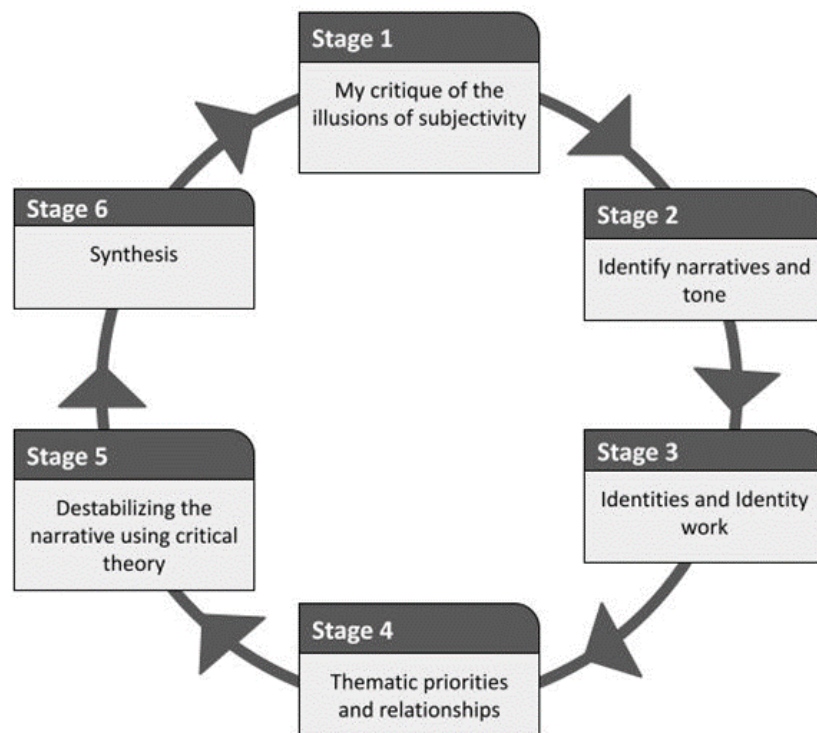
Note. Adapted from Langdridge (2007) for this study (p. 134)

Stage 1: Illusions of Subjectivity

The first stage of CNA analysis allows for the researcher to identify why and how they are engaged with the project. Establishing themselves as part of the research, the researcher can better highlight the deep connections between the self and the social worlds. Oftentimes this connection between the self and society can be identified as a discourse. Gee (2014) identifies a discourse as "ways of displaying membership in a particular social group or social network" (p. 83). It is through adopting these discourses that we find places of belonging or at the same time can feel alienated. This research project works to identify the strong power of multiple discourses within educator preparation programs and the education system in general.

It is because of my own reflection on how these discourses have shaped my own life that I developed this project. Too often I was told I was *too loud* or that I needed to *follow the rules* as a female teacher candidate. This experience still shapes the way I view the work of EPPs and is driving my exploration of how individuals internalize these narratives and make them part of their own stories. I recognize that even while following a prescribed framework for analysis I still view any data gathered through my own experiences. I am not neutral in this endeavor, just as no researcher is ever completely neutral, but I embrace this work by using critical theory as a lens for my methodology.

Stage 2: Identifying Narratives

When working with the texts for this project, I worked to identify broad master narratives along with individual stories from the participants. This was not done to extract meaning but rather to compare the experiences and the stories told. We process our experiences by sharing them with others in the form of stories (Souto-Manning, 2014).

These stories are also "how we make sense of what we know, what we feel and experience in the world in which we live" (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 162). Throughout this stage of analysis, the researcher also identifies *how* the stories are told, identifying the tone of voice used in the interviews.

I followed Langdridge's (2007) instructions regarding this stage in the CNA analysis: "the claim is not to have grasped some hidden 'truth' about the person…but rather to offer an alternative perspective on the phenomenon and specifically an alternative grounded in broader sociocultural discourse" (p. 137). It is in this stage that I can highlight the ways that the structure of education creates a framework of discourse including: the creation of the binary of pass/fail and education's reliance on standardized testing. Specifically, I will work to identify potential themes within the larger narratives and individual stories of my participants that mirror the discourses that have already been established within the education system. These participants may also provide insight into how they have internalized their transitions between teacher candidates and first-year teachers. I will also continue to be open to new emerging themes. Throughout the analysis stage I recognize that I will bring my personal opinions and strong belief in teacher advocacy. The researcher is always entangled with/in the research and data for this can not be separated while identifying narratives and I will most certainly recognize narratives that I am most familiar with while potentially leaving unfamiliar narratives uncovered.

Stage 3: Identities and Identity Work

While stage 2 and 3 have been separated in the analysis process it is important to note that they are closely aligned. By leveraging CNA for this project I am recognizing

that "our identities are constructed narratively through the stories we tell" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 138). The stories that the participants choose to tell directly speak to who they are and how they see themselves with/in the discourses they have been apprenticed into (Gee, 2014; Souto-Manning, 2014). This stage will rely heavily on recognizing how the teacher candidates matriculated into *becoming* a first-year teacher.

It is also in this stage that I embrace the fact that when "individuals make sense of their experiences through narratives, they bring together the micro (personal) and the macro (social or institutional) situations in place (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 163). This combination of the micro and macro narratives is unique to CNA as it works to highlight how individuals exist between these forces to create not only their own identities but also their own narratives of who they are and how they interact with the discourses they are embedded with/in.

Stage 4: Thematic Priorities and Relationships

Unlike other qualitative methodologies, CNA examines broad patterns and themes with/in the texts in order to retain the larger narratives that have been articulated by participants (Langdridge, 2007). Texts are not to be broken down to levels that allow for the coding of "every unit of meaning" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 138). It is here where I will also draw from St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) and Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2018) in regard to their work around data, what counts as data, and how it is analyzed. Recognizing that these texts are not just data waiting for me to extract meaning from them, I will focus on and privilege the words of the participants as I explore the ways they work with/in and against dominant discourses in our society. Returning to the texts will be essential in this

stage of analysis as the narratives will be shifting and changing in the reading and re-reading of these texts as I work to identify themes and individual stories.

Stage 5: Destabilizing the Narrative

In order to destabilize the narrative Langdridge (2007) calls on the researcher to interrogate the warning: "this stage is explicitly political and requires the researcher to engage with critical social theories" (p. 139). The texts of the participants will undergo a critique with critical theory in order to work against institutional discourses. It is also where this framework allows me to think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). I will be drawing from the work of critical theorists in educational research to destabilize the narratives of my subjects that always exist within multiple political contexts. Another potential way to destabilize the narrative is to highlight how capitalism works closely with/in education and educational data gathering in order to more easily label our children and turn a profit for companies like Pearson Education.

Stage 6: A Critical Synthesis

The final stage in this analysis work will be to synthesize the ways the narratives and stories have presented themselves. This will take place both in chapter five and my defense of this work. It is key here to privilege the voice of the participant (Langdridge, 2007) by retaining original quotes and recognizing tone and context of their shared stories. The synthesis will occur in written form within my dissertation but will also be shared at my defense by including original audio samplings in order to provide the tone for some of the more poignant moments in the interviews.

Design Rationale and Data

The design for this study was born from my intention to study the teacher performance assessment's (edTPA) impact on student teachers in the spring of 2020. Little did I realize that there would be a world-altering event during that semester when I began my research. Because of the global Covid-19 pandemic, my research shifted to a more robust project seeking to understand how these teacher candidates *became* teachers during this difficult time in history. The methods for data collection were varied with most of the data being collected through semi-structured interview protocol utilizing Zoom over the course of a year (see appendix A). I was also able to include the participants journal reflections submitted to me via Google Forms per the IRB exempt distinction received for this study. The narrative data that I collected spans from February of 2020 until March of 2021 for all participants (see Table 1). I also was able to collect final reflections from four of the participants in June of 2021 after they had completed their first year of teaching. It is with this data that I highlight the major narratives at work in their lives throughout this time and how institutional discourses are recycled in the stories they tell (Souto-Manning, 2014).

Table 1

	Student Teaching Journal Entries (Feb./March, 2020)	Student Teaching Interview (March, 2020)	First-Year Teaching Interview (March, 2021)	First-Year Teaching Check-In (June, 2021)
Elizabeth	X	X	X	
Serenity	X		X	X
Natalie	X	X	X	X
Jordy	X	X	X	
Becky	X	X	X	X
Jessica	X	X	X	X

Note: Table timeline of data gathered from proposed participants.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide my study work to examine how teacher candidates, turned first-year teachers, describe their experiences within the Covid-19 pandemic. These questions will aid in the analysis of the narratives collected from the participants over the course of several months. By leveraging the CNA framework outlined in this chapter I have developed a robust analysis that exposes how the participants navigated these difficult times in education. The questions that guide this study are as follows:

1. What role does edTPA play in the process of *becoming* a teacher?

2. How much autonomy do teacher candidates have in their process of *becoming* a teacher in the era of edTPA?

3. How did the Covid-19 global pandemic complicate the process of *becoming* a teacher?

Context of Study

The participants for this study are 2020 graduates from Private Rural University (PRU). PRU is a predominantly white institution (PWI) with 125 students in their education preparation program (EPP). Of the 125 students reported in the 2019 EPP Bachelor Performance Report submitted to NCDPI reports that 91.2% of PRU's EPP identifies as white, with 3 students identifying as African American, 5 as Hispanic/Latino and 1 student identified as Asian. At the time of reporting, 114 of the students identify as white in this education preparation program. PRU is located in a rural county that lies adjacent to the largest county in North Carolina. The urban sprawl is quickly heading towards this area and housing prices are increasing. The commute to research campuses

and downtown areas are becoming easier with newly constructed highways and toll roads. The PRU teacher education program funnels a majority of their students directly into Home county as licensed teachers. The population of Home County is changing right along with the rest of the United States.

As of 2019, the US Census Bureau, estimated the population in Home County was 71.3% white, 21.9% Black, with Hispanic or Latino making up roughly 13.4% of the population (2019). However, what is interesting to note is that the makeup of Home County's public schools reports a different population than the county as a whole. White students make up only 42.17% of Home county's school population with 25.21% Black students, 24.19% Hispanic students, 6.77% multi-racial students, .71% Native American students, .69% Asian students, and .25% Pacific Islander students (Home County Schools, 2021). This signals that the next generation of Home County residents will look dramatically different than the roughly 70% white population that this county currently reports.

PRU should be intentional in preparing future teachers for work in this area using field placements and student teaching experiences. Not to mention that there should be dedicated classes that discuss culturally responsive teaching, race, class, and gender equity issues throughout their curriculum. However, there are not as many opportunities for these topics to be discussed as there should be. This context provides a small look at the relationship between PRU and its surrounding school system.

While many graduates choose to take jobs in Home County, only three of my sample group currently teach there. All six of these individuals completed their first full year teaching during the Covid-19 pandemic. The first year as a teacher is difficult for

anyone but these teachers have endured this experience amidst a global pandemic. Needless to say, their dreams of setting up a traditional classroom and welcoming their students into the room with open arms did not take place. Many of the teachers experienced chaos as their year began. Hotspots and computers were quickly being handed out to students in both middle school and elementary schools. One participant had to make her own YouTube channel for students to watch on their parents' phones because they had no internet access. While the term "group" can certainly be used to describe this assemblage of people, they did not share many experiences during their first year other than the constant battle with uncertainty.

This transitional time is one where much learning takes place not only about *how* to be a teacher but also *why* teachers do what they do. Much time is carved out in Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) for students to observe veteran teachers. This process can be misleading because students may leave these experiences feeling that they are ready to teach. They see "a lot about what teachers do but almost nothing about why they do it" (Labaree, 2016, p. 232). The understanding of *why* comes with full-time teaching experience. However, at PRU and many other EPPs, the full-time teacher experiences do not happen until the end of coursework (7 semesters into the program).

The participants in this study were two months away from graduating when the Covid-19 global pandemic was acknowledged in the United States. All of them were in the middle of their student teaching experience and some were just about to begin teaching full days independently. One may ask why in March a student-teacher would only just be beginning their full-time teaching days. The answer to that question is the Teacher Performance Assessment, more commonly known as edTPA.

EdTPA is a portfolio assessment that must be passed to become a fully-licensed teacher in the State of North Carolina (Pearson, 2019, para. 2). This spring of 2020 cohort was the second semester of teacher candidates who were required by state law to pass edTPA in order to become licensed. Most of the participants in this study had submitted their portfolios before their schools were closed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, but one individual had not. Jordy (all names used are pseudonyms) had not yet submitted edTPA but had luckily video recorded his lessons before he lost access to his classroom and students. Besides losing out on student teaching and not having a graduation, Becky learned that she had failed edTPA and was forced to redo sections of her portfolio while recovering from gallbladder surgery - all while learning how to teach remotely from her bedroom. Only these individuals can describe what it means to *become* a teacher during a global pandemic.

Participants & IRB Distinction

To qualify for this study, the participants must be first-year teachers in a K-12 school district and have completed edTPA in the spring of 2020. The participants in this study have agreed to discuss their experiences as student teachers as well. This provides a more robust understanding of what it was like to *become* a teacher during this time. I gained access to the participants while they were teacher candidates at PRU. I submitted an IRB proposal to Appalachian State University and received an exempt distinction for this study. In turn, PRU acknowledged my Appalachian State exempt distinction. This acknowledgement from PRU of the study's IRB determination did not prove to be necessary because the participants graduated from PRU prior to the implementation of this study. Appalachian State's IRB determination provided me the opportunity to work

with the teacher candidates and in turn, we continued our relationships as they all progressed to first-year teachers.

Implications and Significance

When examining the concept of *becoming* a teacher (Greene, 2007), I am open to learning how this process works to indoctrinate future teachers into the fold by potentially using powerful discourses that have possibly become a part of these first-year teachers' lives. Greene (1987) identifies these powerful tools of assimilation as: "the matrix of a culture, its prejudgments, and its symbol systems" (p. 444). This matrix of culture was ever-shifting throughout the Covid-19 pandemic as these beginning teachers worked to construct their narratives of what it meant to be a teacher during this difficult time.

The potential implications for this work are many as this study seeks to understand and capture multiple narratives from the participants. Each one of their stories tells us about a lived reality for these individuals. It is important to "identify and demystify" how the social constructions of their realities impacted their work as teacher candidates and first-year teachers (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 167). Once we identify the ways multiple discourses present as power we are "establishing a setting for them to be challenged and changed" (Souto-Manning, 2014, p. 167). From capturing the impacts of edTPA upon the teacher candidates to experiencing some of their first-year teaching moments through their eyes allows us to explore the participants' world. There are lessons to be learned not only by educator preparation programs but also school districts provide support for beginning teachers and their work. It is most important that we stay

open to new beginnings and new understandings of what it means to *become* a teacher for

if you identify as a teacher, you are never done learning.

Chapter 4: *Becomings*

The title of this chapter was purposefully selected recognizing that while the words captured within this chapter may be here for the time being, these participants are still *becoming*. For a moment in time, six first-year teachers entrusted me to share their experiences about learning and teaching during a global pandemic. I do not work under the illusion that the data captured during this moment in time is static or representative of many experiences but rather only those of the participants.

By allowing us a glimpse into their personal narratives, participants constructed their own identities through what was shared, and how they chose to share them (Souto-Manning, 2014). This chapter will also work to recognize the power of discourse and language as we explore these narratives (Fairclough, 2021). The work of discourse and ideology are deeply embedded in our participants' *becomings* as we see first-year teachers adhere to and work against institutional discourses. Every narrative is deeply embedded in a history of discourse that has been created to impart a social order (Fairclough, 2021; Mckenna, 2004).

Adhering to the stages of Critical Narrative Analysis (Emerson & Frosh, 2009; Langdridge, 2007) I begin this chapter with a brief overview of the author's inability to approach this work as a neutral being. I will identify the beliefs and ideologies that I hold that have already impacted my data collection and will most certainly influence the ways in which I present the following *becomings*. Next, I will introduce the reader to my participants. These vignettes will provide a brief introduction to the participants' experiences and expose you to their voices. Following the participant introductions, I will

present themes that I identified within the participants data as they align with my research questions:

1. What role does edTPA play in the process of *becoming* a teacher?

2. How much autonomy do teacher candidates have in their process of *becoming* a teacher in the era of edTPA?

3. How did the Covid-19 global pandemic complicate the process of *becoming* a teacher?

Lastly, I will conclude the chapter by briefly summarizing my experiences with the participants and reflect on how their *becomings* may actually provide us some hope for the future of education.

Illusions of Subjectivity

Gee (2014) intently states that "Discourses ensure that their members a) get apprenticed…as to keep them 'in line'" (p. 84). This statement connects deeply to my being. Having grown up playing "teacher" at a young age and seeing first-hand the dedication needed to be a quality educator, I am unapologetically a teacher advocate. The theoretical work and analysis done in this chapter is employed to raise awareness of the ways in which teachers have been deprofessionalized (de Saxe et al., 2020) and blamed for deeply embedded institutional and social issues in America (de Saxe et al., 2020; Kumashiro, 2012) that persist today. These issues include but are not limited to sexism, racism, and the underfunding of schools. Teachers work in the face of these issues every day to make the future a better place.

The narratives shared in this chapter are evidence of the way that the institution of public schooling continually attempts to keep teachers *in line*. With teacher resignations

at an all-time high and job satisfaction at an all-time low (Merrimack College, 2022) combined with the stress and burnout caused by the pandemic (Berger, 2022; Lynch, 2021) the United States is faced with the opportunity to learn from these shifts in the teacher workforce and reimagine what it means to *become* a teacher. The participants in this study were apprenticed into their work as teachers through their Educator Preparation Program. It is evident that they feel that there is a right and wrong way to teach, even during a time of norm shifting. They have all adhered to the institutional discourses and adopted coded language about testing scores and expected behaviors in the classroom. In one sense the adoption of language around testing and student behavior does signal that they are indeed *becoming* teachers.

Participant Introductions

The six participants of this project are currently beginning teachers in North Carolina. I met these individuals during their student teaching experience in Spring of 2020 when their experience was cut short due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Some of them stopped their student teaching altogether while others transitioned to online learning. Upon graduating and earning a passing score on their edTPA assessment, all six of these teachers found jobs and embarked on their first year of teaching during a global pandemic. Two of the six are elementary teachers who teach in Home County where their alma mater resides. These participant vignettes serve as a window into their experiences during their first-year teaching and also as the third stage of CNA, recognizing identity formation. Below I prioritize the participants' own words expressing their experiences with *becoming* a teacher.

Participants - Elementary Teachers

Serenity (pseudonym) and Natalie (pseudonym) are first-year elementary teachers teaching second and third grade in Home County. While they are in the same county, their experiences have been dramatically different. Within the same county, teachers receive drastically different resources and support. Having observed student teachers in this county, one elementary teacher may have a set of laptops, a smartboard, and tablets for one-to-one access, while another school only miles away has one device for every two students. When I asked about the discrepancy between schools and access to technology, the response was that the parent teacher groups are responsible for the funding. These groups facilitate fundraising activities and collect donations from local businesses (which are often owned by school parents) and the families that attend the school. Technology access is only one small example of the inequalities across this district's campuses.

Serenity - First Year Teaching Online. Serenity was born and raised in Home County and had family ties to the school where she is currently teaching. Upon starting the school year all teachers and students were virtual with plans to return to face-to-face instruction later in the year. However, Serenity was then told that she would be a virtual teacher for the entire school year:

So there's five third grade teachers, I guess, and two of us - there's one other third grade teacher and I've been virtual all year, but of course everybody was virtual at the beginning. From there it was decided, so honestly I don't really mind because I feel like it might be better to just do one thing all year. I don't know. But yeah…I didn't volunteer - but I don't mind it. It's been very different, even if I was teaching face to face that will be way different than what I was doing in my

student teaching. (Interview, March 12, 2021)

Serenity tried to remain positive about her situation but expressed sadness about her inability to form in-person relationships with students while they are working virtually. With over six different roster changes, there were only five students who remained in Serenity's class the entire year. Families had the choice to switch between virtual and in-person learning. This has left Serenity and the other online teachers wondering who will show up in their virtual classroom almost every day.

Serenity indicated the importance of building meaningful relationships with her students and has taken great care in finding spaces online for her students to share things with her in order to build relationships:

Especially at home, they all want to show me their baby sister and their puppy and the Legos they just built and 'look at this picture I just drew' and 'do you want to see me do a handstand?' I'm trying really hard to actively do that [build relationships]. (Interview, March 12, 2021)

Serenity also shares that her first year was "enormously stressful and not what I signed up for" (Serenity, personal interview, March 12, 2021). Serenity recognized the difficulties of first-year teaching online because she had hoped to be making these connections with her students in-person but rather was forced to teach alone in her classroom in the school building she was hoping to welcome students into on the first day of school.

Natalie - Switched Grades Mid-Year. Natalie teaches only a few miles away from Serenity but had a very different experience as a first-year teacher. When school began in August, Natalie was teaching virtually but three out of her 15 students did not have internet access:

> I was putting together paper packets of things that we were doing with full instructions for their parents to read and examples and lots of things like that to send home. Some of that was received well and some of it was not received well but that's what we did, and then in the middle of September, we came back [in person]. (Interview, March 17, 2021)

Natalie navigated the rest of her first semester teaching the best that she could. Because of her passion for teaching with research-based instructional strategies that included hands-on and tactile learning, Natalie grew frustrated with the pandemic and the restrictions that it placed on the way she could teach her students:

> And then we come to a world where none of that is possible and where we can't give them things to touch and feel and do and where we can't let them work in groups and we can't be together and we can't do tactile learning. We can't do anything that we've all been told, is the best way to do it. (Natalie, personal interview, March 17, 2021)

She recognizes that this challenge is on top of the fact that she is still "trying to figure out everything else, at the same time trying to figure out how to be a teacher - just baseline" (Natalie, personal interview, March 17, 2021). Natalie cares so deeply about her role as a teacher she agreed to switch classes and grades after her principal asked her to take on a different grade level. In fact, because Natalie was succeeding as a teacher with her 2nd

grade class, she was asked to move to a 3rd grade class that had a student with some major behavioral issues, evidence of the ways teachers are expected to continue to adapt and comply. She reflected on the beginning of her relationship with this student in our interview:

> He [the student] came to me, he was great for a while and then we started having some anger problems and that came with a little bit of - kind of say this nicely - violence. And he tried to come at me and attack me and he got hold of some scissors one day… I don't know how to do that, I didn't have that in my teaching experience. They don't really tell you what to do when someone grabs scissors and starts running at you with them. (Natalie, personal interview, March 17, 2021)

Natalie later said "I don't even mind that he tries to hurt me. I just feel like it's such a cry for help that that's all he knows how to do" (March 17, 2021).

It was clearly unethical that an administrator would choose to put a first-year teacher in this situation without fully-informing her beforehand. The administration provided Natalie with little to no information about her new class and students. She shares "I was not as prepared as I could have been [for the new class] in the beginning, because I don't think they wanted to scare me away" (Natalie, personal interview, March 17, 2021). This challenging student compounded Natalie's stress of teaching in the pandemic all while protecting herself from potential bodily harm.

Participants - Middle School Teachers

Four middle school teachers chose to participate in this study. Jessica was teaching math and science, Becky (pseudonym) band and chorus, Jordy (pseudonym) and Elizabeth (pseudonym) taught history and social studies. These four teachers are all in

different counties and again their experiences vary.

Jessica - Teaching the Whole Child. Jessica teaches 6th grade math and science in a county where she and her fellow teachers were expected to reach an unprecedented nine points of growth for every student on the end of year test:

> I think yeah it's [the nine points is] the average, the average, however, at least at this school from what I've spoken with my coworker, the average that they grow is about four on a normal year. And we're shooting for nine this year. (Jessica, interview, March 9, 2021)

While Jessica is frustrated with this seemingly unattainable goal set for her by her new superintendent. Because this is 6th grade, there are more testing requirements than in elementary school. This seems to be a driving force for Jessica's work with her students as it is the message she has received from administration. Despite the fact that she has to move faster than her students are prepared for, she has taken every opportunity to provide them help when possible:

> We're about a month and a half behind on our curriculum and we're, to the point where I literally had to have a conversation with my students last week, where I said 'guys I'm sorry I like I'm sorry, whether you get it or not, we have to move forward', because we had to take check-in three last week. They didn't know a single standard on that check in, a single one. And I felt so horrible because it's either we meet the student where they are or we prepare for a test that those are the only options. (Interview, March 9, 2021)

Jessica is torn between her need to do what she was trained to do - meet students where they are and personalize their learning - and make sure they score well on a test. This

would not be as stressful had the mandate from the top not put the extra pressure on the test scores.

The test scores at the end of the year are going to appear trivial to some students as Jessica shares that some of her students have lost family members to Covid-19 and also how she views her work at balancing teaching curriculum as well as creating a culture of care in her classroom:

> Two weeks ago I had another student who lost a family member and so it's just - you need to be aware of that, you know, like - school isn't everything - we're teaching the whole child here, and so a word that I really like to use for my responsibilities is I want to teach the child in an integral way just that integral type of learning where something I always said at the beginning of the year was 'I don't care if you walk out of my room a better scientist or mathematician I want you to walk out of here a better human all around'. (Jessica, interview, March 9, 2021)

There is honesty in everything Jessica does in her classroom. She took time at the beginning of the year when they were finally back together in the classroom to focus on social emotional learning (SEL) instead of jumping into the curriculum like other teachers chose to do.

> Some other teachers on the hall wanted to go straight to the material, and I mean, I understand that as well, but it was my first year teaching - I need to know these kids - I need to know their parents. (Jessica, interview, March 9, 2021)

Jessica did what she felt best for her students and it paid off because at the end of their first few weeks together in the classroom she had a majority of her parents signed up for

her email contact list. By forming relationships with the students, the parents bought into her classroom and the social emotional work she was doing as well. Contacting parents is never an easy thing to do for first year teachers but she demonstrated the importance of clear communication - especially during this difficult year.

Becky - Teaching 12 Classes. Becky's first year teaching began with her learning how to teach band and chorus completely virtually. These two classes were specifically impacted by Covid-19 as there were multiple recommendations to not sing in a group and also not to play instruments. Becky is not only starting her career, she is also restarting these programs at her school:

> So I am the band and chorus teacher at [school] and I teach obviously grades six through eight. And this is a title one school, so you can figure out the demographics and all that sort of stuff just from that so and actually I am restarting the music program here, because they have not had a steady teacher here in several years, so I am basically starting from scratch with my job for both band and chorus. (Becky, Interview, March 17, 2021)

This means Becky is teaching 12 different classes this year. She has six sections of Chorus and six sections of Band depending on the day's schedule. The whole first-year of Becky's career she did not teach one traditional band lesson or hold one practice for choir. There was no singing and the students never got their own instruments. Becky shares:

> March 29th was the first time I ever had students come into my classroom. And like I hadn't even set up my classroom… the fact that it was March 29th when my students stepped foot in my classroom is crazy. We did not play instruments or

sing with my core students. So literally that was just kind of coming up with

different things to work on with my kids. So I was still teaching on the computer

because we still had virtual students, and so I think my biggest class in the room

was 19 students and my smallest was four. (Interview, June 8, 2021)

Becky went on to explain that after her students returned to her classroom they had spring

break for a week. Returning to the classroom again on April 12th, she only had four

weeks until their entire schedule changed again and testing began.

Being an electives teacher is never easy in a middle school as teachers are pulled

out for testing and schedules are constantly changing. Again, Becky is attempting to

revive an entire band and choral program at this school but did not even have an

opportunity to pass out instruments this year. Because of Covid-19 and scheduling, she

also had some students who did not choose to be in band or choir for their elective. Not

only is she going to be continuing her work with band and choir, she will be coaching

volleyball as well. She made note that the coaching is "for the extra money" as she is not

paid more despite having 12 different classes to teach throughout the year (Becky,

Interview, June 8, 2021).

Jordy - Moving Away from PowerPoint. Jordy attended PRU as a secondary

history major but was not able to find a job during the summer of 2020. Finally, he

accepted a position at the middle school level a week before school started. Transitioning

to middle grades after experiencing student teaching in a high school proved to be

difficult. A few months into the school year Jordy spoke to his assistant principal about

the instructional strategies he was using.

He [the assistant principal] said 'hey you know - you're lecturing too long', like because they gave us a time period of 20 minutes to lecture and then the rest of the time for the kids to go out and do their thing. (Jordy, Interview, March 17, 2021)

Jordy has a passion for making connections with his students and since he moved away from his PowerPoint lectures, he has added a lot of projects into his curriculum that is giving students choices.

It's giving them an opportunity, like 'show me your culture' and that's actually the first assignment or project that I gave them - to make a postcard from wherever they want around the world outside of the United States…I had so many of my Hispanic students do Mexico. One did his on Guatemala and then my one Asian student she did one on Thailand. (Jordy, Interview, March 17, 2021)

Navigating a new grade level, content area, and teaching online was a lot for Jordy to handle his first year teaching but add in working with parents for the first time:

For me it's like reaching out to parents, of course, I was hired late, there was no open house, so it was even more difficult...yes, we have a thing called talking points where we can just shoot them a text. But even that's terrifying, maybe it's just me, but that's terrifying for me shooting an email. I'm playing the worst situation in my mind. (Jordy, Interview, March 17, 2021)

Luckily, Jordy found support in his coworkers and felt like he could go to them for advice. He has taken a lot of the advice from his principal to heart as well:

My principal [name] says: 'come from a place of humility.' Um, so when I started working on like yeah you know - 'I know my history!' I'm gonna starstruck each

85

kid with my knowledge, because that's what I wanted when I was younger and

that's where I'm going at is - that's what you wanted when you were younger...

(Jordy, Interview, March 17, 2021)

Jordy realized that what he wanted as a young student (as a self-described history nerd) is

not what his students are necessarily looking for in a teacher, especially as Jordy and

these students navigate what it is like to learn together during a pandemic.

Elizabeth - Experiencing Challenges Outside the Pandemic. Elizabeth teaches

social studies in Home county at a local middle school. She has experienced multiple

schedule changes and changes in modes of teaching but she shared that the most

challenging aspect of her year has been dealing with a coworker:

[The coworker situation] has been very stressful and made this whole situation a

lot more crazy than it already was. I haven't really had any issues as far as

teaching face to face and remote I feel very comfortable with technology so that's

probably why…But I would say, a teammate situation has been most difficult

because she has not been a team player at all so we've kind of had to pull up even

more slack than we already have. (Elizabeth, Interview, March 17, 2021)

Within this challenge, Elizabeth expressed how homeroom teachers have been "thrown to

the wolves and we are constantly being given more and more tasks that we don't even

have time for already…" (Elizabeth, Interview, March 17, 2021). This includes covering

for other teachers when they are absent and increased communication with parents.

She continues to share that their department has experienced some turnover

during this year including the loss of her mentor teacher:

Oh, just to make matters crazier, my teacher on my team, who was also my mentor teacher - today's her last day and she's leaving so now I'm getting a new mentor teacher near the end of the year. And we're down in LA (language arts) teachers now M is going to be joining the other eighth grade LA teachers, for the rest of the year, until we find someone. If we find someone so like I said it's been a crazy year of changes... (Elizabeth, Interview, March 17, 2021)

These changes have included trying to figure out how to fit 24 desks into her classroom while still complying with Covid-19 mandates from her county. Elizabeth shares how she was greeted the first week on campus after she had been denied a request to teach from home because of health concerns:

Yeah, and I remember my first week when I was in the building. I'm with the instructional coach at the school. She came up to me, she goes: 'you know you don't have to tell me if you don't want, but you know why, why do you have an accommodation?' And I explained to her that I have an autoimmune condition and she said she basically asked me in a very respectful way: 'Why would you even go into teaching because, even without Covid-19 wouldn't that be a concern for you like, would you just come to school every day with a mask on or?'...but I said, you know I'm going to do my best and I'm going to follow the guidelines, and all I can do is hope and pray that nothing happens to me, I mean I don't I don't know how else to respond to that. (Elizabeth, Interview, March 17, 2021)

The only accommodation that she was provided was an extra plastic sneeze guard in her classroom for her to sit behind when she had students in the room. This was not a very welcoming way to greet a first-year teacher on their campus.

Now that you have been introduced to the participants in this project, I will elaborate on the *becomings* identified through my interviews with these dedicated individuals. The following section will expand upon identified themes that speak to the experiences of these student teachers transitioning to first-year teachers.

Becomings

The following data was collected over the course of a year and a half. When this study began, the term Covid-19 had not yet become known in every household around the globe. In February of 2020 these participants were on their way towards *becoming* teachers through the completion of their student teaching semester. Their concerns about completing their Teacher Performance Assessments (edTPA) in order to earn their licensure were the most pressing things on their minds. Quickly, their concerns shifted to the global pandemic, finding jobs during the upheaval of education as we know it, and eventually their first year of teaching.

Meeting with these participants during their transitions from student teachers to first-year teachers provided rich narratives about their experiences. Again, drawing from the concept of *becoming,* we see how these individuals continued to learn and to grow throughout our interviews together. The connection between student teaching and first-year teaching is monumental because student teaching provides the first experience of being a full-time teacher. I can still remember the moment I was first left alone in a classroom with students and I was in charge. Looking up, I saw my clinical teacher smile as she left the room, gave a small wave and let me take charge. I thought to myself, "what freedom and at the same time, responsibility!" This transitional moment did not occur for

some participants of this study. Because they were so focused on edTPA, these students did not get to experience any full-time teaching responsibilities.

Despite their lack of experience, all of these individuals still chose to go into full-time teaching once they passed edTPA. This choice was not necessarily made out of the goodness of their hearts. They were left with an impossible decision: become a first-year teacher during a global pandemic or search elsewhere for a job with an education degree. Once fully licensed by the state of North Carolina and in turn, Pearson Education, these individuals dove head-first into the 2020-2021 school year. The twists and turns along with unrealistic expectations set by administrators and districts caused them great distress.

It is through the following sections that you will experience both their student teaching and first-year teaching with them. You will hear first-hand accounts detailing the stress and anxiety caused by edTPA as well as how every one of these participants pressed on despite playing a role in perhaps the most chaotic school year in the history of formal education in the United States. This section serves as my fourth stage in the CNA process as I work to identify major themes with/in the participants' stories and privilege their words.

The next section outlines themes focused on how the participants experienced edTPA and the second section will highlight major themes throughout their first-year teaching experiences as we explore their *becomings*.

Experiencing edTPA as Student Teachers

The *becomings* identified within this section have been broken down by major themes. These themes include: stress induced by edTPA, edTPA as inauthentic or

detrimental to classroom students, and the inconsistency in preparation or assistance given to student teachers by EPP faculty. I begin by exploring the ways in which the participants in this study experienced stress caused by completing edTPA.

Stress Induced by edTPA - "Stress and work breathing down my neck every day." The theme of stress runs deeply through my participant's journal entries and interviews. Every one of them expressed and experienced the stress caused by edTPA in different ways. I have also constructed a sub-theme demonstrating how these student teachers wondered out loud if they even want to become teachers after completing this mandatory assessment.

I begin this section with Becky candidly documenting in her journal her concerns about her mental health regarding her experiences with edTPA:

> edTPA has really affected me in a negative manner this week. Even though I am ahead of the game and only have Task 3 left to do, I had a mental breakdown this week due to the stress of edTPA…I am excited to almost be done with edTPA because it has caused nothing but confusion, frustration, stress, and tears…Overall, I'm surviving. Not necessarily thriving, but I am surviving, and that's all that matters at this point. (Journal entry, February 21, 2020)

Becky was not the only participant to express this deep of anguish in her journals. Serenity also shared how the untimed nature of this standardized test known as edTPA became all-consuming:

> It [edTPA] also takes up a lot of mental space. I spend so much time thinking about it, I worry that I haven't thought through my lessons well enough. It is just really stressful to know that this project is so important. Particularly because I

have already finished all of my other exams. I was really careful to finish all of

the Pearson tests before my senior year, so that I could really focus on practicum

and student teaching, but now I have to worry about edTPA anyway. It also is

frustrating because it feels like such a small snapshot of my teaching, so I wonder

how accurate it will be. (Journal entry, February 18, 2020)

Serenity is concerned about the time and effort she has put into edTPA, wondering if it

will accurately capture her love for teaching. This feeling of frustration was also present

for Elizabeth as she reflects in her journal about how edTPA has drawn her away from

the classroom:

I find myself feeling very disconnected while in the classroom because I'm

constantly thinking about what I need to be/should be doing [on edTPA]. While I

always try to be engaging with my students and build rapport with them, I've been

lacking the original passion I once had for teaching. I often arrive at the middle

school drained and overwhelmed about what each day will entail. I'm not as

present in the classroom as I would like. (Journal entry, February 29, 2020)

Elizabeth speaks of how she is both physically and emotionally drained. Yet another

participant, Jordy, shared that his faith is what has been getting him through his

experience with edTPA and all he could do was pray for the strength to continue:

The only positive outcome of edTPA is my recognition that I can't do it on my

own…Needless to say, I was downtrodden and I had to get on my knees and ask

for help. Look, I wasn't sure I wanted to be a teacher and edTPA did nothing to

sway that thought, but through prayer I came to the accept the concept that if I

have a gift to teach and reach out to young adults, then it would be unwise and

cowardly to waste a gift invested onto me by the almighty. Maybe my narrow

faithfulness is nothing but a band-aid for my mental, physical, and emotional

well-being, but at least it's working for the time being. (Journal entry, March 14,

2020)

As presented in the participants' quotes, the participants focus on temporary states of

being. Jordy uses the saying "for the time being," while above, Elizabeth reminds herself

edTPA is temporary. Similarly, Becky shares an update in her journal by ending with "at

this point." The impact on their sense of time and immediacy of edTPA is

overwhelmingly palpable.

Jordy also shared that his grandmother passed away while he was working on

completing edTPA:

I became kind of numb to certain existential pain or whatnot. My grandmother,

she passed away, and usually when a family member of mine passed away, I

guess like with most people you will cry, if not at least shed a tear…because

edTPA was the focus, it was the priority. There's no time to reminisce on

memories. There's no time to shed a tear. I don't think I had enough tears left in

me because every time I opened edTPA and tried to do something, I felt dumb,

and I felt not capable as a teacher. So within the confines of my room and without

really much telling anyone else, I kind of started tearing up and went to bed. I'm

like 'oh, let's see if the next day is a better day.' But, yeah, when she passed away,

my mom was crying, and I remember talking to her on the phone like, oh, that's

unfortunate. But I couldn't cry with her on the phone.

92

Jordy finds himself unable to engage with the loss of his grandmother due to the stress of edTPA. It has consumed him and as he reflects, shares that only edTPA was causing him tears during this time.

Stress was felt in yet another way as Natalie expresses how edTPA has taken away from her ability to meet the needs of her students, causing her to feel like she is not giving her best:

> My students are what is important and I need to focus on delivering quality lessons for them everyday and push edTPA to the back burner. Except I cannot do that because edTPA is required for my licensure and I have deadlines and stress and work breathing down my neck everyday. It is unfair that my focus is constantly being pulled from my students in order to complete this task, most of which is redundant and unnecessary, in my opinion. (Journal entry, February 18, 2020)

Natalie's feelings remind us of the high-stakes nature of edTPA. It is ultimately the gatekeeper for these student teachers to receive their state teaching license. The push and pull between the roles of teacher candidate and future teacher compounded the stress of this transitional time in their educational experience. Jessica shares her concerns over how edTPA stole her student teaching experience:

> I realize EdTPA was really not that much of a nightmare. It was just something that required much time. However, I must say that I believe it alters the effect of what Student Teaching should be. It 'steals' the first almost two full months of our student teaching experience and turns it into a stress that does not allow us to actually feel like a real teacher. It also has caused me to be focused fully on

turning this in instead of actually observing, learning, doing, performing, and also thinking about the future that comes up in just a couple months like applying for jobs and where I want to be. I have honestly observed and learned more this past week [after submitting edTPA] because I felt like my brain was not absorbed in EdTPA. Again, it isn't a nightmare. It's actually a simple task that just requires hours of work and mental engagement. However, now that it is over, I can go back to enjoying what I wish I could have these past few months. (Journal entry, March 10, 2020)

Choosing to utilize the word *steals* signals the loss of an important educational experience. Something has been taken from her and it is her student teaching. Jessica also highlights how she felt after submitting edTPA and the difference between completing it and having time to experience student teaching without edTPA hanging over her head.

Traditionally the student teaching experience is utilized as a place for student teachers to create their teacher persona. These individuals lost half of their student teaching experience to edTPA and the other half to school shutdowns because of the Covid-19 pandemic. While the completion of edTPA is mandated by the state, it is doing much more than assessing student teachers for *classroom readiness,* it is making them question if they even want to become teachers.

Questioning - Should I Teach? Compounding the stress caused by actually completing edTPA, this assessment has also caused multiple participants to question if they are even still interested in becoming teachers. Jordy points out how North Carolina

is already experiencing a teacher shortage and edTPA is doing nothing to help:

> edTPA feels like an unnecessary added weight to becoming a teacher. After all, doesn't North Carolina already suffer from a shortage of teachers? Unless the outcome is to raise teacher salaries with intent to diminish the supply of teachers, this is a counterintuitive program to implement. I do want to teach. That has never been in doubt. But edTPA has made me question whether becoming a teacher is worth it. And unfortunately, it is not. (Journal entry, March 3, 2020)

While Jordy did choose to become a first-year teacher in the state of North Carolina, throughout my communications with him, he never stopped questioning if it was the right choice. Serenity shares that had she known what edTPA would truly be like, she is questioning if she would choose education as her major:

> If I was going into the [EPP] program all over again, I don't know that I would pick teaching again. I love teaching, but this has been really difficult and stressful. When I started at PRU, it wasn't required, and it feels unfair that it would be required of me when I did not know about it going in. Overall, it [completing edTPA] feels pointless and scary. (Journal entry, February 18, 2020)

The power of this assessment is demonstrated by how it has potentially tainted a career that many of these participants had looked forward to entering for quite some time. Elizabeth must remind herself that edTPA is separate from teaching and it is not what real teaching is:

> This whole edTPA process has honestly made me question if going into this profession is right for me, though I remind myself in those moments why I chose it in the first place and that all of this is temporary…I'm hoping that I can

experience the passion for teaching again after submitting this portfolio, but it's all been pretty tainted at this point. (Journal entry, February 29, 2020)

After spending years looking forward to the opportunity to teach, these students are now regretting that they entered the field of education all because of edTPA. The stress caused by this assessment impacted these student teachers' ability to see themselves as teachers in their own classroom. Earlier, Jessica said that edTPA "steals" their student teaching experience but it has also stolen the love and passion that some of these student teachers' once had for *becoming* a teacher.

edTPA as Inauthentic - "I felt like I had to be fake." The second major theme expressed by the participants' data was that edTPA is an inauthentic assessment. This theme was operationalized through the ways that the student teachers shared they had to *act* in front of the camera. Many of them also expressed how they prepped their students for how to behave during filming. Becky details a conversation she had with her students before filming for her edTPA video:

> When I'm in my classroom I joke around with my kids a lot…on a normal day I'm joking around with them and being sarcastic. We're able to have fun. When I was filming I felt like I didn't have that freedom to, you know, be myself. I felt like I had to be fake. My kids couldn't really be themselves either…before we started recording I was like: 'hey, this is a really important video so you need to not be off the chain today. I need you to behave. It's three days and then you can act like yourselves'. (Interview, March 24, 2020)

One of the foundational concepts of *becoming* a teacher is to find your teacher persona (Palmer, 1998). Here Oliva is expressing that not only can she not be who she is in the

classroom, she is begging her students to behave in a way to benefit her score for edTPA, rather than who they really are.

Becky also shared her concern over how her edTPA portfolio focused on teaching band and conducting could actually be scored by someone with a fine arts background but no experience teaching band. There are no specific requirements within her subject area that her evaluator would need to be certified in music education. Becky has every right to question the authenticity of edTPA after she received a failing score. Upon receiving her failing score, she worked and resubmitted one part of her portfolio:

> Now my second time around, I reached the page limit on everything. Do I think that was necessary? Absolutely not. But, like my supervisor said, 'anytime you write a sentence ask yourself why and just explain yourself: why why why why.' It got annoying but it changed my score by 17 points.

The 17 point increase in her score is quite alarming. Becky mentioned that she was just "completing it to get a score" at that point and was just doing what was needed to pass.

Elizabeth mentioned yet again the ways that her video did not capture the authenticity of her classroom either:

> But while I was filming [edTPA], it just seemed like [the students] weren't exactly sure how they should behave or they didn't feel like they could be natural in the classroom. So going through my recordings and things, I couldn't necessarily use certain clips because it just felt like they were just kind of, I don't know how to explain it, just all over the place. (Interview, March 27, 2020)

The students did not understand why Elizabeth started acting differently while filming. In turn, the students were confused by why she was teaching the way she was. Jordy was

student teaching in a high school classroom when he filmed edTPA and felt the pressure of using his clinical teacher's favorite tool of PowerPoint:

> So whenever it came to edTPA, I told the kids: 'this is edTPA and this recording was going to happen'...Some of the kids were kind of visibly uncomfortable with it since I wasn't going along with the day to day format of just PowerPoint, PowerPoint, PowerPoint. There was a day of PowerPoint for lesson one. Lesson two was pretty much group collaborative learning. I did cover a PowerPoint because I'm trying to not interfere with my clinical teacher's pacing. So I tried to incorporate the PowerPoint and the collaborative learning. And then day three was a debate with some PowerPoint. It was confusing for them as well.
>
> (Interview, March 23, 2020)

Knowing that incorporating collaboration and differentiation would score him higher, Jordy had to work against the norms established by his clinical teacher of just using PowerPoint. This caused his students to feel uncomfortable because he had to try something different that the students were not familiar with. Jessica went into detail about the language that she must use for edTPA and how that is not how she would typically talk to her students:

> I did warn them …you have to basically probe the students to use the language you want them to use [for edTPA]. By the second day [of recording], which was the clip I used for my edTPA…this was the one I knew had to go excellently, I knew I had to remember key words like 'can you deepen on that or expand on what your neighbor just said?' The kids are just looking at you like 'Why are you

talking to me like that?'...it's not very natural but it's what they want to hear so you're kinda catering to the scorer of that clip. (Interview, March 25, 2020)

Jessica said that the kids asked her why she was being *extra* that day in class. She felt pulled away from the task at hand. Jessica also shared her internal struggle of how edTPA "can hurt the students more than it helps them" (Interview, March 25, 2020). Not feeling like she was being her authentic self caused Jessica to question what edTPA is worth if it is not for the benefit of her students. Natalie elaborated on how edTPA drew her attention away from her students and ability to plan meaningful lessons and back onto previous lessons:

> Your duty as a teacher and the reason that we're all teachers is because we care
> about the kids and we want what's best for them. And I do not believe with any
> part of me that what's best for them is me dwelling on the three lessons that I
> planned a month ago. I had planned the lessons a month ago. I had taught them a
> month ago, and I was still explaining myself and dwelling on it and expanding on
> it. (Interview March 23, 2020)

Frustrated with edTPA's demanding reflection, Natalie expresses her concern about reflecting on two-month old lessons rather than planning new and engaging ones. Her concern for her students is also evident, pointing out that edTPA is once again not built to benefit the students in the classroom.

Inconsistent Support - "We didn't know the limits of our advisors and what they can do." The last theme that emerged from the participants' experiences as student teachers was that of inconsistent support for edTPA from their EPP. As discussed in chapter 3, there is no real way to regulate support for those taking the assessment. Even

within this small sample of student teacher experiences, there was a wide range of support received. I begin with Natalie's explanation from one professor:

> I even had one of my professors who was helping me with the edTPA. She said, if you feel like you're saying the same thing over and over, you're doing it right. And I was like, what's the point of that? I've already told you that. I told you that two prompts ago. I shouldn't have to tell it to you again to get a score. And so all of that was just very frustrating for me, and it was frustrating to have to keep reminding myself and thinking about all of this, and it was just frustrating overall. (Interview March 23, 2020)

It is concerning when the best advice you get as a student is to repeat yourself. Natalie uses the word frustrating three times in this quote. You can tell that she is hungry for more help but she is not able to get it from her advisor. The same was true for Becky. Her advisor was strictly adhering to the guidelines for help while it appears others were not:

> I had heard that several of the other student teachers had gone back and redone their task one…we also didn't know the limits of our edTPA advisors and what they can do. Ms. D was like 'I can't do anything except look at it' while other advisors were saying 'you should do this or this'...that triggered a lot of stress in me because what if I have completely done my task one wrong? (Interview, March 24, 2020)

Compounding the general stress of edTPA Becky now wondered why others were getting more support while she was not. Ms. D provided very vague feedback while others were helping to edit the final project. The PRU education department is very small so to see inconsistencies within this department certainly causes concern for larger programs.

While Becky was concerned about her lack of feedback, Jordy was receiving proof-reading assistance from his advisor. "Dr. K has been helping me with that edTPA, like proofreading. Not telling me what I need to say, but this is an English error there and what not. So she's been helping me proofread" (Interview, March 25, 2020). There is no way to tell exactly what level of assistance was provided to Jordy by Dr. K or how much these corrections did to impact his final score.

Elizabeth compares her experience with edTPA with that of an author:

So you're constantly, I mean, every single Tuesday you get early release to go to PRU and work on your edTPA stuff and meet with your adviser and they kind of help you go through things. It felt like nothing was ever complete. It felt like I was writing my first novel or something. I kept submitting my draft, and it was never good enough, kept getting it sent back. That's what it felt like. (Interview March 27, 2020)

Here we see yet another demonstration of the inconsistency of support along with the stress that this caused Elizabeth. The never-ending nature of edTPA can be seen through the expectations placed on student teachers by their advisors and the edits they request as well.

Transitioning to First-Year Teachers

While the student-teaching experience is intended to give future teachers a glimpse into what it means to be a teacher, this experience can also be drastically different than that of your first-year teaching. The participants in this study experienced unprecedented events during their student-teaching experience. Including but not limited to the shutting down of their schools and their own university as well as educational and

social norms being rewritten before their very eyes. In the fall of 2020, these students now turned professionals were met with an uncharted territory in which they were expected to thrive.

In this section, I have sorted the participants' experiences into three main themes: impossible expectations, the uncertainty of what comes next, and lastly the participants' concern for students. We begin with the ways that the participants were asked to fulfill impossible expectations laid out for them by administrators and school boards.

Impossible expectations - "Just me, surrounded by piles of tables back in the corner." No matter how many years one had been teaching, the fall of 2020 proved to be a new experience for all teachers. However, for those who had never taught full-time before, it was clear that there were many impossible expectations being placed upon these first-year teachers. Starting off her career in teaching, Serenity was "volun-told" that she would be the virtual teacher for her grade level: "I didn't volunteer but I don't mind, it's…it's been very different, even if I was teaching face to face that will be way different than what I was doing in my student teaching" (Serenity, Interview, March 12, 2021). Referencing the fact that the other teachers in the building had been shifting back and forth between virtual learning and in-person, Serenity did have a consistent experience. However, it consisted of her working alone in a room at her school:

> Yeah, I'm teaching from the school but it's just me in my room by myself, surrounded by tables from other rooms that they can't put in there because they need more space to spread their desks out. Just me, surrounded by piles of tables back in the corner. (Interview, March 12, 2021)

Serenity was given no training on how to teach online and now her first year teaching is nothing like what she signed up for. Even when recalling this first-year experience more recently, Serenity called her first year teaching a "train wreck" (personal correspondence, September 17, 2022). On top of a virtual teaching load with a fluid roster of students, Serenity was also asked to help with breakfast duty, recess duty, and dismissal. She was not given the opportunity to build any in-person relationships with students but was still expected to perform extra duties during time that she could be building her virtual materials for her class.

Jordy experienced an impossible situation because of his background in secondary education. Also beginning his teaching career teaching virtually, Jordy recounts how he was under the impression that all students can learn like high school students:

One thing stuck with me at the school of education, it was *make sure every minute is used for education*, I thought I was doing that at the time, not anymore I don't. I see the error of my ways, but, at the time, I thought just lecturing going off the PowerPoint giving them fun facts was teaching them, no, no, it wasn't. They were just getting bored of me, but they were respectful enough to know not to interrupt so I'll give the kids that. (Jordy, Interview, March 17, 2021)

Jordy did not receive any training in middle grades education. Jordy reflects on how he started to understand what seventh grade work looks like in comparison to high school content:

I thought it was like little kindergarten colors and stuff, but I don't know how to do that, but eventually I started smoothing, well I shouldn't say smoothing, it was bumpy…I'm not saying I'm a good expert at that right now. But we're getting

there bit by bit. Hopefully I will become the seventh grade teacher that these

students want me to be and what the administration and teachers need me to be.

(Jordy, Interview, March 17, 2021)

Here Jordy internalizes the expectations for him to be a middle school teacher without

having ever been taught age-appropriate instructional strategies.

While Elizabeth has been given some support as a beginning teacher, she explains

how the topics covered were not quite helpful:

I feel like the topics that were chosen for this year, but also the order that they

were placed in - was not beneficial for beginning teachers…There is a beginning

teacher meeting on how to read IEPs...it was not until the end of November...So

it's kind of like that really should have been given at the very, very beginning of

the year. Even classroom management, that was given in January. (Elizabeth,

Interview, March 17, 2021)

Elizabeth also advocates for teachers in general, and she expressed concern about how

teachers are not prepared to teach in a pandemic, and that they are doing the best they can

with the resources available:

I just feel like in general, there needs to be more awareness of the pressures that

teachers are under and then, how do we, how do we alleviate some of that for

them? Because I feel like we've all kind of been on the struggle bus ourselves and

it's all up to us, and how we drive the bus, you know there's no guidance at all. So

I feel like any sort of help, or even just an email every once in a while saying

'Hey, I appreciate what you're doing. Is there something that I can do to help?' I

mean something as simple as that would be great. (Elizabeth, Interview, March 17, 2021)

Experiencing such dejection as a first-year teacher will most certainly make an impact on the remainder of Elizabeth's career.

Becky's experience as the band teacher at her school was quite unique and seemingly impossible. Teaching 6 sections of band and 6 sections of chorus Becky's schedule is difficult to comprehend. In order to teach virtually while still in the school building, Becky was assigned a classroom to not only monitor students so the core teachers had a planning time, but she was also expected to teach on the computer at the same time. All of the students in the classroom were "attending" their individual electives virtually.

The way that they have electives set up right now is students are not allowed to change classes, so they stay in the same room all day. And the teachers move around now for electives. Obviously all students don't take the same electives at the same exact time so I am sitting in one room, our PE teacher is sitting in another room, STEM teacher's in one room and the computer teacher is in another room. All while the kids are on their Chromebooks in the room, we're sitting in the room teaching through our computers, we might have our own students in the same room with us, we might not. Basically we can't do any of the things we originally wanted to do. And so that has gone on the entire time we have been hybrid so I have become quite a professional at using a laptop and running Google meets because that's what I've had to do this entire time. (Becky, Interview, March 17, 2021)

This situation made Becky feel like a "glorified baby-sitter" and she grew frustrated with the expectation of teaching virtually while supervising other students in-person (Becky, Interview, June 8, 2021). On top of the fact that Becky was teaching 12 different classes and had not even passed out any instruments to students her whole first year, Becky was also concerned about the future possibility of taking on more responsibilities:

> Yeah, hopefully because we're adding one more elective next year we're adding an online Spanish program which I'm probably going to be overseeing that because I'm the one with the most Spanish knowledge in my entire building besides our ESL teacher, so that's probably going to be my job next year, Spanish. (Interview, June 8, 2021)

Yet another impossible situation was created by Jessica's school district through their initiative for nine points of growth for grade-level testing, and Jessica questions how she is supposed to help students grow whom she has never met:

> I feel like only teachers are being held accountable…I have a handful of students that to this day I've never seen them, I've never heard from them and all I can do is document, that's all I can do. Yet, I'm still pushed to meet growth at the end of this year. An unprecedented amount of growth at that! But they want us to grow nine points. But it's absolutely insane so like I have a handful of kids I've never met before in my life, I've never seen them because they just don't do anything and so they're not held accountable. (Interview, March 9, 2021)

Jessica is concerned about how this goal of nine points of growth is going to impact her teaching evaluations. They are still being held accountable for students that are not attending school. Jessica also shares concerns that any first-year teacher would have:

106

I had all my student teaching and all of my field placement in seventh and eighth

grade. I had never done sixth grade, so I had never really messed around with the

content, and so I would be like: 'Am I supposed to know how to do that? or Am I

supposed to teach this in what way? I had to get over it. I had to ask my co-

worker, you know my partner, like: 'Is this the way I do it?' (Interview, March 9,

2021)

While we often equate student teaching within grade levels as similar, Jessica expresses

the differences between even one grade of content. Asking her co-worker for help was

difficult for Jessica because she did not feel like she was doing a good job for her

students.

Like many teachers throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, Jessica was also asked to

teach in-person and virtually at the same time:

We don't have a teacher that's all virtual and then all face to face. I've been doing

hybrid completely, so I have a group of students in front of me, and then the other

half of the classes at home watching online. (Interview, March 9, 2021)

Multimodal teaching was most certainly not something that was covered in Jessica's

EPP. It had not been conceived of yet. However, throughout her first year teaching she

was asked to do things that no one had ever done before.

Every one of these examples of impossible situations represent the expectations

placed on all teachers and students throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. Asking more and

more from these individuals, we expect them to continue to comply and move forward. It

was seemingly impossible for some of these first-year teachers to keep up as their

schedules changed and so did some of their teaching assignments. The next theme we will explore is that of uncertainty.

Uncertainty - "Just make a decision and we'll roll with it. We will make it happen. That's what we do, but make up your mind." Throughout their first year teaching these participants were met with much uncertainty. Whether it be their schedules, content, or even the students they teach, there was nothing constant except for change. As noted in her vignette above, Natalie switched classes and grades half way through the 2020-2021 school year. She noted how her students were also asked to deal with uncertainty:

> I had to take a class who had been basically out of any sort of consistent instruction for like nine months because they were out from March of the year before [2020] until January [2021] when I got them and they were just, I mean, they had no consistency. It wasn't their fault or anything, but I did have a lot of behaviors to calm down and correct and make sure they were on the same page. (Interview, June 10, 2021)

In this class was a student who not only threatened Natalie with scissors he also put his hands around her neck one day. The student was finally removed from her classroom and placed in a smaller class where he could have one on one support. Yet another uncertainty that Natalie raised was that of curriculum and how these knowledge gaps will be filled in over the course of the students' time in school. Natalie shares this about her first year teaching:

> It was rough, I don't think I can overstate that. It was rough for everybody. I feel like, there is still something we're ignoring. We're just ignoring this big giant

hole that we're digging deeper and deeper. We have eight modules in Math. We were on Module 3 when we left, three! So there's five things that we didn't even attempt to cover. And now we're just like sending them up to third grade…I can name 15 million things they can't do. And it's because we were so hurried and it's not, I don't think we should blame the teachers. I say that as a teacher. But like we were doing the best we could. Like me, we were trying. I couldn't have tried any harder. I couldn't have done anything different. But yeah, I mean, there's just so much that they didn't get. I mean, reading too, like we were way behind where it's behind all year. So, so far behind all year. (Interview, June 10, 2021)

During the 2020-2021 school year there were no exemptions given for end of grade (EOG) testing. All of the tests and scores were used to evaluate schools and teachers. Becky shares how inconsistent their schedules were until about a month before their final tests. Because of this, she only had her band students for about a month of instruction:

We went back in [person] March 29th, that was a Monday, so they were in person, Monday and Tuesday. Wednesdays were always remote learning days. And then that Thursday, April 1st was our remote learning day because a lot of our teachers were out sick with their second vaccine and then we started spring break. Then like literally a month later, May 12th I think, was our first day of testing. It was a Wednesday, and that was for our virtual students, they started their EOGs. (Becky, Interview, June 8, 2021)

The twists and turns of the school year were hard to keep track of. Moving from in-person to virtual learning along with different cohorts of students was seemingly impossible to keep up with.

Jessica shares her disappointment with the uncertainty of watching school board meetings as they were the ones making decisions for the teachers regarding how they will be instructing their students:

> I don't care if we make the wrong decision. Just make a decision and we'll roll with it. We will make it happen. That's what we do, but make up your mind. I think that for me, there have been times I have cried after watching a board meeting because, I know that there's no right answer, but I feel like if we want teachers to be seen as professionals our board should be the first one to see us that way. Our fellow educators should be the first ones to talk to us that way and take our word for it…but we're overlooked. (Jessica, Interview, March 9, 2021)

Not knowing how they will be instructing students next week is growing increasingly frustrating for Jessica. She shares a little more about her inconsistent year:

> You know, we came in with the cohorts in October. So that was like the first day of school. Then they went back out to virtual [learning] and came back and I figure that was another first day. So it was just so many first days of school. That was weird…I feel like my second year teaching is more like year one 2.0. I didn't really have a first year. (Interview, June 9, 2021)

This first year teaching was filled with so many changes and uncertainties, she doesn't even call it a year teaching. She shares that her second year will be "year one 2.0". There are so many things she shared she needs to learn about a *normal* school year. Serenity shared the same concern about a first year filled with uncertainty:

> I'm definitely nervous about my classroom management skills, since it's very, very different with online, because if they get really bad, I just removed them

from the meeting. And you can't do that when they're in person. You just have to figure it out. I say I'm a little worried about that because it's been so different this past year, I haven't practiced the skills. And like I was kinda thinking with the first year a lot of time to really try out some different strategies and figure out what I think works best for me and how I interact with the kids, but haven't really been able to do that. I'm interested to try it out next year and see how that all works out. (Interview, June 9, 2021)

Elizabeth shared the same concerns about not having traditional experiences throughout her first year of teaching:

I feel like next year we're going to have an even harder time because now we're going to be thrown in with all these kids at one time, which we haven't had this year. So it's kind of like experiencing a first year all over again, and next year if you know, things are changed with the pandemic we'll see how that goes but if we do have full classrooms next year starting off, I feel like that's going to be a little crazy because we're not used to that. (Interview March 27, 2021)

The constant state of uncertainty made Elizabeth feel like she will be "experiencing a first year all over again" during her second year of teaching as well. Whatever training they did experience during their abbreviated student teaching semester no longer applied to the world that all of these first-year teachers entered into. In some cases they were left alone to explore even the simplest of information. Elizabeth also shared that she has felt "this whole year, I feel like I'm playing the part of a teacher and am not really a teacher so that's been really strange." (Interview, March 27, 2021). Given the lack of closure for the end of her undergraduate experience, Elizabeth never quite felt like she had *become* a

teacher. Little did she realize that this is a never-ending process and one that will endure for however long she chooses to teach.

Concern for Students - "Are they getting it? Are they doing this? Are they learning this?" Throughout my many interviews with these participants there was always a theme of concern for their students. It would have been very easy for these first-year teachers to selfishly complain about their experiences. However, not a discussion went by without them questioning if they were doing enough for their students. In Jessica's case, at times the only thing that drove her to continue were her students:

> My coworker and I joke around that if it wasn't for the students we, I would not, I would not be here this year anymore. I would have left two months ago, but we put our best foot forward for these kids and I think that has been so rewarding for me. (Interview, March 9, 2021)

Jessica actually had another offer to teach fully online for a different school district at the semester break. However, she decided to stay at her school in order to finish off the school year with her students. Similarly, Elizabeth is motivated by her relationships with her students as well. She reminds herself that creating relationships with her students matters:

> I feel like they know that if something's going on at home or something stressing them out, they know that they can reach out to me at any point in time to let me know. Which has been really great, but also, I think it makes them work harder in my class in general. I feel like having that relationship with them, it reminds me, even when I'm super stressed and down that I'm making a difference. (Interview, March 17, 2021)

112

So many of the participants expressed their concerns about forming relationships with their students. It was difficult for many of them to teach virtually because they never really had the chance to interact in-person.

Becky was teaching virtually for a few months throughout her first year and she internalized her student's absences:

> My biggest concern is what am I doing wrong that is making my students not come to class, not do the work? Are they not understanding the content, therefore they're not even going to try that sort of stuff? That's been a really big challenge for me. (Interview, March 17, 2021)

Not having an opportunity to see many of her students online, Becky great concerned with absences and the lack of homework being turned in. Eventually, she had a chance to interact with students in-person when they returned to school.

Natalie echoes Becky's concern for her students as she questions if she is truly doing enough for her students:

> When I was in the trenches with them, I was worried if I was doing enough. Am I being enough? Are they getting it? Are they doing this? Are they learning this? And I think I've learned that my first job is to teach and is to make sure that they're learning what they need to learn. The whole flip side to that is it's a total it's a relationship building position… the most rewarding thing is, when my old third graders now pass me in the hallway and they get so excited to see me. (Interview, March 22, 2021)

Having changed classes and grade levels half-way through the year Natalie now sees her old students and can happily reflect on their time together. Her hope was that she may

have some of those students the following year that she worked so hard at forming relationships with.

Lastly, Serenity's empathy for her students was inspiring. While working to figure out how to teach virtually during her first year as a teacher, Serenity recognized that her students are also faced with unprecedented situations:

> It's important for me to remember, I think, that this is also a really weird year for them [my students] and they're also stressed out and it's also hard for them to keep up…some their parents aren't there, but they have a bunch of other siblings and they're helping take care of other siblings. There's a couple of my students that I see most of the time holding a baby. So they are there and they're keeping up and they're doing okay, but there's so much more that they have to keep up with well. (Interview, March 12, 2021)

These are third grade students who are learning fully online while holding younger brothers and sisters. The amount of responsibility placed on some of these virtual students is unimaginable. The fact that these students who were caring for younger siblings were also still tested on their curriculum is infuriating.

Conclusion

There was an ever-present sense of survival that was tangible throughout all of my time spent speaking with these participants. First, as student-teachers facing school closures, the loss of a graduation celebration and uncertainty about their future careers. Secondly, as first-year teachers just trying to survive an unprecedented first year in the classroom, or in Serenity's case - virtually. There was no playbook for this period of time. Administrators and school boards alike were making it up as they went along.

However, the themes that emerged from the participants' *becomings* can also give us hope for the future.

Focusing on the first-year teaching themes of navigating impossible expectations, working to mitigate uncertainty, and the care and concern shown for students - we see these participants rise to the challenge. I wholeheartedly wish that this did not need to be a story of survival, however it was. Working amidst constant changes in expectations, schedules, and modes of teaching these future teachers showed up every day. They showed up for their students and they pressed on. None of them quit despite having every reason to step aside and say *no one taught me how to do this*. In Chapter five, I will destabilize the narratives (Langdridge, 2007) that have been presented within this chapter and synthesize the participants *becomings* through the lens of critical theory.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

Throughout the global pandemic our society has continued to evaluate both students and teachers in the same ways as before this life-altering event occurred. The state of North Carolina has reported that only 45.4% of students were proficient on state exams after the 2020-2021 school year – the school year in which this study's participants experienced their first-year teaching (Hui & Raynor, 2022). After only a slight improvement in test scores for the 2021-2022 school year, the state has labeled one-third of schools in North Carolina as "low performing" (Hui & Raynor, 2022). In turn, they are also labeling the teachers, students, and communities who claim those schools as their own, *low performing* as well. These results are no surprise; but they are not an accurate reflection of the efforts that students, teachers, and parents put into learning and teaching their students throughout the pandemic.

The fear and stigma of failure is often utilized within educational settings. In some cases, it is intended to motivate students. This was most certainly the case for the participants in this study as they were subjected to completing the Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) throughout the start of a global pandemic. The fear of failure caused compounding stress for these individuals as they worked towards *becoming* teachers in the spring of 2020 and also as they transitioned into the classroom as first-year teachers.

Chapter Overview

This chapter examines how the *becomings* presented in chapter four inform my research questions. I also share implications for school districts, EPPs, and state legislatures, and provide recommendations for future research. I also address the limitations of this study and share a conclusion to this work along with my final thoughts.

116

Through this study I sought to answer the following questions:

1. What role does edTPA play in the process of *becoming* a teacher?

2. How much autonomy do teacher candidates have in their process of *becoming* a teacher in the era of edTPA?

3. How did the Covid-19 global pandemic complicate the process of *becoming* a teacher?

In the following sections, I will address each question individually by weaving together the current research and literature presented in chapter two and the *becomings* presented in chapter four. Following the research questions, I will connect the ways that language worked to apprentice the participants into *becoming* teachers (Fairclough, 2001). Lastly, I will outline the ways in which my Critical Narrative Framework (CNA) supported data analysis through the lens of critical theory.

Research Question 1

What role does edTPA play in the process of becoming a teacher? This study has shown that edTPA does not simply play a role in the process of *becoming* a teacher, it is the sole focus of teacher candidates and takes precedence over university faculty evaluations during their student teaching experience. The intended role of edTPA is to be a measure of teacher readiness for day one in the classroom (SCALE, 2019). It is also intended to be only one part of the teacher licensure process. However, the narratives in this study show that edTPA has become much more than it was intended to be.

The completion of edTPA has superseded the need for student teachers to gain real student teaching experience. By completing edTPA during their final student teaching semester, much of their time is, as Jessica put it, "stolen" by the test. Days are

spent in the back of the classroom working on edTPA rather than working with students. Jessica even mentioned how her students would encourage her to work on edTPA so she could get back to teaching them sooner. The way that edTPA is designed as an open-ended portfolio (Lalley, 2017) allows for student teachers to spend inordinate amounts of time working on it. Natalie discussed how she continually "dwelled" on edTPA and returned to lessons she had taught almost two months ago to review.

My own experience with edTPA as a university supervisor maps to Donovan and Cannon's (2014) work addressing how the focus of student teaching shifted from *becoming* a teacher to completing edTPA. Before edTPA, questions from student teachers were normally focused on pedagogy or instructional strategies but teacher candidates now ask for help with edTPA. In this same way, edTPA reduces teaching to a "technical and apolitical act" (Gorlewski & Tuck, 2019, p. 14). EdTPA also works to "give the impression that teaching can be good if you follow directions" (Donovan & Cannon, 2014, p. 21). Through the adoption of edTPA as a step in state licensure requirements, we are fully adopting a vocational model of teacher education described by Britzman (2003) which situates *becoming* a teacher "as no more than an adaptation to the expectations and directives of others and the acquisition of predetermined skills—both of which are largely accomplished through imitation, recitation, and assimilation" (p. 46). Anyone who has taught can tell you that is simply not true.

The compounding event during the teacher candidates' student teaching experiences was the beginning of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Traditionally, edTPA is completed early in the final semester of student teaching at PRU. This means that edTPA is to be completed before the teacher candidates experience full days of teaching. In the

118

spring of 2020 the unintended consequence of this scaffolding was that most of the participants were not able to experience a full day of teaching. They only had experience with teaching one or two class periods a day. Prioritizing edTPA over obtaining real classroom experience indicates the need to obtain initial licensure is more important than learning how to teach. This study points to the fact that it is Pearson Education who is determining for how long and when our future teachers will get real classroom experience, not the Educator Preparation Programs that the teacher candidates have enrolled in.

The last and most alarming role edTPA plays in *becoming* a teacher is that of an inhibitor. The extreme stress and pressure to succeed that candidates experience while completing edTPA was evident throughout data collection. Natalie says it best by indicating that she had "deadlines and stress and work breathing down my neck everyday." Meanwhile Serenity shared that she does not know if she would enter into education had she known about edTPA: "If I was going into the [EPP] program all over again, I don't know that I would pick teaching again. I love teaching, but this has been really difficult and stressful". This assessment has taken the joy away from teaching and caused multiple participants to question if they still wanted to be teachers. Jordy cautioned that if edTPA was an indication of what teaching was like, he would not remain a teacher for long, sharing, "edTPA has made me question whether becoming a teacher is worth it. And unfortunately, it is not."

When it comes to the option to complete edTPA there is no other option; this assessment serves as the ultimate gatekeeper to initial teacher licensure. Teacher candidates must earn a passing score on edTPA to become a fully-licensed teacher in

North Carolina. There is no way around completing this task. The only option would be to pursue a non-certified education degree that does not include state licensure and therefore lose your ability to teach.

Research Question 2

How much autonomy do teacher candidates have in their process of becoming a teacher in the era of edTPA? Unfortunately, data analysis has indicated that those working toward initial licensure in the state of North Carolina hold little to no autonomy throughout their process of *becoming* a teacher. As exemplified in Table 2 below, the themes identified within the data align to the current literature examining edTPA as well as the examples highlighted from this study.

The term *roadblock* is utilized to identify these various barriers that teacher candidates have no power to change. The first roadblock identified for teacher candidates is the degree to which their EPP prepares and supports them through the edTPA process. If you attend an EPP that was not ready to implement edTPA then you will most certainly be at a disadvantage. At the same time, those EPPs that are adept at preparing students for edTPA may tend to hyper-focus on the exam and begin to teach to the test (Attick & Boyles, 2016).

Yet another way that students experience a loss of autonomy is through the support given to them by their advisors and or their ability to pay for someone to complete edTPA for them (Schultz & Dover, 2017). The data in this study indicated that there were inconsistent supports for students throughout their completion of this assessment. Becky was concerned because she heard others in their cohort had been told to rewrite sections of their assessment while her advisor was adhering to the support

guidelines and not giving her substantial feedback. Causing her to question if she should do the same: "what if I have completely done my task one wrong?" She was left to wonder how much more work she should put into her submission.

Two other roadblocks that serve to reduce the autonomy teacher candidates experience in their journey towards *becoming* a teacher are their student teaching placement and lastly the scorer assigned to their assessment portfolio by Pearson Education. The placement experience varies by EPP but in some cases the teacher candidate has no say in what school or to which teacher they are assigned. Depending on the support provided to them by their clinical educator, they may or may not be able to receive support from yet another source. The same can be said of the behaviors that the teacher candidate may experience with the students. Jessica chose to change schools in between her clinical hours and her full-time student teaching experience because she did not feel she could be successful in completing edTPA at her first placement. It may have been a place in which she could learn, but her focus was the completion of her test.

Lastly, one glaring way that autonomy is taken away from the teacher candidates is through the single scorer approach utilized by Pearson Education. This single external evaluator only has a short video clip and pages of commentary to assess if the individual before them deserves to be a fully-licensed teacher. There are still many questions surrounding the actual scoring process because Pearson has not disclosed the specifics of the single or double scoring process when a candidate does not receive a passing score (Gitomer et al., 2021). Removed from the cultural context of both the teacher candidate and the students, those who submit their portfolios online are only left to wonder if they will pass their test and be allowed to continue their journey of *becoming* a teacher.

Table 2

Emerging Themes as Roadblocks to the Autonomy of Teacher Candidates

Roadblocks	Examples from Literature	Examples from Study
EPP's Preparation of Students & Inconsistent support	(Attick & Boyles, 2016; Carter & Lochte, 2016; Ratner and Kolman, 2016; Schultz & Dover, 2017)	EPP focus has been placed on teaching to the test, not learning how to teach and work within the classroom. The focus placed on edTPA can eliminate meaningful conversations about pedagogy and student learning.
Placement of Teacher Candidate for Student Teaching	(Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016, 2019; Henning et al., 2018)	Where participants were placed for student teaching impacted their perceptions of their ability to successfully complete edTPA. They are given no choice in whom they are assigned to teach with.
Pearson Education as Sole External Evaluator for State Licensure	(Donovan & Cannon, 2014; Gilbert & Kuo, 2019; Gitomer et al., 2021; Greenblatt &O'Hara, 2015; Gorlewski & Tuck, 2019; Henning et al., 2018)	Disconnected from any local context, participants shared concern about scores being placed on them by external evaluators, in some cases untrained in their content area.

Note. This table aligns roadblocks with current literature and *becomings*.

Research Question 3

How did the Covid-19 global pandemic complicate the process of becoming a teacher? The data shows that there were numerous complications caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Around the world, traditional education as we know it was turned upside down and seemingly every educator was asked to reinvent the way they taught (Ellis et al., 2020). The same was true for those who had no previous classroom experience. The first-year teachers in this study were exposed to the classroom during a state of upheaval. There is a glaring disconnect between their experiences and the theory and lessons they

had neatly crafted while they were undergraduate students dreaming of teaching in their own classrooms.

Impossibility and uncertainty were the central themes evident in the data for this study. These themes show up in the work of Mecham et al. (2021) as they also conducted interviews with first-year teachers and explored the first-year experience. The researchers coded "changing instructional requirements" as its own category while I chose to include the demanding shifts in teaching and facilitation of learning within the theme of uncertainty.

Every participant's narrative of first-year teaching during the pandemic was different, just as every K-12 students' experiences varied. It should be noted that even within the same county, Home County, Natalie and Serenity had drastically different experiences. Serenity was asked to teach virtually her entire first year, while Natalie's students did not have access to the internet and devices for the start of the school year. Only miles apart, these students had varied access to their teacher's instruction and technology tools. Becky taught her band class without ever handing out an instrument, while Jessica wondered what some of her students' faces looked like as they never turned their cameras on.

The final theme displayed within the data was the ways that these first-year teachers showed concern for their students. Jessica shares that she only showed up for her students and "would not be here this year anymore" if it were not for them. Lastly, I want to share Serenity's experience witnessing her eight and nine year-old students act as caretakers: "There's a couple of my students that I see most of the time holding a

baby…there's so much more that they have to keep up with." Her third grade students are caring for younger siblings while being required to learn online.

The 2020-2021 school year was a year unlike any other and it is safe to say that complications abounded. However, we also see throughout the data that these individuals showed up for their students and did not question the expectations placed upon them. They complied and were apprenticed into full-time teaching. In the next section I highlight the extensive work participants did on their identity, as it showed up in the data.

Identity Work of Participants & Language of Apprenticeship

In this section I discuss how "our identities are constructed narratively through the stories we tell" (Langdridge, 2007, p. 138). Every story told by the participants in this study was awe-inspiring. There were numerous ways that they were asked to shift and reinvent themselves first as student teachers and secondarily as first-year teachers. In some cases, participants' concern over their teacher identities was sometimes made known, and other times beneath the surface. There was most certainly a "reality shock" in relation to their first-year teaching but this was unlike any previous year that had been experienced before (Allen et al., 2020; Mintz et al., 2020).

Jordy expressed his concern about his own transformation into a teacher: "Hopefully I will become the seventh grade teacher that these students want me to be and what the administration and teachers need me to be." What Jordy does not share is that he was trained as a secondary social studies teacher, not a middle-grades teacher. With no age-appropriate pedagogical training, he set forth to be the best teacher he could be. For a time, he did not understand why his middle schoolers were not enjoying his slideshow lectures. Only later did he open himself up to new ways of teaching.

In March of her first year teaching, Becky shares that she has begun to identify as a virtual teacher as that has been most of her experience: "I have become quite a professional at using a laptop and running [virtual meetings]because that's what I've had to do this entire time." Missing in-person experiences, Serenity shared that she was alone in a classroom full of unused desks as she sought to *become* a teacher. This was most certainly concerning as she had been trained to teach her students in-person and was not afforded the opportunity to teach in-person (Allen et al., 2020).

Both Becky and Jessica shared concerns over their journeys towards becoming teachers, expressing that they will essentially have a second first-year teaching. Nothing was normal about their first year and they both cited the reduced class size and lack of in-person classroom management opportunities as barriers towards their important experience of in-person teaching.

All in all, it is clear that the participants were taking on the role of teaching through their use of language and questions of if they were good *enough* teachers for their students. Their questioning was indicating that as they reflected they did view themselves as teachers (Stenberg & Maaranen, 2021). It was also clear through their adoption of edu-speak or the coded language of testing and requirements that we saw them take on the roles into which they had been apprenticed.

When discussing testing, we see Jessica and Natalie concerned their students are not going to demonstrate growth at the end of the year. Serenity shared a concern about future student behavior and her ability to *control* it. They have adopted the language expressed by their administration and districts. It is through this language of control that we see them begin to take a dangerous shift into labeling students, just as we saw the

state of North Carolina label our schools and students as *low performing.* The power of language is ever present as these first-year teachers begin to adopt the narratives present in the world around them (Gee, 2014). It is my hope that they have the opportunity to work against the adoption of this coded language by recognizing their students as individuals.

Implications

By conducting a Critical Narrative Analysis focused on exploring *becoming* a teacher during a global pandemic I have demonstrated the myriad of ways these participants continually rose to the challenge set before them. Their experience is mirrored in the ways that society continually asks our in-service teachers to take on more responsibility each year (Floden et al., 2020). The implications of this study have been broken down into categories, starting with the need for first-year and beginning teacher support.

First-Year Teacher Support

Due to the nature of starting a career in education during a global pandemic, I call on districts and schools to recognize the need for increased support for all beginning teachers through the use of mentorship and co-teaching (VanLone et al., 2022). I also echo Kang's (2020) call for increased support for beginning teachers with 1:1 coaching and increased support networks with veteran teachers. I also suggest finding spaces for these teachers who are early in their career to discuss their experiences with other teachers experiencing the same thing.

There are some situations where there may only be one or two beginning teachers at a school. Districts need to provide support and space for these individuals to share their

own narratives of what it has been like working towards becoming a seemingly static role of teaching – only to learn that the expectations have changed. One example is the creation of a New Teacher Learning Community as outlined by the work of Flushman et al. (2021). These learning communities supported new teachers through "having someone check in on their well-being helped new teachers to feel supported and cared for both on a professional and personal level" (p. 98). This model can also prompt these new teachers to adopt social emotional work in the classroom with their own students.

Educator Preparation Programs

I call on EPPs to tap into their networks of recent graduates and explore the possibility of employing them as advisors for their current teacher candidates. It is important to speak to those who have experienced this upheaval first-hand and not *pretend* that we know what it has been like. Allowing teacher candidates to talk to these beginning teachers who have taught during both the 2020 and 2021 school years may provide clarity and direction for the current undergraduate students. It is time that we provide the teacher candidates with transparent information about what it truly means to be a teacher given our current cultural climate.

In line with creating networks around recent graduates I also call on EPPs to find ways to embed meaningful teaching experiences for students early-on in their coursework. There is no excuse for allowing future teachers to graduate with no full-time teaching experience even if edTPA is to blame for that stolen time. One suggestion is to seek out meaningful partnerships with local school districts through the use of professional development schools (PDS). This model provides teacher candidates with embedded teaching opportunities as well as a school community that can provide

multiple opportunities for support. The teacher candidates working within the PDS system are treated as interns and are exposed to all aspects of teaching, not just lesson planning (Coler et al., 2021). The PDS model also strengthens the relationship between local school districts and EPPs creating a potential pipeline for students to find jobs and support the local schools in finding qualified teachers.

State Departments of Education

Lastly, to fulfill Jordy's request made in February of 2020 (see p. 6 of this study), I call on states like North Carolina that are still utilizing edTPA as a measure of readiness for the classroom to cease and desist. This study has outlined the multiple ways that edTPA has interfered with these teacher candidates' process of *becoming* a teacher. Even after an unimaginable first year of teaching, participants still cringed when I brought up their experiences with edTPA in their interviews completed almost a year later. The process of completing their open-ended assessment stole their opportunity to experience full-time teaching before entering the profession.

Even with all of the documentation presented by SCALE and Pearson Education as to why states should use edTPA to assess future teachers, Gitomer et al. (2021) state that the use of edTPA is "unwarranted on technical grounds" (p.4). There is no data to prove that edTPA is a true indicator of teacher readiness or that they will have a stronger influence on their students' learning outcomes. Lalley (2017) also states that edTPA "needs to demonstrate its superiority to current predictors of teacher effectiveness" before it is utilized as an assessment for future teachers (p. 77). Pearson Education successfully sold state legislatures across the country on an empty promise of edTPA as "the first nationally available, educator-designed support and assessment system for teachers

entering the profession" (SCALE, 2019, p.1). Instead of adding to the profits of a multi-billion dollar company let us imagine new ways to assess our future teachers that take into account their autonomy and the cultural context of their work (Attick & Boyles, 2016).

There may be hope for North Carolina as a draft of proposed changes in teacher licensing has been outlined in the Pathways to Excellence for Teaching Professionals document (Tomberlin & Sioberg, 2022) released by the State Board of Education. This plan calls for the removal of edTPA as part of initial teacher licensure. The plan also increases the ways for teachers to become licensed without attending an EPP. The plan is more inclusive for those individuals who can not attend an EPP. Some concerns have been raised because this proposed change also asks current teachers to continue their professional learning and licensure through the completion of state- or district-provided micro-credentials. These micro-credentials would consist of topics focused on "high-leveraged instructional areas" (p. 16). While many details remain to be discussed, the idea that edTPA would be removed as a roadblock in the journey towards *becoming* a teacher provides me hope for this future change.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research includes investigating whether or not Pearson Education is collecting internal data on how scorers or results may be gendered or racialized. Are their evaluators trained in recognizing implicit or internal bias? Because much of Pearson's training materials are locked behind an EPP log-in, there is a need for them to engage in open practices demonstrating good faith in relation to their role as initial licensure gatekeeper. This study of bias could also explore the question of:

if teaching were a male-dominated field, would Pearson Education have asked young men to provide video evidence of their competence?

Another avenue of possible research would include a more in-depth look at how the completion of edTPA possibly detracts from or interferes with the necessary clinical educator/teacher candidate relationship. Before the inception of edTPA, this relationship was a deciding factor in a teacher candidate's ability to become licensed as the clinical educator was part of the evaluation process.

Lastly, another recommendation includes a study focused on critical analysis of edTPA in regards to its misalignment with best practices in assessment. After submitting their portfolios, the teacher candidates receive no feedback from scorers, only a numerical score. Pedagogical growth does not take place from receiving a numerical score on a rubric. Nor can any growth take place without a place for reflection or qualitative feedback. Any or all of these recommendations would add to the growing body of literature questioning edTPA as the gatekeeper to initial licensure in 21 states.

Limitations

One limitation of this qualitative study was the sample size and the small scope of experiences that were gathered. This work is not intended to be indicative of any people other than those of the participants, but an increase in the number of participants would only add to the conversation surrounding the experiences of future teachers with edTPA. Another limitation is the sample area. The participants were all graduates from Private Rural University teaching in close proximity to one another and lacked the perspectives of teachers working in urban settings during the pandemic. The last limitation of this study are the boundaries of time. Unfortunately I am not able to study what further affects

this experience may have on the participants. Will this make them less likely to stay in education? Or perhaps more prepared for the unexpected?

A Pause for Final Reflection

This study sought to explore the experiences of six teacher candidates turned first-year teachers and their journeys of *becoming*. Chapter one provided an introduction to this study as well as the context for the participant's experiences. Chapter two discussed how teacher education was originally created and also outlined the multiple ways that teachers are controlled through curriculum and testing. The literature review of educational research on edTPA also set the stage to more fully understand the ways edTPA interacted with the participants' experiences. Chapter three outlined the use of Critical Narrative Analysis, and how it allowed this study to highlight the robust narratives of the participants. Lastly, chapter four presented the *becoming* of each participant, prioritizing their words and experiences. Major themes were also discussed in order to fully address the research questions.

I want to conclude this study with the words of Liston (2000) to remind us why these participants' stories matter:

> Good teaching entails a kind of romantic love of the learning enterprise; it is motivated by and infuses others with a love of inquiry. Teaching in and with this love is a vulnerable undertaking, one that leaves the teacher open to pain and rejection. (2000, p. 82)

This pain and rejection that Liston speaks of was also felt by the participants in this study as they wondered if their students had access to food and safety when schools shut down. It is also the pain that they most assuredly experienced as their first year teaching was

simply not what they had expected. Liston also exemplifies the rejection the participants felt when they were relegated to the back of their student-teaching classrooms in order to finish their edTPA portfolios, rather than engage with their students.

The fact that edTPA has taken over the student teaching experience for these participants should be alarming to practitioners everywhere. Traditionally, this time has been held sacred. Providing real-life experiences in order to bolster the theoretical foundations laid out for the teacher candidates throughout their years of coursework. This is time for experimentation and the creation of their teacher persona. This is only the beginning of their journey of *becoming*. EdTPA has seized essential learning time and turned the student teaching experience into one of survival. If we treat our teacher candidates this way, we can not expect to change the discourse around how our in-service teachers are treated.

We ask these civil servants to give of themselves time and time again. If we can not find the strength in us to push back against a standardized test graded by an external evaluator, then we are not the teacher advocates we claim to be. In this study I examined who is really assessing our student teachers, and the multi-billion dollar corporation of Pearson Education is clearly the supreme evaluator of our future teachers. Removed from cultural context and the teacher candidate's personal narratives, a single external evaluator determines their future rather than those who share in their stories that are presented in this study.

Secondarily, I had the privilege of following these individuals through their first year teaching, albeit during a global pandemic. The character and professional ethics they demonstrated throughout their first year is inspiring. The dedication to their students was

apparent in all they did. But again, there was a strong theme of survival that could be felt throughout their stories. Following the uncharted course of teaching throughout Covid-19 was not easy and it shows. As of this writing, only two of the participants are still at the same schools as they began their careers in. Three out of the six are still teaching. This demonstrates just how tumultuous their experiences were as they continually worked to meet their administration's shifting expectations.

I have noticed many times throughout my journey that I write best when I am angry and I found myself angry often. This project began as a simple paper for a graduate class and morphed into something much larger. It has fed my passion for teacher advocacy. I was also motivated by every conversation I have had with individuals who shared very similar stories to those of my participants. I will carry these participants and their experiences with me forever. Since I began this study, five more cohorts of future teachers have had to endure completing edTPA for their initial licensure in the state of North Carolina and across the country.

The last edTPA official administration report was released in 2019 (Pearson, 2021). No new data has been disseminated by Pearson since the Covid-19 pandemic began. In 2019 over 42,000 assessments were submitted. Each one of those assessments a potential future teacher, a human, with their own narrative. While I recognize that my participants are only a very small part of this story, their stories are powerful and they matter. How many of these other candidates across the country experienced the same stress and turmoil as Jordy, Serenity, Natalie, Elizabeth, Becky, and Jessica? More importantly, how many of those individuals decided against *becoming* a teacher?

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Learning to Teach in Troubling Times:
An Exploration of Culturally Responsive Teaching and edTPA

Interview Procedure

1. Once the participants have contacted me to express interest in participating in my study, we will find a time to meet virtually via Zoom. The recruitment email has been attached to this IRB application.
2. At the time of the Zoom meeting I will review the protocol and also share with them the exemption document for their signature.
3. I will make clear that I will be recording the meeting to use for voice transcription and that once we begin, I will tell them we are recording.
4. The interview should last about 20-40 minutes and I will remind participants that they can stop at any time.

Interview Protocol

Begin Interview:
Thank you for participating in my study. My name is Rachel Nelson and I will be asking you a series of questions about your experiences in your teacher preparation program, classroom, and experience with edTPA. Please feel free to answer as freely as you can. Information such as your experience, current position (student, teacher, student-teacher), and field of study will be included in this study but no other personal information will be shared. There is no required length to your responses and you may skip any questions or stop at any time. As I mentioned in the email you responded to, this interview should take approximately 20-40 minutes. Once again, thank you for your time. Would you still like to proceed?

-If yes, proceed to interview questions.
-If no, stop the interview and thank the participant for their time.

Interview Questions

Student Questions:
1. Please describe your current position (student, teacher, or student-teacher).
2. What is your area of study?
3. When will you complete your student teaching?
4. Has what you have heard about edTPA before beginning the process been positive, negative, or neutral? Please explain your thinking.
5. How do you feel about the need to complete edTPA for state licensure?
6. What is your understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)?
7. Do you see yourself implementing CRT in your future classroom? If so, how?
8. Do you see any connections between CRT and edTPA? Can you explain?
9. What could be done to promote CRT within edTPA?

10. Do you feel that edTPA is preparing you for your future classroom?
11. What concerns do you have about becoming a teacher as we continue to battle with Covid-19 in our state?
12. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your experience or understanding about either CRT or edTPA?

Student-Teacher Questions:
1. Please describe your current position (student, teacher, or student-teacher).
2. What is your area of study?
3. Grade level?
4. How are you currently completing your student teaching? (Virtually, face to face, blended?)
5. How has your mode of completing student teaching impacted your ability to complete edTPA?
6. How do you feel about the need to complete edTPA for state licensure?
7. Do you feel that edTPA is preparing you for your future classroom?
8. Does edTPA impact your relationship with your students?
9. What is your understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)?
10. Do you feel that the pandemic has affected your ability to be culturally responsive? How so?
11. Do you see any connections between CRT and edTPA?
12. What could be done to promote CRT within edTPA?
13. What concerns do you have about becoming a teacher as we continue to battle with Covid-19 in our state?
14. Is there anything else you'd like to share with me about your experience with either CRT, your student teaching experience, or edTPA?

First-Year Teacher Questions:
1. Please describe your current position and grade level.
2. What subjects are you currently teaching?
3. How have you and how are you currently teaching your students? (Online, Face to face, blended)
4. What were the biggest challenges you had to face this year?
5. What was most rewarding about your first year teaching?
6. Thinking back to your student teaching or undergraduate experience, what best prepared you for your first year teaching?
7. Did you complete edTPA during your student teaching experience?
8. Did edTPA prepare you for your first year teaching? How so?
9. What is your understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching?
10. Have you implemented culturally responsive teaching in your classroom this year? How?
11. If you were to give advice to new first-year teachers, what would it be?
12. What concerns do you have about being a teacher as we continue to battle with Covid-19 in our state?
13. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your first year teaching experience?

Appendix B
Recruitment Email

Greetings,

My name is Rachel Nelson (nelsonre@appstate.edu) and I am a doctoral student at Appalachian State University. I am completing a study titled "Learning to Teach in Troubling Times: An Exploration of Culturally Responsive Teaching and edTPA". This study focuses on individuals who are choosing to become teachers during this unique time in our country's history. I am seeking to explore the experiences of both first-year teachers as well as those students choosing to enter the field of education.

This project will investigate how the state-mandated teacher performance assessment (edTPA) interacts with individuals' understanding and implementation of Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as well as how the pandemic has impacted your experiences. Highlighting the experiences of **[pre-service teachers still enrolled in course work, student teacher interns inside the classroom, and first-year teachers]** this research can provide valuable insight into how to best support future and first-year educators.

I am seeking participants to be interviewed for my research project. The interview itself will take place over Zoom and should take no more than 40 minutes to complete. You will be asked a series of questions about your experience as a **[student, student teacher, first-year teacher]**.
The interview will be recorded in order to document your answers. Only your teaching experience, and subject area **[area of study]** will be included. There is no required length to your answers and you may skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering. You may also choose to end your participation in this study at any time.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please respond to this email with "I agree to participate in this study" and we can begin to set up a time for you to be interviewed.

I thank you for your time and willingness to contribute to this important research. If you have any questions about my study, please feel free to contact me (nelsonre@appstate.edu) or my dissertation chair, Dr. Bellows (bellowsme@appstate.edu) with any questions.
Thank you for your time and also your dedication to education during this most difficult time for both you and your students.

Best,

Rachel E. Nelson
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Vita

Dr. Rachel Nelson began her educational journey by earning a B.A. in Elementary Education at Concordia University, Wisconsin. While teaching middle school in Las Vegas, Nevada she completed her M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus on technology integration. While living in Texas, Dr. Nelson transitioned out of the classroom and into the role of instructional technologist and had her first opportunity to work with pre-service teachers.

Recognizing her passion for working with future teachers, she entered into Higher Education and began coaching and serving as a university supervisor for individuals completing their student teaching. This work prompted Dr. Nelson to return to school yet again and earn her doctoral degree in Educational Leadership from Appalachian State University. Dr. Nelson is also currently employed by Appalachian State University and serves as the Assistant Director for Teacher Outreach for the Empowering Teacher Learning program. Dr. Nelson's research interests include the use of Critical Narrative Analysis in educational research, the first-year teacher experience, and culturally responsive teaching. Dr. Nelson works to be a teacher advocate in all she does and is a fierce advocate for the removal of edTPA as a mandatory component of teacher licensure in the state of North Carolina.