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'Small but mighty': a case study of teacher educators disrupting neoliberal reforms of teacher education and reclaiming a voice in policy conversations

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ABSTRACT

As attacks on teacher education mount, teacher educators have been urged to take a more active part in policy deliberations. Yet the question of how teacher educators get their voices heard in policy contexts that are not receptive to their expertise remains underinvestigated. This qualitative case study addresses this gap by exploring the work of a group of teacher educators who engaged in advocacy against the introduction of edTPA as a licensure assessment in their state. Through the analysis of interviews, public testimonies, and policy artefacts produced by this group, we documented how over a span of one year the group engaged in policy advocacy that redirected reform efforts from the implementation of edTPA to running a pilot comparing edTPA to another locally produced assessment. The most important outcome of this advocacy, however, was the shift in roles afforded to teacher educators: instead of being seen as objects of reform, they were invited to become participants in policy dialogues about the future of teacher education. The significance of this study lies in offering insights for how teacher educators in other contexts can mobilise their response to neoliberal reforms of teacher education.

Introduction

For the last twenty years, teacher education has been under attack around the world (Beauchamp et al. 2016; Ellis and McNicholl 2015). In the U.S., teacher education has been labelled an 'industry of mediocracy' (Duncan 2016), accused of low quality professional preparation, and subjected to a heavy dose of reforms. Among them are 'managerial reforms' that treat university-based teacher education as a key impediment to 'centralised or uniform management' and seek to 'alter dramatically how universities do business' (Cochran-Smith et al. 2018, 7–8). These reforms have reduced the field's autonomy and authority, deprofessionalised many of those affiliated with it, and undermined teacher educators' ability to influence decision-making processes (Bullough 2016). Among these reforms are new accreditation led by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, more extensive reporting for accountability purposes, and new performance

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assessments, such as the Educative Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA) (Cochran-Smith, Keefe, and Carney 2018). edTPA is an assessment of preservice teachers' classroom performance based on videos of their instruction and their reflections, which was originally developed by Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) in order to professionalise teaching. Yet its takeover by Pearson came to be seen as expansion of privatisation and corporatisation of teacher education (Au 2013; Dover et al. 2015). The subsequent implementation of edTPA for high-stakes decisions, such as teacher licensure or programme accountability, has also created much controversy (Dover 2018; Gorlewski and Tuck 2018). While some programmes used edTPA to engage in inquiry into programme quality, others saw it as incompatible with their philosophy of teaching and social justice commitments (De Voto et al. 2020).

Attacks on university-based programmes have also been accompanied by growing support for new actors that pursue 'entrepreneurial reforms' of teacher education (Cochran-Smith, Keefe, and Carney 2018). Entrepreneurial reforms reflect deregulation of teacher preparation (Kretchmar, Sondel, and Ferrare 2018) and its redesign through the work of Graduate Schools of Education (e.g. Relay), TNTP (formerly known as The New Teacher Project), and other alternative routes (Zeichner 2016). These intermediary organisations – non-profit and for-profit providers as well as advocacy groups – seek to address the 'crisis' in education through market-based solutions and technocratic teaching approaches (Kretchmar and Zeichner 2016). They do so not only through the redesign of teacher preparation, but also through active policy advocacy (Zeichner and Conklin 2016). One way they affect policy is by coaching teachers how to influence policymakers through public testimonies, op-eds, blog posts, and individual meetings (Aydarova 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). With extensive funding from venture philanthropies and a strategic focus on reaching policymakers with their message (Zeichner and Peña-Sandoval 2015), these organisations have gained prominence in directing teacher education reform efforts (Aydarova 2019, 2020b). As a result, 'educators have lost control of the narrative and been sidelined, whereas reformers with corporate and ideological agendas have framed both the problems and the solutions for policy action' (McLaughlin, West, and Anderson 2016, 141).

Within this struggle over the direction of teacher education reforms, scholars and educational researchers have called on teacher educators to become more actively engaged in policy advocacy (see Dumas and Anderson 2014; McLaughlin, West, and Anderson 2016; Oakes 2017). Hence, teacher educators have begun to document their efforts to disrupt neoliberal policies and practices. From critical reflections on programme-level changes that align with new accreditation requirements (Cross, Dunn, and Dotson 2018) to collective protests against Pearson's hold over the field through the introduction of edTPA (Gorden and Biebler 2019), teacher educators have been working to make their voices heard. In New York state, teacher educators formed a collective that worked to disrupt the introduction of edTPA (Gorlewski and Tuck 2018), whereas in some states teacher educators collaborated with policymakers to create an alternative performance assessment based on specific state needs (McGough, Bedell, and Tinkler 2018). Reflecting on his experiences with policy advocacy, Brenner (2007) recommended that teacher educators build relationships with policymakers, offer alternatives to their proposals, seek to build common ground, and celebrate small victories instead of expecting big wins.

Amidst all of these policy activities, empirical investigations of teacher educators' policy advocacy have been rare. Yet in the context of post-truth politics where the struggle over power is also the struggle over whose knowledge matters in policy contestations (Aydarova 2020c and Dumas and Anderson 2014), it is more important than ever to understand how teacher educators as experts in their field work to get their voices heard. Understanding teacher educators' policy advocacy can help identify strategies to disrupt neoliberal technocratic influences and reclaim the field's authority and autonomy. The purpose of this study is to examine a case of teacher educators' policy advocacy in a southwestern U.S. state in order to shed light on what this work entails, what strategies teacher educators deploy, and what results they manage to achieve. Research questions included:

What does teacher educators' policy advocacy look like?

(1) What inputs support teacher educators' policy advocacy? What strategies and resources do they utilise to get their voices heard?
(2) What policy activities does teacher educators' advocacy entail? What challenges do they encounter in their work?
(3) What are the outcomes of their policy advocacy?

To pursue answers to these questions, we conducted a qualitative case study of a group of teacher advocates engaged in policy advocacy in their state. Our findings indicate that even a small active core of teacher educators can mobilise policy advocacy activities that overcome the challenges of the current political moment. In the case of this state, collective efforts to disrupt the push for edTPA played an important role in reshaping not only the conversation on teacher performance assessment but also the role teacher educators could play in policymaking processes.

Conceptual framework

In this paper, we draw on the conceptual framework of policy advocacy developed by Gen and Wright (2013) based on a synthesis of empirical studies and theoretical models of policy processes. They define policy advocacy as 'intentional activities initiated by the public to affect the policy making process' (2012, 165) and examine it through three interrelated categories: inputs, activities, and outcomes. The key element of policy advocacy *inputs* is 'able advocates' (173). In order to engage in advocacy, policy advocates have to have a sense of agency about the potential change and feel empowered to act. They also have to possess 'specialised knowledge' and develop relationships with various stakeholders to navigate the advocacy process. In addition, advocates need material resources to support their work.

Policy advocacy activities are defined as 'the concerted actions done in advocacy that are meant to affect policy processes' (Gen and Wright 2013, 175) and include several options that advocates can pursue. Policy advocates can build coalitions by bringing diverse actors into the policymaking conversations or they can engage and mobilise the public around a policy issue. They can also engage decision makers through lobbying, testifying, or relationship building. It is important to note that decision makers may in fact be responding to pressures from more powerful noninstitutional actors and have less

power than is commonly assumed. Some advocates build relationships with these power-ful noninstitutional actors – elites – in order to educate them about policy issues and seek their influence to affect policy. Another set of activities in which policy advocates can engage is information campaigning through research and analysis, rhetoric, or media work. While research and analysis can be used to provide policymakers with empirical evidence regarding the issue at hand, rhetoric tends to deploy 'carefully crafted language meant to persuade' (Gen and Wright 2013, 178). The latter can include anecdotes, stories, and personal narratives that frame 'policy targets in a favorable light' (178). Advocates can move beyond attempting to influence policy-makers' perspectives to direct policy through litigation or through pilots or demonstrations, each of which can 'demonstrate the efficacy of a reform on small scales' (180). Finally, policy advocates can also engage in policy monitoring. This involves holding decision makers accountable for the reforms during the implementation stage or evaluating how well the reform meets its goals.

Different policy advocacy activities can lead to different *outcomes*, which can include changes in decision-makers' or public views, policy adoption, setting new policy agendas, or shortening the time frame for action. There can also be wider social impacts, such as a strengthened 'democratic environment' and 'people-centered policy making' (168) where stakeholders feel empowered to participate in efforts to improve democratic decision-making.

Methodological approach

This paper is a part of a larger project that draws on case study methodology (Stake 1995) to explore how teacher educators engage in policy advocacy. In this paper, we examine one case: a group of teacher educator policy advocates who worked together to influence policymakers in their state. The case study approach allows us to focus on the 'uniqueness and complexity' of a case and 'its embeddedness and interaction with its context' (Stake 1995, 16). We established contact with one of the participants during a professional event focused on teacher educators' policy advocacy. Through this initial contact, we learned about the rest of the group. We then invited others in the group to participate in the study. We bounded our case by focusing on policy activities of this specific group in response to the state's introduction of edTPA as an assessment for teacher licensure.

Data sources

After we obtained ethics approval for our study from the Institutional Review Board, we conducted open-ended, semi-structured interviews with four advocates in this group. They comprised a majority of the core group of policy actors whose work we were exploring. We developed interview protocols using categories from policy advocacy frameworks and focusing on participants' activities, experiences, and struggles with policy advocacy. Interviews lasted between an hour and 90 minutes, and they were recorded and transcribed. Through the interviews, we learned about policy changes in the state and teacher educators' responses to those changes. Using those interviews as a guide, we located and assembled video recordings of the public deliberations of the proposed policies that advocates described. We identified their testimonies and transcribed those

for analysis as well. We also collected policy artefacts that advocates created through their advocacy activities. These included written comments, letters, empirical analyses, and policy briefs. In addition, we incorporated policy texts, agenda meetings, and meeting packets to deepen our insights into the policy context and various actors' involvement in the ongoing teacher education reforms in the state.

Data analysis

As we conducted interviews and read transcripts, we wrote analytic memos to capture emergent observations and began to establish patterns (Glesne 2010). Data were processed and uploaded into Dedoose for analysis. We developed a codebook using an iterative process of reviewing the data and concepts from a policy advocacy framework (LeCompte and Schensul 2013). Large categories, such as 'responses to policy change,' 'policy advocacy activities,' 'resources,' 'barriers,' and 'impact of policy advocacy' were subdivided into more detailed codes. For example, 'policy advocacy activities' included such codes as 'building relationships with policymakers,' 'testifying,' 'writing letters,' 'mobilising networks,' etc. To ensure trustworthiness of the study (Lincoln and Guba 1986), two coders engaged in the analysis and excerpts where coding did not match were discussed to reach consensus.

After textual sources were coded, we constructed a case summary by synthesising across different participants' accounts and across different data sources (Stake 1995). We used the case summary to develop assertions about the case. The case summary was shared with participants to confirm and disconfirm our observations. Subsequently, the patterns identified by case summary were mapped onto the policy advocacy framework in order to illuminate the strategies that participants deployed and the impact of their overall activities.

Findings

We present our findings using the conceptual framework of policy advocacy (Gen and Wright 2013). After describing how policy advocates worked together, we focus on the resources that supported their work, policy activities they engaged in, and policy outcomes they managed to achieve.

Policy advocates

In the state where our participants worked (State A), the teacher education community at large was fairly involved in policy advocacy. While we focused on one group of advocates, it is important to note that there were other institutions that also supported active engagement with policymakers. The core group of advocates included a dean, two associate deans, two directors of teacher education, and one external actor who had prior experiences with the State Education Agency. This small group organised various advocacy activities, mobilised resources, and engaged with policymakers to affect change.

Members of the core group were motivated to engage in advocacy for different reasons. Keeping sight of the big picture, some believed that it is both a right and a responsibility to make sure that their voices are heard by policymakers:

> What a privilege in today's world that you have a voice, and you are in a position where you have the opportunity to be informed and to be engaged. So it's not just an opportunity. In many ways, it's a responsibility. If we don't ensure that our voice is heard, then we're giving that voice to somebody else to define for us. If we choose not to be engaged, then we've given up that privilege and that opportunity and that power to somebody else. (Interview 11, January 2020)

Others spoke about the urgency to engage in advocacy in the face of hostility towards teacher education. One advocate related an increased intensity that necessitated a response from teacher educators:

> We have a really great network of people. Those structures have been in place for a long time and I think you're just seeing those structures work in a way they've never had to work before because we've never been under attack as we are now. (Interview 9, November 2019)

The larger structures evoked in the quote above refer to several professional organisations in the state to which core group members belonged. On the one hand, a state chapter of a national professional organisation had recently changed its course and decided to become more actively involved in the policy world. On the other hand, the state has a consortium that brings together several tiers of professionals involved in different aspects of teacher education, such as associate and assistant deans and directors, education deans from independent universities, directors of field experiences, and others. Among these tiers, associate and assistant deans and directors have been most active in mobilising other groups to action. They are in a position to watch the legislative processes and alert their leadership of the changes that require a response. As one participant described it:

> One of the smallest and I think probably the mightiest is the Associate Deans and Directors of [State A]. We pitch it as the 'organisation for middle management', so we're not the deans but we're also not the professors or the people with all the responsibility and none of the authority – the boots on the ground. That group of people has been pretty amazing about keeping their eyes on the legislation and then convincing their deans to speak up and say something, because in a lot of cases we aren't allowed to. (Interview 9, November 2019)

These structures allowed the advocates to mobilise resources across a wider network of teacher educators in the state and across other states as well. In preparing a policy brief opposing edTPA, for example, the advocates secured signatures of 39 representatives as well as letters of concern from the state chapter of national organisation of teacher educators and organisation of education deans from independent universities. While the large group provided support in strengthening the legitimacy of advocates' claims, they were not always actively involved. As a member of the core group described the relationship between the small group of advocates and the larger group of supporters:

> I think it just got so unwieldly trying to keep that many people in it that we've got a group that's pushing forward and then we reach out and get the other people back in it when we need to make a big splash. (Interview 3, September 2019)

In sum, teacher educators' policy advocacy emerged as a set of nesting dolls. The smallest group was most active and most involved. It activated a mid-range group of professionals that occupied similar positions. Subsequently, larger structures became mobilised through state-level organisations and more people came to bear on policy deliberations,

even if their participation was merely a signature or a vote. Thus, two important components came to matter: while a small active core set policy advocacy in motion, pre-existing professional networks and organisational structures added weight and momentum to policy advocacy activities.

Resources

Gen and Wright's (2013) framework of policy advocacy acknowledges the importance of resources in policy advocacy. At the individual level, participants felt empowered to participate in policy advocacy when they received explicit instructions that policy advocacy was a part of their job. Across the interviews, participants also explained that their institutions showed a commitment to advocacy by providing financial resources to support advocates' travel, lodging, and other expenses associated with their policy advocacy activities. In addition, when preparing a testimony, advocates had to reach out to colleagues that have greater expertise in educational finances or in educational psychology to get more concrete data to support their arguments or to ensure that their texts were factually accurate. These types of requests from colleagues could be easily dismissed if there were not an overall institutional commitment to weigh in on policy debates. Thus, at the programme or institutional level, commitment to policy advocacy has to be translated into allocating budget lines and fostering an understanding that engagement with policymakers requires time and collective sharing of expertise.

Policy advocacy activities

While the group has engaged in a variety of different policy activities, we will focus here on their engagement with the state's proposal to introduce edTPA as a performance-based assessment for teacher licensure. Because this assessment became a matter of controversy in the field (Au 2013; Gorlewski and Tuck 2018), teacher educators' responses to their state's adoption of edTPA had become cautious or outright resistant (Craig, Olson, and Gottlieb 2020). This case serves as a useful example of how teacher educators' sceptical response to edTPA was translated into policy advocacy that attempted to block the introduction of this assessment.

By early September of 2018, the State Education Agency (SEA) had decided to implement edTPA, and on September 11, the agency met with ten deans. Expecting a discussion, the deans were surprised when they were given a rollout plan. After that meeting, the SEA continued discussions about edTPA primarily with non-profit and for-profit teacher preparation providers in the state: Relay, TNTP, iteach, Teach Plus Fellows, Urban Teachers, and others. In October 2018, during an annual meeting of the consortium that brings together teacher educators of different ranks, the SEA made an announcement that it was introducing edTPA. Similar to the earlier meeting with the deans, there was no discussion; edTPA was presented as 'a done deal' (Interview 9, November 2019). During the presentation, agency representatives tried to use the meeting with the deans as a form of endorsement for the rollout, to which the present deans protested. Even though SEA called it 'a pilot,' it was a rollout plan that scaled up over five years. This announcement evoked strong responses: shock, panic, and anger.

Throughout the interviews we conducted, advocates often noted how 'the deck is stacked against' them (Interview 3, September 2019). This unequal distribution of power between teacher educators and SEA was evident during the meetings of the board of education – the policy body that that had to decide whether edTPA would be adopted as a licensure assessment. During their December 2018 meeting, edTPA was a discussion item for the first time since the October announcement. The SEA representatives acknowledged that they did not handle the process of informing stakeholders well. Instead of recognising that they did not seek input from the profession, they claimed that they should have done a better job raising awareness of edTPA benefits. During the presentation, they shared stories from other states of edTPA implementation and quotes from TNTP reports. The information shared was not based on rigorous empirical research but represented cherry-picked anecdotes to make the case that teacher preparation failed to prepare graduates for the classroom – a problem they argued edTPA would solve. In completing their presentation, SEA representatives used survey results showing that there were some in teacher preparation who supported edTPA to argue that the testimonies against it that the board was about to hear did not represent everyone's views. They also noted that if alternatives were not offered, arguments against edTPA were not enough. Speaking from a privileged position, SEA representatives discursively pre-empted and dismissed teacher educators' opposition. This presentation took almost 30 minutes from a meeting that lasted close to three hours, during which SEA representatives spoke leisurely using a PowerPoint, interacted with board members, and asked them to guess the statistics for the survey items they shared. In contrast, when teacher educators testified, they were given only three minutes and were cut off if they went over time. Furthermore, SEA connections with the non-profit sector landed it extra political capital as those non-profits were able to bring in teachers and district personnel to testify in favour of edTPA.

Despite this unequal distribution of power, the core group mobilised opposition. To work on their response, the core group emailed, created Zoom meetings, and used Google docs to exchanges ideas. By the end of November 2018, advocates assembled a policy brief *edTPA: Information, Concerns, and Recommendations* that was signed by '37 representatives of educator preparation at 30 universities, public and private, across [state A].' The brief identified issues with edTPA, offered recommendations to hold stakeholder meetings before adopting any assessments, and called on policymakers to consider a locally designed performance assessment. The advocates also prepared written comments, wrote letters to board members, and even got district partners to submit letters stating that they did not support the introduction of edTPA either. These responses translated empirical peer-reviewed research for policymakers.

Between December 2018 and December 2019, the core group also testified at almost every bi-monthly state board of education meeting. In their testimonies, teacher educators focused on the challenges that edTPA would create. Those who worked more closely with district partners and supervised teacher candidates' clinical experiences described how edTPA would negatively affect the quality of field experiences and damage relationships with mentor teachers. The advocates also argued that future teachers would have to bear the brunt of the cost while Pearson would be able to amass extraordinary profits:

> If we assume that 30,000 teacher candidates will attempt the edTPA exam, a conservative estimate of the annual loss in revenue to the [SEA] would be 330,000, USD the annual increase in cost to teacher candidates would be 3.5 USD million, and the annual revenue for Pearson would be 8.4 USD million. Over a five-year period, this would result in a loss of 1.7 USD million for [SEA], an increase in cost to teacher candidates of 17.4 USD million, and revenue in the amount of 42.2 USD million for Pearson. (Public Testimony, July 2019)

Growing fiscal impact along with the expansion of regulatory oversight would cause lasting damage to the profession. Since the state was experiencing shortages of special education, English as a Second Language, and bilingual teachers, the group argued that a new expensive assessment added to the other 3 to 6 assessments required of teacher candidates for licensure would increase teacher shortages and decrease diversity in the teaching profession. These shortages would affect students from vulnerable communities the most. In a testimony to the board, one of the advocates warned, 'We do not want the noble work of teaching to become a profession of privilege that few people can afford' (Public Testimony, September 2019).

One important aspect of teacher educators' advocacy work was developing relationships with policymakers. They met with them individually and discussed their concerns. They used those meetings to provide more information and resources. Those relationships also involved connecting during public events, exchanging cards, and following each other on Facebook and Twitter. Relationships mattered in getting teacher educators' voices heard and helped advocates extend conversations after their testimonies. One of the participants shared that she had prepared a testimony but had something to add that would take more than the allotted three minutes. Because she had an established relationship with a board member, she was able to get that person to ask her a question after she completed her testimony. The question gave her more time to elaborate on some of the research in support of the advocates' position.

Together these policy activities created so much controversy that the vote on implementing edTPA was continuously delayed. After multiple meetings, however, the core group realised that SEA submitted rebuttals to their testimonies in the packets provided to board members before each meeting. In those packets, teacher educators' messages were often misconstrued or misrepresented. To address that, the core group began paying closer attention not just to the minutes for the meetings, but also to these background packets, which required extensive time as each packet could contain several hundred pages. Their role shifted to intercepting SEA's messages to the board and addressing the misinformation that might have been provided. They also adjusted their strategy: instead of focusing on the problems with edTPA, they began emphasising alternatives.

The alternative that the group supported was a locally designed performance assessment that was used by district partners. The test did not have a cut-off score but was significantly cheaper to implement because the infrastructure for it was already in place. As a result of their advocacy, the board decided to run a pilot to collect data and compare the use of edTPA and the locally designed performance assessment. By the end of 2019, the final approval for the pilot experiment comparing two assessments was secured. Twenty programmes across the state representing different types of entities (state, non-profit, for-profit) agreed to be a part of the

pilot. Programmes would implement both assessments and collect data to compare the impact of those assessments on different aspects of candidates' preparation, relationships with districts, and costs.

Outcomes

The impact of policy advocates' activities over time were three-fold. First, the board's decision to introduce edTPA only as a pilot and compare it with a locally designed assessment was a success for the group:

> As a result of our efforts we've been able to have some small victories and one of those was to have it in rule that the edTPA is just a pilot and that data will be shared before it is implemented. And it may not be implemented, and I don't think that anybody saw that coming, but that was the result of our testimony and trying to inform all of the board members about what edTPA is. (Interview 6, October, 2019)

Second, the extensive policy advocacy allowed participants to reframe the terms of the dialogue: instead of focusing on the problem of teacher education and how edTPA would solve it, they managed to steer the conversation towards posing mutually developed research questions and urging the board to use data to make their decisions. In other words, instead of relying on anecdotes from reports produced by intermediary organisations or stories of what worked in other states, advocates managed to shift the conversation towards contextually-relevant and empirically-driven deliberations.

Most importantly, however, intentional engagement with this policy issue in a diplomatic and thoughtful way led to stronger relationships with policymakers. Indeed, some policymakers began inviting advocates to engage in conversations about other issues related to teacher education. For instance, as the state began exploring new accountability systems, more teacher educators were invited to provide input:

> I was at the [State Education Agency] on Friday for a meeting working on our accountability system. I think there are only ten or twelve people on that committee. They want to redesign our accountability system, and typically they would have sat in their offices, they would have redesigned it and told us what we were going to do, but we were presented with, "This is what we're considering; play around with the model; let us know what you think. I know you're not all going to agree so we'll take your recommendations and then we'll come back to you with something that sounds like the consensus of the group." I think that maybe the fight of the last year has shown that we won't go down without a fight so they're going to start to engage us more. That's at least my hope. (Interview 9, November 2019)

In sum, despite their overall sense that the deck was stacked against them, teacher educators felt that their work had impact. edTPA implementation was delayed and an alternative assessment was selected for the pilot. They also saw hopeful signs that they were now perceived as participants in a dialogue rather than objects of reform. The long-term effects of this work remain to be seen, but for now, their hard work paid off and policy process turned towards a more democratic deliberation rather than authoritarian imposition of change.

Conclusion

In this paper, we used a conceptual framework of policy advocacy to analyse teacher educators' engagement with policymakers in a state that attempted to introduce edTPA. Driven by the vision that it is important to speak up to be heard, a core group of educators mobilised opposition, testified for policymakers, provided policy briefs, and invested in building relationships with individual decision makers. As a result of their work, edTPA was introduced only as a pilot and they became invited to participate in other decision-making activities. This story offers hope for the field: with institutional commitments backing them and with professional networks responding to them, even a small group of policy advocates can make a difference in response to top-down managerial reforms.

Our case, however, points to an area that has not been given sufficient attention in teacher education research. Since intermediary organisations and venture philanthropies gained an upper hand in policy debates (Aydarova 2019, 2020b; Scott et al. 2017), teacher educators need to pay attention not only to policymakers but also to these organisations' influences on teacher education policies in their context. Be it think-tanks or international donor agencies, those actors' agendas need to be critically analysed to understand whether they are pursuing managerial or entrepreneurial reforms (Cochran-Smith, Keefe, and Carney 2018). If that turns out to be the case, teacher educators have to find ways to disrupt the 'disruptors' (Ravitch 2020) that seek to redesign the field based on neoliberal and technocratic values.

The conceptual framework of policy advocacy we used in this study (Gen and Wright 2013) also reveals a dimension of policy advocacy that deserves more attention – efforts to influence the public. As teacher educators begin to engage with policymakers, they also need to consider how to build alliances with various communities that are pursuing similar goals of improving education for students from vulnerable communities. In addition, teacher educators' voices need to reach a wider audience with the vision of new educational forms. Through op-eds, blogs, or podcasts, teacher educators need to make a concerted effort to raise the public's awareness of the damage caused by years of neoliberal reforms and offer possibilities for re-envisioning the future of public education (Aydarova 2019, 2020a).

In offering this case, we recognise the contextual differences in how teacher education policies are conceptualised and implemented across international contexts. In many countries around the world, much more centralised decision-making systems may make it more challenging for teacher educators to get their voices heard. The conceptual work on policy advocacy, however, offers other possibilities that can be pursued. Relationship-building with decision-makers can occur in any system and deliberate investment in getting to know main actors could pay off even in the most authoritarian contexts. For example, one of the authors conducted research in Russia where policy advocacy involved a university president drinking with the governor to urge him not to close a teacher education university in the city, which turned out to be a successful intervention (Aydarova 2019, 2019). Our hope is that this case study offers possibilities for teacher educators to begin imagining how they could disrupt attacks on teacher education and reclaim their voice in policy conversations. Building 'mighty groups' and small collectives among teacher educators interested in influencing policymakers would be a promising start.

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