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Digital and AI-Enabled Transformation of Preservice English Teacher Preparation and Assessment Guided by the Spirit of Educators

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Abstract: A well-written AI-assisted lesson plan tells teacher educators little about whether its author can teach it, adapt it, or defend its educational purpose. This gap matters for English teacher education in China, where digital reform is expected to advance the spirit of educators as well as professional competence. This conceptual paper examines how these expectations can enter the everyday work of preparation and assessment. It develops an account of three connected processes: interpreting educational values in instructional decisions, learning through tasks that require those decisions, and using evidence from practice to determine what should be attempted next. An illustrative reading unit on local culture shows how the account could connect language coursework, microteaching, and the school practicum. The proposed arrangements give particular attention to materials verification, responses to learner differences, and the distinction between assisted performance and independent competence. They also specify how mentors and preservice teachers might interpret portfolios without turning incomplete records into fixed judgments of ability. The paper proposes a design for local trials; it makes no claim that these arrangements have already improved preparation outcomes.

Keywords: Spirit of educators; Preservice English teachers; Digital and AI-enabled transformation; Teacher education; Developmental assessment

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1. Introduction

English teacher educators now face a practical difficulty: preservice teachers can produce increasingly polished teaching materials before they have learned to judge their educational suitability. A fluent reading passage, for example, may contain an inaccurate cultural explanation or demand knowledge that the intended pupils do not possess. Examining the finished passage alone will not show whether the pre-service teacher noticed either problem. The growing availability of generative AI therefore makes the relationship between

preparation and assessment a pressing concern.

In China, this concern sits within a broader policy commitment. The 2024 national opinion calls for the spirit of educators to be integrated into teacher preparation and professional development [1]. Provincial policy in Shandong also calls for the digital transformation of teacher education programs [2]. These commitments meet in actual teaching decisions: what materials deserve classroom time, whose learning difficulties receive attention, and what responsibilities remain with the teacher when a tool supplies an answer. Policy provides direction, but programs still need to work out how such decisions will be taught and assessed.

This paper asks how preparation and assessment can be organized around those decisions. More specifically, how can the spirit of educators inform expectations for preservice English teachers? What kinds of tasks allow them to exercise the judgment these expectations require? What evidence would justify a claim that they are becoming better prepared? The discussion is conceptual. It draws on policy and scholarship to develop a reform proposal, using teaching examples to clarify its operation. The examples are illustrative rather than records of an intervention.

The argument begins with educational purpose. Biesta [3] places judgment about the purposes of education at the center of educational professionalism. This is useful here because technical effectiveness cannot settle whether an instructional choice is educationally desirable. Yet the spirit of educators has its own grounding in Chinese educational practice, including commitments to public responsibility, moral cultivation, and cultural transmission. Biesta's account helps identify the place of judgment; it does not supply a substitute definition for this locally grounded concept.

A second concern is how teachers bring different kinds of knowledge to bear on a lesson. Mishra and Koehler [4] describe the interaction of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. Their framework helps explain why learning an application apart from a teaching problem is insufficient. An English teacher needs to know, for instance, whether automated text simplification preserves the language features that pupils are meant to study. Questions about the legitimacy of collecting pupil data or the value of the lesson's cultural content, however, require additional ethical and educational reasoning.

Existing digital and AI frameworks acknowledge responsibilities of this kind. China's Teachers' Digital Literacy standard includes digital social responsibility alongside application and professional development [5]. UNESCO's framework likewise addresses human-centered practice and AI ethics [6]. Scholarship on large language models identifies opportunities for resource production and personalized support, while raising concerns about reliability and bias [7]. Taken together, these sources give teacher educators grounds for asking preservice teachers to review generated content and explain its use. They do not remove the need to decide what counts as convincing evidence in a particular course or practicum.

The proposal below connects these concerns through the work of teaching. Educational values shape what a task asks preservice teachers to notice; the task gives them something consequential to decide; and assessment examines the grounds and effects of their choices. The intended contribution is an explanation of these connections. Installing a platform or adding an AI assignment would leave them unresolved.

2. From educational values to professional judgment

2.1. Interpreting the spirit of educators in teaching decisions

A program cannot establish that a pre-service teacher has understood the spirit of educators simply by asking for an accurate definition. Nor does agreement with an attitude statement show how that person will respond

when legitimate educational concerns compete. A lesson may need to introduce demanding cultural content while remaining accessible to pupils with limited English. Interpreting the spirit of educators for preparation therefore means identifying what it asks teachers to consider when they face such choices.

Its six dimensions suggest related, though distinguishable, questions. Ideals and convictions ask how English teaching serves pupils and a wider educational mission. Moral integrity concerns whether the teacher's conduct warrants the standards expected of pupils, including honesty about sources and AI assistance. Pedagogical wisdom asks what instruction is appropriate for these learners at this point. Diligent study and innovation require a willingness to check information and revise an unsuccessful approach. Benevolence directs attention to pupils whose difficulties or limited participation might otherwise pass unnoticed. The commitment to advancing educational ideals through cultural communication calls for informed explanations of Chinese experience and respectful engagement with other perspectives. These are interpretations for professional learning, rather than six independent traits to be scored in isolation.

Consider a generated English passage describing a local festival. Its language may be accurate while its account presents a contested custom as a practice shared by everyone in the locality. A preservice teacher who merely simplifies the vocabulary has left the cultural problem untouched. Checking the claim, deciding how to explain variation, and making the passage accessible require several of the above considerations at once. The educational value becomes visible in the decision and its justification, although one decision cannot establish a stable personal quality.

2.2. Learning judgment through professional tasks

Tasks make these questions teachable when they give preservice teachers a reason to choose between plausible alternatives. Authenticity need not mean that every assignment takes place in a school. A university task can use an anonymized classroom case, an identifiable learner group, and realistic limits on lesson time. What matters is that the learner information changes the design and that the author must explain how. Johnson's [8] sociocultural account of second language teacher education provides a basis for treating interaction, tools, and situated activity as part of learning to teach.

A reading unit on local culture can carry this work across several courses. The initial assignment might ask preservice teachers to check the source material and decide which cultural details the target class needs. A later assignment can require them to adapt the passage for learners with different reading difficulties and design questions that move beyond factual retrieval. In microteaching, peers and mentors can examine whether the questions elicit the intended reasoning. Revision then has a specific object: a question that invited guessing, a gloss that gave away the answer, or a cultural explanation that assumed too much background knowledge. No single version of the unit is presented here as a tested teaching solution.

The sequence matters because a final plan can conceal how little its author understands. Requiring a brief account of one rejected alternative and one consequential revision gives mentors a better basis for discussion. It also makes the preservice teacher's reasoning available for challenge. Such records should remain selective: documenting every edit would create work without necessarily clarifying any educational decision.

2.3. Turning records of practice into useful feedback

Digital tools can preserve material that would otherwise be difficult to revisit. A mentor can compare two versions of a lesson plan or return to a short recording of an exchange between teacher and pupil. AI-assisted transcription may make that exchange easier to discuss, provided the transcript is checked. The relevant

advantage is access to a particular episode, rather than the volume of data stored about the lesson.

A record still needs interpretation. More teacher questions could indicate a productive discussion, but could also reflect repeated attempts to obtain a predetermined answer. A quiet interval might signal confusion or give pupils time to think. The mentor and preservice teacher need to examine the task, what happened immediately before and after the episode, and any pupil work that helps explain it. Their discussion should end with a feasible change to try, such as revising a prompt or delaying intervention, together with a way to judge its effect.

This account links the three processes without assuming that one automatically produces the next. Values guide attention but need a task in which a choice can be made. Tasks provide experience, but experience may remain unexamined. Records support examination only when someone can interpret them and arrange a further opportunity to act. A program that collects extensive portfolios but leaves no time for revision would therefore be missing a necessary part of the proposed mechanism.

3. Organizing preparation and assessment

3.1. Locating responsibilities in the curriculum

Before changing course requirements, a program should examine how its present arrangements handle instructional decisions. Course documents and teaching artifacts can show what students are asked to produce. Interviews and observations can help establish what guidance they receive and whether feedback is used. School mentors can identify decisions that beginning teachers struggle with during the practicum. These inquiries would provide a local diagnosis; this paper does not presume that all programs face the same deficiencies. Counts of platform use or expressions of enthusiasm for AI would offer little help in locating them.

The diagnosis can then inform the allocation of curricular responsibilities. For cultural communication, English reading and intercultural communication courses might take primary responsibility for source interpretation, while a methods course examines how that content becomes a classroom task. Educational psychology and practicum supervision can contribute to understanding learner differences and judging the adequacy of support. Each contribution needs an identifiable place in the curriculum. Asking every course to repeat all six dimensions of the spirit of educators risks producing broad declarations with little ownership.

Assessment expectations should be negotiated while these responsibilities are assigned. All pre-service teachers need to meet shared requirements for English competence, integrity, and basic teaching practice. Their next learning tasks may nevertheless differ. One may need help explaining cultural content accurately; another may need to adapt explanations for pupils who cannot yet follow them. An initial assessment should help select that work and should be revisable as new evidence appears. It should not become a prediction that limits what a learner is allowed to attempt.

3.2. Carrying a teaching problem across courses and practice

Continuity is easier to establish when assignments return to a teaching problem that grows in complexity. In the local-culture example, a language course could examine the accuracy, difficulty, and coherence of candidate passages. A methods course could use those passages to design a unit for a specified class. Microteaching would expose problems in the enactment of that design, and the school practicum would require further adjustment to actual pupils. Corpus searches or generative tools enter where they help address

a problem. Preservice teachers still need enough language knowledge to recognize when the tool's output is misleading.

Grossman et al. [9] distinguish representations, decompositions, and approximations of practice. Their analysis helps justify examining a classroom case, working closely on a component of teaching, and rehearsing it before assuming fuller classroom responsibility. In the proposed sequence, a recording can make questioning available for study; a workshop can examine the wording and ordering of questions; microteaching can provide an opportunity to try the sequence. AI-generated pupil responses may add rehearsal possibilities. They cannot show how a real class will respond, and should not be treated as learner data.

The assignments need not produce a separate portfolio for every course. A small collection could travel with the unit: the verified passage, a plan explaining its adaptation, a selected teaching excerpt, and a justified revision. The language tutor would examine different aspects of this collection from those considered by a practicum mentor. Sharing the materials would allow later feedback to address earlier choices and would make duplicated or inconsistent demands easier to identify.

3.3. Assessing what preservice teachers can explain and do

The central assessment question is whether a preservice teacher can make a defensible teaching decision and respond when its consequences become apparent. Relevant evidence includes the fit between an objective and an activity, the accuracy of a cultural explanation, the handling of a pupil's difficulty, and the grounds for a revision. Responsible technology use also needs to be visible through source checking and disclosure of assistance. These actions may illuminate how educational values enter practice. They do not warrant a comprehensive moral judgment based on a single episode, a platform score, or inferred emotion.

A portfolio is useful only if its contents answer such questions. For each selected item, the preservice teacher should identify the teaching context, the assistance received, and the claim the item supports. A mentor who doubts that claim can ask for another episode or an explanation of contradictory evidence. For example, a lesson plan may provide differentiated tasks while the recording shows that the teacher offered the same prompt to everyone. This discrepancy calls for discussion and further observation before any conclusion about responsiveness to learners is settled.

Assessment of AI-assisted work requires an additional distinction. A strong submitted plan is evidence of the quality of the plan; independent teaching competence requires further demonstration. A brief oral discussion can ask why a passage was retained, what was changed in the generated draft, or how the lesson would be adjusted if pupils misunderstood a key concept. A short task completed without AI can add evidence of independent performance. Mentors should agree on sample judgments before applying a rubric, and revisit substantial disagreements. A descriptor such as "uses technology effectively" is too broad to resolve them; descriptions should identify what the teacher actually checks, explains, or adjusts.

Feedback must also become something the preservice teacher can use. Carless and Boud [10] connect feedback literacy with appreciating feedback, making judgments, managing affect, and taking action. In this setting, a useful next step might be to revise two reading questions and explain how the new versions address a difficulty identified in trial teaching. If the same difficulty recurs across a cohort, course tutors should reconsider the opportunities they provide to learn that part of the work. This gives assessment a route back into curriculum decisions, while keeping the immediate improvement task manageable.

3.4. Providing mentoring and testing the proposal

These arrangements require time for people to examine the same work. University tutors can help connect a decision with subject knowledge or educational theory; school mentors can judge its plausibility for a particular class. Technical staff can make recordings and documents accessible to authorized users. A workable local agreement should identify who provides feedback, who moderates assessments, and when the pre-service teacher can attempt a revision. If this work is added without recognition in teaching and supervision workloads, the proposed connections may remain largely administrative.

The technology can be modest. Shared documents, an audio recording, and a checked transcript may be sufficient for a focused mentoring discussion. More elaborate systems need to justify their additional cost and burden. Where actual pupils are involved, the program must establish authorization, limits on collection, access arrangements, and retention periods. Preservice teachers and mentors should be able to correct errors in records and add missing context. An incomplete profile must not acquire authority merely because it appears on a dashboard.

A limited pilot in a methods course and its associated practice component would allow the proposal to be examined before wider adoption. The pilot should specify the tasks, the mentoring available, and the claims each assessment is intended to support. Comparisons of successive plans and teaching episodes could then show what changed and whether feedback plausibly contributed. Where a suitable comparison group is available, differences in prior English proficiency, teaching experience, and mentoring would need attention. A small descriptive study could establish feasibility and reveal implementation problems, but would not by itself establish a causal effect.

Evaluation should also look for occasions when portfolio performance fails to transfer. Can a preservice teacher adapt a task for unfamiliar learner information without assistance? Can the person explain a cultural issue when follow-up questions depart from the prepared text? Agreement among assessors, the relevance of selected evidence, and the time required for mentoring all deserve examination. The resulting findings may justify changing an assessment or simplifying the documentation rather than expanding the technology. Whether the arrangements are worth sustaining depends on what they help teacher educators and pre-service teachers understand and improve.

4. Conclusion

Digital reform in English teacher education changes what submitted work can tell us about the person who produced it. This paper has argued that preparation and assessment need to meet at the point of professional judgment: selecting content, anticipating learner difficulties, responding during teaching, and deciding what to revise. The spirit of educators can guide those choices when its expectations are interpreted within the work itself. Tasks provide opportunities to exercise judgment, while mentoring and evidence from practice help preservice teachers examine its consequences. Technology is useful insofar as it makes that work possible or easier to examine.

The proposal remains to be tested. In particular, the interpretation of value expectations, the distinction between assisted and independent performance, and the demands placed on mentors require local investigation. The reading-unit example clarifies how a trial could be organized; it supplies no evidence of effectiveness. Research following preservice teachers from coursework into school practice could examine where the proposed connections hold and where they break down. Such evidence would provide firmer

grounds for deciding which arrangements deserve a lasting place in English teacher education.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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