

Viewpoints: should teaching students who fail a literacy and numeracy test be barred from teaching?

January 18 2019, by Lynn Sheridan And Nan Bahr



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Starting this month, teaching students who fail or haven't yet taken the [Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education](#) (LANTITE) will not be able to teach in Victorian schools. Previously, around [one in 20](#) teachers who had failed the test or hadn't taken it yet received

provisional registration. Prospective students who took the test late in 2018 received their results [on January 11](#).

Victoria is the first state to implement these new standards. The [test](#) is a [federal initiative](#). By 2020, all states and territories will be required to ensure all new teachers pass the test before registration.

The test is meant to ensure all new teachers can read, write and perform simple maths equations. In this Viewpoints, Lynn Sheridan argues this test can't predict a teacher's effectiveness, while Nan Bahr argues we should prevent teaching students who haven't yet passed, or who fail the test, from registering.

Lynn Sheridan: The [Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education](#) (LANTITE) is limited in assessing the future quality of teachers. This test only assesses the students' baseline literacy and [numeracy skills](#) for teaching in the classroom. It is modelled on year nine NAPLAN tests, complex to administer and [expensive for students to access](#).

This means students who don't have the means to pay the A\$185 fee (up to three times) will be barred from registration, regardless of their efficacy as a teacher. It also doesn't test for a range of [personal attributes](#) essential to good teaching, including interpersonal and communication skills, resilience and passion for teaching. And it measures their test-taking ability, not their ability to teach that knowledge in practice.

Increased attention on how we select teachers for initial teacher education programs and employment is needed. [Research](#) shows we need to pay attention to both academic *and* non-academic capabilities to recruit the most appropriate teachers.

Ensuring initial teacher education programs are effective and high

quality are now [national education priorities](#). But there has been little systematic focus on how we make decisions about choosing teachers for the classroom, or students for initial teacher education programs.

Teacher effectiveness can only be measured by [how they support their students' achievement](#). A new teacher needs job opportunities and colleagues who support their teaching. [Research](#) shows practise is far more important than natural talent.

It takes [time, practice and support](#) for a new teacher to fully understand the demands of the profession and become an effective teacher. The personal attributes of the person selected, their development and commitment to improvement, teaching opportunities and guidance are crucial to good teaching.

Nan Bahr: The vital life skills of literacy and numeracy are learned and honed at school and they must be taught and demonstrated by every teacher. Send away applicants for teacher registration who can't meet the mark. Link them up with support programs for literacy and numeracy, and only provide provisional registration when they have met the standard. We know [parents expect it](#).

If we want our children to be fully literate, and numerate, they need to be taught by people who have a high level of personal skill. The [literature, social media](#) and intuition tell us how important it is for teachers to have strong personal literacy and numeracy capabilities. They'll struggle to employ the required skills for instant feedback in spotting basic errors and appropriately correcting them: fundamental for enhancing learning. It's unlikely they'll be able to unpick complex texts, problems, and ideas with their students.

As teachers, they need a deep understanding of what it means to be literate and how they can lead learners to their own [functional and](#)

[critical literacy](#). Without this, our children will not be enabled to be effective communicators of their ideas or self-reliant as functional adults.

These capabilities are [important life skills](#). Without numeracy and critical literacy skills, a person will struggle. A calculator won't help without a conceptual understanding of what needs to be calculated and why. A spell check won't help comprehension of the messaging in written communication. A grammar check won't help anyone be a powerful writer capable of advocating for themselves or their families.

If we want these capabilities for our children, teachers must have them. Some might say to leave it as a requirement only for the English and maths teachers, but functional and critical literacy and numeracy are a feature of [every discipline area](#).

The Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education regularly identifies pre-service teachers [who struggle](#). There is an opportunity to [re-sit the tests](#) multiple times. But if a pre-service teacher can't pass, they're clearly not ready to oversee student literacy and numeracy development.

Lynn Sheridan: The literacy and numeracy test (LANTITE) is a useful indicator of a graduate teacher's ability to pass a year nine NAPLAN style test. It's only a very simplistic "first pass" instrument to determine suitability of students for the teaching profession.

The LANTITE test does not determine a teacher's level of personal skills, intuition or life skills. It simply tests baseline literacy and numeracy skills at a year nine level only.

Current [research](#) suggests it would be better to assess a graduate teacher's suitability for teaching based on their teaching performance and teaching

degree results.

Much more is required to develop quality graduate teachers. Firstly, they should be selected on both academic and non-academic attributes, then supported in their education and into the [teaching](#) profession. Through this coordinated, long-term approach, student teachers can develop as effective teachers.

Nan Bahr: There is definitely [more to teaching](#) than [functional](#) personal literacy and numeracy. I also agree tests are inexact measures for understanding the deep and nuanced dimensions of critical [literacy](#) and [numeracy](#). But we shouldn't forgive people who have not yet demonstrated functional literacy and numeracy and allow them to be registered teachers anyway.

A teacher's perceived professionalism is [undermined](#) if their written communication is poor, or if they can't do simple calculations. Even apart from the classroom context, a [teacher's](#) letter to parents peppered with spelling errors, or assessments with miscalculated grades undermine the professional perceptions of the capabilities of teachers to teach complex ideas.

The profession's reputation and status can't withstand such a body blow. We should fully support the requirement for teachers to demonstrate basic [literacy](#) and numeracy skills prior to professional registration.

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Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Viewpoints: should teaching students who fail a literacy and numeracy test be barred

from teaching? (2019, January 18) retrieved 9 April 2024 from
<https://phys.org/news/2019-01-viewpoints-students-literacy-numeracy-barred.html>

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