Implementing a Teaching Performance Assessment: An Australian Case Study

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Abstract: This paper reports on the implementation of a Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA), a component of graduation recently introduced into the teaching workforce in Australia. The TPA typically requires graduates to demonstrate that they can plan, implement, assess and reflect on a series of lessons given to school students. This case study used grounded theory to analyse the initial implementation of a TPA at an Australian university, based on interviews, student focus groups, and a classroom readiness survey. We investigated the TPA's contribution to final-year pre-service teachers' learning and professional readiness. We conclude that the TPA, as a threshold task, is broadly beneficial to the profession and graduating teachers, and may strengthen professional bonds between schools and universities. We also warn of TPA-related fragilities and its potential to reinforce populist notions of 'teaching as telling' and to test surface-level quiz-knowledge to the exclusion of deeper, attitudinal learning outcomes.

Introduction

Discerning teaching quality is a complex issue. In Australia as elsewhere in the developed world, graduating teachers are required to demonstrate their ability to evaluate the impact of their teaching on their students' learning. Numerous researchers have published lists of the attributes of effective teachers (Lamb, Maire, & Doecke, 2017; Mohamed, Valcke, & De Wever, 2016; Thompson, 2018; Soulé & Warrick, 2015; Stronge, 2018; Van Laar, van Deursen, van Dijk, & de Haan (2018). These attributes are assessed through the monitoring of teachers' preparation, organisation, and implementation of lessons, their analyses of student assessment and/or work samples, and their feedback on these. While studies have identified teachers as among the greatest influences on learning (e.g. Hattie, 2003), isolating the 'teacher effect' from other effects on learning is problematic (Stronge, 2018).

This paper reports on the implementation of a teacher performance assessment (TPA) at an Australian Technology Network university. It investigates the implications of this TPA for pre-service teachers (PSTs), university staff, schools and supervising teachers, and more broadly for the teaching profession and teacher educators. Nineteen students responded to a survey and 15 students participated in focus groups. The university's administering lecturer, who was also the TPA assessor, took part in two interviews.

Literature Review

This section discusses some of the problems and prospects related to the TPA, and explores some of the contextual and historical aspects that have led to and shaped its establishment in Australia. A TPA sets out to capture a beginning teacher's 'value-adding' (Darling-Hammond, 2015) to their students' learning, using a plausible set of competencies that also build the teacher's confidence. Nevertheless, demonstrating this over a short period of time, and in a relatively unfamiliar environment, is not necessarily straightforward.

The most crucial components of effective teaching are, arguably, personal attributes such as empathy, patience and interpersonal understanding (Noddings, 2007), which are difficult to teach and to measure (Brown, 2017). Effective teachers recognise how to match a student's potential with the subject matter. Suffice it to say that relationship is central to good teaching, but this is difficult to establish, much less evaluate, in a short professional experience (PE) period of a TPA. The literature on the TPA is as yet inchoate; accordingly, we draw on international research, largely from the United States (Stacey, Talbot, Buchanan, & Mayer, 2019).

The TPA derives from the Australian Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2017a). These standards are, in part, responses to concerns about the declining academic performance of Australian school students, particularly when compared with their counterparts in some international jurisdictions (Dinham, 2013). Buchanan (2017) has criticised these and similar standards for being somewhat clinical and detached; their tendency to be reductionist (Sinnema, Meyer, & Aitken, 2017); their oversimplification of the complexity and contextual variability of teaching (Cochran-Smith, 2006); and their propensity to constrict and "standardize the teacher, student and work" (Krise, 2016, p. 28).

Two competing narratives appear to have emerged with regard to the operation of TPAs. The first espouses the importance of raising the standing of the teaching profession. by referring to "securing quality teaching and preparing new teachers well" (AITSL, 2017b, para. 1). Forde, McMahon, Hamilton, and Murray (2015) contend that professional standards have a capacity to be used productively in the service of teacher professional learning. Simultaneously, though, there exists in Australia a crisis-of-confidence undertow expressed in the media as concerns, founded or otherwise, about Australian school students lagging behind their peers internationally (*The Guardian*, 2018; SBS, 2018). For Mayer (2013), these are "anecdotally informed 'teacher education is failing us' headlines" (p. 9), while Cochran-Smith, Piazza, and Power (2013) regard with scepticism reports of a "lack of accountability and standardization of expectations" (p. 16) in teacher education. As a broad generalisation, narratives affirming the need for standards tend to be the preserve of the media (e.g. d'Abrera, 2018), while criticism of standards and increasing accountability prevails in the scholarly literature (Buchanan, 2017; Krise, 2016; Mills & Goos, 2017; Sinnema, Meyer, & Aitken, 2017).

TPAs typically focus on PSTs' "planning, instruction, assessment and reflection" capabilities (Darling-Hammond, 2006, p. 121), but they have also been criticised on various grounds: they may fail to capture candidates who might otherwise be effective teachers (Greenblatt, 2018) and to exclude all ineffective teachers (Goldhaber, Cowan, & Theobald, 2017). In the US context, Dover and Schultz (2016) speak of "*illusions* of objectivity and rigor" (p. 95, emphasis added). TPAs may also fall short of capturing the complexity that is teaching, and the diversity of classrooms and learners (Buchanan, 2017; Buchanan & Schuck, 2016; Lewthwaite et al., 2015; Reagan et al., 2016; Schuck, Aubusson, Buchanan, & Russell, 2012).

One strident criticism that reflects on TPAs has been the operationalisation of their equivalent in the US, the edTPA, by a commercial entity, Pearson (Carter & Lochte, 2016;

Dover & Schultz, 2016; Parkes & Powell, 2015). Charteris (2019) advises that this may be an example to be avoided in Australia. TPAs in Australia are currently in the hands of teacher educators, but they must nevertheless echo the Standards and be responsible to AITSL and, in some cases, to state regulatory bodies for their implementation and operation.

TPAs may also fail to capture the breadth of professional readiness, such as desirable attributes and dispositions (Hochstetler, 2014; Paugh, Wendell, Power, & Gilbert, 2018). Their high-stakes nature has also attracted criticism in that it may dissuade PSTs from undertaking creative lessons of a higher order of complexity (Heil & Berg, 2017). A PST is unlikely to demonstrate the totality of their expertise in one 'learning cycle'.

Methodology

The study site is a small university-based initial teacher education (ITE) provider that graduated 80 teachers in its primary courses and 40 in its secondary courses in 2018. All graduates were required to complete the TPA, and they were invited to participate in this study. This relatively small cohort size presented some problems in terms of TPA administration because, regardless of their participant size, all TPAs incur the same cost to purchase and involve similar amounts of work to develop and moderate.

Teaching in the Australian state where this TPA was undertaken is quite highly regulated by its Education Standards Authority, as well as federal government and university regulatory bodies. All of this university's ITE programs require accreditation/approval by the Authority at subject and assessment task levels. Alongside the university's requirements, this builds a certain inflexibility into its subjects and programs.

Problematic

This study investigated the problems, prospects, benefits and limitations of implementing a TPA in an Australian university ITE program, from the viewpoints of the TPA assessor and the final-year PSTs. Via these PST accounts, some opinions of the supervising school teachers were also recorded. The study adopted a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), using informant responses and analysis of documents to generate inferences and theories. Grounded theory was deemed appropriate for this study given that the TPA is new to the Australian education landscape.

Conduct of the Study

Within the grounded theory approach, the study adopted the form of a case study (Pearson, Albon, & Hubball, 2015). This permitted an intense analysis in real time of a bounded case (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Four data sources were used: a teacher preparation survey (n = 19 PSTs); three focus groups (n = 15 PSTs in all); two interviews with the ITE lecturer who administered and assessed the TPA; and document analysis.

The survey (Spooner-Lane, Thompson, & Shields, 2017) sought demographic data and posed questions related to preparation for, inter alia, teaching literacy and numeracy; differentiating; moderating; data-informed planning; dialogic instruction; and effective strategies. The survey comprised Likert scales ranging from 1 (not prepared) to 7 (very well prepared).

The following documents were also analysed: the outline of the subject in which the TPA is embedded and the TPA assessment task instructions; the subject's TPA Guide; the TPA 'response template'; and the TPA marking rubric. Our analysis of these documents served as a point of comparison for PSTs' interpretations of the TPA requirements. Supervising teachers at the schools were not interviewed, but some of their views were reported in PST focus groups.

We conducted three focus groups with the PSTs, and two interviews with the TPA assessor, between July and November 2018. The PST focus groups were coded FG1, FG2 and FG3, and assessor interviews were coded AI1 and AI2. The focus groups sought PSTs' views on the contribution of the TPA to their professional development and identity as teachers, and on its affordances and facilitators with regard to its implementation. Similarly, the assessor was asked about the TPA's contributions to the PSTs' professionalisation, and about aspects of its assessment and administration. Informed consent was obtained from all informants prior to their participation.

Focus groups and interviews were transcribed and coded for analysis of recurring patterns and outlying responses. They were then cross-checked as a measure of inter-rater reliability. Mean responses to survey questions were calculated and compared.

The TPA Instrument

This TPA derives largely from a template devised by the NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA, 2017). The TPA instrument comprises three elements:
1. Planning and preparation for teaching – lesson plans, strategies, resources, outcomes, assessment, classroom management
2. Reflective analysis of teaching practice – evaluation of the above in the light of student learning
3. Assessing impact of learning – a whole-class summary, and a more detailed report on work samples or assessment tasks of three 'target students' (Internal unpublished institution documents).

These align with AITSL (2017c) requirements. There are overlaps or resonances between the second and third of these elements.

Subject and Course Details

The TPA operates in the culminating subjects of two distinct programs at the university: the BA/BEd (Bachelor of Arts/Education) and the Secondary MTeach (Master of Teaching). Most BA/Ed graduates proceed to primary teaching, the rest becoming secondary school teachers. In 2018, 80 students graduated from the BA/BEd course and 40 from the MTeach course. The TPA grading was pass/fail, with all students who submitted a TPA achieving the pass grade. Table 1 provides demographic details of the 19 PSTs who agreed to participate in this study.

Categories	Details
Gender	7 males; 12 females
Study mode	17 full-time; 1 part-time
Enrolment status	16 domestic; 3 international
Education program	4 BA/BEd (primary); 15 MTeach (secondary)
Identify as Indigenous	0
English as first language	13
Language spoken other than English	6

Table 1: Demographic Details of Participating PSTs

Findings

This section presents the findings from three of the data sources used in our study: the survey on teacher preparedness; the focus groups; and the TPA assessor interviews. It discusses the main themes we derived from the analysis: assessment, complexity, authenticity, and context.

In general, the respondents saw value in the TPA. When asked what elements of teaching the TPA brought to light, participants referred to the multifaceted nature of individual lessons; the sequencing and pacing of lessons; reflection; the importance of providing regular, informal feedback and formative assessment more broadly; and moderation. The TPA assessor reported that the TPA made the PSTs "far more thorough, systematic and rigorous in what they're doing" (AI2).

Assessment

Assessment emerged as a highly significant issue in the student surveys. Most survey questions garnered high confidence levels on a scale of 1 (not prepared) to 7 (very well prepared), for example:

- Preparing a lesson: mean response score of 6.3
- Preparing a unit of work: mean response score of 5.9.

Areas to generate lower confidence levels were:

- Designing appropriate assessment: mean response score of 4.7.
- Using moderation: mean response score of 4.6.

The only other issue of some concern for survey respondents was long-term preparation. The confidence in planning declined markedly at the year-long level:

- Preparing a year's work: mean response score of 4.1.

The TPA appears to have helped the PSTs to focus on "assessing more concretely" (FG1) and "analysing assessment" (FG2). This FG1 participant added that teaching about assessment is something that education programs could refine. For one PST, the TPA process was akin to compiling an assessment e-portfolio, and another observed, "The biggest benefit was being able to teach a full cycle of teaching the unit sequence, assessing it and providing feedback *in real life* rather than through an assignment" (FG2, emphasis added/inferred). Another indicated, "Because I knew we had this TPA, I actually took the time to plan out a whole six-week lesson sequence, the whole unit, and prepare for the assessment that I was going to make and implement" (FG3). Other comments included: "The TPA prompted me to be more formal with my formative assessment" (FG1), and "The main thing I learned from the TPA was analysing assessments" (FG2).

One emerging problem was the difficulty of representing assessment data so as "to show that there was an improvement" (FG2). PSTs were advised that if most or all their students performed poorly, that should not jeopardise their TPA (AI1). They were also encouraged to report honestly and reflect on what they might do differently next time. Nevertheless, some found their students' results demoralising, with one observing, "I think there's also pressure within yourself to want to see improvement. I felt that more than actually feeling that from [the TPA]" (FG3). The better responses explained, rather than described, results (AI1).

In terms of the PSTs' presentations of student assessment data, the TPA assessor noted, "Everybody did a reasonable effort of displaying data … line graphs and bar graphs, pie charts. … What a lot didn't do was give an explanation for the results." Many, however, demonstrated a capacity for "discerning patterns and making some inferences about what to do"; they "performed well in terms of differentiating their lessons and devising appropriate assessment tasks" (AI2). One PST avoided undertaking the TPA with a high-performing class because it would have made discrimination difficult.

Linked to the above, feedback to school students, including feedback to build rapport with them, emerged as an important TPA component. Tensions emerged between being supportive and being honest in feedback. One PST shared, "I think with writing the feedback made me conscious of the importance of providing it and being encouraging at the same time" (FG3). Another reported the TPA's capacity for "bringing to attention the absolute importance of feedback to your students" (FG3). A third respondent conjectured that a lack of experience led to being perhaps more critical than necessary in feedback. One indicated that providing extended feedback, of the type anticipated by the TPA, would be difficult with kindergarten students, and another confessed to being unable to provide the same level of detailed ('targeted student') feedback for a full class of 30 students (FG3).

The TPA assessor confirmed some PSTs' concerns regarding assessment of their students, observing that it appeared to hone their skills in assessment. He recollected that the exercise "put their heads very much into gear about what is actually acceptable practice in making valid determinations about your pupils' academic performance" (AI2). He lamented "a minimal approach to assessment in universities" (AI1), and suggested that further "frontend loading" of the course with "more systematic assessment procedures" would be valuable (AI2).

The TPA assessor also expressed his concerns about assessing TPAs out-of-field. He had relied on the supervising teacher's endorsement of the PST's content material. He recommended that the university collect more explicit advice from the supervising teacher to ensure the associated content was accurate (AI1); that "secondary people from discipline areas mark their discipline for the [PSTs]" (AI2); and that more university staff be trained in marking the TPA (AI1). He also raised concerns about the making of valid, justifiable TPA assessments and comparisons, especially if a PST performs barely, or slightly less than, adequately (AI1). All of the PSTs passed the TPA assessment in this instance, with one requesting more specific feedback from the assessor (FG3). There was a range of views among the PSTs on whether the TPA should be assessed on a pass/fail or graded basis.

Moderation, as one aspect of assessment, emerged as a significant issue at school and university levels. From the focus groups we noted that some PSTs appeared to know relatively little about moderation, and how to undertake it in the context of their placement and the TPA. According to the TPA assessor, many PSTs moderated their assessment scores with their supervising teacher. He raised concerns that although the administration of the TPA is not expected to impose any additional workload burden on supervising teachers, who are vital links in the TPA's successful operation, it will inevitably do so. He advised that

more specific in-service preparation would be necessary (AI2). The PSTs did report high levels of support from supervising teachers, as will be discussed next.

Capturing the Complexity of Teaching

Particularly in the four-year primary BA/BEd program, participating PSTs indicated that the entire program (not just the TPA-embedded subject) lent itself to devising appropriate assessment tasks and measuring impact. Some praised the number of PEs the program offers (eight, in the case of the BA/BEd students). The TPA was seen by the PSTs as a good stepping stone into the profession. In the words of one, "It will never capture the entirety of what teaching actually is, but it was a good leg-up into what I kind of expect I'm going to have to do once I get into the actual classroom" (FG1). It helped some PSTs to assume a more holistic view of the work of teaching: "It clarified your thinking, crystalised it a bit – consolidated the process of planning the sequence which you already had to do" (FG2). For one respondent, the complexity of the task was initially daunting: "I was a bit overwhelmed to be honest. I was, like, how am I ever going to be able to finish this whole thing?" This respondent proceeded to observe, however, that once she became familiar with the task it was no longer overwhelming (FG2). We note that the instructions for completing the TPA are extensive (Unpublished subject outlines).

The TPA was interpreted as a practical application of the AITSL Standards: "We saw the Standards from a practical perspective, and gave the Standards some meaning" (FG2). Some participants felt it provided useful preparation for an employment interview: "I felt much more empowered going to the suitability interview having done the TPA. The structure of it allowed me to talk about it much more easily" (FG2).

Authenticity

Some focus group participants felt that the TPA displaced their attention on teaching to some extent. Comments included: "A concern was that I focused on the TPA rather than my general teaching", and "The TPA became somewhat the focus rather than the [teaching more broadly]." By contrast, other PSTs indicated that ascertaining impact on student learning "is second nature to us"; it is "documenting what we do anyway"; and "it turned out to be, while it was a lot of work, it was relevant and practical" (FG2). The TPA assessor noted that the TPA is probably more authentic than typical assessment tasks to date and is "a step forward" in that regard.

Some participants reported their students' concerns about an additional assessment task generated by the TPA and possibly being seen as arbitrary. One raised the matter of reconciling the TPA with the class teacher's work:

> *I suppose the biggest difficulty was just accommodating the content I was going to teach with the TPA, keeping in mind my supervising teacher's unit program for that term. ... You can't address two masters. You can't address the requirements of the school and the requirements of the assessment in the same task, when those two requirements are actually in contradiction (FG1).*

Contextual Matters

In-school support is crucial for successfully completing a TPA. School-based supervising teachers and school students were reported as supportive: "I did get some good support from both my supervising teacher and the other teachers in the department in terms of moderation and the level of assessment appropriate for the class" (FG2). Despite the misgivings reported above about authenticity and the perceived purpose of TPA-related student assessment tasks, one PST reported that the school students were eager to do well in assessment-related tasks "for the sake of the [PST's] uni assignment" (FG3). This is probably a sign of a good rapport between PST and students. Another reported that differences in educational philosophy did not present a problem with the supervising teacher for the conduct of the TPA. Assessment tasks were commonly negotiated with the supervising teacher.

The TPA assessor commented on the duration of the PE, indicating that a month is probably the minimum needed: "It takes you a couple of days on any prac to acclimatise to the class" (AI2). Even the MTeach PE, of six weeks' duration, proved challenging for some of the PSTs. Others, though, including the BA/BEd PSTs undertaking a four-week PE, indicated that its duration was sufficient to operate a TPA. One focus group member referred to "the high [student] absenteeism, something that unfortunately is out of your control but that ultimately affects how well you can analyse your impact as a teacher" (FG3).

A suggestion made by some PSTs was to submit the planning component of the TPA prior to the PE, and following some discussion with the supervising teacher. The TPA assessor summed up the TPA as "a definite step in the right direction for turning out better quality graduates". More broadly, he described the TPA as having a "good roundness for fitting the purpose" even though it "needs refining" (AI2).

Discussion

In this section, we apply our grounded theory approach to explore further the four themes of assessment, authenticity, complexity and context, and their implications for practice. The latter three themes – authenticity, complexity and context – have implications for assessment.

Assessment

The aspect of assessment raises three distinct matters that we discerned: assessment by PSTs of their students' work; the university's assessment of the TPA; and the TPA as an assessment instrument. As Looney, Cumming, van Der Kleij, and Harris (2018) point out, "Teachers' capabilities to conduct classroom assessment and use assessment evidence are central to quality assessment practice" (p. 442) and are at the heart of determining teacher effectiveness. While we recognise the limitations of 'teaching to the test', the TPA is a useful model of teachers' work, with some caveats that we will discuss.

As reported in the findings, assessment appeared challenging for some of the PSTs in the shorter MTeach PE program. The lower level of confidence regarding assessment of students' work, as opposed to planning, correlates with findings elsewhere (Carter, 2015; Charteris & Dargusch, 2018). This serves to remind to us to emphasise further this essential aspect of teaching. Accordingly, we believe that a backward-mapping process (Elmore, 1979) that embeds more explicit student assessment-related tasks into the PE continuum would

serve prospective teachers well. We refer to university's assessment of the TPA, and the TPA's validity as an instrument, in subsequent sections.

As already mentioned, none of the PSTs in this study failed the TPA. On the one hand, this could be said to vindicate the TPA and its assessment demands, and validate the PSTs' attainments. On the other hand, some might argue that that the cost of implementing a TPA demands that it discriminate, with some PSTs inevitably failing. Such perspectives may be the topics of research in future years.

Submission of the planning element of the TPA prior to the PE component also carries with it pluses and minuses. It might substantiate that planning was carried out prior to the PE, and allow for formative feedback, but it might also introduce some inflexibility. For example, it may discourage a return to, and a revision of, the planning in light of the conduct and impact of the teaching – unless this were to be marked a second time by an assessor, which would present a workload burden.

Authenticity

Authenticity is a desirable aspiration for TPAs, given that ITE providers are at times impugned for detached, theoretical inauthenticity. Some focus group participants reported that the TPA displaced more authentic teaching. From this we infer two possibilities: that the TPA is, indeed, an inauthentic imposition in an otherwise natural setting; or that the distinction in the minds of these PSTs is artificial. Each may have some claim on the truth, and further study, including extensive classroom observations, should shed more light on this.

It is possible that the high-stakes nature of the TPA could distort the results. For a number of reasons, determining a fail is problematic. Moreover, the conditions under which the TPA occurred cannot be replicated, and may be difficult and costly (particularly for the PST) to repeat. External judgements will typically be made in the absence of familiarity with the context of the PE and the associated TPA. This could make the university's stance fragile in such matters, particularly if a PST fails the PE but passes the TPA, or vice versa. The latter scenario may play into existing narratives that schools are the better, or the only valid, arbiters of quality teaching. This potentially presents a problem for the standing of teacher education, and for prospective relationships between schools, PSTs and universities, in addition to having significant consequences for the PSTs. Moderation processes need to feature demonstrable rigour in order to engender confidence. External judgements are discussed further under 'context'.

Linking assessment and authenticity, it may be that the TPA privileges performance over reflection. Even though the TPA is positioned as a summative assessment task, for the PST it should serve as stimulus for critical reflection, analysis and diagnosis of future professional practice. Stacey et al. (2019) discuss the authenticity of TPAs in an Australian context, as well as possible alternative assessment instruments, such as portfolios and other methods incorporating multiple data (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Sandholtz, 2012).

Complexity

A dilemma we discerned from the findings is that the TPA is complex and multifaceted in its nature and operation, yet not sufficiently so as to encapsulate the complexity of teaching and learning, or even the entirety of a PST's fledgling expertise. Linked with this are questions about what and how to assess the TPA. The PSTs in this study were not required to video their lessons as part of their TPA. Videoing may offer further

insight into a PST's implementation of the curriculum, but brings its own burdens – technical, performative, and privacy-related. Such documentation also has a bearing on context. For example, PSTs might be tempted to video themselves explaining something to a class, but this may reinforce a 'teaching-as-telling' construct of pedagogy and fail to demonstrate the student learning taking place. Naturally, PSTs could be advised against using video as evidence of 'performance' and instead to use it as a means of capturing learning and for personal reflection.

Linking assessment, authenticity and complexity, the idea of 'threshold concepts' may be a better way of conceptualising TPAs than as a collection of basic competencies. The threshold or hurdle metaphor implies stepping beyond a basic capability and is implicit in the Standards, given their multiple levels (Proficient, Highly Accomplished etc.) (AITSL, 2017a). As with any entry-level task, the TPA is necessarily a somewhat simplified microcosm of teachers' work.

Context

Contextual matters, such as support from supervising teachers, students, and the school more broadly, were vital in the operation and successful conduct of the TPA. However, we recognised a number of concerns, specifically with regard to the accuracy of the TPA as an assessment instrument. University ITE providers in Australia are required to moderate their TPA results with at least one other provider (AITSL, n.d.). However, given that moderation even within an ITE provider is problematic, engaging with other providers' contextual circumstances is likely to add to the complexity (Charteris & Dargusch, 2018; Schatzki, 2002; Tuytens & Devos, 2018).

Along with the multifaceted nature of the TPA tasks, the length of the final PE is another vital consideration. PSTs are arguably operating in spaces that are more difficult than those of their full-time teaching counterparts. They are probably unacquainted with their students at the outset of the PE, and they have limited time to familiarise themselves with their students and their environment (such as the school and its processes and expectations, and the broader community), to make an impact via their teaching and their interrelationships with students, and to measure that impact. The PE regime at the university where this study took place no doubt helped with familiarisation – PSTs undertake their penultimate and final PEs with the same class. Given that their students are already undertaking particular schoolwork, the PST is aiming at a 'moving target' in terms of reconciling their own teaching with that of the supervising teacher. Student absences, while a part of the pedagogical condition, also disrupt teaching and, more especially, learning. The future operation of the TPA may bring these matters into sharper focus for further study.

Perhaps most fundamentally, universities typically assess their TPAs in the absence of intimate knowledge of school settings and their affordances or impediments. All teachers will 'perform' differently in different contexts, particularly if we they are making judgements out of their discipline areas. But we see this as less problematic, given there are usually content experts in each of the teaching areas. Regardless, PSTs' responses to school settings will impact the workloads of supervising teachers and might act as a disincentive for schools to host final-year PSTs, considering the proliferating responsibilities of supervising teachers and their meagre financial recompense.

The scope of the student learning being assessed also arose as problematic for us. The PSTs typically measured advances in their students' learning via pre- and post-tests, the focus of measurement being students' knowledge and understanding. We believe this has the potential to reinforce in the minds of beginning teachers the notions of teaching-as-telling and

learning as an accumulation of facts, at the expense of more life-changing learning of an attitudinal or affective nature. As we see it, this deeper, perspectival learning takes longer to effect, and associated change is less likely to be evident during a relatively short-term PE period.

Two of the issues referred to above – judging out of context, and the truncated nature of the PE – may mean that school students' understanding is assessed and compared in raw, rather than value-added, terms. We speak of teachers being classroom-ready (Buchanan & Schuck, 2016) or work-ready (Jordan, Littlewood, Kennedy, & McLaughlin, 2019) but some school classes are more teacher-ready and work-ready than others. The test of this may lie in the quality of the TPA.

Arguably, the TPA captures, even if in somewhat reductionist terms (which may be justifiable educationally), the nature of teaching – coherent planning and organisation; clear implementation; meaningful assessments; and realistic determination of its impact (Hébert, 2017). Yet positioning the TPA as a learning opportunity, rather than an accountability measure (Mockler, 2013), can only add value to the instrument itself, its attendant processes, and its capacity to serve and support neophyte teachers.

Conclusion

We report firstly on what we see as some positives attributable to the TPA. We present these in terms of their effects in ITE courses and in schools and classrooms. We then consider some potential pitfalls in terms of professional aspects that might remain under-problematised by the TPA.

In ITE courses, the TPA arguably problematises school student assessment, an area that Grainger and Adie (2014) observed as under-researched. To the extent that PSTs might neglect assessment of student work, we infer that they may be privileging their own teaching 'performance' over their effectiveness as evidenced by student learning. Increased opportunities for assessing students' work, and in turn having these assessments evaluated, will prepare PSTs better for the critical skills of assessment and interpretation. The first stage in this undertaking may involve mapping TPA and TPA-like assessment tasks (formative and summative) across both the undergraduate and postgraduate programs, and, where appropriate, increasing the number of such tasks.

The TPA appears to have allied some students with their PSTs to perform well in assessment tasks. Several participants noted that the TPA tended to have a positive 'greenhouse effect' on students' willingness to work with their PSTs towards the demonstration of their own learning. It is to be hoped that this will continue and have a positive effect on the conduct of the TPA. Supervising teachers, too, wanted to assist. It will be interesting to note whether their inclinations change over time as they become more familiar with the TPA.

We add here that the abovementioned benefits are likely to need resourcing. For the TPA to be effective, increased funding will be required, not just for ITE providers but also for participating schools. We now turn to what we see as some weaknesses or fragilities in the TPA.

Under-problematising of teaching and learning. While a PST brings to the TPA the totality of their learning from their ITE course and other experiences, one 'teaching/learning cycle' cannot capture their expertise in its entirety. Given the relatively short timeframe of most PEs, the PSTs' initial unfamiliarity with the school context, and the high-stakes nature of the TPA tasks, PSTs may opt to demonstrate increases in their students' lower-order knowledge and understanding, rather than the value-added capacities of synthesis and

application. Such changes are easy to measure through pre- and post-quizzes, but they might serve to reinforce in the eyes of the PST, and of the public, the popular view of teaching as knowing, telling and (possibly) checking.

Under-problematising of reflection. The high-stakes nature of the TPA task may render it more performative than reflective in nature and diminish the place and importance of creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and dissent. Candidates may attempt to airbrush any blemishes from their work and its outcomes, rather than interrogate, analyse and diagnose such imperfections with a view to improving practice.

Under-problematising of moderation. Given the range of contextual variables in any school, we envisage problems regarding the moderation of TPA grades within ITE institutions, and, more so, between institutions. Contextual issues may be unknown to the TPA assessor, and, perhaps even to the PST, except through inference.

The abovementioned fragilities remain risks only, rather than insurmountable problems, but risks that should be kept in mind as universities develop and refine their TPAs and advise and consult stakeholders in the process. In short, a TPA should strive for authenticity, not artifice, and rigour, not rigidity.

It is perhaps regrettable that the introduction of the TPA in Australia has followed market models. Market emulation may result in a suite of nearly indistinguishable TPAs. Engel (2000) speaks of a struggle for the control of public education, and the clash between market ideology and democratic values. As mentioned earlier, the US equivalent of the TPA, the edTPA, is administered by a commercial entity, Pearson (Gurl et al., 2016), which further removes it from the context of the teaching being assessed. Numerous other criticisms of the edTPA have been raised, including a narrowing of teaching approaches, corporate interference, and a loss of academic freedom (Madeloni & Gorlewski, 2013). It is not desirable for the teaching profession to outsource measurements of teacher quality (Shulman, 1986).

As we conclude this article, we offer a caution to all Australian ITE providers developing their TPAs. Given time, someone will obtain data on the proportion of PSTs who pass and fail the TPA. Associated league tables of providers may thus be created from more or fewer, stronger or weaker, substantiating data. Such conditions are likely to be corrosive to ITE providers (some more than others). The risks might be greater still if universities were to incorporate an 'exceeds expectations' stratum into TPA assessment regimes, and if claims were made (based on evidence or otherwise) that all TPAs have equivalence. As pressure mounts to ensure that graduates are seen to pass the TPA by a clear margin, there may be a reduction in the validity and accuracy of reporting – not to mention integrity. While there are compelling arguments that a pass/fail regime can affirm mediocrity and not reward excellence, it may actually affirm risk-taking in ways that graded assignments do not.

As TPAs are developed in the future, what might be required is mutual, reciprocal accountability from all stakeholders, including the media. Given its capacity to reward caution over bold experimentation in teaching, the TPA itself may also need to be kept in check. That said, the TPA will probably prove to be a useful assessment task in the hands of skilled teachers.

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