Support for teacher candidates and the edTPA

Dia Gary
Central Washington University, garyd@cwu.edu

Dylan Thomas
Central Washington University, dylan.thomas@cwu.edu

Joseph Miller
Central Washington University, joseph.miller@cwu.edu

Corresponding Author

Dia Gary, 2003 Dry Creek Road, Ellensburg, Washington 98926

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Dia Gary[1], Dylan Thomas[2], and Joseph Miller[3]

The College of Education and Professional Studies
Central Washington University, United States
[1]garyd@cwu.edu
[2]dylan.thomas@cwu.edu
[3]joseph.miller@cwu.edu

Abstract

Equipping new teachers in today's society is a noble and challenging task. Of late, many additional licensing standards for teachers create additional responsibilities for universities that provide pedagogy, knowledge, and content for teacher candidates. Identification of best practices that support teacher candidates on the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) is of interest to many teacher education programs. The purpose of this research was to analyze whether incorporating a *mock edTPA* had beneficial results on the passage of the edTPA. This study spanned fourteen ten-week quarters and included 688 teacher candidates who were preparing to become certificated teachers at a university in Washington State. The questions that were posited were: a) Does a capstone class requiring a mock edTPA benefit students? b) Which edTPA rubrics are the most challenging, and why are they challenging? This research study found that adding a mock edTPA prior to the student teaching experience did not produce a statistically significant difference in scores when compared to the group who received an embedded curriculum. When comparing the two different time periods, the passing rate was not significantly different and there was little difference in the mean scores of both groups.

Keywords: assessment, teacher preparation, higher education, edTPA

Introduction

Preparing teacher candidates to be the most effective educators is the goal of the teacher preparation program at the university in this study. Higher education preparatory facilities educating teacher candidates for effective practice, are challenged to ensure that programs are of high-quality equipping today and tomorrows' educators with the skills they need to guide the next generation. In the last few years, teacher candidate evaluations have broadened to include performance assessments that are authentic and mirror what the educators will encounter in their first years of teaching. The Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) is one of those performance assessments which require teacher candidates to prepare a series of consecutive lessons, instruct students using those preparations, while concurrently video tapping the lessons to be submitted for documentation that they (teacher-candidates) are *ready to teach* upon graduation from the university. The edTPA includes writing a lengthy narrative which follows fifteen rubrics designed to determine the skills of the teacher-candidate. Quite often teacher candidates are able to plan the lessons, implement them and video tape them with success. However, when reflecting on pedagogy and student learning they often become frustrated and ineffective in their approach

to show what they have learned at the university. Many end up frustrated, and emotionally distraught because their reflective abilities do not reach the level that is required by the edTPA. Quite often mishaps occur such as the one reported by McKenna (2014).

> I put everything on a shelf on my desk, uploaded all the videos to my laptop, and ignored it for six weeks. I was so upset about it that I couldn't even bring myself to look at it. How was this mess supposed to represent who I was as an educator? (p.32).

Too often students who are completing the edTPA fear failure and are fatigued. They question whether or not the edTPA is an adequate assessment of who they are as an educator.

According to Gary (2015), these experiences are common when teacher candidates are completing the requirements of the edTPA; which is a required consequential performance assessment in many states and was introduced in 2014 in the United States. (Washington State University, n.d.) Failure to pass this performance assessment denies teacher candidates a state license which is sometimes required to teach in a public or private school. Unfortunately, many teacher candidates are so consumed with the completion of the edTPA that they lose out on the rich learning environment that they have been placed in for their student teaching experience. (Gary, 2015) The edTPA focus takes away the time that teacher candidates could be experiencing the students and knowledge provided by the mentor teacher. Moreover, because they are so focused on the edTPA they miss opportunities to establish positive relationships with the students (Clark-Garcia, 2015). Greenblatt (2015) suggests that too many teacher candidates are emotionally frazzled, overwhelmed, and consumed with passing the edTPA.

According to edTPA (n.d.), the assessment is completed within the first weeks of student teaching and consists of 3-5 consecutive educational plans with a central focus that integrates the goal and objectives of the lesson segments. The instruction is videotaped, and accompanied with several artifacts and written commentaries, which provide evidence of teacher candidate competency including next steps for remedial or advanced knowledge presented to classroom students. All of the materials are electronically uploaded and scored by various individuals who have been trained by the Pearson Publishing Company. This robust requirement has universities and credential awarding institutions investigating to find the most appropriate way to support teacher candidates.

The university where the research study was conducted desires to produce quality educators. The program's primary mission is to "prepare students for enlightened, responsible, and productive lives; to produce research, scholarship, and creative expression in the public interest; and to serve as a resource to the region and the state through effective stewardship of university resources" (Central Washington University, n.d., para. 6). Moreover, the goal is to produce high quality teacher candidates who will not only serve local communities but international communities as well. High stakes are involved and passage of the edTPA is of major importance. To that end, supporting teacher candidates was frequently the primary topic at faculty meetings. Although it is assumed that the elements of the edTPA were imbedded in the natural flow of the education courses, proof was not evident that courses covered all aspects of the performance assessment, such as defining and reflecting on student voice and focused academic language. The decision was unanimous that a concluding teacher preparation capstone class would equip teacher candidates with successful passage of the edTPA by requiring the entirety of the edTPA to be staged into a mock trial run. In other words, all teacher candidates who were elementary education majors were required to complete all tasks that were included in the edTPA prior to student teaching in the

concluding capstone class. They started with creating consecutive lessons and finished with written expression meeting the requirements of each of the fifteen rubrics. One faculty member (senior lecturer) was given the task of designing and implementing the course, with one assistant professor assigned as a *co-instructor*. Training was facilitated by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) at Stanford University. The purpose of this research was to analyze whether incorporating a mock edTPA had beneficial results on the passage of the edTPA.

Literature Review

A review of the literature for best practices and most effective programs for supporting teacher candidates was conducted. Specifically, the researchers focused on which edTPA rubric areas were the most challenging for teacher-candidates to answer or earn a passing score. One of the relevant studies identified in the research was Burns et al. (2015), where they developed a capstone class that required their teacher candidates to complete an extra quarter of university attendance in an elementary classroom. They developed partnerships with local community schools to allow the teacher candidates to spend a quarter of their classroom time with the same students, and the same mentor teacher. They found the arrangement was very successful. By spending time in the same classroom, teacher candidates developed stronger relationships with the students. The quarter (10 weeks) prior to their official student teaching experience, the teacher candidates conducted a mock edTPA with real children. Because it occurred prior to the official capstone student teaching experience, the university faculty were able to analyze the mock edTPA's rubric scores and give valuable feedback. Understandably, when it came time for the real edTPA during the student teaching experience, the teacher candidates had an advantage because they knew the students more intimately.

In a similar study, Barron (2015) reported success after embedding additional components into their existing education program to further support their teacher candidates. An additional five weeks were added at the beginning of the student teaching semester to allow for the teacher candidates to, a) work on completing contextual information, b) focus on academic language and video recording and, c) focus on appropriate assessment, feedback, and reflection. The teacher candidates paid close attention to analyzing the student work produced in the classroom setting. They concluded that honing and developing analytical skill was essential to passing the edTPA. After completing the capstone class, when these teacher candidates began their student teaching, they essentially had all the required components needed to complete the edTPA. In essence this was very similar to the Burns et al. (2015) process, except it was five weeks compared to ten or more weeks. In reviewing these studies, it was noted that additional fees were passed on to teacher candidates as their program was lengthened. Hofstra University instructor Singer (2014), stated the following about his students.

> All of my students passed the edTPA evaluation, including some who I felt were weak. In one case, two student teachers that handed in very similar packages received significantly different scores, which calls into account the reliability of the evaluations (para. 7).

Clark-Garcia's (2015) study also added an additional teaching experience to the academic program where teacher candidates were required to complete two semesters of student teaching, one in an elementary K-6 classroom and the other in a middle school secondary environment, grades 7-12. Again, the cost of the extra semester was passed on to the teacher candidates.

Methods

The researchers of this study were interested in comparing fourteen quarters, (each quarter was ten weeks) of implementation of support for the edTPA by comparing a capstone class focused strictly on the elements of the edTPA or components of the edTPA in comparison to the edTPA information (analysis, reflection on student learning, and written reflections) embedded in course work. In other words, which method was more successful? The teacher candidates started with creating consecutive lessons and finished with written expression meeting the requirements of each of the fifteen rubrics. One faculty member (senior lecturer) was given the task of designing and implementing the course, with one assistant professor assigned as a *co-instructor*. Training was facilitated by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity (SCALE) at Stanford University. The premise of the research study was to find out if teaching and implementing a *mock edTPA* in the university concluding capstone course for teacher candidates was the best practice in supporting teacher candidates to successfully pass the edTPA. Or, was embedding the components of the edTPA the best practice?

The capstone class requiring the mock edTPA was implemented from the Fall Quarter 2013 through Spring Quarter of 2015. Fall Quarter of 2015 through Winter Quarter of 2018, the researchers did not utilize for the mock edTPA. Instead, the components of the edTPA performance assessment were embedded into the required classes, which included the capstone course. The edTPA scores on the cohorts involved in those two time periods was analyzed.

The first research question of this study sought to determine if a capstone class requiring a mock edTPA would benefit the students. The hypothesis was that the students who completed the mock edTPA would have higher scores on the official edTPA compared to the students who received components of the performance assessment embedded in their classes. The second research question of this study focused on the fifteen edTPA rubrics. Specifically, which rubrics were the most challenging for the teacher candidates? By determining which rubrics of the edTPA were the most challenging, instructional interventions could then be implemented to fill the deficits.

Sample

Participants included undergraduate teacher candidates ($N = 688$) who attended the university during the quarters Fall 2013 until Winter 2018. All teacher candidates involved in this research were seeking Washington State licensing and certification to become teachers at the P-3 level or K-6 level. The teacher candidates were primarily female. Of the submissions analyzed, 347 teacher candidates completed the elementary math edTPA, 306 completed the elementary literacy, and 14 teacher candidates completed the early childhood edTPA's. The cutoff edTPA score for passing was 35 until the Fall of 2017, at which time it was raised to 40 (edTPA for Washington, n.d.). As stated previously a mock edTPA was conducted in the concluding capstone class which included creating three-to five consecutive lessons, teaching those lessons to peers while concurrently video tapping the lesson. A reflective analysis was then completed by each student following the edTPA rubric guidelines, and then graded by the capstone class instructor. The control group did not include a specified instructional session(s) focusing strictly on the edTPA but instead embedded components of the edTPA were included in instructional sequences without mentioning that the information presented was a component of the edTPA.

Materials

Support materials that were implemented into the capstone class included: a) *Making Good Choices* which is a support manual designed by SCALE; b) rubric templates which were designed by the university instructors; and c) discussion questions created by the instructors to allow teacher candidates to examine the rubrics. The class was a co-taught class with two instructors and 25 students each quarter. Moreover, one of the instructors became an official *scorer* of the edTPA (earned through watching Pearson sponsored edTPA scoring rubrics, and passing an exam), and one of the instructors devoted one complete weekend to write her own mock edTPA with fictitious students and lesson objectives and goals.

Procedure

Each quarter was broken down into ten weeks with two 80-minute class sessions per week. During the first week of the quarter, the class focused on the difference between goals and objectives and what entailed *close reading*. The second week's classes centered on the components of teaching and learning cycles, the definition of an essential learning strategy, and the concepts of Understanding by Design created by Wiggins and McTighe (2008). Week three focused on writing learning objectives that matched the teaching and learning cycle. The *context for learning* Task 1 was investigated during the fourth week. The teacher candidates created their own context for learning implementing fictitious students and classroom environment. The next week focused on designing the learning segment and included writing a 3-5 consecutive lesson segment to serve the fictitious students developed in the context for learning. Academic language was featured the sixth week with vocabulary definitions, brainstorming, and reflection on how academic language is taught in an elementary classroom. Student Voice was also discussed. The seventh week included a guest speaker from the multi-modal lab who taught students how to video tape using a flip camera and upload it to Canvas, the university's learning management system. The ninth and final week of the quarter were set aside for the teacher candidates to *teach* one of their consecutive lessons from the lesson segment to peers who role-played students in grades K-5th grade. That lesson was videotaped, reviewed by the instructors and teacher candidates. The knowledge gained from the videotape and the discussion with the instructors enabled the teacher candidates to address each of the edTPA fifteen rubrics with confidence. The mock edTPA manuscripts were then submitted to the instructors for a final grade. Essentially, the class required each teacher candidate to construct a complete edTPA excluding uploading to thePearson Publishing Company. Additionally, each of the Tasks 1-3 were reviewed as they were accomplished so that the instructors could provide feedback to the teacher candidates and scaffold instruction along the way.

For two instructors to review 25 mock edTPA submissions each quarter was quite time consuming and took many dedicated weekends to accomplish the endeavor. There were also discrepancies in the variability in grading between the two instructors.

Reliability is a very serious concern with the edTPA. According to Pecheone (2019), evaluator qualifications demand that scores have adequate electronic equipment, internet band-with, 19-24 hours of Pearson provided training, and have at least a Bachelor of Arts or higher. However, a Bachelor of Arts or higher does not give evidence that the evaluator has ever stepped into a classroom as an instructor or is knowledgeable about the teaching profession. This information is similar to the differences in the instructors involved in this study. The backgrounds of the mock

edTPA graders were similar to those employed by Pearson. One instructor had no teaching experience in a K-12 setting and one instructor had over 25 years teaching experience K-12 in the United States, Kazakhstan, and China. Scoring variability was problematic when incorporating the feedback of the instructors in the evaluation process. Some of the teacher candidates met with one instructor and then would go to the second instructor seeking a more favorable evaluation of their edTPA manuscript. This led to some friction between the two instructors. Ideally, it would have been better to have one instructor score all of the edTPA's. However, due to time constraints, two instructors decided to divide the workload. Because one of the instructors had received scoring training from Pearson Publishing, and one had not, it is quite possible that validity was compromised. Moreover, one had K-12 teaching experience and one did not. However, ensuring that at least one of the instructors had official training sponsored by Pearson added validity to the study.

A statistical analysis was conducted to determine whether the implementation of the mock edTPA resulted in higher edTPA test scores. The comparison included multiple statistical analysis of the means and medians of each time period–the mock edTPA group and the embedded group. The other statistical analysis included in the research was comparing the scores on the individual rubrics to determine which rubrics were the most challenging.

Results

The purpose of this research was to analyze whether incorporating a mock edTPA had beneficial results on the passage of the edTPA. The results of this study included data ($N = 688$), from Fall 2013 until Winter 2018; with the first three years incorporating data from a capstone class requiring a mock edTPA, and the following period incorporating embedded edTPA components into the curriculum routinely implemented I the classes. In addition to comparing teacher candidates' edTPA scores between the two time periods, the second research question investigated the edTPA rubrics. Specifically, the researchers sought to determine which were the most challenging for the teacher candidates. One aspect the researchers considered was whether the Capstone class mock edTPA truly improved test scores. A chi-squared test provided a *p* value of .9766, which indicated both periods' test scores followed almost the same normal distribution, with very little change. This similarity in distribution illustrates that scores were shifted due to the capstone class mock edTPA, not skewed. All of this can be easily seen within the histograms provided (see Figure 1).

Two-sample *t*-tests and the Wilcoxon ranked sum test require a few common assumptions that include random sampling, independent observations, normal distribution of data, adequate sample size, and similar variances of the two samples. Random sampling of the data is shown by the fact that the scores provided for the two time periods were recorded purely by what quarter students' enrollment occurred, with no preferential treatment. Independence of observations is assumed in this data as one student's score should not have significant if any effect on another student's score. Normal distribution of the data used in the various two-sample *t*-test can be shown by the representation of each time period, and the various rubric histograms; see Figure 2.

In order to identify which rubric areas students were underperforming on, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the edTPA data. Rubric sections 8 ($M = 2.86$), 10 ($M = 2.84$), 13 ($M = 2.59$), and 14 ($M = 2.77$) had the lowest mean scores. It is clear that each rubric's scores are significantly different at the 94% than the other, except when comparing rubric 8 and

10. Rubrics 8, 13 and 14 had five students receive a score of zero, while rubric 10 had no students receive a zero; see Table 2.

Multiple two-sample *t*-tests were also conducted. A summary of the corresponding two sample *t*-tests are provided in Table 3.

Similar variances between samples are shown for the mock edTPA, embedded curriculum, and rubric analysis in Table 4.

Table 1. Analysis of edTPA Scores

Period	Mean Score	Median Score	Sample Size	Percentage Passed
Capstone-Mock edTPA Embedded edTPA	44.38	45	328	91.84% - (349/380)
General Education Classes	43.79	44	340	91.83% - (283/308)

Figure 1. Histograms
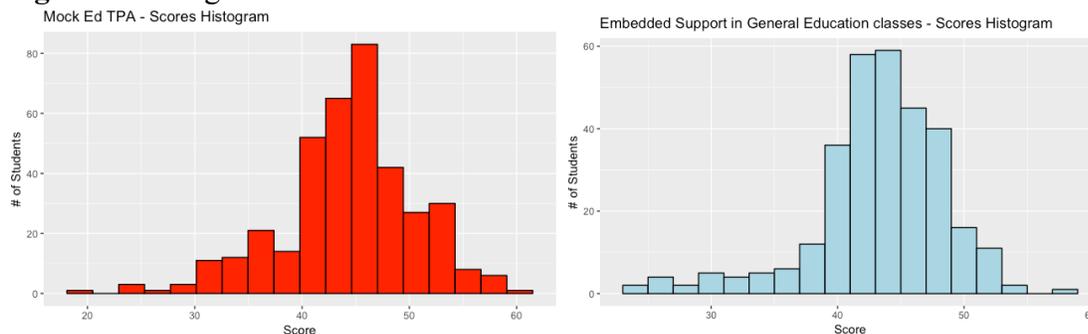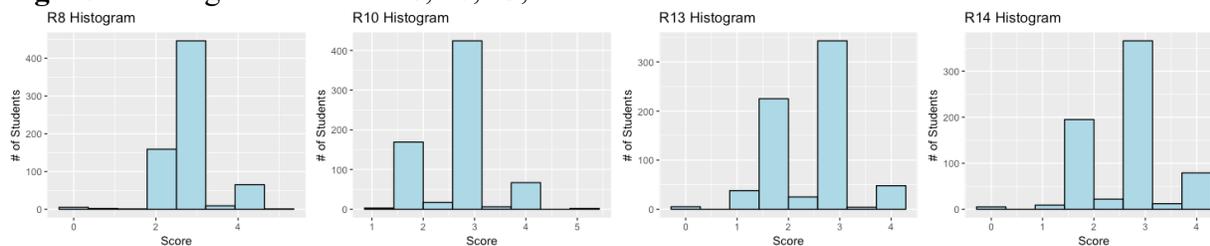

Rubric Analysis

Table 2. Analysis of edTPA Rubric Scores

Rubric	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Mean	3.14	3.06	3.10	2.99	2.93	3.11	2.97	2.86	2.93	2.84	2.96	2.92	2.59	2.77	2.95

Table 3. Comparison of edTPA Rubric *p* Values

Comparison	R8 – R10	R8 – R13	R8 – R14	R10 – R13	R10 – R14	R13 – R14
P Value	.5159	0	.01255	0	.05576	0

Figure 2. Histogram of rubrics 8, 10, 13, 14

Table 4 Variance in Mock edTPA, Embedded Curriculum, and edTPA Rubric Sections 8, 10, 13, and 14

Sample	Mock edTPA	Embedded	Rubric 8	Rubric 10	Rubric 13	Rubric 14
Variance	40.20	27.81	.368	.355	.534	.483

Conclusions

This research study found that adding a mock edTPA prior to student teaching did not produce a statistically significant difference in scores when compared to the group who received an embedded curriculum. When comparing the two different time periods, the passing rate was not significantly different and there was little difference in the mean scores of both groups.

When comparing the edTPA individual rubric scores, the students scored lowest on rubric 13 and 14. Based on the scores of these rubric sections, more emphasis may also be needed when compiling evidence for rubrics 8 and 10. According to the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning and Equity(2018), rubric 8 focuses on deepening student learning, rubric 10 on analyzing teaching and teaching effectiveness, rubric 13 assesses student work with the addition of providing feedback to students for improvement. Rubric 14 analyzes student language use and subject specific learning. Because, similar studies were not found in any of the literature focusing on the implementation of the edTPA, it was difficult to ascertain if the findings of this study were unique to this university.

The information that was the most valuable from the study was information gained from the focused analysis of the rubrics. It was notable that the teacher candidates were failing by receiving a zero, or obtaining low scores of either a 1 or a 2 on rubrics 8, 10, 13, and 14. These rubrics showed the least success and will prove to be the rubrics that will require more intensity and rigor. The university where the research was conducted endeavor to enable teacher candidates to become quality teachers who can face the swiftly changing population of public and private education with confidence. The present research will provide preparatory institutions the data needed to strengthen support systems to equip teacher candidates with the pedagogy necessary to educate today's youth for professions and lives that are rewarding, resourceful, and remunerative.

Practical Implications

From the information gained in this research study it is evident that the rubrics where the teacher-candidates obtained low scores were focused on deepening student learning (rubric 8), analyzing teaching (rubric 10), student feedback (rubric 13) and academic language which analyzes how student use academic language (rubric 14). Pragmatic ways to improve programming in these areas include instructing teacher candidates in how to make a documented and analytical conclusion. For example, rubric 8 analyzes instruction. This would include instructing teacher-candidates in how to ask questions that guide the learner to think at a deeper cognitive level. Instead of asking what happened, ask why it happened. By changing questioning strategies, students are challenged to make deeper inferences instead of answering questions that regurgitate facts. For rubric 10 the focus would be to analyze the effectiveness of the instruction given by the teacher candidate. Guiding the teacher candidate to learn how to dissect teaching into what worked, and what didn't would include an analysis on what could be changed to ensure that the lesson supported the various needs of the students including factors addressing a myriad of learning styles. Rubric 13 involves

giving feedback to students. Both positive and negative feedback to students would require teacher candidates to be empathetic to learning needs in a positive but constructive manner. Designing several assignments where teacher-candidates peer review colleagues' work and then give constructive feedback would help the teacher candidate when they are required to give their students feedback. Rubric 14 encompasses academic language. This includes analyzing how the students used academic language associated with the lesson. Modeling academic language as a university instructor to teacher candidates is the first step in ensuring that teacher candidates understand the academic language needed. Instructing the teacher candidates to initiate a list of vocabulary terms and definitions at the beginning of each lesson will help their students understand what is involved in the lesson. Moreover, it is important that teacher candidates present the context of the vocabulary as focused on in the lesson to ensure that multiple meanings are not construed. It is especially important that the teacher-candidate understand that there will be varied levels of vocabulary use in the classroom and that introducing a lesson with vocabulary associated with the lesson is a key support for student learning

Limitations and Future Research

As in all research endeavors, there are limitations. The question arises as to whether or not these findings are isolated to this particular university, or are the conclusions of this research similar to the findings at other universities? One limitation of the study was that the two groups of teacher candidates were not the same teacher candidates. Accounting for individual differences in ethnicity, age, experience in teaching children, and a host of other variables were involved. Another limitation is that faculty members teaching the classes of the independent group (embedded components of the edTPA) changed over the period when the research was being conducted. The instructors ranged from newly hired adjunct instructors to tenured full professors. However, the dependent group (mock edTPA) was taught by the same instructors throughout the entire period of research. Student teaching sites and mentor teachers involved with the teacher candidates during the student teaching phase may also have impacted the results of this study. Some teacher candidates may have had more supportive mentor teachers, and or students from a more rigorous academic background than others. Moreover, the compilation of the edTPA scores included the results of passing rates of three different edTPA areas. Early childhood, elementary education with a focus in either math or literacy. Variations of the edTPA's may have some bearing on the research results. Although, the two professors who taught the dependent group were both seasoned instructors (one tenured, one senior adjunct), one had obtained official edTPA training sponsored by the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, & Equity, and one had not. This may have resulted in discrepancies in how the mock edTPA's were analyzed and then graded, thus perhaps influencing the interrater reliability.

Future research may include conducting the identical study at a similar university, or at least analyzing edTPA pass/fail data to see if a similar teacher-candidate population would fail the same rubrics. Information gleaned from multiple universities conducting the same research would give significant insight on how best to improve teacher-candidates preparation, thus ensuring that our future educators are successful when they enter their respective profession. It is also possible that the edTPA is not an adequate measure in determining who will be an effective teacher and who will not. It would be interesting for future studies to compare principal evaluations of teachers within their first- and second-year teaching experiences with their edTPA scores. The question to

investigate would be *do higher edTPA scores produce quality teachers based on principal evaluations?*

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