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Assessment in HE Initial Teacher Education: Competing Contexts Discourses and the Unobtainable Pursuit for Fidelity

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Some sections in this chapter have been developed from my previous text 'Understanding Feedback' (Elbra-Ramsay, 2021).

Abstract

In England, student teachers have a number of routes into teaching. One of the key routes is that of Higher Education (or Higher Education Institution) based Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Student teachers on these programmes experience assessment in a multitude of ways. They are assessed in their academic work and their performance on placement and then they assess the pupils they work with. Student teachers need to meet particular assessment criteria in order to qualify as a teacher and they study assessment as a subject, the underpinning theory, national policies and perceived 'good' practice. Furthermore they experience all of this across three, often competing, contexts: Higher Education, school education and Initial Teacher Education itself. This chapter seeks to examine the conflicting discourses, contexts and practices that English ITE student teachers need to navigate in order to succeed, or at least make sense of assessment.

Key Words

assessment; initial teacher education; fidelity

Index terms

1988 Education Act; Assessment; Core Content Framework; feedback; fidelity; formative; grades; Higher Education; identity; ITE Market Review; Ofsted; Performance/Performativity; Quality agenda; self regulation/regulatory; summative; student satisfaction; workload; Teacher Standards

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the Initial Teacher Education context in England as a case study of how complex assessment practices are in teacher education. Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and Assessment should be natural bedfellows. After all assessment is integral to teaching and learning, and teaching and learning is the core business of ITE. However, the sector (particularly the English Higher Education ITE sector) increasingly finds itself sandwiched between differing understandings, processes and policies related to assessment. As an offshoot of school education, it needs to respond to, model, teach and monitor school policy and practice. As a subject within Higher Education (HE), it also needs to respond to the 'Quality' marks associated with assessment in the University setting, along with a raft of policies and processes. In ITE, the recent Core Content Framework in England (Department for Education, 2019) represents another discourse where a particular view of assessment is prescribed, ready to be judged by Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education), the English inspectorate responsible for 'inspecting services providing education and skills for learners of all ages' (Gov.UK, n.d.); Ofsted judgments carry high stakes for English ITE providers with judgements determining whether teacher education can continue to be offered by the provider. A mire of confusing and contradictory understandings of assessment therefore compete. It is not hard to see the problem of operating in a sector which straddles so many competing discourses. ITE teacher educators need to become adept at navigating these multiple ideas and practices and make sense of them for both themselves, the student teachers they work with, and ultimately the pupils in our schools.

In order to be effective, or be judged as effective, Initial Teacher Education also needs to reflect the school context and that of Higher Education. Each of these contexts will have different understandings and expectations in relation to assessment and feedback all of which will need to be understood and experienced as either a learner or practising teacher. ITE too has its own context too with specific metrics, approaches and understandings in relation to assessment, all of which need to be accommodated within programme design and processes.

When it comes to assessment, student teachers on an ITE programme may face something of an identity crisis. Indeed, the role of a student teacher itself can present challenges as it encapsulates being both teacher and learner; active and passive; or novice and professional. As Lee and Schallert ask, is a student teacher 'a student or a teacher, or both, or neither, at different times?' (Lee & Schallert, 2016, p. 72). In terms of assessment, student teachers may come across jarring conflicts between their own conceptions of assessment following their lived experience as a school pupil, their experience of being assessed academically in HE and of being assessed on school placement, their role as assessor whilst on school placement and even their own research into assessment, or the assessment of assessment. Student teachers will have assessment 'done' to them, will need to understand it at a theoretical level and will need to 'do' assessment in the classroom as part of school experience. Indeed, at a broader level, assessment itself is full of polarised distinctions, e.g. formative versus summative; performative versus learner centred.

As a further complication, ITE in England needs to be extremely responsive to changes in assessment; understanding of assessment is not in any way a fixed state but one that is continually evolving and not always for the better. The speed of change in ITE can be both breakneck and sluggish. Breakneck when a national reaccreditation process is announced, sluggish when a technical change is required to a programme or module. As a result, conceptions that are initially complementary can become conflicting, and vice versa, as the sector responds to both government missives and Higher Education processes and enhancements. As George and Maguire argue (2019, p. 20) ITE is in a state of 'persistent turbulence.' This is particularly the case the last five years for ITE in England. The changing nature of Ofsted inspections (and the frameworks than underpin these) has meant that, either directly or indirectly, the way performance on school placement is measured has changed. In the past student teachers had individual lessons and whole placements graded against agreed criteria. However, it has become no longer appropriate to grade the performance of lessons or, more recently, to grade the placement overall as Ofsted have encouraged a pass/fail judgment instead. It is however, appropriate to grade academic work at each stage of training and Higher Education is reliant on a range of Quality Assurance (QA) processes in an attempt to guarantee fidelity across different subjects and contexts. The high stakes nature and speed of change in the ITE sector specifically, further exaggerates the conflict that arises when assessing outcomes across contexts.

In other words, assessment in ITE is complex. In stating this, Van Geert and Steenbeek's dual definitions of complexity seem particularly relevant, 'hard to understand, difficult to manage' and 'a

complex dynamic system and its associated properties' (2014, pp. 23–24). Put another way assessment in ITE is 'muddy water with purpose' (Nichols, 2020, p. 36) or 'a persistent challenge facing teacher education' (Richmond et al., 2019, p. 86) This chapter seeks to analyse all of these competing assessment discourses and contexts, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of assessment within ITE. It will begin by introducing the English HE ITE system then discuss the broader assessment discourses before examining the three separate contexts and the impossible striving for fidelity across these. The chapter will also examine the conflicting identities student teachers, and indeed student teacher educators, need to understand in relation to assessment before examining possible routes through the assessment impasse.

[The English HEI ITE system](#)

The English approach to teacher training is particularly complicated with different routes, approaches and demands. The system explored in this chapter is that of Higher Education Institution based Initial Teacher Education. Here Universities are the accredited provider and carry responsibility for the meeting of the ITE criteria set out by government. Within HEI ITE student teachers can be university or school centred but either way a large proportion of their training will take place in a school / setting meaning student teachers will need to enact national or local school policies and practices. Alongside these school experiences, student teachers will attend university-based sessions, submit academic assessments and leave the programme with both an academic and professional qualification.

Given that the English HEI ITE route is technically based in University, alongside school policies and practices, there will be similar directives from the university itself. Arguably, English universities that provide ITE are juggling as many demands as schools today. Education departments, within which ITE provision is located, are expected to contribute to the REF (Research Excellence Framework) a six-year cycle for assessing research excellence in UK providers. Similarly, the Teacher Excellence Framework (TEF) is an important cyclical process where providers are awarded gold, silver or bronze for teaching. More recently the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) measures the range of activities HEIs undertake with partners, including schools. In addition, given English universities are fee paying they also need to evidence their academic rigour, the employability of their graduates and the experience of their students in an attempt to prove value for money. The 'effects and conduits of contemporary neo-liberalisation' are plain to see in the league tables, ranking and measures (Ball, 2015, p. 258) that inform much of the practice at English universities including initial teacher education.

Competing Assessment Discourses

Before we examine the specific dilemmas and contradictions in ITE assessment, we need to recognise the broader competing discourse of assessment per se. In essence, assessment is generally understood as two fairly ambiguous concepts: assessment for learning (formative assessment) and assessment of learning (summative assessment) (see C.Elbra-Ramsay, 2021 for previous work on this) The distinction is often overstated resulting in a polarisation or ‘a significant site for competing discourses and contestation’ (Adie & Wyatt-Smith 2020, p.279). The spectre of performativity and metrics has fuelled this further with summative assessment increasingly seen as a powerful measure of performance for both learners and teachers. Interestingly the emergence of the two discourses happened at a similar time and followed the 1970s/80s Great Education Debate.

Arguably as long as we have been educating we have been assessing but it is only within the last few decades that assessment has become a ‘pervasive presence’ (Broadfoot, 2007, p. 19). The 1988 Education Act and the subsequent practice of comparing the results of national testing, school-by-school, through the publication of school performance league tables marked the start of a new discourse where ‘reasonable standards [and] expectations’ (Department of Education and Science, 1980) began to be accentuated. Close at hand was a progressively high stakes Ofsted inspection framework. As a consequence, summative assessment became a tool to identify under-performance (Leckie & Goldstein, 2017). Assessment standards were increasingly seen as a measure to be exceeded if schools and settings were to compete (Broadfoot, 2007); assessment became a comparable indicator of competence for learner, teacher or the institution. What started with schools soon spread to other education sectors including Further Education (FE), Higher Education (HE) and of course Initial Teacher Education (ITE). Standards, league tables, performance measures and inspection judgements were soon an accepted part of the education landscape and one that relied on summative assessments. The UK had arguably developed an education system that was:

not only as tightly controlled and centrally directed as any in the world ... but also a system that might appear ...to be infected by a kind of madness [because of the] rampant growth of a forest of assessment procedures which threatens to throttle the whole education system within a dense canopy of externally-imposed performance indicators (Broadfoot, 1999, p. 3).

So, since the 1980s, assessment has undergone something of a transformation into what many now regard as an influential and controlling mechanism, informing the 'quasi-market' of education (Leckie & Goldstein, 2017, p. 194) and increasingly part of a 'dangerously powerful technology ...with little consideration of its consequences' (Broadfoot, 2007, p. 31). ITE probably feels these consequences more acutely than any other sector, given that teacher education programmes are responding not just to one 'powerful technology' but to many. By contrast, the same period also saw a competing assessment discourse emerge. Alongside the performative focus, an alternative view of assessment became more prominent; one that was learner focused and formative and therefore 'an integral part of all teaching situation' and a 'much more complex phenomenon than simply applying certain skills in gathering and interpreting assessment data' (Kyttälä et al., 2022, p. 1). Broadfoot concluded that the two competing discourses were essentially a question of 'performativity or empowerment' (1999, p. 2). Although these appear to be totally opposed understandings of assessment, they were in fact more closely linked in the past. In 1987, the TGAT (Task Group on Assessment and Testing) report (Department of Education and Science, 1987) was published and recommended that assessment needed to 'be capable of comparison across classes and schools' (p.7); the links to performativity are clear as is the influence of the report in the newly introduced National Curriculum for England the same year. However, elsewhere in the report, we find two other recommendations which are more aligned to what is understood as a formative conception of assessment: 'assessment results should give direct information about pupils' achievement in relation to objectives; should provide a basis for decisions about pupils' further learning needs' (Department of Education and Science, 1987, p. 7). One of the authors of the TGAT report was Paul Black who subsequently co-authored 'Inside the Black Box' (Black & Wiliam, 1998), widely viewed as the seminal text and one which initiated the focus on the use of formative assessment, or, as is often used synonymously, "assessment for learning" as the approach was frequently called. The reference to assessment as a means of informing future teaching/ learning within TGAT is therefore not surprising.

The development of formative assessment

Based on Scriven's (1967) 'formative evaluation,' the notion of formative assessment impacted on both policy and practice (see C.Elbra-Ramsay, 2021 for previous work on this). By focusing on the consequential purpose of formative assessment, judgments were used not to measure, compare and compete but 'to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs' of the learner (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 2). Assessment was no longer viewed as the end point of learning but rather a 'prerequisite for learning' (Sambell, 2013, p. 380); assessment was actually vital to securing learner progress. Formative assessment became positioned in clear opposition to summative assessment (Lau, 2016; Brunker *et al.*, 2019). This distinction had an ethical distinction; 'good' versus 'bad' assessment. Taras (2008, p. 395) agrees, arguing that 'assessment for learning portrays formative assessment as the ethical face of assessment.' Assessment for Learning is not, however, without criticism. Many contend that the area is relatively under researched, despite its pervasive existence in the discourse, and also that its potential benefits have been 'over-sold' (Skovholt, 2018, p. 143). Possibly the wholesale uncritical embracing of formative assessment (or assessment for learning) has been a response to, or a deflection from, the other opposing concept of assessment: summative assessment and in particular performativity. Furthermore, although the same seminal works have influenced understanding and application of formative assessment across the sectors, arguably 'multiple and conflicting conceptions' (Brown, 2011, p. 47) exist. This confusion has led to misconceptions, or at least varying meanings, of formative assessment. The impact of summative assessments is clearer across all education sectors. University, school, teacher and learner improvement are now measured through performance marks and grades (Brunker *et al.*, 2019; Elbra-Ramsay, 2021). In ITE, Ofsted surveys and judgments (along with other data sets) add another layer of measure, one that is 'inconsistent with [the more formative] pedagogic criteria' (Ali *et al.*, 2017, pp. 246–247). National assessment systems appear to be more valued by the system (Black & Wiliam, 2005; DeLuca *et al.*, 2012) and serve to present comparisons locally, nationally and indeed internationally through metrics such as PISA (Program for International Student Assessment); performativity is increasingly a worldwide tool linked to globalisation This increasing focus on external performance testing, performance related pay and accountability has propagated a tension between the perceived value of formative and summative assessment respectively. It is not hard to feel that national assessment systems have more value and significance in the system (Black & Wiliam, 2005; DeLuca *et al.*, 2012; Elbra-Ramsay, 2021). Learners are increasingly viewed as 'customers' and as such are paying for good assessment (Brooks, 2018). Along with other areas of Higher Education, ITE providers need students

to be enrolled, satisfied, employable and achieving well as this performance data means the institution can compete in the marketplace (Elbra-Ramsay, 2021). The summative standards achieved and indeed the students' experience of assessment and feedback are both high stakes. As Brooks states:

achieving a high and rising position in the rankings is now considered a legitimate (and perhaps the most important or even only) objective in its own right rather than being merely a positive side effect of good performance on other, more specific indicators (Brooks, 2018, p. 1118).

Education has a habit of presenting aspects of policy and practice as a value laden dichotomy, either good or bad (Lau, 2016). As a result, rather than a developed understanding of the differing conceptions, and all the nuances that exist in between, presenting these ideas as mutually exclusive and disconnected (DeLuca et al., 2012) results in the classification of practice as right or wrong with little in-between. As a result, formative and summative assessment are seen as particular and distinct practices. In fact, the definitions are dependent on the context, the process or the presence of a consequence to the assessment. The 'formative-ness' is associated with the informing of future teaching/learning, and, as such, 'it follows that any assessment can be uniquely summative when the assessment stops at the judgement' (Taras, 2009, p. 58). Taras goes on to argue that any polarisation of assessment concepts is ultimately 'self-destructive and self-defeating' (Taras, 2005, p. 476) which will in turn result in less successful implementation of practice (DeLuca et al., 2012).

In conclusion, Brunker, Spandagou, and Grice (2019) assert:

'Competing demands on assessment pose an ongoing challenge for Higher Education. In Initial Teacher Education (ITE) these demands are problematised further in meeting the roles of assessment for measurement, accountability, learning and curriculum. ITE holds a dual role of teaching through content and practice, whereby Pre-Service Teachers (PST) are assessed for learning while learning to assess, thus positioning assessment as curriculum (2019, p. 89).

Competing Contexts

The context of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) adds a further degree of complexity. Pre-service teachers are generally required to study and work within three distinct contexts – the HEI, the distinct ITE programme (within the university) and the school context(s) in which the practicum takes place. .

Assessment Context 1: Higher Education

Assessment in Higher Education is particularly challenging. Of the three contexts mentioned above, it is perhaps the one where the clash between assessment of learning and assessment for learning has been felt most acutely. Unfortunately assessment is largely often seen as a measure of performance rather than a vehicle for future learning (Sambell, 2016). The pursuit of a 'Quality' agenda, which some have argued often measures anything but (Bloxham, 2009), has also prioritised compliance against summative rather than formative processes. Even feedback, possibly the area of assessment with the most formative potential, has become more about quality assurance and accountability, rather than the learner themselves (Bloxham, 2009). From the learner's perspective, assessment and feedback is an area of low satisfaction (Cockett & Jackson, 2018; Irons & Elkington, 2021) and the focus on summative performance effectively means that the 'student as an active user of assessment information is ignored' (Song & Koh, 2010, p. 3).

Low student satisfaction in relation to assessment is a real concern for the sector, but also has to be seen within a context in which Higher Education has increasingly become a 'marketized system based on a combination of neo-liberal and neo-conservative approaches' (Childs & Menter, 2013, p. 93). Assessment satisfaction in the National Student Survey (NSS) informs the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (Office for Students, 2018) as well as other league tables. Furthermore Irons and Elkington (2021) argue that many of the considerations for Higher Education identified in the 2019 Augar Review (Hubble & Bolton, 2019) are 'touched by assessment and feedback' i.e. 'choice, value for money, access, and skills provision' (Irons & Elkington, 2021, p. 1). Assessment matters in Higher Education, but largely in terms of the reputation of the institution rather than the trajectory of active self-regulatory learners.

When summative assessment is used as an accountability tool, it will influence individuals, groups and societies through implicit regulation and discipline (Danaher, Schirato and Webb 2000). The high stakes nature of this will ultimately prioritise particular forms of assessment, practices and behaviours;

this is certainly true in Higher Education. The focus on assessment as accountable measurement has led to the development of a number of processes viewed as characteristic with quality: calibration; moderation; concurrence; external examination; generic assessment criteria; anonymous marking and so on. However, do these serve any purpose in terms of the learner? Anonymous marking may limit bias but also limits the likelihood of feedback loops being circled, of learners being able to identify progress and also limits the building of relational economies (Elbra-Ramsay, 2019) necessary for feedback to feedforward (Pitt & Winstone, 2018; Winstone & Boud, 2022). The performative function of summative assessment is perhaps being prioritised over the formative potential of assessment; something the sector itself has acknowledged and encouraged reform in (Bloxham, 2009; Rawlasyk, 2018; Sambell, 2016).

Formative assessment, where it exists, often reflects more something of an informal summative assessment, than an integrated approach to learning and teaching. The modular structure and timetabling constraints of Higher Education are certainly also a factor, with tutors working with large numbers of learners in discrete and sometimes infrequent teaching slots (Reimann et al., 2019). Furthermore workload issues, perceptions of student needs and preferences may also be relevant to the take up of more formative assessment approaches (Irons & Elkington, 2021).

However, there are signals that change is afoot in terms of HE assessment. McVitty (2022) argues that a consequence of Covid has been a 'shift in the learning landscape' as institutions come to terms with the adaptations in assessment the pandemic required. Furthermore recent publications such as 'Assessment and Feedback in a Post-Pandemic Era: A Time for Learning and Inclusion' (Baughan, 2021) bring together writings that debate how assessment can be used to 'promote, support, and extend future learning' (Sambell & Brown, 2021) given the fact that 'universities right now have a golden opportunity to make positive and lasting changes to assessment,' one that 'strikes the right balance between what is possible for practitioners and what has the most impact on our learners' (Pitt, 2021, p. 6).

Assessment Context 2: School Education

Arguably school education has been able to respond to the formative assessment agenda more effectively than Higher Education (Kincal & Ozan, 2018) and it is an context that has been a focus of much of the published work on formative assessment (Irons & Elkington, 2021). As Lambert and Lines argue, assessment is 'a fact of life for teachers, part of what teachers do,' an 'organic part of

teaching and learning' and also 'part of the planning process' (2000, p.2) Planning, teaching, learning and assessment are often seen as 'intertwined, but mutually dependent' (Alderson et al., 2017, p. 380); interlinked rather than discrete with one informing the other in a spiral, hence predominantly formative in nature. The favoured formative approach is partly structural. Learning tends to have greater flexibility because it is not limited to a single session a week. Instead teachers work with their learners each day, every day (in primary schools at least) enabling a fluid approach to both assessment and its consequences. The constancy of a class teacher supports the building of relationships which are important for a formative learning culture (Elbra-Ramsay, 2019). Having said this, the uptake of formative assessment is not uniformly positive or indeed effective in schools. As Alotaibi (2019) identifies, a positive attitude to formative assessment is not necessarily enough for the adoption of successful strategies and formative assessment practice runs the risk of being superficial.

In relation to feedback as an area of assessment, the school discourse supports the view that feedback is key to progress. In addition to the claims made by Black and Wiliam (1998), the Education Endowment Fund (The Sutton Trust 2014) also recognise the potential of feedback to make a learning difference. Echoing the focus on formative assessment, feedback is conceptualised as having consequences (Hattie and Clarke 2018). Indeed, there has recently been a shift in schools towards verbal or live feedback in preference to written feedback. Some of this is pedagogical in that recommendations can be discussed, better understood and actioned in the moment by the learner, but it should also be viewed in the context of other marking trends that have come and gone e.g. marking codes, in depth marking, cursory marking (NASUWT, no date). There is also the current focus on teacher workload, informed by the ongoing teacher recruitment and retention crisis (Quicke, 2018). Assessment and feedback are specifically named as areas that contribute to heavy teacher workload (Department for Education, 2016) so any strategies that improve efficiency in this area are recommended (Department for Education, 2022b) and indeed scrutinised by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2019).

This is not to say that summative assessments do not loom large. Standardised Assessment Tasks taken around age 11 and GCSEs (General Certificate of Secondary Education) taken at the end of compulsory education around age 16 etc are now very powerful measures of not just the learner but the teacher and the school. The league tables that accompany the publication of the results of these assessments create an unnecessary pressure. The roots of this are in the Education Act of 1988 and the subsequent 'pursuit of 'standards'' (Wyse & Torrance, 2009, p. 217). The introduction of the national curriculum and statutory testing were significant 'mechanisms that increased government

control' and subsequently reduced teacher autonomy and 'teacher-owned deeper levels of knowledge and critical thinking (Wyse & Torrance, 2009, p. 216). The definitions of school assessment that followed in the 1990s sometimes focused on measure and performance and it is hard not to accept the view that assessment became synonymous with testing that were seen as 'gate keepers' to future success (Alderson et al., 2017). Indeed Black and Wiliam (2018) argue that summative school assessments often harm rather than help learning. The perceived success that summative assessment can bring is not just in terms of the learner's own performance but has increasingly become a measure of the success and potential of the teacher, the school or the area. The consequences of not meeting the expected measure of performance have also grown, adding to the high-stakes context. Of course any student teacher will also have experienced this context as pupils themselves, before embarking on a teacher education programme and these prior experiences, alongside the classroom context they experience during training, will undoubtedly shape their conceptions of assessment as teachers (Yan et al., 2021). In short, both formative and performance based summative assessment both have a strong presence in the school classroom, and their co-existence (an often contradictory co-existence) present 'real, practical dilemmas and challenges for teachers, who are tasked with promoting pupils learning as well as certifying their performance' (Mogboh & Okoye, 2019, p. 1)

Assessment Context 3: Initial Teacher Education

At this point we move to the third context, Initial Teacher Education itself and this is where we see greater complexity. Not only does the ITE context straddle the contexts previously described for Higher Education and school education, it has its own assessment characteristics, policies and processes that also need accommodating. Indeed, not only does the process of assessment look slightly different, it is also a focus of the taught programme in itself, given that student teachers need to develop expertise in assessment per se. as well as be assessed in terms of their knowledge and competence, and ultimately assess pupils. Brunker (2019) notes that::

Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs) learn through assessment how to utilise assessment processes in their own practice. This purpose of assessment may be derailed when learning is not the main focus of assessment. The challenges for assessment in ITE are thus problematised further in the need to meet the role of assessment for learning, accountability, measurement, as pedagogy and as curriculum (Brunker et al., 2019, p. 90).

The academic assessment of student teachers will sit within the assessment structures of the wider Higher Education context and will follow the quality procedures agreed by the University, with grades or marks ultimately informing the classification of the programme award. The assessment of the student teacher within the practicum experience necessitates a different, and perhaps fairly unique, assessment experience. Not only will student teachers operate in the school assessment context, their competencies will also be assessed differently from their academic work. Notably, placement-based assessments will involve more complexity: an additional person contributing to the assessment (the mentor), a different evidence base for such assessments (school practice), an increased use of verbal and/or immediate feedback following taught lessons in practice and also a judgment against the Teacher Standards by the time the final placement is completed. The performance aspect of these final judgements has decreased over recent years with the removal, or at least heavily encouraged removal, of grading of lessons and overall placement performance. There are good reasons for this. Chiaravall claims that the 'gradeless classroom is fundamentally open, dialogic' (2017, p.1) and Spring, Robillard, Gehlbach & Moore Simas (2011) argue that student well-being is improved by the removal of grades. In addition, Lancaster et al. (2020) found that learners who received a low grade were less likely to make use of feedback than those who received a high grade. It appears that grading reduces the formative potential of assessment (Wiliam, 2014, cited in Chiaravall, 2017). However, removing grades also has an impact on the performative nature of assessment for without grades; how do ITE providers evidence the standards that they (and their student teachers) are required to meet? Evidencing student teacher outcomes was a key part of the previous 2014 Initial Teacher Education Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2014) so once the grading of individual student teachers was removed, how could this be done? The nature of assessment as a performativity tool means that over time it is possible to lose confidence in one's ability to evaluate the quality of what is happening; we begin to rely on assessments to measure performance and ascribe value to what is worthy s Ball states, performativity is 'a recipe for ontological insecurity' as individuals constantly question if they have done enough to be good enough (Ball, 2000, p. 3).

Practitioner based competencies in England are largely assessed with reference to the Teacher Standards (DfE, 2012) a list of eight standards and professional behaviours. However the choice of such Standards is arbitrary. Indeed Aparicio-Herguedas et al (2020) suggest that the prescribed key competencies are not necessarily those that are currently needed.. Nichols (2020) goes further arguing that teacher educators should reassess programme goals, given the increased performativity and politicisation of the sector where subjective criteria are increasingly used to evidence that student teachers, teacher educators and teachers themselves are serving the needs of the state (Dahlback et al., 2020; Nichols, 2020). These standards are often demonstrated through evidence collated by the student teachers and evaluated by student teacher educators who are effectively 'gatekeepers to the profession' (Adie & Wyatt-Smith, 2020, p. 279). The Standards are the minimum, summative end-of-programme assessment which determines whether the student teacher can be awarded Qualified Teacher Status. Ofsted quality assure this process, judging whether the partnership makes 'accurate and rigorous final assessments for the award of QTS in relation to the teachers' standards for primary and secondary trainees' (Ofsted, 2022, p. 36) which will inform whether the provider is able to continue recruiting student teachers in the future. The stakes are therefore high for all involved.

Given the school context in which these judgements are made, there are likely to be a number of professionals involved in the pass/fail decision. Mentors (who support student teachers in school), class teachers, headteachers, tutors and university-based link tutors (who act as a link between university and school) will all be involved not only as assessors, but also expected to model effective assessment practice to their students (Grainger, 2020). Lortie (1975) terms this the 'apprenticeship of observation,' where student teachers develop an understanding of teaching, and therefore assessment, through their experience as a learner (Boyd et al., 2013; Kyttälä et al., 2022). It is not only the assessment relationships which inform this understanding. Student teachers study, as well as experience, assessment.

Teacher Standard 6 is focused on making:

‘accurate and productive use of assessment’ and includes: knowing ‘how to assess the relevant subject and curriculum areas, including statutory assessment requirements;’ ‘use of formative and summative assessment to secure pupils’ progress;’ use of ‘data to monitor progress, set targets, and plan ... lessons’ and ‘give ...regular feedback ... and encourage pupils to respond to the feedback’ (DfE, 2012, p. 12).

Assessment is therefore an experience, a competency and a subject in its own right. And of course, these have to align with the other competing assessment contexts of Higher Education and school education.

Fidelity across the Assessment Contexts

Sadler discusses the concept of fidelity as ‘the extent to which something actually is what it purports to be, and is therefore true to type, concept or label’ (2010, p. 728) and asserts its relevance to academic achievement. Related to validity and reliability, fidelity, is, in essence significant when it comes to marking, grading or any assessment of student teacher work. For student teachers this will include both academic and placement-based assessment. Sadler argues that summative assessment practices are inherently problematic in relation to fidelity as they include ‘systems of bonuses and penalties which boost or depress grades by including components that are in fact counted as learner achievement, but in theory should not count’ (Sadler, 2010, p. 741).

Fidelity of any assessment practice in Higher Education are therefore not without challenges. Indeed Adie and Wyatt-Smith (2020) argue that fidelity (and constructive alignment) is very challenging given ever changing view of quality, metrics and competing discourses within Higher Education; lack of fidelity leads to variation in outcomes. This is amplified for student teachers who are navigating more than one assessment context; they are assessed within both the Higher Education context and the school context. Furthermore, the school context overall is actually made up of several individual placement contexts, as student teachers are typically assessed across two or three different settings. And, of course, the school context and the academic Higher Education context have different systems, criteria, processes, judgements and outcomes. Fidelity of assessment in this sector appears to be increasingly unreachable. Adie and Wyatt-Smith (2020) recognise the inherent contradictory difficulty in striving for comparability across contexts (and therefore fidelity) and also being responsive and adaptable to both student teacher and context needs. The same criticism has been made of the recent

Early Career Framework, a two year developmental package for newly qualified (Early Career) teachers (Parker, 2021). Taking all of these factors into account, how can programmes of teacher development have fidelity, deal with the 'need for reliable systems to evaluate teacher preparation programs' (Nichols, 2020, p. 52), and also straddle such differing contexts?

There is little that can be done about competing contexts. The criteria for any ITE programme include the 'requirement to teach in at least 2 schools' (Department for Education, 2022a) ; student teachers therefore have to have their competence assessed 'across diverse and complex contexts (Adie & Wyatt-Smith, 2020, p. 272). However, whilst Ofsted do not insist on 'the frequency, type or volume of trainee assessments, observations or feedback; the content of, or approach to, trainee assessments' (Ofsted, 2022, p. 12), they do insist upon, and use to inform their judgments, 'accurate and rigorous final assessments' (Ofsted, 2022, p. 36). Higher Education Institutions will have their own assessment procedures and no doubt apply Quality Assurance (QA) processes to evidence fidelity across academic assessments but these often exclude placement specific assessments. The difficulties with fidelity may be compensated by the potential for a richer understanding of assessment by comparing, analysing and evaluating contextual variation. To try and discount the impact of contextual variation would negate the concept of assessment practice 'as a relational activity, influenced by the social, cultural, economic, and political contexts in which it operates' (Charteris & Dargusch, 2018, p. 357). Indeed, maybe 'classroom-readiness' in regard to assessment capability should be reframed as 'the notion that graduates will emerge from their ITE with the capacity to demonstrate criticality, agility and responsiveness in school practice architectures' (Charteris & Dargusch, 2018, p. 365). Rather than the maintain the pretence of fidelity, the sector may need to embrace the difference and attempt to move across it.

[Competing Identities- The Academic versus the Professional](#)

Student teachers on HE ITE programmes will have dual identities: the identity as a learner in the academic context of the university and the identity as a teacher in the school placement setting. Menter (2010) defines professional identities as 'how teachers see themselves and their work' (p.29). The construction of this identity will therefore include perceptions from within the self but also external perceptions of what good teaching is, for example, from the educational context, educational policy and the Teachers Standards (DfE 2012). Clarke et al. (2017) summarise these competing influences as 'outside in' where student teachers' 'knowledge and expertise are seen to derive from an external source' (2017, p. 116) and 'inside out where they may 'imagine the sort of teacher they

aspire to be' (2017, p. 120) based on their own experiences, wishes and fantasies ' For student teachers, the formation of teacher identity will be influenced by 'multiple stories of what it is to be a teacher' some realistic, some idealistic and some impossible to reach (Brown and England 2004, p.71). This identity formation is fluid and changes over time. Generally, a sense of self will become more definite in young adulthood (Michikyan, Dennis and Subrahmanyam 2015), but student teachers are also working through their development from novice to professional, traversing from learner to teacher across the university setting and the school placement setting. As such, student teachers need to 'shuttle back and forth between the desires and demands of self and others as well as to creatively respond to tension, paradox and ambiguity' presented by the ideals of identity from outside-in and inside-out (Clarke, Michell and Ellis 2017, p.116). Assessment, of course, will be part of this. Assessment judgments will reinforce or change the sense of worth and competence of the student teacher, and the dual identity inherent within this role. As Gee states, identity is 'being recognized as a certain "kind of person," in a given context... In this sense of the term, all people have multiple identities connected not to their "internal states" but to their performances in society' (Gee, 2000, p. 99). For student teachers, performances are assessed within different contexts in different ways. They also have to demonstrate competence against the Teachers' Standards. There is therefore further potential tension between the identity of the individual within the institutional context (be that school or the university) and the identity of the student teacher framed by reference to the discourse of the Teacher's Standards.. Or, as Gee identifies, tensions between the 'institution identity' and 'discourse identity.' (2000, p. 100).

The move towards authentic assessments in some way supports these competing identities, by connecting the academic or theoretical with the classroom. By authentic assessments, the work of Rawlusk (2018) is relevant; she describes realistic assessments as those that encourage application and are linked to future learning or work. Authentic assessments are supported somewhat by the dominant teacher education discourse of the reflective practitioner (Moore, 2004) in that teachers need to be able to analyse, apply and adjust a range of theoretical perspectives in relation to practice; 'practice is always underpinned by theory and, further, practice is theory-in-action' (Adie & Wyatt-Smith, 2020, p. 271). If this is the case, both the academic and placement identity need to be assured. Imbrailo and Steenekamp (2020) go further and argue that the ability to reflect critically is determined by the presence of a professional identity, hence why critical reflection is easier for more experienced teachers whose professional identities are often more assured. They also state that the development of professional identity is 'an important part of self-assessment practices' (Imbrailo & Steenekamp,

2020, p. 9) and peer-assessment has been found to be similarly effective (Sluismans et al., 2002) in developing self-regulatory skills which are necessary for reflection. Self-regulation is concerned with the self's ability to 'actively monitor, take action and evaluate one's cognition, motivation and behaviour' (Altun & Erden, 2013, p. 2355) and provides the 'basis for purposeful action' (Bandura, 1991, p. 248); this is the essence of reflection. Self and peer assessment, reflection and the development of professional identity are all interrelated. Self and peer assessment should therefore be of key importance for any professional programme (Endedijk et al., 2014; van Dinther et al., 2015). A dearth of self/peer assessment practices in ITE programmes will impact on the ability to reflect and further compound the complications around the development of a secure professional identity.

Adie and Wyatt Smith (2020) also argue that not only do student teachers experience conflicting identities through assessment, so do teacher educators. This conflict has at its heart the competing formative and performative discourses. Teacher educators have an identity associated with support, nurturing and scaffolding which sits well with a formative understanding of assessment (Adie & Wyatt-Smith, 2020). However, they also need to enforce the performative demands of assessment frameworks by judging whether a student teacher passes or fails a placement, or indeed the programme. Similarly, Kwan and Lopez-Real (2005) found that mentors felt challenged and conflicted between providing support to student teachers (through feedback) and judging performance as part of ITE quality assurance. It appears therefore that ITE assessment contributes to conflicting identities for all involved.

Competing Measures of Quality /Performance

Alongside competing contexts and competing identities, ITE also has to deal with competing measures of performance, some of which use related terminology. Currently Higher Education ITE programmes will have performance measured through the following external metrics: student satisfaction (National Student Survey); the outcomes of Ofsted inspections; the Teacher Excellence Framework as well as various league tables .

The outcomes of an Ofsted inspection (itself a very particular type of assessment process) are perhaps the area that causes most concern in the sector given the implications of an unsatisfactory inspection i.e. the closure of programmes and departments. During an inspection how student teachers are assessed and how they understand and use assessment in the classroom are judged and will inform the overall grade awarded to the institution. In terms of the assessment of student teachers, providers

are expected to provide opportunities for ‘ongoing formative assessment ... on whether trainees are gaining, applying and refining the knowledge and skills set out in the ITE curriculum...’ in order to ‘diagnose deficits and close gaps’ through collaboratively produced and flexible targets (Ofsted, 2022, pp. 41–42). As such, the inspection framework appears to prioritise the formative discourse. However, the very presence of a set of criteria used in a very high stakes inspection framework is, in itself, performative as it focuses on ‘performance against appropriate standards or criteria, in order to generate grades which are reliable, valid, and defensible’ (Winstone & Boud, 2022, p. 657). The criteria allow a summative grade to be awarded by Ofsted to the provider. The irony of the emphasis on a formative approach within criteria which are there essentially to inform a summative judgement is not lost. Reflecting the argument about performance data in the school sector, teacher educators experience the same challenges as teachers because of this uncomfortable co-existence between formative and performative values and practices where teachers need to both support pupil progress and measure performance (Mogboh & Okoye, 2019).

If we consider another metric, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), we see another set of criteria and, indeed, the use of summative grades. The TEF may be linked to the ‘neoliberal values of market, choice and competition’ (Morrish, 2019, p. 356) but it is difficult to see how this will help prospective student teachers make informed choices about where to go to study. Furthermore, the TEF looks likely to continue to base judgments on a different set of criteria including student perceptions of assessment and feedback (not necessarily recognised by Ofsted) alongside student learning gain, a definition of which will be articulated by providers themselves (Office for Students, 2020). This will no doubt include reference to assessment. So, again, we see competing and conflicting messages in relation to assessment: How does assessment link to performance? What is measured? How is it measured? What are the subsequent judgements? And what are the consequences of these? There is little alignment for ITE, instead the sector needs to navigate a way through.

[Finding a way through](#)

So far this chapter has essentially argued that assessment in ITE is particularly complex with conflicting and competing discourses, practices and measurements. But how do we, as ITE teacher educators, find a way through? In discussing possible remedies, what follows does not attempt to provide easy wins, quick fixes or even reliable solutions; the climate and context is too convoluted and fluid for

that. Rather, a number of possible points of reflection are listed below for consideration (see C.Elbra-Ramsay, 2021 for previous work on this).

Explicit modelling

Given that there are competing assessment discourses for ITE, finding and exploiting any possible opportunities for concurrence where we can will be significant. Examples of evidence informed 'good practice' that have links across contexts could be modelled explicitly by articulating the reasoning, decision making and underlying assessment principles to the student teachers. Modelling (and the use of exemplars) is regarded as a useful approach for teaching disciplinary thinking and complex ideas (Matsumoto-Royo & Ramírez-Montoya, 2021) in teacher education and assessment is certainly, as has been argued, complex and particularly benefits from this approach (Macken et al., 2020; McConlogue, 2020) Furthermore Matsumoto-Royo and Ramirez-Montoya (2021) argue that modelling allows core practices and understandings to be made visible to student teachers particularly when they are 'relevant to authentic teaching situations and be as realistic as possible' (p.2). Graham also found that modelling was crucial in the development of student teachers understanding of assessment as it provided 'concrete examples of how assessment theory and practices' (2005, p. 619) were applied to the real classroom. Cheng, Cheng and Tan (2010) state that student teachers see their teacher educators as role models from whom they can learn; modelling of assessment behaviours, approaches and strategies by teacher educators can therefore influence student teachers' own understanding and practice so teacher educators need to choose these modelling opportunities well in order that assessment becomes clearer rather than further confused. For example, when briefing student teachers on an academic assignment, can we use strategies from the school context? Student teachers could work in pairs to explore model assignments, identify success criteria and areas of improvement to jointly action. As another example, could academics make use of 'live marking' strategies in taught sessions? Could formative approaches be made more explicit by adapting session or even module content to accommodate emerging needs that formative strategies reveal? Again, all of these could be done explicitly so that student teachers experience and understand a formative assessment approach as a learner in order that they can also make sense of it as a practising teacher. Modelling and exploiting opportunities for similarity rather than difference in this way, will meet the need to 'rethink [and in some cases establish] the relationship between the ITE academic program, undertaken in universities, and the school-based professional experience program' (Adie & Wyatt-Smith, 2020, p. 269).

Self-Regulation

Sambell (2016) argues that students' experiences of assessment in Higher Education promotes 'general feelings of compliance, powerlessness and subservience rather than a sense of belonging, enthusiasm, enjoyment and ownership of the learning process' (Sambell, 2016, p. 1). For student teachers this will no doubt influence how they then approach assessment in their own classrooms and indeed how their pupils will then feel about assessment and learning. However, Klassen and Tze (2014) found that teacher effectiveness and pupil outcomes are linked to a teacher's ability to evaluate teaching performance (Lorencová et al., 2019) and indeed student teachers and teachers have a professional responsibility to actively reflect on and seek out professional development opportunities (DfE, 2012). An important consideration therefore is how ITE attempts to use a more self-regulatory, learner centric approach to assessment wherever possible in order that such skills can be developed in student teachers. The argument for a more self-regulatory approach appears clear.

Opportunities for meaningful self and peer-assessment should be maximised given the positive impact on self-regulation (Kincal & Ozan, 2018; Macken et al., 2020; Sluijsmans et al., 2002). Wherever possible assessment criteria and targets for development should be jointly constructed and dialogue used to encourage self-assessment and reflection (Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick, 2006). Assessment should not feel like something that is done to a student teacher, rather a process they own, use and engage with (Bloxham, 2018); a 'necessary' learning opportunity in itself which includes self-critique, independent judgement.... other skills for continuing learning and personal responsibility for assessing performance' (Boud, 2011, p. 2). Wherever possible therefore, ITE teacher educators should carefully construct assessment opportunities for self-regulatory principles to be met and revisit any assessment practices which may explicitly or implicitly suggest a top-down model of assessment, bearing in mind of course (as has been argued previously in the chapter) that teacher education is itself subject to numerous top-down models of assessment. However, wherever possible teacher educators should try to 'own' assessment materials in the same way the assessment literature argues that assessment materials should be 'student owned' with self-regulatory opportunities and associated self-regulatory language. We want assessment practices that stimulate and improve student teacher learning in the long-term (Sambell, 2016) rather than simply evidence that an assessment policy has been met so teacher educators need to seize any opportunity to do this.

Critical debate

Ignoring the competing discourses and practices discussed in this chapter only serves to create further confusion. Rather, areas of assessment conflict should be made explicit, explored and critically debated. Kyttälä (2022, p. 14) argues that assessment 'always involves the use of power' and therefore the area should be explored critically by student teachers. Indeed the development of critical thinking is viewed as a core purpose of teacher education, particularly in relation to assessment (McConlogue, 2020) as it prepares them for the changing education context and enables deeper understanding of the links between theory and practice (Lorencová et al., 2019). Given that understanding of assessment is viewed as holding the 'highest potential of increasing student outcomes' (Oo et al., 2022, p. 366), it is doubly important that this is a critical and therefore complex and nuanced understanding. In suggesting the potential of critical debate, it is recognised that there is a risk in being seen to critique mandated assessment practices, but we need to encourage reflective and reflexive links between these discourses and student-teachers' experiences, as both a teacher and a learner, through reasoned and critical engagement and debate (Elbra-Ramsay, 2021). This will support ITE providers in developing transformative teachers with a deep understanding of assessment principles, assessment research and the underpinning values of assessment practices. Without debate we run the risk of producing compliant technicians (Clarke & Phelan, 2017) who only hold superficial understanding (Lorencová et al., 2019) and are incapable of moving beyond performative requirements of a given set of standards in operation at the time.

Conclusion

If we view assessment as part of learning and teaching, we should perhaps not be surprised by its complexity, given that learning is similarly multifaceted, contested and problematic. Nevertheless, the subject and practice of assessment is made even more challenging for the ITE sector, given the different contexts, concepts and high stakes performativity measures it operates within. Acknowledging this complexity is the first step as it is only by doing so that we can begin to debate some of the inherent tensions regarding assessment with our student teachers. This is important because not only is it recognised that 'one of the key aims of teacher education is to support the development of adequate assessment skills' (Kyttälä et al., 2022, p. 16), we also need our student teachers to be critical, thoughtful and reflective about such an important part of learning and teaching.

The same is also true for teacher educators. We must not lose sight of the choices we still have in terms of the nature of assessment within the sector and the opportunities that can be exploited for harmony rather than conflict. Indeed, rather than considering the sector problematic, maybe we should view it as unique in that it allows student teachers to experience assessment in different contexts and in different roles as both a learner and teacher. The distinctive and multifaceted nature of ITE could allow for a really rich understanding of assessment to be developed in our student teachers, one that will no doubt influence the future pupils with whom they go on to work. In terms of assessment, 'it is essential to establish the link between the faculties, where future teachers are educated and actual schools where these teachers will eventually educate our children, and to deepen our scientific knowledge of the issues' (Hamodi et al., 2017, p. 187). ITE is well positioned to do this.

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