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## **A Comparative Analysis between the Assessment Criteria Used to Assess Graduating Teachers at Rustaq college (Oman) and Griffith University (Australia) During the Teaching Practicum**

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*Abstract: This article reports the findings from a study that compares the assessment criteria used to measure pre-service teachers' professional competencies at Rustaq College of Applied Sciences in Oman, and at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia. The study adopts a discourse analytic approach to deconstruct and critically compare the assessment criteria outlined in documents that report on graduating teachers' classroom performance used at each teacher education institution. The results of the analysis reveal a different normative vision of graduating teachers in each country. The Omani graduate pre-service teachers are likely to be 'a compliant student-trainee', whereas Australian graduate pre-service teachers are more likely to be 'professionally qualified to teach and classroom ready'. The findings are used to identify practices that may help to improve the current Omani approach to determining pre-service teachers' classroom readiness to be more credible in terms of valid and equitable assessment processes.*

### **Introduction**

A key contributing factor to the quality of pre-service teacher education programs is the school professional experience component (also known as the school practicum) because it provides students with experiential knowledge about the teaching profession inside and outside the classrooms (Chiang, 2008; Farrell, 2008; Kaldi, 2009). The school/classroom context provides the stage for pre-service teachers to demonstrate their ability to teach and for someone to evaluate their classroom 'performance'. In Australia, the school environment is where teacher education students demonstrate evidence of meeting the recently implemented national professional standards for graduating teachers that enable them to become a registered teacher. The school experience can often result in employment opportunities for students in their final year. This makes the school experience 'high stakes' for students which puts pressure on the assessment processes to be fair and valid.

This article reports on a study that examines how pre-service teachers enrolled in their final year of an education degree are assessed on their classroom performance in Australia and in

Oman. The study adopts a discourse-analytic approach to critically compare the assessment criteria outlined in documents that report on graduating teachers' classroom performance at Rustaq College of Applied Sciences (hereafter Rustaq College) in Oman, and at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia. The aim of the study is to analyse each set of assessment criteria to determine how they construct and position graduating teachers in terms of valued skills, knowledges and dispositions. The study compares these normative visions of graduating teachers and the set of social practices that constitute the school experience assessment process to identify practices that could form the basis of recommendations for reforming the phenomenon in Oman to make it more equitable and valid. As such the study is designed to respond to the following research questions:

- What discursive and social practices are used to assess the classroom performance of graduating pre-service teachers enrolled at Rustaq College in Oman and at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia?
- Which practices employed at Griffith University could be transposed to Rustaq College in Oman to enhance their system for evaluating their pre-service teachers' classroom performance?

The stimulus for this study was some perceived inadequacies and inequities in the graduating teacher assessment processes in Oman. In particular the lack of rationale for the criteria selected to assess classroom performance, the limited authority of the classroom supervising teacher in the process, the emphasis on English language speaking and the absence of the pre-service teacher's voice in negotiating the assessment outcomes. These issues were especially evident when one of the authors moved from Oman to undertake her doctoral studies at Griffith University in Queensland. Here she could observe how teacher education at Griffith employs a more consistent and equitable process for assessing the classroom performance of pre-service teachers. In contrast to Rustaq College, the assessment criteria used at Griffith University are clearly linked to the national professional standards for graduating teachers; the assessment process affords greater authority to the classroom/supervising teacher *and* the pre-service teacher; and the evaluation of a pre-service teacher's performance is transparent and negotiated. It became evident that the approach adopted at Griffith University had something to offer teacher education in Oman. To better understand how the two systems differ, a discourse analytic approach is adopted by this study to deconstruct the assessment criteria outlined in the documents used to evaluate and report on pre-service teachers' classroom performance. The rationale for this approach is that the assessment criteria represent what is valued in this set of social practices and the discursive practices employed in these 'texts' construct a particular vision of graduating teachers in each sociocultural context.

The study is significant in terms of its aim and its methodological approach. In relation to what the study aims to achieve, there is limited extant research that undertakes an international comparison of the school professional experience especially between a developing middle-eastern nation such as Oman, and a country with a well-developed system for certifying, registering and tracking teaching career trajectories such as Australia.

From a methodological perspective the study adopts an original approach by applying critical discourse analysis to the texts and the set of social practices associated with assessing pre-service teachers' classroom performance. In particular this study adapts Gee's (2011) "seven building tasks" model for analyzing discourse as a unique method for understanding how language and social practices are used to construct and position pre-service teachers in considerably different sociocultural contexts in Australia and Oman. Further, the information gained from this study will potentially benefit teacher education programs in Oman as practices identified as efficacious for assessing pre-service teachers' readiness to teach will be used to develop recommendations for improving the system currently in use at Rustaq College. In addition, this study could contribute to a broader project for reforming the system of qualifying pre-service teachers across Oman as well as in neighbouring Gulf Cooperation Council Countries (GCCC) which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) that share some similarity across their socio-cultural contexts. In other words, this study may function as a pilot project for more expansive analyses of international practices around assessment and certification of teachers that informs major change in this set of social practices in Oman and in neighboring GCCC.

In the next section, the study is situated in relation to relevant research and literature around the trend towards establishing teacher professional standards and how these are applied in teacher education programs using Australia as a case study. Following this the discourse analytic approach adopted by this study is rationalized and explained before the results of applying this methodology to the assessment texts are outlined. The discussion of these results is a critical analysis of the discourse and social practices in their respective sociocultural contexts. The article concludes by examining how the results of the study can inform improvements to the Omani system along with limitations of the study and further research that it could generate.

### **From teacher competence to teacher professionalism**

Teaching and learning are complex processes that are still not fully understood and so the concept of what constitutes an effective classroom teacher is dynamic because it is dependent on our understanding of how learning occurs. For example in the early 1900s when learning was thought to be a passive process, a 'good' teacher was equated with a normative view of 'goodness' which meant that teacher attributes such as honesty, dedication and friendliness were valued as much as their ability to discipline students and manage the classroom in an authoritarian manner (Killen, 2013). Conceptions of effective teaching changed during the 1920s with the growing acceptance of behavioral psychology, a field that shifted the focus of educational research to observable teacher behaviors that stimulated students to learn. This behaviorist conception of effective teaching is closely linked with the competency model for assessing teacher performance that came to prominence in late 1960s and early 1970s (Adams, 1996) because both assume that teaching can be broken down to particular behaviors that can be identified, isolated, demonstrated and measured.

A distinguishing feature of the competency approach to measuring teacher effectiveness is the demonstration of competence through a 'performance' that occurs *in situ*. What constitutes

competence however is unclear and seems dependent on whether the observed behavior is viewed as attributable to the teacher, to the performance or to both. For instance, Boyatzis (1982) explains competence as “underlying characteristics of an individual which is crucially related to effective or superior performance” (p. 64). Whereas Whitty and Willmott (1991) define teacher competence as characterized by an ability to perform a task satisfactorily according to predetermined criteria that encompass intellectual, cognitive and attitudinal dimensions. Later conceptions position teacher competence as one of three conceptual dimensions for judging teacher proficiency; the other two dimensions being teacher performance and teacher effectiveness (Westera, 2001). More recently Huntley (2008) explains teacher competence through five quite specific professional attributes including, “demonstration of thorough preparation, a sound knowledge base, effective classroom management, professional communication with a range of stakeholders, and an accurate sense of self-awareness” (p.125). Regardless of how teacher competence is understood, the competency movement was seen as a way of capturing and measuring teacher professional practice for improving the quality of teaching and teachers. The movement attracted considerable criticism during the 1990s, “particularly in relation to their potential to render teaching a technical activity with little contextual meaning.” (Mayer et al., 2005, p.160). By the end of the 1990s, the discourse had shifted from competencies to standards. The shift to applying standards in teacher education was part of a broader reform to ‘new managerialism’ in education which appropriates practices and values from the business sector and functions in support of a neo-liberal economic agenda (Apple, 2001 cited in Tuinamuana, 2011, p. 77).

According to Mahony and Hextall (2000), the shift to professional teacher standards is also about enhancing teaching quality as well as providing appropriate professional learning opportunities for teachers throughout their careers. Several studies have demonstrated how teacher professional standards can define good practice and act as powerful vehicles, useful mechanisms and useful reference points for credential, appraisal and professional development (e.g., Darling-Hammond, 2001; Flowers and Hancock, 2003; Mayer et al. 2005). Hargreaves (2000) adds to this debate stating that a set of professional standards would positively increase teachers’ effectiveness and their public credibility. Australia is a country that has recently devised professional standards for teachers that are applied nationally for certifying and registering graduate teachers, for accrediting teacher education programs, for providing promotional pathways for practicing teachers and for generating professional development opportunities for the profession. As this initiative is still in its early phase of implementation, it is considered worthy of closer examination to establish how these professional standards operate in assessing and certifying graduating teachers.

### **Professional standards and teacher education: Australia as a case study**

The Australian education system has recently undergone major reforms to become a unified, national program aimed at excellence and equity in education for all Australian children. Quality teaching is identified as an essential element for young Australians to gain the benefit of a high quality education (Hattie, 2003). Based on this belief the *Australian Professional*

*Standards for Teachers* (or APST) were devised by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (hereafter AITSL) in 2009 and endorsed by all Australian state Ministers for Education the following year. According to the AITSL (2014), the standards

...provide a framework that makes clear the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers' careers. They present a common understanding and language for discourse between teachers, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public.

This statement indicates some of the broader implications of standards for the teaching profession. More specific applications of the APST standards are outlined by AITSL (2014) as informing professional development, as criteria for assessing teaching capacity, and as the basis for a professional accountability model. As to the latter role, Mayer et al. (2005) had earlier raised concerns in relation to the use of the teaching standards for accountability purposes and regulation of teacher's work in Queensland. More recently, Tuinamuana (2011) questioned the design and implementation of the APST in terms of teacher 'ownership' in this process. Nelson (2013) asks whether the standards "...will ultimately lead to improving student outcomes and the extent to which they are hoped to do so." (p. 21). The implications of the national standards for pre-service teacher education are also of concern in relation to the constraints they place on the design of curriculum and their ability to truly represent the complexity of teaching (Santoro et al. 2012). This study complements these broader critiques of the APST and their implementation by narrowing in on the standards outlined for the *Graduate* level of career progression, examining their application to assess, evaluate and report pre-service teachers' professional performance. More specifically, this study examines how the standards are employed in the school professional experience component of the primary teacher education program at Griffith University. Therefore, it is important to understand the stated role of this set of professional standards and how they are being applied in teacher education across Australia including Griffith University.

According to AITSL (2014) the *Graduate Standards* underpin the accreditation of initial teacher education programs and enable graduates who meet the standards to qualify for teacher registration in each state and territory. In an interim report on the evaluation of the implementation of the APST (AITSL, 2013) the top two reported uses of these standards by pre-service teachers relate to university-based assignments and use during practicum (AITSL, 2013, p. 24). At Griffith University, the *Graduate Standards* provide the basis of the observation and reporting tool for assessing pre-service teacher performance during their school professional experience. This study examines these standards as more than "a public statement of what constitutes teacher quality" (AITSL, 2014). In this context the standards constitute an assessment text, imbued with power and authority because of their role in assessing and certifying graduate teachers.

It is therefore considered that analyzing these texts and the contexts in which they are applied will reveal how the *Graduate Standards* and the social practices around assessing pre-service teachers positions and constructs different stakeholders in terms of agency, equity and effective practice.

## Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative approach, in particular discourse analysis. The main research focus is on how the assessment criteria designed to measure pre-service teachers' classroom performance constructs their professional identity, and how the assessment process positions them in relation to other stakeholders. The goal is to compare the discursive and social practices employed at Griffith University and Rustaq College used to assess pre-service teachers and critically examine the normative vision of a graduating teacher that these construct in each context. Another goal is to identify effective practices for assessing graduating teachers that could be employed in Oman to improve its system for certifying pre-service teachers. This section outlines the research methodology employed to achieve the goals of the study. It begins with a description of contemporary education in Oman to situate the study in its rightful context. Then the professional experience component of the teacher education program at Rustaq College is described and compared with its counterpart at Griffith University. Following this, Gee's (2011) 'ideal' discourse model is explained along with its adaptation for this study to deconstruct the assessment criteria outlined in the assessment texts used for evaluating pre-service teachers' classroom performance.

The Sultanate of Oman is a developing country which is relatively new in embracing English Language Teaching (ELT). Contemporary education in Oman began on a small scale in 1970 when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos came to the throne. Until recently, Oman has employed mostly expatriate expertise in its education system, and particularly for the teaching portfolios associated with English as a Second Language (ESL). The recruitment process for English language teachers is complicated and hiring and retaining qualified experts has until recently proven extremely challenging as Omani English teachers still do not have the professional capacity to assume these responsibilities. The highly centralized system adopted by Oman has led to a high turnover and indifference among the recruited expatriates and this exacerbates the state of instability in the education system. Another side-effect of this centralized education system is a slow pace of change because once procedures or policies are adopted, they require endorsement by central authorities to modify or replace them and experience shows that generally initiatives are often turned down before they even trialed. Therefore, it is unsurprising that there has not been any practical attempt to modify the process for certifying Omani teachers at Rustaq College since 2004.

Pre-service teachers at Rustaq College undertake their school professional experience in the final year of their degree program. This occurs one day per week for 15 weeks during the first semester and increases to two days per week for 15 weeks in the second semester – a total of 45 days. The system of awarding the final grade to pre-service teachers involves three assessors with each allocated a percentage of the total. The college supervisor (an academic employed at Rustaq College) is the main assessor who controls 80% of the final mark. The remaining 20% is split equally between the school principal and the cooperative teacher (classroom teacher supervising the student). By comparison, school professional experience at Griffith University is undertaken throughout the degree program and amounts to a total of 100 days in the classroom (the distribution of days is shown below in Table 1). As explained previously, pre-service teachers at Griffith University are assessed through a comprehensive set

of criteria that are based on the APTS. For the purpose of this study the report used for assessing Griffith pre-service teachers' performance during their final practicum is analyzed for comparison with the equivalent assessment and reporting documents employed at Rustaq College. The Griffith final report is completed by the school supervising teacher in conference with the pre-service teacher. A university liaison officer may assist in this process and the school principal may observe the pre-service teacher if requested but neither of these people have a role in final assessment.

<b>School placement time and duration in Griffith</b>	<b>Teaching practicum during the Academic year</b>		<b>Number of days in schools</b>
<b>Griffith University professional experience and learning (PX)</b>	<b>Fir st year</b>	<b>Professiona l experience 1</b>	<b>15 days</b>
	<b>Se cond year</b>	<b>Professiona l experience 2</b>	<b>15 days</b>
	<b>Th ird year</b>	<b>Professiona l experience 3</b>	<b>20 days</b>
	<b>Fo urth year</b>	<b>Professiona l experience 4 &amp; Internship</b>	<b>20 days  30 days</b>

**Table 1: The professional experience program outline at Griffith University**

Significant differences exist between the school professional experience component at each institution. Within these different contexts sit two vastly different texts for assessing pre-service teachers' classroom readiness. The main data source for this study are these documents that outline the assessment criteria against which graduating pre-service teachers are assessed on their classroom performance during their final school professional experience. The documents were obtained from the School of Educational and Professional Studies at Griffith University and from the Department of English Language and Literature at Rustaq College of Applied Sciences in Oman. Table 2 below lists the assessment criteria outlined in each document.



Griffith assessment criteria for pre-service teachers	Rustaq assessment criteria for pre-service teachers
<p><i>Professional knowledge and practice: teaching and learning</i>            Planning and preparation of lesson            demonstrates a working knowledge of the curriculum in the early years            demonstrates the ability to plan single lessons moving to a sequence of lessons            uses accurate literacy skills in planning            uses accurate numeracy skills in planning  <i>Teaching skills</i>            demonstrates the ability to deliver a sequence of lessons independent of interventions by the supervisor teacher            demonstrates the ability to identify and apply appropriate transition strategies to enhance teaching/learning time            demonstrates a range of strategies to include all learners in the class            uses accurate literacy skills during teaching            uses accurate numeracy skills during teaching</p> <p><i>Professional practice: relationships</i>            Communicating with students            consistently gives clear and assertive instruction in a professional manner;            applies a range of positive/proactive and reactive strategies for managing behavior            routinely checks for understanding            consistently provides effective questioning techniques            provides effective feedback in writing and verbally to individual students on their learning</p> <p><i>Communicating with parents</i>            demonstrates knowledge of the strategies the school and learners use to involve parents/carers in the learning of their children            demonstrates knowledge of the ethical use of ICTs in relation to communication with students and parents/carers</p>	Supervisor/cooperative teacher evaluation of graduates based on:
	<p><i>Personality</i>            having self-confidence            using a clear voice  <i>Language Proficiency</i>            uses language accurately and fluently            uses language appropriate to students' level  <i>Lesson Preparation</i>            states clear lesson aims            uses effective teaching strategies            applies appropriate timing  <i>Instruction</i>            uses pre-teaching effectively            presents the new lesson efficiently            provides students with enough practice            demonstrates skills in questioning            provides students with appropriate reinforcement            provides students with appropriate feedback            gives clear instructions            utilizes teaching aids effectively            distributes participation fairly among students            checks students' understanding  <i>Classroom management and achievement of aims</i>            maintains appropriate classroom behavior            offers assistance to students during activities            achieves lesson aims</p>
	School principal evaluation of graduates based on:-

<p>has become fully informed of the importance of working sensitively and confidentially with parents/carers</p> <p><i>Demonstrating professional behavior</i></p> <p>communicates with supervisors and colleagues</p> <p>demonstrates professional conduct e.g. maintains a standard of dress appropriate to the placement context, is punctual</p> <p>maintains professional relationships with students and colleagues</p> <p><i>Professional engagement: reflective practice, professional renewal</i></p> <p>Demonstrating commitment to professional learning</p> <p>follows supervisor's advice and attempts to implement suggestions</p> <p>participates where appropriate in out-of-class school activities</p> <p>fulfills the written requirements of the professional experience and has these documents available for the supervising teacher, school coordinator and university liaison</p> <p>demonstrates the development of critical reflective thinking</p>	<p>takes care of his/her general appearance</p> <p>cooperates well with his/her colleagues, teachers and the school administration</p> <p>respects school regulations and instructions</p> <p>accepts advice and direction from school administration</p> <p>learns from other school teachers' experiences</p> <p>participates in school activities</p> <p>punctual in daily attendance during practicum</p> <p>uses a variety of learning resources in lessons</p> <p>treats pupils in a professional manner</p> <p>open to criticism from the school administration</p>
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**Table 2: The assessment criteria for Griffith and Rustaq pre-service teachers**

### Analyzing the assessment criteria

This research adopts Gee's (2011) 'ideal' discourse analysis model to deconstruct the assessment criteria used to measure and report pre-service teachers' classroom performance. This model is based on the 'seven building tasks' of language: *Significance, Practices, Identities, Relationship, Politics, Connections and Sign system and knowledge*. These seven building tasks contribute to the understanding of how people communicate, and they illustrate the interdependence between society and language. The building tasks enable discourse analysts to ask specific sorts of questions about the language used in texts namely: situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, discourses, and conversations. Situated meanings and figured worlds are integrally related to how language works in context. While the situated meanings "are the specific meanings of words and phrases take on in specific contexts of use" (Gee, 2011, p.103), a figured world is "a model of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical about people, practices, things or interactions" (p.205). In terms of this research, the situated meanings are how the desired professional attributes of pre-service teachers are represented in the data (assessment criteria). The figured world is the normative vision of a graduating teacher constructed in each context by the assessment criteria.

Social languages and discourses construct ways of enacting identities and practices. They are used to construe what identities and practices are being enacted and built in a written or spoken discourse. So, social languages guide the seven building tasks through using cues or clues to present different social identities. Social languages are a way to uncover how discourse works in society to enact significant identities and practices. In addition, discourses are ways of "acting, interacting, valuing, knowing, believing and using things, tools, and technologies at appropriate times and places" (Gee, 2011, p.109). With regard to this research, the analysis aims to reveal how the identities and teaching practices of graduating pre-service teachers are constructed by the discourse in the assessment documents and procedures.

This comparative analysis of the assessment criteria only uses six of Gee's building tasks with the exclusion of analyzing *Connections*. This decision is based on Gee's (2011) suggestion that not all things are inherently related or connected to each other and this is assumed to be true with respect to this study. The documents being analyzed for comparison are linked by purpose only and they originate in two vastly different geographic, economic and sociocultural contexts which influences the language choices in each text. Therefore rather than compare contexts, the analysis must move between each text and its respective context to better understand how the discourses and social practices construct and position graduating teachers. The six building tasks and Gee's questions for guiding the discourse analysis are shown in Table 3 (below). Beneath each guiding question is the modified version (shown in italics) for this study that better identifies each aspect of the data that the analysis is focused on.

A selection of Gee's building tasks	discourse analysis questions
Significance	How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways? <i>How do the documents set up pre-service teacher's professional attributes to be significant or not and in what ways?</i>
Practices	What activities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e. get others to recognize as going on?) <i>What activities are pre-service teachers engaged in?</i>
Identities	What identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e. get others to recognize as operative)? <i>What knowledge, attributes or skills, and dispositions are pre-service teachers required to demonstrate?</i>
Relationship	What sort of relationship is this piece of language seeking to enact with others (present or not)? <i>Who/what do pre-service teachers relate to and how?</i>
Politics	What perspective on social goods is this piece of language communicating (what is taking to be normal, good, proper, appropriate, valuable, the way things are, the way things ought to be, high status or low status)? <i>Who has the power in this situation?</i>
Sign system and knowledge	How does this piece of language privilege or dis-privilege specific sign system or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief? <i>How do the documents privilege English language skills since the pre-service teachers will be English teachers?</i>

Table 3: Analytical framework based on Gee's ideal discourse model (adopted from Gee, 2011, p.17-19)

## Findings

In addition to framing the analysis, Gee's model is also used to frame the following discussion of the results of the discourse analysis.

**Significance:** How do the documents set up pre-service teacher's professional attributes to be significant or not and in what ways?

Significance in these texts is indexed in the layout of the documents, especially in the headings, their focus, and the inclusion and exclusion of certain professional attributes. Significance is also evident in discursive devices such as repetition and lexical choice. The layout of the assessment criteria in each text suggests that they are listed in order of priority from top to bottom. Therefore, a simple comparison of the order of listing of the assessment criteria should signify which criteria are considered more important in each context. For example, the Griffith assessment criteria list 'planning and preparation of lesson' first under the category of *Professional knowledge and practice*. Here the assessor is looking for indicators such as knowledge of the curriculum, content knowledge of single lessons moving to a sequence of

lessons, and literacy and numeracy skills in planning. At Rustaq College ‘lesson preparation’ is third on the list of criteria and the focus is on lesson aims, teaching strategies and timing. This arrangement could suggest that single lesson preparation is considered desirable at Rustaq whereas the Griffith document emphasizes lesson preparation over a longer time span.

When the focus is on teaching there is also a contrast in how this practice is understood at each institution. In the Griffith document, ‘Teaching skills’ is listed as the second significant assessment criteria with demonstrable indicators being delivery of a sequence of lessons; transition strategies; a variety of strategies to include all learners; and literacy and numeracy skills during teaching. The equivalent criteria for Rustaq College is listed in fourth place as ‘instruction’ and is broken down into a range of indicators including pre-teaching the lesson, the student (mentioned three times), skill in questioning, instruction, teaching aids, participation and students’ understanding. So again, the analysis highlights a focus at Rustaq on the minutiae of classroom ‘instruction’ whereas at Griffith, ‘teaching’ is a much more holistic experience.

Significance is also highlighted by any absence of particular categories. When the two documents are held up for comparison it is evident that ‘communicating’ (with students, colleagues and with parents/caregivers), and a ‘professional’ disposition, are valued characteristics of graduating teachers at Griffith but not so at Rustaq. These attributes are absent from the Rustaq assessment criteria and are replaced by traits such as ‘personality’, ‘language proficiency’ and ‘classroom management and achievement’. The indicators for these traits are quite specific behaviors such as confidence, clarity of voice, language, classroom behavior, student assistance and lesson aims.

Another significant difference at Rustaq is the inclusion of ten extra assessment criteria applied by the school principal for assessing pre-service teachers’ classroom performance. The focus of this set of criteria is personal characteristics which are open to subjective interpretation. For example, the assessable indicators include things such as appearance, cooperation with others, respecting school regulations, accepting advice, learning from school teachers, participating in school activities, being punctual, treatment of pupils, and openness to criticism from school administration. These criteria appear to be a substitute for the notion of professionalism found in the Griffith document. Here, it is worth reiterating for Rustaq students, the principal and cooperative teacher are assigned a small percentage of their total mark while the university-based supervisor is allocated 80% of the total. At Griffith only the classroom-based supervising teacher evaluates the pre-service teachers’ performance.

The analysis has so far kept the focus on the macro-linguistic and semiotic structures of each document to gather some insight into the priorities of the assessment process at each institution. Now the focus drills down to the microlinguistic features of each text that have been explicated via a clausal analysis that aimed to reveal how the discourse constructs the ‘ideal’ graduate teacher in each context. The language used in the assessment criteria to describe pre-service teachers and their performance is outlined in Table 4 (below).

Griffith document	<b>Adjectivals</b>	Rustaq document	<b>Adjectivals</b>
	working; accurate (x4); ethical; professional (x3); critical and reflective; clear and assertive; effective (x2)		clear (x2); effective; appropriate (x4); general; professional; new
	<b>Adverbials</b>		<b>Adverbials</b>
	routinely; consistently (x2); fully; sensitively and confidentially; verbally		accurately and fluently; effectively (x2); efficiently; fairly; well

**Table 4: Lexical descriptors of pre-service teachers in each document**

The findings here show that Griffith pre-service teachers' classroom performance is predominantly described as accurate, professional, effective and consistent. In contrast, Rustaq pre-service teachers' classroom performance is listed mostly as appropriate, clear and effective. In the Griffith document, 'professional' is used with reference to personal conduct and to relationships with students and colleagues whereas the term is only used once in the Rustaq document to indicate how pupils should be treated. The Rustaq document seems to prefer the term 'appropriate' to describe how pre-service teachers provide 'feedback', and 'reinforcement', apply 'timing', and manage 'classroom behavior'. This term is ambiguous and therefore open to interpretation.

The Griffith document collocates 'accuracy' four times with teaching, and planning to teach, the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Whereas 'accurate' is used only once in relation to the language skills of Rustaq pre-service teachers. There is an emphasis on Griffith pre-service teachers' continuous behaviors in the classroom, through using the adverbs 'consistently' and 'routinely', while there is no emphasis of continuous behavior in the Rustaq document. Rather, there is some emphasis on pre-service teachers having 'clear' and 'effective' behavior in relation to lesson planning, voice, and the use of teaching strategies and aids.

The repetitive use of particular words in the assessment criteria is the final indicator of significance in the Griffith and Rustaq assessment criteria. For instance, in the Griffith document, the term 'demonstrates' is used frequently which is unsurprising as these clauses are designed to detail what evidence the pre-service teacher must show (demonstrate) to meet each assessment criterion. In the Rustaq criteria the term 'demonstrates' is used only once, whereas the term 'uses' is repeated often in relation to language, clarity of voice, and other attributes. However, when it comes to learning resources, the language positions Rustaq teachers as dependent on other things to teach and are rarely construed as being able to demonstrate their teaching ability as independent beings.

#### **Practice: What activities are pre-service teachers engaged in?**

The practices that pre-service teachers are expected to demonstrate in the classroom are revealed through a transitivity analysis of each clause in the documents. Here the analysis uncovers the material, behavioral, and verbal processes that graduating teachers are engaged in

These represent the things pre-service teachers are supposed to do, the way they should behave and the people they should talk to during their school practicum and are outlined in Table 5 (below).

Processes	Material	Behavioral	Verbal
<b>Griffith document</b>	gives, applies, checks, provides and fulfills	uses (x4), follows, participates	communicates
<b>Rustaq document</b>	applies, provides (x3), gives, distributes, checks, offers, presents	uses (x6), utilizes, takes care, cooperates, respects, accepts, learns, participates, and treats	states

**Table 5: A comparison of material, behavioral, and verbal processes**

This comparison shows that both Rustaq and Griffith pre-service teachers engage in activities that tend to mimic what ‘real’ teachers do. For example ‘gives’, ‘provides’, ‘checks’, ‘uses’ and ‘participates’ are all processes expected of a regular classroom teacher. The main difference between the two contexts is found in the behavioral processes which indicate that Rustaq pre-service teachers should be subservient and compliant to the Omani school system. Terms such as ‘takes care’, ‘cooperates’, ‘respects’, ‘accepts’, and ‘learns’ all suggest that these pre-service teachers need to show respect and are highly dependent on the school personnel for achieving their goals. For Griffith teachers there is some idea of ‘following’ the teacher mentor however there is not quite the suggestion of such an unequal power relation between these two stakeholders. It is interesting to note that neither institution has the expectation that pre-service teachers engage in a lot of communication considering this is the main premise of teaching.

**Identities: What knowledge, attributes or skills, and dispositions are pre-service teachers required to demonstrate?**

To understand how the language used in the assessment criteria constructs these pre-service teachers’ professional identities it is necessary to look at the relational processes revealed by the transitivity analysis as this will identify the attributional expectations of the Griffith and Rustaq pre-service teachers (see Table 6 below). What this data clearly shows is that Griffith pre-service teachers are expected to demonstrate a higher number of attributes. Also highlighted in the data is that pre-service teachers from Rustaq College are not expected to demonstrate either pedagogical knowledge or content/subject knowledge in the classroom but are expected to be ‘punctual’, ‘maintain appropriate behavior’ in the classroom and have ‘self-confidence’. On the other hand, the attributes that Griffith pre-service teachers are required to demonstrate are specific teaching behaviors that are observable and measurable such as ‘plan and deliver a sequence of lessons’, ‘have a range of inclusive teaching strategies’ and to ‘engage in ongoing

critical and reflective thinking'. Another significant aspect of this data is that Rustaq students are required to be 'open to criticism from the school administration' which seems unfair when there exists a power differential that would constrain any opportunity to negotiate with school authorities.

	<b>Identities</b>		
	<b>Knowledge</b>	<b>Attributes or skills</b>	<b>Dispositions</b>
<b>Griffith document</b>	<p>demonstrates a working knowledge of the curriculum in the early years;</p> <p>demonstrates Knowledge of the strategies of teacher and school use to involve parents/carers in the learning of their children;</p> <p>demonstrates knowledge of the ethical use of ICTs</p>	<p>demonstrates the ability to plan single lessons moving to a sequence of lessons;</p> <p>demonstrates the ability to deliver a sequence of lessons independent of intervention by the supervisor teacher;</p> <p>demonstrates the ability to identify and apply appropriate transition strategies to enhance teaching/learning time;</p> <p>demonstrates a range of strategies to include all learners in the class;</p> <p>demonstrates the development of critical reflective thinking</p>	<p>demonstrates Professional conduct (e.g. maintain a standard of dress appropriate to the placement context, is punctual);</p> <p>maintain professional relationship with students and colleagues</p>
<b>Rustaq document</b>		<p>having self-confidence</p> <p>demonstrates skills in questioning</p>	<p>maintain appropriate classroom behavior;</p> <p>is punctual in daily attendance during practicum</p> <p>is open to criticism from the school administration</p>

**Table 6: Griffith and Rustaq pre-service teachers' knowledge, attributes or skills and dispositions**

**Relationships: Who/what do pre-service teachers relate to and how?**

The analysis reveals that Griffith pre-service teachers are expected to build and maintain professional relationships with student and colleagues and to communicate with parents and caregivers. In contrast, pre-service teachers at Rustaq College are not expected to have overt professional relationships with members of the school and there are no criteria for assessing their ability to professionally engage or work with parents or carers. Instead, the language used around relationships in the Rustaq document includes phrases such as 'cooperate with colleagues' and 'learn from other school teachers' which, as already mentioned, positions the pre-service teachers as dependent and subservient to these other parties.



**Politics: Who has the power in this situation?**

The language used in the assessment criteria has highlighted differential positioning of pre-service teachers such that those from Rustaq College are deemed subservient to school staff whereas those at Griffith have some parity with their teaching colleagues. The allocation of power in this situation is better understood by examining the social practices associated with the assessment of pre-service teachers during their school practicum. Examining these more closely reveals that power is allocated differently and a different set of personnel is involved in each assessment system. For example, the system at Rustaq College allocates 10% of the final grade to the school principal, and 10% to the cooperating (classroom) teacher, while the university-based supervisor teacher is allocated the remaining 80% of the total mark. At Griffith University the supervising teacher (the classroom teacher) is the only assessor involved in the process although the principal and other school administrators may formatively assess pre-service teachers for the purpose of providing feedback. This situation can create its own problems because of the conflicting roles of the supervising teacher who is mentor and assessor. However, the Griffith system does afford the pre-service teacher more agency because they are expected to participate in discussions about their teaching performance and contribute to the evaluation process. For example, their signature is required on their final report and they have the right to question their final evaluation before signing the document. On the other hand, Rustaq pre-service teachers have no voice in the assessment discussion and very little agency in the entire evaluation process as this is considered a confidential matter.

**Sign system and knowledge: How do the documents privilege English language skills since the pre-service teachers will be English teachers?**

Being skilled at planning and teaching literacy and numeracy is a significant aspect of the assessment criteria for Griffith pre-service teachers. This is unsurprising based on the current emphasis in Australian primary schools on basic skills and the high-stakes, standardized testing regime that measures literacy and numeracy performance of children in Grades 3, 5, 7 and 9 annually. Pre-service primary school teachers are therefore expected to demonstrate advanced literacy and numeracy skills to teach and model these skills for their students. In Oman, English is the official language and so English language proficiency is considered a significant attribute that Rustaq pre-service teachers must demonstrate. Prioritizing this attribute is evident in it being listed second in the Rustaq College document and in the use of IELTS test results as a final determinant in credentialing Omani English teachers.

**Discussion of the findings**

In this section the findings are discussed with respect to the questions that guided the research for this study. To reiterate these the study is trying to determine, 1) what discursive and social practices are to assess the classroom performance of graduating pre-service teachers

enrolled at Rustaq College in Oman and at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia?; and, 2) which practices employed at Griffith University could be transposed to Rustaq College in Oman to enhance their system for evaluating their pre-service teachers' classroom performance?

When placed in juxtaposition, the two documents designed to assess pre-service teachers' classroom performance use language that constructs quite different normative visions of a graduating teacher in each country. These different constructions of an 'ideal' teacher are discussed below. This discussion begins by capturing the normative vision of graduating teachers in each country. Then we explain how Gee's "Seven building Tasks" model has enabled us to explicate this vision from the discourse used to construct the assessment criteria. The discussion concludes by re-situating the findings in their respective contexts.

The analysis of the assessment criteria used at Rustaq College in Oman reveal an image of a graduating teacher who is depicted as a compliant, student-trainee that is proficient in English and has an air of self-confidence. Their expected teaching skills are not categorized according to pedagogical or content knowledge nor is there an expectation of being able to prepare and teach any more than one lesson at a time. There is no expectation that these pre-service teachers will maintain professional relationships with other members of the school and its wider community. The main focus is on how pre-service teachers can control classroom behavior, manage a lesson within the timeframe and be compliant to and respectful of the school rules. As prospective teachers, their professional attributes are often outlined in ambiguous terms which are open to interpretation. This is problematic for a couple of reasons. Firstly, final year teacher education students cannot easily identify the aspirational goals they are trying to attain making it difficult to ascertain the attributes of a proficient teacher. Secondly, the lack of transparent and explicit criteria constrains their ability to monitor their progress towards graduation.

The results from analyzing the Griffith assessment criteria reveal a vision of a graduating teacher who is professionally qualified to teach and classroom ready. Griffith pre-service teachers are expected to graduate with the requisite pedagogical and content knowledge, effective strategies for preparing and teaching a series of lessons, and to have advanced literacy and numeracy skills. In addition to that, they are expected to build and maintain positive working relationships with colleagues and with parents, carers and other members of the wider school community. Above all, Griffith teacher education students graduate with a comprehensive picture of the attributes and the expected quality of performing these attributes because their evaluation is based on the AITSL (2011) professional standards for graduates which enables them to monitor their performance as they progress through their degree program.

Gee's (2011) model of discourse analysis has proved to be a powerful tool for deconstructing the assessment criteria used in each country to capture what a graduating teacher 'looks like' when they complete their teacher education program. The model reveals how purposefully selected language and social practices are used to construct the identities of pre-service teachers and position them in their respective contexts. The assessment criteria used in Griffith's system affords pre-service teachers a more professional stance in the sense that the activities, relationships and pedagogical practices they engage in are equivalent to an experienced classroom teacher. With regard to their constructed identities, Griffith pre-service teachers are expected to demonstrate their content and pedagogical knowledge and their

advanced literacy and numeracy skills. Additionally, the fact that these pre-service teachers having an active role in the assessment process and decision-making elevates their status and validates their contribution. On the other hand, the discourse employed in the Rustaq assessment criteria constructs a very different vision of a pre-service teacher that is still in training and not yet considered 'professional'. Rustaq pre-service teachers are positioned as classroom controllers and as compliant, dependent on resources and subservient to the Omani school system. This positioning is reinforced by criteria that reward punctuality and being open to criticism from school administration and that does not recognize any collegial or other relationships with members of the school community. A significant point of difference in the Rustaq context is that these pre-service teachers are required to be proficient in English however this is to be expected of students training to teach English.

To gain a deeper understanding of why these different visions of graduating teachers exist, it is necessary to re-situate the results of the discourse analysis in their respective contexts. The contextual factors that influence these different normative visions of Australian and Omani pre-service teachers are the final focus of this discussion.

The APST currently being implemented across Australia are considered a major contributor to the differential positioning of pre-service teachers in each country. Griffith's assessment criteria for evaluating pre-service teachers are aligned directly with the standards for *Graduating Teachers* as these, "...are a public statement of what constitutes a teacher quality" (AITSL, 2011, p. 2). This is illustrated by the detailed indicators that outline the quality of professional performance expected for each criterion and which function as a guide for development and for evaluation. The Griffith assessment criteria can therefore be described as fair, reliable and valid which, according to Killen (2005), are the three most significant characteristics of 'good' assessment practice. The Rustaq document, on the other hand, consists of general assessment criteria, most of which are ambiguous, subjective and open to interpretation. There are no detailed indicators to guide and specify the expectations of a graduating teacher.

A second factor behind these different normative visions in each country is variations in assessment systems. Griffith pre-service teachers have to produce evidence in a range of formats that demonstrates that they have met the assessment criteria. This is on top of their evaluation based on classroom observations. This evidence is compiled into a portfolio of artifacts that clearly demonstrates that the pre-service teacher has the wherewithal to teach. Assessing students this way enables them to demonstrate a range of professional competencies and to be confident they can fulfill the expectations of a graduating teacher. This assessment approach also minimizes bias because it enhances the construct validity of the assessment. Compared with Griffith's assessment system, Rustaq pre-service teachers are assessed using criteria which are not indicators of measurable classroom performance. Furthermore this criteria-based system is then overridden by a normative system that calculates a numerical mark that is designed to rank pre-service teachers for comparative purposes. Quantifying classroom observation data in this way further undermines the validity of the assessment system. This narrow approach to determining a graduating teachers' suitability to teach does not adequately capture the universal attributes expected of a beginning teacher.

The third factor influencing the construction of these normative visions is the authoritative voice in the documents. In the Rustaq document, pre-service teachers have no agency or voice in assessment decisions that are made by three assessors, including the school principal. This is problematic as it increases the assessment stakes because of the principal's position of authority in hiring graduating teachers. By comparison, there is a notable presence of Griffith pre-service teachers in the evaluation process who engage in dialogue about their performance directly with their classroom supervising teacher. Other school personnel may observe and provide feedback on occasions but all of this is negotiated. Giving pre-service teachers a voice in assessing their own classroom performance helps their development as reflective practitioners. The same can be said of using assessment criteria that are qualified with standards descriptors that enable pre-service teachers to self-assess and monitor their performance (and ultimately also develop their skills in reflective practice). These elements suggest the Griffith approach is underpinned by "assessment for learning" whereas the Rustaq system is based on "assessment of learning" where it seems that reflective practice is not considered important.

The final factor that influences each country's vision of a graduating teacher is the transparency of the appraisal process. The Rustaq College system is strictly confidential involving only the three personnel assigned to assessing the pre-service teachers' performance. By comparison, the Griffith systems is transparent with explicit criteria and even the outcome is negotiable in discussions between the pre-service teacher and the mentor teacher responsible for the final report. The Rustaq pre-service teachers, on the other hand, never see their final performance scores. During the 45 days in the final year of their teaching practicum, the only time their progress is formatively assessed is when they receive informal feedback from the supervisor teacher.

### **Concluding remarks and recommendations**

The fact that the historical, cultural and social conditions favor the development of quality teachers in Australia in no way suggests that teacher education in Oman is doomed. It is worth noting, however, that the Ministry of Higher Education in Oman has recently taken drastic measures to re-constitute the pillars of a more reliable assessment system including the setting up of an Assessment Center. Teacher education lecturers with a strong assessment background have also been recruited and more pre-service teachers in Oman are encouraged to pursue research in this field. One of the aims of this study was to identify other practices that may add to these reforms in teacher education in Oman. Specifically, this study aimed to identify effective practices for assessing and developing quality teachers and these are listed below. These can form the basis for making recommendations to the relevant key personnel in Oman for improving their system for assessing their graduating teachers.

Effective practices in assessing pre-service teachers are:

1. Objectivity and explicit assessment criteria: using the APST *Graduate Standards* to develop the assessment criteria for pre-service teachers' classroom performance has meant

that they explicitly indicate what the observer is looking for and are subject to minimal interpretation. The recommendation is to revise the observational assessment tool at Rustaq College so that the criteria reflect current expectations of a quality teacher based on research and literature in the field. Put simply, more details should be included to indicate clearly what pre-service teachers are expected to do in the classrooms;

2. Professional engagement: social professional relationships in and outside schools should be integrated in the Rustaq assessment criteria, as this would raise the status of pre-service teachers in Omani schools and enable them to be recognized by their community as trustworthy, accountable and almost ready to teach;

3. Self-assessment and monitoring: Producing graduate teachers who can be reflective practitioners will assist in self-assessing and monitoring their progress during the professional experience and throughout their teaching profession. Giving Rustaq graduate students a voice in the assessment processes will help achieve that goal; and

4. Professional learning progress: Implementing a more authentic assessment system that includes a portfolio, in addition to the observational assessment tool, will enable Omani pre-service teachers' to not only demonstrate their progress but provide a valuable record of their achievements and enhance their critical reflective thinking. Most importantly, however the portfolio would create a more transparent and equitable system of assessing pre-service teachers' classroom readiness.

In closing, this study has some limitations and it is acknowledged that the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to any other context. The first of these limitations is restricting the methodology to analyzing the discourse and social practices associated with the phenomenon of assessing pre-service teachers in Oman and in Australia. While this does not diminish the significance of the study, it would be beneficial to support it with other data sources such as interviews with the pre-service teacher, the supervisor, the cooperative teacher and the principal who are all involved in the assessment process. This would provide some very different realities about this process that cannot be inferred from the discursive practices used in the relevant texts. Secondly, the focus of this study is only on the assessment criteria used for measuring pre-service teachers' classroom performance. To draw firm conclusions about pre-service teachers' professional attributes and classroom readiness, it would be beneficial for future research to incorporate other aspects of the assessment process. Despite these limitations, this research has indicated an imperative for personnel at Rustaq College in Oman to review their system of assessing and certifying pre-service teachers to ensure their assessment practices are more valid, transparent and equitable and brought into line with international best practice.

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