

## TAU 3 REPORT

### Project title: Design-based approach to enhancing student engagement through peer feedback

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#### Contextual background

The Covid-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdown led to unprecedented and unplanned changes in South African Higher Education, such as remote and online teaching and learning. For teacher education students, placement in schools for work-integrated learning (WIL) or teaching practice became impossible. The pandemic “necessitated alternative ways of thinking about how to do Teaching Practice safely but still result in meaningful practice-based learning” (DHET, 2020:ix). One of these alternative ways was the introduction of the Teacher Choices in Action (TCiA) module, which was meant to enable learning from practice. The design of TCiA was framed on Legitimation Code Theory, an approach “that enables both the exploration of knowledge-building and the cumulative building of knowledge” (Maton, 2016:2).

As stated in the TCiA Resource book (DHET, 2020), video observation was an integral part of the module in order to offer pre-service teachers a learning-from-practice approach that would supplement and enrich work-integrated learning. The approach involves analysis of lesson tasks by students such as engaging with case studies and lesson observations and writing reports. University lecturers then assess and grade students’ reports. Because the tasks are online, the effectiveness of TCiA, therefore, requires that students have access to relevant infrastructure and resources to enable online engagement. In addition, students should have the ability to make evaluative judgments and provide meaningful feedback. The module is aligned to four SACE principles, one of which is “*Making teaching choices requires pedagogical reasoning*” (Resource book, x), which would guide the provision of opportunities for students to think about classroom practice in ways that matter and that develop their pedagogical reasoning.

Univen is a Historically Disadvantaged University (HDU) which is characterised by underprepared students coming from poor backgrounds with little economic capital. With better-resourced Historically Advantaged Universities (HDUs), students have an economic and academic advantage. As a result of the pandemic lockdown, Univen students had to participate in TCiA from their homes where most lacked relevant resources. Therefore, lack of resources such as data and living in rural areas with compromised connectivity would be some of the factors affecting access and hence outcomes of learning from an online platform. Hence, by engaging in TCiAs, there might be a lack of ‘participatory parity’ [See Nancy Fraser’s views on social justice and parity of participation (Fraser, 1996; 2005)] for the majority of students at Univen compared to their counterparts from better-resourced backgrounds and environments. Fraser’s views on participation parity have been found to be relevant in the South African higher education landscape (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; Garraway, 2017) and even in schooling in other places (Hargreaves, Buchanan, & Quick, 2021). As noted by Leibowitz and Bozalek (2015), student and staff participation at university is impeded by social injustice in terms of social, educational and cultural capital. As already stated, the University of Venda has been affected by low economic capital, as seen by the number of students who benefit from student support grants such as the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), a bursary scheme funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) meant to assist students who cannot fund their higher education studies. The question, therefore,

would be whether TCiA represents a socially just pedagogy (offering equitable learning conditions for achievement” (Moje, 2007 cited in Leibowitz & Bozalek, 2015) to all students, or if it perpetuates the inequality that exists between HDIs and HAIs. In other words, does TCiA approach to teaching practice benefit students at Univen or is it more of a disadvantage as students are not provided with an opportunity for learning due to lack of access to the learning platform(s)? Bearing these constraints to participatory parity in mind this project examined challenges students experienced and then explored ways to enhance students’ understanding of teaching and learning and the ability to critique lessons, online or face-to-face, meaningfully.

## Aims and Processes / Methods

The focus of this project was on exploring instructional strategies that would enable students to develop knowledge and skills in pedagogical reasoning and prepare them to be *contextually responsive* in their practice as teachers. The Design-based research approach (Brown, 1992; Collins, 1992) which has been summarised by Reeves (2006) into four phases was adopted to guide the study. From the first phase, the problem articulated was whether or not students at a historically-disadvantaged institution, most of whom have low economic and social capitals would have the capacity to engage in an online module from their homes in a similar way as students having higher capitals. The was a question of equity in terms of access to TCiA and the opportunity to learn from it and that there seems to be a lack of ‘participatory parity’ as described by Fraser (1996).

The first objective, therefore, was to examine possible challenges and threats to learning which came with TCiA at Univen. This included identifying, from the students who had completed teaching practice, lived challenges from participating in TCiA, and also attempts to address those challenges by identifying pedagogies that would promote effective ways of learning how to teach from lesson observation. Views were collected from Bachelor of Education in Further Education and Training (BED FET) and Postgraduate Certification in Education (PGCE) students who had completed their teaching practice, part of which was participating in TCiA. In addition, some of the lecturers who had assessed and graded student teachers’ reports provided their opinions regarding students’ participation in TCiA. Although some findings indicated that students lacked data or connectivity in order to engage effectively with the module, in general, other views regarding students’ participation suggested that more time and training were needed to engage meaningfully with the tasks and increase the effectiveness of engagement. There were suggestions that students needed to be guided by lecturers before they engage with video lessons.

The findings prompted the second objective of the project, which was an exploration of teaching approaches that would enhance students’ engagement in learning in- and from-practice, for them to learn how to teach. This was guided by the question: “What instructional strategies would enable students to develop knowledge and skills in pedagogical reasoning and prepare them to be contextually responsive in their practice as teachers?” Since the main activity in TCiA was lesson observation and reporting, one of the subsidiary research questions was “How can peer feedback on lesson observations be enhanced to improve students’ experiences and learning?” This question led this project into exploring sustainable ways of providing feedback. As noted by Balloo and Vashakidze (2020:255), feedback is most effective when students are active participants in the feedback process.

In this latter exploration, the design principles toward a constructivist and adaptive pedagogy that would provide a supportive and non-threatening environment were identified. In order to enhance students’ engagement in the feedback process, a collaborative pedagogy was followed by organising students into groups so that they could learn from one another and

together. By engaging student teachers in video analysis and peer support, the project hoped to add to the pedagogy of social justice, which should contribute to the transformation of students and their knowledges and contexts as they engage in critical questioning and engagement (see Moje, 2007 in Leibowitz and Bozalek, 2015). This would serve as learning for both students and staff alike. As higher education staff and researchers, this project intervention was meant to assist us to critically engage with our own practice and reflect on what we do with a purpose to transform.

Based on ideas from Herrington and Herrington (2008), Herrington and Oliver (2000), Korthagen (2010) and Ravitch (2020), a number of design principles were formulated to come up with an intervention to enhance students' engagement. The table also shows the design principles and how each design principle was reflected in the enhancement intervention.

<b>Design principles</b>	<b>Enhancement approach</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide an authentic context that reflects the way the knowledge of teaching will be used in real life, with activities that have real-life relevance and transfer.</li> </ul>	Simulated teaching environment whereby student teachers prepared and taught lessons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enable access to expert performance in teaching and enable modelling of teaching within a real-life context.</li> </ul>	Simulated teaching whereby student teachers prepared and taught lessons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for multiple roles and perspectives by enabling students to critique others and also receive feedback from others.</li> </ul>	Students observed others' lessons where they played the role of learners, while at the same time analysing the lessons.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for collaborative construction of knowledge by enabling students to work in groups.</li> </ul>	Students worked in groups of 3 to 4 to prepare lessons. They took turns to teach where they were observed and critiqued by others. After teaching, each group had a partner group that provided feedback. The group receiving feedback was also given an opportunity to respond.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for reflection and articulation.</li> </ul>	The recipients of feedback reflected on their teaching and responded to the feedback received from peers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for students to develop judgement about their own practical performance, in a supportive and humane environment.</li> </ul>	Students reflected on their own performance in terms of pedagogical practices and the safety and conduciveness of the classroom environment.

## Achievement and Challenges

The importance of teaching practice in the education of a teacher has been lauded considerably in teacher education literature as an integral part of learning in practice (MRTEQ, 2015). Thus, preparing student teachers for WIL is essential so that they can learn from the WIL experience to become independent teachers. It is even more important to prepare students for life-long learning so that beyond teaching practice, they are able to make informed choices about their teaching. Students' engagement in peer feedback seems to have facilitated adaptive learning by enabling students to have dialogue, posing questions and generating claims and assessing practice. Focussing on aspects such as 'Lesson

introduction', 'learner engagement' through tasks, paying attention to grouping strategies, questioning and allowing learners to ask questions, students were able to provide feedback on how they felt their peers did or did not achieve.

### Achievements

One of the achievements of this project was the involvement of other members of staff, where strategies to engage students in critiquing lessons and providing feedback were tried out with samples of BEDFET and PGCE students. Students' willingness to receive and give feedback and the positiveness with which peers' feedback was received could be a mark of an improved academic self-concept as noted by Simonsmeier, Peiffer, Flaig, & Schneider (2020), which could also translate into improved engagement with learning. Further, the students have indicated an intention to continue keeping ties and collaborating when they go to schools for work-integrated learning. This is a possible indication that they found some value in the activity.

### Challenges

The modularised system in education programmes makes the implementation of long-term projects difficult. The research could not start in the second semester of the year which was when the project started because by then students were in schools for WIL, delaying the start of the project by half a year. The new year started late and that meant that the semester was short. The group of students that participated in this phase are leaving the module at the end of the semester. Furthermore, the first semester when the project was implemented started late and had only a few weeks, making it difficult to provide students with sufficient opportunities for practice. The short semester has also affected the number of assessments and the amount of feedback students receive on their performance. As noted by Boud and Molloy (2013) few assessment tasks and feedback mean less practice for students and "less systematic knowledge about their performance" (p.699). Due to these challenges, coupled with an excessive overload of the researcher, Phase 4 of the DBR, which is a reflection and revision of the design principles to enhance the implementation of the intervention will be done in the next stage of the project.

### Future prospects

The need for more practice to enhance engagement is highlighted by this research. Therefore, to further enhance that engagement, the next phase of the study will include a reflection by students before they receive feedback from their peers. By comparing their self-reflection and peer feedback, students can also learn what other people look for in their teaching which they might not have noticed themselves. The coming academic year promises better outcomes since the new BED qualification will see subject methodology modules starting in the second year of the programme. This will enable a longer engagement with the students and more time to implement the project iteratively for the impact and effectiveness to be realised. Thus, supported by the FLUX pedagogy framework (Ravitch, 2020), an exploration of emergent design will be explored for the development of a student-centred pedagogy that enhances student engagement in judgment-making and peer feedback.

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