

Playing Chess When You Only Have a Couple of Pawns: Policy Advocacy in Teacher Education

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Abstract

Background: In recent years, intermediary organizations have increasingly influenced educational policy. Among other proposals, they have promoted teacher education redesign based on technocratic values and stringent accountability measures. In response to these policy changes and the intensifying crisis in the teaching profession, teacher educators have been called to engage in policy debates. Yet, to date, few studies have explored how teacher educators participate in policy advocacy.

Purpose/Research Question: The purpose of this study is to examine variations in teacher educators' efforts to influence policymaking decisions. Using the conceptual framework of policy advocacy, the study addresses the following research question: How do teacher educators engage in policy advocacy?

Research Design: The study utilizes multiple case study methodology and incorporates four cases. Through a qualitative analysis of interviews, policy artifacts, policy documents, and videos of official policymaking and legislative meetings, we document how teacher educators seek to influence the direction of teacher education reforms by engaging with policymakers, the public, and other policy actors. We compare advocacy activities of different teacher educators and note the varying outcomes these activities produce.

Findings: Our study shows that teacher educators engaged in information campaigning through research briefs, policy reports, letter writing, and sharing personal stories. Although some attempted to engage the public, most focused their efforts on building relationships with decision-makers. Despite those efforts,

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study participants were rarely consulted when new policies were conceptualized. Our study also points to a contrast between groups that worked to disrupt policy agendas of intermediary organizations and those that aligned their advocacy work with them. Those who attempted to advocate against the measures promoted by intermediary organizations faced more challenges than those who formed coalitions with intermediary organizations.

Conclusions: Our study sheds light on the paradox teacher educators faced when they engaged in policy advocacy. Resisting the agendas of intermediary organizations (IOs) made policy advocacy more challenging for teacher educators. But coalitions with IOs could co-opt teacher educators' voices toward technocratic agendas of teacher education reform.

Keywords

teacher education, educational policy, education reform, policy advocacy, intermediary organizations

Introduction

The field of teacher education policy has long been populated by actors pursuing competing agendas (Wilson & Tamir, 2008). In recent years, however, teacher education policy has been increasingly influenced by intermediary organizations (IOs)—non-institutional policy actors that include nonprofit and for-profit organizations, think tanks, and research institutes (Imig et al., 2018; Wiseman, 2012). With support from venture philanthropies, these groups have promoted policies that disrupt public education through the introduction of charter schools, vouchers, and alternative routes into teaching (DeBray et al., 2014; deMarrais et al., 2019; Lipman, 2015; Lubienski et al., 2016; Scott & Jabbar, 2014). IOs have also pursued a redesign of teachers' professional preparation. From accountability regimes focused on outcomes (Aydarova, 2022a; Cochran-Smith, Carney, et al., 2018) to blueprints for what teaching entails (Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016), external actors have sought to reshape the identity, the priorities, and the practices of teacher education. Policy challenges created by these actors have encompassed "heightened federal and state accountability burdens, unproven regulatory demands, shifts in professional accreditation and burgeoning alternative and emergency certification provisions" (Horvath & Caulfield, 2017, p. 2).

In this context, educational leaders, scholars, and researchers have called on teacher educators to engage in policy debates and to support the advancement of public education for democracy, equity, and justice (G. L. Anderson & Cohen, 2018; Cochran-Smith, 2006; Crocco, 2018; McLaughlin et al., 2016; Oakes, 2018). In response to these calls, teacher educators have become involved in policy debates in various ways. Some teacher educators have adopted the agendas of external actors and joined the advancement of technocratic reforms (L. Anderson, 2019; Philip et al., 2019). Others have mobilized

efforts to reimagine teacher education for a democratic society by advocating for the redistribution of resources, greater investment in struggling communities, and pursuit of educational justice (Education Deans for Justice and Equity, 2021).

Amidst this growing engagement in policy contexts, little is known about teacher educators' involvement in policy activities. To address this gap, this paper presents a multiple case study analysis examining variations in teacher educators' efforts to influence policymaking decisions. Using the conceptual framework of policy advocacy (Gen & Wright, 2013), we compare advocacy activities of different teacher educators and note the varying outcomes these activities produce. This conceptual approach allows us to tease out the factors that increase the efficacy of teacher educators' advocacy. This examination contributes to the growing literature on educators' activism and policy advocacy by shedding light on the challenges teacher educators face when they interact with policymakers and other policy actors that seek to influence teacher education reforms.

Literature Review

From alarmist reports describing teacher education programs as mediocre (Burke & DeLeon, 2020) to offering policy guidance that represents “an intentional epistemological and structural break with the traditions and norms of universities” (Cochran-Smith, Keefe, et al., 2018, p. 13), IOs have gained dominance in debates on teacher education policies (Imig et al., 2018; Wiseman, 2012). Some IOs provide alternative routes into the profession, such as Teach for America (TFA) and The New Teacher Project (TNTP); others influence policy by providing policy scripts and offering “disruptive” solutions to the problems of teachers' professional preparation, such as the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) and the Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelInEd). For example, the New Schools Venture Fund was involved in drafting the GREAT Act, which laid the foundation for teacher academies—fast-track programs that place under-qualified teachers in schools serving high-needs populations (Zeichner & Peña-Sandoval, 2015). In this policy climate, alternative providers have expanded their operations with notable growth in student enrollments (King & James, 2022), despite the fact that their expansion “rests not on evidence, but largely on ideology” (Zeichner, 2016, p. 4).

IOs have advanced their policy agendas by cherry-picking research findings that support their claims and amplifying them through the echo chamber of like-minded actors' reports and media releases (Aydarova, 2022a; Zeichner & Conklin, 2016). Operating as idea brokers that translate research for policymakers, IOs have facilitated a convergence of teacher policies (Galey-Horn et al., 2020) and teacher education reforms (Aydarova, 2022b). As a result, a growing privatization of teacher preparation and technocratization of teaching have become the new common sense of teacher education policies (Aydarova, 2021, in progress; Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016; Zeichner & Peña-Sandoval, 2015). Extensive philanthropic and corporate funding has provided support not only for IOs' operational activities, but also for their knowledge production and extensive policy advocacy (LaLonde et al., 2015; Reckhow & Snyder,

2014). Through teacher fellowship programs and policy training for their alumni, such IOs as TFA, TNTP, TeachPlus, and others have offered training in policy advocacy for teachers to advance IO agendas (Kretchmar et al., 2019). These organizations have also placed like-minded actors in key decision-making roles (Kretchmar et al., 2018).

The field of teacher education, on the other hand, has been historically characterized by policy compliance (Wilson & Youngs, 2005). Positioned on the margins of colleges and schools of education, teacher education often lacks the institutional prestige and power for its practitioners to join policy debates as experts (Labaree, 2004). Because of a lack of professional preparation for policy work, many teacher educators feel underprepared for “navigating the agendas and policies of programs, departments, colleges/universities, and local/state/national government agencies” (Goodwin et al., 2014, p. 293).

Additionally, growing bureaucratization of the field and multiple streams of accountability requirements keep teacher educators—particularly in smaller institutions—focused on data collection and reporting. This, in turn, hinders their ability to follow broader policy conversations and attend to ideological shifts promoted by various policy actors (Allington, 2005; Bullough, 2016; Wilson, 2014; Zeichner, 2010). In short, these trends diminish “the possibilities for teachers and teacher educators to work as knowledge generators and agents of change” (Cochran-Smith, 2020, p. 56).

Despite these challenges, however, pockets of resistance and contestation have emerged. American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) has offered advocacy training for teacher educators to engage in advocacy at the federal level (Aydarova et al., 2021; McLaughlin et al., 2016). Some teacher educators have documented their individual struggles to act counter to neoliberal policies and assessments at their own institutions (Cross et al., 2018; Henning et al., 2018). Others have shifted their advocacy and activism toward the critique of educators’ professional organizations—especially those coopted into neoliberal reforms of corporatizing teacher education and engaged in advancing agendas of their sponsors (Golden & Bieler, 2018, 2019).

A growing trend in teacher educators’ advocacy is the emergence of collectives that contest policies they perceive as detrimental at the state level where most teacher education policies tend to be conceptualized. Tuck and Gorlewski (2016) described the work of teacher educators who critically analyzed the settler colonial logic of edTPA and collectively pushed back against its introduction in their state. McGough, Bedell, and Tinkler (2018) reported how teacher educators in their state not only opposed edTPA, but also designed an alternative performance assessment. Further, the emergence of activist groups among teacher educators, such as Teacher Education Collective and Teacher Education Thought Collective (Aydarova & Berliner, 2018; Cochran-Smith, 2020), suggests a shift among some actors in the field of teacher education toward a more vocal critical engagement with dominant policy paradigms.

Much writing on teacher educators’ policy engagement so far has focused on offering lessons for others to consider in their policy advocacy. For example, McLaughlin, West, and Anderson (2016, p. 145) noted the differences in cultures between policy-makers and academics, encouraging teacher educators “to embrace new communication styles and media to make [their] scholarship accessible to policymakers and the

public at large.” Brenner (2007) described how teacher educators in Mississippi mobilized in response to that state’s proposal for a stand-alone course on phonics in teacher preparation. Lessons learned from their policy advocacy included the importance of building relationships with policymakers, participating in defining problems and offering solutions, and finding common ground despite potential political differences. In Indiana, the leadership of one school of education engaged in debunking myths circulated by the media about teachers’ insufficient readiness for the classroom. The authors submitted op-eds responding to policy proposals that would decrease teachers’ professional preparation and communicated with journalists whose stories contained errors about state requirements for licensure. Across these cases, teacher educators celebrated “small wins”—whether in the change of bill wording or policymakers’ increased commitment to considering empirical data before making major policy decisions (Aydarova et al., 2021; Brenner, 2007; Gonzalez & Carney, 2014).

Amidst teacher educators’ first-hand narratives of their efforts to disrupt the encroachment of neoliberal reforms or propose policy alternatives, much remains unknown about the policy advocacy that teacher educators do. More specifically, one area warrants empirical investigation: how variations in teacher educators’ policy activities and their engagement with IOs’ agendas relate to the outcomes of their advocacy. Because IOs are gaining the upper hand in policy conversations and tend to promote technocratic, entrepreneurial, or neoliberal policies through their advocacy (Aydarova, in progress; Cochran-Smith, Keefe, et al., 2018; L. Anderson, 2019), the capacity of teacher educators to counteract IO agendas becomes critical. If the trend of policy initiatives that curtail the autonomy and authority of university-based programs continues, and teacher educators’ ability to intervene remains limited, the role of college-based professional preparation for teachers will decrease, as has already happened in other parts of the world (Ellis & McNicholl, 2015; Aydarova, 2019, 2022b, 2022c). To capture the variability of teacher educators’ efforts to engage in policy deliberations, we draw on sociocultural theories of policy and the conceptual framework of policy advocacy (Gen & Wright, 2013), which we describe next.

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

We situate our work within sociocultural and critical theories of policy processes that conceptualize policy as a “practice of power” (Levinson et al., 2009, p. 767). This line of scholarship attends to policy actors’ engagement in educational reforms through the lens of unequal power, privilege, and prestige (Levinson et al., 2009). What matters is not only how policies are enacted (Ball et al., 2012), but also how they are contested, negotiated, and appropriated (Levinson et al., 2009) because struggles over values and meanings shed light on the inequities and injustices embedded in reform processes.

Complementing the sociocultural theories of policy in our study is Gen and Wright’s (2013) framework of policy advocacy as “intentional activities initiated by the public to affect the policy making process” (p. 165). The framework maps policy advocacy *inputs* and *activities* to trace connections between various elements and understand what factors

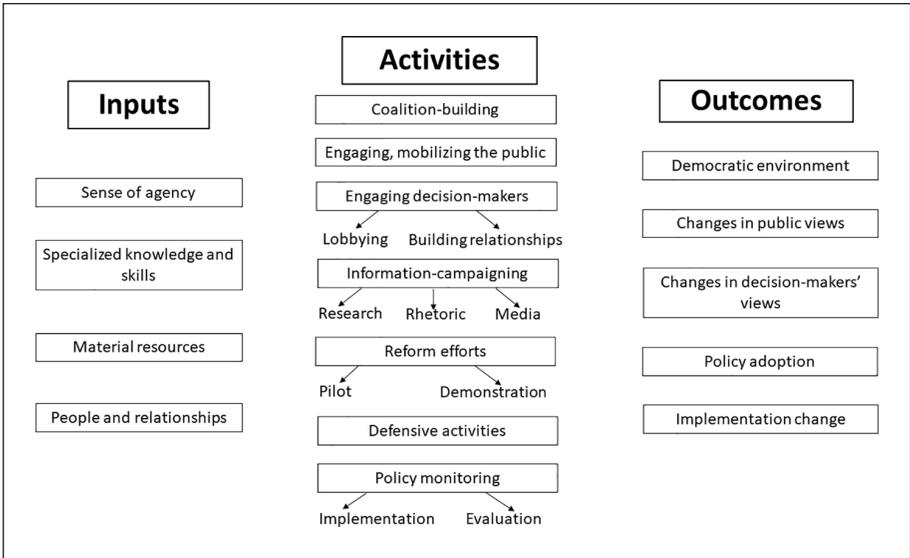


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Policy Advocacy (Gen & Wright, 2013).

contribute to various policy *outcomes* (Figure 1). Inputs are required resources and “necessary conditions for policy advocacy activities” (Gen & Wright, 2013, p. 171). Inputs comprise advocates’ *sense of agency* as well as their *specialized knowledge and skills* for navigating policy contexts. Specialized knowledge incorporates “an understanding of strategy, research, media advocacy, public relations, and lobbying” (p. 173). Together, these elements play an important role in empowering advocates to act. In a context where power relationships are unequal and advocates’ actions represent “bottom-up” efforts to influence policymaking, “enacted empowerment allows people to exert control over their own lives, rather than cede control to . . . decision makers” (Gen & Wright, 2013, p. 173). Other resources advocates bring into policy conversations—such as *material resources* for their work or *relationships* they have developed among themselves or their allies—also constitute inputs for policy advocacy. Relationships constitute either networks established through professional organizations, such as AACTE in teacher education, or strategic partnerships with other groups involved in policy advocacy on specific issues.

Activities are defined as “concerted actions done in advocacy that are meant to affect policy processes” (Gen & Wright, 2013, p. 175). *Coalition-building* takes place when advocates work with other groups or policy actors who pursue similar goals. Coalitions allow advocates to exchange information or work together to raise public awareness of an issue. These efforts increase the likelihood of policy changes (Sabatier & Weible, 2007). *Engaging the public* can increase the number of involved participants through protests or rallies, but mobilizing the public requires extensive effort to engage those who might otherwise remain inactive in policy processes. One of the

more direct ways to influence policy might be *engaging decision-makers*. This entails “building support within small groups of key policy players” (Gen & Wright, 2013, p. 177) through either lobbying or relationship-building. Some advocates hold the view that the power to affect change belongs to noninstitutional actors, such as “parties, interest groups, political consultants, and the media” (Cahn, 2012, p. 199), rather than those who occupy formal decision-making positions. In those instances, advocates build relationships with noninstitutional actors, such as intermediary organizations, to increase their ability to effect change. *Information campaigning* is accomplished through the provision of research briefs or white papers to inform policymakers of the existing empirical evidence on the topic of deliberation. It also includes rhetoric, or “carefully crafted language meant to persuade” (Gen & Wright, 2013, p. 178), such as “presenting an issue from a particular perspective” or sharing a personal story. Advocates engage in information campaigning through direct contact with decision-makers or through mass media. Other policy activities comprise advocates’ involvement in *reform efforts* through litigation or pilot projects. *Defensive activities* entail the engagement of opposing factions in public debate “to counter or lessen the oppositions’ influence” (Gen & Wright, 2013, p. 180). Finally, *policy monitoring* is carried out through advocates’ push to “implement policies as adopted” (p. 180) or through their participation in evaluating whether the adopted policies are achieving their goals.

Outcomes represent the impact of advocates’ activities. Public mobilization can create opportunities for a more democratic environment where diverse actors and coalitions feel empowered to contribute to policy deliberation or implementation. Through information campaigns, advocates can achieve a *change in the public’s views* on an issue or *decision-makers’ views* on a policy problem. Among the outcomes is also *policy adoption*, where advocates manage to set a policy agenda or promote the introduction of a new policy (Kingdon, 2011). Or, advocates’ activities can lead to *implementation change*, where an existing policy is modified or abandoned. These outcomes can bear results for specific groups or introduce changes in services and systems.

Drawing on Gen and Wright’s (2013) framework, the research study we conducted pursued answers to the following research question and subquestions:

How do teacher educators engage in policy advocacy?

What policy advocacy activities do they pursue?

What advocacy outcomes do they manage to accomplish?

How is their advocacy affected by the presence of intermediary organizations?

Methods

This paper is a part of a larger project (Aydarova et al., 2021, 2022) that utilized multiple case study methodology (Stake, 1995, 2006) to understand how teacher educators

engage in policy advocacy. The four cases were selected using purposive sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2015) based on three selection criteria: (1) participating teacher educators had to be actively involved in policy contexts; (2) participating teacher educators demonstrated a *sense of agency* and shared *specialized knowledge* for engaging with policies in professional settings; and (3) participating teacher educators were affiliated with university-based programs. We also intentionally pursued variability in our cases to ensure that we captured the diversity of activities that comprise teacher educators' participation in policy processes. Of note here is our own positionality in this study. All three authors see themselves as teacher educators, but, for the most part, our engagement with this study is in the role of observers and analysts, rather than advocates. This meant that as we engaged in data collection and analysis, we took on the role of learners without preconceived knowledge of what worked or did not work in policy contexts.

We began selecting participants by first contacting teacher educators who shared their advocacy experiences at professional meetings or demonstrated their impact on teacher education policies through their writing. Once we established initial contacts and conducted our interviews, we asked these contacts for recommendations of others we should include in our sample. Gradually, it became clear that in three of the four cases we pursued, advocates worked together either in an informal network or with the support of formal structures, such as a research center. Although participants occasionally recommended that we speak to advocates in other states, most often our participants nominated teacher educators who they worked with closely in their own context. We bound our cases along the lines of shared activities. As a result, we focused our attention on three advocacy groups and one individual educational researcher. This bounding allowed us to gain a deeper insight into the contextual factors shaping teacher educators' advocacy, develop a better understanding of the policy pressures they were under, and explore in greater detail the policy artifacts these advocates produced.

Cases and Participants

Cases A and B encapsulated groups operating primarily within a single state context. In case A, the active core of advocates included a dean, two directors of teacher education programs, and two associate deans. In case B, our three study participants represented the most actively engaged members of the state education deans' alliance, which was composed of 30 members. Case C represents the work of a single senior researcher and teacher educator who participated in national policy debates. Case D involves a research center located within a university that was created with an intentional focus on policy engagement. At the time of data collection, the center had informed educational policy in 26 states. As in previous cases, even though all faculty affiliates, regardless of their rank, engaged in some form of reform activities, there was a core of leaders who were more active in policy conversations. Although we only interviewed three or four participants for each case, those numbers represented most

Table 1. Cases, Participants, and Policy Contexts.

| | Participants | Policy Context | Interviews | Videos | Artifacts |
|--------|--|--|------------|--------|-----------|
| Case A | Deans, associate deans, directors of different teacher preparation programs in one state | edTPA, science of reading, education degrees, negotiated rule-making in one state | 4 | 15 | 51 |
| Case B | Deans of colleges of education in one state | Teacher preparation accountability, science of reading in one state | 3 | 24 | 10 |
| Case C | Individual teacher educator engaged in national-level advocacy | Federal-level legislation and intermediary organizations' involvement in shaping teacher education reforms | 1 | 1 | 28 |
| Case D | Research center faculty affiliates (associate and full professors) at one university | Technical assistance for reforms along the teacher professional development continuum in 26 different states | 4 | 9 | 25 |

of the active core of advocates in each group. Across cases, most of our participants worked in contexts where lobbying on their part was prohibited, so engagement with decision-makers was only possible through relationship-building or public policy work. The summary of the four cases included in this study is presented in Table 1.

Data Collection

We spent a year collecting data for this project (September 2019–September 2020). Drawing on scholarship in policy advocacy (Gen & Wright, 2013), we designed semi-structured interview protocols with open-ended questions focusing on participants’ journey into policy advocacy, their activities in policy contexts, and the challenges they faced. These protocols, however, were used to inform our interviews but not limit them structurally or conceptually. When interacting with our participants, we used a dialogic approach (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004) that allowed us to be responsive to the experiences our participants shared with us and tailor questions for each participant to enhance our learning about each case. As a result, participants’ voices predominated in our conversations, and their stories took us in directions that were not always anticipated. We conducted interviews with 12 participants, with each interview lasting between 60 and 90 minutes. The interviews were transcribed verbatim.

In addition to interviews, we collected videos of participants’ policy engagements whenever those were available. As Sandler (2017, p. 99) noted, “attention to meetings plays a particular role in making visible not only the policy practices but the various

lines of contention and struggle entailed in educational policy worlds.” To capture those lines of contention, we searched archives of the relevant websites of legislative and policymaking bodies for videos related to the education policies with which our participants engaged through their policy advocacy. We compiled and analyzed these video recordings to observe interactions among the participants, policymakers, and other actors. For all video data we relied on publicly available recordings and therefore had no control over the angle of recording, which meant that not all the processes that were taking place in those settings were visible to us. Nevertheless, these videos offered us an opportunity to develop deeper insights into advocates’ policy activities and to contextualize the struggles they described during interviews. The length of videos ranged from an hour to three hours. We took notes as we watched the videos for contextual information about the case but chose specific segments of our participants’ testimonies and interactions with decision-makers for verbatim transcription and more detailed analysis. We also incorporated into our dataset relevant policy documents (proposed and passed bills, board of education meeting agendas, IO policy advocacy artifacts on related policy issues, etc.).

Moreover, we assembled policy artifacts that participants developed during their advocacy work. Policy artifacts provided by the participants included letters to policymakers, drafts of testimony to be presented at state policy and legislative meetings, as well as published (academic and news) articles. In case A, participants shared with us an extensive collection of documents, policy briefs, written comments, and informational packets they had produced. In case B, we were able to receive artifacts not only from the participants, but also from the state house archivists who had stored some of the submitted written comments. In case C, we incorporated into our analysis artifacts of public and policy advocacy available on our participant’s professional website. Finally, in case D, the center’s website provided a wealth of information collected and developed over the years related to its members’ policy engagement. Across cases, policy advocacy was not uniform in terms of its intensity, length, or focus. Because we sought to examine variations in advocates’ policy activities, each case contained a wide range of data sources. This afforded us multiple angles for understanding how advocacy works.

Data Analysis

All textual data sources that we had collected were imported into the digital qualitative software package Dedoose, which was used for coding the data and developing analytic memos about the cases. Through iterative readings of the data, we developed a detailed codebook that included several large categories (“policy changes,” “policy advocacy activities,” “policy actors,” and others) based on the sociocultural theories of policy and the conceptual framework of policy advocacy (Gen & Wright, 2013). Those large categories were subdivided into code families, which in turn were subdivided into codes. For example, the category “advocacy inputs” contained the code family “material resources,” which included such codes as “institutional funding” and

“grant funding.” The category also contained the code family “people and relationships,” which included the codes “existing networks” and “state-level professional organizations.” “Policy advocacy activities” included such code families as “engaging decision-makers” and “information campaigning,” with the latter being subdivided into such codes as “writing letters,” “producing policy briefs,” and “testifying.” We engaged in iterative and recursive rounds of coding (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013), revising the codebook as we saw new codes emerge and renaming codes to better capture the patterns in the data.

As we conducted the interviews and engaged in early coding of the data, we wrote analytic memos capturing the emergent themes and preliminary observations (Marshall & Rossman, 2015) about the policy advocacy of teacher educators in our sample. When data collection was completed and coding was done, one of the investigators read across transcripts, advocacy artifacts, and other data sources within each case to construct case summaries (Stake, 2006). Those detailed case summaries were developed drawing on the patterns of codes that were common for each case as well as careful holistic rereading of transcripts, other texts, and video notes. The case summaries were used to reconstruct the timeline of events in each case, capture educators’ actions, and document the insights participants shared about their work. We shared case summaries with our participants to elicit their feedback on our analysis and check the accuracy of our reconstructions of each case. Only in one case did we receive a suggestion for minor changes. Otherwise, participants responded that our summaries captured the events and their experiences well.

The case summaries were used to map teacher educators’ policy advocacy in each case onto Gen and Wright’s (2013) framework (Figure 1). This mapping allowed us to connect inputs, activities, and divergent outcomes in each case. We also used these summaries to conduct a cross-case analysis to identify themes that were common among cases and those that were unique for each case. Even though each case had several unique features, due in part to the governance structure in each state and the specific nature of advocacy activities, one of the commonalities across cases was that teacher educator advocates needed extensive amounts of time to develop a sense of agency as well as specialized knowledge and skills for advocacy (Aydarova et al., 2021, 2022). Differences in advocacy activities, on the other hand, suggested that advocates’ engagement with intermediary organizations contributed to the divergent outcomes of their advocacy activities. These differences are the focus of this paper.

Rigor and Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, we utilized several strategies drawn from the work of Lincoln and Guba (1986). First, in cases where teacher educators engaged in advocacy in groups, we conducted interviews with several people from the same group to reconstruct shared understandings and gain insights into areas of potential disagreement. Second, for each case, we collected different types of data, so that our analysis could be triangulated between what participants said and how they engaged with

policies. When data were uploaded into Dedoose, two coders engaged in coding. Although we did not apply formal measures of interrater reliability, parallel coding gave us opportunities to identify areas where code applications varied in order to address inconsistencies in analysis. Finally, we used case summaries to compare observations amongst ourselves, to conduct member-checking of how we reconstructed participants' experiences, and to test whether our preliminary interpretations resonated with them.

Findings

In what follows, we focus on teacher educators' policy advocacy activities and the outcomes of their work (Gen & Wright, 2013). First, we present a summary of our findings for each case. Then, we discuss how advocates interacted with intermediary organizations and ways in which the differences in their respective interactions contributed to divergent policy outcomes of their advocacy.

Case A

In our first case, a core group of advocates led several initiatives to influence decision making over the course of several years (Figure 2). One of the main policy events that brought the group together was the introduction of edTPA (Aydarova et al., 2021). Without seeking input from teacher educators, the state education agency informed educator preparation providers of their plans to adopt edTPA. When proposals were unveiled without any prior consultations or deliberations, participants described experiencing "shock and anger" (Case A, Interview 6). In response, five advocates mobilized opposition and engaged in *information campaigning* by preparing a policy brief, writing letters, and testifying in front of policymakers about the potential dangers of edTPA. An outcome of this work was the *implementation change* of turning edTPA into a pilot. This was accompanied by *changes in decision-makers' views* because its effectiveness would be compared to the performance assessment previously developed by the state. The advocates managed to get decision-makers to "collect data and evaluate that data to inform a decision" (Case A, Interview 11) rather than engage in an abrupt policy adoption.

These advocates' reform efforts also included the introduction of education degrees that had been banned in the state since the 1980s. Public university students interested in education could pursue only interdisciplinary studies degrees, and there was a cap on the number of credit hours in education they could take. Relationships within the state chapter of AACTE were activated to address this policy issue. Seeing this as a problem that undermines the quality of teacher preparation and decreases the authority of colleges of education, deans across the state during one of their regular convenings discussed the possibility of seeking a change in the state educational code that would allow education degrees to be awarded. First, they worked on getting the prohibition of education degrees lifted. Then, they developed policy recommendations for introducing education studies degrees. Four people—the leader of the deans' group, a

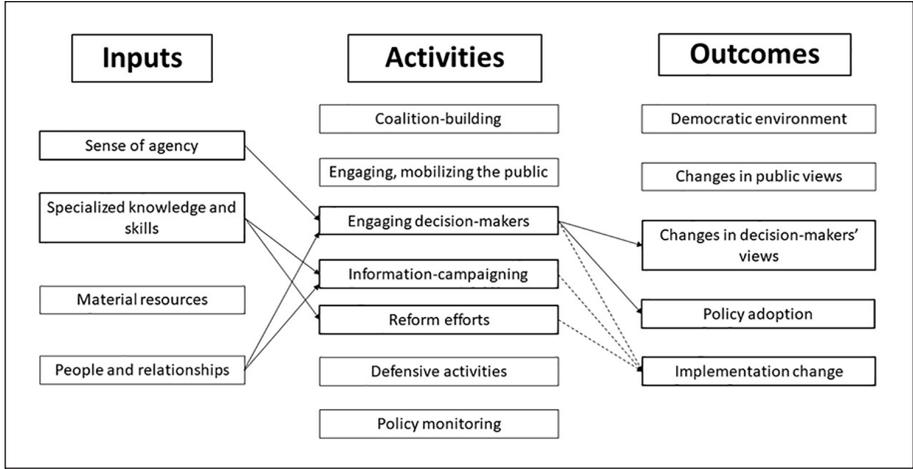


Figure 2. Case A.

government relations person, an interim university president, and a chancellor of a university system—took the lead on drafting a bill proposal.

The group had to be strategic in how they engaged with decision-makers as they planned the introduction of the proposal: “Who would be the right person to help introduce this bill, both at the house and senate level? What are those agencies that would be opposed to it? What do we need to watch out for?” (Case A, Interview 11). The group had to check informally with decision-makers in the state to make sure there would be no opposition to this proposal. They found a sponsor who introduced it to the legislature. When the bill was introduced, the sponsor explained that the bill was a result of a year-long effort by 69 members of the state’s organization of colleges of teacher education. The bill was voted in unanimously and effected *policy adoption*.

Not all of teacher educators’ reform efforts, however, led to positive outcomes. When advocates proposed a negotiated rule-making bill that would have required teacher educators’ involvement in the development of teacher education policies, decision-makers blocked the bill at its inception. This move came after those in power heard about advocates’ efforts to oppose the introduction of edTPA as a licensure assessment in the state. Negotiated rule-making could have created more opportunities for communication, but because this effort was blocked, teacher educators had to resort to testifying and identifying other informal channels through which to be heard.

Case B

In case B, education deans worked together on *engaging decision-makers* (Figure 3) in response to a specific bill that was introduced in 2019. The deans regularly invited

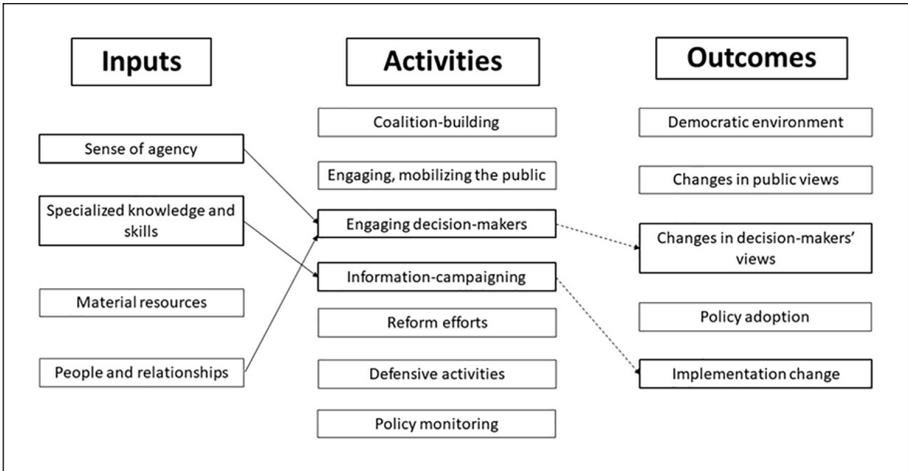


Figure 3. Case B.

policymakers to their meetings to build relationships and ensure that communication channels remained open. Despite these efforts, the deans learned that without any solicitation of their input, the state was introducing an omnibus bill with major implications for teacher education, such as increased accountability reporting and additional reading requirements. They felt “betrayed” when they learned about it: “We built relationships with certain key members of the legislature and certainly key people in the Department of Education at the state level, and yet we were not consulted in any way as this major piece of legislature was being put together” (Case B, Interview 10).

To respond to the bill, a core group of advocates drafted a letter outlining the problems that the bill would create for teacher education and reached out to an AACTE government liaison to “vet” it. The letter later became a part of *information campaigning* that utilized research to show the areas where the proposals outlined in the bill were misguided. For instance, an additional licensure test focused on reading would increase candidates’ costs up to \$1,000. Participants argued that this cost increase would exacerbate teacher shortages the state was experiencing. The letter was signed by half of the education deans in the state, on behalf of the members of AACTE’s state chapter and the dean’s alliance. During public hearing sessions, the advocates used the points outlined in the letter in their testimonies.

When the state house and senate were in session, the advocates organized a Day on the Hill through the state AACTE chapter to meet with their legislators to discuss the provisions in the bill. This strategy did not receive unanimous support, however, because some teacher educators were “trying to protect the relationships” with legislators by “having the internal, behind-the-doors conversations” and “work[ing] the back channels” (Case B, Interview 12).

The omnibus bill produced “angst” among educators across the state. When the education committee was holding its hearings, the room was flooded with teachers wearing red shirts who were protesting other measures included in the bill. Our participants’ advocacy was happening alongside these teachers’ resistance to the bill. Among other things, advocates called on legislators to recognize the expertise they bring to conversations on teacher education policies. As one participant explained in his letter submitted to the Senate, “It would have been desirable if those of us in teacher education had been consulted when the bill was being drafted, and I encourage the Senate to reach out to those of us in higher education prior to drafting legislation in the future” (Case B, Artifact 3). Together these advocacy activities created *changes in decision-makers’ views*. Ultimately, the bill went into effect in a “piecemeal” fashion, and several items related to teacher education were placed “on the back burner” (Case B, Interview 5), signaling *implementation change* as another outcome.

Case C

Our third case focuses on a single teacher educator and educational researcher who had been active in policy advocacy for over 20 years. This participant’s advocacy (Figure 4) began when he became “very active in meeting with policymakers at the state level,” participating in the “redesign of the state teacher education system” that the state was conducting (Case C, Interview 8). He worked on *engaging decision-makers* through *building relationships* and testified for legislators in various states. Gradually, he realized that teacher education policies took a punitive turn and were driven by “a narrative of failure” of university-based programs. His first response was to engage in what Gen and Wright (2013) described as *defensive activities*. He invited IO policy actors who advocated for deregulation and privatization for a dialogue across political divides. But that strategy did not produce desired results because either those actors did not show up or they performed for the audience instead of directly addressing the issues at hand:

There were a number of years where I was involved in organizing large sessions for [AERA] around policy issues where I recruited people from different perspectives to come in and discuss with one another. It wasn’t very effective because it was done on the academic turf and it was not a genuine dialogue, and a number of people like Rick Hess often failed to show up. So there were large ballroom sessions where people were sort of playing to . . . it was a political event playing to an audience and it was not a serious debate about the issues. (Case C, Interview 8)

The bulk of this advocate’s work, however, has been described as “a one-man crusade to expose . . . false claims” made by alternative providers and other intermediary organizations (Case C, Artifact 8). His *information campaigning* included op-eds for major national newspapers, interviews for various media outlets, and policy briefs. He engaged in raising the awareness of the public, policymakers, and educators of the

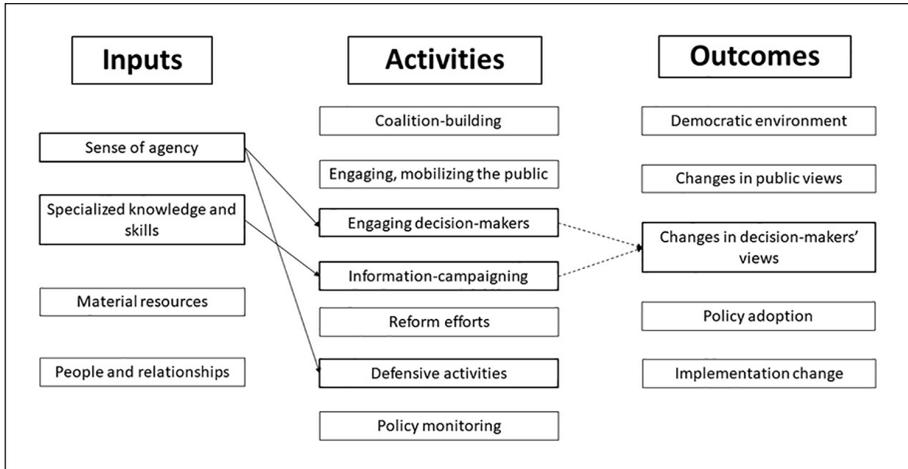


Figure 4. Case C.

dangers of some federal or state proposals for reforming teacher education as well as IO proposals to privatize and deregulate teacher preparation.

In one instance, a think tank published a blog post authored by a libertarian scholar who argued that new business models were necessary to improve the quality of teacher preparation. According to the blog author, these new models could be built through the introduction of teacher preparation academies authorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Our participant reached out to this scholar to offer his perspective on the potential dangers of teacher academies. As a result of their conversation, the think tank invited our participant to submit a blog post offering a critique of the ideas published earlier, in which he outlined how the ESSA provision for the establishment of teacher academies could “lead to a lowering of standards” (Case C, Artifact 10).

In another instance, our participant was invited to speak to the leadership of an IO that advocated for the deregulation of teacher education. He shared research findings that shed light on this IO’s policy activities. In response, the organization changed its priorities and eliminated the program that focused on teacher preparation. These two instances point to the *changes in decision-makers’ views* that emerged because of his work. As to op-eds and media interviews, “even with the 200 angry comments there’s an impact” (Case C, Interview 8), but whether these advocacy activities have created *changes in public views* is much harder to trace.

Case D

The research center was established several years ago with large grant funding as *material resources* to support advocacy work. The center works “with state departments of education and teams of teacher educators within the states to reform

preparation content so that teachers are better able to support students” (Case D, Interview 7). The purpose of the center’s policy activities was to create institutionalized reform focused on “a cohesive pipeline of teacher development” that included different stages of teachers’ work, such as “preparation, licensing and credentialing, and support on the job.” Approximately 40 staff members worked for the center.

As a part of its *coalition-building*, the center developed partnerships with several national nonprofit organizations and think tanks. Three areas of alignment between the center and various IOs supported this coalition-building. A shared commitment to advocacy appeared as the first point of alignment because it was IO actors who showed that “advocacy matters a lot” (Case D, Interview 1). Unlike university-based “teacher educators. . . [who] scuttle off into [their] own little space,” IO actors “understand how important advocacy is” and have “been particularly effective when talking to state-level people” (Case D, Interview 1). Second, center affiliates and IO actors demonstrated a shared value orientation that prioritized “performance assessments,” “outcomes,” as well as “data collection, analysis, and reporting of multiple measures for continuous improvement and accountability” (Case D, Artifact 20). Finally, both the center and its IO partners, such as the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), utilized “the same approach” of influencing policy—“involving key players and making plans and really taking stock of where they are in those plans, and then develop[ing] tools to help them use those” (Case D, Interview 1).

The center’s *reform efforts* entailed providing support for states to conceptualize, revise, and implement teacher education policies (Figure 5). The center created a roadmap of reform that identified steps states could take, actors and stakeholders who could take action, as well as tools to support those actions, such as a communication protocol worksheet, scaffolds for teamwork, and tools for evaluating innovations. Center affiliates worked with state-level teams that brought together actors from different sectors—policymakers, local education agency representatives, school personnel, higher education representatives, and others. Together with state teams, center affiliates looked at state data to identify issues to be addressed through reforms and worked to “build a vision around policy and preparation practice with an eye towards induction” (Case D, Interview 1). Recognizing that “what gets measured, gets done” (Case D, Interview 2), center affiliates incorporated *policy monitoring* and *evaluation* procedures into reform plans.

Each member of the center personnel focused on their own state or set of states. This afforded familiarity with the state context and an opportunity to *engage decision-makers* through *building relationships* with key players in each state over time. This also allowed for responsiveness to contextual differences and initiatives taking place on the ground. One participant shared how a committee of state-level professional organizations started a grant program with the center’s support that eventually grew into a state-wide alliance dedicated to a specific policy issue.

The center supported a wide range of *information campaigning* activities. With policymakers as the target audience, the center produced policy toolkits and reports that mapped out the implementation of comprehensive reforms of educator

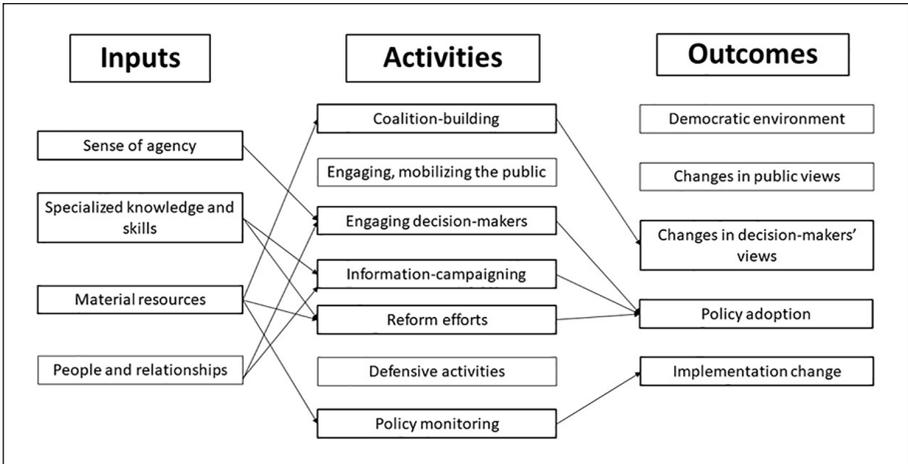


Figure 5. Case D.

preparation. In their presentations and conversations with key stakeholders, center affiliates supplemented research with rhetoric—“give them numbers that they can see and tell them stories that might resonate” (Case D, Interview 2). There were also professional development modules that states and programs could adopt, books and videos that informed stakeholders about reform possibilities, as well as simulations that preservice teachers could try.

The outcomes of the center’s policy advocacy activities varied by state but often included *changes in decision-makers’ views*, *policy adoption*, and *changes in reform implementation*. Overall, through workshops, working sessions, and national convenings of state teams, the center affiliates have supported the redesign of teacher education policies across 26 states.

The Presence of Intermediary Organizations

Gen and Wright (2013) observed that “the decisions and actions of institutional players [can] be reactions to more powerful noninstitutional players that influence them” (p. 177). Across three cases (A, C, and D), participants scanned the policy landscape in an effort to identify what other policy actors were involved in policy debates and what agendas they were pursuing. They noted the presence of nonprofit organizations that had easy access to policymakers, alternative certification providers that had extensive resources for policy advocacy, as well as philanthropic organizations that supported the advancement of certain agendas. IO actors often enjoyed greater power, privilege, and prestige in policy contexts than what was afforded teacher educators. In their advocacy efforts, teacher educators either tried to disrupt what IOs were promoting or built coalitions with them to advance their own agendas. How teacher educators

positioned their work in relation to IO agendas affected the advocacy outcomes in their contexts.

Efforts to Disrupt the Influences of Intermediary Organizations. In some circumstances, the IOs' work was not fully visible to the advocates. For instance, in case B, as teacher educators contested additional accountability measures and reading tests for licensure, they met with the chair of the House Education committee and his staffer. During the meeting, our participants "were trying to explain to him how much focus we had on reading in our teacher preparation curriculum already" and they were "jumping through so many hoops" for accountability reporting but "the [staffer] got remarkably defensive" (Case B, Interview 10). What remained obscured, however, were the points in the omnibus bill that reflected "model policies" promoted by IOs. Headed by Jeb Bush, *ExcelInEd* engaged in regular advocacy at the state department of education as well as in the state's legislature. In its own model policy, *ExcelInEd* called on states to "ensure teacher training programs are preparing teacher candidates with the knowledge and skills to teach all students to read" (*ExcelInEd*, 2018, p. 5). In the NCTQ state policy guidelines promoted by *ExcelInEd*, states were urged to "produce and publish an annual report card that provides all of the collected data for each individual teacher preparation program" (NCTQ, 2017, p. 17). Supported by a wide range of philanthropic and corporate funders, both *ExcelInEd* and NCTQ have managed to translate their policy priorities into legislative action to which teacher educators attempted to respond. This context, however, was more difficult for advocates to detect because many of these conversations happened behind closed doors.

To address IOs' obscured influence on policy, the work of our individual teacher educator participant (Case C) has focused on "illuminating" IO involvement in conceptualizing teacher education policies:

Part of it was trying to shine the light on things that a lot of people were not aware of. One clear example of that recently has been the New Schools Venture Fund. When I'd go to conferences and talk to people, nobody had ever heard of it. Another aspect of that was ways in which lies were being told using educational research as a weapon to try to promote particular policies of deregulation. One example of that was the highly qualified teacher provision in *No Child Left Behind*. Each state could define what a highly qualified teacher was, but there were certain givens and one of those was they had to complete state certification as a teacher. Arnie Duncan with Wendy Kopp and others in the alternative education world managed deceptively to undermine what was written in the law. They couldn't get it changed formally. Then they started operating under the table through continuation bills that keep the government open by slipping amendments in on Friday night or Sunday mornings. So, I wrote a series of op-eds and gave interviews on various radio shows, broadcasts just to illuminate what they had done, laying out the court cases. (Case C, Interview 8)

It took considerable time and energy for this participant to trace the "lies" and "under the table" operations as well as shed light on IO activities. With ongoing shifts in IO

activities and priorities, paying attention to how they are directing teacher education reforms required extensive time and resources. The ultimate impact of advocacy was educators' increased awareness of the presence of other actors, but this awareness did not always change the course of IO policy activities or teacher education reforms.

Study participants in other contexts expended considerable energy trying to determine which IOs were involved in reform efforts. In case A, when working to introduce edTPA as a licensure test, decision-makers at a key education agency—one of whom was a TFA alumna—invited national nonprofits and alternative providers, such as TNTP, Relay, TeachPlus, Urban Teachers, and others (Aydarova et al., 2021). When the Board of Education held a public discussion about the benefits and advantages of edTPA, a number of teachers offered polished and well-rehearsed testimonies urging the decision-makers to adopt edTPA. Teacher educators who were concerned about the impact of this assessment on the teacher pipeline were surprised to see teachers' involvement but realized that it was IOs that were orchestrating these teacher advocacy efforts. As one participant said, "somehow the New Teacher Project has gotten involved in this. All of a sudden, they're weighing in on edTPA and bringing these people, where they're getting days off and substitutes to come testify" (Case A, Interview 3). Many of those teachers came from areas outside of the capital city, which meant that they incurred major expenses in travel and lodging for the days when public hearings were held. It seemed highly unlikely, from the perspective of our participants, that these teachers were paying for these expenses themselves. With funding from the Walton, Gates, Schusterman, and Hewlett Foundations, Goldman Sachs Philanthropy Fund, as well as other sources, TNTP's revenue stream of over \$50 million a year afforded extensive resources for supporting various forms of policy advocacy. This reflects a larger pattern in which IOs, including TFA and TeachPlus, direct some of the philanthropic funding they receive toward teachers' policy advocacy. These organizations offer teachers year-long policy fellowships that provide extensive training on how to write op-eds, speak to legislators, write policy-focused blogs, and engage in research that can influence decision making.

The resources and networked connections external actors brought to the debates on teacher education policies decidedly exceeded what teacher educators could rely on:

When I first started there was very little presence from traditional [educator preparation programs (EPPs)] at the meeting. There might be three or four of us there, but the audience was packed with alt-cert people. Of course, they have money and resources that traditional EPPs don't. So, they were always there, 20 or 30 of them in the audience. Of course, they can have lobbyists and traditional prep, especially the state programs can't. It's already an unlevel playing field for educator preparation. (Case A, Interview 1)

Even though a foundation dedicated to public education in their state offered to fund the pilot project, advocates shared that they felt outnumbered: "It's very much a game of chess in which you have only a couple of pawns and maybe a knight and they've got the full complement and the second queen" (Case A, Interview 1).

Coalition-Building and Partnerships with Intermediary Organizations. In contrast, when advocates engaged in *building coalitions* with intermediary organizations, they were able to garner more influence in policymaking communities. The research center (Case D) was started with substantial federal funding that required partnerships with intermediary organizations active in conceptualizing and overseeing education reforms, including in teacher education. The center aligned its priorities with the agendas of IOs that worked closely with legislators and policymakers. As one participant explained, some IOs “have the ear of the chief in the state, so if you have trouble getting into those partnerships they can help with that and they have in some states; they have relationships we could not get” (Case D, Interview 2).

Even though collaborations with various IO partners differed in depth and were “challenging” on occasion, those partners have been instrumental in helping the researchers affiliated with the center navigate policy conversations and keep their hand on the pulse of policymakers’ concerns. These agencies were “good allies” because “they were stronger in the policy domain,” “a little more savvy,” and “a little more street smart about that kind of stuff” (Case D, Interview 7). IO partners have also been helpful for learning the language that policymakers use and dealing with leadership at the various state departments of education. Importantly, some of those intermediary organizations brought the center’s priorities to the attention of education chiefs and worked with the center to advance reform agendas:

We work with national organizations to get the message out. CCSSO take the same approach involving key players and making plans and really taking stock of where they are in those plans, and then we develop tools to help them use those. (Case D, Interview 1)

The center co-organized events with IOs for various decision-makers and produced policy guides with IO support.

Of all the cases in our study, the research center has had the most influence on shaping teacher education policies. Although many other factors likely contributed to the center’s influence, federal funding and its position in the network of intermediary organizations strengthened the center’s ability to influence teacher education reforms.

Discussion

To date, teacher educators’ policy engagement has received little empirical attention. The findings of our study suggest that some teacher educators have directed increasingly more effort toward influencing policy. This is an important shift from the culture of compliance seen as traditionally predominating the field (Wilson & Youngs, 2005). In the context of declining enrollments in teacher education programs and the looming danger of education program closures (King & James, 2022), policy advocacy has become an existential imperative. As Gen and Wright (2013) pointed out, “through inaction, nonparticipants tacitly delegate their authority to the existing power holders” (p. 177). Without active engagement with policymakers, university-based teacher

education faces the threat of extinction (Weiner, 2007, 2011; Zeichner, 2010), as has already become visible in other countries (Ellis & McNicholl, 2015).

The contribution of this paper to the existing literature is three-fold. First, by utilizing a multiple case study design, our project captured variations in how teacher educators across different contexts engaged in policy advocacy. Common policy advocacy activities across our cases included information campaigning through research briefs, policy reports, letter writing, and sharing personal stories. Even though most advocates in our study noted that they engaged decision-makers through relationship-building, many of them were not informed or consulted when new legislation targeting teacher education was being drafted. Some groups managed to turn reform implementation into pilots or steer state reforms through evaluation. In three of the four cases, our participants responded to the proposals put forward by the state or IO actors. But we also documented an example of coordinated advocacy that advanced a vision of reform generated by the professionals in the field. Professional organizations provided support and guidance for some of the advocates' activities but did not drive advocacy initiatives at the state level.

Second, the application of Gen and Wright's (2013) framework in educational policy contexts points to an area that has received less attention among those who engage in advocacy and activism—engaging and mobilizing the public. Only in one case did information campaigning encompass persistent efforts to raise awareness of the public at large through op-eds and media interviews. With most of the participants' attention focused on changing decision-makers' perspectives, it was relatively rare for teacher educators to discuss how they could engage the public in conversations about the future of education in general and teacher education in particular.

Third, by tracing connections among inputs, advocacy activities, and outcomes, our study pointed to important differences. Our findings indicate that material resources matter in policy advocacy. External funding that supported the operations of the center played an important role in translating its reform vision into actual policies implemented across various states. But the most crucial difference emerged in the way teacher educators positioned their advocacy in relation to IOs' work. In the case where advocates built coalitions with IOs and strategically aligned their work with the IOs' priorities, their work reached wider scales and had more impact on reform processes. In most cases, however, teacher educators had to compete with IO actors who possessed far more power and support. Illuminating IO agendas or contending with the proposals IOs promoted required effort, time, and resources. In these cases, teacher educators felt that they were outnumbered in policy contexts and were playing chess with "only a couple of pawns."

Thus, our study sheds light on the paradox teacher educators face when they engage in policy advocacy. To join policy debates, they have to enact their roles as experts as they engage decision-makers. But in the current political climate, professional expertise is often sidelined and marginalized (Aydarova & Berliner, 2018; Fischer, 1990; Lubienski et al., 2014). To have greater impact in policy contexts, some build coalitions with intermediary organizations whose expertise

policymakers tend to value (Aydarova, in progress). IOs work more closely with policymakers and are savvier in navigating policy contexts (McLaughlin et al., 2016; Wiseman, 2012). Yet these are often the very organizations that circulate narratives of failure in teacher education and pursue agendas of deregulation, privatization, and technocratic reorientation of teacher education (Aydarova, in progress; Kretchmar & Zeichner, 2016; Trujillo, 2014; Zeichner & Conklin, 2016; Zeichner & Peña-Sandoval, 2015). This leaves teacher educators at the juncture of having to consider how to get heard and not let their voices become coopted into reforms spearheaded by intermediary organizations and venture philanthropies (L. Anderson, 2019; Philip et al., 2019).

Implications and Directions for Future Research

Our study points to three potential implications for policy advocacy. First, professional organizations can do more to support relationship building among advocates in different contexts and become more proactive in state-level policy debates (Aydarova et al., 2021, 2022). One additional area that deserves more attention is engaging with the public and mobilizing public support for the teaching profession and the professional preparation it requires. Finally, teacher educators have to pay more attention to IO agendas and make an effort to build coalitions based on shared commitments to public education, democracy, and justice (L. Anderson, 2019; Philip et al., 2019).

The exploratory nature of this study opens more possibilities for future research that could explore in greater detail how coalition-building with IOs affects agendas, assumptions, and values that different policy actors bring to their advocacy work. In particular, future studies could examine how the issues of equity and justice play out in teacher educators' policy advocacy and how partnerships with IOs support or thwart the pursuit of asset-, equity-, and justice-oriented reforms of teacher education (Souto-Manning, 2019). Another area that deserves further empirical investigation is teacher educators' efforts to mobilize the public and build alliances with activist groups, community organizers, or civil rights organizations. A lingering question that has remained unanswered so far is whether teacher educators' policy advocacy in solidarity with underserved communities (Sleeter, 2008; Zeichner et al., 2016) creates more opportunities for historically marginalized communities.

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