Using Teacher Performance Assessment to Dismantle Injustice and Construct Possibilities in Teacher Education

Leah Bartlo[1] &Julie Gorlewski[2]

Abstract

Educators at a public institution embraced the opportunity to collaborate with faculty, school partners, and community members to develop a portfolio-based teacher performance assessment (TPA) that centers program values and goals along with state and professional standards when their state removed the edTPA as a certification requirement in 2022. This study describes the process of development, the product generated with faculty and community engagement, as well as the results of a content analysis of data collected during the first round of full implementation. Findings support use of a portfolio-based TPA as a promising component of teacher certification with the potential to advance inclusive, culturally-sustaining, evidence-based practices that create pathways to equitable, just futures through a critical approach to collaboration, persistence, care, and joy, and prioritized authentic relationships with students, families, teachers, schools, and communities.

Keywords: Teacher performance assessment, TPA, portfolio, values, assessment, justice, content analysis, equity

1. Introduction

Assessment of teacher performance is a complex and critically important endeavor. Teacher effectiveness is among the most significant factors influencing student achievement. Yet evaluation of teacher effectiveness requires identification and measurement of elements of performance, which are difficult to discern and quantify. Consequently, it is essential to investigate effective teacher candidate evaluation following educator preparation programs before entering the profession.

As part of participation in the U.S. Department of Education's Race to the Top initiative, New York State added the standardized, Pearson-developed and administered edTPA as a certification requirement to evaluate preservice teacher readiness. After years of navigating concerns related to edTPA as a barrier to certification, the state revised its policy:

In April 2022, the New York State Board of Regents voted to modify the teacher performance assessment requirement for certification by eliminating the edTPA requirement for certification and, instead, requiring that New York State-registered teacher preparation programs integrate a teacher performance assessment into the candidates' student teaching, practicum, or similar clinical experience (e.g., residency, mentored in-service component) (Office of Teaching Initiatives, n.d.).

[1]Presidential Fellow, Graduate School of Education, University at Buffalo, 505 Baldy Hall, Buffalo, NY 14260-1000.Email:lbartlo@buffalo.edu

[2]State University of New York at Buffalo, Graduate School of Education, 505 Baldy Hall, Buffalo, New York 14260-1000, United States. Email: jgorlews@buffalo.edu

When edTPA was removed as a certification requirement, teacher educators at a public institution embraced the opportunity to collaborate with faculty, school partners, and community members to develop a portfolio-based performance assessment that centers multiculturalism, program values, and professional standards. This case study shares the process and product of developing context-based teacher performance assessments (TPAs) by demonstrating how they can be implemented as a means of evaluating progress toward program goals and a lever for supporting transformation toward equity and justice by linking candidate assessment with program experiences and artifacts, as well as program evaluation and innovation-oriented accreditation. By building on the opportunity to collaborate in the creation of an assessment, this work emphasizes how multiculturalism can revitalize and reinvigorate assessment practices to be more just, inclusive, and equitable.

The TPA that is the focus of this study was developed in response to an opportunity to advance an alternative to edTPA as part of the state requirements for teacher certification. Administered and scored by designated program personnel, the TPA utilizes multiple measures requiring candidates to display their pedagogical knowledge and skills as outlined in the state's teaching standards and consistent with the principles of the state's culturally responsive and sustaining education framework. Additionally, candidates exhibit their content knowledge and teaching skills in accordance with the state learning standards specific to the grade level and subject area of the certificate being sought. The TPA represents a culmination of diverse experiences, providing insights into candidates' preparedness for teaching and their commitment to program values; thus, an exploration of its effectiveness in cultivating critical reflection is associated with teacher education as a means of transformation toward equity and justice.

The purpose of this research is to describe the process of development and investigate the effects of a context-based TPA. This research uses content analysis to provide empirical evidence that demonstrates the extent of the alignment between student-generated artifacts/reflections and program values, state teaching standards, and culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy.

To investigate the potentially transformative effects of a locally and collaboratively-developed and implemented TPA, this study considered the following research questions:

1. How do teacher candidates in an urban teacher residency program narrate their experiences in relation to program values?
2. How do teacher candidates in an urban teacher residency program demonstrate their ability to assess student learning?

We believe these are fundamental questions to explore following the first round of full implementation of a context-based TPA and that findings demonstrate TPAs can be implemented, not only as a means of evaluating progress toward program goals, but also as a lever for supporting transformation toward equity and justice by emphasizing how multiculturalism can revitalize and reinvigorate assessment practices to be more just, inclusive, and equitable.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Nearly 40 years ago, Lee Shulman (1987), director of the Teacher Assessment Project at Stanford University, charged with developing new approaches to the assessment of teachers, declared a new approach to teacher assessment "that will reflect a more enlightened view of teaching" was "needed badly" (p. 38). Shulman (1987) explained that teacher assessments are important work that "must mirror as accurately as possible the complexity and richness of teaching" (p. 39). Messick (1994) later contributed, "Exposure to authentic assessment is expected to provide the student with a meaningful educational experience that facilitates learning and skill development as well as deeper understanding of the requirements and standards for good performance" (p. 17). Toward this goal, myriad reforms have been initiated by policymakers over these years, including new standards, tests, curricula, and governance models, all with the understanding that teachers play a pivotal role in the success or failure of any school initiative, particularly as educational standards rise, necessitating more advanced teaching skills to meet

the needs of all students including those with individual learning needs, English language learners, and those who lack resources at home (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2020).

Although edTPA was mandated in New York State beginning in 2014, TPAs had been used in various states in the U.S. for many years to assess preservice teacher readiness, most notably in California after successful completion of a TPA became a requirement for certification (Kolman, 2022). However, the edTPA mandate in New York was not without controversy due to the rapid pace and high stakes associated with its implementation (Peck et al., 2021). Peck and colleagues (2021) concluded:

While a slower pace of implementation does not necessarily avoid stress and confusion, it is likely to allow better communication and more effective planning and problem solving between state policymakers, teacher educators, and P-12 partners. This, in turn, can lead to more meaningful use of TPAs as tools for achieving program improvement goals that matter to program faculty, staff, and candidates (p. 18).

It is with these keen insights in mind that we set out to examine the first full implementation of a portfolio-based TPA based on program values, state teaching standards, and culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy.

The theoretical foundation of this study is rooted in the concepts social constructivism and reflective practice. Social constructivism posits that learner construction of knowledge is the product of social interaction, interpretation, and understanding, and emphasizes the role of others in the individual construction of knowledge (Vygotsky, 1962; Vygotsky, 1978). In the context of this study, teacher candidates' experiences, as demonstrated in their portfolios, are likely to be influenced by their interactions with students, peers, mentors, and the learning community.

According to Dewey (1973), "thinking is the accurate and deliberate institution of connections between what is done and its consequences" (p. 505). With reflective practice, candidates engage in thinking as described by Dewey to explore and critically analyze and interpret their residency experiences providing insights into the cognitive processes involved in portfolio decision making. By conducting a content analysis of teacher candidate portfolios with a social constructivism and reflective practice lens, this study aims to illuminate how teacher candidate narratives of their pedagogical experiences demonstrate program values and the ability to assess student learning in the first full implementation of a portfolio-based TPA.

3. Methods

3.1 Sample

Ten participant portfolios from a diverse sample of teacher residency students were examined in this study. A range of participant characteristics, including age, race, and gender, was achieved. Portfolios were examined from three Black females, three White females, one multiracial female, and three White males, all of whom are early- to mid- career. Participants also varied in content areas and grade levels representing Social Studies, English Language Arts, Science, and Foreign Language teachers from elementary and high school settings (See Table 1). This study was conducted involving completers of a teacher residency program at large a public university in the northeastern United States. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained.

Table 1

Participant demographics Participant Pseudonym	Age	Gender Identity	Race / Ethnicity	Subject Taught	Level Taught
Andrew	24	Cisgender	White	English	Middle

		Male		Language Arts	School
Alyse	23	Cisgender Female	White	Elementary	Elementary
Brittany	24	Cisgender Female	Black	Elementary	Elementary
Carly	22	Cisgender Female	Black	Foreign Language	High School
Christine	55	Cisgender Female	White	Foreign Language	High School
Maria	21	Cisgender Female	White	Elementary	Elementary
Mitchell	24	Cisgender Male	White	Science	High School
Nancy	38	Cisgender Female	Multiracial	Social Studies	High School
Paul	30	Cisgender Male	White	Science	High School
Tracy	30	Cisgender Female	Black	Elementary	Elementary

3.2 Teacher Performance Assessment

The overall structure of the TPA that is the focus of this study aims for a balance of standardization and flexibility. The product was developed during the 2021-2022 academic year as an educative instrument to facilitate professional induction and support critical dispositions through reflection. A Faculty Advisory Board was convened to leverage pedagogical expertise,and a community advisory board was consulted to ensure inclusion of knowledge outside academia. The development process was iterative, including components that had been used as signature assessments in coursework. The team began by creating a crosswalk of standards and program goals (which were also crafted in a collaborative manner with faculty and community input). Next, subcommittees of the Faculty Advisory Board and Community Advisory Board reviewed and responded to a draft document. Revisions were made in response to feedback. This cycle was repeated numerous times over the course of the year until faculty and community participants were satisfied that it was ready for submission. At this phase, the TPA was sent to the New York State Education Department for approval. The TPA was approved in summer 2022 and was implemented with teacher residents during the 2022-2023 academic year. The final version of the TPA provides a structure for candidates to reflect on their experiences and related growth during the course of their education programs. Teacher candidates were given comprehensive instructions on how to complete their portfolios which were generated across two semesters, embedded in program coursework related to yearlong clinical placements. In the fall semester, students were expected to contribute an introduction and three artifacts with rationales to their portfolio, and in the spring, they were expected to revise their introduction and submit the remaining three artifacts and rationales. Guidance included written directions and reference materials, as well as instructor and peer support during the residency seminar and fieldwork courses. Scaffolding included definitions of important terms, an outline of the expected portfolio format and organization, detailed information on how their portfolio would be evaluated (including a rubric), an overview of the portfolio's two sections (Section I: Executive Summary, Section II: Artifacts), a table encompassing the six artifact categories aligned with state standards, and an appendix with supporting information to guide selection of artifacts and development of rationales which included sample documents.

The instructions described the portfolio as "a purposeful sample of work that demonstrates learning over time" where candidates provide a justification (rationale) of what sample entries "demonstrate about their

skills, knowledge, and dispositions." This sample of work includes artifacts defined as "a piece of work that you have created in response to course requirements, workshops attended, experiences in the classroom, conferences attended, or any other meaningful educational or discipline related activity." Candidates are encouraged to include an artifact that "represents an authentic experience of educational failure." Additionally, teacher candidates were offered the following guidance on portfolio creation: With thoughtful critical reflection, people often learn more about teaching from what went wrong than what went right. Please consider the benefits of taking the risk of presenting an artifact that demonstrates an experience that taught you the importance of a mid-course correction and the importance of becoming a lifelong learner.

The portfolio instructions then define the Executive Summary as a statement that "describes how program core values are revealed in the artifacts selected and their accompanying rationales." (See Table 2.) The rationale was explained: In essence, a rationale for the artifact tells the reader what the artifact is, why you chose it to be in a particular category and how it impacts you and/or your future students in teaching and learning and professional development.

Table 2

Six Core Values Program Value	Descriptor
Asset-based, Responsive Pedagogies	We approach students with a focus on their many skills, knowledges, and ways of knowing and we tailor instruction to build on those strengths. We value community knowledge and collaborate with families and communities to inform curriculum.
Inquiry and Adaptability	We ask questions and seek out evidence-based strategies that make content more accessible to students. When something isn't working, we change course.
Urgency and Persistence	We recognize that every minute of instruction is an opportunity to engage students in learning. We do not give up when confronted with a challenge and persist in advocating for and working toward justice.
Reflective Ownership	We reflect on our own practice and seek always to improve. We acknowledge our responsibility to students and effective instruction.
Critically Conscious Purpose & Advocacy	We understand that we work within systems where resources are not equally accessible to members of all social groups. We reflect on our own positions and act strategically to disrupt social injustice.
Critical Joy	We approach students and our classrooms with enthusiasm and care. We seek to inspire curiosity and provide space for children to engage with new ideas in ways that promote personal happiness.
Standard IV: Learning Environment	Teachers work with all students to create a dynamic learning environment that supports achievement and growth. Teachers create a welcoming and affirming environment.
Standard V: Assessment for Student Learning	Teachers use multiple measures to assess and document student growth, evaluate instructional effectiveness, and modify instruction. Teachers identify and implement inclusive curriculum and assessment.
Standard VI: Professional Responsibilities and Collaboration and Standard VII: Professional Growth	Teachers demonstrate professional responsibility and engage relevant stakeholders to maximize student growth, development, and learning. and Teachers set informed goals and strive for continuous professional growth. Teachers engage in ongoing professional learning & support.

Teacher candidates were instructed to select artifacts from specified categories based on the state's teaching standards and culturally responsive-sustaining framework principles and were provided with instructions on how to access further information on the standards and principles. Teacher candidates were told the artifacts and rationales should demonstrate how their experiences prepared them for the teaching profession. In all, the portfolio should include the Executive Summary along with six artifacts selected across the six categories and rationales. Teacher candidates were encouraged to select artifacts in a non-written format, such as a photograph, drawing, or video.

Instructions indicated that four of the artifacts could be in a format of their choosing; however, the other two artifacts needed to include a lesson with its implementation observed by a coach along with a reflection on the experience (videoclip optional), and an example of how candidates used data to inform the candidate's instruction, such as an action research project. Directions explained that "mandated artifacts could fit with a number of the core values." Further, when identifying artifacts, it was suggested that candidates ask themselves: "What evidence do I have that demonstrates my successful progress in my teacher education program and my understanding of and application of evidence-based practices in my teaching?"

In total, there were six artifact categories corresponding to seven state standards. To answer our research questions, we focused our study on the Executive Summary and Artifact 5. Artifact 5 corresponds to "Standard V: Assessment for Student Learning." (See Table 3.)

According to the instructions, each rationale should have a title and a one or two sentence description. The instructions also indicate the teacher candidate should "identify the category this artifact serves as evidence for and explain how the artifact addresses aspects of the domain." A key aspect of the portfolio intends to cultivate critically reflective educators. Consequently, in addition to the description of the artifact, the teacher candidates were also directed to create a rationale for each artifact.

To guide reflections, teacher candidates were asked to answer the question, "What does the artifact demonstrate about your readiness to teach – knowledge, skills, and dispositions?" Candidates are encouraged to make the connection between the artifact and the identified category and provide commentary that explains how the artifact demonstrates their "growth, confidence, achievement, doubts, concerns, etc." It was explained to candidates that this section is expected to be the longest part of the rationale, as it "reveals how the artifact represents impact with respect to your teaching, as well as the learning of your current and future students."

Lastly, candidates were instructed to include a one or two sentence conclusion to their rationale. The instructions explained, "Restating is safe, but boring. More beneficial, but riskier, is proposing a next step. How has the process of reflecting affected your development as an educator? How has the program prepared you to become a critically reflective teacher?"

3.3 Data Collection

Data in this study consists of 10 TPA portfolios submitted to the teacher residency program. The portfolios consist of two sections: Section I, the Executive Summary, and Section II, consisting of six artifacts and rationales. This study focused on the Executive Summary and Artifact 5. Three of the ten portfolios from the sample were selected for an initial round of coding. To ensure a diverse sample for the initial round, one from each of the rubric scores, Exemplary, Satisfactory, and Needs Improvement, was selected.

3.4 Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four key criteria for trustworthiness guided this study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was addressed through multiple careful reviews of the data and through regular sessions of peer debriefing amongst the research team throughout the content analysis process. Transferability of qualitative findings can be hard to establish, however, our

inclusion of portfolios from teacher candidates of varyingages, genders, racial and ethnic backgrounds, and subject areas was purposeful in an effort to ensure our study was representative of teacher candidates more broadly. Additionally, the use of a priori coding—using program values and professional standards as predefined codes—provided a transparent, structured, and systematic approach to our data analysis, which enabled us to explore the research questions consistently across samples while simultaneously mitigating bias and subjectivity in the coding process. This method also serves to facilitate comparisons between studies enhancing the utility of our findings for informing theory, practice, and policy. Dependability was established throughout the study by involving both members of the research team in the data analysis process, while confirmability was supported by the use of verbatim excerpts from participants' portfolios.

3.5 Positionalities

Boveda and Annamma (2023) put forth a thoughtful and important framework for researcher positionality as "more than an enumeration of identities or a claim on authority," (p.312). They contend scholars must understand the "power and function" of positioning (Boveda and Annamma, 2023, p. 306), go "beyond rhetorical moves that center researchers" and situate positioning as "a necessary part of the inquiry" (Boveda and Annamma, 2023, p. 312). Researchers bring decades of experience in teacher education research, as well as expertise in conducting research on educational assessment. Individually, and as a research team, we acknowledge and remain mindful of our multiple identities—class, citizenship, ability, age, race, sexual orientation, gender, as well as our positions within academia—and the role these identities play in knowledge production (Boveda and Annamma, 2023, p. 312). This framework served as a guide throughout our work as we collaborated with faculty, school partners, and community members to develop a portfolio-based TPA to advance inclusive, culturally-sustaining, evidence-based practices that create pathways to equitable, just futures.

3.6 Data Analysis

To address the research questions, our analysis focused on the Executive Summary, aligned with the program's six core values, and Artifact 5, aligned with Standard V: Assessment of Student Learning, from a sample of ten portfolios. As an initial step, a content analysis of three portfolios was conducted consisting of four main steps (Erlingsson &Brysiewicz, 2017). We began with a careful reading of three portfolios with one portfolio representing each possible rubric score (Exemplary, Satisfactory, and Needs Improvement) to thoroughly familiarize ourselves with the data. Memos of initial impressions were generated throughout the process. Then, portions of text were divided into discrete meaning units and condensed as needed (Erlingsson &Brysiewicz, 2017). The third step involved formulating "codes that are descriptive labels for the condensed meaning units" (Erlingsson &Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 96). The final step of the content analysis involved sorting codes into categories to determine which codes belong together based on "manifest content visible in the data with limited interpretation on the part of the researcher" (Erlingsson &Brysiewicz, 2017, p. 96-97). It was at this point, it became clear that utilizing the standards as an a priori guide for coding would be an appropriate way to address the research question. Therefore, this approach was used to code the remaining seven portfolios. Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) explain "intuition results from tacit knowledge" and is a valuable asset in qualitative analysis (p. 97). This intuition led us to pursue this analytic approach with the remaining seven portfolios which were then coded in two phases: connection to standards and connections to program values. Next, we outline a layer of intersections between standards and program values discovered in the content analysis of our data.

4. Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand how teacher candidates in an urban teacher residency program narrate their experiences in relation to program values and how they demonstrate their ability to assess student learning. In the following subsections, choice excerpts from the teacher candidate

portfolios are organized by the program values that were used as a priori codes in the analysis. Additionally, intersections between program values and professional standards exemplified in each excerpt are highlighted.

4.1 Value: Asset-based, Responsive Pedagogies

Candidates demonstrated focus on their students' many skills and knowledge and sought ways to build on their strengths. Alignment with Standard II: Knowledge of Content and Instructional Planning is evident as Alyse explained how she planned instruction based on knowledge of her students, "I know that I have many artists and students that need to talk about their thoughts. Having group whiteboards means that students' personalities and creativity are being leveraged in an asset-based fashion." Maria also emphasized the importance of getting to know her students and their families to plan instruction that best supports learning (Standard II):

I found my strengths in personalized differentiation by learning more about the child and their family but understand that I need to spend more time focusing on how to dispense the content to my students as any preservice teacher does.

Brittany shared how a research project on Black history supported student agency and identity in alignment with Standard I: Knowledge of Students and Student Learning, "This research project on Black history gave students the autonomy to create a project that reflected them as students and allowed them to learn in ways that were conducive to their academic abilities."

4.2 Value: Inquiry and Adaptability

Candidates ask questions and seek out evidence-based strategies that make content more accessible to students and demonstrate flexibility when something is not working. Brittany demonstrated adaptability in response to a high level of engagement with her students, aligning with Standard IV: Learning Environment:

I originally was going to read the book, have a whole group discussion and do a form of assessment with the students in my class, but their interest in the story took us far beyond just my lesson. We watched interviews, did interactive activities, and they were even able to create their own dream jar.

Alyse described her assessment approach with a student who was an English language learner with ADHD and anxiety as an example of inquiry and adaptability (Standard I: Knowledge of Students and Student Learning), "I was able to see where the student was struggling, identify a possible issue and quickly adapt to her needs to tailor instruction to what was best for her." Mitchell also revealed thoughtfulness and adaptability as a Science teacher (Standard I):

My artifact demonstrates my ability to plan full units that begin with them describing basic things that they witness everyday such as gravity or their perception of what "force" is, which highlights my adaptability as a teacher since I use whatever students bring to the table.

4.3 Value: Urgency and Persistence

Candidates' written narratives were consistent with the idea that every minute of instruction is an opportunity to engage students in learning and they are able to persist in advocating for and working toward justice despite the challenges of teaching. Andrew demonstrated his knowledge of his students' learning (Standard I) in a successful ELA lesson: "I was unsure of how my students would react to Shakespeare. However, by the end, I was left with many students who were able to claim new knowledge of literature and some who were even wanting more." Paul shared how he fosters rigorous instruction with high expectations (Standard III) for his students, empowering them to solve real-world problems in their communities:

I have developed lesson plans utilizing a local environmental group that has a team of educators that come into classes to carry out demonstrations and teach students about local environmental

problems…Students become connected to their nearby environment, and develop a sense of urgency, and become more willing to learn content and construct creative solutions to those problems.

Mitchell described his struggles and persistence with student assessment (Standard V):

Using whiteboards in such a variety of ways has been a process for me as a teacher, since I really struggled with assessing students and giving them feedback. This has been a powerful solution to that problem and gives me an avenue of assessing students that isn't very intimidating.

In the following excerpt, Paul's commitment and sense of urgency are apparent and align with Standard III: Instructional Practice:

I yearn to make more lessons like this. I need to keep in mind the benefits of creativity when it comes to lesson plans. Teachers should encourage students to explore new ideas through creative ways to create joyful, memorable lessons that make students work for their own knowledge. Especially in science, students need to come to their own conclusion and not just receive information.

4.4 Value: Reflective Ownership

Candidates reflected on the practice of teaching, how they strive to improve as educators, and their responsibility to students. Brittany's narrative demonstrated a sense of responsibility as well as a deep appreciation for program values and professional growth (Standard VI): "These core values will be embedded in my instructional practices throughout my professional career. I will continue to reflect on these values to make improvements in my teaching pedagogy."

Carly cited an action research project she engaged in during her coursework to demonstrate her reflective ownership as a budding teacher. She explained: "This is not so much an assessment of student learning as it is an assessment of how students can learn better" (Standard V). Carly observed students checking their cell phones during classes that relied too heavily on lecture:

There is only so much a student can learn from a teacher talking at them. I have a responsibility to plan effective instruction, and when something isn't working, it is my responsibility to alter my practices to best support my students.

Additionally, Tracy reflected on her ability to understand and meet her students' needs (Standard I) and demonstrated a sense of responsibility for effective instruction:

The biggest achievement for me was seeing the multiple ways and techniques I taught each lesson and seeing how each student used a unique way to get to the same answer. I feel as though my students challenge me to become better."

Christine recognized the importance of having knowledge of student learning (Standard I) and assessment (Standard V) as she cited an example of reflective ownership, "I now see that quizzes are invaluable for my lesson planning as well and in determining whether I can go forward or need to differentiate the lessons to catch up some of the students."

4.5 Value: Critically Conscious Purpose & Advocacy

Candidates demonstrated an understanding of the systems that exist and persist where resources are not equally accessible to members of all social groups. They reflected on their own positions and acted strategically to disrupt social injustice. Brittany's narrative demonstrated how she worked to foster a supportive, safe environment for her students (Standard IV), "I conduct a community circle each morning with the students. This circle fosters a sense of community and allows me to build relationships with the students along with them building relationships with their peers." Nancy's narrative demonstrated her sense of responsibility to make curriculum relevant in the lives of students (Standard II and Standard VI): "To create equity in the social studies curriculum, educators must educate themselves. The educator must be able to understand the past of the country and how it led to the present and be able to share with their students." Tracy reflected on her position as a teacher, her understanding of her students (Standard I), and a sense of responsibility as an educator:

I am evolving as a new teacher and these students are becoming my family (home away from home). I am learning not all children learn a lesson the same way and as an educator it is my job to educate.

Another example of critically conscious purpose was evident in Paul's reflection (Standard III): "By developing a science curriculum incorporating these core values, I'm sure I can leave future students with tools to better themselves, better their community, overcome social injustices, strive for higher education, become self-sufficient, and become scientifically literate."

4.6 Value: Critical Joy

Candidates approach students and classrooms with enthusiasm and care. They seek to inspire curiosity and provide space for children to engage with new ideas in ways that promote personal happiness. Andrew reflected this value as he cited his creative approach to assessment (Standard V) that contributed to a joyful learning environment (Standard IV): referred to a test as fun.

Nancy's narrative described a striking example in which weighty topics are made more accessible and impactful with instruction (Standard III) that involves familiar board games:

I have incorporated several fun activities into my unit planning such as an obstacle course as a trust activity to relate how American citizens can trust the government again after Reconstruction, Monopoly to explain monopolies as a business, and Hungry, Hungry Hippos to explain imperialism.

Paul reflected on the learning environment (Standard IV) that he created in his classroom and the enduring impact he believes it will have:

The major strength of this lesson is that it is so fun. Not only for the students, but teachers as well. Laughter fills the room. It's loud, but in a constructive, organized way. It's a bit hectic, but the students are all into it. It is so memorable. I'm certain that students will remember this lesson and retain the information learned. Joy is easily on display by both students and teachers.

Instead of another formal test or writing at the end of our unit, I posed a class test. This entailed the whole class being given the same questions where if one student knew the answer, they all received credit… It was a high compliment when one of the students

5. Discussion

Our findings provide empirical evidence demonstrating alignment between student-generated artifacts/reflections and program values and professional standards. Overall, the narratives of teacher candidate portfolios revealed experiences that were strongly connected to program values. We found that teacher candidates expressed a sense of responsibility for using evidence-based teaching strategies and ensuring effective instruction for students consistent with Cochran-Smith and Keefe's notion of "strong equity" in which teacher effectiveness encompasses more than just an ability to transfer knowledge to students; it includes a capacity to recognize and attend to students holistically as full members of society (Cochran-Smith & Keefe, 2022, p. 23). We also found that teacher candidates expressed enthusiasm and a desire to cultivate an atmosphere where students can learn and engage with others in meaningful ways. Teacher candidates conveyed flexibility and a willingness to make modifications in response to student needs.

With respect to teacher candidates demonstrating their ability to assess student learning, we found teacher candidates used multiple measures to assess and document student growth, evaluate instructional effectiveness, and modify their instruction to meet students' needs. Narratives depicted an awareness of the importance of assessments and responsibility for ensuring fairness in evaluation. Paul described a simple, but important, example of how he strives for fairness when evaluating his students. He explained that he places each student's name on a popsicle stick and then places all the sticks in a cup. When he wants to assess students informally during class by posing questions, he chooses students by pulling popsicle sticks from the cup one at a time. Once a stick is pulled, it remains outside the cup until all the sticks are pulled. This ensures that every student will eventually be called on. Paul explained:

Using my popsicle sticks is a simple way to steer clear from my own subconscious biases which helps me informally assess my students' learning more effectively and adjust my instructional practices for both struggling and advanced students. Additionally, it brings more focus, fairness, and a bit of humor into the classroom.

By ensuring he calls on each student in his class fairly, Paul is ensuring each student feels valued and equal amongst their peers. Paul's awareness of his own potential biases and his efforts to ensure fairness when making even small instructional decisions suggests a deep alignment with program values similar to several other portfolio excerpts presented in our findings.

5.1 Limitations

This study was limited to information obtained from 10 portfolios submitted by male and female teacher candidates of different ages and racial/ethnic backgrounds from varied subject content areas and grade levels in an urban teacher residency program at a public university in the Northeastern United States. The teacher candidate portfolios were limited to the first round of full implementation. Additionally, findings were limited to one data type: portfolios. Future studies could include additional data types, such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups. Additionally, future studies could examine different portfolio content, include a broader sample of participants, and/or study portfolio development over a longer period of time.

5.2 Implications

Our findings offer implications for researchers, teacher education programs, and policymakers to consider. Researchers can use the findings of our study to expand on this line of research when developing their own research agendas related to teacher candidate assessment and teacher education more broadly. Teacher educators can use the findings of our study to inform practices in teacher education programs, in particular when assessing teacher candidates using portfolios. Policymakers can use the findings of our study to inform their decisions related to teacher assessment and teacher certification requirements.

This study provides initial evidence that a thoughtfully designed and implemented portfolio-based TPA, generated with faculty and community engagement and centered on program values and goals along with state and professional standards, has the potential to advance inclusive, culturally-sustaining, evidence-based practices, dismantle injustice, and construct possibilities in teacher education.

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