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Education Researchers Respond to The COVID-19 Pandemic

Theme 11:
BUILDING BACK BETTER

Teacher choices in action: An enriching supplementary module for 'Teaching Practice' in 2020 and beyond

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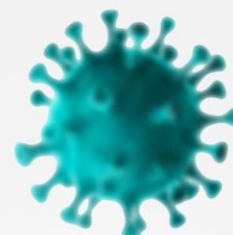
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CONTENTS

1 Introduction

Disruption to the basic education system from the COVID-19 pandemic poses significant challenges for higher education institutions (HEIs) offering pre-service teacher education programmes. The move to distance teaching, the closure of schools and concern for the safety of students and staff has meant that arrangements for Teaching Practice (TP) may not be able to proceed in their normal form. The trajectory of the pandemic, the location of 'hot spots', its duration and the risks posed to those working in the schooling sector are still unknown at this stage. It is risky to place students with declared or undeclared underlying health conditions in school-based TP placements until it is safe to do so. While some HEIs have received communication from surrounding schools welcoming the placements of pre-service teachers to replace teachers with comorbidities, others have intimated that the demands of catch-up programmes mean they are unable to accommodate students, or that their staff will be unable to provide their usual levels of mentoring to pre-service teachers. The use of public transport and taxis to travel between their residences and placement schools exposes pre-service teachers to risk. Some academic and contract staff used to supervise and assess student teaching, particularly those with underlying health conditions, have expressed reluctance to visit dozens of different schools until it is safe for all. Even in the cases where pre-service teachers can be placed and continue with small classes or groups, they would probably do so without the continuous support of a mentor teacher. There is an urgent need to consider how professional learning during Teaching Practice (TP) can be offered meaningfully to pre-service teachers during and after the pandemic.

2 A practice-focused module to supplement TP

A group of teacher educators, drawn from a range of HEIs, have formulated a practice-focused module that can be used towards a partial fulfilment of Teaching Practice requirements. The module, called "Teacher Choices in Action" draws attention to an essential but often ignored dimension of student learning during their school-based placements. The module presents to students sets of choices that teachers need to make in every lesson they design and teach. These choices revolve around how teachers conceptualise and work with knowledge, how teachers work inclusively with learners and how teachers support learner engagement with the content. The module uses guided analysis of lesson recordings and transcripts, teacher interviews and teaching resource materials to extend the mentoring that ideally happens between a pre-service teacher and a mentor teacher. The module enriches, but does not repeat, what is covered in university coursework. Analysing how these choices are enacted in a range of recorded lessons, senior pre-service teachers draw on concepts from what coursework they have already covered. The tasks are designed to alert junior students to the importance of coursework that is still coming in their curriculum.

The module offers:

- Practice-focused units that articulate with, but do not repeat, what pre-service teachers have already covered (or will cover) in their university-based coursework.
- An extension and enrichment of the mentoring that pre-service teachers should ideally receive in school-based placements.

- Carefully developed activities that guide student teachers in identifying and analysing the lesson design choices made by teachers.
- A set of analytic tools and concepts for describing and analysing classroom practice.
- Opportunities for pre-service teachers to articulate and interrogate their own thinking about the lessons they observe.
- Opportunities for pre-service teachers to become more aware of the ways in which they focus on some aspects of teaching, and less so on others.
- An option for HEs to require their pre-service teachers to produce lessons with a rationale for the various teaching choices made in their lesson design.

The module requires pre-service teachers to observe and analyse classroom teaching and materials. The module replaces the mentoring and coaching that ideally should take place when pre-service teachers work closely with a teacher who is able to give an account of her practice. This module is not isolated from students' previous experiences of classroom-based TP. Students are provided with opportunities to reflect on, during this module, and compare with actual school-based practice, whether it be retrospective comparison (in the case of senior students) or prospective anticipation (in the case of beginner students). It is an important intervention that should strengthen students' understanding of their own classroom-based practices in the long term.

The teaching practice-focused module would be freely available to any HEI that needs to supplement TP requirements during 2020, and beyond. The module ensures that registered students can undertake work that contributes to their TP requirements for 2020, as a part of the expectations of the TP requirements of a Bachelor of Education or Postgraduate Certificate of Education qualification. In 2020, it may be used to supplement, for example, a distance-based study of teaching, a campus-based session of peer micro-teaching, time in virtual classrooms, a community-based initiative or other such arrangement. The module consists of 7 units with tasks that require pre-service teachers to describe, analyse teaching. Full participation and the completion of the required tasks of the core module is equivalent to 8 SAQA credits towards TP requirements. In addition to the core module, HEIs may require their students to complete two extension tasks that requires them to produce original work and a rationale of their teaching choices for an additional 2 SAQA credits. The designed lessons required by the additional tasks would be submitted to and assessed by the relevant HEI as part of a portfolio of evidence.

This module has the support of the Department of Basic Education (DBE), the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the South African Council for Educators (SACE). Planning is underway to make modules and materials accessible through an on-line distance learning platform hosted by JET Education Services Application to have this platform zero-rated is underway so that pre-service teachers can access the materials without incurring data costs. The module will be available to pre-service teachers to start from _Monday 17 August 2020_.

3 The module design

Teaching is intentional, complex work in which teachers should make informed choices in the lessons they design. The best decisions are not arbitrary, but are made considering a range of complex variables, including the content to be taught, the diverse needs of learners, the contextual realities and teachers' ethical commitments. The units in the module draw the attention to the pedagogical options teachers have, and the choices they make in their lessons. In each unit, a series of key questions is posed. Pre-service teachers are shown these choices in action, and how some basic teacher decisions have important implications for how they structure the learning process. The module also includes metacognitive tasks in which pre-service teachers analyse their own thinking and reasoning about teaching. The module therefore enables pre-service teachers to become more aware of the reasoning of teachers in practice, and aware of their own reasoning on practice.

The module thereby contributes directly to enabling pre-service teachers to attain South African Council of Educators' Professional Teaching, Standard 7:

> **7. Teachers make thoughtful choices about their teaching that lead to learning gains for all learners.**
>
> 7.1. *Teachers consider how learners develop and learn when choosing teaching and learning strategies.*
>
> 7.2. *Teachers seek to understand how theoretical concepts and evidence-based research can inform the choices they make in their classroom practices.*
>
> 7.3. *Teachers can account for the design, delivery and assessment of lessons to themselves, their colleagues and to other stakeholders.*
>
> 7.4. *Teachers improve their teaching by reflecting on what has worked and what has not worked in the learning experiences they have created.*

The module is developed around key decisions teachers make as they work with knowledge and learner diversity. By the end of the module, pre-service teachers should be more aware of the alternative courses of action that teachers may choose from, and how their choices have direct implication for the structure of their lessons.

The module consists of the following units:

UNIT 1: Choosing to be a teacher

UNIT 2: Teachers' choices in establishing a learning environment

UNIT 3: Teachers' choices that work with knowledge

UNIT 4: Teachers' choices that support learning

UNIT 5: Teachers' choices with making lessons inclusive

UNIT 6: Teachers' choices with modes of lesson delivery

UNIT 7: Teachers' choices in action

A more detailed outline of each unit, its purpose, content focus, key questions, tasks and theoretical underpinnings are elaborated in **ANNEXURE A** of this report.

4 Potential for strengthening TP offerings

While this TP module is offered as an alternative response to the current crisis with respect to COVID-19, the situation offers unique learning opportunities for student teachers and addresses the multiplicity of concerns about student learning during school-based TP. The module draws on international studies that show the benefits of teaching students about professional decision-making in contexts of reduced complexity (Grossman, 2009; 2011) and having an enhanced focus on systematic learning and knowledge-building. It draws extensively on insights from empirical and conceptual research on teacher education produced by South African scholars and researchers.

Sessions of TP must be more than a logistical exercise in placing pre-service teachers in schools with an assessor. In school-based TP placements, pre-service teachers devote much attention and energy to the management of classrooms and the supervision of learner behaviour. Recent research suggests that while pre-service teachers generally appreciate their time in schools, they tend to focus on the more visible routines of teaching and less attention is paid to the pedagogical reasoning that informs teaching actions. This less visible, but crucially important dimension of teaching practice needs to be made explicit. It is likely to be more visible in the analysis and production of recorded teaching materials, where the immediate concerns of classroom management are not uppermost in students' minds.

Some challenges to the quality of student learning during TP have been revealed in research and include:

- High absenteeism by mentor teachers (Moodley, Sadeck & Luckay, 2018)
- The challenges of articulating tacit teaching practices so that feedback tends to be tips rather than an elaboration of practice (Borello, 2019)
- Reflections that are often more descriptive than analytical (Rusznyak, forthcoming).
- The overwhelming complexity of classrooms where teachers focus on many dimensions of practice simultaneously (Gravett, Henning & Eiselen, 2011)
- Technical, rather than pedagogical responses to learner diversity (Amin & Ramrathan, 2009)
- An absence of a shared coherent framework with which to discuss teachers' pedagogic choices (Langsford, forthcoming)
- Lesson planning expectations that require little rationale for lesson design (Rusznyak & Walton, 2011)
- TP Assessment rubrics that promote a technical compliance approach to student teaching (Rusznyak & Bertram, 2015).

The consequence is that while TP provides an opportunity for pre-service teachers to acquire ample classroom experience, it does not always reveal the grounds on which teachers make choices in their lesson design. While teacher education literature and indeed, the MRTEQ Policy (DHET, 2015) delineates the different types of teacher knowledge that pre-service teachers should acquire during their ITE programmes. Professional teacher knowledge is condensed in the pedagogical choices that teachers in organising cumulative, inclusive learning opportunities. The systematic study of the effects of teacher choices in their lessons provides possibilities of seeing how knowledge informs practice in enacted ways. This moves pre-service teachers beyond simply recognising a knowledge category or type of question, or level of thinking in classroom practice.

There are multiple benefits of this module that could strengthen and consolidate TP, well beyond addressing the immediate needs of the sector during the pandemic. This module draws attention to pedagogic possibilities in lesson design and the choices teachers make in authentic recorded lessons. Understanding pedagogical reasoning in context is crucial if pre-service teachers are to become discerning professional teachers. It is a required competence in the SACE Professional Teaching Standards, yet the above research suggests that pre-service teachers are not often made aware of pedagogical options and reasoning during their school-based TP placements.   The module could, in the longer term, provide training material for mentor teachers through a South African Council for Educators (SACE) endorsed continuing professional development course. The evaluation of the module in 2020 is also likely to highlight how and why it could be incorporated as part of normal TP offerings beyond 2020.

5 Logistics and operational matters:

1. The module is designed as a resource for the teacher education sector. It does not replace normal coursework nor does it impose particular lesson planning requirements on participating pre-service teachers. Instead, it directs the attention of pre-service teachers to aspects of mentoring and classroom teaching that research suggests are often overlooked during their time spent in school-based placements.

2. The module works together with what pre-service teachers have already learnt through their previous classroom-based experiences and university coursework. It is expected that students in their first or second year of study would not provide the same level of theoretical sophistication in their responses that could be expected of more senior students. For this reason, the differentiation of this module across various NQF levels resides in the sophistication of student engagement. Students' credits are therefore pitched at the level of the NQF of the work-based learning module for which they are formally registered.

3. There is value in the units and the tasks for pre-service teachers over different levels of their ITE study. For junior students, the module flags key issues, and provides a framework for noticing what is less visible in classroom observations. For senior students, it provides consolidation and enrichment.

4. The 'Teacher Choices in Action' module is offered at two levels of SAQA credits, a core module of 8 credits that are done variably at NQF 5-7. There is also an option for HEIs to require that students do an additional 2 credits at NQF 7, in which case the module will contribute 10 credits towards work-based learning.

    4.1. The completion of the core module requires 80 hours of notional learning time, and therefore consists of 8 SAQA credits. This includes engaging with the module, watching the lesson clips, and working on the tasks. This module is asynchronous, and can be done flexibly. It could be scheduled for an equivalent of 3- 4 weeks of full time study, or could be extended over a longer period of time if used with other teaching practice activities. It may be used to supplement a reduced practice-based TP programme such as a reduced school-based placement, time in a virtual classroom, the formal observation and analysis of distance lessons on on-line learning platforms and/or the design of lessons and teaching materials for peer teaching on campus.

4.2. Should HEIs require pre-service teachers to complete additional tasks for up to 10 SAQA credits, at NQF level 7, extension tasks offered in Units 6 and 7. These require the design and production of a set of lessons plus a rationale for the teaching choices made in its design. These additional tasks could form the basis of a micro-teach programme in which the rationale for lesson design is presented and lessons are demonstrated for assessment by the HEI at which the student is registered.

5. The module is offered through on-line learning system to be hosted by JET Education Services, on behalf of the Department of Higher Education and Training. It shall be ready for pre-service teachers to access from Monday 17 August 2020.

6. The module team works together with the Teaching Practice coordinators based at different HEIs to confirm students' full participation and completion of the tasks required for 8 or 10 credits towards work-based learning.

7. Tasks completed by pre-service teachers can be submitted by students to their HEI as part of a Teaching Practice portfolio of evidence required for assessment. The 2-credit extension task in the 10 SAQA credit option may be used as a basis for a micro-teaching requirement based at the HEI. The completed tasks could also be used by the student as part of a portfolio of evidence for full SACE registration, during their teacher induction.

8. The module development / research team can provide training to HEIs about the conceptualisation of the module and how the portfolio tasks can be assessed, if required.

6 A research dimension to the module

This TP module not only provides a way for HEIs to enable pre-service teachers to safely and meaningfully engage with practice-focused learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also adds value and enriches the TP programme across the sector. It also provides a much-needed opportunity for a systematic and large-scale study of how pre-service teachers develop insights into teaching through ITE programmes. This research has the potential to provide empower the sector by understanding how better to structure and support the TP part of ITE programmes.

Higher Education Institutions are invited to consider module as a supplement for their TP programme for 2020 and beyond. To assess the value of this module, interested institutions and their students will be invited to participate in a research project entitled "South African pre-service teachers' pedagogical reasoning on action"

The research will be guided by the following question:

'How do cohorts of South African pre-service teachers make sense of classroom teaching during their teacher education programmes?'

It seeks to understand how pre-service teachers develop more expert ways of thinking about teaching as they move through their ITE programmes. Research findings will be shared with participating institutions who can then use findings to inform curricular and staff development initiatives. Participating institutions may wish to encourage teacher educators to undertake a postgraduate qualification using research data

from this project, under the supervision of the research team. Without institutional identifying details, the broader research findings will be made available through engagement with the DHET and the Education Deans Forum in due course. Research will also evaluate the module to assess its value in being incorporated as part of normal TP offerings beyond 2020.

7 Invitation to participate in the module and the research project

The module development team is working in consultation with SACE, the DBE and DHET to ensure an educationally sound, worthwhile module that supports pre-service teachers' professional development, while meeting requirements of the Departments.

HEIs who would like more information about offering the module as a part of TP requirements, and participation in the research project, should contact the Project Leader, Prof. Lee Rusznyak, Email: Lee.Rusznyak@wits.ac.za

The Project Management team would need confirmation from HEIs about their intention to participate in the project by **Monday 22 June 2020**.

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Annexure A: Module outline

UNIT 1: Choosing to be a teacher

Purpose: This unit introduces pre-service teachers to the visible and difficult to see aspects of teachers' work. This unit also provides a space for pre-service teachers to interrogate their assumptions about what is important when observing and analysing lessons. Their responses become an object for analysis and reflection in subsequent units.

Content Focus:
The importance of pedagogical reasoning to inform classroom action
The central place of reasoning and responsiveness in teachers' professional practices

Key Questions:
- Why did I choose to be a teacher?
- What kind of a teacher do I hope to become?
- Teaching as thinking and doing work: what parts of teachers' work can't be done by robots (and other technology)?

Recorded lesson observations
Tasks for submission:
- Basic biographical details, and metaphor task
- Observe and respond to a recorded lesson in your phase and subject specialisation:
  - *What decisions did teacher have to make in planning and teaching this lesson?*
  - *How does the teacher enact principles of good teaching in this lesson?*
  - *How do you think that this lesson could be improved?*

Estimated time: 10 hours

Conceptual underpinnings that inform the design of Unit 1:
- Lortie's (1975) Apprenticeship of Observation
- Gallego (2001) Apprenticeship of Oppression
- Lakhoff & Johnson (1985) Cognitive Metaphor Theory
- Batchelor & Petersen's (2019) Teaching in the age of AI
- Maton's (2014) Knower gazes in social practices
- Shulman's (1987) Types of Teacher Knowledge
- Korthagen (2004), Going to the core - Onion model

UNIT 2: Teachers' choices in managing the learning environment

Purpose: This unit introduces pre-service teachers to the more visible and difficult to see aspects of teachers' work. This module addresses a concern that during TP, pre-service teachers focus more attention on the routines of teaching without sufficient attention to the underlying pedagogical thinking and rationale for lesson conceptualisation and task design.

Content Focus:
Teachers as thinkers; Teachers as doers

Establishing learning spaces that make the most of teaching and learning time

Key questions:
- How does the way in which teachers arrange space affect teaching and learning?
- What choices enable teachers to make the best use of the lesson time?
- What choices do teachers have when responding to disruptions?

Recorded lesson observations
Tasks for submission:
- Analysis of own response to the lesson observation task from Unit 1: What visible aspects of teacher action did I comment on? What less visible parts of teachers' work did I comment on?
- In the triage of teacher, knowledge and learners, on which interactions did I focus on the most? The least?
- What do my responses to tasks from Unit 1 reveal about my conceptions of teachers' work?

Estimated time: 10 hours

Conceptual underpinnings that inform the design of Unit 2:
- SACE Professional Teaching Standards
- Morrow's (2007) Teaching as the professional practice of organising systematic learning
- Rusznyak & Walton (2011) Planning as a rationale for lesson design
- Shulman's (1987) model of teaching as pedagogical reasoning and action

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UNIT 3: Teachers' choices that work with knowledge

Purpose: This unit introduces pre-service teachers to the choices that teachers make in sequencing a series of lesson steps that help learners build their understanding of more complex forms of knowledge.

Content Focus:
How do teacher arrange lesson steps that promote cumulative and coherent learning processes?

Key questions:
- How does the knowledge to be taught affect teaching decisions?
- What choices enable teachers to turn learners' experiences into more complex knowledge?
- What choices enable teachers to make complex concepts more understandable?
- How do teachers decide on the best order for their lesson steps?

Recorded lesson observations and textbook extracts
Tasks for submission:
- Responses to a set of questions about how teachers work to build a different kind of learning pathway in three observed lesson recordings
- Use semantic waves to describe how the target knowledge's complexity and context-boundedness shifts over time to construct coherent sequences of lesson steps.

Estimated time: 14 hours

Conceptual underpinnings that inform the design of Unit 3:
- Shulman's (1987) Pedagogical reasoning and Pedagogical Content Knowledge
- Bernstein's (2000) hierarchical and horizontal knowledge structures
- Hugo's (2013)'Cracking the code' of educational practice

- Maton's (2014) Knower structures and semantic waves

UNIT 4: Teachers' choices that support learning

Purpose: The purpose of this topic is for pre-service teachers to understand the choices they have in setting learning task demands and providing feedback to learners. Classroom research in South Africa shows that often task demands are cognitively low, and that teachers seldom provide explicit task or process feedback to learners, particularly when correcting learner errors (Reeves, 2005, Hoadley, 2012).

Content Focus:
Teachers choices for design of learning tasks and the feedback to learners and their work

Key questions
- What interactions between teachers and learners support their learning?
- What choices do teachers make about the design of learning tasks?
- What choices do teachers make about when to use learner tasks?
- What choices do teachers make when providing feedback to learners?

Recorded lesson observations, assessment tasks and samples of marked work
Tasks for submission:
Student teachers will need to analyse task demands, teacher's feedback to learners. They will need to explain their rationale for the categorisation, and how these choices contribute to the overall design of a coherent lesson structure.

Estimated time: 14 hours

Conceptual underpinnings that inform the design of Unit 4:
- Krathwohl & Anderson's (2009) Taxonomy of Learning, Teaching, Assessing
- Hattie & Timperley (2007) The Power of Feedback
- Maton's (2014) Semantic waves
- Reeves (2005) 'Opportunity-to-learn'
- Black & Wiliam's process and ego feedback'

UNIT 5: Teachers' choices with making lessons inclusive

Purpose: This unit asks pre-service teachers to consider how learner diversity is pedagogically significant in each lesson they teach. Making choices with learner needs in mind ensures that they can participate fully in all aspects of the lesson.

Content Focus:
Teachers' perspectives on domination, marginalisation and inclusion in their lessons

Key Questions:
- What do teachers choose to keep the same for all learners in their lessons?
- What do teacher choose to make different for specific learners in their lessons?
- How can these choices be responsive to the diverse needs of all learners?

Recorded lesson observations and teacher interviews

Tasks for submission:
Critically analyse the teacher's choices her rationale for pitching lessons at a particular level.

Estimated time: 14 hours

Conceptual underpinnings that inform the design of Unit 5:
- Florian's (2019) Inclusive pedagogical approach in action
- Lewin's (2009) zones of exclusion
- Morrow's (2007) epistemological access and situational appreciation
- Shulman's (1986) Pedagogical reasoning
- Walton & Rusznyak's (2013) Pedagogically significant aspects of diversity

UNIT 6: Teacher choices with modes of lesson delivery

Purpose: This unit invites pre-service teachers to consider various modes of curriculum delivery suitable for teaching at a distance as an alternative means for knowledge-building given different technological and pedagogical affordances. It emphasises that a coherent, inclusive lesson of teaching at a distance needs to be informed by sound learning design principles and must to consider various barriers to participation necessitating a combination possible of solutions.

Content Focus:
Teaching at a distance require knowledge of various ICT tools and services and a level of digital fluency, however, pedagogical reasoning remains core.

Key questions:
- How do various modes of curriculum delivery inform pedagogic and technological choices?
- What design principles are important when planning lessons for teaching using different modes of delivery?

Tasks to be submitted:
Use the principles you have learnt to compare the choices made in two recorded clips - a lesson topic taught through contact and through distance modes of delivery.

EXTENSION TASK required for additional 2 SAQA credit option:
Use the principles you have learnt to design and produce a sequence of 3 lessons suitable for teaching either at a distance to South African learners. As you are planning the lesson, take note of the options you consider and the choices you are making.

Estimated time:
- 10 hours for 8-SAQA credit option
- 22 hours for 10-SAQA credit option

UNIT 7: Teacher choices in action

Purpose: This module consolidates the previous units, assesses pre-service teachers' learning, and provides them with an opportunity to give account of the pedagogical choices they make in producing a distance lesson. This task is designed to enable transfer of pedagogical reasoning from recognition to realisation in practice. It contributes to the building of "habits of personal inquiry and reflection about teaching and the

context in which it occurs" (Krull, 2005:145)

Content Focus:
Informed teacher thinking makes classroom action purposeful and powerful.

Key questions:
- Why do some teacher choices create better opportunities for learning than others?
- What criteria do teachers use to make appropriate choices?
- What design choices do I make when conceptualising and producing a set of lessons?

Recorded lesson observations
Tasks to be submitted for assessment:
- Observe and respond to an observed distance lesson in your phase and subject specialisation:
  - *How does the teacher enact principles of good teaching in this lesson?*
  - *How do you think that this lesson could be improved?*
- In what ways is your response similar or different to the one you wrote in Unit 1?

EXTENSION TASK for additional 2 SAQA credit option:
Write a full rationale for your lesson design choices when conceptualising and producing the sequence of 3 lessons required by Unit 6.

Estimated time:
- 8 hours for 8-SAQA credit option
- 16 hours 10-SAQA credit option

Conceptual underpinnings that inform the design of Unit 7:
- Bernstein's (1975) Rules of recognition and rules of realisation
- Maton's (2014) Cumulative knowledge-building
- Morrow's (2007) Teaching as the professional practice of organising systematic learning
- Rusznyak & Walton (2011) Planning as a rationale for lesson design
- Shulman's (1986) Pedagogical reasoning and action