



EdSolutions Teacher Created Materials Study

Pre-Study Exploration and Qualitative Findings Around K-12 Practitioner Use of the Teachers Pay Teachers Site

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Study Overview

Collaborative Efforts Between EdSolutions and ResultsLab

During fall of 2022, EdSolutions and ResultsLab partnered for the Teacher Facing Repositories Study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF). In a larger market assessment of teacher created materials, ResultsLab tapped members of the K-12 Practitioner Panels to collect insights and perspectives of K-12 educators on the site Teachers Pay Teachers.

The purpose of this portion of the larger EdSolutions Teacher Facing Repositories study was to elevate community insights regarding the site Teachers Pay Teachers (TpT) through participatory design and research methodologies. This subset of work has aimed to add narrative color and nuance to BMGF’s understanding of why educators use TpT and how they are assessing quality of resources. With TpT being such a dominant player in the supplemental materials space, educators were asked specifically about their use of TpT to ultimately help the foundation to understand the needs driving the behavior. Gaining insights on the use of the site with special attention to the engagement and motivation will enable the foundation to identify shared goals around quality and engagement. This work has also aimed to help the foundation better understand the market of teacher facing repositories to strategize an entry point for the foundation as a funder in this space. The goals of this broader work are three-fold:

- 1) Define the market for teacher facing repositories, and understand who are the providers, buyers, users, and enablers;
- 2) Develop a deep understanding of the use of Teachers Pay Teachers (engagement and motivation); and
- 3) Analyze and interpret findings in order to recommend entry points for BMGF as a funder in this space.

Over a 16-week engagement, EdSolutions proposed a four-phase study highlighted in Table 1 below and explained in [this kickoff deck](#). For this work, ResultsLab focused on phase two with a deep dive of the TpT site.

Figure 1. Phases of the Teacher Facing Repositories Study.

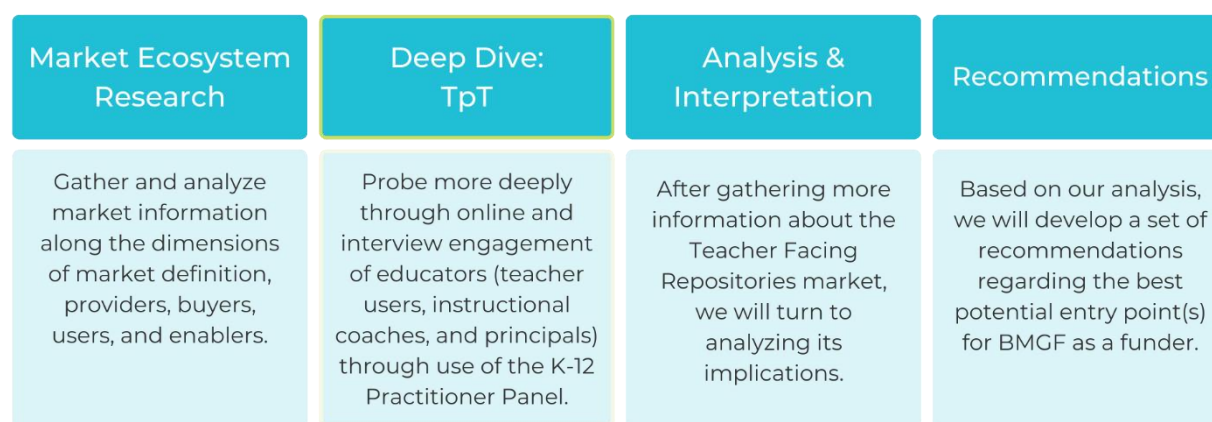


Figure 2. End use of Insights from K-12 Practitioner Panel Engagement.

End-User	Intended Use	Deliverable(s)
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EdSolutions: Allison McNamara, Advisor; Emily McLane, Engagement Manager	ResultsLab will provide EdSolutions' research on Teacher Facing Repositories with perspectives of K-12 Practitioners to fit into understandings of the market of teacher facing repositories as they pertain to Teachers Pay Teachers.	Internal Memo on findings from participatory research methodologies
Rachel Leifer, Interim Deputy Director, US Program- K12 Education	Insights from the community will be used to help the foundation better understand the market of teacher facing repositories to strategize an entry point for the foundation as a funder in this space.	Content from participatory methodologies in a broader deck that EdSolutions will deliver to the foundation

Study Approach

Through engaging the K-12 Practitioner Panels in participatory research, ResultsLab aimed to gather insights on the following learning questions:

- 1) How and why do practitioners utilize TpT?
- 2) How are practitioners using TpT to make instruction engaging? Motivating?

To answer these learning questions, ResultsLab began its portion of this study in late July with engagement of K-12 Practitioner Panel members through the online Slack community. ResultsLab used Slack to field exploratory posts relating to teacher facing repositories and the use of TpT. Data from these engagements were used to shape questions in a survey and in-depth interviews on the engagement of and motivations behind using TpT. Potential interviewees were screened in late August and selected panelists were invited to participate in a live interview or an online journal, which had similar questions but allow participants to equitably engage in written format or a time that works best for them.

Figure 3. Methodologies.

Method	Target Participants	Incentive ¹	Relevant Deliverable
Slack Exploration Posts	Member of the K-12 Practitioner Panel engaged in the Slack community	\$5 coffee on us for response to open-ended questions on Slack	Contributions to EdSolutions' Fact Sheet presented to BMGF on September 7 th
Pulse Check Survey	Member of the K-12 Practitioner Panel on Slack - Person must have used TpT in some capacity	\$15 incentive for response to pulse check survey fielded on Slack	Contributions to EdSolutions' Fact Sheet presented to BMGF on September 7 th

¹ Incentives have been scoped using the incentive structure that ResultsLab uses across studies with the foundation found [here](#).

30 to 45-Minute Interview or Completion of Online Journal	18-20 interviews or online journals completed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Person must have used TpT in some capacity - 1/3 of engagements were with principals - Oversampled math, ELA, and science teachers 	\$50 incentive	Internal memo of qualitative findings shared with EdSolutions Contribution to EdSolutions study findings deck presented to the foundation in November
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K-12 Practitioner Panel Engagement

In August 2022 during an exploratory phase of data collection, ResultsLab asked open-ended questions of the K-12 Practitioner Panels using the online Slack community to learn about practitioner use of teacher facing repositories. Data from this exploratory phase of work was used to refine learning questions and the protocol used for in-depth qualitative data collection with practitioners.



- What sites do you look to for lesson content?
- Why do you use these sites?
- What sort of content do you typically look for and use (such as supplemental curricula, resources for a certain time of year or situation, etc.)?



- Do you use the Teachers Pay Teachers site?
- Why or why not?
- Do other teachers at your school use Teachers Pay Teachers?

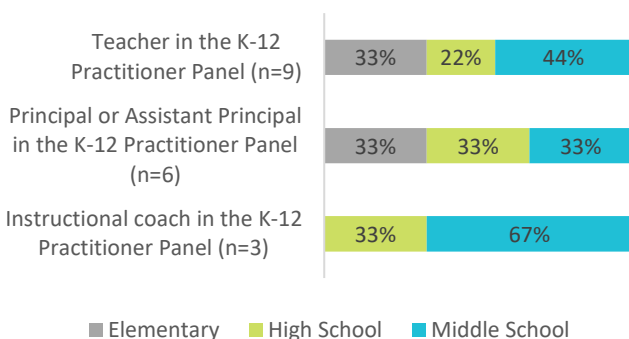
In September 2022, ResultsLab then facilitated qualitative data collection for the Teacher Created Materials Study with EdSolutions by conducting interviews or facilitating engagement through online journals with 18 educators in BMGF's K-12 Practitioner Panels.

Individuals first expressed their interest to participate in this study by completing a screener survey to gauge their use of TpT. Using panelist demographic data from the K-12 Practitioner Panels database, individuals were then screened into the study to ensure selected participants had a frequent use of TpT and that there was diversity among participants across geographic distribution, ethnicity, gender, years of experience in role, and student diversity. Priority was given to individuals from Gates priority states (CA, WA, TX, NY, FL, GA) and to Math and ELA teachers. There was also an oversampling of Black/African American teachers and Hispanic/Latinx teachers.

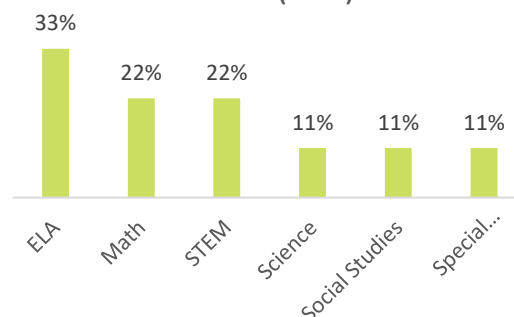
Those individuals selected to participate were then asked to complete either a real-time, 30-minute interview over Microsoft Teams or to engage in an asynchronous interview by completing an online

journal and responding to follow-up questions. Through this qualitative data collection process, the ResultsLab team gathered perspectives of 18 individuals across elementary, middle, and high school grade bands. The following visuals depict various characteristics of interview and online journal participants including their roles, to geographic distribution, subjects taught, years of experience, gender, ethnicity, and school diversity.

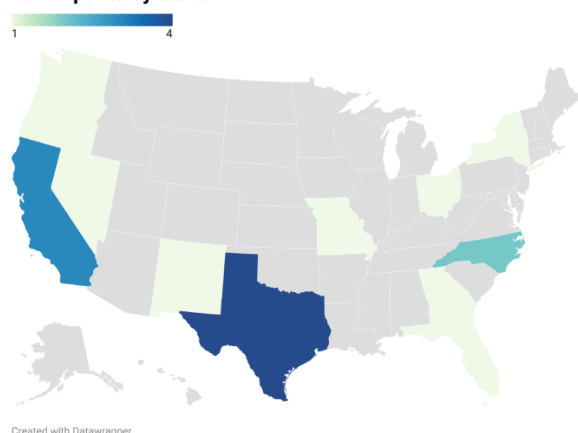
Role in K-12 Practitioner Panel by Grade Band



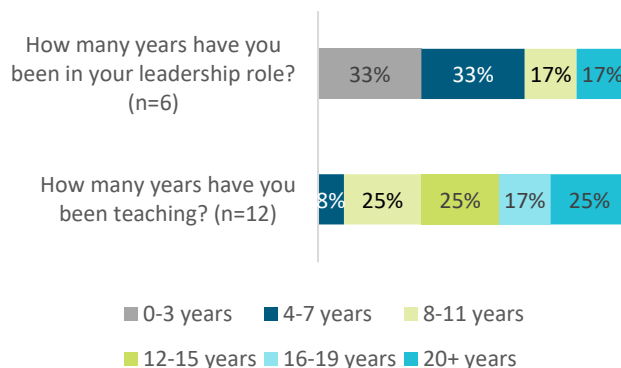
What Subject(s) do you teach (n=9)



Participants by State



Years of Experience by Role



With which gender do you identify? (n=14)



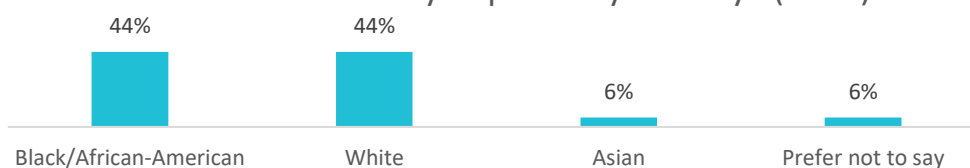
■ Female ■ Male

What ethnicity do you most identify with? (n=18)

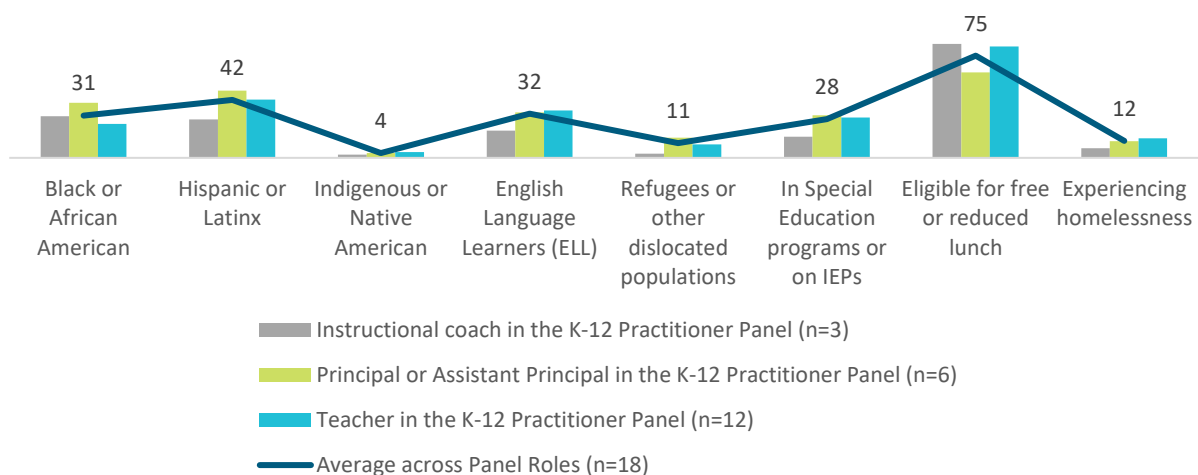


■ Hispanic or Latino ■ Non-Hispanic or Latino

With which race do you primarily identify? (n=18)



Average Percent of Student Identities Reported by Panel Role



Pre-Study Exploration with Panelists on Slack²

Qualitative Research: What drives TpT usage?

Early qualitative analysis indicates that most use of the Teachers Pay Teachers site is to:



Supplement Core Curriculum

Teachers use the site to find pre-made resources that build upon standards rather than using TpT to replace core curriculum; teachers also use the site to offer **tailored support** to students struggling with a new concept or who need it taught a different way.



Freshen Up Lessons

Many teachers look to the site for inspiration on new ways to teach topics and how to keep students engaged with content; new teachers seem to use this as a learning tool more than experienced teachers.



Introduce Soft-Skills Concepts & Topics Not Covered in Curriculum

Practitioners often look to the site for resources on topics such as SEL and student wellbeing and fostering a growth mindset.

Those who use TpT love how it is accessible for practitioners.
Ways TpT is accessible include:

1

Sharing a wealth of knowledge in one place where people can easily be connected to supports.

2

Having a price point that is reasonable to practitioners.

3

Supporting a communal education environment where people share what is working and support one another by buying resources that work well.

Those who don't use it cite perceived issues with:



Quality of Resources

Including:

- Rigor
- Alignment with standards
- Correct skill level



Copyright

Frequent reproductions of someone's original content.

² Findings were initially presented to the Gates Foundation in a [fact sheet](#) on August 19, 2022 along with other early study findings in the larger Teacher Facing Repositories Study by EdSolutions.

Appreciation for and Criticism of TpT by K-12 Practitioners

Saving Time
Fun
Intervention
Criticisms of Quality and Rigor

Yes, I use Teacher Pay Teachers and working on adding materials to my own "store". I like the ability to find things matching my needs. **Work smarter, not harder. If someone has already created what I'm looking for, I'll gladly pay them for the resource to save myself the time.**

– Teacher

When I use Teachers Pay Teachers it is to **supplement a standards-based mini-lesson, or for warm-up, or as part of a re-teach**. I only use the free resources usually. When I do pay for something it is typically covered by my tiny earnings I have for a few products I have posted. **I think you should always work smarter not harder but you must be critical of your materials. If it works use it!**

– Teacher

I like using TPT because **I can find interventions or extra practice for my students when they are struggling with concepts or IEP goals.**

– Teacher

I use Teachers Pay Teachers to supplement my curriculum. **I use them mostly for games and fun activities.** I have, however, used them in the past for unplanned sub plans early in the morning. I have also defeated my bulletin board. It has even been suggested by administrators.

– Teacher

Yes, but it is somewhat discouraged. Sometimes TPT just takes a worksheet and puts it in a pretty template to make it seem "higher order" and "engaging." I think it's really important to look at the comments **and look at the level of rigor before using**, but that's not always easy to do when you only get a preview before purchasing. **We see teachers primarily use this after teaching a concept and student data shows they still "don't get it."** We might be brainstorming how to reteach it, and that takes us to TPT for ideas.

– Principal

I have used it in the past, but not so much anymore since I have been teaching for a long time. I have lots of resources and **I find it difficult to connect with standards for my state at times**

– MS Teacher

We generally **steer folks away** from it as we have found that many of the activities are either not strongly aligned to the standard they indicate or, and if larger concern, **not aligned with the grade level expectations for that standard**. I remember reading a study that indicated that upwards of 70% of activities on TpT is 1-3 grade levels below the listed grade level with respect to rigor and outcomes. Buyer beware

– MS Principal

I don't use the site. **I've had issues finding quality activities on it that possessed the rigor.** I was looking for in content. I do know several teachers at my school that do use it.

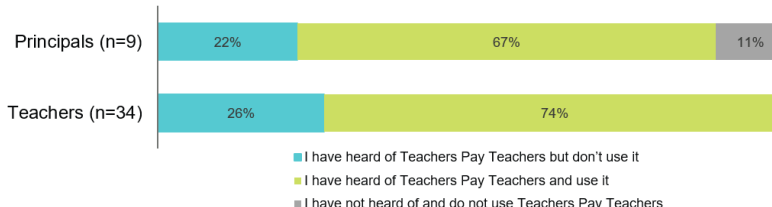
– MS Teacher

I have several issues with the site, **including mixed results on the quality of materials and issues with plagiarism**. I don't put my materials up on TPT because I'd rather give them away. Teachers aren't paid enough as it is; I don't like the ethics of charging my colleagues for something I would have made anyhow for my own students

– HS Teacher

Use of TpT by K-12 Practitioner Panelists

Which best describes your relation to the Teachers Pay Teachers Site? (n=43)



Among the K-12 Practitioner Panelists, **9 out of 10 principals, and 10 out of 10 teachers** have heard of TpT

Teachers and instructional coaches pulled an **average of 35 resources a year** off the TpT site with **most downloading 15 resources a year**.

What do TpT Users Search for on the Site?

Qualitative trends from top 3 words or phrases that teachers use when searching for resources on the TpT site (n=27).

	Frequency of theme occurrence
Topic / Specific Skill (reading, photosynthesis, use of commas)	68%
Format or Type (digital, activity, substitute plans, task cards, bell ringers)	39%
Subject	29%
Grade	25%
Life Skill / Soft Skills / Real Life	18%
Description (fun, hands-on)	18%
Standards	11%
Price	7%

How do Users Evaluate and Assess Resources on the TpT Site?

Frequency of top ten most commonly cited indicators for resource selection in descending order (n=27).

- Alignment with standards and associated standard objectives (33%)
- Price point (26%)
- User friendly (For teachers: easy to implement, answer keys; For students: easy to understand and execute) (26%)
- Subject / skill accuracy or grade level appropriateness (15%)
- Resource comes in bundle or has multiple uses (11%)
- Aligns with objectives of intended lesson (11%)
- Visually appealing (11%)
- Purported to be engaging for students (11%)
- Resource made by a teacher they have heard of or have used before (7%)
- Reviews of the resource (7%)

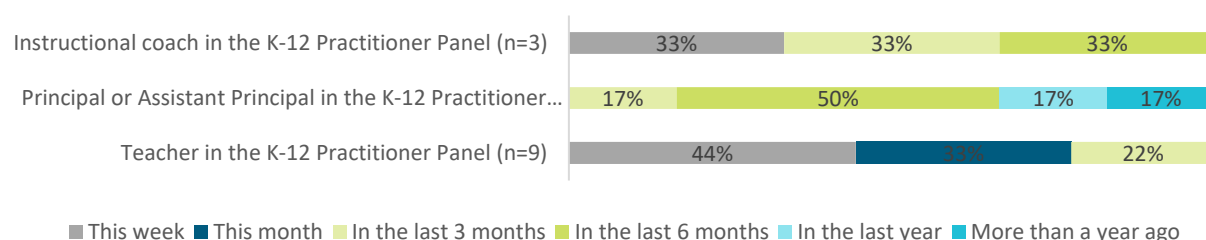
Themes from Interviews and Online Journals³

Use of TpT

Individuals who engaged in the Teacher Created Materials study were selected specifically for their previous use of TpT. The intention here was to learn more about the use of the site, how use varies across participants, how their use has changed with time, and their general experience with the site.

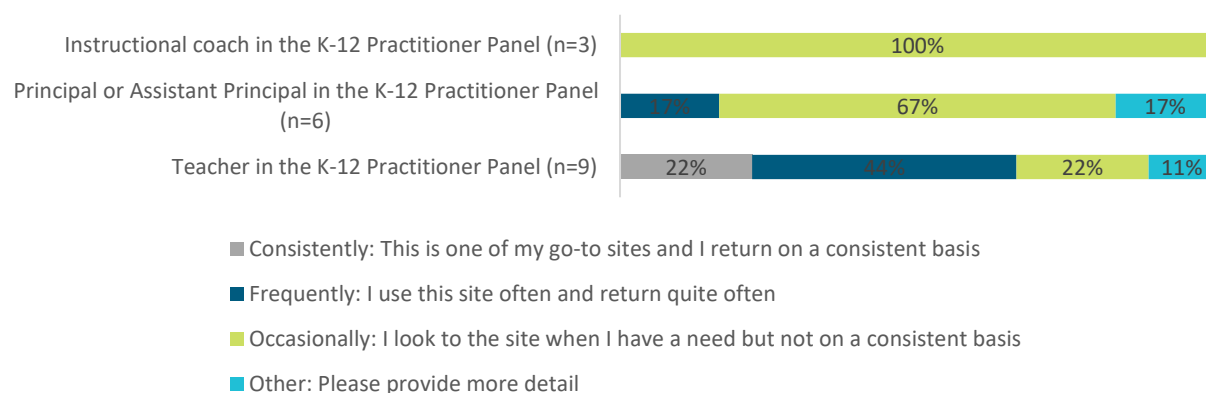
From the screener survey data of selected interview or online journal participants, we see that teachers have both used TpT more recently and more frequently than instructional coaches and principals. While two-thirds of teachers report using the site either consistently or frequently, instructional coaches and principals are more likely to use the site on an occasional basis as a need arises.

When did you last use the Teachers Pay Teachers site?



This varied use of TpT tracks with how participants described their TpT use during interviews. Here, teachers were most likely to use the site on a consistent basis when planning for lessons, finding supplemental activities to support curriculum materials, or to support the unique learning needs of specific students.

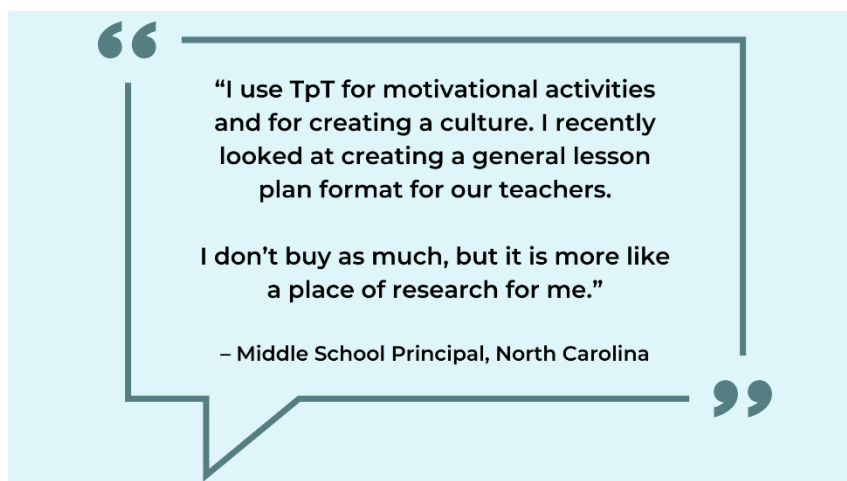
I use the Teachers Pay Teachers site ...



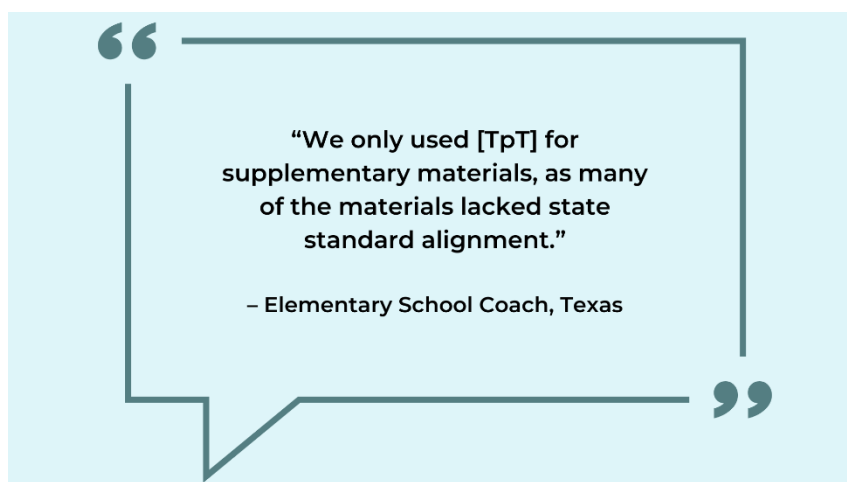
Instructional coaches tended to visit the site when teachers approached them with a gap in the curriculum or if they needed help thinking through how to teach a concept. Similarly, principals also used the site if a teacher asked for support with developing classroom materials. Principals also used

³ Findings were shared with the Gates Foundation in a [market ecosystem final presentation](#) on October 17th, 2022 along with other findings in the larger Teacher Facing Repositories Study by EdSolutions.

TpT when planning for staff development days, preparing to teach life-skills classes, or when looking for resources on building school culture.



Overall, use of TpT in the classroom seems largely dependent on the enabling conditions set by a school's administration. If a school's leadership team pushes heavily for curriculum use to fidelity, there is much less use of TpT by teachers and the use is much more in alignment with filler content for holidays or transition periods. Alternatively, if a school's culture is for teachers to create all lesson plans from standards and a school leadership team supports the use of TpT, teachers use TpT much more consistently in their lesson planning.



In interviews, teachers were asked to select from a list the two most frequent and the two least frequent reasons they use TpT (see Figure 4 below). The most frequently cited reason teachers go to TpT is to freshen up a concept or make it more engaging for students and to help when the whole class is struggling with a concept. Teachers reported they are least likely to use TpT to promote diversity in their classroom and for classroom or bulletin board decoration. When asked what was missing from the list of reasons a teacher might go to the site, teachers added to source ready-made materials, source skills application activities, and to sell self-made resources to other educators.

It is important to note that while many teachers said they used the site least for promoting diversity in the classroom, teachers did not say whether using TpT to increase cultural relevance of materials was a reason they most often or least often visited the site. This suggests that teachers may perceive a difference between promoting diversity and offering culturally relevant materials. Additionally, teachers frequently said they used the site when the whole class was struggling with a concept but did not say they use it when an individual is struggling. Other mentions of using TpT for pull-out instruction to help certain groups of students suggests that teachers use the site when the whole class is struggling and when sub-groups of students may benefit from additional support. This also supports the idea that teachers use TpT to offer differentiation.

Figure 4. Most frequent and least frequent reasons teachers use TpT.

! Most Frequent	⊘ Not Mentioned	↓ Least Frequent
<p>To <i>freshen up</i> a concept or make it more engaging for students</p> <p>To help when the <i>whole class or groups of students</i> are struggling with a concept</p> <p>To teach a concept <i>not covered in the curriculum</i></p>	<p>To increase the <i>cultural relevance</i> of materials to students</p> <p>To offer additional support when <i>specific students are struggling</i> with a concept</p>	<p>To <i>promote diversity</i> in your classroom</p> <p>For classroom or bulletin board <i>decoration</i></p> <p>To build <i>Social-Emotional Learning</i> skills</p>

“Sometimes it can help me to solve [something] a different way. It can also help me with a variety of resources, like giving the kids choice by giving them an option of how they want to do it if they're not grasping the concept when using the core curriculum. It helps them a whole lot, which is good for me in helping them help my students with that choice factor with their learning.”

– Elementary School STEM Teacher, Ohio

“TPT does help make content more engaging and motivating for students because it gives you a wide variety of learning outlets for students across all modalities.

They can be unplugged activities, they can be plugged activities, they can be center based activities, they can be physical activities where they're actually moving around.”

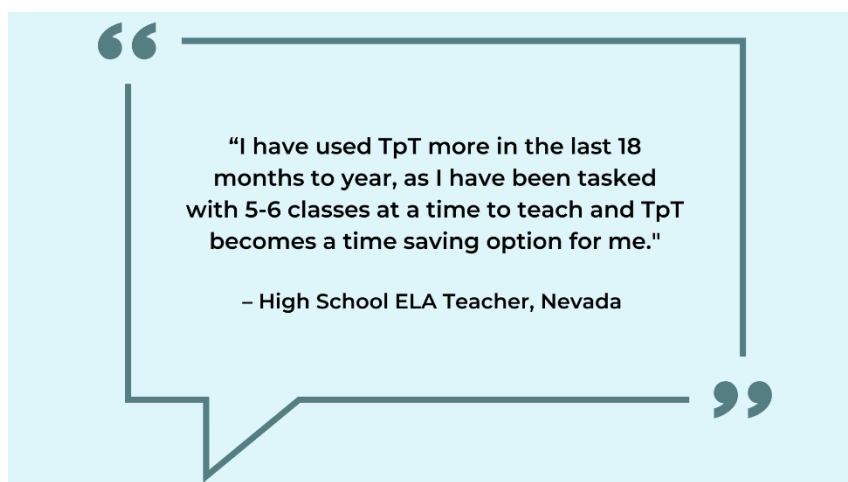
– Middle School STEM Teacher, Florida

Interview and online journal analysis reveals that teachers use the site for a variety of reasons at any given time. Their use and what they are looking for can vary depending on whether teachers are in planning stages of the school year, how their students are doing with specific content, how supportive they find a curriculum in the applied classroom context, and more. Their reasons for coming to the site can change on a daily basis. The underlying consistency, however, is that they know they can come to TpT to find most anything they need at a given point. Rather than spending time on other online resources trying to find what they are looking for, teachers know they can come to TpT, find a number of relevant options, and then use their own vetting processes to find supports that best fit their needs at any given moment. In qualitative data trends, differentiation is the primary reason that teachers come to TpT.

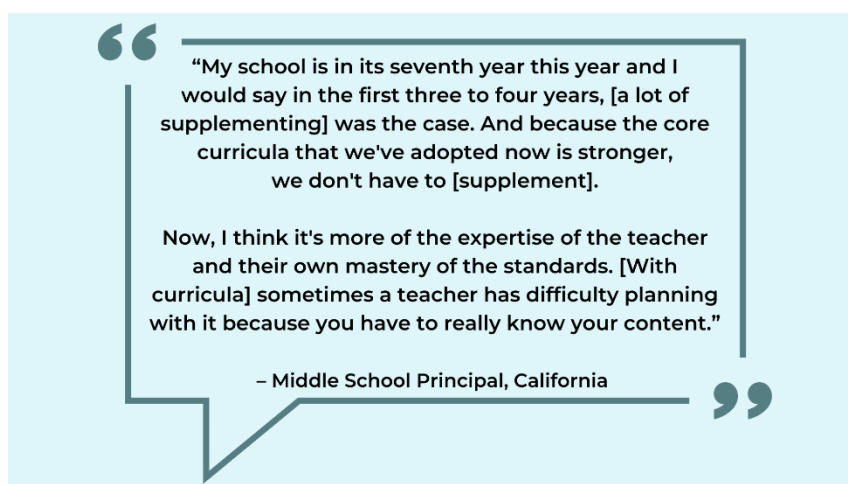
“There is not a lot of differentiation in the in the curriculum and the curriculum nowadays that we're using right now. And I'm just merely speaking to the district that I'm in right now does not leave a lot for teachers to be able to differentiate the lesson and for the teachers to be able to have any creativity of their own. They're expecting the teachers to implement a curriculum that we have with fidelity, No deviation.”

– Elementary School Principal, Texas

During interviews, educators were asked to describe how their use of the site has changed with time. **Here, teachers and principals alike agreed that the site is becoming more popular and also more accepted in the field as a valuable resource for building on what already exists.** Several teachers expressed that their use of the site has increased in the last few years as they have consistently been able to find what they need and have found the resources they downloaded to meet their standards of quality. Others mentioned that the site has been instrumental in their ability to keep up with heavy class loads and to being able to do their job well amidst heavy demands on teachers.

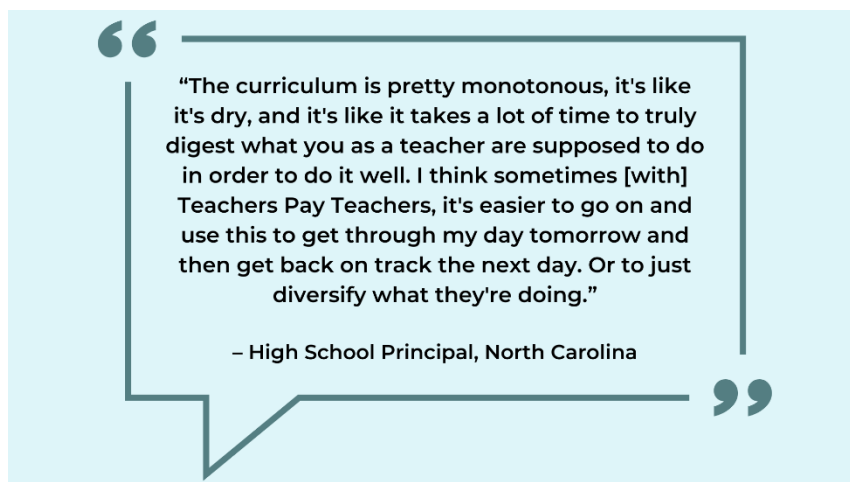


Alternatively, several principals and coaches discussed trends in which TpT use has decreased as teachers have become more confident with their curriculum and the integrated support resources. Across teachers and principals, there is a general wariness with taking TpT resources at face value, but many see it as a positive resource provided that teachers are tailoring downloaded resources to the unique needs of students in the classroom and vetting resources for standards alignment.



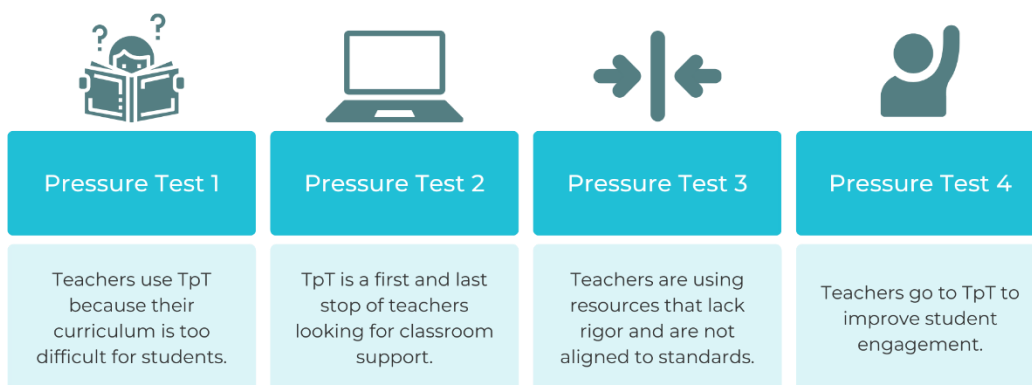
When exploring the differentiated ways that teachers used TpT, the following trends emerged:

- Teachers with robust and high-quality boxed curriculum are least likely to use TpT for academic content. If they do use the site, it is for additional practice for their students.
- Teachers without boxed curriculum and who build their lessons from standards are most likely to use TpT to find lesson plans and classroom resources.
- Elementary school teachers are most likely to find resources relevant to their lessons or standards they are teaching whereas high school teachers struggle the most to find relevant content.
- A teacher's subject focus and curriculum also is a predictor of how likely they are to find supporting resources on TpT with math and science teachers being most able to find resources. Teachers focusing on state-specific content, implementing specific state standards, and those who use less commonly used curricula are least likely to find resources aligned with their needs.



Pressure Testing: Reasons People May Use TpT

This study effort to understand educator use of TpT aimed to uncover trends around how practitioners are using the site along with their rationale for why they are using this site in particular for classroom supports. Here, the EdSolutions and ResultsLab teams drew together common assumptions around content implementation and why people were using TpT and then used interviews and online journals to pressure test these ideas. The following section is broken up by assumptions tested and trends that emerged from conversations with educators around their use of TpT.

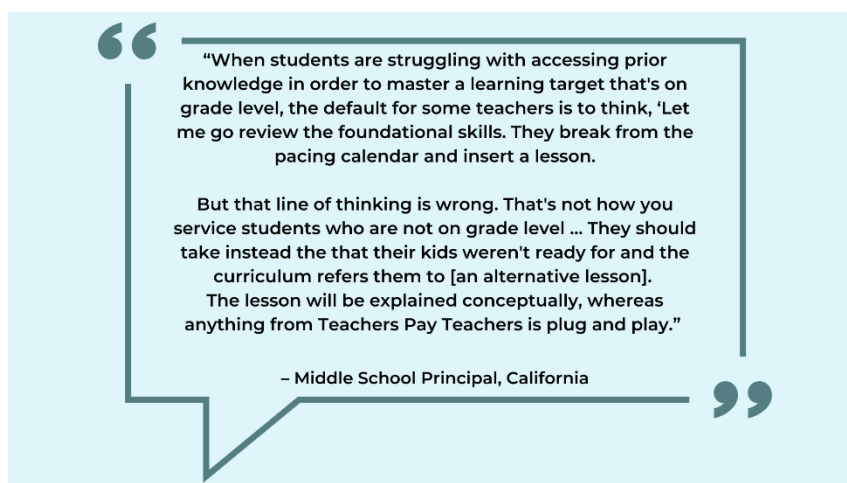


Pressure Test 1: Teachers use TpT because their curriculum lacks the differentiation needed to meet the diverse needs of students in their classroom.



Correct: Teachers supplement because they find the curriculum to be lacking in terms of the differentiation offered for situations such as students who are behind, students who are ahead and need more of a challenge, and unique and engaging activities. Teachers who do have curricula do not use TpT to supplant the instructional materials provided. Rather they take the curriculum as far as it can go and then supplement if they find students need an alternative approach, more practice, or engaging activities. If a curriculum is too difficult for students, a teacher may turn to TpT for alternative activities and approaches, but this is less likely the case when teachers have

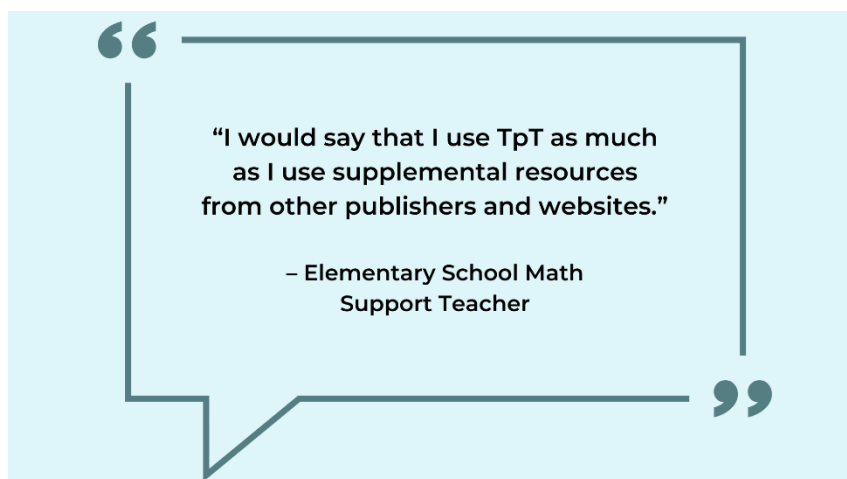
differentiated curricula that guide them around what to do if a content area is too challenging for students. Many non-math or science teachers lack a boxed curriculum and rely on standards to guide their lesson plans. These individuals often look to TpT for inspiration for lesson plans and engaging activities for students to help reiterate concepts. Although teachers do use the materials to help students who are behind, this is only part of the story.



Pressure Test 2: Teachers use TpT when looking for supplemental materials and do not look further to other open education, district, or Department of Education resources.

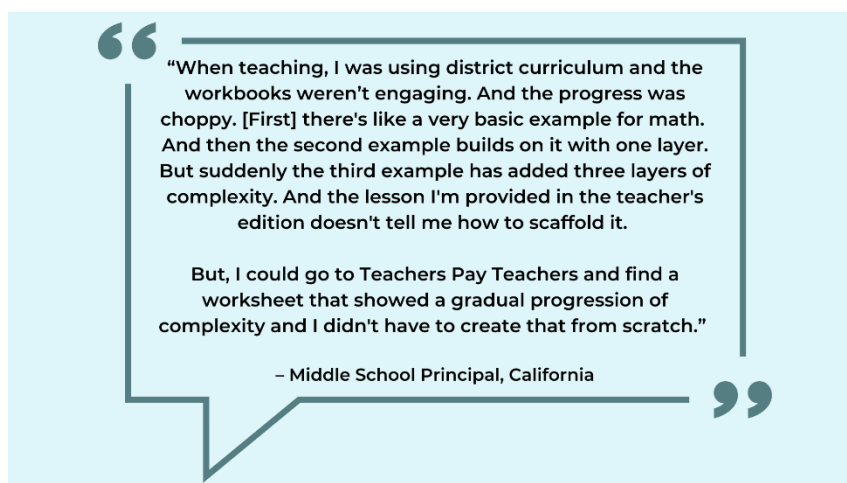


Incorrect: There are some perceptions in the education field that teachers only use TpT when looking for supplemental resources because they know they will find something, regardless of its quality. While many go first to TpT when looking for supplemental resources because the site is easy to navigate and they know they will likely find what they are looking for, TpT is just one tool that teachers are using to tailor content to the needs of their students.




Whether a teacher finds TpT inherently useful depends on the subject they teach and the grade level of their students. Elementary resources are more prevalent than high school resources and some subjects have far fewer resources than others, namely state-based curricula such as Georgia history. Many teachers using curricula that are not widely used by other teachers also struggle to find aligned

resources on the site. These individuals, therefore, rely on resources from other sources as well when building lesson plans. Finally, some teachers look to TpT for supports such as social emotional learning resources whereas others look to avenues such as PD offered by their school or resources offered at a district level. All of this points to how many educators see TpT as a tool in their toolbox; it is not the whole toolbox in and of itself.



Pressure Test 3: TpT resources lack rigor and are not standards aligned; teachers are not properly vetting their downloaded resources.

 **Incorrect and Incomplete:** Many teachers, coaches, and principals engaged for this portion of the study agreed with the importance of selecting materials that they perceive to be high quality, standards aligned, and meet expectations of rigor. Principals tend to be the most worried that teachers in their school are not properly vetting supplemental resources. However, when asked how teachers vet resources, many indicated that they have not personally found resources that were of poor quality on TpT. This indicates that practitioners often perceive resources on TpT to be high quality. If not, they see these resources as a point of inspiration and something they can refine, tailor to their specific classroom context, and align to their specific standards. Individuals who have high quality and differentiated curricula may just use the TpT for fun activities and filler contents because their needs are being met by their curricula. Those who are not happy with their curricula or do not have curricula find the resources on the site to be of quality.

“

“[TpT] is limited and in the verification of alignment to common core or right doc levels like depth of knowledge levels ... It's not entirely possible to just sort by rigor.”

– Middle School Principal, California

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Additionally, there is an underlying assumption in the education context that many teachers use TpT to download resources as plug-and-play and do not vet for rigor and alignment. While this was not perceived to be the case with the sample of individuals a part of this data collection effort, we must acknowledge that educators in this study came from the K-12 Practitioner Panels and inherently show leadership and drive in their roles and may not be a fully representative sample of practitioners in the United States.

“

“When I look at the standards, I look for a vertical alignment with my core curriculum. [With TpT], I try to look at concepts, activities, and support to make sure those are vertically aligned to what we're learning as close as possible to reinforce the concept in a way that's not to varied for the student.

[With a new activity] I will then ask the students, 'Did you enjoy about this lesson? What can we fix?' It's always good to test an activity.”

– Middle School STEM Teacher, Florida

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Pressure Test 4: Teachers go to TpT to improve student engagement.



Correct but Incomplete: Many practitioners agree that resources on TpT are one way for teachers to improve the engagement and motivation of their students. Similar to teachers having multiple places they look to for support when building lesson content, teachers have many reasons for looking to TpT. Although teachers may find engaging activities for their students on the site, the main driver behind why practitioners visit the site is because they are trying to find supplements to their current classroom resources. If they have a boxed curriculum, they use the site to fill gaps in the curricula or offer differentiated activities for students. If they do not have a curriculum, they look to the site for lesson plans and ready-to-implement activities.

“I think that for some, Teachers Pay Teachers is the first resort because they just know that they're going to find something there and because it's easily accessible. Some of the State Department websites or district websites that have resources are so hard to navigate. And when you don't have the time to really muddle through them, with TpT it's just easy to navigate and they know that there's likely going to be something there.

However, they're not avoiding the departmental websites or the other open-source stuff. I feel like they're using a combination.”

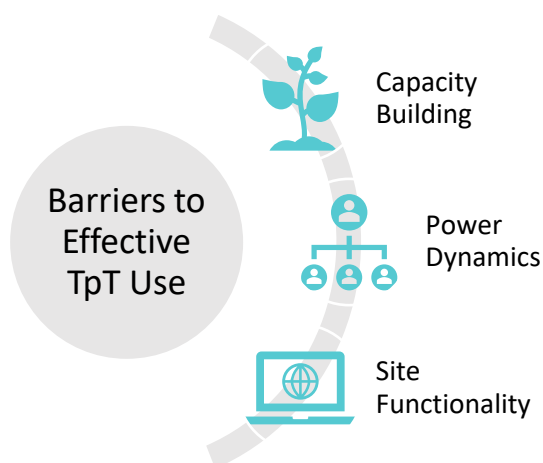
– Middle School Principal, North Carolina

The primary motivator for TpT use is ease for educators. With much on their plates and stacked class loads, many need to find supports quickly and to be able to easily vet those resources. Teachers go to TpT because they know they will find something that fits their needs without having to spend too much time on resource creation. The main goal here is to avoid recreating the wheel and have time left over for other demands of teaching. Teachers also use TpT as a professional development tool in that they are able to see what other teachers are doing, to build up their own course-related repertoire, and to have resources on hand in the event that students need additional practice.

“You had to be very careful on TpT because there's common core stuff that isn't aligned and you have to wade through it. And then different states have different orders of like their histories ... and you just have to take that into consideration when you're wading through all that stuff because you could get something that's totally misaligned or just too deep or too shallow.”

– High School Social Studies Teacher, Texas

Addressing Barriers to Effective TpT Use



When exploring educator use of TpT, principals, coaches, and teachers alike reflected on the barriers that prevent its most effective use.

Barrier 1: Capacity building on how to supplemental materials well.

Universally, teachers, instructional coaches, and principals agreed that if TpT is used, there is a need for vetting of materials to ensure that a given resource is standards aligned and meets expectations for grade and subject-matter rigor. Many also added that there is an additional need

to be able to take resources from TpT and tailor them to a specific classroom context. In order to do this, however, many practitioners mentioned the need for training on how to understand standards, how to ensure materials are aligned to standards, how to assess a resource for appropriate depth of knowledge and rigor, and how to build strong lesson plans that are based in standards but tailored to student needs.



As it currently stands, very few school leaders offer such capacity building training on how to implement supplemental resources from sites like TpT and very few teachers get explicit training either. More frequently, practitioners spoke about quality control procedures and processes in place at their schools for ensuring that materials meet various expectations. Most commonly, teachers have time with their teams or with an instructional coach during which they can elevate resources and decide as a group as to whether they meet specific classroom needs and standards. For many, quality assurance processes come in the form of lesson checks in which teachers have to submit supplemental resources and make a case for why the resource is needed. Those who have departmental budget to spend on supplementary materials must also make a case for why a TpT resource will benefit students.

“I don't think I've ever seen professional development that really incorporates [how to use TpT]. I think it's really just kind of treated as a 'Hey, here's another tool for your box. There's five different websites you could go to and TpT is one.”

– Middle School Principal, New Mexico

The amount of oversight around supplemental material use, however, seems dependent on a teacher's grade band. In the elementary setting, it is much more common for teachers to have to seek approval for supplemental resource use whereas in the high school setting, where there are many more students and teachers per instructional coach or department chair, oversight is less frequent. Oversight of materials also seems to be dependent on the school leadership's philosophy. If a principal encourages teachers to implement curricula to fidelity but sees the added benefit of supplementing with TpT, they may care less about monitoring supplemental material use so long as the curriculum is being properly implemented.

“There is a framework to use when vetting resources, but it has really been aimed at elementary teachers at this point. High School tends to be a little less rigid.”

– High School ELA Teacher, Nevada

Generally, the more that school leaders trust the experience of teachers and their desire to best meet the needs of students in the classroom, the more teachers are taught how to select quality resources, have opportunities to engage in observations and demo teaching, and have ongoing coaching on how to implement materials and tailor to student needs, the less often they go through rigorous vetting processes for supplemental material use.

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“I have two teachers that have recently asked, ‘Can I use this website?’ And my response is ‘Absolutely, I want to give you the benefit of the doubt as a practitioner in the classroom. You’re the professional.’”

– Middle School Principal, New Mexico

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Several teachers also mentioned that freedom to choose resources is something that has come with time as they have built their own experience both in the classroom and with selecting quality resources. Such indicates that teachers new in their career may benefit from more explicit training on how to select resources to be sure they are aligned with standards and expectations of rigor. Many educators also emphasized that this is especially true given the ability for TpT use to be a shortcut. Teachers may be able to save time and build their repertoire, but without capacity for vetting and aligning resources there may be significant issues of teachers offering resources that are lower than grade level standards, which may have significant impacts on equitable education offerings. In addition to having accountability to standards, however, it is important to teachers that they have the freedom to do what they need in their classroom to help meet student needs.

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“Teachers are professionals and spend a lot of time working with students. A good teacher knows what students need and sometimes it might be using supplemental materials so that students can understand concepts that are essential for other learning targets to be met.

I do think there are certain times when it is essential for materials to be evaluated, but I also think teachers should be able to make that professional decision.”

– Middle School ELA Teacher, Oregon

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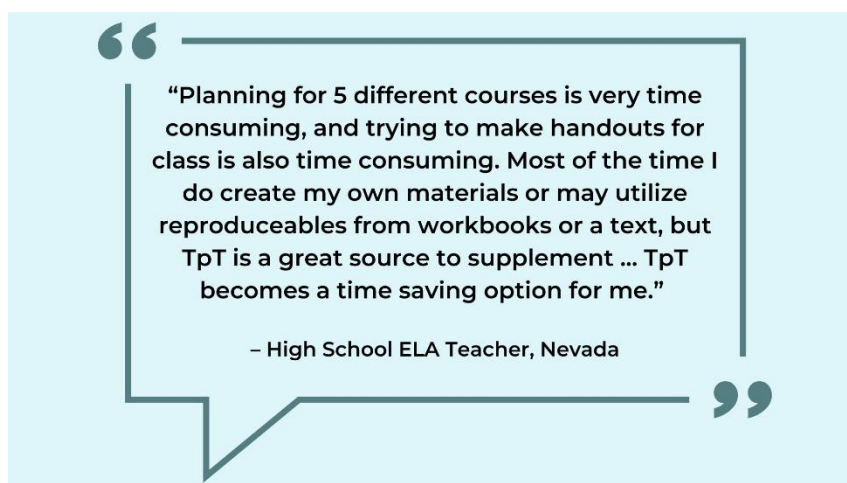
Barrier 2: Tensions between teachers, school leaders, and districts.

Throughout data collection with study participants, there emerged trends of additional forces at play that affect how teachers use TpT, which all seem to exist on a structural level in relation to power. These power dynamics set the stage for perceptions of TpT, of teachers who use the site, and hint at general misunderstandings taking place between district officials, curriculum developers, school leaders, and classroom practitioners.

1) There may be points of misalignment between school leadership, coaches, and teachers in the classroom around roles, responsibilities, and knowledge needed to execute on these.

While a coach or school leader may believe that teachers have enough planning time to be able to develop unique lesson content and tailor resources to meet their students' needs, many teachers feel pressed for time. They are taking on more responsibilities in the classroom, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, have higher class loads due to teacher shortages, and are often moved to different grade levels or subjects. As a result, teachers struggle to feel solid in the curriculum they are offering and like they have time to meet all of their responsibilities.

The more that is asked of teachers, the more leadership and coaches must be comfortable with teachers using resources like TpT as a jumping off point so they can save time and build their own curricula or grade-level repertoire. School leadership may acknowledge there is a need to train up teachers, but without supports to help lighten their loads, teachers may find it difficult to engage genuinely in trainings. Rather than seeing TpT use as a teacher looking for shortcuts, coaches and school leadership should see the ways that supplemental resources help teachers deliver tailored content without having to always reinvent the wheel.

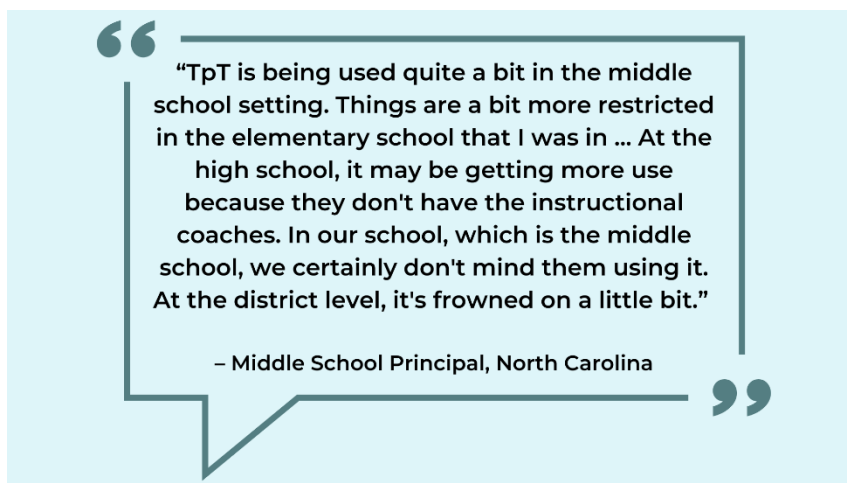


2) There appears to be tension at play between the district wanting to institute processes and procedures across school and grade bands and schools wanting to allow teachers the ability to adapt and tailor.

While this project did not engage district-level officials, an emerging area of frustration from principals centered on pressure from the district to deliver codified lessons and content across schools to ensure that students are all receiving the same materials. Similarly, principals expressed frustration around believing that teachers should be able to tailor on a class-by-class basis with supplemental resources like TpT and the district being opposed to use of such resources. As a result, many teachers expressed feeling like their job is being so standardized that their expertise is being questioned.

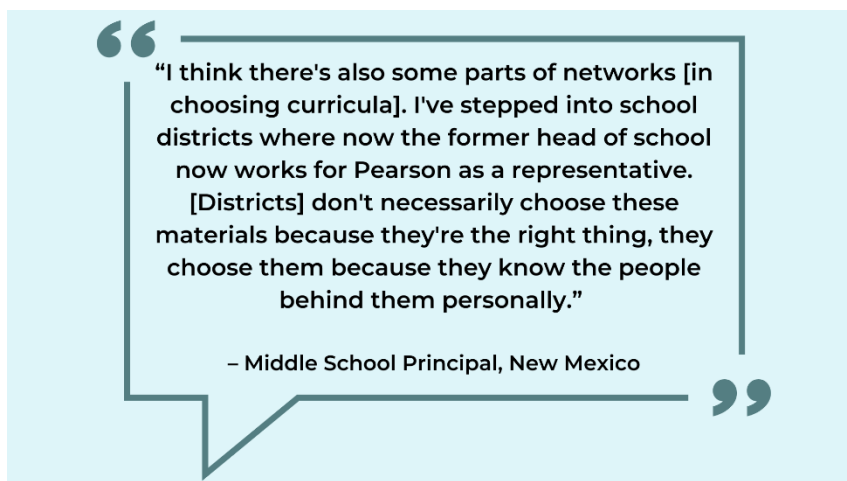
Although districts may benefit from being able to ensure that students are receiving the same degree of quality instruction, this seems to come at the cost of teachers feeling undervalued in their roles and expertise. Additionally, by districts placing higher emphasis on buying curricula that can be implemented across student populations and not embracing teachers use of supplementary resources like TpT,

teachers are left with curricula that teach to the middle and lack the ability to customize lessons to the unique needs of students.



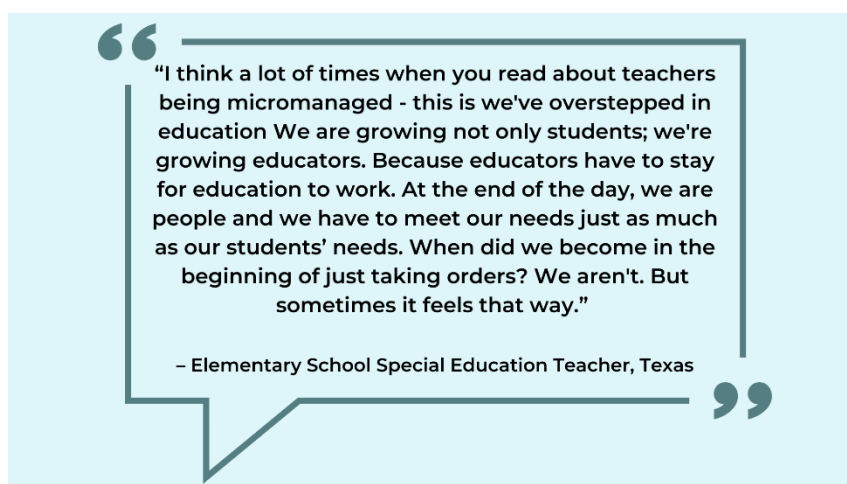
3) Analysis reveals that there are also tensions between perceptions of where expertise lies – with the practitioner versus the academic.

Through interviews with teachers, a trend emerged that many feel that there is an over-emphasis placed on the inherent value of a curriculum. With an expectation that teachers follow curricula to fidelity without supplementing or tailoring, there is an implied value placed on the experience of academics and curriculum developers above classroom practitioners. When teachers are working with high quality curricula that are differentiated for various classroom needs and have a wide variety of ways to engage students, this isn't much of an issue. However, several teachers expressed that they are expected to follow curriculum and that they do not feel the curriculum is top quality. Just because a curriculum adoption process is facilitated does not mean that the best curriculum was included in the potential curricula to choose from.

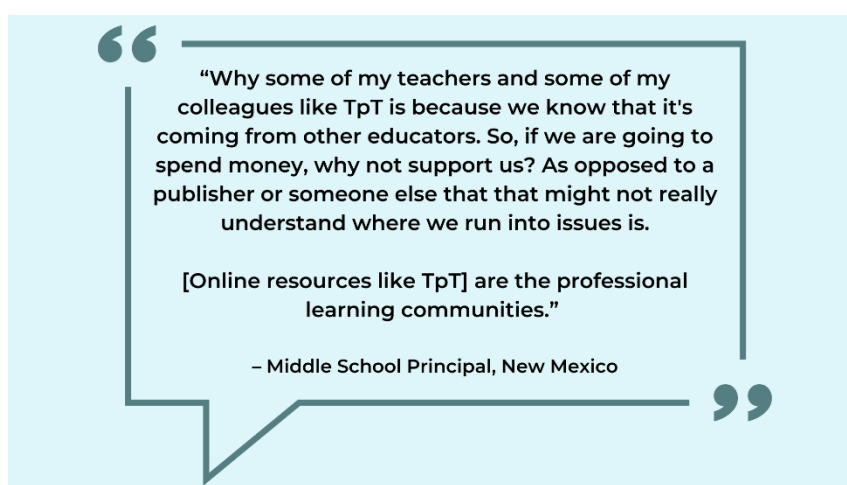


Similarly to the theme above where teachers expressed frustration with the need to standardize to the extent that such puts their expertise into question, teachers also feel frustrated that they are given curricula to follow but that there is no guarantee that the curriculum is applicable or tested in the classroom setting. Many teachers are glad to implement curricula to fidelity and many said they have

seen student growth through sticking to a curriculum's laid path. However, in the case of what a teacher may see as "non-high quality" curricula, teachers want the option to supplement after they have taken the curriculum as far as it can go.



People are often so proud of TpT and the associated community because it is made of resources by teachers and for teachers. Resources on the site have already been vetted in that someone implemented it and thought it was enough of a success to share with other practitioners. To accept curricula simply because they are created by curriculum developers and to question teachers' ability to create and use supplementary materials demonstrates a differential in perceived expertise of people with different roles.

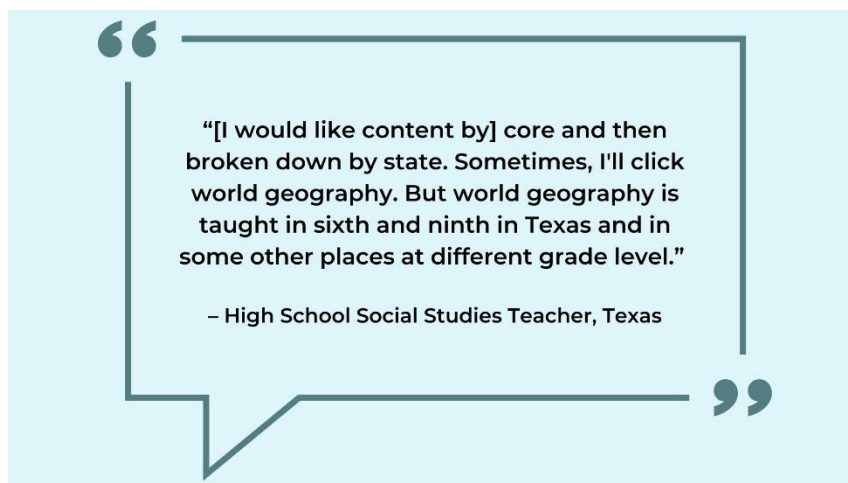


Barrier 3: Site functionality

During data collection, practitioners were asked what they would change about TpT or teachers use of the site. To this, the most frequent responses in descending order included:

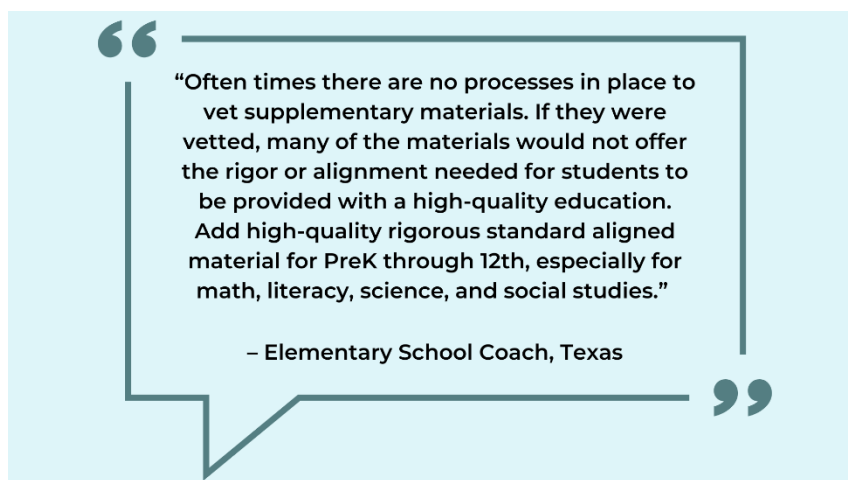
1) A strong desire for more robust search features.

Here participants were interested in being able to toggle on and off a variety of search features to refine what they are looking for and thus spend less time wading through potential resources. To this end, participants wanted to be able to filter for paid versus free resources, grade bands, various state standards frameworks, updated math frameworks such as integrated math I, II, or III instead of by math subtype like geometry or algebra.



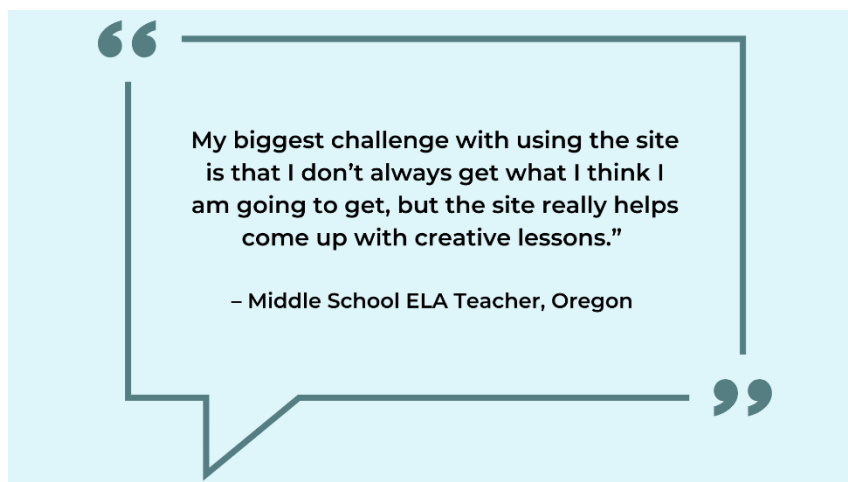
2) The interest in more substantial vetting processes.

Educators were also very interested in TpT having a more rigorous vetting process for what resources are eligible to be posted. Here practitioners were concerned about copyright issues both from curricula as well as resources produced by other teachers that are then sold by people who were not the original creators. Principals were also particularly concerned that there was no process for ensuring activities are grade-level appropriate, align with depth of knowledge standards, and meet expectations of rigor. Several teachers also mentioned the need for betting for cultural relevancy and ensuring that resources are not potentially damaging to students.



3) Ways to better see how resources are being used by practitioners and anticipate what you may be downloading.

Classroom practitioners expressed that they often would like to know how a resource is intended to be used and how people who have downloaded the resource used it. For example, there should be a place to list whether the resource created and used for whole-class use, group work, a pull-out activity, or additional practice of a concept covered in curriculum. Having access to this information would help teachers sift through resources that will best fit their needs. Additionally, better preview options for resources will similarly help teachers to know what they are downloading and if it will fit their needs.



Appendix: Additional Quotations by Theme

Curriculum Insufficiencies

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“Something that we're hearing from other people is that it is the creative nature of teaching, being able to tailor adapt and you have your own personality. So, imagine if things are too scripted, that might feel a little bit constraining.”

– Middle School Principal, North Carolina

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“The curriculum is pretty monotonous, it's like it's dry, and it's like it takes a lot of time to truly digest what you as a teacher are supposed to do in order to do it well. I think sometimes [with] Teachers Pay Teachers, it's easier to go on and use this to get through my day tomorrow and then get back on track the next day. Or to just diversify what they're doing.”

– High School Principal, North Carolina

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“When teaching, I was using district curriculum and the workbooks weren't engaging. And the progress was choppy. [First] there's like a very basic example for math. And then the second example builds on it with one layer. But suddenly the third example has added three layers of complexity. And the lesson I'm provided in the teacher's edition doesn't tell me how to scaffold it.

But, I could go to Teachers Pay Teachers and find a worksheet that showed a gradual progression of complexity and I didn't have to create that from scratch.”

– Middle School Principal, California

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TpT Use for Inspiration

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“[TpT] helps give me ideas. Here, I'm seeing how it's already designed and I can still keep that and add more to it. So you are not reinventing the wheel. The foundation is already there and it starts the brainstorming process.”

– Elementary School STEM Teacher, Ohio

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“Sometimes it can help me to solve [something] a different way. It can also help me with a variety of resources, like giving the kids choice by giving them an option of how they want to do it if they're not grasping the concept when using the core curriculum. It helps them a whole lot, which is good for me in helping them help my students with that choice factor with their learning.”

– Elementary School STEM Teacher, Ohio

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TpT use for Efficiency / Ease of Use

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“I have used TpT more in the last 18 months to year, as I have been tasked with 5-6 classes at a time to teach and TpT becomes a time saving option for me.”

– High School ELA Teacher, Nevada

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“Over the past two years, I have used the site more often than in the past as it seems I usually find a resource to match my needs.”

– Elementary School Math Support Teacher, New York

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“The site is very much a place to go for things if I am in need of something quick, as well as use for long-term planning of my lessons throughout the year. I also like to use materials that are good for re-teaching a concept or reviewing before a test.”

– Middle School Math + ELA Teacher, California

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“I really like that there is a place to find ideas for lessons or buy lessons to save time instead of creating my own. This allows me to save time and be more creative with my lessons depending on what I am looking for when I look at the site.”

– Middle School ELA Teacher, Oregon

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“Planning for 5 different courses is very time consuming and trying to make handouts for class is also time consuming. Most of the time I do create my own materials or may utilize reproducibles from workbooks or a text, but TpT is a great source to supplement ... TpT becomes a time saving option for me.”

– High School ELA Teacher, Nevada

“Teachers don't have as much time as they used to have. And there are a lot of constraints on teachers. At my school, we don't believe that we need to recreate the wheel if there's something out there that works. And we know that it works. So, not use it?”

– Middle School Principal, North Carolina

“I think that for some, Teachers Pay Teachers is the first resort because they just know that they're going to find something there and because it's easily accessible. Some of the State Department websites or district websites that have resources are so hard to navigate. And when you don't have the time to really muddle through them, with TpT it's just easy to navigate and they know that there's likely going to be something there. However, they're not avoiding the departmental websites or the other open-source stuff. I feel like they're using a combination.”

– Middle School Principal, North Carolina

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“I'm a member of various professional organizations like CSKA in SD and they have lots of content and lots of materials, but Teachers Pay Teachers, since I've used them so long, I know that I can go to the site and I can find a varied list of activities that I can use.”

– Middle School STEM Teacher, Florida

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TpT Use for Student Engagement and Differentiation

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“TPT does help make content more engaging and motivating for students because it gives you a wide variety of learning outlets for students across all modalities.

They can be unplugged activities, they can be plugged activities, they can be center based activities, they can be physical activities where they're actually moving around.”

– Middle School STEM Teacher, Florida

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“There is not a lot of differentiation in the in the curriculum and the curriculum nowadays that we're using right now. And I'm just merely speaking to the district that I'm in right now does not leave a lot for teachers to be able to differentiate the lesson and for the teachers to be able to have any creativity of their own. They're expecting the teachers to implement a curriculum that we have with fidelity, No deviation.”

– Elementary School Principal, Texas

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TpT Use in Relation to Other Supports

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“TpT is one of the many tools that I would have in my box provided I'm looking for something that is grade level that hits those standards. It also helps me with accommodations and modifications for anybody who's going to have an IEP. Just because they're in eighth grade, doesn't mean that that they might be at eighth grade level. That is how I previously used TpT as a secondary resource in my classroom.”

– Middle School Principal, New Mexico

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“I would say that I use TpT as much as I use supplemental resources from other publishers and websites.”

– Elementary School Math
Support Teacher

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TpT and Sense of Ownership / Filling Own Need

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“Why some of my teachers and some of my colleagues like TpT is because we know that it's coming from other educators. So, if we are going to spend money, why not support us? As opposed to a publisher or someone else that that might not really understand where we run into issues is.

[Online resources like TpT] are the professional learning communities.”

– Middle School Principal, New Mexico

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“I believe they use the TpT resources as a supplement again because they are material that has been created by people who are in the same types of classes they are working with the same level and range of students. This is vastly different many times than those that write curriculum for publishers. I think you have to have some sort of way to access and monitor what teachers are using as supplementary material but at the same time I believe we need to treat teachers like professionals.”

– High School Principal + Instructional Coach, California

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“I think that when teachers create material it is a way to get students to learn a concept or skill. It takes hours to create some of these lessons on TpT site. They are seeing that students are not getting something and they are finding a way to get students to learn.”

– Middle School ELA Teacher, Oregon

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“Curriculum is written for the bell curve. Well, what about the kids that may be above the curve? Below? Either you're going to have to water the curriculum down for those who may be lower or you're going to have to skip to the next possibly unit or lesson for those who are past what you're what you're working on. Whereas if you supplement the information, you can continue to stay on track with what it is that you're doing right now, but still have something for those students who need to go a little above are those who you may need to bring it down a little bit.”

– Elementary School Principal, Texas

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Issues with Quality

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“[You have to] read a standard and look at the language and the demands of what the child should be able to create or demonstrate. Often the TpT materials fall short ... I have to, as a principal, exercise caution. I check [a resource] out. It's not actually matching what the cognitive demand is as written.”

– Middle School Principal, California

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“[TpT] is limited and in the verification of alignment to common core or right doc levels like depth of knowledge levels ... It's not entirely possible to just sort by rigor.”

– Middle School Principal, California

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“The challenges experienced [with TpT] have been the free documents, usually with basic information. The documents that require pay may be high-quality documents half the time and the other half, they are not.”

– Elementary School Coach, Texas

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“We only used [TpT] for supplementary materials, as many of the materials lacked state standard alignment.”

– Elementary School Coach, Texas

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“I thoroughly enjoy using the site and would love for it to continue to be a part of sharing and networking in the education field. At the same time, I can see why some schools don't allow for its use as systems of review are not yet in place. I appreciate the time and creativity that teachers bring to the site.”

– Elementary School Math Support Teacher,
New York

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Need to Trust Professional Experience of Teachers

"I'm a big fan of curriculum maps; I'm not a very big fan of daily lesson plans. There is enough time to vet every single support worksheet. But once I can scope and gauge that they've got an understanding of what they want to do within the alignment of the standards, I can see they are not pulling a random worksheet and that there is alignment ... You have to know where your teachers are and when they can identify high quality instructional material and supports. It just goes back to the trust." – Middle School Principal, New Mexico

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"I'm a big fan of curriculum maps; I'm not a very big fan of daily lesson plans. There is not enough time to vet every single support worksheet. But once I can scope and gauge that they've got an understanding of what they want to do within the alignment of the standards, I can see they are not pulling a random worksheet and that there is alignment ... You have to know where your teachers are and when they can identify high quality instructional material and supports. It just goes back to the trust."

– Middle School Principal, New Mexico

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"We have our teachers make lesson plans ready day of, but they don't have to submit them ahead of time because the reality is, even if we took the time to give a lot of feedback, we then have them have the time to implement the feedback. And if it's anything more than a grammar check, they're not going to have time to do that high level feedback. So, we'd rather be proactive and build their skills, capacities and retroactive and kind of just waste our time spinning our wheels."

– High School Principal, North Carolina

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"There is a framework to use when vetting resources, but it has really been aimed at elementary teachers at this point. High School tends to be a little less rigid."

– High School ELA Teacher, Nevada

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“When I look at the standards, I look for a vertical alignment with my core curriculum. [With TpT], I try to look at concepts, activities, and support to make sure those are vertically aligned to what we're learning as close as possible to reinforce the concept in a way that's not too varied for the student.

[With a new activity] I will then ask the students, 'Did you enjoy about this lesson? What can we fix?' It's always good to test an activity.”

– Middle School STEM Teacher, Florida

“Teachers are professionals and spend a lot of time working with students. A good teacher knows what students need and sometimes it might be using supplemental materials so that students can understand concepts that are essential for other learning targets to be met.

I do think there are certain times when it is essential for materials to be evaluated, but I also think teachers should be able to make that professional decision.”

– Middle School ELA Teacher, Oregon

“The nuance is to make sure we are not just finding work for the kids to do but materials that actually help further their learning. There is such a vastness of resources, that it can be a double-edged sword. I would not want to be handed one option for curriculum, but it is near impossible to go through a formal vetting process for every resource that exists. I think it then falls to professional autonomy for a teacher to vet the curriculum and match it to standards and academic goals.”

– High School ELA Teacher, Nevada

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“I'm given a lot of freedom to pick what I want. It's taken years. I can ask questions, but I'm given a lot of freedom and I really appreciate that. And I'm given the respect because I'm in the 12th year of my education.”

– Elementary School Special Education Teacher, Texas

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“We have to turn lesson plans in weekly, and they vet the lesson plans. So, I've never run into any occurrence where it's been questioned, but my choices are always standards aligned.”

– Middle School STEM Teacher, Florida

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“I have two teachers that have recently asked, ‘Can I use this website?’ And my response is ‘Absolutely, I want to give you the benefit of the doubt as a practitioner in the classroom. You're the professional.’”

– Middle School Principal, New Mexico

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Capacity Building and Professional Development

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“[On TpT], I feel like there are some good things but that we need to make sure that teachers understand their standards, so then they can identify whether the materials they're using are aligned with the standards as opposed to just being something fun. In our PLCs, they break down standards. What do they mean, what is expected, what does acquisition look like. Then they link about activities to help teach this.”

– Middle School Principal, North Carolina

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“My school is in its seventh year this year and I would say in the first three to four years, [a lot of supplementing] was the case. And because the core curricula that we've adopted now is stronger, we don't have to [supplement].

Now, I think it's more of the expertise of the teacher and their own mastery of the standards. [With curricula] sometimes a teacher has difficulty planning with it because you have to really know your content.”

– Middle School Principal, California

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“How to vet a resource for validity, bias, etc. - I think we used to take this for granted but again with the political climate being what it is and with so many inexperienced teachers in the profession we have to train them to thoroughly research what they are putting in front of students.”

– High School Instructional Coach, California

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“We do have PLC meetings, but we don't talk about supplementary materials in policy unless it's something that we want to use school wide. But as far as other supplementary materials, the teachers know the expectation is to number one use the core curriculum with fidelity. Then from there [we look at] what may not be working for certain groups of students.”

– Elementary School Principal, Texas

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“I think if you use it right, you know what you're doing. It's a really great tool. I also think it can be dangerous for someone it isn't. That's like newer in their career and their journey. Or just like not interested to put the time in to really think about. Is this rigorous for my kids? Is this a line for my kids? Am I going to adapt it to make it right? Or am I going to just put it on my kids because I'm tired and I have to deal with something tomorrow?”

– High School Principal, North Carolina

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“Our district does not offer guidance on quality indicators when choosing resources on TPT. There really isn't any oversight on what supplemental resources our teachers use. Teachers use their own judgment when deciding to purchase supplemental resources with their own money. If a TPT resource is paid for by the district, it must be approved by the building principal or myself, the curriculum director.”

– Middle School Coach, Missouri

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“I don't think I've ever seen professional development that really incorporates [how to use TpT]. I think it's really just kind of treated as a 'Hey, here's another tool for your box. There's five different websites you could go to and TpT is one.”

– Middle School Principal, New Mexico

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“I believe there has been a culture and precedence set with teachers for a very long time that lack of training and coaching is the norm in the education field. Thus, requiring these efforts, intentional planning, internalization not only takes time but also training and coaching that many teachers are not interested in receiving. Being that there is a lack of accountability within many districts and schools, the easy way and low expectations is expected.”

– Elementary School Coach, Texas

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Ways to Improve Site

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“You had to be very careful on TpT because there's common core stuff that isn't aligned and you have to wade through it. And then different states have different orders of like their histories ... and you just have to take that into consideration when you're wading through all that stuff because you could get something that's totally misaligned or just too deep or too shallow.”

– High School Social Studies Teacher, Texas

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“The site enables me to see the different types of materials and the various strategies that the creators have [used] to address the skills of learning the subject matter ... It is very easy to use, but the challenge is to find the right one, because there are so many resources. Looking at the teacher reviews helps to pick the best one.”

– Math + ELA Teacher, California

“[I would like content by] core and then broken down by state. Sometimes, I'll click world geography. But world geography is taught in sixth and ninth in Texas and in some other places at different grade level.”

–High School Social Studies Teacher, Texas

“Finding the customizable activities and resources that students and teachers can use to make the day meaningful is really helpful for me. TpT is not just worksheets, it's now the boom card activities which kids love. It's now interactive like Google Sites or Google Docs. So for me, it's super helpful and I would not be able to do my job without it.”

– Elementary School Special Education Teacher, Texas

“Often times there are no processes in place to vet supplementary materials. If there were vetted, many of the materials would not offer the rigor or alignment needed for students to be provided with a high-quality education. Add high-quality rigorous standard aligned material for PreK through 12th, especially for math, literacy, science, and social studies.”

– Elementary School Coach, Texas

“As TpT has become a go-to for so many new teachers, I see the great necessity for a review process for posted materials. There are far too many inaccurate resources posted and used in classrooms. There are so many creative teachers sharing on the site and it has a wealth of amazing resources but resource review and correlation to standards is necessary.”

– Elementary School Math Support Teacher, New York

“I have found wonderful resources on there, but I have also come across some resources that are not great. I wish there was an evaluation for what could be put on the site. There might be and I don't know, but some materials are not great. You do have to look at what you are getting and use professional judgement [to determine] if it will be a good lesson/material for students.”

– Middle School ELA Teacher, Oregon

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“[I want] a place to have submissions of feedback on how well the material helped the teacher who purchased it.”

- Middle School Math + ELA Teacher, California

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My biggest challenge with using the site is that I don't always get what I think I am going to get, but the site really helps come up with creative lessons.”

- Middle School ELA Teacher, Oregon

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