



## The Home Exam: from Reading List Reproduction to Student Centred Production

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### Abstract

This study addresses challenges of form and format of student assessment in teacher training. The point of departure is teacher training in Norway and the subject of English. Teacher training programs in general, and certain subjects in particular, see the challenge of providing exam formats that adequately reflect the practice of a future profession. Also, one in teacher training may well seek to teach the students about how to cater for and assess the value of the individuals and their varied areas of strengths, traditional college and university teacher training programs may not always be exemplary role models in this matter. This study takes a look at how the unplanned and unprepared for challenges of the Covid19 pandemic and a general trend of digitalization of higher education have fast-forwarded the need to rethink how, and in what format, exams in a professional program are carried out. This study provides a concrete example of how the needs of the future teachers are catered for in a home exam format, and how – in contrast to the traditional school exam – the individuality of the student and learner has centre stage; using a traditional taxonomy of learning revised by Anderson et al [1] as a yard stick. There is also deep-learning involved in the suggested exam format, as opposed to traditional school exams which may require a mere reproduction of textbook material. This paper presents pedagogical and methodological ideas behind a five-day home exam where the students create their own tableau as a take-off point for the multi modal exam product. Students are prompted to use all sources and media, including consulting each other during the exam, to emulate the work for which the students are trained; thus triggering the student's ownership to both process and product, rather than becoming a mere reproducer of reading list-based knowledge. Though under critique from some, the principle ideas of Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences [3] are central in triggering and fostering a variety of student learning styles applicable to the sample exam format. The data forming the foundation for this paper are collected by implementation/execution of action research projects in two third year courses and one first-year course in a five-year teacher training master program at Nord University, Norway.

**Keywords:** *Teacher training, home exam, multiple intelligences, student centred*

A move towards an increased digitalization of higher education, and especially Covid-19 measurements, has fast-forwarded the need to reconsider the exam format in some areas of higher education. A primary concern is that assessment of a university course is summative and has traditionally been school-based. There are two main points that back a wish for change: 1) a summative assessment on one particular day testing a selection of material from the reading list does not give an accurate reflection of the competence of the student as a future teacher, but rather a glimpse into a segment of the course. Compartmentalisation of subjects is an issue in higher education programs, and especially in teacher training – not just between subjects, but also within subjects. Teachers in schools do not, or at least should not, think in terms of compartmentalized fragments of knowledge, and need to take a holistic approach to their work. 2) a traditional school exam is based on reproduction of facts from a reading list/lectures; a reproduction process which is curriculum and teacher centred, often not permitting other aids than an English-English dictionary, or other shorter texts supplied with the exam. Teacher training is a professional training program, and this type of exam does neither target nor represent the practical side of the profession the institution seeks to educate for.



The home exam is nothing new, but based on experience home exams have tended to be in essay form and analysis of a given topic; and in teacher training, typically a lesson plan to be provided. There is in the school exam, and especially the home exam, the challenge of possible plagiarism; a challenge that in itself is an indicator that the traditional summative assessment is inadequate to address and test the desired competences. The traditional school exams are to a large degree based on knowledge reproduction, hovering around the lower levels of Bloom's Taxonomy of learning [2]. We do not desire teachers – or anybody else, for that matter – whom we educate to a profession to merely reproduce from a reading list. This view might be a little categorical, as yes, there are certainly elements of analysis and reflection in traditional exam sets for *some* subjects of English, whereas not so much for others. Literary analysis and didactical reflection will contribute to reaching the higher levels of the bespoke taxonomy, but I claim still fragmented and under time and word count pressure. Exam formats need to be changed to emulate the field of profession we seek to educate for; cooperation, sharing and advice seeking is the norm of the profession – a far cry from the traditional school exam of academia.

The tableau based exam format presented in this study encourages the support of all available resources, which in many ways indeed reflects the current working situation of the teachers, where all tools are available in the planning and execution of their lessons. The tableau based exam format is an opportunity to move from traditional school exam of reproducing facts from the reading list to a more student centred formal assessment. This is especially critical in professional training, where the exam situation and format should ideally emulate the future work and workspace that is the target of the given educational program.

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This exam consists of two main components, both to be responded to.

**Component 1:**

As a framework for your multi modal presentation, design and present a tableau based on an image from an English speaking country/location/world.

Your product is to be in form of a multimodal presentation, and you are to contextualize and design learning activities applicable for a selected age group/grade of your choice. The multimodal presentation is to include complete tasks (what pupils will see and be able to respond to) that cover the following areas:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language</li> <li>• Culture</li> <li>• Young persons' literature</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Numeracy</li> <li>• Digital skills</li> <li>• An edutainment section (needs not be accompanied by tasks)</li> </ul>
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For each of the above, include a "teacher's note", where you reason for your choice (min. 200 words for each).

For THREE of the above elements (excluding edutainment), design a complete session/activity plan that is ready-to-go as a planning document.

**Component 2, a video presentation (10-12mins):**

With in-depth learning as the focal point, present your thoughts and ideas behind design and development of your tableau.

Fig. 1. Exam text; info on format/how to submit not included here.

The multi modal exam format is chosen to emulate the multi modal world of the intended work arena beyond the university classroom, and as each individual has unique distributions of Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences (MI) [3], the home exam format provided here triggers a range of intelligences

and accompanying learning styles. This exam format ensures the students work on two levels: 1) the level as future teacher, providing learning goals and material for potential pupils, and 2) the level of the teacher trainee, where the student needs to meet the learning goals of the program; thus blending theory and practice seamlessly into one exam.

The background image which is the foundation of the tableau is not just carefully selected based on personal interest and experience, it functions as a concrete exemplification of Bloom's lower level of thinking on which to construct the levels of higher thinking. Constructing the tableau and the accompanying exam tasks is a hands on journey up the ladder of the bespoke taxonomy. Anderson et al's revision of Bloom's taxonomy adapts to our current age by proposing a taxonomy that better than Bloom meets the needs of curriculum designers, teachers, and students. Note that where Bloom uses nouns defining the levels, Anderson et al use verbs, indicating and reaffirming a shift from static knowledge to active competence.



Fig 2. Sample exam tableau with no less than eighteen interactive elements for pupils to explore.

Adapted learning is a topic often preached in teacher training, and in all honesty, university courses do not in my experience adequately cater for the needs and strengths of the individual learner. The concept of adapted learning is very much in focus, as the students not only select theme and images for the tableau based on their personal experience and interests, but also form of multimodality chosen, ranging from - but not limited to - plain text, images, embedded audio/video, hyperlinks, and QR coding. The topic areas to be covered ensures that the main categories of the curriculum's learning goals and textbook contents are covered, though no specification of *how* they are to be covered. The students are through "teacher's notes" required to provide both reflections and reasoning for choices, thus providing a theory and personal interest combination.

Component 2 proves to be ideal for triggering a variety of MI through the use of low threshold technology as mobile phones or iPads, on location in classroom or outdoors. Bodily-kinaesthetic and interpersonal intelligences are exemplified by two students spending part of a day lighting a fire and boiling coffee on the beach while recording discussing their tableaux; while a couple of other students mounted a mobile phone on the car dashboard and recorded the video while out driving – a technique that draws attention away from the camera, resulting in a natural and unstressed presentation. Two different methods of reaching the same goal, and fully adapted to the MI and style of the individual. The students in this action research have agreed to the disclosure of their identity, though unknown to

the external examiner. This gives room for an anonymous summative assessment by the external examiner, combined with the teacher's assessment based on product and also option to have adapted learning, progression and the individual qualities of the students in mind. Whether this is viewed as correct procedure or not by the reader, is beyond the scope of this paper.



Fig. 3. Exam component 2; reflecting over process.

The course on which the exam is based has had a focus on in-depth learning, and the exam does not require to write *about* in-depth learning, but to be a process and product *of* in-depth learning. The focus of the video to view the exam process and product in light of in-depth learning has resulted in some quite profound reflections based on personal experience, rather than theory of the textbook. Though challenging for some, others prefer the freer oral presentation to a tedious written presentation; thus motivational and gives students with e.g. dyslexia the opportunity to shine.

Educating teachers should be modelling, where each learner being seen and given the opportunity to draw on his or her strengths; strengths which in this sample released through triggering a range of MI. With this approach as a yard stick, the sample home exam with a framework catering for a large scope for personal preferences and interests ensuring ownership to both process and product, ticks the boxes. With safe ground as a point of departure, the students are more motivated to provide a product they are proud of, rather than struggling to provide standardized responses. The exam gives students options to work on their *own* premises, rather than those of the textbook driven exams. The video reflection is an important means for students to not only assess their own work in process, but also the exam format itself; whereby the teacher may value this as formative assessment of providing the course over time. Unison student feedback is exemplified by “the most enjoyable”, “challenging” and “most relevant” format experienced in higher education. With full access to all resources and cooperation with peers, one might assume an inflation of top grades. This proved not to be the case, as the grades awarded spanned from A to D; and besides, it proved far more enjoyable assessing the exam papers when there are not two identical ones. Challenging when not being able to compare answer for answer, but also a positive challenge where the teacher may need to sharpen wits rather than count points.

As opposed to a pure reading list reproduction, the students through the sample home exam are given the chance to create, the highest level of Anderson et al's revised taxonomy, as opposed to being required to remember facts as per lower level. There should be no doubt at which level category we desire our students to be assessed.



## References

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