Summative assessment of student teaching: a proposed approach for quantifying practice

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Abstract

A pass mark in a teaching practice module is a convenient way for universities to signal confidence in students' beginning teaching competence. However, assigning marks for teaching competence is a fraught undertaking if marks are to be standardised across different assessors *and* reflect teaching as a complex, coherent practice. This paper analyses reports written by university tutors justifying the marks awarded to a cohort of final-year student teachers for their teaching practice. The analysis shows that marks reflect an interplay between the students' pedagogical thinking (evident in the rationale for their lesson design and written and verbal reflections on their teaching), and their ability to deliver lessons effectively (from direct observation of their teaching). This finding prompted the development of a Summative Teaching Practice Assessment Rubric which considers both the cognitive and performance dimensions of student teaching. It potentially enables a more coherent, holistic summative assessment of student teaching than had been possible using lists of isolated criteria or general impressions of competence.

Introduction

Higher education institutions are responsible for ensuring that newly-qualified teachers are able to assume responsibility for classroom teaching at the start of their careers. A credit or 'pass' mark in a teaching practice course is a convenient way for institutions to signify their confidence in qualifying students' readiness to begin teaching. Observations of student teaching together with other sources of supporting evidence (such as students' rationale for their lesson design, reflections, devised learning and assessment tasks and their contributions during post-observation discussions) contribute to a holistic profile of student teaching on which assessment can be based (Fraser, Killen and Nieman, 2005; Darling-Hammond and Snyder, 2000). Summative assessment instruments are supposed to guide large numbers of university tutors and supervising teachers as they undertake these observations and make high-stakes judgments about students' teaching

competence or incompetence. This study was prompted by dissatisfaction with a particular guideline for the summative assessment of student teaching previously used by staff at the Wits School of Education (see Appendix A). That guideline provided university tutors with a list of twelve criteria for assessment, some of which were inherited from documents used before the merger between the Johannesburg College of Education and the Wits Faculty of Education, while others were derived from the Exit Level Outcomes stipulated by the Norms and Standards for Educators (Department of Education, 2000). The guideline provided no indication of how to translate students' teaching competence into a single mark. Some university tutors wrote an open-ended report in which they commented on observed teaching and supporting evidence to justify the impression mark that they had awarded. This approach enabled university tutors to consider different forms of evidence related to students' teaching in a coherent and integrated way, but negated the possibility of a reliable approach that could be easily standardised across the various teaching subjects and phases. Other university tutors determined a final mark by assigning a numerical rating to each criterion and obtaining a cumulative total. The use of marks against checklists provided clearly visible criteria, but also assumed that every criterion had equal value and could be considered as an isolated competence. This approach might indeed be suited to technical training (which applies facts, rules and procedures to a range of predictable situations), but it is far from an ideal way to assess practices that involve professional judgment (Martin and Cloke, 2000; Coll, Taylor and Grainger, 2002).

Dissatisfaction with the limitations of both these approaches prompted an investigation into what university tutors recognise as distinctive student teaching, and a qualitative analysis of the reports written to justify marks awarded. The findings informed the construction of a different kind of S*ummative Teaching Practice Assessment Rubric* (Appendix C). It prompts university tutors and mentor teachers to consider various forms of evidence to assess both the performance *and* the cognitive dimensions of a student's teaching and suggests a standardised mark range that takes both these dimensions into account. The structure of this rubric potentially offers teacher educators a more principled and coherent approach for the summative assessment of student teaching than is possible through approaches using lists of criteria or overall impressions of competence.

Summative assessment of student teaching

Whereas some higher education institutions offering teacher education in South Africa allocate a 'credit' for students' final session of practical teaching, others assign a mark (Reddy, Menkveld and Bitzer, 2008). Where a non-quantitative 'credit' is awarded for student teaching, teacher educators need only establish that the student teacher is *not incompetent* during their final session of teaching practice. The allocation of a mark for teaching competence has some merit, as the wide range of marks on the percentage scale can be used to acknowledge excellence in student teaching by awarding a distinctive mark, or signalling a minimal level of competence by a pass mark of 50%. The assigning of marks for student teaching provides for the comparative profiling of results for the purpose of issuing awards, especially when considering students teaching over different subjects and/or phases. However, the multifaceted nature of the evidence used to determine the quality of student teaching, and the complexities of teaching itself makes it difficult to represent teaching competence in a single numerical value (Uhlenbeck, Verloop and Beijaard, 2002; Darling-Hammond and Snyder, 2000).

The summative assessment of student teaching has been described as "contentious and complex" (Reddy, Menkveld and Bitzer, 2008, p.155). The Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications stipulates that teaching practice should be both supervised and assessed (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). However, a recent review of South African initial teacher education programmes raised concern about the "design, monitoring and assessment of teaching practice", noting particularly a pervasive "lack of common understanding of . . . assessment rubrics" (Council of Higher Education, 2010, p.94). Summative assessment instruments should ideally make explicit the principled grounds upon which marks are awarded to different stakeholders: university tutors (who need to be accountable for the judgments they make); student teachers (who could benefit from understanding how excellence within a practice is recognised); the wider teaching profession (who participate in mentoring and assessment of student teachers); the State (as accreditors, policy-makers and future employers of student teachers). It is not surprising then that the summative assessment of student teaching has been identified as "one of the major challenges facing practicum supervisors and teacher educators in general" (Reddy *et al*., 2008, p.146).

Competence in teaching

Nationally and internationally there is a well-documented tendency for school-based mentors and university tutors to focus their attention on the performance of teaching without due consideration of the cognitive thinking underlying it (e.g. Zanting, Verloop and Vermunt, 2001; Roelofs and Sanders, 2007; Reddy *et al.*, 2008). Shulman's (1987) Model of Pedagogical Reasoning and Action provides a potentially useful framework for understanding teaching with consideration of the "intellectual basis for teaching performance, rather than on behaviour alone" (p.107). He insists that teachers need first to *comprehend* the content knowledge or text to be taught before a lesson takes place. Teachers' understanding of key concepts enables them to *transform their understanding* into appropriate representations understandable to classes of diverse learners. Transforming the content into an accessible form thus culminates in a pedagogically-reasoned "plan, or set of strategies, to present a lesson, unit or course" in which teachers take pedagogical decisions based on a simultaneous consideration of the demands of the content to be taught, the needs of their learners and the possibilities within their teaching contexts (p.104). During the interactive stage of teaching, which Shulman calls *Instruction,* teachers and learners are simultaneously involved with the concept, text or topic to be learnt. He refers to "observable forms of classroom teaching", in which the prospective plan is enacted and adjusted in response to the learning environment created during a lesson (p.101). It includes classroom management as well as presentation of content, interaction with learners, and assigning of learning and assessment tasks. In order for a teacher to act flexibly and responsively to the ever-changing dynamics within a lesson, the teacher must be continually thinking about what is happening and how learners are engaging with the concepts. Shulman defines reflection as "the set of processes through which a professional learns from experience" by reviewing the lesson in relation to the purpose that the teaching intended to achieve (p.106). It often takes place in the post-active phase following a lesson when a teacher "looks back at the teaching and learning that has occurred, and reconstructs, re-enacts, and/or recaptures the events, the emotions and the accomplishments" (p.106). As a result of 'reasoned' teaching, the teacher comes to a "new comprehension" of the "purposes and of the subjects to be taught, and also of the [learners] and of processes of pedagogy themselves" (p.106). In all these processes Shulman shows how the visible actions of classroom teaching are underpinned by a knowledge base that supports the making of considered pedagogical choices.

While there are many calls for student teaching to be assessed with due consideration of cognitive and performance dimensions of the practice, there is little in the literature on how this call might be enacted in practice.

Initial teacher education programmes should enable students to develop a beginning repertoire of teaching knowledge and skills that lay a basis from which they can continue to learn from their practice and eventually develop expertise (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Studies on the practices of expert teachers have identified attributes of excellence in teaching that enable powerful learning (e.g. Berliner, 1994; Hattie, 2003; Hayes, Mills, Christie and Lingard, 2006). Findings in these studies suggest that *expert* teachers (as compared to those that are *accomplished* or merely *experienced*) have efficient automated routines; engage learners in learning activities that build deep knowledge and understanding; provide relevant feedback, use appropriate representations of concepts, are responsive to learners needs, and create safe learning environments. Some attributes refer to the thinking that teachers do before and after the lessons they teach (such as their capacity to devise appropriate representations of the content they teach) and others refer to how they manage the learning process during the course of the contact time with the learners (such as how they use routines to maximise teaching time). These studies are exceptionally valuable in guiding teacher educators attention to those aspects of students' developing practice that make the most impact on learning (both in coursework and in their formative feedback on students' attempts at teaching). While students should be developing these vital aspects of their practice, the attributes of expert teaching should not be used as a checklist for rating the competence of teachers (Hattie, 2003). Furthermore, it is unrealistic to expect that students will have a fully developed expert practice by the time they qualify (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). It is therefore important to identify the attributes of competent student teaching and incompetence that characterises student teaching. Reynolds (1992, p.1) produces a list that describes "what beginning teachers should know and be able to do" by the time they qualify. Some criteria she lists refer to the cognitive dimension of teaching (e.g. students' knowledge of the subjects they teach; their consideration of the needs of learners; their ability to make appropriate pedagogical choices, their capacity to plan coherent lessons and their ability to reflect on their teaching). Other criteria propose what beginning teachers should be able to do during the lessons they teach (such as relate well to learners; establish and maintain routines; construct a conducive learning environment and assess learning). These capacities can be observed and could be seen to constitute the *performance dimension* of competent

student teaching. While the findings and criteria from these studies are valuable in designing descriptors for formative assessment rubrics that prioritise the kinds of knowledge, skills and dispositions that student teachers should develop during their initial teacher education programmes, they do not offer a way of using the criteria to translate students' practice into a numerical mark in a standardised and coherent way. In contrast, Raths and Lyman (2003) describe *incompetence in student teaching* as "acts of commission or omission on the part of the [student] teacher that interfere with the learning processes of learners, or that fail to advance them" (p.211). They propose that these acts of commission/omission could include a lack of understanding of the subject matter content; inability to incorporate feedback from previous lessons into subsequent planning; inability to relate to learners, and/or not engaging learners in high-quality active learning. While their comprehensive list is potentially useful for exploring the grounds on which student teaching can be deemed 'not yet competent' for qualification, their guidelines do nothing to distinguish between different levels of developing but nonetheless competent student teaching. Little is known about the attributes of the teaching observed from the most accomplished of student teachers at the end of their initial teacher education programmes.

Methodology

Student teachers at the Wits School of Education undertake periodic sessions of practical teaching, mentored by a supervising teacher and a university tutor. University tutors undertake several lesson observations of each student allocated to them and examine other evidence of thinking and planning (such as the student's lesson preparation and reflective journal). After each observed lesson, they meet the student teacher to reflect on issues of the teaching and learning arising during the lesson. In the first three years of their BEd degree students are thus mentored, and their ongoing progress is *formatively assessed* with the intention of providing feedback that promotes their professional development (Rusznyak, 2011). A different approach needs to be used for final year student teachers who are *summatively assessed* by university tutors to verify their teaching competence prior to qualifying.

The search for a more systematic, principled approach to summatively assessing student teaching holistically required a two-phase qualitative investigation. First it was necessary to understand the grounds on which

experienced university tutors award distinctive marks for teaching practice, and how these grounds related to the 12 criteria contained in the guideline that was used at the time. Sixteen university tutors accepted an invitation to participate in a focus group discussion. All had experience in observing and mentoring student teachers, and assessing their teaching within their particular phase and/or subject specialisation. The group was asked to 'describe student teaching that you consider to be worthy of a distinctive mark (above 75%)'. Detailed notes were made during the discussion, and consensus emerged around thirteen attributes of distinctive teaching that were suggested (See Appendix B).

The empirical data for the second phase of this investigation were the reports written to justify the marks awarded for a cohort of 46 final-year BEd students who specialised in Intermediate/Senior phase teaching. The reports were written by fourteen university tutors appointed to assess the cohort of student teachers. All of these tutors had prior experience in the summative assessment of student teaching and in previous years, they had all participated in annual internal moderation meetings in which the grounds on which they had awarded marks had been discussed and adjusted where necessary. Five of these tutors had also participated in the focus group discussion about the attributes of distinctive teaching.

Shulman's distinction between *pedagogical reasoning* and *pedagogical action* was useful in analysing the reports written by university tutors to justify their marks. Comments in each report were coded according to those that referred to the *cognitive dimension* of students' teaching (their knowledge and understanding of the concepts taught, rationales for pedagogical choices and reflections on their teaching) and those concerned with observable *classroom performance* (such as their classroom management, interactions with learners, use of resources, execution of teaching strategies and pacing). The reports could then be clustered into four categories according to the nature of the comments university tutors made regarding the students' pedagogical thinking and their pedagogical action. The four categories were defined as follows:

1. Reports that commended thinking and lesson delivery

2. Reports that commended student thinking but noted challenges with lesson delivery

3. Reports that commended performance but expressed concerns about conceptualisation of and/or reflection on lessons

4. Reports that expressed concern about the students' ability to think about their teaching and deliver lessons effectively

The mark profile of each category was analysed, and patterns were identified. The findings of this analysis and the literature around cognition in teaching enabled the construction of an alternative rubric for the summative assessment of student teaching. I describe the structure of the rubric and then use the report of one student, Fatima, to illustrate how the rubric suggests a mark range for her teaching given the particular strengths and weaknesses identified in her tutor's report written on his observations of her teaching and his examination of her lesson preparation.

Limitations of this study

The data relies on the observations and interpretations of student teaching by university tutors who were appointed to assess this cohort of students. The analysis assumes that each report written is a complete account of each student's teaching. The study also assumes that the fourteen university tutors who wrote the reports possess the capacity to make appropriate professional judgments about the teaching competence of student teachers. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999, p.263) conceive of teacher knowledge *in* practice as "embedded in experience and in the wise action of very competent professionals". Such professional knowledge enables an "appropriate perception of what is salient in particular situations" (Morrow, 2007, p.80). Despite the limitations, the reliability of this study is significantly enhanced by the experience of the 14 university tutors and the internal moderation processes that fostered the development of shared standards for assessing students.

Findings:
The attributes university tutors recognise in distinctive student teaching

The focus group discussion yielded consensus on 13 such attributes (Appendix B). The 13 attributes of distinctive student teaching generated included both cognitive and performance aspects of student teaching. These were then compared with the criteria competence of the guidelines (Appendix A). It was immediately apparent that the official criteria emphasised the *performance dimensions* of student teaching, whereas the attributes of distinctive student teaching focused more on the underpinning *understanding and thinking* that went into making appropriate pedagogical choices, as evident in Table 1. This finding suggests that a much higher level of cognition characterises student teaching that is recognised as being distinctive.

Table 1: Comparison of cognitive and performance dimensions of the criteria for assessing student teaching competence and with attributes of distinctive student teaching

	Pedagogical reasoning and action	Given criteria for assessing competence (from Appendix A)	Attributes of distinctive teaching (from Appendix B)
COGNITIVE DIMENSION	Comprehension	Degree of knowledge & insight into relevant subjects	Thorough knowledge of topics taught and how they relate to rest of curriculum Ability to distil key concepts from the detail Making learning relevant and current
	Transformation	Planning, preparation and integration of units of work Development of support materials Design of learning tasks and assessment tasks for assessment of learner development Variety and appropriateness of teaching strategies	Lessons that develop a systematic learning process Sense how this learning links with previous and future lessons Choice of innovative teaching strategies conceptually appropriate to lesson content. Catering for diverse needs of learners
	Instruction	Not applicable	Flexible and responsive during the lesson Meaningful engagement with learners
	Reflection	Not applicable	Rigorous & insightful reflection
PERFORMANCE DIMENSION	Instruction	Effective use of support materials Ability to motivate, arouse and maintain interest of learners Ability to communicate Assessment of learner development Effectiveness of class discipline strategies Classroom management Quality of relationship with learners	Choice of innovative teaching strategies conceptually appropriate tolesson content. Meaningful, responsive engagement with learners Flexible and responsive during the lesson Creating a safe learning environment

Both the criteria for competence and the attributes of distinctive teaching were organised as lists. By their very nature lists do not necessarily show any conceptual hierarchy between items on the list or how the items listed interact with one another. To understand the grounds on which assessment decisions are made as aspects of a coherent practice rather than discrete elements on a list, it was necessary to analyse the university tutors' reports that justified the marks they awarded for student teaching.

Analysis of reports justifying marks awarded for student teaching

The open-ended reports that justified marks could be classified into four broad categories. In the first category are reports that commended both students' knowledge and ability to think pedagogically, and their effective execution of lessons. Reports in the second category commended students' competence in interaction with learners, but expressed concerns about their ability to conceptualise lessons and/or reflect on their lessons. In the third category, reports contained comments that commended students for their ability to think about their teaching but noted concerns about their ability to deliver their lessons effectively. Fourthly are those where concern was noted regarding both students' ability to think about their teaching and to deliver lessons competently. I will now briefly describe each of the four categories.

Category 1: Reports that commended thinking and lesson delivery

Reports in this category commended students for their subject knowledge, thoughtful pedagogical choices in the planning stages and their ability to deliver their planned lessons effectively. A tutor, for example, describes how a student *maintains a sound working environment in that her learners were always busy and productive*. Although not a criterion on the guidelines, the ability of students to reflect on and understand their teaching was noteworthy in reports in this category. Hence, for example, comments like, *reflective notes at the end of lessons were insightful with regard to the effectiveness of her teaching in relation to the development of her learners*. The ability of the student to be responsive to learners' needs during their lessons was also frequently emphasised. Thus, a tutor commends the way a student was able to notice, adjust and refocus her lesson: *Once [the student] realized that the*

material contained too much information for some learners, she revised and shortened the texts and tasks. Having the flexibility to respond to unpredictable classroom dynamics in a manner that maximises learning opportunities was commended in these reports.

In several reports, university tutors had commended students' thinking and lesson delivery but had included qualifiers, such as 'mostly', 'sometimes' and 'often' which suggests that although their teaching had been found to be competent overall, this level of competence was not consistently maintained.

Category 2: Reports that commended student thinking but noted challenges with lesson delivery

Commendation here was for thorough and thoughtful lesson planning, such as *she showed excellent insight and knowledge in different subjects, and she was well prepared in advance*. However, reports contained expressions of concern about the students' ability effectively to convert their lesson plans into effective lessons. One such read: *At times, very well prepared lessons with sound educational intentions came to little because effective discipline could not be maintained*. In some cases, such 'challenges' were exacerbated by contextual factors, such as: *having to move from classroom to classroom contributed to the difficulties she experienced with the class*. In other cases students' difficulties were attributed to their developing teaching skills, such as: *She still needs to develop the way she gives instructions, and limit the interventions in the lesson after she has given her instructions. While it is important to give deadlines and deal with common queries, it was often at the expense of the flow of the lesson*.

Category 3: Reports that commended performance but expressed concerns about conceptualisation of and/or reflection on lessons

These reports describe students' strong classroom personalities with effective interaction with learners. For example, a tutor describes a student who *seems to relish the role of teacher and works with calm confidence in the classroom, also with real empathy for learners*; yet, despite this positive attribute, the student needed to *demonstrate the ability to do more than act as a good babysitter for the teacher*. Reports expressed concern about the conceptual

depth of lessons, the quality of thought reflected in the lesson planning, and occasionally their ability to reflect on the teaching and learning in their lessons. Several tutors commented on lessons that had been enjoyable for learners, but lamented *busyness rather than purpose*. Thus, a tutor acknowledges that the student is *competent enough to keep learners quiet and busy* but challenges the student to demonstrate *well thought out, conceptually strong teaching*. Several of these reports suggested that the student relied more on their personalities than on an intentional intervention to enable new learning.

With pressure from the tutor to attend to their planning, many students in this category improved dramatically in the quality of their teaching over the practicum. One report describes how a student *discovered that preparation not clearly thought out results in disastrous, inconclusive lessons. These problems have now led to more methodological, systematic (and successful) lesson planning*. This category includes potentially capable students who either underestimate (or try to avoid) the amount of thinking required for coherent lesson planning.

Category 4: Reports that expressed concern about the students' ability to think about their teaching and deliver lessons effectively

Here, reports suggested that students' understanding of content knowledge caused great concern. One tutor was concerned about a particular student's ability to understand and organise content knowledge, noting that the student *kept straying off the topic and often explanations were not coherent*. Another expressed concern about a student's teaching competence despite her caring disposition: *Without thorough planning and preparation, she is insecure in the classroom, for she is struggling to think of what to say and what to do next. In future, she needs to ensure that all this is in place well before she starts her lessons. Furthermore, she must do more in-depth research: what is provided in the textbook is insufficient. She clearly cares for learners and learners respond to her, but at times this interaction is not directed to learning*. The report suggests the challenges in lesson delivery are sometimes attributable to weaknesses in the student's understanding of the content and planning.

Table 2: The mark distribution within each category of reports

	< 50%	50% – 54%	55% – 59%	60% – 64%	65% – 69%	70% – 74%	75%+	**Number of reports in each category**
1. Number of reports that commended thinking and lesson delivery	0	0	0	2	7	4	18	**31**
2. Number of reports that commended student thinking but noted challenges with lesson delivery	0	0	0	2	1	3	0	**6**
3. Number of reports\ that commended performance but expressed concerns about con-ceptualisation of and/or reflection on lessons	0	0	0	1	2	3	0	**6**
4. Number of reports that expressed concern about the students' ability to think about their teaching and deliver lessons effectively	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	**3**
Number of students whose mark fell in the mark range	**1**	**2**	**0**	**5**	**10**	**10**	**18**	**46**

The reports of all students awarded distinctive marks fell within in Category 1 (although not all students in this category obtained distinctions). Reports in Category 1 who obtained marks of below 70% were those in which university tutors used qualifiers to denote some reservations about consistency. Students deemed minimally competent or who failed their teaching practice were all located in the Category 4. The grounds for awarding distinctions and marks of less than 60% were fairly consistent. By contrast, reports for students ranging from 60% to 74% fell variously within Categories 1, 2 and 3. In all the

categories justifications for marks awarded were made on the grounds of how the students' thinking about and understanding of their teaching related to their ability to realise their intentions for learning in the lessons they delivered.

Contrary to claims in the literature that cognitive dimensions of teaching were frequently ignored, the analysis of the open-ended reports justifying marks showed that, in assigning a mark, tutors in this study considered both the students' thinking and also their ability effectively to create productive learning experiences during their lessons. Furthermore, analysis of the range of marks awarded to the four categories of reports suggested that strengths and weaknesses in students' teaching thinking and classroom action combine in ways that reflect in patterns of marks awarded across the cohort of students. This finding provided a way for the design of a rubric in the form of a two-dimensional grid rather than a linear list (see Appendix C).

Design of a different kind of summative teaching practice assessment rubric

The revised rubric for the summative assessment of student teaching describes a continuum consisting of five levels of *teacher understanding and thinking* (across the top row) and a continuum consisting of five levels of *teaching performance* (along the far left column). Assessment then takes the form of identifying the appropriate level of students' *teacher understanding and thinking,* and an appropriate level of their *teaching performance.* Plotting the horizontal to the vertical, identifies a cell that suggests a range of appropriate marks. Perhaps the chief merit is that the suggested range for different combinations of strengths and weaknesses is consistently accessible for all university tutors and supervising teachers assessing final year student teachers' teaching competence.

Assessing teacher thinking

The dimension of *teacher thinking* refers to those aspects of a teaching practice that are not directly observable during classroom action, but which nonetheless require subject and pedagogical knowledge and reasoning prior to and after the lesson itself. In accessing and assessing this, university tutors

draw on several forms of evidence. Firstly, students' lesson plans are not merely a record of their intended actions, but are structured to provide a rationale for their lesson design (Rusznyak and Walton, 2011). The tutor can thus assess the degree of thoughtfulness in the planning. Secondly, the students' reflective journals, which should be kept up-to-date throughout the practicum provide evidence of how the students reflect upon the teaching and learning during lessons they teach. Thirdly, after every lesson observed, students are expected to meet with the university tutor/mentor teacher to discuss their lesson. The assessor has opportunities during these post-observation discussions to probe the student's perception about their teaching and the learning that took place. The kinds of teacher thinking that are evident from the above sources includes the students' understanding of content knowledge, thoughtfulness of their lesson preparation, their ability to reflect on their practice, and the degree of insight and innovation they bring to the design of their lessons. The separation of 'teacher thinking' from 'teacher action' in the rubric does not imply that no teacher thinking takes place during the lesson itself, but in order to assess this dimension, the university tutor looks for evidence in sources other than the direct observation of student teaching.

Assessing teacher action

The dimension of *teacher action* refers to those aspects of teaching that are directly observable during the time in which students are in contact with a class of learners during the lessons they teach. The kinds of observable aspects of students' performance includes the way in which they interact with learners, their ability to communicate, their classroom management and their responsiveness to learners and the learning dynamics during the lesson. It includes students' ability to work productively with learner responses and managing the learning processes. In order to identify an appropriate range for a student's mark, the assessor is required to undertake several classroom observations. While this represents only a fraction of the total teaching time, a joint assessment by a university tutor and a diligent mentor teacher would be able to build a more complete picture.

Using the rubric

The rubric suggests a mark range in a cell where the two dimensions of a students' teaching practice intersect. It still reduces practice to a single mark, but this mark represents an assessment of teaching as a practice that relies on both competent pedagogical thinking and competent pedagogical action. By describing a continuum of five levels each of teacher thinking and teacher action, the rubric is able to accommodate the large variations observed in the student teaching in the analysis of the reports and suggest an appropriate range of marks. The rubric also indicates the grounds for an assessment of student teaching that is not yet competent for certification. Students who persistently misunderstand the content they teach; put little thought into their preparation; behave unprofessionally, or are unable to execute their lessons effectively are not yet ready to assume independent responsibility for a class of learners. In these cases, the rubric recommends a mark of below 50%. In order to obtain a distinctive mark, students would need to demonstrate both the capacity to think insightfully about their teaching, and to create productive learning opportunities in the lessons they teach.

Using the summative teaching practice assessment rubric to assign marks for student teaching

The following open-ended report was written by a university tutor to justify the mark awarded to a student teacher in her final year of study. There is evidence that the university tutor referred to the list of criteria (Appendix A) when writing the report to justify the awarded mark of 68%. The report includes references to the student's lesson planning (criterion 2); support materials (criterion 3); her ability to motivate, capture and sustain the interests of learners (criterion 5); class discipline (criterion 7); ability to communicate (criterion 9) and her relationship with learners (criterion 10).

> *Fatima has a well-organised preparation file and her lesson planning is very good and this is her strength. She is respectful towards her supervisors and attempts to implement suggestions and guidance provided by them. She usually saw to it that she had all the support materials on hand to ensure the success of her lessons. She displayed satisfactory knowledge of the underpinning concepts of her lessons. Good written planning and preparation are not always guarantees of success in teaching. The effective management of the learning experience is important, including pacing, discipline and enough by the way of content and activity to maintain the interest of learners. Good intentions were destroyed when she let the pacing of the lesson to slip, because with that the discipline slipped too. She*

> *must work at maintaining the interest of her class by avoiding lengthy explanations and then start an activity before learners become fidgety. Fatima obviously enjoys being in the classroom, but must pay attention to her lesson delivery and her relationship with learners.*

Fatima's strength lies in her thoughtful and careful planning but the report suggests that she experiences difficulty in translating her planning into effective learning opportunities. The report written about her teaching is typical of those in Category 2. The report that Fatima demonstrated Teacher Thinking at Level 4 and Teacher Action at Level 2. The rubric suggests that a mark of between 60–64% would be appropriate for Fatima (see Appendix C). The rubric suggests a slightly lower than the mark than that of the tutor awarded for an overall impression of Fatima's teaching competence.

Limitations and implications

Several refinements to the rubric have been over the past two years as we first piloted its use and then adopted it as the institution's formal instrument for Summative Teaching Practice Assessment. As we continue to deliberate what characterises excellence in student teaching, various adjustments have been made to the level descriptors in both the Teacher thinking and Teacher action dimensions. It is possible that the teaching of a particular student cannot be reliably placed along the continua of either (or both) of the dimensions of teacher thinking and teacher action. For example, one might come across a student whose planning demonstrates thoughtfulness, but whose reflections on teaching and learning are not at the same depth. In such cases, it might not be possible to pinpoint just one cell in the grid to determine an appropriate mark range. In such cases, the university tutors would need to consider a mark within the wider mark range indicated over two cells. Despite these limitations, we find there are now more transparent and accessible grounds upon which we can quantify the competence of student teaching at the end of their initial teacher education.

Conclusion

Any summative assessment rubric that assigns a mark to teaching carries the hazards of reducing a complex practice to a single mark. We continue to debate whether a mark against a teaching practice course is an appropriate way to reflect the university's confidence in students' teaching competence.

However, as no satisfactory alternative exists at present, then summative assessment rubrics used should reflect aspects of the complexity inherent in teaching. The revised Summative Teaching Practice rubric prompts university teachers and supervising teachers to consider a wide range of evidence when making decisions about student teaching competence at the end of their initial teacher education. It offers teacher educators an approach that gives due attention to both the *cognitive* and *performance* dimensions of student teaching in more principled and coherent way than has been possible with the use of lists of criteria or resorting to awarding marks based on a general impression of competence. The simultaneous consideration of these two dimensions offers possibilities for making summative assessment of students' teaching competence more reliable and more explicit to university tutors assessing the students, student teachers and the wider teaching profession.

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Appendix A: Criteria to guide the summative assessment of student teaching

1. Knowledge and understanding of subject/s.
2. Planning, preparation and integration of units of work
3. Development and use of support materials
4. Variety and appropriateness of teaching strategies
5. Ability to motivate, arouse and maintain interest
6. Assessment of learner development
7. Class discipline
8. Classroom management
9. Ability to communicate: instructions; explanations, descriptions, questions
10. Quality of relationship with learners
11. Professionalism
12. Relationship with teachers and school organization

(Taken from: Guidelines for Summative Assessment of Teaching Practice, abandoned in 2008)

Appendix B: Thirteen attributes of 'distinctive' student teaching

- Thorough knowledge of topics taught – and how they relate to other areas of the syllabus/learners' lives
- Ability to distil key concepts/key issues from the detail
- Makes learning relevant and current
- Well-conceptualized lessons that systematically develop a learning process
- Innovative/creative use of teaching strategies conceptually appropriate to the lesson's content
- Sense of larger picture – forward planning and also how this learning links with previous and future material
- Rigorous, insightful reflection – shows deep understanding of their own teaching
- Pre-empts possible misconceptions; designs tasks to expose how learners think/understand a concept
- Creates a safe learning environment for learners
- Caters for different needs/ability levels of learners
- Flexible and responsive to the dynamics within the lesson
- Meaningful, responsive engagement with learners
- Works well within the school environment

(Generated during a Teaching Practice Committee focus group discussion, Wits School of Education)

Appendix C: Summative teaching practice assessment rubric

Student name: **Fatima**		**Teacher understanding and thinking:**	
Teacher understanding and thinking level: **4** Teacher Action level: **2** **Recommended MARK: 63%**		1: Pervasive misunderstanding of content knowledge; Little or no formal thought to the design of a learning process; reflective journal shows little engagement with issues around teaching and learning	2: Sometimes inadequate content knowledge; Conceptualisation of learning processes is often largely limited to what has been provided to the student; limited reflection on own teaching
Teacher action: Evidence from direct observation	1: Lessons are often not executed effectively, so little meaningful learning takes place and / or unprofessional conduct	44% or less	
	2: Student mostly able to capture initial attention of learners, but struggles to maintain interest and momentum throughout the lesson. Some worthwhile learning takes place. Satisfactory professionalism	45 – 49%	50 – 54%
	3: Confident lesson delivery and responsive to queries of learners. Awareness of learner understanding. Satisfactory professionalism	Not applicable	55 – 59%
	4: Strong teaching performance in which learning is mediated effectively; Active monitoring of learner understanding; caters for different learning needs. Exemplary professionalism	Not applicable	60 – 64%
	5: Responds flexibly to classroom dynamics; exceptional responsiveness to diverse learning needs; creates safe, productive learning environment; Probes learner understanding; Exemplary professionalism	Not applicable	Not Applicable

Evidence from rationale for lesson plan, Journal for Reflection and post-observation reflective discussions		
3: Basic but accurate understanding of content knowledge; Application of basic teaching methodologies to structure coherent lessons; Some meaningful reflection on lessons observed and taught	4: Comprehensive understanding of content knowledge; Thoughtful consideration of pedagogical options and appropriate choices made; Worthwhile learning tasks with planning for formative / summative assessment; Detailed reflection on teaching and learning..	5: Deep insight into subject/s taught, own teaching and the needs of diverse learners; Probing reflection evident; Advance planning of consistently innovative, conceptually sound units of lessons with attention to formative/ summative assessment;
45 – 49%	Not applicable	
55 – 59%	60 – 64%	65 – 69%
60 – 64%	65 – 69%	70 – 74%
65 – 69%	70 – 74%	75 – 79%
70 – 74%	75 – 79%	80% or over