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“In LANTITE, No One Can Hear You Scream!” Student Voices of High-Stakes Testing in Teacher Education.

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Abstract: This article investigates pre-service teachers' experiences of undertaking LANTITE, a high-stakes literacy and numeracy test for initial teacher education students. In this mixed methods study, 189 initial teacher education students from 28 Australian universities participated in an online questionnaire, with 27 students going on to take part in semi-structured telephone interviews. Indicative findings give voice to those most impacted by the implementation of LANTITE in 2017, revealing student concerns about the processing and return of results, and test anxiety. This study provides a unique insight into the experiences of completing this high-stakes test.

Introduction

Change and reform are inseparable companions of education and schooling. Throughout the twentieth century, educational reforms focused on what to teach (curriculum content) (Aspland, 2006) and how to teach it (teaching approaches) (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Yeigh & Lynch, 2017). However, in recent times, political and economic factors have fueled changes in education, resulting in greater accountability for teachers and increased pressure for school and education providers to operate within a more commercial framework (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013; Timms et al., 2018).

The reform of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in Australia is one example of the response to recent drivers for change. Primarily driven and overseen by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), the national governing body for teacher standards, a national high-stakes Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Educators (LANTITE) was introduced in 2017. The stated aim of the test was to ensure graduates of initial teacher education courses would be in the top 30% of the Australian adult population for literacy and numeracy. The test is administered by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER). Some researchers suggest the test is part of a strategy to ensure standardisation and centralisation of schooling and education in Australia (Ball, 2016; Lingard, 2010; O'Meara, 2011).

This study involved data collection in 2019 and examined the range of pre-service teacher (PST) experiences of undertaking the tests. To date, no wide-scale studies have explored student perceptions of undertaking LANTITE and little is known about the experiences of the high-stakes test takers. Listening to the experiences of those who complete LANTITE will help understand the practical and affective dimensions involved for students, and consider ways in which they might be better supported through the process.

Background

The background for this paper is aligned to four main concepts which are of importance to this study; a broad overview of high-stakes testing, a brief history of LANTITE, an explanation of what LANTITE is, and student experiences of undertaking LANTITE.

High-Stakes Testing

High-stakes testing in education, refers to an assessment, or series of assessments, which hold a high degree of consequence for both the teacher and the student (Berliner, 2011). LANTITE is considered a high-stakes test because there are significant consequences in the test outcome for the candidate and the universities (and their teaching staff) who deliver ITE programs. Test scores are highly consequential for the candidate as they determine whether they will graduate from their ITE course (in some states of Australia) and ultimately whether or not they will be able to enter the profession of teaching.

The wave of popularity of high-stakes testing in education has stemmed from international practices, most notably in the USA and UK where both school students and PSTs are subjected to a wide range of high-stakes tests. LANTITE follows the trend of high-stakes testing requirements in Australia. These include the introduction in 2009 NAPLAN (National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy) a standardised test in Australian school students assessing literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, was introduced.

There are benefits to high-stakes testing; many professions have implemented licensure examinations or assessments to allow registration and professional practice. The National Research Council (2001) suggest that professions offering a licensure test are generally perceived to be more reputable than those professions who do not have licensure testing requirements. In some countries, the introduction of a licensure test for teachers has been a catalyst for salary increases for teachers (Angrist & Guryan, 2008).

The general consensus supporting the introduction of a high-stakes test in teaching is to ensure a particular standard in relation to teacher quality (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Defining teacher quality however, is problematic. Bahr and Mellor (2016) argue that determining the attributes of a quality teacher is difficult in our increasingly data dependent era and problematic to measure. High-stakes testing then offers policymakers and politicians a simplified mechanism to communicate success or failure of a required standard in relation to literacy and numeracy, thereby allowing government to maintain accountability in education and serve the agenda of improving teacher quality (Jones et al., 2003). League tables of student scores, school or educational institution performance are an easy, data-driven way to communicate testing success or failure, and have already pervaded mainstream media (Mockler, 2013).

Despite the advantages of high-stakes testing it is not without its challenges. Studies have highlighted a number of unintended consequences, including curriculum narrowing (Amrein-Beardsley et al., 2010; Berliner, 2011), an escalation in test anxiety (Baker-Doyle & Petchauer, 2015), and issues with the tests being fit for purpose (Bennett et al., 2006). Studies of high-stakes testing of PSTs conducted in the USA and UK have highlighted concerns relating to test biases (Albers, 2002; Bennett et al., 2006; Petchauer, 2015) and potential negative impacts on students (Baker-Doyle & Petchauer, 2015; McNamara et al., 2002; Petchauer et al., 2015). Australian studies have explored experiences of school children undertaking NAPLAN (Howell, 2012; Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2012; Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013), but the exploration of LANTITE and its consequences remain limited at present (Hall & Zmood, 2019; Wilson & Goff, 2019).

History of LANTITE

To inform the implementation of the teacher education framework created by AITSL, the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) was established in 2014 by the then Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, and later that year, *Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers* was released by TEMAG to chart a major reform agenda in initial teacher education. This report offered tangible outcomes and opportunities to improve various aspects of education, including teacher education. One of its key recommendations focused on the need to implement a mandatory literacy and numeracy test for graduates of teacher education programs.

The federal government provided a swift and decisive response to *Action Now*, rejecting recommendations to implement a minimum Australian Tertiary Admission Ranking (ATAR) for teaching, instead focusing on a range of measures focusing on assessment processes for teacher education comprising a broader range of characteristics a candidate should possess. In 2016 LANTITE, a licensure test for teachers, was implemented across Australia after being mandated by AITSL. From 2017 it became a condition of graduation that all ITE graduates must pass LANTITE in order to obtain teacher registration. However, interpretation of this condition has been left to the responsibility of state registering boards, with some boards choosing to mandate that any PST graduating in 2017 must have passed LANTITE and others adopting an approach which offers students commencing courses from 2017 the condition of passing LANTITE.

What is LANTITE?

LANTITE comprises two examinations: one for literacy and one for numeracy. Both tests provide quantifiable measures against a benchmarked standard. Each test is two hours in duration. The content of the questions, and the number of questions, vary with each testing window and, therefore, the score required to achieve the standard and the number of questions to be answered within each given test varies from session to session (Australian Council for Educational Research, 2017). Students have the option of undertaking the test at a designated testing centre (within the four, week-long testing windows per year) or via remote proctoring, whereby they access the test on their computer from an external location.

Student Experiences of LANTITE

Shifting landscapes and the commercialisation and marketisation of higher education has resulted in universities and higher education systems migrating towards the perspective of students as customers or consumers (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2014). This cultural shift has resulted in an increased interest in student experience and their voices in higher education with institutions actively engaging students in the research process and employing strategies that involve Students as Partners (SaPs) in research design, delivery and presentation (Bovill et al., 2011; Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Student voice, as an area of research, is gaining momentum and importance for higher education providers. However, many universities continue to engage with student experiences as a consumer feedback tool, utilising large scale surveys and big data (Kinchin & Kinchin, 2019) limiting student voice to a data source and legitimising commercial decision making in education systems (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2014). The systemic review conducted by Tan, Muskat and Zehrer (2016) identifies 5 main trends in research relating to quality of student experience in higher education and urges deeper research on quality of student experience beyond that of learning experiences.

Within the context of LANTITE and high-stakes testing in initial teacher education programs, few if any studies, privilege the student experience and listen to their voices, and this is where the focus of this study is positioned. Definitions of student experience in higher education have evolved from being solely related to students perceptions of academic experiences (Tan et al., 2016), through to a more

holistic ‘total life experience’ (Harvey & Knight, 1996) Complex and, at times, contradictory perspectives, student experience and giving voice to students should also consider their actions– what they do and do not do (Lygo-Baker et al., 2019) as well as considering the manner in which students are consulted and engaged. Within traditional educational systems, students are not in a position of power and are generally located in the lower levels of the educational hierarchy, resulting in the muffling and simplification of their experience and voice, ultimately disenfranchising students in systems designed to educate them.

International studies have explored the student voice of PSTs in relation to high-stakes testing, including perspectives relating to failure of tests (Bennett et al., 2006), preparation groups for tests (Baker-Doyle & Petchauer, 2015) and the effects of testing on future practice as a teacher (Okhremtchouk et al., 2009). In Australia, student voice has been well-explored in relation to NAPLAN (Howell, 2012; Mayes et al., 2019; Swain & Pendergast, 2018; Wyn et al., 2014), but given the recency of its introduction, to date, no research has been conducted on student experiences and perspectives in relation to LANTITE.

Given the significance of such a large-scale reform such as LANTITE, Fullan’s key question “what would happen if we treated the student as someone whose opinion mattered in the introduction and implementation of reform in schools?” (2001, p. 170) is integral to understanding the importance of the perspectives and experiences of students in education, in particular the voices of those undertaking initial teacher education. By framing students in a manner that allows them to consider themselves as heard in a dialogic process, the next generation of educators experience a more discursive process, assisting them to understand that their own future students have voices and should be engaged, not only in their learning but in the system that supports them to learn.

Method

This study employed a simultaneous mixed method design comprised of two separate phases (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). A pragmatic approach was selected to provide flexibility, in recognition that individual participants may have diverse perspectives and that student voice does not exist as a singular entity. Student experience can be complex and a mixed method approach offers a richer understanding of the experiences and voices of this group. Phase One involved participants completing a short online questionnaire, designed to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, and Phase Two involved in-depth semi-structured interviews which collected qualitative data. Phases were conducted concurrently, Phase One participants who opted into Phase Two were contacted between one day and two weeks later to arrange interviews, thus minimising the possibility of differing responses for individual participants as their memory of the experience alters over time.

A convergent design approach was used to merge the results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2015), this approach provided the benefit of being able to explore the different experiences of students. This also influenced the instrument design in both phases, by providing open-ended questions in Phase Two and avoiding leading questions to allow participants to share their voices in a way that was meaningful to them.

University ethics approval was obtained and all participants involved in this research were volunteers. Written informed consent was provided by participants prior to the commencement of data collection and pseudonyms have been utilised for the names of PSTs.

Participants

Participants were recruited via an established network of universities involved in initial teacher education, using a convenience sampling method. Due to the nature of the topic, some unplanned snowballing also occurred with participants referring others to partake in the study. Participants in the

study were volunteers and included any PSTs wanting to share their voice relating to LANTITE. A total of 189 PSTs undertaking initial teacher education studies from 28 different Australian universities took part in the study. However of these, 30 students did not indicate in the Phase One questionnaire whether or not they had attempted LANTITE and thus were omitted from these results. Whilst there is no data currently available on how many students have attempted or passed LANTITE, in 2017 AITSL reports that there were 17,338 PSTs completing or graduating from an initial teacher education course (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2020). This provides a broad indication of the number of students who will be undertaking LANTITE each year.

With the exception of the ACT, all states and territories of Australia were represented in the sample, including WA 49 (31%), Tasmania 26 (16%), NSW 23 (14%), Queensland 22 (14%), Victoria 22 (14%), SA 9 (6%) and NT 8 (5%).

A wide range of initial teacher education programs were represented in the study, as (Tab. 1) shows, with 66 (41%) participants undertaking a Secondary Education program and 58 (36%) enrolled in a Primary Education program. Both postgraduate and undergraduate programs had a relatively even distribution of representation 73 (46%) postgraduate and 86 (54%) undergraduate.

	Total n=159	Postgraduate	Undergraduate
Early Childhood	9 (6%)	1 (0.62%)	8 (5.03%)
Early Childhood & Primary	19 (12%)	5 (3.14%)	14 (8.81%)
Primary	58 (36%)	15 (9.43%)	43 (27.04%)
Primary & Secondary course combined	4 (3%)	2 (1.26%)	2 (1.26%)
Secondary	66 (41%)	49 (30.82%)	17 (10.69%)
Other	3 (2%)	1 (0.62%)	2 (1.26%)

Table 1: Participant Information, Current Course of Study

Phase One – Data Collection

Pre-service teachers were invited by email to participate in an online short answer questionnaire hosted by the survey platform SurveyGizmo. This questionnaire comprised of 13 short answer questions, taking approximately 15 minutes to complete. A range of question types including rating scales, multiple choice questions and short text responses were used. The questionnaire was open for an 8-week period commencing in February 2019. A total of 189 PSTs participated.

At the start of the online questionnaire, participants were asked to provide general demographic data, and asked to identify their experience or outcome of LANTITE including; PSTs who had passed, failed, still waiting for results, and those who had not yet attempted LANTITE. The following questions focused on direct and personal experiences of undertaking LANTITE. These questions sought feedback on the different stages of the testing journey as well as inviting participants to provide general feedback. At the conclusion of the Phase One questionnaire, participants were asked to provide a first name and phone number on which they could be contacted if they were willing to be involved in Phase Two of data collection.

Phase One – Analysis

Data collected from Phase One was imported into NVivo 12 to allow for queries and cross tabulations to be conducted. Analysis involved brief, simple descriptive statistics. A number of questions included in the online questionnaire contained qualitative data, which was analysed separately using NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International, 2020). A code book with thematic coding categories was developed after an initial review of responses. The initial review identified emergent themes and these were utilised as the basis of the themes within the code book. A second analysis using a final code book with a more thorough coding approach was undertaken to allow for thematic coding of responses.

Phase Two – Data Collection

From the 189 PSTs participating in Phase One, 27 PSTs opted-in to participate in Phase Two, a semi-structured telephone interview. Most participants were happy to undertake the interview at the time of the call, with only 4 participants requesting a call back at another time.

The semi-structured interview included 6 open-ended questions as well as an opportunity for participants to provide open-ended responses. The duration of interviews ranged from 6 minutes to 25 minutes. The first question asked students to share their story of LANTITE. Follow up questions encouraged students to identify both positive and negative aspects of the test, as well as allowing students to explore the value of undertaking LANTITE for them as a PST and future teacher. Questions focused on providing an opportunity for PSTs to share their experiences on LANTITE in an open way, allowing the students to focus on what was meaningful to them. Interviews were recorded with the consent of the PST to allow for accurate transcription at a later time.

Phase Two – Data Analysis

Transcripts were imported into NVivo12 for coding and further analysis. An inductive process was used to identify key themes and to develop a provisional start list of codes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative data was analysed using the conventions of Creswell's (2015) thematic content analysis and preserving the student voice by ensuring analysis was unobtrusive and non-reactive (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2014). An ongoing coding journal was maintained and referred to throughout the process. The first stage of coding used a range of descriptive and interpretive codes. After this, codes were then organised into themes and sub-themes as part of the second stage (Creswell, 2015). The code book for Phase Two utilised the same code headings as Phase One, to allow for future data merging and comparison of responses.

As part of the peer-reviewed ethics application process, content validity of the Phase One questionnaire and Phase Two interview questions were checked. A blind review of coding was undertaken by an independent researcher to determine inter-rater reliability. After providing the detailed codebook with definitions, and a meeting with the coder to discuss the coding process, three transcripts were double coded with an 87% match with the original coding. The 13% discrepancies were discussed and consensus reached. Discrepancies related to further clarity required in the codebook definitions for two of the codes which appeared to have similar definition. Once this clarification was provided, there were no other issues with coding reliability.

Results

The results below are initially described in relation to each phase respectively—Phase One and Phase Two—with a final description of the results using a thematic analysis, combining qualitative data from both phases. The inclusion of student pseudonyms when providing quotes further personalises the individual student voices in this research, whilst preserving their anonymity.

Phase One – Results

PSTs were asked to identify their relationship or experiences with LANTITE at the time of the questionnaire. A total of 78 (41%) participants had not attempted LANTITE for a variety of reasons such as not being ready to attempt it, being too early in course progression to complete the test and not being required to complete the test. Forty-one participants achieved the required standard for both the Literacy and Numeracy tests. A further 35 were waiting for results at the time of the questionnaire, 21 failed one of the components, whilst 12 participants had failed both. Two participants did not answer the question.

Students were then asked to rate their experiences of LANTITE at differing stages of the test using a choice of positive, negative or neutral. To ensure clarity of understanding about each stage of the test, a description was provided to PSTs as indicated below:

Pre LANTITE: *included experiences prior to the test, finding out about the processes involved, preparing/studying for the test and booking into the testing window.*

During LANTITE: *included experiences on the day/s of the tests.*

Post LANTITE: *included immediately after the test and waiting for the results.*

After self-rating each of the stages as either positive, negative or neutral, PSTs were given the opportunity to provide a short narrative on each stage of the test. The description in the narrative accounts were largely consistent with the rating they had provided. Tab. 2 shows students experiences of LANTITE at the different stages of the testing process as well as illustrative quotes from students at each stage. Initially, results were examined to determine if there was any difference in experiences (and at different stages of the test) based on whether or not the PST had passed or failed the test, however the self-rating remains relatively consistent amongst these result outcomes.

n=83	Pre-LANTITE	Illustrative quote	During LANTITE	Illustrative quote	Post LANTITE	Illustrative quote
Positive	(17) 20%	“Information in general was presented pretty clearly; I knew exactly what I was in for.” (Alex)	(22) 27%	“I knew exactly what to expect. It was test based and test rules. Positive experience.” (Sandi)	(14) 17%	“Fine. It took a while to get the results though.” (Gregory)
Neutral	(33) 40%	“Felt prepared and was unconcerned.” (Peter)	(24) 29%	“Nothing wrong with it, just wasn't great.” (Dom)	(26) 31%	“It was done. Tick. Hoop completed. Next hoop to jump through.” (Ed)
Negative	(33) 40%	“There was little information provided regarding the test and I felt very uncomfortable needing to complete it.” (Linley)	(37) 44%	“Worst hours of my life. I was so anxious and people around me kept getting up and finishing and I was really behind and ended up balling [sic] my eyes out as soon as I left.” (Jayde)	(43) 52%	“Results took longer than they should have to come out. Also, they should give you an exact score, not just a "you're in this section".” (Sam)

Table 2: Student Experiences of LANTITE at Different Stages of the Testing Process

Students who reported a negative experience during the test cited test anxiety (13) and the content/structure of the actual test (10) being the biggest challenges. More than half of the students indicated that the post-LANTITE stage was a negative experience 43 (52%), with the length of time waiting for results (21) and post-LANTITE test anxiety (10) being the greatest factors of concern described.

Phase One & Two – Results

Responses from both Phase One and Two were combined into overall themes and sub-themes. Illustrative quotes were selected for each of the themes, with a positive, neutral and negative experience quote selected from students. In maintaining connection with the individual student voice, each quote identifies each student. The results from the table below identifies the frequency with which both the themes and sub-themes were raised by participants at either Phase One or Phase Two.

Theme	Positive	Illustrative Quote	Neutral	Illustrative Quote	Negative	Illustrative Quote
Sub-themes						
On the day of the test n=198 (comments)	42	“Personally, I thought it was fun! Just like doing an IQ test.” (Donna)	14	“Well the whole process was very painless, I was fairly neutral towards it.” (Mike)	142	“When I sat down to do the test I had studied stuff I didn’t need to know.” (Bec)
Adjustments for special needs						
Remote testing invigilation						
Results						
Testing centre						
Length of test						
Testing window times						
Actual test content						
Cultural bias						
Self-efficacy n=6 (comments) I am competent	6 (100%)	“It’s nice to know that I am in the top 30th percentile of the population for literacy and numeracy.” (Donna)				
Relationships with others n=46 (comments)	8 (17%)	“[The University] are very conscious that this is a new requirement and so they hold the student’s hand through it, so to speak.” (Mike)	5 (11%)	“I also expect [to receive] support in the form of practice tests and such from my university.” (Lee)	33 (72%)	“Just like it just seems like there is not really any support for it... You just go to a website and sign up for it.” (Emma)
Communication with testing authority						
Peer support						
Relationship with University						
Wellbeing n=47 (comments)					47 (100%)	“As a student you already have time pressures, you already have stressors and financial demands... and to have this extra thing on top is a bit more stressful you know.” (Josephine)
Mental health						
Test anxiety						
External Environment n=11 (comments) Purpose	2 (18%)	“I can understand why I need to do it – I believe it is to show that I am competent at			9 (82%)	“Why are we paying this money to someone to say that we can do a little bit of

Relevance		what I am doing what I teach.” (Stephen)				maths and write some words?” (Ben)
Administration for the student n=70 (comments)	6 (9%)	“I found the administration side, so the booking of the test and getting to the venue, I didn’t find any stress with that, the communication was pretty simple and easy.” (Joshua)	3 (4%)	“Booking and all that was fine. Sort of treated like cattle as you were going through the process – like a number.” (Ben)	61 (87%)	“The cost. It is really cost prohibitive.” (Anita)
Costs to undertake test/s						
Blocking student graduation						
Logistics						
Inconsistent national requirement across registering authorities						
Total	64		22		292	

Table 3: Thematic Responses from Phase One & Two and Illustrative Quotes Relating to These Themes

PSTs described negative experiences on 292 occasions, outweighing the 64 positive experiences and 22 neutral experiences. Within the broad theme categories, there were some specific sub-themes that were more frequently alluded to in participants' descriptions; for example, under the Day of the test theme, the sub-theme of Results was described on 40 occasions, with 5 responses being positively described and 35 being negatively described. Negative comments in regards to results, related to either the time being excessive between sitting the test and receiving results, or the test result document being ambiguous and unhelpful in determining what areas to focus on for future improvement. "...the length of time it takes to get results... It takes over a month to get results via something that is done over a computer that gets a computer to mark it" (Anita).

Within the theme of Wellbeing, test anxiety was described on 26 occasions negatively and a further 22 instances of descriptions relating to mental health were also recorded. PSTs reported test anxiety frequently, and detailed their physical and emotional reactions to preparing and undertaking the tests, "I ended up having a really bad panic attack, where I blacked out and I actually I don't ...I mean I was conscious and everything but I could not just comprehend anything that was going on in front of me. So, I had a really negative experience with that one. I fell below the standard, I was quite devastated actually" (Stephanie).

A number of students identified extreme test related consequences. Six students detailed consequences arising from test anxiety ranging from self-harm and suicidal thoughts through to ongoing mental health issues. Test anxiety appeared to be more prevalent in those who had multiple attempts of the tests. One student reported paying large sums of money (in excess of \$10,000) for private tutoring in order to pass the tests creating a significant financial impact on the student. Students were also aware of the current pressures of being a university student and the impact that LANTITE as an additional layer is adding to the pressure "I think they really need to take students' mental health into consideration, I mean this is a big deal for a lot of us, I think that is the big thing to understand. I think that the people who are doing this, are forgetting to put themselves in our shoes and the pressures we have" (Sonja). There were also instances where PSTs described experiences in a positive and empowering sense. "When I got my marks back for literacy I was like ok I am in the top 30% for literacy skills that was that actually made me feel good. I was like wow!" (Deanne).

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore how PSTs describe their experiences of undertaking LANTITE. The findings show PSTs are experiencing a range of emotions and concerns regarding test anxiety and the pressure of having to complete an additional component in their degree. Furthermore, students are frustrated with the process and format of receiving their test results.

The strong response rate from PSTs is indicative of the currency of this issue, with many wanting to have their voice heard. Participants indicated their appreciation of being able to share their experience and to give voice to their journey (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2014) even though they understood that their voice would not be directly shared with the testing provider.

Findings from this study are consistent with other student experience studies, with widely diverse views, experiences and perspectives shared by participants, reinforcing the idea that there is not one singular voice shared amongst the PSTs concerning their experiences (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2014). Voices that expressed empowerment and even indifference to the process, contrasted greatly with those that shared stories of extreme personal consequences as a result of undertaking LANTITE. Literature surrounding student voice highlights the need to involve students in change processes and points to the benefits of shifting the current educational reform paradigm in this direction (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). Whilst this study is not an exploration of student voice, the potential of engaging students in the research and improvement of this testing process would be of value. Whilst the potential benefits of moving towards and embracing active partnerships with students in educational

change (Fullan, 2001) are acknowledged, this field remains largely unexplored to date. Whilst emergent initiatives such as engaging Students as Partners (SaP) (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Matthews et al., 2018) aim to provide a legitimate space for students to co-construct teaching and learning processes in higher education, limited research has been conducted on SaP in relation to assessment processes (Bovill et al., 2011). Whilst mutually constructed assessment processes would require considerable re-design and thought (Deeley & Bovill, 2017), some potential for change nevertheless exists. If students were included as partners by the testing authority, it may result in them becoming more meaningfully engaged in the LANTITE process. The adoption of the SaP concept by the testing authority has the potential to positively impact the student experience and alter perceptions of LANTITE as more than just “a tick-box” or “another piece of paper”. In addition, it may have the potential to motivate PSTs to improve, and understand the importance of, their personal literacy and numeracy as a teacher, as well as improve their assessment literacy. Partnership could initially involve co-designing assessment processes or focusing on one element of the assessment, or even re-designing the feedback mechanism (Deeley & Bovill, 2017).

Student Experiences

Two frequently occurring themes in this study related to test results and test anxiety. Analysis reveals concerns raised in relation to test results, specifically the type and timeliness of feedback provided from the testing provider at the release of results. This concern was expressed consistently by both students who passed and those who failed the test. Embedded within the AITSL standards for teachers, good pedagogical practice emphasises the importance of post-assessment feedback (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014). Post-assessment feedback assists students to identify where they have gone wrong and what needs to occur in order for them to improve (Brown, 2005). Participants in this study were quick to identify the lack of feedback from the testing provider in relation to their test performance, impacting on their motivation and engagement with the overall process (Deeley & Bovill, 2017). Providing detailed feedback would allow PSTs who do not meet the required standard to prepare for future attempts, and for those who have met the standard, feedback would provide information which could be used for the continued development of personal literacy and numeracy.

The very nature of a standardised test means that there is minimal meaningful feedback to the participant. However, throughout their studies, PSTs are taught the value and importance of providing clear, differentiated feedback at the point of error, and their expectations of receiving targeted feedback, especially from PSTs who did not meet the required standard of LANTITE, are rooted in the high consequence of failing. Reconciling this disconnect is a challenge, but exploring possibilities of providing detailed feedback to test-takers and their educational providers has the potential to be of value to both the PSTs and the profession. Providing feedback summaries to educational providers would allow teacher educators and their PSTs to identify gaps in personal literacy and numeracy and develop strategies on how to improve, or develop further.

Test anxiety and wellbeing also emerged as key themes. Test anxiety amongst university students has been well documented as being a prevalent concern and key factor in academic performance (Gerwing et al., 2015; Trifoni & Shahini, 2011) and overall wellbeing (Baik et al., 2019). Interestingly, PSTs provided detailed narrative accounts of individual nerves and test anxiety. Some reported extreme reactions, with a number requiring psychological or other mental health support post LANTITE. There are opportunities to better support students, particularly around test anxiety, by offering different preparation programs for PSTs undertaking standardised testing, which could be offered by universities or by the testing authority. Findings from Baker-Doyler and Petchauer (2015) suggest peer support and advice networks can be a valuable mechanism for alleviating anxiety and preparing students for testing. Furthermore, PSTs could also benefit from targeted supports, including content-specific support from academics and other teaching staff, as well as focused assessment skills support (Baik et al., 2019), for example a program dedicated to electronic test-taking skills. The disconnect in responsibility between an independent testing authority (ACER) and the initial teacher education provider has the potential to create

tensions in the student experiences related to LANTITE. The testing provider maintains control over the entire process yet the university remains accountable. Support for PSTs undertaking LANTITE is important given they are the future generation of teachers, who for the foreseeable future, will be themselves administering standardised tests to their students and supporting them through that same process.

Conclusion

Despite this study being limited to volunteers and therefore susceptible to a potential bias towards students who held strong beliefs about LANTITE, the research captures a wide range of experiences and perspectives and demonstrates the need and desire for students to be engaged in the process to build a shared responsibility for the ‘common good’ (Cook-Sather et al., 2014). This is also a singular study, which has sought experiences from students undertaking LANTITE early in its implementation, and scope therefore exists for future longitudinal studies regarding student experiences of the test.

Whilst this study has provided a unique insight into the PSTs experiences of undertaking LANTITE, it is clear that further work in this area needs to be undertaken. Future research could explore the different models and approaches used by Australian universities to inform and support students through the LANTITE process, with a view to identifying what is working well and sharing good practice. In order to better understand student perceptions and experiences, there is also a continued need to engage them (and higher education providers) in a longer-term dialogue regarding LANTITE and its role in initial teacher education requirements.

In a climate of teacher shortage, and a demand for a more diverse teacher population, which accurately reflects the increasingly diverse nature of Australian society, barriers to becoming a teacher should be carefully considered to minimise unintended consequences. Ultimately as Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2014) argue, “...individuals have the right to be consulted about decisions which affect them and to be protected from other intended and unintended forms of harm” (Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2014, p. 16). Findings in this study confirm that wellbeing, emotional and financial issues are additional stressors related to LANTITE, and this has broader implications for higher education providers, the testing authority and education policy makers. Affording students the opportunity to add their voice to decisions that affect them has the potential to positively impact the future design and administration of LANTITE.

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