TILTing it Forward: The Transparency Model of Assessment as a Scaffold for Secondary Teacher Education

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Even though K-12 educators must assess student learning and adjust instruction based on learning data, many teachers lack confidence in their ability to assess. Because low confidence levels may be due to inadequate teacher preparation, this study invokes the pivotal SoTL project, Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TILT), as it examines TILT's impact on twelve undergraduate ELA teacher candidates (TCs). The hypothesis was that TILT would not only enhance undergraduate TCs' learning outcomes in an ELA methods course, but also scaffold their early development of assessment literacy. Findings support the hypothesis but indicate that TCs would benefit from additional instruction in assessment design prior to implementing assessments in field placement settings. Findings also point to potential for future SoTL studies across disciplines and in broader contexts to align with trends in higher education, such as high-impact practices and cross-institutional partnerships.

Andrea Beach (2015) contends that "SoTL [focusing] on the different needs and outcomes of diverse groups of students is critical to supporting student success" (p. 34). In fact, investigating the success of underrepresented college students is one of the more "important opportunities and imperatives…for faculty development and new SoTL work" (p. 33).

Mary-Ann Winkelmes and her colleagues seem to agree. Since 2009, Winkelmes and her team have led *TILT in Higher Education* (2023), an international faculty development initiative grounded in transparency in learning and teaching (TILT). This concept involves adjusting (or *tilting*) instruction and assessment according to a three-part framework: purpose, task, and criteria. TILT's aim seeks to open communications between faculty and students to clarify learning objectives, instructional processes, and assessment guidelines. Since its inception, TILT has influenced "over twenty-five thousand students in hundreds of courses at higher-education institutions in seven countries" (TILT in Higher Ed, 2023). Winkelmes and her team have generated rich student learning data attesting to the positive impact of the TILT framework, especially as it supports first-generation students, low-income students, and other underrepresented student populations (Winkelmes, 2023; Winkelmes, Boye & Tapp, 2019; Winkelmes, et al., 2016; Winkelmes, et al., 2015).

Given its roots and widespread impact, TILT resides within the intersection of SoTL and faculty development (Beach, 2015). It meets Felton's (2013) five principles of SoTL best practices by investigating student learning with sound methodologies. Studies examining TILT are "grounded in context" and are "appropriately public;" most importantly, they are "conducted in partnership with students" (p. 122). Although Winkelmes and her team do not overtly declare TILT's impact and data as examples of SoTL, they certainly fit that definition.

In fact, I see TILT's potential in extending the traditional SoTL boundaries. As a professor in an undergraduate teacher-education program, I often employ the teaching/learning strategies I have learned from TILT in Higher Education while also making the framework part of the subject matter for my teacher candidates (TCs). By leveraging TILT's multilayered benefits, I can help TCs understand the expectations of my own assessments while also teaching them to design transparent assignments of their own. TILT, then, offers a pay-it-forward approach that directly supports undergraduate students while also potentially giving indirect support to K-12 students. Also, as an open educational resource, *TILT in Higher Education* (2023) grants free access to its framework and many examples across disciplines.

CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK AND PURPOSE

In the past several years, the TILT framework has guided my instruction in writing and teacher education courses. It comprises a three-part structure. First, the purpose statement lends authenticity to the assignment by establishing why students do the work and why it should matter. Then the task statement explains the "productive steps for students to follow" and the "counterproductive steps they should avoid" (Winkelmes, Boye, & Tapp, 2019, p. 38). The task also identifies/explains the resources students may use for support of their work. Finally, the criteria component illustrates a successful assignment with an outline of the teacher's expectations and "multiple examples from real-world work in the discipline" (p. 39).

Anecdotal evidence from my own use of TILT led me to suspect that the TILT model could scaffold my English language arts TCs' developing assessment literacy (Stiggins, 1991) by mitigating their "over-reliance on the models they remember experiencing as students" (Tulley, 2103, p. 45). I hypothesized that TILT could work as a two-fold support system: a framework to clarify the assignments I developed in my methods course and a vehicle for supporting TCs' own assessment literacy and assessment design. The purpose of this SoTL study, then, was to investigate TILT's impact on the assessment literacy of twelve undergraduate TCs in English language arts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Devising writing assignments…is one of the most taxing and least understood parts of a teacher's job (White, 1994, p 21). Much knowledge about writing assessment has developed in the thirty years since White made his claim, yet educators still contend with the befuddlement of receiving student work that does not resemble what assessments asked for.

TCs and Assessment Training

Research reveals that teacher candidates complete their teacher education programs with "concern about the adequacy of their assessment knowledge and skills" (Campbell, 2012, p. 71). Those concerns point to assessment training in teacher preparation programs (p. 75). Campbell & Evans (2000) discovered TCs' inability to transfer their assessment knowledge from assessment courses to classroom settings. Behlol, Fox & Qadir (2021) examined TCs' "difficulties applying student centered assessment practices" due to a lack of modeling in their teacher preparation courses and field placements (p. 80). Unfortunately, limited time and resources often result in inadequate training and therefore low confidence in assessment (Dempsey, PytlikZillig & Bruning, 2009).

When one considers the many concepts/skills TCs must master, their weak assessment skills are understandable. TCs must learn the purposes of assessment (diagnostic, formative, summative, peer-assessment, self-assessment); the various assessment formats (selected response, constructed response, performance based); large-scale assessment design (standardized and norm-referenced); reading and communicating assessment results, including the various types of rubrics (holistic, analytic, single-point, interactive); and grading scales (Dirksen, 2014; McMillan, 2018; McTighe & Ferrara, 2021; Nitko & Brookhart, 2007; Pearsall, 2018; Popham, 2008; Wiggins, 1998). Professional standards expect TCs to assess student learning effectively, do so without bias, analyze assessment data, and use those data in adjusting instruction (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2001; International Society for Technology in Education, 2003; National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2016). To meet the needs of various learners, TCs must differentiate assessment, which includes accommodating disabled learners or multilingual learners (Tomlinson, 1999). Such breadth of knowledge can overwhelm TCs, especially when they synthesize assessment knowledge with subject matter knowledge, ethics, pedagogical knowledge, instructional design expertise, instructional technology, and classroom management skills. It's no wonder, then, that when under pressure, they often resort to the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975) to inform their classroom assessments (Tulley, 2013).

Although commercially available assessment platforms (such as USA Test Prep and iReady) mitigate some responsibility for designing selected response tests, teachers must still develop constructed-response and performance-based assessments fostering students' higher-order thinking. Where I teach/supervise TCs, teacher certification is governed by the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (2023), which requires programs to document how they foster TCs' assessment literacy (Stiggins, 2018), whether through integrated instruction in curriculum and methods courses (the way some Georgia institutions do) or through courses dedicated to assessment (which my institution does). All Georgia's teacher preparation programs require field experiences where TCs apply their assessment knowledge.

Available Resources for Assessment Literacy

That knowledge develops amidst a wealth of resources on designing, developing and implementing valid assessments. Print/digital teaching handbooks, assessment texts, and writing resources provide similar recommendations for composing clear assessment purposes, procedures, and expectations (Budget & Christmann, 2012; Davis, 1993; McMillan, 2018; Stiggins, 2001; Stiggins,

2017; Wiggins, 1998). Also essential to effective assessment design is clear communication and exemplification, as Wiggins (1998) describes it: "a clear and complete set of instructions, guidelines and models" that are "rich in feedback" (p. 139-140) with "rubrics that describe performance along an excellent to poor continuum" (p. 145). An assessment's purpose should be authentic (Darling-Hammond & Adamson, 2014; Frey, Schmitt & Allen, 2012; McMillan, 2018; Nitko & Brookhart, 2007; Strong, Grant & Xu, 2017); in other words, it should simulate actual scenarios, problems or questions to stimulate higher-order thinking and foster "a meaningful experience" (Stronge, Grant & Xu, 2017, p. 38). However, according to Zuidema & Fredericksen (2106), print/digital resources are those that TCs use "least often" (p. 33).

Instead, they synthesize knowledge, not only from print/digital resources, but also various other influences, including misconceived "pieces of information" from coursework (Glogger-Frey, Deutscher & Renkl, 2018, p. 228), school culture (Smagorinsky & Barnes, 2016), apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), and others (Gomes, 1996; Hallman & Burdick, 2011). Campbell (2012), then, rightly calls for more research investigating "implicit theories about what constitutes good assessment" that possibly "negate the positive effects of assessment training" (p. 81).

Assessment in Writing Instruction

Meanwhile best practices in writing instruction correspond with those recommended by assessment experts. Effective assessment emerges from the authenticity of the writing process (Burke, 2008; Christenbury & Lindblom, 2016; Daffern & Mackenzie, 2020; Glenn & Goldthwaite, 2008; Irmscher, 1979; Lindemann, 2001; Penniman, 2009; Smagorinsky, 2009; Soles, 2007). As Smagorinsky (2009) notes, "if [students] are enabled to produce culminating texts that they find worthwhile, then there is a good likelihood that [the] assessment will be…authentic" (p. 114). In short, teachers can make writing matter by proposing topics that facilitate real writing purposes (Lindblom, 2004). Additionally, methods texts emphasize giving constructive feedback to student writing. Peer review and revision based on facilitative, rather than directive, feedback help students set goals for future writing tasks (Christenbury & Lindblom, 2016; Spandel, 2006).

Designing Writing Assignments

Although these research-based strategies foster student writing "for real," (Lindblom, 2004), their theory-to-practice emphasis sometimes overlooks an important task: assignment design. Although "there are no hard and fast rules for constructing and presenting assignments" (Soven, 1999, p. 154), some texts, such as Spandel's (2012), recommend the six-trait model of student writing. That model, however, emphasizes the characteristics of well-written works over purposes and procedures for writing them.

Other texts recommend assignment design that reflects purpose, audience, topic, procedures, and criteria for success, thus bearing similarity to TILT (Bean & Weimer, 2011; Lindblom, 2004; Soven, 1999; White, 1994). Perhaps the most thorough examination of writing assessment design is Gardner's (2008) book, in which she breaks down assignment documents into three essential components: task, expectations (with supporting materials), and activities (p. 35). When examined among these other assessment resources, it is evident that TILT does not reinvent the assessment wheel. However, it nicely encapsulates assess-

ment design into a concise starting point for teachers' assessment best practices. Anish Dave (2023), for instance, garnered encouraging results when he employed TILT in combination with Hattie's (2015) visible learning concepts in his first-year composition course. However, his research focused more on his students' reactions to the transparency than his ability to assess.

Gaps in the Research of Writing Assessment

Within the wealth of research investigating writing instruction and assessment, a smaller set examines TCs' writing assessment practices, most of which focuses on evaluating the written product (Dempsey, Pytlikzillig & Bruning, 2009; Ruppert & Pisano, 2021; Tulley, 2013). Even fewer examine TCs' assessment design. One action-research project follows TCs' development of assessment skills from the point of constructing the writing assignment to examining sample student work. DelleBovi (2012) discovered that by incorporating writing assessment practices into a middle grades literacy course, teacher candidates reported greater awareness of "careful planning for any writing assignment…to be a success" (p. 279). TCs were also "better skilled to offer effective and constructive written feedback to students" (p. 281). These positive results point to opportunities for examining how TILT can support secondary preservice teachers' assessment design in such a way to avoid the "contract of vagueness" Soven (1999) developed as a novice teacher (p. 136).

Even though thousands of studies investigate the impact of TILT on college student success (a 2023 issue of *Perspectives in Learning* is dedicated to such inquiries), few SoTL studies examine the influence of TILT on teacher education. Although one study attests to TILT's positive impact on a teacher education course, it focuses mainly on TILT as a framework for designing transparent syllabi and facilitating student-centered instruction (Crosby & Short, 2022). No research examines TILT's influence as a framework to help TCs learn how to design assessments.

As Paar (2012) notes, "support is necessary for teachers to implement quality classroom assessment in writing that will impact teaching and learning and raise writing achievement" (p. 490). That support can occur in an ELA methods course.

METHODS

SoTL projects usually arise from faculty reflection on their teaching (Bishop-Clark & Dietz-Uhler, 2012) as well as their own inquiries as to whether or why a strategy worked (Witman & Richlin, 2007). This project emerged from reflection about TCs' progression through an undergraduate teacher education program in a Georgia university. For this initial certification program, ELA TCs complete their methods course prior to their assessment course. Because best practices in writing pedagogy inform assessment practices, and because a corequisite field placement exposes TCs to writing assessment, I hypothesized that the TILT framework could serve as an effective early scaffold to support TCs' assessment literacy (Stiggins, 1991).

Participants

Participants were 12 TCs enrolled in my ELA methods course during the junior year of their secondary education program. Because the teacher education program exists at a multi-campus university, and because TCs' "home" campuses varied, I taught the methods course online, combining synchronous and asynchronous instruction. For a common text around which to design all

lesson plans and assignments, TCs read the coming-of-age novel *Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya (1973). TCs also enrolled in a corequisite field placement, but because I served as field placement supervisor to only a few of them, I collected data from the methods course only.

Data Collection

Using the single-group, post-test design, I collected data from the course's writing pedagogy module (Bishop-Clark & Dietz-Uhler, 2012, p. 57). Instruction highlighted the concepts of recursive writing processes, prewriting options, peer review strategies and avenues for publication. Embedded in writing process pedagogy are the concepts of writing assessment, which occurs formatively and summatively through the writing process stages. During instruction on assessment, I included learning activities introducing TCs to TILT and facilitated critiques of TILT examples. To foster TCs' writing processes, and for purposes of triangulation, I collected two sets of formative data: one from a digital discussion board and another from a writing goals table TCs completed during a follow-up synchronous lesson. One summative assessment comprised the third data set measuring TCs' TILT knowledge: a writing assignment relevant to Anaya's novel.

Discussion Board

Communication is not only an essential component of the writing process (Shubitz & Dorfman, 2019) and a transparent assessment (Winkelmes, 2017); it is also an important form of visual data for analysis (Leavy, 2014). Therefore, I collected visual data from TCs' prewriting activity conducted via an asynchronous discussion board, through which they shared/critiqued initial ideas for composing transparent assignments. The discussion addressed three prompts:

1. What objective do you want your students to meet?
2. What writing assignment would measure your students' ability to meet that objective?
3. What will your students have to do in order to succeed on that assignment?

Writing Goals Table

When the discussion board activity revealed partial understandings of alignment between purpose and task, I tailored a subsequent synchronous lesson, thus demonstrating the iterative nature of qualitative research (Burns & McPherson, 2017; Bishop-Clark & Dietz-Uhler, 2012). During that lesson TCs reflected on discussion board posts, assessed sample TILT-informed assignments, and completed a writing goals table generating visual data of their developing understanding of purpose.

TILT Writing Assignments

The ultimate data set, as informed by Klein (2012), was the summative writing assignment developed according to TILT (see Appendix A). Because the methods course was the first time TCs had learned about TILT or practiced its concepts, and because they'd had limited access to secondary student writing, they would be unable to provide examples of success. Therefore, I did not require them to submit models of success for this summative assessment. Although I encouraged them to include rubrics, they had experienced only preliminary lessons in rubric design, so I wrote modest expectations: multiple criteria with distinct levels of performance and accurate math (when applicable) to reflect the weights assigned to those levels.

To position TCs for success on this assessment, and to scaffold their implementation of TILT, I used that same framework to design my own assignment guidelines. I included a rubric and a model of success, thereby providing a meta-example of TILT. In accordance with Winkelmes's (2023) recommendation, I discussed all written assignments with TCs prior to their discussion board activity and during our synchronous learning session.

DATA ANALYSIS

Even though all of the data came from TCs' work toward one summative assessment, their own TILT assignments, I analyzed those data separately (first discussion boards, then the writing goals tables, finally the TILT assignments) so that I could examine their developing knowledge of assessment as it resides in the realm of writing pedagogy and so that I could examine their developing knowledge of TILT as a framework for assessment. For the digital discussion board, I employed content analysis of TC interactions, examining how they communicated purpose, task and criteria (Bishop-Clark & Dietz-Uhler, 2012, p. 90). Analytical notes revealed patterns in their understandings/misunderstandings of TILT and of writing pedagogy. Content analysis of the writing goals table focused on purpose only, but I examined those data against those from the digital discussion board, identifying instances of growth TCs' abilities to communicate purpose.

Data analysis for the summative TILT assignments occurred in two iterations. Initially, I employed rubric analysis because a rubric was how I communicated my evaluation of TCs' work (the data analysis rubric omitted the expectation of correct grammar/mechanics as language conventions are irrelevant to the concept of transparency) (Bishop-Clark & Dietz-Uhler, 2012, p. 92). However, I was dissatisfied with how rubric analysis reflected my own judgment of assignments instead of evidence revealing TCs' learning progress. So I returned to content analysis, examining the TILT assignments against TCs' discussion board interactions and alignment tables. The multi-layered approach revealed some progress in TCs' use of TILT, leading me to determine that the TILT framework scaffolded their assessment design somewhat, while also leaving room for further instruction.

LIMITATIONS

Enrollment trends, locations, and academic schedules presented a few significant limitations to this study. The first is the number of TCs involved. Although qualitative research usually investigates phenomena in smaller numbers, it also raises challenges for generalizability, especially with the single-group, post-test design (Bishop-Clark & Dietz-Uhler, 2012, p. 57). For that reason, I examined multiple data sets, thus triangulating data "for a better, richer, more complete picture" (p. 58).

Another limitation, related to the first, is that this study did not examine TCs' practical applications of TILT assessments. Because Winkelmes, et. al (2019) contend that "tilting" two assessments bears a positive impact on student success, implementation of transparent assignments is necessary to draw conclusions about the framework's full impact. This limitation is why the purpose of this SoTL project was to investigate TCs' performance on my methods assessments and not the practical application of their own.

A third limitation, related to the second, is its examination of visual data only, which omits data from personal interactions, thereby precluding the inclusion of TCs' voices in this study. My omission reflects two considerations about this SoTL project. The first was an abundance of concern for TC confidentiality. During personal interactions, TCs might inadvertently identify themselves, classmates, or students in their field placements. I could more effectively eliminate identifying information if I didn't put TCs in the position of possibly revealing identities. What's more, although I would have garnered rich data from observing TCs as they used their assignments in field placements, I was assigned to supervise only a few of them. By focusing on visual data, I could examine a larger number of data sets.

Because of these limitations, and because of my research purpose, I conducted this study as a first step in discovering the wider implications of TILT on TCs' assessment literacy.

FINDINGS

By analyzing the discussion boards, the writing goals tables, and summative TILT assignments, I discovered some progression in TCs' learning about TILT and its implementation. Although the ultimate data set presented more developed assessment knowledge, it also exhibited gaps in TC knowledge which could be filled through continued instruction.

Discussion Board

The informal interactivity of the discussion board resulted in loosely constructed, often incomplete, assignment proposals. Those characteristics are common in prewriting activities as they serve as springboards to discussion and more specific development. Still, these digital interactions generated useful data to reflect TCs' perception of TILT at this early stage of learning.

Accurate Concepts of TILT

TCs identified observable, measurable goals and reasonable tasks for secondary learners. They occasionally omitted Georgia learning standards, as they were not required to include them at this stage. Nevertheless, they identified the learning skills inherent in the assessment activity. Goals included the following:

- Connecting personal response to information found through research
- Creative narration
- Using dialogue
- Engaging in the writing process
- Supporting claims with textual evidence
- Using sensory detail in storytelling

TCs' early ideas revealed how purpose and task overlap. Inspired by assessments they had observed in field placements, they proposed a range of assessments from analytical essays to journal entries to works of fiction. In addition to identifying the ultimate deliverable, several identified resources to support student writing. As TCs outlined plans for writing process stages, including timelines, they acknowledged that the task involved an overlap of learning process and learning product:

> Day one would be theme choosing and researching while day two would be essay writing. I would do this on a Thursday and Friday…Some students will be able to finish the assignment in class, while others may prefer to take it home. This allows them some freedom to discuss.

> Students will practice the writing process for this assignment, so they will engage in peer review after creating a first draft of their narrative…I will provide students with a week for

this entire project as they will brainstorm, plan, write, peer review, and edit.

Students will do some research during brainstorming (while creating a flowchart) for information about [Antonio's] culture…This could fuel ideas for interesting questions for Antonio.

TCs also explained how students' tasks would meet assignment criteria, as in this example:

The [journal] entries would need to relate to the character and align with the content of the novel.

Or this one:

Students will add dialogue and new events to make their narratives go in the direction of their choosing.

TCs sometimes mentioned rubrics and levels of performance, but mainly in quantitative terms, as in "The diary would need to have a minimum of ten journal entries" or "Paragraphs should have 5-6 sentences."

TCs' responses to classmates also revealed their understandings of criteria. For instance, when one TC proposed that students write "a short narrative essay…in which they will add themselves as a character into one chapter of their choosing," a classmate offered suggestions for clearer criteria: "I do feel like sixth graders could use a very direct set of guidelines for the assignment. While this could be a rubric, you could also just add more direct instructions–at least four lines of dialogue for both the new character and another character, etc."

Lapses in TILT Logic
Although posts revealed overall comprehension of the general TILT components, they also exhibited partially formed concepts of how those three components should work in unity.

In one instance, a TC overlooked purpose entirely and dove right into the task:

Students would be required to create a diary for a character of their choosing…from the point of view of [that] character.

The post detailed the required number of journal entries, available resources and options for artistic features, but pointed to no learning standard or general learning goal. One classmate inquired about the scope of the assignment, but no classmates asked about the lesson's purpose.

Other discussion posts showed lapses in alignment, for instance, proposing writing assignments to meet reading goals. Because reading and writing are "intricately intertwined," (Tedrow, 2018, p. x) and considering that the TCs' task was to design an assignment in the context of *Bless Me Ultima* (Anaya, 1973), I expected goals to include some reading/analysis skills. However, I also expected writing skills to be the primary goals of their assignments.

Instead, one TC proposed an assignment for students to

create a written/drawn project in which they choose three symbols from the novel…and identify the symbols' larger meaning.

Learning activities involved students identifying, illustrating and discussing symbols. But the TC omitted information about what students would *write*. Fortunately, some classmates noticed the absence ("You are a little vague about the details of what [students] need to write–does each symbol need three pieces of

textual evidence?") and suggested having students "[link] a symbol to a previously read text."

Another TC replicated an assignment she learned from her field experience:

a choice board where students can choose from several options…that each have their own set of requirements. Examples include an informal essay, letters to characters in the book, illustrations of a scene with a paragraph reflection, etc. I would not [offer] these exact choices because I would want them to more specifically apply to a standard."

However, when she identified three learning standards for the assignment, they were all reading/literature standards, not writing standards. She acknowledged that "there's still lots for me to think about here!" I agree, and her post informed me of concepts to address during our follow-up synchronous lesson.

Knowledge of Writing Process
As TCs revealed their understandings of TILT, they also exhibited partially formed concepts of the writing process. For instance, as one TC proposed a brief narrative essay enabling student writers to develop plot and character, she contradicted the best practices of writing instruction with this statement: "I will not expect them to engage in peer review because I want their creativity to come to life." Fortunately, a classmate suggested an alternative for providing constructive feedback: "Maybe you could have a designated 1/1 meeting with each student to discuss their writing and offer constructive [criticism] for revisions throughout the project process."

Another post proposed a product-based assessment: "I am going to have my students…write about the two different viewpoints on the use of old herbal medicines…It would be a compare and contrast kind of paper." The TC acknowledged criteria by proposing a rubric "on a 5-4-3-2-1 scale," but because the post identified no specific writing skills to be assessed with that scale, writing process was not evident.

Sometimes I found writing process pedagogy buried in TCs' developing plans. One TC, for instance, initially proposed that students would compose a plot diagram, so that "students will be able to determine the central idea/theme of a reading." Writing process didn't emerge in the post until the TC added, "[students] will be able to use that information to write their paper on the theme of the story." So a writing process, though vaguely acknowledged, was somewhere on this TC's mind.

Writing Tables from Follow-Up Synchronous Instruction
The synchronous lesson began with reflection on the discussion board with some TCs volunteering their posts for full-group critique. The class transitioned to conversation about aligning writing goals with writing activities. Then, as we discussed the need for precise written directions, I recommended that TCs complete their own assignments: "Did you have to add steps or combine steps? How long did it take you to complete that assignment? Your students will likely need more time than you did."

As for criteria, we discussed the benefits and challenges of providing models of success, specifically the question of how much is too much information (Winkelmes, et al. 2019). The issue of balance arose as the work involved for some assignments didn't match the intended grade. I suggested they consider the stakes of the assignment. "If a teacher requires research, is that really a low-stakes assignment?"

To address the TCs' logical gaps related to purpose, I designed a small group activity in which they analyzed a sample writing assignment and identified how it connected writing tasks to writing purposes. Finally, TCs completed the writing goals table in which they brainstormed goals for student writing, then aligned writing activities to those goals. For instance, one TC identified an adaptation of a scene written from another character's perspective. This assignment would address the learning goal of narrative writing. Another TC stated students should learn "how to form an opinion and defend it with evidence" and proposed an "argumentative essay about characters or situations" to meet that goal.

Still, even after the discussion of alignment, some TCs persisted in proposing reading goals for writing assignments. Multiple TCs proposed an assignment where students "rewrite the end of a chapter or predictions for the next chapter" as a demonstration of "reading comprehension skills." Another suggested "journal entries, character point of view writing assignments" as a way to assess "critical thinking skills, reading comprehension skills."

The alignment table, then, presented minimal evidence of learning progression about designing writing goals to meet writing tasks. I therefore expected the ultimate TILT assignments to reveal partial knowledge of composing clear, aligned purpose statements. TCs delivered what I expected while also revealing learning progress related to other TILT components.

TILT ASSIGNMENTS

After discussions and revisions, TCs' summative TILT assignments included more substance than the proposals in the discussion board, but they also indicated opportunities for additional instruction.

General Organization

Overall, assignments used an authoritative voice written for an adolescent readership. They presented unified, coherent chunks of information for purpose, task and criteria. Document design features, such as headings, bold type, bullets, and highlighting, guided users through assignment details.

Although organizational choices indicated TCs' knowledge and application of TILT components, they also revealed how strongly the model of success influenced their work (see Appendix B). That model, a summative TILT assignment from an earlier semester, presented information in the following order: learning context, identification of deliverable, task, purpose, criteria (including rubric), supporting resources. Even though TCs had examined multiple examples, including those within the guidelines for this assignment (see Appendix A), almost all of them submitted TILT assignments mirroring the structure of that model, down to the headings, bullets, bold type and highlighted passages. Those strong patterns indicated TCs' use of the model as a template, which led me to wonder how confident they felt in designing writing assessments.

Purpose

Most assignments indicated the following understandings about purpose: The assessment should have a measurable and observable goal not only relevant to the assigned task but also applicable in the future. The goal should be tied to learning standard(s), which should be listed in the assignment document.

Evidence also suggested TCs would benefit from future instruction about purpose statements, which might also elevate the authenticity of their students' writing processes.

For instance, although all TCs declared how assignments would address specific learning standards, only a few elaborated on how the assessment prepared students to meet practical writing goals. Some TCs confined their purposes to academic goals, as in this example: "The purpose of this assignment is not only to sharpen your skills in informative writing but also to allow you to conduct a research project into your own family." And this one: "The purpose of this assignment is to help you build and master your narrative writing skills, with a focus on dialogue writing." However, when it came to meeting future, non-academic writing purposes, most TCs pointed vaguely to writing in college or the workplace. Only one TC referred to writing as a professional or communications skill: "You can even use these skills throughout college and into the professional world to defend or create an argument for or against something." This last purpose statement showed the strongest acknowledgement that writing should matter to students. Instruction, perhaps in their next semester's assessment class, might help them elevate their thinking about designing assessments that achieve authentic writing purposes.

Across all three data sets, even after our synchronous discussion of writing lessons with writing goals, some TCs persisted in designing writing assignments with reading goals, as in the following examples:

- The purpose of this assignment is to help you engage with the story and find connections throughout the reading.
- The purpose of this assignment is to practice analyzing central themes and character development…It also allows the students to demonstrate their knowledge in terms of symbolism and figurative language.
- The purpose of identifying symbols in the novel is to analyze their larger meaning or abstract contribution to the text as a whole.

These assignments demonstrate a valid point about ELA instruction: written assignments can be used to measure students' reading skills. However, because instruction of TILT occurred during a writing pedagogy module, I was struck by how TCs persistently overlooked assessment purposes measuring students' ability to *write*.

One TC's purpose statement showed evidence of an interesting combination of concepts, which must have come from several knowledge sources, such as system-wide strategic plans ("You will be using a technique called 21st century thinking") and curriculum design instruction ("Another skill you will be using is Bloom's Taxonomy.") Ultimately, the purpose statement pointed to a Georgia learning standard: "write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts." These representations of taxonomy as skill and context as technique indicate confused concepts of an educator's overall knowledge. The TC demonstrated ability to write a learning goal that mirrors language in state standards, but the assignment suggested that the TC was not yet able to compose a goal that would matter to student writers.

Task

TILT assignments revealed TCs' abilities to communicate several aspects of the task:

- The ultimate learning deliverable
- Timing, including deadlines and dates for accomplishing specific steps
- Progression through the writing process
- Procedures on how to submit the assignments
- Information about acceptable resources to support student work.

In fact, TCs' most specific and clear language appeared in task statements, specially when assignments expected only one deliverable.

However, several TCs designed assignments for which students were to create multiple deliverables, such as a family tree with a written explanation. The assignments' diction and written voice indicated the TCs' enthusiasm for student choice or student creativity. But tasks for these multi-faceted assignments lacked focus and suggested the TCs deviated from backward design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), starting with the task/activity instead of developing the task from learning goals.

One compelling example of a multi-faceted assignment instructed students to adapt a chapter into a dramatic scene, then to perform the scene. Task details were sparse for both writing and performing. A schedule omitted reference to writing process stages and instead noted that students would "work on" their writing on Monday, Wednesday and Friday with "page 1 due on Friday" and performances taking place the next week. Much of the task element consisted of links to supporting resources: a YouTube video titled "How to Write a Play," and another YouTube video of a student-performed scene. Links to drama-oriented videos without details about writing process raised the question of whether students were figuring out how to write drama while being assessed at the same time.

Criteria

All TILT assignments demonstrated how task and criteria statements often overlap. At the same time they revealed TCs' general understandings of two criteria features:

- Descriptions of the characteristics of the finished assignment, including length, development, language use, and formatting.
- Information about how the assignments should be scored.

One characteristic remained unchanged from the discussion board data: reliance on quantitative expectations. As noted in the methodology, TCs learned about the different rubric types and purposes, but they gained only basic instruction on how to construct those rubrics. That limited instruction was evident in these TILT assignments. Every rubric submitted in a TILT assignment organized performance levels on a numeric scale (5, 4, 3, 2, 1) in the same way the model of success did. Rubrics overlooked information explaining what those numbers meant: Five points? Level 5? Excellent or Exceeds Expectations? This pattern pointed to TCs' heavy reliance on the model of success and indicated a need for more specific instruction on rubric design: how the *quality* of written work should be evaluated and described as well as how the levels of written performance should be distinguished in measurable terms.

Several TCs included both rubrics and checklists, which always mirrored criteria included in their respective rubrics, but were written in student-centered language, underscoring an interest in user-friendly instructions. For example, checklists included items such as, "I have five clear questions;" "My paper is in correct MLA format," or "My paper includes at least ten lines of correctly written dialogue."

One TILT assignment, which communicated criteria with a checklist, took a deficit-based approach to scoring, noting how students' grades would be penalized if they omitted aspects of the assignment. The "Grading" section opened with a line about score penalties: "If you miss a requirement, your grades will go down, below is the point system used." The checklist includes a heading revealing a "beginning" score of 100 points followed by bulleted descriptions of expectations and points deducted for insufficient quantity or omissions:

- Part from book is LESS than 3 pages long: – 5 points
- Final assignment IS LESS than 2 full pages long: – 10 points
- Font and font size incorrect: – 3 points
- No scene headers (Ex. Scene 1): – 5 points
- No setting description: – 10 points

Students would only lose points by omitting details or submitting too few pages. Written this way, the checklist suggested that writing quality was less significant than quantity and structure.

The checklist appeared in the assignment to adapt a prose scene into a dramatic scene; it was the one assignment that included an example of success: a scene from Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which (according to this assignment) students had read in a previous unit. That example, which was included with two YouTube videos as supporting resources, suggested the TC's perception of writing as an exercise of following models. If so, this one TC might benefit from instruction about assets-based approaches to scoring, which would more directly reveal how students could succeed and perhaps, according to Winkelmes, et al. (2019,) also develop a sense of belonging.

DISCUSSION

In spite of the small number of TCs in this project, the three data sets produced significant evidence indicating TILT's impact as a scaffold for their developing pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986) and assessment literacy (Stiggins, 1991). Even more enlightening was the way TILT could support my own self-assessment. These data, then, point to the potential of TILT as a springboard for future SoTL studies that cross boundaries across educational contexts.

Developing Assessment Literacy

Overall, TILT as an assessment framework opened windows to TCs' developing assessment literacy. Discussions and written work reflected their enthusiasm for assessment ideas, especially those they'd observed in field placement experiences. At the same time, patterns across the data showed how some TCs elaborated more on the *what* than the *why* and the *how,* even after garnering peer and teacher feedback on initial assignment plans. Peer-peer interactions opened opportunities to revisit backward design principles (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005) and writing process pedagogies, a learning process exemplifying Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978). Hence, introducing TILT in this ELA methods course offered active learning opportunities so TCs

could experience how instruction and assessment are enmeshed. Although they developed basic skills in designing a TILT-informed assignment, all of them are positioned for further development of assessment literacy in dedicated assessment courses, which can better prepare them to implement writing assessments in actual classrooms.

Developing Writing Process Pedagogy

Engagement with TILT also illuminated TCs' developing understandings of authentic writing processes. TCs' TILT assignments often referred to prewriting and drafting activities while minimizing (in one case deliberately omitting) constructive feedback and revision. Writing process pedagogy takes time and practice to implement effectively, so the data from these assignments were not surprising; still, they revealed significant misunderstandings that should be addressed prior to implementing writing assessments. Because authenticity permeates the writing process from prewriting through assessment and publication, TILT-informed assessments in a writing classroom must rely on a clear understanding of those best practices.

Perhaps a different SoTL project might have rendered different results. TCs persistently chose to develop writing assignments that targeted reading goals. My decision to incorporate *Bless Me, Ultima* into the methods course was to demonstrate the strong relationship between reading and writing and to foster discussions of cultural responsiveness. However, the novel's use as a common text influenced TCs in unintended ways, particularly when learning writing pedagogy. If TCs had developed assignments unrelated to a work of literature, reading/literature standards would be irrelevant, making it more likely that TILT assignments would identify writing purposes for writing tasks. Though reading/literature purposes overshadowed writing purposes in these data, TCs could nevertheless implement TILT's basic components, suggesting that further practice would help them develop those components more transparently.

TCs as Writers

In this ELA methods course, the TILT assignment contributed not only to my TCs' success as teachers, but also as writers. Their authentic writing process began with the digital discussion board, generating ideas, discussing them and garnering constructive feedback. The follow-up synchronous discussion emphasized strategies for clarifying misconceptions and opportunities to use precise, organized language for clear communication of expectations. Ultimately, as a result of writing, consulting, and revising, TCs developed written works they could further enhance and use in future classrooms. In future methods courses, I will underscore assessment instruction with explicit acknowledgement of Traci Gardner's (2008) contention that "When teachers design writing assignments, they are engaging in a 'form of writing'" (p. xi) that deserves "a full process…to ensure that the assignments we devise or choose for students contribute to their success as writers" (p. 8).

TILT as Vehicle for Self-Assessment

Finally, this SoTL project proved valuable for examining my own instruction. Although I expected TCs to demonstrate understandings and partial understandings of writing process and assessment, their learning products illuminated unexpected gaps in their understanding, gaps which seemed rooted in my instruction. The

over-reliance on my model of success indicated a need for more critical discussion of that model. The persistence in setting reading goals for writing assignments indicated a need for conversations about what we mean by the term *writing assignment*. The pattern of setting quantitative criteria for student writing points to a need for instruction of strategies for assessing writing quality over writing quantity.

Of course, I adjusted my synchronous instruction to address TCs' early misunderstandings. Still, the data inspired me to adjust the design, delivery, and assessment of future methods courses. More importantly, assessing TCs' TILT assignments motivated me to revisit my own use of TILT, specifically as I provided a previous TC's TILT assignment as a model of success. Perhaps a different model would have been a better choice, or maybe multiple models would better clarify my expectations. Of course, additional research can address those questions. For now, I can say that TILT as a framework for instructional self-assessment served me as much as it served teacher candidates.

CONCLUSION

Data generated from this SoTL project underscore earlier findings that teachers and preservice teachers benefit from dedicated instruction in assessment practices (Campbell, & Evans, 2000; Koloi-Keaikitse, 2016; Volante & Fazio, 2007). Although this study focuses on TCs' assessment literacy in one location, its findings correspond with international investigations of teachers' assessment literacy (Behold, Fox & Qadir, 2021; Brown, 2011; DuPlessis & van der Westhuisen, 2021; Lam, 2019; Koh, et al., 2018; Weng, 2023; Willis, Adie & Klenowski, 2013; Willis, Shaukat & Low-Choy, 2022). Such findings are significant considering the severity of the global teacher shortage (UNESCO, 2023). Training with TILT situated my ELA TCs in a zone of proximal development and prepared them for continued learning through assessment coursework and field placements (Vygotsky, 1978). Continued SoTL studies examining assessment literacy could confirm TILT's impact as a teacher preparation scaffold while also revealing additional measures to strengthen preservice teachers' knowledge of and confidence in assessing student learning. In fact, I have already taken initial steps to examine such phenomena. My continued research, and other studies like it, could introduce communications and collaborations within the SoTL commons (Huber & Hutchins, 2005), thereby illuminating strategies to support worldwide teacher preparation and perhaps mitigate teacher attrition.

Teacher educators across disciplines might also use TILT as a vehicle for fostering TCs' recursive writing processes. An assignment's clarity is dependent on the teacher's discussion with students (Winkelmes, 2017), but only after it has been through a careful revision process (Gardner, 2008). As research from the National Writing Project attests, "there is much writing going on across disciplines" and in those contexts "meaningful writing happens" (Eodice, Geller & Lerner, 2016, p. 130-131). That meaningful writing should occur for all TCs, not just those in ELA. By demonstrating the necessity of continued writing and continued revision, teacher educators can support TCs who will be required to employ teacherly writing, even if they lack confidence in their own writing skills (West, 2014, p. 51). Assignment design processes rely on recursive writing processes that ELA best practices recommend (Burke, 2008; Christenbury & Lindlbom, 2016; Smagorinsky, 2018). TILT, therefore, when used in a teacher education program, bears positive results on multiple levels.

Furthermore, as West (2014) notes, "those of us who are teacher educators can serve as exemplars, as models of practice– good practice, we hope" (p. 11). As we encourage our students to engage in their own writing processes, we must also embrace our own. One way to do so is with the TILT framework. Do our assessments communicate the purposes, tasks and criteria of the assignments as clearly as possible? If so, to what extent do we model those assessment practices so that our TCs can "pay it forward"? Of course, such reflective practice (Hillocks, 1995; Lying, 2010, Schön, 1983) is inherent in TILT's purpose: to open communications between faculty and students so that they can really learn what we intend for them to learn (Bishop-Clark & Dietz-Uhler, 2012, p. 5).

Reflective practice also inspires faculty to generate more questions for further inquiry within the intersection of TILT and teacher education (Williams, 2015). Field placements, for instance, exemplify high-impact practices, a priority in many higher education institutions (Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin & Rivard, 2016, p. 12). Also, in the same way that faculty developers are being called upon to address teaching/learning priorities at the institutional and cross-institutional level (Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin & Rivard, 2016), SoTL examinations of TCs' assessment literacy could underscore the efforts of academic-employer partnerships, such as National Association of Colleges and Employers (2022) as well as the research coming from academic organizations such as American Association of Colleges & Universities (Finley, 2021). Suffice it to say that the TILT framework resides in a fruitful intersection of SoTL, faculty development, and teacher preparation, and its potential points to rich conversations in the teaching commons (Huber & Hutchings, 2005).

Finally, SoTL research in teacher education can be an avenue toward social justice (Liston & Rahimi, 2017). TILT's abundant data highlights students' "elevated confidence, belonging, and metacognitive awareness of skill development" (Winkelmes, Boye & Tapp, 2019, p. 17). Its impact is even more evident on "first-generation, low-income and underrepresented students" (p. 18), many of whom aspire to become teachers. It only makes sense, then, to leverage the benefits of transparent instruction and assessment: its potential to "rectify the current inequality in college graduate rates," (Winkelmes, 2023, p. 5) as well as its potential contributions to a pool of diverse, assessment-literate new teachers using transparent instruction in K-12 schools.

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APPENDIX A
TILT Assignment for ELA Methods Course

As an English teacher, you will develop many assignments—projects, papers, speeches and activities. It makes sense, then, that you demonstrate your skills at composing assignment guidelines. Now that we have discussed the components of transparency, you have the tools you need to design assignments that will communicate not only what students will do and what standards they will meet but also how the assignment is relevant to their development of life-long skills.

T**his semester you will design a writing assignment relevant to Rudolfo Anaya's novel** *Bless Me, Ultima*. **It should communicate to students the purpose for completing the assignment, the procedures they will follow to complete the assignment, necessary support systems and your expectations of their work.**

This semester you will also develop instructional plans for teaching *Bless Me, Ultima.* If you would like this assignment to correspond with that instructional plan, you may do that. But you're not required to make this writing assignment part of your instructional plans.

Design your assignment for the group of students you are working with in Practicum II. Also, design each assignment so that it reflects best practices in teaching secondary English language arts. **Although you're designing this assignment for that cohort of students, I am not requiring you to use this assignment during your field placement.**

As you compose your assignment, review our resources from *TILT in Higher Education* as well as the other resources in our content module for Week 3. Include the necessary components for each segment.

You don't have to create high-stakes assignments (although you may), but your assignment must require a graded deliverable, and it should require students to use their higher-order thinking skills. In other words, don't write a set of guidelines for an exit ticket or an informal formative assessment.

If your assignment has students progressing through an entire writing process, then your assignment is likely a high-stakes assignment. If your assignment is to have students complete *one stage* of the writing process, then the stakes will be a little lower.

As you work, you should keep in mind the following expectations:

- The assignment should include information that identifies the class, developmental levels and writing skills of the students you're teaching so that it's clear that the assignment is appropriate for these learners.

- Your assignment should make the writing process evident.

- The assignment should, of course, follow the guidelines in Module 3 so that it clearly communicates the reason for the assignment, the procedures for student work, the support systems, the expectations.

- The document should be designed in such a way that all information is logical, sequential and clear. Make use of headings, bullets and spacing so that information is logically chunked to facilitate smooth, clear reading. Choose your words to address an audience of adolescent English language arts students. Proofread carefully to make sure the document uses language correctly.

- Select a rubric that fits the assignment you designed. Not every assignment needs a complicated rubric, but the rubric should indicate clearly what is expected of a successful assignment and what an unsuccessful assignment might look like.

To see an example of success for this assignment, <click on this link>. It's not a perfect example, but it would succeed on this assignment). In addition, all of the assignments in this course employ this transparency model, so you can see examples by exploring our *Assignment Guidelines* folder. This set of assignment guidelines, of course, also follows the TILT model. Assignments in this course include rubrics, which might also serve as guides.

You will submit your assignments to the *Transparent Assignments* folder by **9:00 PM, ET, Friday, February 24.** This writing assignment can earn you up to 100 points. Your professor will assess your work according to the rubric below.

Please reach out to your professor if you have any questions.

APPENDIX B
Model of Success

Bless Me, Ultima Narrative News Articles

For this writing assignment, pretend that you are a top journalist for New Mexico's biggest news outlet, *The New Mexico Times*. Because you are such a great journalist, you have been sent to Santa Rosa, New Mexico (the town setting of *Bless Me, Ultima*) to report on the things that have been happening within the town. Choose one important event from the novel and write a news article explaining the event to the readers and watchers of the state news.

The information in your news article should accurately answer the 5Ws and 1H of journalism: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How. Answering the 5Ws & 1H will help you to be certain that your news article includes the proper details and narrative elements that we have been reviewing and practicing in class (more information on the 5Ws & H of journalism is included in the supporting materials section below). In addition to the 5Ws & H, your article should have an attention grabbing title, be typed in MLA format, and at least a page long. I have included a checklist at the end of this assignment sheet that can be used to check if your news article includes all of the required guidelines.

*<u>Remember that news and opinion are separate, so only report accurate details from the text. Tell the story, but avoid writing about your personal feelings on the event you choose.</u>

The assignment should be turned in to ItsLearning by October 8, 2021 by 5:00 PM.

PURPOSE

The purpose of writing the news articles is to help you practice and master writing and storytelling skills. This assignment encourages you to take on the role of someone else, and clearly and accurately explain an event in Bless Me, Ultima through the use of narrative elements in the form of a news article. This assignment also requires that you use 21st Century Skills, which are skills that students need to succeed in today's society. The 21st century skills addressed include creativity and technology literacy. The [State] Standard of Excellence being addressed by this assignment is:

ELAGSE9-10W3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. D. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

GRADING CRITERIA

Each news article will be graded according to the following rubric. You can receive a maximum of 18 points on this assignment. This assignment will be due Friday, October 8, 2021 at 5;00 PM. An extra five points will be taken off your grade for each day your assignment is late.

Category	4	3	2	1
Accuracy of Facts	All facts presented in the article are accurate.	Almost all facts presented in the article are accurate.	Most facts presented in the article are accurate (at least 70%).	There are several factual errors in the article.
5Ws of Journalism	Article answers the 6 questions of journalism: What, When, Where, Why, Who, and How.	The article answers 5 of the questions.	The article answers 4 of the questions.	The article answers less than 4 of the questions.
Title	Title is creative, sparks interest, and is related to the article and topic.	Title is related to the article and topic.	Title is present, but does not appear to be related to the article and topic.	No Title
Formatting	Article is typed in correct MLA format with all the required components.			Article is not typed in MLA format
Length	Article is 1-2 pages long.			Article is less than 1 page or more than 3 pages long.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

The 5 Ws and H of journalism that your article should answer:

- Who is it about? (Which characters from the text are involved?)

- What happened? (What is the plot of this event?)

- When did it happen? (Setting)

- Where did it happen? (Setting)

- Why did it happen? (Why did the event happen? Was conflict involved?)

- How did it happen? (Plot)

Style and Formatting:

- An MLA format template is provided for you on Google Drive. Customize the heading and type your news article inside the template.

- For more on MLA formatting, visit the Purdue Writing Lab which can accessed by clicking the following link: https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_style_introduction.html

Schedule:

Although this is a shorter writing assignment, I want you to be able to participate in a recurring writing process. Your first draft should be finished by Wednesday, October 6. 2021, so you will be able to participate in guided peer review.

Checklist

- My article has an attention grabbing title.

- My article accurately reflects the event I chose to write about and answers the 6 questions of journalism: Who, What, When, Where, Why. and How?

- My article is typed in proper MLA format with all of the basic requirements listed from the Purdue Owl MLA Guide

- My article is at least 1 page long, but does not go over 3 pages.

- I have double checked my article for all punctuation and spelling mistakes.

This assignment should be turned into ItsLearning by October 8, 2021 by 5:00 PM.