



Welcome to  
**Teacher Choices**  
in Action

# Getting started ...



Welcome to the Teacher Choices in Action module! This module is a result of ground-breaking national collaboration. This is the first time in teacher education history that many different institutions have worked together to produce a single course available to all South African student teachers. We hope that you will enjoy doing the course as much as we have enjoyed designing it for you.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated alternative ways of thinking about how to do Teaching Practice safely but would still result in meaningful practice-based learning. For several years, teacher educators and the Department of Higher Education and Training have considered setting up a national Teaching Practice initiative. The pandemic meant it was time to put the thinking into action. No one university had the resources or capacity to put a module like this together on its own, and so a team convened to lead the project.

The Teacher Choices in Action module forms part of the *Teaching and Learning Development Capacity Improvement Programme* (TLDICP), which implemented through a partnership between the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the European Union. The module launched in August 2020 with 26 700 student teachers from 20 higher education institutions registered to participate. The pilot phase of the module shall continue during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

## Teacher choices in action

Teaching is not as easy as it may seem. Telling a class a few facts is not the same as building their knowledge. Keeping learners busy is not the same as organising opportunities for them to develop their skills. To be a professional teacher, you need to know what to do, and why you are doing it in one way and not another. Some teachers have learnt over years of experience ‘what works’ but may find it difficult to explain why it works. Others may be able to give reasons for their actions, but we know that classrooms are busy, complex places. There is seldom time for teachers to stop and explain the reasons for their classroom actions to others. To really learn from teaching practice, you need to see both the visible and less visible parts of teaching. You also need to understand how things fit together to make learning happen. This module is called *Teacher Choices in Action* because it focuses on the thinking work that teachers do with learners and knowledge.

There are decisions that all teachers make in every lesson they teach, regardless of phase or subject specialisation (Hugo, 2014). Teachers make decisions about how they work with resources, space and time, with knowledge, with learners and the opportunities and limitations in the school context. During the module, you will learn why some choices are better than others depending on what is taught, who is being taught and where the teaching is happening.

When you know about the basic choices that every teacher makes, they become more visible to you, and you can think about these choices much more intentionally in planning your own lessons.

## Principles informing this module

This module is aligned with principles underpinning the SACE Professional Teaching Standards. There are four main principles underpinning the course:

*1. Teachers have a specialised knowledge base*

The choices that teachers make in their lessons are not just a matter of personal preference, or a collection of ‘tips for teachers’. Teachers need strong content knowledge of the subjects they teach, well developed literacies, and they need to understand how to organise worthwhile learning opportunities. Teaching is considered a professional practice because teachers must act ethically and use knowledge to design lessons that enable all children to participate and learn.

*2. Making teaching choices requires pedagogical reasoning*

There is no ‘correct’ way of teaching that always works for all content, or for all learners across all contexts. Teachers who ask questions that matter can consider their options with more purpose. Teachers should be able to justify why they have made some choices but not others. Lee Shulman (1986) called this ‘*pedagogical reasoning*’. This module has been designed to teach you about pedagogical reasoning in action. The tasks give you opportunities to think about classroom practice in ways that matter and that develop your pedagogical reasoning.

*3. For teachers to talk about their reasons for choices, they need a shared set of concepts*

It is important that teachers, student teachers and teacher educators develop a language and a set of concepts that enable all of us to describe our teaching practices. When you do teaching practice in a school, you have the opportunity to be mentored by a teacher who has learnt to use their professional knowledge and their reflections on experience, and to create learning opportunities for the children in the class. However, mentor teachers often do not know how to explicitly explain the reasons for their pedagogical choices to student teachers. In this module, we aim to make these choices explicit and to develop a set of concepts that enable us to talk about teaching practice.

*4. Teaching must be contextually responsive*

Although there are choices every teacher needs to make in every lesson, what is appropriate will be different depending on the grade level of the learners as well as the subject that is taught. In this module, we have drawn examples from a range of different subject areas and grade levels because the students participating in this module are teaching at all the different phases and in different subjects. You will need to transfer what you learn from these examples to your own grade level and subject area of expertise.

## This module and links with your university coursework

The module enriches your teacher education programme. An important part of learning to be a teacher is learning in and from practice (MRTEQ, 2015). You will study teachers’ practice through analysing lesson tasks and engaging with case studies and lesson observations.

Teacher education programmes are designed around modules that develop vastly different types of knowledge for teaching. Sometimes the connections between the different courses are easy to see. But sometimes, seeing possible connections are very difficult. This course doesn’t repeat what you learn in your teacher education programme. But it does make connections with different kinds of knowledge covered in your teacher education curriculum. You will need to look for the connections with studies in education, content knowledge, teaching pedagogies, situational and contextual learning and inclusive teaching. For senior students, this module should give you a chance to draw on many different concepts from the coursework you have already covered. For junior students, this course gives you a framework for thinking about practice. As you learn more, so you will learn more of the theoretical foundations of what you learn here. For all participating students, we hope that the course helps you to develop a deeper understanding of teaching as a coherent, but complex and sometimes unpredictable, professional practice.

# Structure of the module

The Teacher Choices in Action module has a set of tutorial units that you are expected to work through. The module also requires you to undertake Lesson Observations and write up Lesson Observation Reports. Some students will be required to develop a set of three lessons in their subject/phase specialisation and write a Rationale for Lesson Design for the teacher choices they have made.

## Tutorials

There are 6 tutorials in the module, each one covering a different set of teacher choices in action. These introduce you to the main ideas, and give you concepts on how to analyse classroom practice. They are:

- *Unit 1 Choosing to be a teacher*
- *Unit 2: Teacher choices that enable learning in different contexts*
- *Unit 3: Teacher choices for working with knowledge*
- *Unit 4: Teacher choices that promote cumulative learning*
- *Unit 5: Teacher choices for making lessons inclusive*
- *Unit 6: Teacher choices for managing learning environments*

The Teacher Choices in Action module is not designed as a race to see who completes it the fastest. There are many important ideas, and you may need to revisit the units several times to get their full benefit. Once you have worked through a unit, you should go back and listen to the whole unit again - this time, from start to finish without stopping. You can revisit the completed units as often as you wish. The Teacher Choices in Action summary page provides you with a list of concepts to help you revise.

To earn a credit in the module, you will need to participate and complete all the required tasks. Most tutorial tasks will be marked automatically and you will get immediate feedback if your answers are partially correct and you need to try again. Some tasks will not let you proceed until you have correctly answered all questions.

You are also expected to engage with the resources that have been added at the end of each unit. Some units have downloadable resources. Others take you to recommended websites that are not necessarily zero-rated but have outstanding resources that will extend your knowledge of the unit.

## Tasks and Assessment

There are different kinds of tasks for you to do during the Teacher Choices in Action module:

- There are tasks that form part of the tutorials. These are done online as you move through the learning materials. They are there to reinforce course content and to apply learning to classroom practice. You are not given a mark for these. You get instant feedback about whether you have done the task correctly or not. You can repeat the task as many times as you need to. You will not be able to proceed until your score for the task is above 80%. Think carefully about the concepts you have been taught and how they apply in the resources you need to analyse.
- You will reflect on your own experience of schooling and/or teaching in relation to what the module offers, both privately and connecting with student teachers from around the country. Some tasks invite you to contribute to a conversation with other participating students on the discussion Forum.
- You will observe and analyse recorded lessons. Some of them are built into the tutorials, and some you will select yourself from a Lesson Library. You will need to write up and

submit at least 5 full Lesson Observation Reports from the Lesson Library. It may be possible that you find lessons that match your subject/phase specialisation. If not, observe and analyse lessons from other phases and subjects. You will learn a lot about teaching through observing teaching from your own specialisation – and from seeing how teaching is similar or different across subjects/phases. You should also observe lessons in a variety of contexts and delivery modes.

- Your institution may require you to prepare a set of lessons, resource materials and assessment tasks. These tasks will be incorporated into the module. You will also be expected to write a full rationale for the teacher choices you have made in the design of the set of lessons. You should continue to use the institutional lesson planning guideline given to you by your lecturers. Requirements for the Rationale for Lesson Design will be given to you during the Teacher Choices in Action module.
- There will be an 'open book' test as a summative assessment on the content and the classroom analysis tasks you have worked on during the various units. If you concentrate well during the tutorials and work thoughtfully with the tasks, you should do very well in the summative assessment. The test will provide you with a mark that gives you a measure of how well you have done. For final year students, this mark may be used towards your final Teaching Practice mark, together with your Lesson Observation Reports, the Rationale for Lesson Design and the set of lessons you develop.

Your responses to tasks will be recorded online. The Teaching Practice co-ordinator in your institution, and some of the lecturers, have access to the work you do. They will check that you are doing the tasks regularly and are progressing. Arrangements regarding assessment of your work will be communicated to you by the Teaching Practice co-ordinator at your institution.

Participation and satisfactory performance are essential. Completing all tasks of the Teacher Choices in Action module earns you credits towards the work-based learning required for the Bachelor of Education and Postgraduate Certificate in Education qualifications.

The Teacher Choices in Action module carries a weight of between 8 - 10 SAQA credits towards the work-based requirements of your qualification. This means that you are expected to devote 80-100 hours of learning time to doing this module. If for some reason, you are unable to complete the tutorials and the tasks in the time allowed, you will need to apply for a deferment through your normal institutional channels.

## Suggested time management plan

Not all units of the Teacher Choices in Action module are the same length. Units 3, 4 and 5 are slightly longer than the others. The following is a suggestion of how to use the time available. You do NOT have to stick strictly to this plan – it is a guide. The module is flexible and you can adjust these to suit your circumstances.

### ***Suggested plan for Week One:***

- Work through the Welcome to Teacher Choices in Action - video and the text outline.
- Get familiar with the Technical user guide and the website.
- Work on Task 1.1. and Task 1.2.
- Rest of Unit 1
- Unit 1 lectures again (without stopping for tasks)
- Lesson Observation Report (Number 1 of 5 for submission)
- Unit 2
- Unit 2 again (without stopping for tasks)

***Suggested plan for Week Two:***

- Lesson Observation Report (Number 2 of 5 for submission)
- Unit 3
- Unit 3 again (without stopping for tasks)
- Lesson Observation Report (Number 3 of 5 for submission)
- [Work on developing set of lessons – only if required by your institution]
- Unit 4
- Unit 4 again (without stopping for tasks)
- Lesson Observation Report (Number 4 of 5 for submission)

***Suggested plan for Week Three:***

- [Work on developing lessons, resources and Rationale for Lesson Design – if applicable]
- Unit 5
- Unit 5 again (without stopping for tasks)
- Lesson Observation Report (Number 5 of 5 for submission)
- Unit 6
- Unit 6 again (without stopping for tasks)
- Revise all units to prepare for the summative assessment
- [Finalise lessons, teaching resources and Rationale for Lesson Design –only if applicable]
- Summative Assessment – online test

***If application: Suggested plan for Week Four:***

Present Rationale for lesson design and your lesson/s if required by your institution]

## Using the online platform

The learning material is available online at [www.teachingprac.co.za](http://www.teachingprac.co.za). Your official student email address will be your Username. The initial password will be 'Teachingprac@1'. You will change the password after your first log in.

Online course materials will be available 24/7 for the duration of the module. You can work directly online, or you can prepare written tasks offline, and copy and paste your responses into the system once you are happy with your responses. You will work through each unit in your own time and at your own pace. You should manage your time and be sure to complete all work between the dates determined by your institution.

Read through the guideline that explains how the learning platform works.

# Researching the module

The Teacher Choices in Action module presents a unique opportunity for the teacher education sector to understand how South African student teachers benefit through the study of classroom teaching. For this reason, an important national research project is attached to the module. The research has received ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-medical) at the University of the Witwatersrand (Clearance Certificate H19/09/47). The findings of the research will be used by participating institutions to strengthen their teacher education programmes. The Department of Higher Education and Training expects that the findings will be useful to inform policy developments for work-based learning in teacher education programmes. There is also much international interest in the content and design of the module and what it might offer student teachers in other countries.

The choice as to whether or not to participate in this research project is entirely up to you. A decision to participate or not will NOT advantage or disadvantage you in any way.

*If you choose to be a part of this research:*

- You will not have to do anything beyond what you are required to do for the module.
- Your identity and the name of your institution will be kept confidential at all times. You will not be identified in any reports or publications that come out of the research.
- The research team will not disclose to your lecturers and tutors whether or not you have agreed to participate in the research project.
- The research will only begin once you have completed the module and you have your final outcome. It is impossible for your participation in the research project to affect your assessment in any way.

Once all student teachers from your institution have completed their work and received their results, the research team will begin to analyse the data. The research team has promised to share general findings of the study with teacher educators. Institutions will be able to think about how the research findings help them develop their courses and curricula.

*To accept the invitation to participate:*

You will receive an invitation to participate in this exciting national research project. You will be asked to read the letter that has further information about the research. You will be asked to indicate whether or not you consent to participate and allow your responses to the tasks to be used to study how student teachers make sense of classroom practice.

## References

Department of Higher Education and Training. (2015) *Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications*. Pretoria: Government Gazette.

Hugo, W. (2014) *Cracking the code to educational analysis*. Pearson: Cape Town.

Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational researcher*, 15(2), 4-14.





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# Teacher Choices in Action: A summary

## Unit 1: Choosing to become a teacher

- Apprenticeship of Observation

## Unit 2: Teacher choices that enable learning in different contexts

- Challenges and opportunities in school contexts
- Face-to-face, blended and distance modes of delivery
- Using digital technologies to enhance teaching and enable learning

## Unit 3: Teacher choices when working with knowledge

- Selection and hierarchy of knowledge:
  - *Main idea*
  - *Important things to know*
  - *Interesting facts worth mentioning*
  - *Knowledge beyond the lesson topic*
- Sequencing of lesson steps as semantic waves that move between:
  - Complex concepts
  - Experience /examples

## Unit 4: Teacher choices that promote cumulative learning

- Focus of learning tasks:
  - Details of the object of study
  - Connections:
    - *Whole-part relationships*
    - *Similarities and differences*
    - *Processes and sequences*
  - Transfer to different situations
- Form and focus of classroom conversations
- Feedback:
  - *Personal to notice and encourage*
  - *Process to shape knower gazes*
  - *Product to get it right*

## Unit 5: Teacher choices for making lessons inclusive

- Selecting resources:
  - *Promote conceptual understanding*
  - *Reflect diversity of learners*
- In multilingual classrooms:
  - *Communicating in LOLT and other languages*
- Participation and learning for all:
  - *Scaffolding for support*
  - *Differentiation*

## Unit 6: Teacher choices for managing learning environments

- Managing time
- Managing space