



1. Setting the scene

The first scheduled meeting for 2020 was postponed due to the start of the Covid-19 Lockdown. BRIDGE sent out a Communiqué to current and new participants, outlining the work of the BRIDGE Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Community of Practice (ITE CoP) and setting out the context for this virtual CoP. Find the Communiqué [here](#).

The CoP facilitator Hassiena Marriott asked people to share their personal responses to the Covid-19 lockdown. While anxieties about students were uppermost, other comments included reflections on the importance of: social contact and support; a mindshift that accepts change; resilience; a move towards doing with less; and the recognition that we should not take our lives and privileges for granted.

The following Institutions and organisations were represented at the CoP: University of Johannesburg, Wits University, University of Pretoria, Tshwane University of Technology, North West University, SANTS Private Higher Education Institution, Saide, and the Global Teachers Institute. See list of individual participants and contact details below.

Collaboration Reflections:

It is a principle of this CoP to promote collaboration between individuals and institutions through the CoP, but also between CoP events. Throughout 2019 there was a standing agenda item for report backs on interactions between CoP members. In a quick review the following was shared:

- Jackie Batchelor (UJ) said that they are engaging with other universities on Covid-19 protocols, and that UJ is prepared to share its general guidelines (for example, on WhatsApp groups for students). Finding solutions includes engaging on data issues, and online innovations so that learning can still happen. She reminded us of the adage 'Never waste a good crisis' in terms of finding solutions and alternatives in changing contexts. This CoP has a well-resourced repository with documents shared on Google Drive: as everyone is currently updating their documents, these will need to be uploaded
- Carisma Nel (NWU) noted that collaboration was continuing in the context of the DHET and EU-supported Primary Teacher Education Project (PrimTEd) programme, with a focus on how to address WIL and its practicalities in the current Covid-19 situation.
- Lee Rusznyak (Wits) said that Wits is also grappling with the practicalities of WIL for this year, and she shared more detail on a collaborative project looking at WIL alternatives – see point 2 below.



An alternative to school-based Teaching Practice/ WIL

There are many uncertainties around the post-lockdown period, and we don't know if students will want to go into schools, or if schools will be prepared to accept them. There are also liability issues and risk exposure concerns that universities need to consider during a pandemic. It is unlikely to be 'business as usual' for TP/WIL in 2020. Lee described an alternative model being explored by Wits, in the context of the JET Education Service Bootcamp which is thinking through education responses to Covid-19. We need to use all the available research and expertise in the education sector to address impacts on education systems and our learners and students.

The project involves looking at alternatives for distance-based TP/WIL for 2020 if it's not feasible to place students in schools, as seems likely. Dealing with the question of what would constitute an educationally sound and worthwhile alternative arrangement for TP/WIL is beyond any one institution – and it is pointless for institutions to do different things one by one, or try to replicate certain approaches differently. The approach is therefore to brainstorm an outline for an alternative that could be rolled out nationally across the HEI sector.

The foundational concept is to provide students with analytical tools for studying practice, together with demonstrations and discussions of how lessons actually work. The model is a 'stacking model' in that it incorporates different levels of sophistication so that it can be used by students at different stages of study, and respond to learning programme demands.

Lee also noted that the idea is to extend and enrich rather than duplicate what is being done in coursework. When reflecting on cognitive issues in teaching and learning, students tend to default immediately into Bloom's Taxonomy. We need to take our students further into how teachers work with knowledge, and with learners who may have unfamiliar and different learning styles. For example, conventional wisdom is that one should move from the simple to the complex in introducing a topic of learning; however, there are times when it is equally valid and effective to start with the complex and unpack into simple elements. The programme brings a focused lens onto making sense of practice; in a TP/WIL context in a real classroom, there is often such a lot going on in terms of interacting with learners and relating to the on-site teacher that students may miss opportunities to actually think about their teaching practice. This model provides a different way of focusing on teaching, learning and knowledge: with the 'reality factors' taken out of the equation, students can analyse examples of classroom teaching from a different perspective, using analytical tools provided.

The outline should be ready in two weeks' time, after which a national review committee will be invited to make comments and give inputs. It will then be circulated through the Dean's Forum for all institutions to participate. We need to put our minds and resources together to address TP/WIL meaningfully. In response to a query, Lee noted that they are inviting input from across the HEI sector, including contact, distance and private universities. She invited members of the CoP to contribute ideas and perhaps participate in the review process - her email address is lee.rusznayak@wits.ac.za.

JET BOOTCAMP

Theme 11: A model for extra-school-based Teaching Practicum in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Research purpose / objectives:

- Review the South African research on the preparation of pre-service teachers through 'learning from practice' and conceptualise how this can be done in a theoretically coherent way.
- Conceptualise an alternative Teaching Practice course developed around SACE Professional Teaching Standards through the systematic analysis of teaching practice and classroom artefacts.
- Develop the outline and research methodology for the second phase of an Initial Teacher Education Research Project with a focus on pre-service teachers' analysis of classroom practice.

Research question(s)

- How can pre-service teachers analyse classroom practices in ways that move them beyond a theory-practice divide and the simple identification of knowledge types?
- How can an understanding of 'learning to teach' and the SACE Professional Teaching Standards inform an alternative Teaching Practice offering for the 2020 academic year, and beyond?
- How should a research project that investigates pre-service teachers' analysis of classroom practices be conceptualised and enacted?

Project deliverables

1. Produce a conceptual paper on the challenges and possibilities of developing pre-service teachers' understanding of classroom practices, within the South African context.
2. Produce an outline for an alternative, remote Teaching Practice course that can be rolled out nationally during 2020 in the wake COVID-19 pandemic, and beyond.
3. Produce a research project proposal that investigates the way in which South African pre-service teachers learn to analyse classroom practice over the course of their ITE programmes.



Participant inputs and discussions

Suggestions in relation to TP/WIL, present and the future

- One suggestion from DHET is to reduce the required time period for TP/WIL this year. However, this is only a partial solution and does not solve the problem of exposing education students to potential risk. We need to think more along the lines of supplementing and replacing.
- Jackie noted that this model is not just a solution for 2020. It will also be a learning resource that can have an impact in the future, and could be integrated into the academic programme.
- Thelma de Jager (TUT) suggested that students be given lesson plan formats and conduct micro teaching lessons with lecturers sitting in and giving feedback. Video recordings of these could go into their SACE portfolios.
- Ndlelehle Skosana (TUT) said that different digital platforms have different uses, and that Zoom has video and recording capacity that could be used for micro lessons.
- In response to the points above, Lee noted that, while video lessons could work as part of a learning programme for individual institutions, this may not work as a standardised method for all HEIs. Different universities have different ways of structuring lesson plans, and a

generic template may not match what students are learning. In the proposed model students would look at artefacts of practice, sample lessons and examples of online teaching and analyse these using whatever tools are applicable, or that come from their own institutional learning programme. In the example given above about choosing whether to build on a simple concept or unpack a complex one, a student could explore what these different approaches might mean for how the lesson unfolds. Knowledge-building would happen in dissimilar ways in these two scenarios, and the student would learn how certain approaches lead to alternative methodologies. The 'stacked' approach of the model is attempting to build in diverse activities for different years: for example, at lower levels students may just work with analytical tools, and as they progress they will need to move through deeper analysis into production activities.

- Eric Eberlein (SANTS) said that their final year students had fortunately just completed WIL prior to lockdown, so they will be able to graduate with all required credits. SANTS has been considering taking the weeks from Year 1 and spreading these out over the rest of the qualification to alleviate pressure for this year. He recognised, however, that WIL is linked to academic input at different stages of learning. Going forward, micro lessons in additional contact time could be considered. He also noted that students pay for TP, so an alternative model that adds value will be welcomed.
- Francis Faller (Wits) said the model could address a present necessity and a future possibility. However, rather than calling it a 'simulated' TP or WIL intervention, it should be described as 'authentic'. He felt that the immediate focus for this should be on PGCE and final year students. He also noted that DHET is due to come out with a revised communiqué regarding this in the HEI sector.
- Jackie said that the timing of TP/WIL must articulate with the academic curriculum. WIL builds on different stages of the curriculum: a student's exposure to the classroom is intended to build on theories and concepts that have been covered in academic content. WIL can't just be plugged in at convenient times. The proposed model or package can keep the integrity of articulation in place.
- Carisma said they are also focusing on strengthening conceptual understanding at North West University. They are developing a TP/WIL curriculum framework which can be used across institutions: this is a common framework with a minimum core, which can be built on by different institutions. The approach aligns to the model Lee has shared. Students have to justify their practice and link theory and practice. For example, if they present a lesson on group guided reading they have to justify choice of method, choice of material and resources, and explain the reasons for any activities in the lesson. The focus is on strengthening their analytical understanding.
- Joyce West (UP) said that the situation has created opportunities for UP to challenge students to think more critically about incorporating theory and analysis into practice, which students must then apply in TP/WIL. For example, they have been introducing students to various

readability formulas to help them evaluate the level of reading difficulty of texts, so that they can select appropriate texts for teaching and assessment (particularly important in integrated language classes).

Research and Collaboration

- Vuyiswa Ncontsa (BRIDGE) asked if South African institutions are looking at and collaborating with institutions in other countries that might have piloted some kinds of simulations, as we can't be the only country with this challenge.
- In response, Lee noted that a research and literature review has been done, and an international advisory panel has been set up. There are other models elsewhere but we need to contextualise and consider what is doable and manageable for the SA context. This is where the JET ITERP project (previously discussed at this and other BRIDGE Teacher Development CoPs) has been helpful in terms of understanding the range of university curricula for ITE in South African universities. The model currently under development provides a theoretical lens on practice, and involves operationalising particular resources in terms of looking at practice. Currently six universities are taking part, but as noted they want to invite sector engagement. The development of a resource like this can't be linked to one institution, as it is required by the sector as a whole. Even once students can go back into schools, such a resource will in any case be needed going forward to add quality to ITE. Local research and experience has shown that many students lack the conceptual tools that would help them benefit from TP/WIL: often they simply repeat their own schooling experiences once they are in a classroom. Research shows that there is a disconnect between what students focus on at university, and their practice in schools during TP/WIL: they seem to leave all theory behind and don't pull through the tools they have been given. TP/WIL journals frequently show superficial levels of observation and self-reflection. A key aim of this intervention, therefore, is to try to operationalise analytical tools. But it can't be done alone.

The Digital Divide

- Hannelie du Preez (UP) asked how the simulated and virtual environment of the model relates to data usage and costs, computer literacy and competence, and time periods needed for training students and mentors to use such platforms.
- The following points were made in relation to online capacity:
 - It is time-consuming to get online skills in place and online usage running smoothly.
 - Data costs are being addressed nationally. There are free platforms for creating videos, such as www.loom.com, but training and guidelines are needed.
 - The digital divide is more acute than ever, even if data is zero-rated. Students in rural areas may not have connectivity, and unreliable or lack of electricity means that they would not be able to charge their devices even if they have these. How do we reach students who don't have reliable online access?
 - Access relates to both hardware and software, geographical isolation, costs and skills. We can't exclude some students from participation.

- It is important to stay away from synchronous activities: a lot of online learning is data-hungry, and many students connect at night when networks are stronger. So activities need to be separate and staggered, so that students can choose when they can work.
- Noted that students are 'living the 4th Industrial Revolution' (4IR) – they have to trouble-shoot, and find solutions to their issues. In a previous CoP we discussed 'graduate attributes' for high-quality teachers, and these included resilience and resourcefulness. We don't always have to go to the deficit model for students.
- Francis said that the issue of universal access is critically important, and we may need to consider the use of printed resources. Many students may also not have safe or private spaces in which to study, so we do need to think of the most demanding circumstances. The key is to consider how any of these alternatives to 'real WIL' translate into imagined, simulated reception (by learners).

Cooperation with government

- Melissa King (BRIDGE) observed that DBE is putting a number of plans in place relating to a staggered return to school for different grades at different times, and a post-lockdown management plan which may include some curriculum trimming. What mechanisms (if any as yet) are in place for DBE and DHET to coordinate as regards to WIL?
- Francis also stressed cooperation with all relevant agencies – we need unequivocal support from DHET, DBE and PDEs to prevent any impression by schools that 2020 graduates are not 'completely' qualified and ready from 2021 to practise as competent teachers.

As a final point, Jackie suggested that maybe these 2020 students will bring new qualities to the teaching profession in future as they have had to be equipped differently. They will not be 'less qualified' but will have different skills. We need to change the narrative – perhaps these teachers will be better prepared as they have been learning about teaching in the context of a changing world.



2. Checkout Reflections: immediate support

Hassiena asked everyone to share one practice they have done in relation to supporting students during this time.

- Eric (SANTS) is involved in script-writing for TV to produce resources for students and teachers at less functional schools which lack capacity for mentorship. There will be a series of 10 five to seven minute videos for mentor teachers, which will form part of a mentorship teacher-training course for CPTD points. (Note that UJ has a free self-paced online mentorship programme.)

- Memoona Mahomed (UJ) is focusing on final year and & PGCE students who have missed the first weeks of WIL, and looking at other ways of sharing guidelines on theorising about practice.
- Maryla Bialobrzaska (Saide) noted that Saide is not a learning provider with direct interactions with students, but an organisation that supports providers. She is currently working on a project to develop curricula and qualifications for TVET lecturers. The TVET sector has been neglected during lockdown – to her knowledge, the only initiative so far involves putting old exam papers online. TVET students do not appear to be getting much support. The initiative in which Saide is involved supports the TVET lecturers.
- Thelma (TUT) has been putting recorded lessons on the UP Blackboard platform and uploaded activities related to these. They can also be accessed via emails, and students can use these to self-study.
- Joyce (UP) talked about embedding H5P (<https://h5p.org/>) into the Blackboard platform. There are various options to use, including tutorial videos, interactive videos, and interactive slides on Power Point. Options enable pausing content and opening up the process for Multiple Choice Questions which students have to answer – these are automatically graded, thereby providing continuous assessment. Students can't fast forward through the videos or power points. In addition, there are forums for open-ended discussion. If this is used on a university platform it won't use up student data. She said this is an opportunity to start experimenting with interactive platforms for cognitive and social support. Her email is joyce.west@up.ac.za if anyone wants more information.
- Jackie (UJ) said that UJ already has some mature blended learning systems; currently, however they have to use applications like WhatsApp that all students can access. They have introduced more of a focus on Open Education Resources (OERs) for schools that link to interactive pedagogies and videos on classroom practice – see <http://oer.educ.cam.ac.uk/wiki/OER4Schools>. UJ also has a self-regulated, generic model for PGCE students on all the things that underpin pedagogies, and other features that may not normally be addressed as they are not credit-bearing (e.g. self-care, classroom management).
- Jackie also talked about helping lecturers who may not be so comfortable themselves in using online pedagogies with their students. Final year and post-graduate education students can choose an elective in ICT integration in education. These students know both what other education students need for successful online learning, and what the lecturer as mediator/teacher needs in order to facilitate online learning successfully. They are therefore working with faculty and assisting them, while at the same time improving their own future workplace skills.
- David Jacobs (GTI) said that they have an IT audit with their students. The survey questions can be found [here](#) for anyone wishing to undertake a similar survey.

- Hassiena said that BRIDGE has continued with its work of sharing knowledge and information, keeping people connected at this time, and promoting collaboration, through conducting its CoPs as virtual meetings through Zoom. She expressed regret that UNISA had been unable to attend, given the large number of students they reach, as it would be interesting to include their strategies in this discussion.

Hassiena will send out the relevant link for an updated folder for shared documents. The session ended with a quick Mentimeter exercise – see results below.

One question I still have after today Mentimeter

- Would like to know more about how universities are dealing with students who are on the other side of the digital divide with no connectivity
- The feasibility of applying the conceptual framework in practice
- Need to explore the great online learning tools there so will have loads of questions then.
- What are our collective responsibility to those institutions that are left behind?
- In what ways can we all get on the same page?
- What are the best ways of reaching students that are in really remote contexts?
- How will we build capacity in mentors? Considering the South African diverse context.

Please share one thing you will be taking away from this meeting? Mentimeter

- No one organization has the answers so we have to work together
- There are challenges about online learning and thinking through problems that we cannot solve as individual institutions working in isolation from one another
- I am struck by the willingness to share.
- The need to do some health risk assessment of our intern host schools should a return to school be happening.
- Love all the innovative thinking
- Proposal from Lee on their initiative to develop a rich resource that can inform HEIs unique WIL practices. It is not a replacement but an informative tool
- Amazing session! It would be great to see more collaboration among organisations.
- A lot of our solutions are conceptual and theoretical...We need to be more pragmatic for a change
- A greater need for collaboration between institutions
- Collaboration is now more important than ever before

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