# "Do It All but Don't Kill Us": (Re)positioning Teacher Educators and Preservice Teachers Amidst edTPA and the Teacher Strike in West Virginia

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**Abstract:** We explore how two "happenings" representing different political, social, historical and economic influences converge to shape the narratives of preservice teachers and teacher educators in West Virginia. These happenings are the 2017-2018 edTPA roll out and the teacher strike of February 2018. We use the framework of sensemaking to explore preservice teacher and teacher educator identity/agency using a phenomenological analysis of narratives accessed through narrative portfolios, artifacts, and interviews with pre-service teachers, mentors (supervising teachers), and teacher educators. We found that the confluence of these political moments reinforced a neoliberal orientation for both preservice

teachers and teacher educators, positioning preservice teachers to expect teacher educators to intensively support the edTPA and ensure their success while silencing the collective history and moral imperative of protest. Preservice teachers and some mentors reframed the edTPA as a pathway to increased teacher pay/meritocracy by linking it with the National Boards, yet there were pockets of resistance within this among both preservice teachers and teacher educators. These findings are important for informing educational policy and practice around both corporate involvement in assessment/accountability policy and preservice teachers' and teacher educators' roles in protest at this moment when both are expanding simultaneously.
**Keywords**: teacher strike; performance assessment; edTPA; education policy; West Virginia; early childhood

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**Resumen:** Exploramos como eventos que representan diferentes influencias políticas, sociales, históricas y económicas moldam como narrativas de profesores y educadores de profesores en conservatorio en West Virginia: o lançamento do edTPA 2017-2018 ea greve dos professores em fevereiro de 2018. Usamos a Estrutura de criação de sentido para explorar a identidade / agência do professores e educadores de professores, usando uma análise fenomenológica das narrativas acessadas por meio de narrativas, artefatos e entrevistas com professores, mentores e educadores de professores. Descobrimos que a confluência desses eventos reforçava uma orientação neoliberal para professores e educadores de professores, posicionando-os para esperar que os educadores apoiassem intensamente o edTPA y garantissem seu sucesso, silenciando a históricaia coletiva e imperativo moral de protestato. Os professores y alguns mentores reformularam o edTPA como um caminho para aumentar os salários dos professores, vinculando-o aos Conselhos Nacionais, mas houve alguma resistência entre os professores and educadores de professores. Essas descobertas informam a política y a prática educacional sobre o envolvimento corporativo na politics of avaliação e os papéis dos professores and educadores de professores em movimentos de protestto.
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# Introduction

The year 2018 was pivotal for teachers in West Virginia; two seemingly unrelated events shaped the lives of early childhood education (ECE) teachers at West Virginia University. The first event was the roll out of a state-mandated teacher performance assessment in our teacher education program. Our university chose edTPA (https://www.edtpa.com/). edTPA is an assessment of teaching by Stanford Center for the Assessment of Learning and Equity (SCALE) and administered by Pearson Learning, Inc., that is increasingly popular in the United States. For edTPA, our ECE pre-service teachers (PSTs) write a set of literacy lesson plans and then videotape themselves teaching from these plans. They write and submit to Pearson a series of essays evaluating their students' learning. The materials are evaluated by an anonymous teacher who has met the reliability requirements (Greenblatt & O' Hara, 2015). edTPA is high stakes for state certification and program completion at our institution. We argue that edTPA was rolled out as "nonauthorized" policy. It was an executive process driven by accreditation timelines that was not official and not democratically constituted; actors such as teacher educators, mentors, and PSTs have been left to make sense of it (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). A second event was a teacher strike that succeeded in winning a 5% salary increase for grossly underpaid teachers to offset a cut in health benefits. The confluence of these two events illustrates the complexity of multiple forces shaping the identities of PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators in U.S. teacher education programs.

ECE is a crucial field for understanding teacher identities in contemporary educational policy and political contexts because it carries with it both unique and multiple teaching and learning contexts and policy configurations informed by age level and varied conceptions of child development (Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005; Woodrow, 2007) as well as an intensely feminized policy landscape (Dillabough, 2005; Osgood, 2004). Both of these aspects influence how early childhood educators make sense of policies and practices that inform teaching and teacher education. Moreover, with a growing interest in educational policy of how educators and policymakers "make sense" of educational policies in contemporary times, we see this article adding to an emerging scholarship on sensemaking in early childhood policy (e.g., Brown & Englehardt, 2017; Brown, Englehardt, Barry, & Hu, 2018).

In our teacher education program, we refer to school-based classroom teachers who supervise PSTs' as "mentor teachers" and thus we use that terminology in this paper. Teacher educators in our program are university-based faculty, including tenured/tenure track and clinical members, as well as several adjunct instructors and graduate assistants.

A neoliberal business influence in which corporate testing has infiltrated the consciousness of teacher preparation institutions through inserting elements such as the edTPA (i.e., Chiu, 2014; Ginsberg & Kingston, 2014; Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013; Price, 2014) deeply influences teachers and teacher educators. On the other hand, a collective consciousness of union rights and activism has supported teacher agency, even in these trying times (Bascia, 2015; Swalwell, 2014; Swalwell et al., 2017).

It is the interplay of the neoliberal and collectivist forces and how they played out specifically in the minds and actions of ECE PSTs at this pivotal time that is the focus of this paper. The title quote from a PST shows how they discussed the roles and responsibilities of teacher educators—to procure benefits, meet requirements, and ensure that PSTs get well-paying jobs and benefits while keeping life as seamless and easy as possible for the future teachers in our care. In exploring this topic, we suggest processes and themes that drive the thinking and work of multiple stakeholders in this context.

**Neoliberalism in ECE**

Neoliberalism is an orientation to education in which individuals are "spliced" into a consumer-oriented, individualistic culture (Brown, 2009). It positions teachers, children, and parents to act in such a way that democracy is reduced to an economic concept (Apple, 2007). Specifically, early childhood programs have a magnified role in showing how to teach and be accountable to the new early childhood business as evidenced by meeting standards of quality (Brown, 2015). Neoliberalism also applies to ECE teacher education. The U.S. government has placed higher education under tighter oversight due to the new surge of private, for-profit colleges and the increasing financial aid monies earmarked for low-income students shifting there (Price, 2014). As a result, there has been a shift to managerial efficiency to drive an entrepreneurial culture of savings with higher education becoming increasingly standardized and regulated (Apple, 2012); this has been intensified through recent governmental changes towards increased accountability and privatization (Spring, 2017). Thus, teacher education programs are positioned to produce more and better teachers and children with fewer resources (Sleeter, 2017).

Neoliberal policies influence ECE teachers in two major ways (Ball, 1999). Firstly, in marketization, education is subject to a business model of competition. Marketization encourages "designer teacher" identities created in compliance with dictums of effectiveness and efficiency (Sachs, 2001). Secondly, official accountability processes (Brennan, 1996), privilege a "cult of individualism" evidenced by the isolation of individual educators (Hargreaves, 1994).

In performativity, teachers, students, and organizations such as teacher education programs and schools become "products." The targets and performance indicators of various assessments and practices drive, evaluate, and compare them. In performativity, the issue of who controls the field of judgment is especially crucial, as it has often created a context of surveillance in which educators including PSTs may be positioned to "struggle for their souls" as thinking, knowing educators and experience anger and terror towards neoliberal constraints (Ball, 2003). Recently research has shown that ECE PSTs may lose the ability to maintain a reflective and critical distance of neoliberal practices taught in teacher education once teaching in the schools (Brown, 2009; Sherfinski, Jalalifard, Zhang, & Hayes, 2019). And more recently, Holloway and Brass (2017) have found that it is becoming increasingly difficult for educators to maintain a reflective and critical distance as the neoliberal context in the US intensifies. Instead, they are more apt to see neoliberal policies and practices as normal and thus not question them. Today's PSTs were socialized into education as elementary and secondary pupils during the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) reform (2001-2015). Under NCLB, standardized test scores were linked with public schools' longevity and opened the door to privatization. As "children of NCLB", PSTs are likely to see standards, testing, and other accountability measures as a normal way of life in education (Brown, 2009). They may feel more comfortable in teacher education programs that stress these neoliberal components, such that the adoption of edTPA might constitute a parsimonious script for proving one's hard-working nature. This shift from teachers viewing and responding to neoliberalism as a "terror" to now a "pleasure"

might be especially true in ECE because of the fragmented contexts in which ECE educators practice (Sherfinski et al., 2019).

**edTPA**

Nationally, the edTPA is used in 40+ states' teacher education programs, and is required for certification in seven states even though there is not much research linking edTPA scores to outcomes (Goldhaber, Cowan, & Theobald, 2017). Its adoption resonates with a broader movement in U.S. teacher education programs being tasked with creating a "culture of evidence" (Cochran-Smith, 2005). edTPA has become a "fourth member" adding to the traditional triad of PST-mentor-teacher educator (Donovan & Cannon, 2018). edTPA adoption also reflects the move towards "value-added" measures of teaching, in which teachers are evaluated based on their students' standardized achievement scores or their "proven" abilities to achieve those results by passing "valid and reliable" performance exams (Steiner, 2013). New teacher preparation has been a major target for value-added measures in part because student achievement is disproportionately due to poor teacher quality (Sawchuk, 2013) and teacher education programs can be stacked up one against the other based on edTPA pass rates to determine which has the highest market worth (Price, 2014). In this context, teacher educators and mentors are positioned to manage the high stakes assessments by which their PSTs and programs are judged (see Ball, 2003).

The edTPA task focuses on planning, instruction, and assessing students' learning; it includes work samples from three diverse students with a commentary from the PST, showing their feedback to the student and how the PST interpreted students' results to improve student learning. It places student learning at the center of a three-step planning, instruction, and assessment cycle. While paying attention to academic language across the three steps, PSTs use writing prompts to justify their decisions, and analyze their instruction and how they use data to inform it (Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity, 2014). The underlying expectation is that teaching has the outcome of learning for the student.

Sato (2014) characterized edTPA as attempting to contribute to the important task of helping teacher education as a field to demonstrate its accountability to the public so that, like medicine and law, it can manage its own high standards and expectations. At broad scale, it seeks to bring together the teacher education community around the issue of "what counts" as professional performance quality (Sato, 2014). edTPA positions itself as politically neutral with regard to candidate strengths:

> While political purposes for teaching are not explicitly called out and assessed in the edTPA, candidates are not penalized for such ideals and will need to demonstrate how they support students in disciplinary learning that will lead them toward those broader goals. The edTPA does, however, hold an explicit expectation of teaching that is equitable for students with regard to how to (sic) teacher candidates understand the diverse backgrounds and learning needs in classrooms and can justify how their teaching meets those needs. (Sato, 2014, p. 429)

A plethora of literature has chronicled the experiences of teacher education programs implementing edTPA in various locales. The vast majority of this literature has been critical of edTPA. Major critiques of the edTPA are: (a) that it outsources scoring and (depersonalized) feedback to a corporate entity (Pearson Learning; Chiu, 2014; Winerip, 2012); (b) that scoring of a small teaching snapshot by one rater may not be valid (Greenblatt & O' Hara, 2016); (c) that it standardizes teaching, not accounting for place-based approaches to teacher education (Burns, Henry, & Lindauer, 2015; Donovan & Cannon, 2018; Ledwell & Oyler, 2016; Sawchuk, 2013); (d) that it

undermines critical multicultural education by its efforts to provide a valid national assessment focusing on teacher professionalism ( Chiu 2014; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013);  (e) that the test itself is racially biased, privileging Whites over black and Latina PSTs (Garland, 2016; Goldhaber, Cowan, & Theobald, 2017; Michael-Luna, 2016); (f) that it is a disincentive for certification in states that require it for such (Ledwell & Oyler, 2016); and (g) that it forges burnout and tensions among PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators (Burns, et al., 2015; Greenblatt & O' Hara, 2016; Meuwissen & Choppin, 2015).

The final critique, that the edTPA affects relationships among PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators, deserves discussion as it is an important conceptual focus of this paper. Specifically, in their research, Meuwissen and Choppin (2015) suggested that it can be difficult to advance broader views of teaching and learning needed for contextual classroom change through problem solving and relationship building among PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators in the context of the edTPA. These researchers found two strategies, (1) students' social networking around edTPA, and (2) teaching writing as a critical interpretive act, to be generally productive ones for PSTs in the context of the edTPA. They also found a number of issues with fidelity that caused "unproductive tensions". These included translating the edTPA for mentor teachers, using the edTPA to generate changes in the mentor teacher's classroom, and modifying the mentor teacher's classroom to make it seem more cohesive with the edTPA.

## Collective Forces in Education

Collectivism is the "state-centered, bureaucratic, public welfare tradition in educational provision" (Ball, 1999, p. 1). It is posed in opposition to neoliberalism (Ball, 1999). Collectivism can be organized through teachers' unions connecting teachers within a state or through smaller groups located within schools or districts. The 2018 teacher strike in West Virginia was an example of rising up beyond traditional organizational structures.

Teachers' unions have sought stability, not unrest, through their histories, however when they become weakened by a loss of collective bargaining rights, difficulties may ensue. This has been particularly dramatic in West Virginia, often called "the birthplace of the American labor movement" due to its long history of struggle related to mining (Goldberg, 2018). Following the Republican takeover of the Legislature in 2014, the state passed right-to-work legislation prohibiting mandatory union dues (Goldberg, 2018). With less money, unions are weakened and without an institutional voice, organizing becomes more difficult. The state branches of national unions continue to lobby for teachers and help with their grievances, but the membership is voluntary and far from universal (Bidgood & Robinson, 2018). This has become a national issue based on numerous state and local challenges and the Janus decision of 2018 in which public sector unions are barred from collecting a "fair share fee" from employees to represent them (Shelton, 2018). Other authors have pointed out a more complex context, for example Schirmer (2017) in her analysis of the Hortonville, Wisconsin teacher's strike of 1974, found that "cracks" within liberalism have also weakened the power of teachers' unions and thus disempowered the feminized workforce. Specifically, she states:

> Teachers' unions typically do not mobilise for gender, racial or economic justice within and beyond schools, instead tending to short-term, economistic interests of individual members. This economism has spurred political whiplash against teachers' unions, who are critiqued for acting against the interests of students and communities [who are positioned by conservative politicians to crave private fixes for their individual educational challenges]. (Schirmer, 2017, pp. 8-9)

When conditions become dire enough, workers will take action independently of the organization. Teachers in West Virginia, after a nine-day strike in February of 2018, ended in a five percent pay increase. Grassroots anger around working conditions fueled by memory and conscience brought together individuals who were a part of three different unions, some from no union, in an enormous Facebook group and then the walkout (Bidgood & Robinson, 2018). They defied union leaders' calls to end the strike before their demands were fully met by calling a "wild cat strike"; these continue to be rare, but they occurred in the West Virginian coal fields of the early 20th century (Bidgood & Robinson, 2018).

West Virginia's teachers have inspired more teacher strikes around the US through their example. For example, Arizona Education Association union president Joe Thomas stated: "The activities in West Virginia really inspired a lot of teachers to believe again that they can change the system, that their voice could be listened to in a real way" (Hackman, 2018, n. p.). Teachers and union representatives have reported an increase in political engagement after years of steep education budget cuts, President Trump's election, and a national Republican party that has become more connected with its own populist roots (Hackman, 2018). Specifically, the Women's March, as well as the local organizing that followed it, was a catalyst for some teachers to strike (Goldberg, 2018).

In early childhood social justice-oriented schools and centers, there is a legacy of collective activism among teachers, children and families (Lalley, 2008). Early childhood education as a profession has long been fighting for improved wages, conditions, and status for the field (Bruner, 2008). Diminished power for unions is a gendered issue because weaker labor rights for public workers like the many early childhood teachers in public settings politically disempowers women and care labor (Schirmer, 2017). Moreover, there is a core dilemma around the rights of early childhood teachers, indicating that when care workers strike, they deny their responsibilities to students and families. Yet, under liberalism, what rights do they have independently to seek individual access to reasonable wages and benefits? (Schirmer, 2017). In this article, as we will argue, the positioning of early childhood educators extends to PSTs and teacher educators in universities, setting up a double bind for these women by positioning them simultaneously as carers and *neo*liberal actors. Collectivism's underlying theoretical perspective is social constructionism, in which meaning making takes place in a context, and in which teacher educators, mentors, and PSTs ideally work together to create new social realities for example through activism and social protest (Charmaz, 2014). Social constructivism is a related, yet more individualistic, perspective that involves interpretation of experience in the process of meaning making (Vygotsky, 1987).

Communities of practice are groups of educators that might allow for democratic production of policy (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009). Communities of practice learn through engagement with practices created around a common goal through which skills and identities can be perpetuated (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Much of the learning processes and habituated knowledge absorbed within a community of practice involves sensemaking or grappling between one's knowledge and experience and educational policy in a more individualistic, social constructivist sense (Ng & Tan, 2009). However, it is possible that ECE communities of practice have a more critical and reflective focus that might support social constructionism including activism and protest (Long & Souto-Manning, 2016; Sherfinski, 2017).

**Teacher Identity and Protest**

This study is framed in the critical literature on teacher educator, mentor, and PST identity as it plays out in the neoliberal education context. There has been an increasing trend by the state of West Virginia and by our university to comply with particular visions of "evidence" that are "valid

and reliable", for example as part of National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) accreditation schemes required by the state (http://www.ncate.org/) and associated teacher performance assessments like edTPA. These institutional policies and the associated practices influence educators' identities, but they are one part in a larger social and cultural process of identity formation (Sherfinski, 2019).

"Grit" has long been a term associated with challenging social contexts and the West Virginian working-class "hillbilly" persona (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 2000). Cultural notions of West Virginian women and specifically teachers being "gritty," resilient, and motherly have been linked to a context that documents women as needing to provide a family income when their spouses and sons are injured or sickened by the extractive industries (Sohn, 2006), and it has been suggested in the labeling of teachers engaging collectively in the 2018 wild cat strike (Summers, 2018).

However, "grit" has re-emerged more broadly in the neoliberal era, rearticulated as an individual moral characteristic, introducing a metric that removes attention from structural barriers and difficult social histories (Crawford-Garrett, 2018). A lack of individual grit explains who can and cannot transcend the ladder of success in the era of accountability, thus reinforcing a deficit perspective for those who do not have the same outcomes as their peers and thus deflecting attention away from structural inequalities (Gorski, 2017). This illustrates how educational terms can, under neoliberalism, become "universal" and "transferrable" (Friedrich, 2014, p. 301) and points to how singular "tools" like the edTPA can be positioned as an answer that reinforces the idea that they can solve the problems of education by measuring, improving, and removing individual teachers (Paine & Zeichner, 2012). New teachers specifically may have a very bounded role in policy advocacy; they may:

> …focus at a school level on adopting new language around… 'grit'… without questioning why students are being asked to do so many things they find tedious, overwhelming, and anxiety-producing. … They are more inclined to ask questions about or advocate for changes to building-level issues, such as scheduling, resource management, or curriculum decisions. They are less inclined to engage (or perhaps less able to imagine themselves engaging) with deeper district, state, or public education issues such as the allocation of resources, tax base law, or testing requirements and communication. (Good, 2017, p. 437)

The contour of social movements theorization has shifted from large-scale and disruptive challenges (like the West Virginia 55 Strong Teacher Strike of February 2018) to generally local struggles that happen within institutions (Binder, 2002), for example what is happening within the teacher education program under study in this article. What is often not mentioned, however, is the connection between the new institutionalist movements, particularly between on one hand the "down time" or abeyance of everyday life and on the other hand the more dramatic protests. Theorists have begun, however, to consider the synergy of one with the other as they act in mutually informing ways (Holland & Cable, 2002).

Although "grit" is a term associated with both teachers and public school students, it is rarely heard in relation to teacher educators and PSTs. Ginsberg and Kingston (2014) have found that although public perception data supports and respects public school teachers, organizations and interest groups with a privatizing agenda have criticized teacher education, demanding increased rigor and performance. This has resulted in a direct attack on teacher education, in part due to state funding and university and college decisions related to funding. It seems a logical outgrowth of this

context that teacher educators, and perhaps their PSTs would engage with resistance, "grit" and/or resilience in the face of these challenges, although there is not a strong literature supporting this claim.

An important mechanism driving social movements at the group and individual levels are narrations of the self (Ochs & Capps, 1996). Teacher educators and PSTs may construct cultural models, position themselves, and make (counter) claims to business as usual in the accountability paradigm in which they are entrenched (Melucci, 1988). In this study, PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators all have important meanings to reveal through the stories they tell about their experiences with the edTPA and the strike. This is done specifically through socializing identities, developing relationships, and constituting membership within the broader community of educators in particular ways and interpreting these acts as well. Typically, they use mechanisms such as silencing to reinforce the dominant order, and to confirm individuals' positions within society. But narrative identities are also used to teach and learn, and to envision new educational cultures. Specifically in this paper, we use ideas of sensemaking around nonauthorized institutional policy decisions (Levinson, Sutton, & Winstead, 2009) as the theoretical framework to explore how these stories unfold specifically in the context of edTPA and the teacher strikes in West Virginia.

## Sensemaking

How educators make meanings of policies and practices have important implications for equity (Bertrand & Marsh, 2015). Sensemaking is often characterized by the idea that individuals deal with ambiguity within organizational contexts (Allen & Penuel, 2015; Coburn, 2005). They assimilate new experiences through the frames of knowledge that they presently hold; therefore, the meanings they make of policies depends a lot on the knowledge and experience that individuals have (Blignaut, 2008). There may be cognitive dissonance between educators' prior beliefs, knowledge, and experience, and the expectations inherent in a new policy (Spillane, 2006). New policies are often in contrast with the ways in which educators have been socialized into the profession through their experiences as students and through teacher education, professional development, etc. (Blignaut, 2008). Spillane (2006) has argued that the integration of knowledge frames is a difficult process that often results in piecemeal or incomplete changes to practices because new ideas tend to be understood as familiar ones or they may become integrated without shifting existing beliefs. For example, as discussed above, ideas of resilience constituted collectively in the context of inequitable structures have shifted recently to discussing individual "grit" in individualistic and often deficit-oriented terms. It should be apparent that sensemaking relies on the perspective of social constructivism described above.

As we argue in this paper; it is not only a lone individual or group making sense of policy based on what they know; policies whether authorized or unauthorized exist in tension with other forces that may or may not resonate with embodied frames of knowledge. Sensemaking is not only an individual process, it can also mean a collective level process that creates a dynamic interface between a broader context such as a teachers' strike and an organizational context such as teacher educators, mentors, and PSTs grappling together and alone with new policies related to the edTPA (Ng & Tan, 2009). Context is an important piece for understanding sensemaking (Blignaut, 2008). At both collective and individual levels, there is a reciprocal interaction between the individual or group and the context in which they are situated (Ng & Tan, 2009). Seeking information, making meaning, and responding in continuous interactions through primary modes of fact-finding, sharing tips, and trading stories to gain specific knowledge and skills required for adaptation to the neoliberal context of professional teaching, for example applying scripts and routine knowledge. For

example, Holloway and Brass (2018) have recently demonstrated how teachers have over time assimilated within the regime of standardized testing-related policy contexts.

Social positioning is also an important aspect of sensemaking. Smith (1987, 1990, 2001) has written from a feminist perspective about how individuals with lesser power in institutions have contributed to power dynamics that have influenced the formation of authorized policies; these influence subjective interactions and multiple socially constructed realities. In this study, power is important as we are focusing on multiple identities of actors within a complex, power-laden context.

**Alternatives to sensemaking**. Critical reflective learning exists in contrast to sensemaking. In critical reflective learning, educators stand back and seek to understand the meanings and purposes of education within a broader educational context in which policies, politics, philosophy, and sociology matter to understandings (Ng & Tan, 2009). Critical reflection is an important frame for early childhood teacher education, yet one that is not widespread (Long & Souto-Manning, 2016; Sherfinski, 2017). In fact, it is becoming more difficult to engage with as neoliberal education becomes more sedimented (Holloway & Brass, 2018). Another way of thinking about possibilities for reconsidering sensemaking is through the Bakhtinian (1981) concept of internally persuasive discourses. Internally persuasive discourses exist as the site in which new meanings are produced and they are "double-voiced" because they reflect partially the individual and partially others' discourses including "authoritative" discourses such as neoliberalism that seem to drive policies and practices of the day (Morris, 1995). The concept of heteroglossia allows individuals the opportunity to obtain a critically reflective "outsider" view on familiar discourses about early childhood educators and PSTs by troubling the often unquestioned ties between language and ideology (see Sherfinski, 2018). Thus, educators and PSTs gain a relativized and defamiliarized understanding of the multiple ideologies embedded when multiple discourses like neoliberalism and collectivism are positioned together. Sometimes this agency can rupture or transform commonsense interpretations of teacher identity in the neoliberal context by spurring new narratives.

## Teacher Education Context and Study Method

The data from this paper come from a qualitative case study (Yin, 2017) of PSTs', mentors', and teacher educators' experiences with assessment at a university in Appalachia. Teacher educators in this context are not unionized. Data consisted mainly of interviews, but also of researcher experience and artifacts, as is common in qualitative research. The researchers are a part of a community of teacher educators who continually talk about our practices. We realized the weight of the edTPA labor as we started training on the instrument and witnessed the burden on mentors and PSTs as it rolled out in August of 2017. Not long after, we could see the PSTs' and mentors' stresses related to the teacher strike and our own anxieties around wanting to support their efforts. We felt constrained because of our labor related to assessment, which at that time was rolling into a second edTPA cycle. These stresses were not discussed among the researchers only. They were also voiced among the participating teacher education faculty, nearly all of whom are early childhood and elementary education specialists. A mentor teacher sent a letter to our faculty during this period, worried about the stresses on the PSTs. PSTs also continually communicated their stress around these events, as we show in the findings. This shared experience caused us to delve deeper into the phenomenon of study for this article.

The PSTs are in a 5-year teacher education program which includes four years of undergraduate coursework and then a final year to receive their master's degree. In the early 1990s, the program started as a professional development school (PDS) network in which mentors and

teacher educators were set to share program decision-making and responsibilities for educating the next generation of teachers for the state. The PDS network promised to braid teacher educators, mentors, and PSTs, positioning them to engage in joint communities of practice and critical reflection that might promote social constructionism, although that was not often realized. The PDS network was for many years supported generously by a grant from the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. As funding ebbed due to decreasing foundation support and state aid to the university declined over the years, the pressures to create efficient and cost effective organization and practices increased in line with the national shift to neoliberal education.

PSTs complete six semesters of clinical fieldwork in schools, beginning with just two hours per week in the third year of the program and increasing to full time teaching during the internship semester, in their fifth year of the program. The PSTs teach at approximately 20 elementary schools in a five county area; they remain in a single school for all or most of their clinical placements and shift grade levels each term. Nearly all of the schools are high poverty Title I schools, and most are located in rural areas; the remainder are in the small city in which the university is located. Our candidates take 1-2 graduate courses during the internship semester, do 4-8 weeks of lead teaching, and many commute close to an hour each way to rural school placements. They are in the schools all day, every day.

Specifically, this study addresses the following research questions:
- What was the context of edTPA implementation in a West Virginian teacher education program?
- How did teacher educators and mentor teachers interpret their own (re)positioning as part of this process?
- How did PSTs view the edTPA in light of the strike?

All of the authors are teacher educators at the institution under study and are former teachers from different parts of the US and world, which created interesting conversations and points of analysis related to assessment, protest, and agency. The primary researcher (Sherfinski), for example, participated in intensive teacher protests alongside her PSTs as a teacher educator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Spring of 2011, when teachers and public service workers in that state unleashed the largest public protest since the Vietnam War Era (Buhle & Buhle, 2011). She drew upon autoethnographic data from her journal, dating back to 2011, as part of this study. This research has also provided a close and personal link with her ECE teaching and teacher education memories including documentation of experience from six years as the NCATE/CAEP national accreditation SPA leader for elementary education programs and important moments in the process of adopting and implementing the edTPA. A second researcher (Hayes) has been a pivotal member of the teacher education leadership, piloted the edTPA in 2015, and has been a leader in PST support and teacher educator and mentor outreach. The two graduate student researchers (Zhang and Jalalifard) have taught in the 5-Year Teacher Education Program and have experienced directly the challenges of assessment and protest.

Our college does not have a dedicated edTPA tutor or technology specialist to support the initiative. The edTPA was administered by a team of teacher educators who donated their time to run evening classes to support the PSTs through the process in small groups in their certification areas. Sherfinski and Hayes taught these small groups along with other early childhood/elementary colleagues. This time is mostly technical, meaning that the teacher educators' main roles were to make sure that the PSTs understood the rules of the edTPA and the minutiae of how to submit, including helping them navigate how to use their credit or debit cards to pay the $300 fee. Teacher educators ran interference between the PSTs and Pearson Learning, for example when the PSTs

wanted to know who exactly would be evaluating their work, Sherfinski called Pearson. Although the representative she spoke with initially did not know the precise answer, she did check with her supervisor and found that teachers of grades Pre-K-12 could be assigned to review the performance tests of our elementary education PSTs. Sherfinski was assured, however, that reviewers had been reliability tested, so it should not matter if grade levels and disciplines matched or not.

The case study data collection was conducted between August 2017 and October 2018 under the rules of the WVU Institutional Review Board (IRB). We used pseudonyms for all people's names and names of field sites, schools, towns, etc. Table 1 shows the data sources for this study.

Table 1
*Data Sources*

| Data Source | Preservice Teachers | Teacher Educators | Mentor Teachers |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Interviews | $n$=12 <br><br> (6 directly participated in edTPA, others heard about it or experienced it indirectly as teachers) | $n$=6 | $n$=2 |
| Researcher Journal | | $n$=1; 7-year time-span focusing on experiences and memories of being an early childhood educator. This includes reflections on the edTPA training process, edTPA small group support and implementation, dialogues and reflections. | |
| Artifacts | Documents and anonymous narratives of PSTs from their portfolios. The 2018 cohort of PSTs ($n$=49) wrote and submitted teaching narratives at the time of the Teacher Strike. | | |

**Interviews**

The interview component of the study is highlighted in this paper. Interviews lasted 35-75 minutes, 45 minutes on average. The questions were common between the PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators in some respects for comparison purposes but were differentiated by role and position. Questions focused on the assessment context of teacher education, the local and state socio-political context, and the edTPA experience as it related to our other major assessment system, the narrative portfolio. Teacher educator and mentor interviews took place face to face and the interviews with preservice teachers were conducted on the telephone. All of the interviews were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed.

Sherfinski interviewed a total of 12 preservice teachers from each of four cohorts (graduated 2015-2018) just after the first teacher strike, in the Spring of 2018 (see Table 2 and Table 3 below). The 2016 cohort members had experienced piloting the Praxis Performance Assessment for Teachers (PPAT) or edTPA exams as part of the state phase-in process, and were able to share some

important insights on performance exams and the roll-out process in general. The edTPA answers from the 2015 and 2017 cohorts were speculative based on their experiences with edTPA through friends and colleagues going through it except in the case of one individual teaching in New York, who was currently doing it herself. They provided a stronger perspective on the broader context of assessment and protest in West Virginia as most of them had been teaching in West Virginia for 1-3 years at the time of the interviews and had participated in the strike. We chose to interview PSTs/graduates who seemed typical yet thoughtful and articulate from Sherfinski's experiences with them in prior classes. The typical PST was a White middle or lower-middle class female in her early 20s; this narrowed the findings by presenting a biased view of PSTs although we did bring in additional PST perspectives as part of the analysis. There is no recruitment for diversity amongst teacher candidates. Admission to the program is based on grades, test scores, and the completion of required volunteer service hours in schools. The testing requirements have increased considerably in recent years due to NCATE/CAEP accreditation requirements. There is no consideration given to interviews, essays, references, or other materials indicating an interest in early childhood, social justice, teaching for diversity, or any other collectivist-oriented interest. All PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators in this study are White and all but two are female. This nearly reflects the gender and racial/ethnic composition of PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators in the elementary/early childhood teacher education program who are about 98% White and female. It also reflects the racial/ethnic demographic of the state of West Virginia, which has one of the highest White populations in the US at 95% (U.S. Census, 2010). However, small African American populations often associated historically with the mining industry remain in West Virginia (Lewis, 2002). Among PSTs in the teacher education program, there are a range of social class backgrounds represented, from low-income to upper middle class. The study sample reflects the mainly middle-class bias of our PSTs, although the state itself has high levels of poverty, the fourth highest rate among U.S. states at 19.1% (West Virginia Center for Policy and Budget, 2018). The teacher education program has an even mix of in-state and out-of-state students with rural and suburban upbringings; the PST participants reflect this range. The 2018 cohort ($n$=6) served as the primary informants for this research because they experienced taking the edTPA in 2017.

Table 2
*PST edTPA Informants*

| Name | Cohort | Race/Gender | edTPA Taken | Teaching Setting | Participated in 2018 WV Strike |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ms. Lainey Luke | 2018 | White/Female | Elementary Literacy & Math-2017 | Rural WV | No |
| Ms. Heidi Lester | 2018 | White/Female | Elementary Literacy & Math-2017 | Suburban WV | No |
| Ms. Kiki Eddison | 2018 | White/Female | Elementary Literacy & Math-2017 | Suburban VA | No |
| Mrs. Minnie Morehouse | 2018 | White/Female | Elementary Literacy & Math-2017 | Rural VA | No |

Table 2 cont.
*PST edTPA Informants*

| Name | Cohort | Race/Gender | edTPA Taken | Teaching Setting | Participated in 2018 WV Strike |
|------|--------|-------------|-------------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Ms. Melany Hide | 2018 | White/Female | Elementary Literacy & Math-2017 | Suburban NC | No |
| Ms. Alexa Sidebottom | 2018 | White/female | Elementary Literacy & Math-2017 | Rural WV | No |

Table 3
*Additional PST Participants*

| Name | Cohort | Race/Gender | TPA Taken | Teaching Setting | Participated in 2018 WV Strike |
|------|--------|-------------|-----------|------------------|-------------------------------|
| Ms. Asta Ellington | 2015 | White/Female | None | Rural WV | Yes |
| Mrs. Kitty Gardener-Royals | 2015 | White/Female | None | Rural WV | Yes |
| Ms. Jess Kleinmetz | 2016 | White/Female | PPAT Pilot-2015/ NY edTPA in process | Urban NY | No |
| Ms. Merry Nicholas | 2016 | White/Female | PPAT Pilot-2015 | Semi-urban WV | Yes |
| Ms. Stephania Wellington | 2017 | White/Female | None | Urban VA | No |
| Ms. Addison Schoenpfeffer | 2017 | White/Female | None | Rural and Suburban WV | Yes |

Sherfinski interviewed six teacher educators and two mentors (Table 4) in the fall and the spring of 2017-2018, when experiences of protest were the strongest. Each of these teacher educators and mentors were involved in the candidate portfolio evaluation process for two years minimum, and each one served as either an instructor or a mentor teacher as the students were developing their narrative portfolios. They represent the core teacher educators involved in this process over time, in addition to the authors of this paper. Six of the eight teacher educators and mentors interviewed also had a role in working directly with edTPA and each of them had a long history supporting teacher education assessment in our program. Thus, all of them had many

opportunities to hear directly from PSTs and colleagues about their experiences with edTPA during this time period even if they were not directly involved.

Table 4

*Teacher Educator and Mentor Teacher Participants*

| Name | Role | Race/Gender | Number of Years' Institutional Assessment Experience | edTPA Mentorship Experience | Participated in WV 2018 Strike |
|------|------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Archie Jones | Program Coordinator | White/Male | 9 | Yes | No |
| Iris DeSmet | Associate Professor | White/Female | 8 | Yes | No |
| Fiona Lewis | Associate Professor | White/Female | 8 | Yes | No |
| Jillian Madigan | Assistant Professor | White/Female | 15 | Yes | No |
| Selma Johnson | Clinical Professor | White/Female | 13 | Yes | No |
| Janice Lodge | Graduate Teaching Assistant and Adjunct | White/Female | 8 | No | No |
| Todd Dunlap | Mentor Teacher | White/Male | 3 | Yes | Yes |
| Cressida Valley | Mentor Teacher | White/Female | 30 | No | Yes |

## Documents

The 2018 cohort of early childhood and early elementary PSTs (*n*=49) submitted teaching narratives at the time of the WV Teacher Strike; each PST's narrative consisted of between 5-6 narrative vignettes, which were approximately each 5-10 single-spaced pages in length each. These narratives were anonymized by a graduate student and later analyzed by Sherfinski, Zhang, and Jalalifard. The narratives of interviewed participants were included, however we cannot link the narratives to specific PSTs because of the anonymity requirement. We also analyzed published news stories, teacher narratives, and visual culture from the strike to provide further insights into teacher identity. edTPA and program documents were retained and referred to when needed to chronicle and contextualize the process. Finally, we referred frequently to copies of the edTPA manuals and training documents as well as the other major assessments in the program centered on teacher identity, specifically the Action Research project and the longitudinal Narrative Portfolio.

**Analysis**

Sherfinski did a phenomenological analysis (Van Manen, 1990) of the interviews, reading, re-reading, and hand-coding the documents to look for the underlying structures of assessment experience among the PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators and reading these with and against the information on the teacher strike and documents related to the edTPA, particularly in regard to elements of resistance and power. This analysis was informed by consideration of how these individuals and groups narrate the self (Ochs & Capps, 1996) specifically in the context of sensemaking which involves a search for plausibility and coherence, of negotiating complex contexts and sets of expectations (Brown, Stacey, & Nandhakumar, 2008). The interview transcripts were read multiple times and analyzed in depth by the primary researcher, and her researcher notebook was reviewed and brought into the interpretive process. After inductively coding the data, she created categories showing what was there in the data (Saldana, 2016). As mentioned in the Documents section above, the narratives of the anonymous 2018 early childhood cohort PSTs (*n*=49) were read and coded by Sherfinski, Jalalifard, and Zhang. We discussed our emerging findings of the narrative analysis at monthly meetings. We used these as well as published narratives and visual culture of protesting teachers to further understand how the context of protest might influence the narrative identities of teacher educators and teachers in this context. While there were no specific questions asking about resilience and resistance related to assessment in the context of protest, these concepts surfaced in teacher educators' interview responses. Surprisingly, these same concepts did not surface in the PSTs/graduates', and mentors' responses and texts. Instead, they framed the edTPA in only a pragmatic and economic perspective. Sherfinski then did a second round of coding and analysis, resulting in the combining of several codes and categories, which are presented in the findings section.

In the analysis, we worked to enhance trustworthiness by using multiple checks within the PST narrative data sets across researchers. We considered the degree to which each participant experienced the edTPA and the teachers' strike when making our interpretations. All of the individuals quoted in the findings had direct experience. We brought in a core teacher educator familiar with the trajectory of edTPA implementation in her leadership role and how the strike was affecting teachers in the schools through her liaison role (Hayes), to co-author this paper and act as an authoritative source for further validation of the codes, categories, and patterns from de-identified data. We also brought the emerging analysis to additional teacher educators at West Virginia University involved in both assessment and studying teacher protest as well as several diverse PSTs (2019 cohort) currently in the thick of writing their edTPAs, in order to validate interpretations and further make sense of the data.

# Findings

In this section, we explain first the institutional context that the data revealed. Specifically, we explain the institutional changes related to the edTPA roll out and then move to an explanation of how the teacher strike influenced teacher education in our institution at that time. After setting the stage, we delve into an analysis of these shifting contexts on teacher educators', mentors', and PSTs' identities and agency.

**edTPA Institutional Influences**

Greenblatt and O'Hara (2016) argued that scripted and narrow curricula in low performing public schools can cause potential mentors not to take student teachers if they know that edTPA is

part of the equation, as the curriculum can only stretch so far outside the bounds set by the district. In Appalachia, certain norms and expectations of classroom culture may also influence the kinds of lessons (and scores) that candidates have. For example, to provide information to inform our analysis, we analyzed our early childhood candidates' edTPA scores by schools and found that those who student taught in very rural settings and/or were from Appalachia did not have different edTPA scores than candidates who taught in suburban schools or were from outside the region. All of this frames teacher educators' and PSTs' narratives of resistance and power.

The edTPA implementation pushed several new changes in curriculum and assessment in our program. While all classes and coursework were maintained, some components were modified and some new elements were added to accommodate the edTPA and to support students' success. An analysis of assessment forms within the program showed that collective opportunities to assess one's teaching and identity development have been kept yet modified with the adoption of edTPA. Overall, edTPA is a high-stakes and individualistic orientation to assessment with some possibilities for interaction with mentors and fellow PSTs (discussed in the sections that follow). However, the focus is on producing individual video and narratives that show one's performance as a teacher. The other assessment forms used in the program have built in strong strands of working together with mentors, critical friends, and a small group facilitator to develop a community approach to co-constructing teacher identities and stances towards learning and assessment. These assessments are eventually vetted publicly in multiple forums such as the Portfolio Night in which narrative portfolio contents are discussed with teachers, professors, and students that the PST may be unfamiliar with as well as the Inquiry Celebration in which they present and defend their Action Research publicly to a large audience. While the long-standing assessments embedded in a collectivist orientation and democratic evaluative process have been diminished, integrated, and modified to make space for the edTPA (Table 5), the edTPA has taken the space as an individual assessment evaluated by a single un-named reviewer making the overall evaluation process less collectivist and more individual in orientation (Table 6). A second element that this table shows is an overall increase in labor of both the teacher educators and PSTs as new elements are added and some are integrated, but none are completely removed in an effort to preserve the collectivist values of the program.

Table 5
*edTPA Effects on Curriculum and Narrative Portfolio*

| Curriculum Maintained |
| --- |
| °All program classes and coursework. |
| Minor Curriculum and Assessment Revisions |
| °edTPA language backed into literacy courses. |
| °Action research removed as a key assessment. |
| °Internship Action Research project integrated with narrative portfolio and edTPA; becomes literacy-focused. |
| New Curriculum and Assessments Created |
| °edTPA support class. |
| °Mini-performance assessment added to second literacy course. |

Table 6
*Collectivism and Individualism in Assessment*

| Narrative Portfolio | edTPA |
|---|---|
| °Mainly collectivist approach | °Mainly individualistic approach |
| ·Purposes: collaborative and individual inquiry, action research, reflection | ·Purposes: certification, accreditation, data collection on teacher workforce |
| ·Evaluation: education community approach | ·Evaluation: single blind reviewer |

Over the past four years our institution has experienced a 30% decrease in elementary teacher educators while we have added a third elementary education certification program, and our overall numbers of PSTs has remained fairly constant. We are charged to do more with less. Although research expectations and class sizes have increased, workloads have remained constant and in some cases unofficially expanded. With the added burden of teaching the edTPA small group seminars as "service" (not as part of the course load), some tenured and tenure-track teacher educators in early childhood and elementary education are in effect teaching a 4/4 load equivalent as the direct result of the edTPA. This labor involved nearly all early childhood and elementary faculty because in 2017 program coordinators consolidated secondary PSTs across content areas and supervised them so that the secondary faculty could tend to other interests. Teacher educators have also experienced increased labor related to assessment and curriculum change, programmatically and in individual courses. This is positive because courses and programs are increasing the amount of writing about teaching using evidence (for example videos of teaching). But it can also be considered a negative because context influences the culture of the college to redirect autonomy and resources from "overburdened" teacher educators and towards more efficient ways of using portfolios, such as edTPA adoption.

**Silencing the Strike**

The edTPA unfolded at the foreground for our institution while in the background was a massive teacher strike orchestrated by many of our program graduates and mentor teachers, including a couple of the teacher educators and both of the mentors included in this study. The PSTs were kept quite separate from the strike, as explained in this document sent to the PSTs and faculty on behalf of the 5-Year Teacher Education Program:

Hello Ladies and Gentlemen **Pre-Service Teacher Candidates**,

The following is being sent to clarify the appropriate action to be taken in the event that the following circumstances should occur:

If there is a "**blue flu"** event (*or other term used when several teachers in a school call off sick*), and or a "**strike**" (*aka* **work stoppage**) at any of our partnering Professional Development Schools:

• Pre-Service Teacher Candidates **should _not_** participate in *–or-* cross a picket line, *-or-* attempt to enter the building/report to their [school].

- Even if your Teacher Education Coordinator (TEC) or Mentor (aka Host) Teacher is in school or on the picket line **- _you do not report to the schoo_**l, during these events.

- Days/hours missed as a result of the aforementioned circumstances will be treated in the same manner as a missed day/opportunity to fulfill required hours due to inclement weather, etc., **_and_** arrangements should be made for making up missed hours at a later time as per our program's routine practice/expectations.

- Should any of the aforementioned circumstances become of extended duration, you will receive further notification from the program office about possible alternate arrangements. Our institution will not put the safety of any of our students in jeopardy.

Thanks, in advance, for your cooperation with this process/expectation. (Strike Communication, 5-Year Teacher Education Program, February 2018)

Although we see this position communicated specifically in 2018 as problematic and constraining to PSTs, teacher educators, and mentors, we recognize the abuses of PSTs and other un-credentialed teachers in strikes who historically were positioned as "scabs" (strike breakers) or sometimes replaced striking teachers who were fired (Schirmer, 2017).

Echoing Wisconsin's teacher protest seven years earlier (but with a much more positive outcome), in the 13-day 55 Strong West Virginia Strike of February 2018, nearly 20,000 teachers, bus drivers, service workers, and a host of other state workers walked away from their jobs in an effort to claim proper health benefits and a 5% raise (Catte, Hilliard, & Salfia, 2018). All 55 West Virginia counties stood united as the strike spiraled into a wildcat strike and sparked collective action in other states across the nation. The strike was, though, about more than benefits, and pay, it was about a West Virginian collectivist identity different than that portrayed by the media of West Virginians being uniform Trump supporters, hillbillies, and the like. As teacher Mark Salfia stated:

> The work stoppage was about standing up as a state and telling our leadership what
> we value, we value ourselves. We value the blue collar, gritty West Virginia worker.
> We value the coal miner, the truck driver, the teacher. (Catte et al., p. 40)

"Fifty-five Strong" drew on a long state history of protest—against slavery, for mine workers' rights, and as recently as 1990 for teacher pay and benefits. Teachers who protested were linked to mothers, fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers who passed stories of protest forward throughout their lives (Catte et al., 2018). Protesting teachers have presented as professionals, content specialists, moral authority figures, valuable resources and inheritors of cultural legacies (Slocum, Hathaway, & Bernstein, 2018). These complex, multiple teacher identities informed the day-to-day challenges of the edTPA.

**Early Childhood PSTs' Resistance to the Strike**

An analysis of the 49 early childhood PSTs' narratives showed that none discussed who they were becoming as a teacher in light of the strike, this context was silenced. However, in considering the writings of their secondary education peers, several discussed the strike as foundational to their identities as PSTs and soon to be teachers.

Alternatively, several early childhood PSTs emphasized how happiness and not money was important to them in making the decision to become a teacher, as emphasized in this quote:

As I entered the medical pathway to go to Physicians Assistant School upon completion of my undergraduate career…I had always wanted to be a teacher and I had imagined being in front of my very own classroom my whole childhood, but the amount of discouragement I received from those around me when they heard I wanted to go into the teaching profession was so prevalent, I decided I should take an alternate route. I chose Exercise Physiology as my major more so based on salaries, due to the fact that numerous people warned me about how little money teachers make for the amount of work they do. … [I hated the medical pathway] and one day I called my mom and said, "I just don't care about any of this, Mom." (anonymous PST narrative, Spring 2018)

In fact, "It's not how much money you make, it's that you love what you do" was a refrain repeated in some iteration through nearly half of the early childhood PSTs' narratives at the time of the teacher strike. Sentiments like this were also common in students' application portfolios for program admission that were created in a course the first author taught, even though we spent considerable time discussing the strike and its connections to teacher identity. This seemed to reflect the "caring" discourse connected to female teachers' labor that conflicts with liberal conceptions of rights (Schirmer, 2017). It may also be seen as a new instantiation of female "grit" in the form of affective ECE labor, a self-sacrificial giving to the children. "Grit" discourses are also associated with high poverty schools like our PDSs in which children must individually strive to pull their way out of poverty (Gorski, 2017). The interviews with PSTs provided further insight into why early childhood PSTs seemed to resist the narrative of the strike, that teachers have the right to equitable pay and benefits, as this PST interview text illustrates:

Heidi Lester:    I did not make any references [to the teacher strike in my teaching stories], and nobody that I know of did.

Sherfinski:       Okay.

Heidi Lester:    But I think that's because we weren't allowed to participate. Which I totally understand. They're trying to keep us out of conflict. …So I totally understood why they said you can't participate. But I think that that's maybe why it didn't come up [in our stories].

Sherfinski:       Okay.

Heidi Lester:    And nobody that I know of did [write about the strike].

Sherfinski:       Right.

Heidi Lester:    … I mean, we talked about the strike in a lot of our classes, and I know our school took up donations and they delivered the overnight meal bags, the backpacks, and things like that. I know a lot of the community helped, and they offered free lunch, and this and that. That is great, but I didn't even think to put it in mine. (Heidi Lester, PST, 5-3-2018)

In this data example, the official patriarchal discourse of the program is stronger than the motherly voice of teacher educators and the voices of protesting "liberal" mentor teachers are absent. Protest is an add-on, separate from the discourses of neoliberalism that framed the teaching stories of Heidi and her peers. The paradox is that the mentors' protest was off limits, but the PSTs often explained it away as the wrong kind of grit for them personally at this time. Anonymous PST narrative prewriting related to the strike and displayed in our teacher education setting was not chosen by the ECE PSTs for their official narrative portfolio stories, yet it underscores the tensions PSTs felt around how to act within a neoliberal ECE teacher education setting:

> PST 1: "The teacher strike is very difficult because we can't be there for our students but we need to stand up for what we have. Teachers aren't asking for extra, they just don't want things taken away from them."
>
> PST 2: "I think it is important to stand up for your beliefs and take action when things are unfair. I just wonder how else teachers could get their message across to legislators without having so much of an affect (sic) on students. I am concerned for some of the students that I teach at my PDS and wonder how their basic needs are being met since they are not in school."
>
> PST 3: "I think that the WV teacher strike is useful and necessary. All I wish is that the teacher strike occurred at a different part of my education. Although I never intended to stay in WV anyway, I would definitely continue to support WV students by offering help to the teachers here when I was able to."
>
> PST 4: "Right now I am very scared for the future of West Virginia. I was born and raised here and I don't want to leave. However, I'm not sure I could raise a family here under these circumstances. I want to teach here because I relate to students!" (See also Figure 1 below.)

These four representative writing samples show a range of feelings related to the strike, notably a combination of support for mentors, concern for the young students' welfare, worries about remaining in the state as a teacher, and worries that the timing of the strike was inconvenient amidst edTPA and the stresses of the final program year, a wish that the strike could have happened "in a different part of my education."
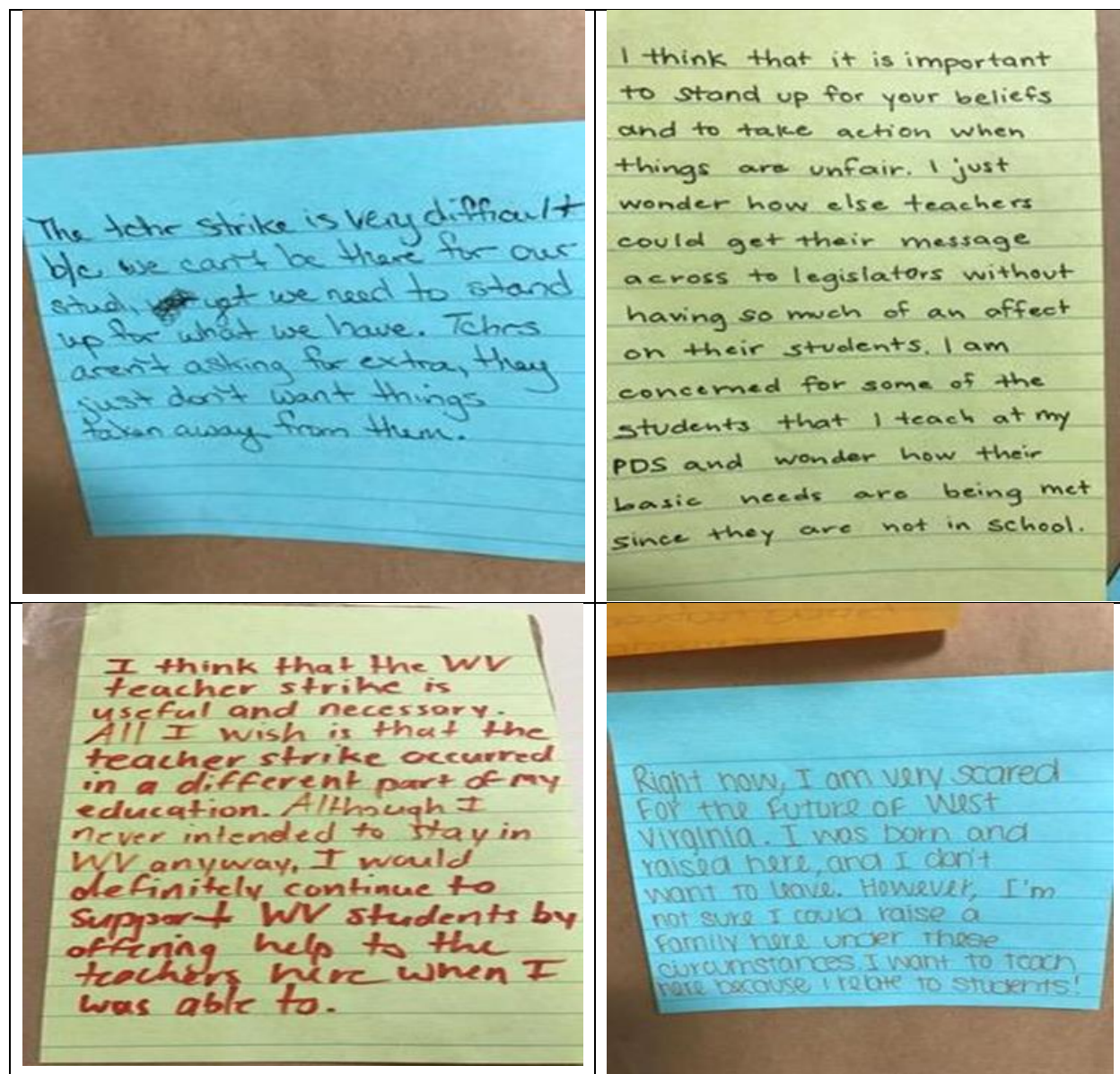
*Figure 1.* PSTs' feelings about the 2018 teacher strike

In her interview, Minnie Morehouse (PST) suggested in contrast to Heidi Lester that the reason PSTs struggled to produce rich narratives linked with the social context of education (such as the pre-writing displayed in Figure 1) was not because of a prohibition, but rather because they had not turned in their narrative drafts to the instructors early for formative feedback as she did. She mocked her peers, saying they kept repeating, "I don't know if it's good or not, I don't know if it's good or not" whereas she had tackled this issue for herself by obtaining pre-emptive instructor feedback (Minnie Morehouse, 5-10-2018). She saw neither the strike nor edTPA as affecting the narratives, but rather individuals' responsibility levels as students; to her, this was the kind of gritty individual ECE teacher identity work that the low-income children in her care required.

The identity elements of professionals and content specialists were strongest within the early childhood PSTs' portfolios. The theme of PSTs as moral authority agents played out in their stated

goals of controlling students' behaviors and in supporting diversity and equity in classrooms. But the themes of teachers as valuable resources and teachers as inheritors of cultural legacies were missing from the PSTs' narratives, suggesting a disconnect between how PSTs viewed themselves in line with neoliberal education and the current socio-political context of education within the state. In other words, the narratives of possibility passed down generationally through experience and collective activism driving practicing teachers seemed to be absent or diluted in this new generation of teachers entering the job market.

**Teacher Educators' Resistance and Power**

Teacher educators experienced one main pattern of practice associated with the edTPA, that it stole crucial time from the curriculum. Within this frustrating pattern of practice, they were forced to wear multiple hats as "middle-managers", "mothers" and "fathers" for the PSTs (described below).

**Stolen time.** The teacher educators the first author interviewed spoke with some hesitation. A couple mentioned fear of losing their jobs for sharing information about edTPA that was not exactly in line with the positive company line. The state of West Virginia, after piloting two teacher performance assessments, the PPAT and the edTPA, during the 2015-2016 school year and soliciting feedback from teacher education programs around the state, decided to allow a choice of valid and reliable assessments: the PPAT, the edTPA, and a homegrown version with acceptable metrics (Interview Archie Jones, Program Director, 10-17-2018). These options supported the requirements of the state-required NCATE/CAEP accreditation process. Although the program coordinators were allowed to vote on the performance assessment, many felt that the vote represented a "veneer of democracy" (Interview, Selma Johnson, Clinical Professor, 9-8-2017). Under pressure to produce accreditation data on schedule, every program coordinator (often untenured or non-tenure track faculty), whether their program had hundreds of students or a handful, received one vote. A minority of program coordinators were not swayed by the expediency argument and the other sales pitch—that it would compel out-of-state students whose states had already adopted edTPA: **"**Unfortunately, I feel like the edTPA is being forced on us" (Interview Archie Jones, Program Director, 10-17-2017). All teacher educators were upset that edTPA took on a posthuman agency, stealing time and displacing the space once available for critical, active projects such as action research: **"**The edTPA seems to be that sum-it-up snapshot that's kind of pushing its way into the limited amount of time the students have in the classroom" (Interview Archie Jones, Program Director, 10-17-2017).

Teacher educators noticed that the PSTs could often "swing" discourses of time instrumentally. For example, PSTs did worry that edTPA stole time from their action research projects in the classroom by prescribing a focus on literacy and a particular kind of instructional language; this came up in both teacher educator and PST interviews. During the strike, teacher educator Jillian Madigan relayed that PSTs continually voiced their worries about being able to complete the requisite number of hours working in the schools to graduate on time. Although they worried about their students missing school and the viability of themselves teaching in this state, PSTs often saw the strike as a short-term culprit rather than a strategy for long-term gain for teachers (see Figure 1 as well). Teacher educators saw this in their interactions with PSTs and questioned their commitments even while recognizing their bubble of nonparticipation. The authors of this study noticed the PSTs' worries about course completion as well. PSTs did not discuss this issue in their interviews, which focused on identities as followers of program requirements and directives related to both the strike and edTPA.

**"Middle managers".** Teacher educators were positioned as middle managers within the supposedly "well-oiled" world of corporate education reform, positioned due to the high-stakes nature of the reform and tight university budgets to figure out how to not only support the PSTs through the complex assessment, but to reconceptualize the entire curriculum to make it fit: "How do we make it manageable? Knowing what we know is important and what we value and still keeping those pieces" (Fiona Lewis, Teaching Associate Professor, 8-29-2018). Besides managing curriculum, teacher educators were now positioned as performativity auditors of task completion. The edTPA process doesn't provide specific feedback to PSTs, it feels like they are simply checking off something else to do:

> I don't feel like edTPA will tell us as much, we don't necessarily go in and investigate what they're submitting and read all of those little pieces, and us give them feedback on it. So I don't know that that's going to provide much feedback on their end, or our end. I think that is more, even though it's not a checkbox, it almost feels like it is a checkbox, because they need to do it for certification and it's not really gonna tell us a whole lot. (Iris DeSment, Teaching Associate Professor, 9-26-2017)

As middle managers, teacher educators were held accountable for PSTs' evidence of good choice-making and readiness to teach. We will not have an accredited program or a program at all if our students do not perform. Teacher educators were positioned as a striving, "gritty" group in that they should make sense of and integrate an assessment that in actuality seemed limited and reinforced the "checklist" orientations present in the program, as indicated by Iris DeSment in her comment above. The mentors were not held accountable for PSTs' performance, did not view data, etc. We are not arguing that mentors should be held accountable for PSTs' performance on edTPA. We do purport, however, that the differentiated positioning of teacher educators and mentors connects teacher educators to edTPA in curious ways while it distances mentors, thus unnaturally separating the two groups.

**"Mothers".** The work of the ECE teacher educators who manage the edTPA, however, is not completely mechanical; it is often imbibed with emotion (reflecting both the performance of a "cheerleader" persona for the PSTs and memory of the rich projects and discussions we have been laboring for) and positioned as motherly. Several teacher educators described how edTPA and other accountability measures pushed teacher education into an NCLB-like regime in which (mainly female) teacher educators are the juice fueling the engine by donating their time to support the PSTs. The inherent emotions of worry were also shared by some of the mentor teachers; one long-time mentor sent a letter to our teacher educators describing how, since the infusion of edTPA, she had never feared for a student's stress level to this degree. With all of the other coursework, rigor of the program, and long commute to and from the school site, it was just too much. As teacher educators, we worried that we would lose good mentors through this assessment, and the anxiety was intensified during the teacher protest because teachers were empowered more generally to claim what was right, rather than aligning their actions with business as usual. Individual teacher educators were positioned in the affective role designated in the literature as the one experienced by mothers and ECE educators, "all body/no mind". This labor was individual teacher educators' gritty care, the new fuel that supported the increasingly well-oiled machine of accountability.

**"Fathers".** The program's "blue flu" warning above designed to set expectations for PSTs during the strike and "not put students' safety in jeopardy" is a strong reminder of the patriarchal functions of teacher educators towards PSTs. In not supporting PSTs' abilities to protest alongside their mentors, there was a missed opportunity for being agentive, one that involved being

professional and following expectations (including passing the edTPA) rather than engaging in the gritty real life dialogues that are the lived work of teachers. As shown through some of the PST comments above, this had a role in how PSTs saw themselves as authors of their own stories of becoming a teacher; the patriarchal official discourse of the program trumped what they were learning in classes and seeing modeled in the schools by striking mentor teachers.

In sum, the patterns, identities, and processes perceived by teacher educators were overwhelmingly critical of the edTPA and the strike intensified the context and emotions experienced relative to the labor and positioning of educators within the edTPA. Teacher educators perceived the edTPA as a bland, time-sucking tool for devaluing teacher educators, PSTs, and the practice of teaching. Teacher educators saw themselves and PSTs as simply checking off the steps to completion when they could be working at much deeper and broader levels, however there was not much evidence that they saw PSTs' participation in the strike as an important task either. This positioning was in-line with (re)conceptualizing proper educator dispositions as individually and collectively resilient and open to embracing the "rigor" of this handed-down corporate reform rather than, like protesting teachers, attune to socio-political consciousness and a collective history of organizing. A secondary education faculty member worked with the Law School faculty, English Department faculty, and secondary educators to quickly pull together and present a popular panel providing information and context about the history and legality of strikes in the state. However, such organizing from within early childhood and elementary teacher education programs did not occur because those individuals were constrained by discourses positioning them to care for the young by spending their time focusing on the good prescriptions of neoliberal teacher education.

## Mentors, edTPA and Teacher Pay

As the teacher strike was fomenting in the background, teacher educators grappled with understanding how the mentor teachers were understanding the edTPA, how they might support it, and what their roles might be. The first author soon learned that there was a clear link between the edTPA and heightened professional identity for mentors:

> And I think that [edTPA] is the direction… they should be headed towards because I literally just got finished with National Boards, and that mimics that. And that was such a reflective process. I reflected more during that, than I ever have in my entire career because you have to. You're videoing yourself. You're analyzing work of your students. You're analyzing your own work. You have to reflect on that. So, I love what I see so far for that. (Todd Dunlap, Mentor, 10-20-2017)

Related to this issue, the first author reflected in her journal:

> Our pass rates were excellent, but still the process is not good. The teacher candidates worry about resisting edTPA and some teachers and principals have also bought in. We are a big National Board state because it is a way for teachers to get a little more pay, which is still miserable here after the strike. Some principals, teachers, and candidates see edTPA as a stepping stone to National Boards. We have 40% out of state students, most on the Eastern seaboard (NY, NJ, etc.) and many of their states already required edTPA so the candidates like it in the sense that it is one less thing to do after graduation. (2-21-2018)

Interestingly, Todd believed that in this time of great strain just a few months before the strike erupted, that his teacher colleagues around the state likely would not buy into the edTPA and not support it:

> My fear would be for that, is that you're going in and introducing something new
> again. And I think that that could be scary for them. It's not for me because I looked
> into it, and I liked what I saw. But… I think that it could be viewed as, here's
> another thing that they're gonna be doing, as well as all of the other things that
> they've been doing. (Todd Dunlap, Mentor, 10-20-2017)

Ironically, 20,000 teachers who were not afraid to risk their jobs in the largest state protest in almost three decades were deemed "scared" of the edTPA. This logic divided teachers from one another, those who were professional, meritorious and upward bound towards helping themselves with National Board Certification versus those who were metaphorically stuck in the muck of too many things coming down from above, unable to help themselves.

Mentors participated actively in the strike, yet at the same time used their own performance assessments as pathways to status and pay. They saw the edTPA as an instrumental stepping stone to better pay in an inequitable salary context for teachers. This data sets the stage for a somewhat different perception of the edTPA and strike context by PSTs.

## PSTs' Resistance and Power

PSTs were positioned quite differently than teacher educators and mentors as the edTPA and strike unfolded. They were like voyeurs to the realities of low teacher pay and benefits yet unable to fight against it for themselves. They were positioned, as evidenced by the data presented above, as "unready" to engage in political discourse and action like real teachers; instead, the edTPA sent the message that their job was preparing for credentials. Still, however, they were positioned to engage in an apprenticeship of observation of the discourses of both neoliberalism and social protest wafting around them. This section details what they were experiencing, and what they were learning. The PSTs in this study experienced silence and resistance to both the edTPA and the strike. For example, all PSTs were invited and highly encouraged to attend the aforementioned panel on the strike, but as the first author recorded in her journal, communicating her exasperation: "Only one [PST] in any of my classes—of 64 [mainly early childhood and elementary majors]—attended even though the time selected for the panel was very convenient. That is one percent!!" (3-3-2018). Behind that silence, PSTs crafted identities as "gritty" and crafty performers in the service of achieving a "stepping stone" through edTPA to an opportunity for professional status and income that teaching currently did not provide.

**Silence.** One middle-class PST did seek to resist the edTPA and teacher educators supported her; the result was that the university's administrative move to require edTPA for certification during the initial year of trying out the instrument was deferred. However, although this student believed that she represented the will of her fellow PSTs, none of them actively worked to resist edTPA; this is evidence of a more complicated story of PST identity. The narratives of the 49 PSTs also provide evidence of silence around the teacher strikes and around the edTPA as being a formative experience that helped them actualize equity and social justice within their teaching. When we brought this data to more diverse PSTs outside of our sample, they interpreted it as there being a history of students in the program not being listened to. They believed that they could not imagine making an impact or having their voices heard, so they did not try. This silence "reverberated" with the silences we as teacher educators felt related to edTPA and the teacher strike: we as protected, sheltered, and compliant girls.

**"Grit".** Multiple participants expressed fears that resisting edTPA might sacrifice their certification and future livelihoods:

> I would say that if teacher educators are not at least acknowledging that several states require edTPA and it's there, you're doing us a disservice. If [teacher educators] pretend like, "Oh this isn't happening and we just won't do it because it's hard." Then you know, you're not preparing us the way that we need to be. But still do what people need obviously for certification without killing them. (Stephania Wellington, 2017 cohort, 5-28-2018)

This quote is a very interesting commentary on how PSTs view teacher education. When Stephania states that teacher educators would resist edTPA because "it's hard" she reveals (a) that she sees resistance as a cop-out, and (b) that she does not recognize the injustice in teacher educators teaching over their workload in order to support PSTs on a mandated exam. She does not see it, as the teacher educators did with a couple exceptions, to be a struggle toward growing democratic professionalism, critical multiculturalism, and labor equity in the ever-narrowing arena of neoliberal accountability schemes. Indeed, in her fear, she positioned (female) teacher educators as those who would be holding PSTs back from a meritocratic road to professionalism, benefits, and pay through National Board Certification via the edTPA.

In Appalachia specifically, the idea of women following meritocratic tracks into the "helping" positions such as teaching (careers historically with good benefits and job security) links teaching to "grit" in the support of men sickened or disabled in the mining industries (Sohn, 2006). When Stephania calls for teacher educators to do whatever is required for PSTs to become certified "without killing them" she takes on a feeling of vulnerability backed by a collective history of "grit" that requires a social commitment from women. When we brought this data and interpretation to diverse PSTs outside the participant group, they believed that current PSTs, with a rare exception, are not thinking ahead to National Boards, they are simply putting one foot in front of the other, trying to get through a rigorous program with worries about personal finances, time management, transportation, and obtaining employment weighing heavily. This one-foot-in-front-of-the-other sensemaking also resonates with the PSTs' distancing from the strike, whether because they did not see the strike as pertinent to their immediate futures as teacher educators claimed or because they were silenced by an official prohibition not to participate as a PST explained. The mentor teachers, meanwhile, were often intent on obtaining National Board certification and thus curious about the edTPA, whether or not they were supportive. In this way, we view the role of PSTs as not merely being pawns in the educational marketplace, but rather being wise and thoughtful actors in the midst of an oppressive socio-political context in this region; this fits the trajectory of Stephania and many of her classmates who were a part of this study, as well as the additional commentary on the data.

**A stepping stone.** Some PSTs, like the savvy mentor teacher participant, saw the edTPA as a 'third way' beyond protest and advanced education to achieve higher pay by linking it to National Board certification. PSTs and graduates saw the edTPA potentially as "really setting themselves up" (Kitty Gardner-Royals, 2015 cohort, 6-4-2018) for the credential of National Board status and the potential pay bump, although the PSTs called on to interpret data while in the thick of their internships and edTPA writing were not thinking towards the future in those ways. Because edTPA rules are conferred across states and the logic is that of a business conglomerate monopolizing new markets (states), PSTs seem to have absorbed that thinking as well, although they may not have time to really reflect upon it until after they have completed the intense internship/edTPA semester and are teachers contemplating a future in the profession. Pragmatically, neoliberalism influences how they are positioned to think about teaching as a set of credentials to be fostered:

> Just from living in New York now… it is the case that I do have to complete a TPA
> and all the related tests, so it's probably, for your students who are like, "Why do we
> have to do this?" it's probably a good thing, to get that under their belt and get it
> done. (Jess Kleinmetz, 2016 cohort, 5-14-2018)

They wanted to see it drive the program in some cases because of its alignment with a brand of teacher professionalism: "edTPA… is a huge deal… like the process for becoming Nationally Board Certified… actually getting it to become a part of the program as opposed to an afterthought" (Stephania Wellington, 2017 cohort, 5-28-2018). PSTs were rational, pragmatic peacemakers: "Just see where things overlap and where you could tie things" (Asta Ellington, 2015 cohort, 6-11-2018). And echoed in comments such as this one:

> I think if you can achieve that balance between action research, narrative portfolio,
> and edTPA, and if that means cutting back maybe on some of it in certain ways,
> maybe limiting where the research can go, and balancing that with the new
> requirements of the certification, then I guess that would be ideal. I know that that's
> probably easier said than done, because you don't want to cut back on opportunities
> for learning for people, but I think if this is something that's a requirement, then
> maybe if that balance can be achieved, that would be a good place to start. (Jess
> Kleinmetz, 2016 cohort, 5-14-2018)

Another PST thought that the Inquiry Days presentation at a local country club should drive the content of the program, noting that presenting on their edTPA exams might be a better match than presenting on their action research projects because edTPA is the element that is required for certification and thus should be the new showpiece:

> Yeah, I think I would eventually pare down the action research [in the program], and
> then have the presentations based off of what you did with the edTPA, since that's a
> requirement. 'Cause I think that I could have definitely presented fifteen minutes
> based off of what I did on my edTPA. (Melany Hide, 2018 cohort, 5-29-2018)

These comments resonate with the "check list" mentality that the teacher educators experienced within the edTPA, although the PSTs do not perceive it as such. However, when we asked current PSTs about this interpretation, they agreed but stressed how they were positioned to think and act in these ways due to the structures of teaching and teacher education. Given the additional stresses of their lives as Appalachian students and the worries they expressed about "getting their hours in" in the midst of the strike, it was all they could do to put one foot in front of another. Resistance could feel risky and costly to them personally, and to their families and the families they hoped to have someday. Knowledge of resistance from striking teachers was witnessed from afar while teacher educators performed compliance but were suspect and under surveillance for being the ones who could potentially "choose" to hold them back from graduating if the strike became protracted, a silent refrain in PSTs' stories of power and resistance.

**A performance.** An interesting, surprising, and somewhat ironic finding was the number of 2018 PSTs who said that, looking back, they liked doing the edTPA. There is a plethora of critical literature on the instrument, and not much positive response reported from PST's in it. But a common sentiment from the 2018 cohort was: "With the edTPA I do think that it's a really great way to assess teachers" (Kiki Edison, 2018 cohort, 5-7-2018). This PST gives an example of why:

> I really liked edTPA once we got into it, because like, my whole thinking behind it
> was, I feel like that showed how I was in the classroom. Like, they had videos to see

how I was as a teacher, and how the kids responded to me. And they saw like, how I
reflected on lessons, and what I took from them, and what my kids took away from
them. The edTPA shows how I teach… like all the ins and outs, like how you get
your students to their understanding of it. And I feel that is a really big part of being
a good teacher. (Minnie Morehouse, 2018 cohort, 5-10-2018)

There is very little feedback provided from edTPA, simply numerical scores on the rubric elements
and a total number. This is not unlike sitting in a large lecture class and awaiting the scantron scores
to come back from the fill in the bubble test, an environment that PSTs have been socialized within
(Brown, 2009). Perhaps it feels comfortable, objective, reassuring and safe to hear that one's "good
choices" align with a number deemed by one's state in conjunction with the corporate facilitator as
"ready to teach", a kind of cultural match for children of NCLB. And, as Minnie described, there
can be a kind of thrill and mystery in putting oneself "out there" and having to wait for the return.
Sampling PSTs from multiple cohorts, and many who had been teaching 1-3 years already at the
time of this study, gave us a better read on how the edTPA roll out was perceived more broadly by
teachers in the schools. There were several negative comments given by the graduates who were
teaching, along the lines of, "I've heard the edTPA is awful" (Merry Nicholas, 2016 cohort, 5-30-
2018). There was a concern amongst graduates that the edTPA "pigeonholes you in literacy" (Merry
Nicholas, 2016 cohort, 5-30-2018). Some PSTs saw an affordance in integrating content into the
literacy thrust of edTPA, saying, "We could integrate a little science, or integrate a little social
studies, or something like that... I'm sure that looks great on the edTPA" (Kiki Edison, 2018 cohort,
5-7-2018).

 Some of the mixed comments on the edTPA expressed by mentors can be explained by the
interpretations of the PSTs currently taking edTPA. One, for example, voiced performative terror
(Ball, 2003) in that she "hates" being videoed and did not want a stranger looking at her. She knows
she is a good teacher because she has had many good people working with her for three years and
has had so many dialogues about her teaching. She also is comfortable with the edTPA format
because in her 2019 cohort, they have practiced the edTPA many times in classes and she strives to
"make every lesson an edTPA lesson" whether or not she is videotaped. She states: "[I] don't
NEED someone else to watch, to validate me." But unfortunately, as several PSTs pointed out by
way of interpretation, it is the context and nature of the exam along with the long-time patterning of
scholastic success that "makes it high stakes". Another current PST had a mentor going for her
National Boards. She found this mentor extremely narrow, allowing her to only teach canned basal
reader lessons, with no room for creativity or thinking about who the children are and what they
need but rather an obsession with "how things look". This reinforced for her that although she may
or may not receive a good score on the edTPA, she is so much more than that number. These
accounts seem to resist the "good girl", box-checking, individualistic social constructivism of the
edTPA.

 West Virginia activist teacher Daniel Summers, a secondary education PST in our program
several years before edTPA was launched, wrote in a 2018 news article about the need to
reconceptualize "grit" as a given of the collective, a resilience that educational disinvestment has the
potential to steal from:

From an outsider's standpoint, this work stoppage was about our wages and health
care. As a teacher, I can say that is certainly true. My profession needs a boost. The
grit of the people I stand beside every day in my school, the people I stood with
on the picket lines and in Charleston [the state capitol], has been tested daily by a

government that refuses to invest deeply in the foundations of a productive society. (Summers, 2018)

Together, these accounts of resistance are hopeful and critically reflective narratives that bring memory and critical conscience from the public square into the neoliberal sensemaking of teaching and teacher education. They show that the collective history of protest has not been completely severed and replaced amongst the newest generation of teachers.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Annually, the lead author coordinates a giant shared art piece with the exiting PSTs. Upon its completion, it is displayed in a hallway or classroom in our department as a reminder of that graduating class' thinking about education (Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* PSTs' thinking about education

It maps their individual and collective stories developed in the program and displays them publicly for teacher educators and PSTs to "read" for, we hope, generations to come. One canvas on the theme of teacher collaboration stands out as relevant to this data: A striking image on the canvas is the Burger King logo with a "C" for collaboration around it, a play on the company's advertising slogan about unlimited meal choices. Instead, the PSTs' version resists corporate America, symbolizing according to PSTs, "You **can't** have it your own way!" This is a beginning, however the data in this study reveal a more complicated, multi-voiced story of PST, teacher educator, and mentor identity and agency in the context of the edTPA and teacher protest in the state.

Narratives in a singular political moment are used in this research to produce complex cadences, echoing multiple narratives of power and resistance that are informed by the broad, global context of neoliberalism and women's protest movements as well as the local stories and histories of this place. We believe that, in neoliberal times, we are called to listen carefully to these stories, which may be buried deep under layers of other stories that position, repress, and oppress. Most tragically, these stories of performing and surveilling the updated assembly line of "good choicemaking"

stamped symbolically with "ready-to-teach" might objectify educators as less than who they might become, or paint creative resistors as simple novitiates or weak and inept individuals, in line with a long list of stereotypes about people in Appalachia (Billings, Norman, & Ledford, 2000). But "grit" spreads beyond our understandings of individual children and families in schools. It affects how teachers, PSTs, and teacher educators are positioned. As heteroglossic power shifts in complex ways among neoliberal and collectivist orientations in space and time, different groups are positioned and constrained within neoliberalism.

## Implications

The two major implications of this research as it relates to the context of edTPA implementation, the role of teacher protest, and the effects on teaching and teacher education are: (1) understandings of "grit" as it applies to educator sensemaking, identities, agency and positioning related to edTPA, and (2) how these findings about educator sensemaking, identity and agency matter within broader cycles of teachers' collective identity, protest movements, and neoliberal reform.

**"Gritty" implications.** In the findings, we described the context of edTPA implementation in a West Virginian teacher education program, and showed how teacher educators and mentor teachers viewed their own (re)positioning as part of this process. While striking mentors and other teachers presented themselves as professionals, content experts, moral agents, and bearers of collective memory in the new context of the edTPA, teacher educators and PSTs experienced a disconnect from their own roots and power to protest. In many ways, they felt silenced and separated from resilient action and collective engagement with the mentors who were a part of the unraveling PDS network of the teacher education program. We believe that the "foundation" of soft money that had historically supported the teacher education program and weakening state support hindered the capacity for creating robust networks that might positively impact both teacher education and P-12 education. Said another way, forces around the 5-Year Teacher Education Program created a context in which social constructvism as "grit" was the predominant discourse normalized within teacher education policies and practices. edTPA was a major force further officializing these discourses and stealing time for critical reflection. Most PSTs privileged social constructivist discourses like edTPA that were individualistic and that privileged caring, "good girl" identities ironically packaged as pink-collar "grit" rather than using the narrative as a space of resistance. Unfortunately, ECE teacher educators were also socialized by neoliberalism, and thus were slow to resist it themselves. All of this split the three groups (PSTs, teacher educators, mentors) when they might have acted as allies in educational transformation. Significant space in this article was devoted to discussing in detail how PSTs viewed edTPA in light of the strike.

Specifically, the influence of time was a construct through which PSTs negotiated their becoming. Watching, witnessing, learning and waiting was strategic even though on the flip side it presented as a "good girl" mentality and a lack of "grit" on the part of PSTs, a presentation of second-generation resistance. Importantly, we found threads of recognition of and resistance to neoliberal versions among the narratives of some PSTs still intact.

While previous studies have documented the challenges of implementing the edTPA from teacher educators' and administrative and social justice perspectives (i.e., Greenblatt & O'Hara, 2015; Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013; Meuwissen & Choppin, 2015) there has been little discussion of how PSTs experience the edTPA reform and why. Interestingly, in this study, the edTPA resonated with PSTs. It is something they could bite off and chew, a wieldy set of tasks they demonstrated that they could manage and control. The edTPA made sense to them, as it fits with the system of accountability that they are under as college students, they are nurtured by teacher educators in a

quality program, and in line with the literature on identity and edTPA performance (Garland, 2016; Goldhaber, Cowan, & Theobald, 2017), they are advantaged as a group by being overwhelmingly White.

Lys and colleagues (2014) explained that at their institution, the edTPA has started to drive the curriculum assessment process, one that was ignored in the past while curriculum development and implementation took center stage. At our institution, mainly female teachers did this type of labor unpaid by teaching an additional informal class called "edTPA Support". This fits with a neo-Marxist vision of labor in which teacher educators, like mothers (Griffith & Smith, 2005), provide the surplus labor needed to drive the business model/educational machine which has now shifted from P-12 to teacher education. This ironically repositions teacher educators outside of collective opportunities for protest within the public eye, and instead in pink-collar labor (a gendered space between white collar and blue collar labor) (Apple, 2013). This is particularly ironic as many teacher educators here were drawn to higher education in part because it seemed to be a more autonomous, professional, and intellectually protected space than schools to do educational work (Researcher Notebook, 2011-2018). Colleagues have commented repeatedly that our institution has become like a "working class public school post-NCLB" (Researcher Notebook, 2011-2018). Placed in relation to other units on campus in which females are a minority, this casts the role of teacher educators as a "maternal" one and may have the result of positioning this group of women in the academy in de-professionalized roles. This hearkens back to the time of the separate "normal" schools for teacher education in which docile, compliant "good girl" teacher educators trained up young women with the limited knowledge and skills thought needed for primary teaching; similarly, we are positioned as good and caring technicians of the edTPA (Labaree, 2006). We sometimes ask ourselves if a similar mechanism is not at play today in ECE teacher education, a mechanism for sweeping us away, and perhaps ed schools along with us.

Framing edTPA as professional improvement, Sato (2014) explained the underlying conception of the edTPA, which she sees as professional practice, both individual and collective. A major "threat to validity" was that different communities might hold different conceptions of teaching and teacher education, that are not completely in line with those promulgated by edTPA. Indeed, some researchers have developed a support model for implementation, addressing program and teacher educator "readiness", and promoting data-directed program improvement and curriculum improvement. For example, at one institution an edTPA leadership team developed a framework to provide clear communication, a chain of command for clinical practice, teacher educator development, and technology support (Lys et al., 2014). "Pod leaders" in their phase-in were university-based teacher educators who served as liaisons to local schools and interfaced with the leadership team to navigate how mentors and PSTs were taking up the edTPA, thus bridging the fragmented structures common in ECE. This kind of organization facilitates sensemaking within a community of practice. Our case describes how, despite all of these preparations, teacher educators were not "dispositionally ready" for edTPA because they were "averse to change". As Ng and Tan (2009) have said and as our analysis also suggests, teacher educators might be wise to reconceptualize communities of practice as a space not for social constructivist-driven, neoliberal-oriented sensemaking as is the current practice, but for critically reflective practice in a truly collectivist micro-organization that draws on perspectives of social constructionism. Therefore, considering the potential of edTPA debriefing sessions and the ongoing deconstruction of edTPA after candidate submission of the exam might provide a critically reflective space to make a new kind of sense related to the broader meanings and purposes of education, building that into the existing curriculum so that this is part of ECE teacher educators' paid labor.

**Collective movement and neoliberal reform.** This study shows how teacher educators' and sometimes PSTs' narratives of resistance sought to reframe teacher educators' identities as collective resistance to neoliberal accountability movements, recognizing how collective work in education is being reframed in the context of neoliberalism. We would argue that this is historically generated and often conscious work occurring not in opposition to institutional-level professional organizing to support edTPA's efficient implementation (an unfunded prospect in our case), not a kind of need for "dispositional readiness" implying ineptitude and inefficiency on the part of PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators.

There is a crucial importance of positioning shown in the data, with it coming together through these aspects of teacher educators' and PSTs' stories in the context of the strike and intensive accountability measures. Whereas the strike positioned mentors and other teachers as agentive and able to achieve success in their goal of more equitable pay and benefits, teacher educators were forced to focus on instrumental goals in the service of accountability and testing performativity rather than on protest and unpacking the socio-political context of education. Teachers found ways to suture together neoliberal pathways to increased pay and status through National Boards, painting edTPA as a logical stepping stone to this goal. But PSTs, once successful with the edTPA, also equated it with professionalism and content knowledge, a useful activity that fit the frame of their socialization as students. Yet, a few PSTs who were asked to analyze the data saw it more skeptically. This information is useful for considering the complexity of on-the-ground social processes unfolding in times of abeyance that are influenced by the "energy" in the wake of collective activism and prior to subsequent movement (Melucci, 1988). It is this kind of disruption, and the cracks between teacher educators and PSTs, that emplace potentialities for the content and texture of future movement by shifting time and space in particular ways.

More specifically on the point of how time and space are shifted, this study showed the specific roles of edTPA as a lever reconfiguring the context through which stories are spoken and told. edTPA is often framed to be about candidate and program development (i.e., Lys et al., 2014). However, when states, universities, and/or programs choose to use it as a key assessment for program accreditation, PSTs' scores become high stakes not only for students but for institutions like ours, because our abilities to produce the teachers needed is now contingent on edTPA (see also Peck & McDonald, 2014). This in turn objectifies PSTs, teacher educators and mentors, with particular implications for identity and agency especially related to group and individual historicized narratives of teacher agency and protest. Structurally, edTPA puts significant economic pressures on the university, professors, supervisors, and PSTs, and opens the door to privatized alternative certification routes as the back-up if and when programs do not rachet up to escalating standards. Yet often neglected is the slippage between individuals' and educator groups' narratives of identity and agency and how this affects not "dispositional issues" but political potency, power and resistance in the complicated project of equity and social justice in education. All of these insights are crucial information for stakeholders and policymakers in teaching and teacher education contexts, particularly at state levels as the movement toward equity in teacher pay and the ratcheting up of performance assessments continues to expand.

Instead of being like "good girls" reproducing "good girls," we will continue to advocate for changing teaching and teacher education through admissions procedures that privilege social justice-oriented dispositions and diversity in the face of the challenging accreditation context. Already we make the study of advocacy and activism part of our curriculum, for example by studying the work of Myles Horton and Paulo Freire (1990) in Appalachia through the text *We Make the Road by Walking,* but fluid and flexible ways of weaving transformation around forced program elements should be a continual goal. Redefining solidarity and what that means is crucial in these times of

educational privatization and the difficulties that public sector unions endure. More radically, the community of practice orientation might re-frame PSTs as those able to use the rich collectivist organizing in West Virginia as an irreplaceable source of teacher education rather than something to be shielded from by leveraging rather than suppressing the collectivist impulses and discourses in our midst.

**Limitations and Future Research**

The qualitative case study findings cannot be generalized, although insights from participants' sensemaking and experiences may resonate with readers (Stake, 1995). The group of participants did not reflect all of the diverse voices present, although we tried to account for that by asking for other PSTs' perspectives during the analysis phase. Mentor teachers' voices were captured to quite a limited extent (two participants); we hope to expand our work with all groups in future inquiries.

Because of the interview cycle timeline, we had more information from PSTs about the strike than we did from teacher educators. The teacher educators were interviewed as the strike was emerging, in the midst of edTPA. Because we interviewed the PSTs slightly after both edTPA and the strike, we believe that we had the best information from them.

As we type these words for the revised manuscript (February, 2019), we are experiencing the second strike in a year in West Virginia. This time, we as teacher educators are more prepared to promote activism and advocacy and we have much more critical reflection to share in future work. Finding, telling, and creating new collective counter-narratives in the context of edTPA is an important future research task to inform policy and practice. In West Virginia state policy we do have multiple performance assessment options for certification that could be explored, yet we are low on examples to show alternative possibilities to the corporate route. Therefore, collecting the stories of alternative practice is an important topic of future research.

The idea of "dispositional readiness" as a kind of "gritty" resiliency placed in opposition to honoring the stories and knowledge of educators and engaging in democratic conversations about the global, national, and local factors influencing education is an important point of contention. This point should be explored in future research. It has broader implications for teacher education programs and understandings of sensemaking, teacher identity and agency far beyond our institution and the context of edTPA and teacher protest, although these two areas deserve continued study and attention as well. Giving increased attention to PSTs, teacher educators, and mentors as separate groups with different contexts and agency, as well as their synergy, slippage, possibilities, and potential for working together is needed.

**Conclusion**

Memory and conscience are vital to education and can be curiously missing from contemporary conversations about educational accountability. This research showed the context and challenges of sensemaking among teacher educators, mentors, and PSTs in the educational context of West Virginia, amidst edTPA and the 2018 teacher strike. We have found that while protest is vital, energizing, and necessary, there is also a need to step back and reflect carefully on what we ask for when we think about what makes a good package deal in education. Collective "victories" such as the salary increase won by West Virginia teachers in 2018 will certainly become leveraged "in trade" for future government cuts and concessions, and in fact this is already happening as a second strike erupts in 2019. While we are proud of West Virginia's teachers and their abilities to seed other teacher protests around the nation and disturbed that we were impotent in protesting actively alongside them, an over-focus on teachers' agency can mask the vast, ongoing, and deepening

struggles of education in this state, embroiled in worsening neoliberal organization. Thus, it is important to remain skeptical yet reflective and hopeful about the future.

This kind of reflection begins in teacher education. There needs to be opportunities in teacher education to reflect on how both neoliberal and collectivist discourses shift and flow over space and time. This involves learning about how edTPA is situated and how PSTs are positioned within the complex interplay of systems that promote oppression. Learning how to reflect on edTPA and its meanings and purposes within this context, and how assessment more generally might be revisioned in the process of (re)thinking the limitations and constraints is crucial. More local and national examples of protest may bring home these connections for PSTs. Panels, documentaries, discussions, volunteerism, relationship-building, models and advocacy can strengthen the contextualization of activism and teacher voice more broadly than only pay and benefits.

Recasting the familial metaphor so powerful in Appalachia to re-examine how we view the relationships among PSTs, teacher educators, and teachers at the confluence of corporate influence and teacher protest in a project of social constructionism is necessary. It is the relation among these groups and individuals rather than a laser focus on scores as the product of caring for individuals that needs to be centered, as the narrative of a PST presented in the findings so eloquently resonated. Together PSTs, mentors, and teacher educators might come together rather than separate despite the structures and different (in)opportunities for agency and collective bargaining that serve to separate and (re)define them. Instead of being cast as sado-masochists positioned to "do it all" without "killing [PSTs]", the embodied energy fueling the neoliberal machine, there is utility in (re)examining the power and potential of the "mother" role in teacher education as a crucial responsibility of passing stories from time past to time present and future. edTPA should not be allowed to (re)configure how we use time as an educational resource. Yet it is also a mistake to turn a deaf ear to the stories of PSTs, who need to feel present instead of voiceless and continually deferred in their lives as educators.

Although moves towards cultures of evidence on the surface reflect the labor of collecting and analyzing data, they have the potential to expand towards aspects of collective values, policies, and tools, both material and conceptual. As Fiona Lewis, a Teaching Associate Professor, noted in her interview, "I think a lot is untold right now, like the story is just being written…" (8-29-2017).

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