

# COVID-19 AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN CURRICULUM

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Produced for: Schools in the time of COVID-19: Possible implications for progression, repetition and dropout and for curriculum trimming (DGMT-funded project led by Servaas van der Berg, with Chris van Wyk & Rebecca Selkirk, Research on Socio-Economic Policy (Resep), Department of Economics Stellenbosch University).

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- a) How much time was lost for teaching, learning and assessing because of COVID-19?
- b) What are the implications of lost time for learning losses?
- c) What was the curriculum policy response to COVID-19?
- d) What is to be done to support curriculum recovery and learning gains?

## HOW MUCH TIME WAS LOST FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSING BECAUSE OF COVID-19?

Grade (in order of staggered return to school)	Term 1 school days available (pre-COVID-19 2020 calendar)	Term 2 school days available (COVID-19 calendar up to 24 July)	Term 3 school days available 2020 (COVID-19 calendar up to 23October)	Term 4 school days available 2020 (COVID-19 calendar up to 15 December)	Total school days available in 2020 (COVID-19 calendar)	% of school days of pre-COVID-19 2020 calendar (=204 days)
Grade 12	48	35	58	0	141	100%*
Grade 7	48	35	53	32	168	82%
Grades R,1,2,3,6,10,11	48	15	44	32	139	68%
Grades 4,9	48	0	44	32	124	61%
Grades 5,8	48	0	39	32	119	58%

## HOW MUCH TIME WAS LOST FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSING BECAUSE OF COVID-19?

- Rotational timetabling (+ remote learning)
- School closure due to infections
- Teacher/learner shortages/absence
- Social instability
- 2020 year end
- Grade 4 → 80 days lost (official) → additional 40-60 days (rotations)

39% - 69% school days lost

## HOW MUCH TIME WAS LOST FOR TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSING BECAUSE OF COVID-19?

- The more crowded a school, the less space and the less resourced, the more days likely lost.
- **School E** is a quintile 4 primary school, located in a poor, peri-urban area. It charges school fees of R4500 per annum. Because of a lack of payment of school fees, the school lost two of its School Governing Body teaching posts, thus creating a staff shortage. In addition, the school has hired out its hall for Grade 12 teaching and exams, and so it is no longer available as it was earlier in the year as a teaching venue. Because of the shortage of space and teachers, the school has opted for a rotational model where Grades 4 attends school on Monday, Grade 5 on Tuesday, Grade 6 on Wednesday, Grade 7 on Thursday and then the four grades take turns coming on Friday. This means that for the third term, each grade will be on-site at school for between seven and eight days in total. The school could accommodate one additional grade per day, but teachers claim they are exhausted and nervous about having more learners on campus.

2021

- Social distancing reduced
- 50% rule removed

BUT

- Union support of rotational timetabling
- Unevenness and inequities

# WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF LOST TIME FOR LEARNING LOSSES?

- Gustaffson & Nuga (2020) estimates 1 school day lost = 2 days learning lost
- Very uneven – differences along socioeconomic lines  
differences within socio-economic groupings

CONCLUSION: Learning losses great, difficult to estimate, and will vary substantially

## **Large differences in 2021:**

Between schools

Within schools (different grades)

Within classrooms

## WHAT HAS THE POLICY RESPONSE BEEN THUS FAR?

Four curriculum responses:

- Reduction in curriculum content
- Suspension / rationalising of subjects
- Changes to assessment
- Remote learning



## WHAT HAS THE POLICY RESPONSE BEEN THUS FAR?

- Revised ATPs (May)
- 'Fundamentals' (July)
- Suspension / integration of subjects
  
- Coherent
- Progression
- Core concepts
- (implicit) distinction between skills-, content- and concept-rich subjects

# WHAT HAS THE POLICY RESPONSE BEEN THUS FAR?

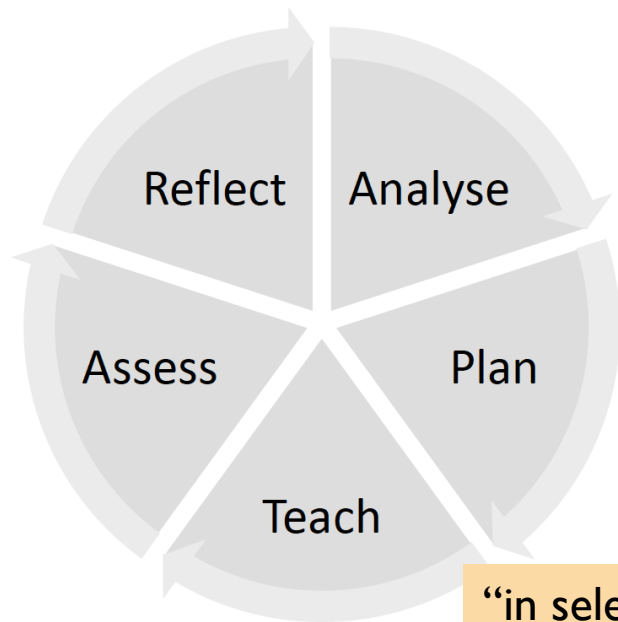
- Assessment
  - Postponement / cancellation of exams
  - Emphasis on formative assessment
  - Emphasis on school-based assessment (SBA)
  - External moderation suspended or weakened
  - No clear directives regarding promotion and progression.

## WHAT HAS THE POLICY RESPONSE BEEN THUS FAR?

- Remote learning
- Self-directed learning:

In the case of Self-directed learning, the learning material is prepared in such a manner that learners are able to progress from the known to the unknown on their own (or with minimal supervision), given the clear exposition and illustrated presentation of content; such content must be well scaffolded and mediated through templates and vivid examples (p. 6).

# TEACHER EXPECTATIONS



“in selecting what content to leave out and to reorganise, teachers will employ their own professional judgement on which content is crucial for their learners to do this year, and at what depth.”

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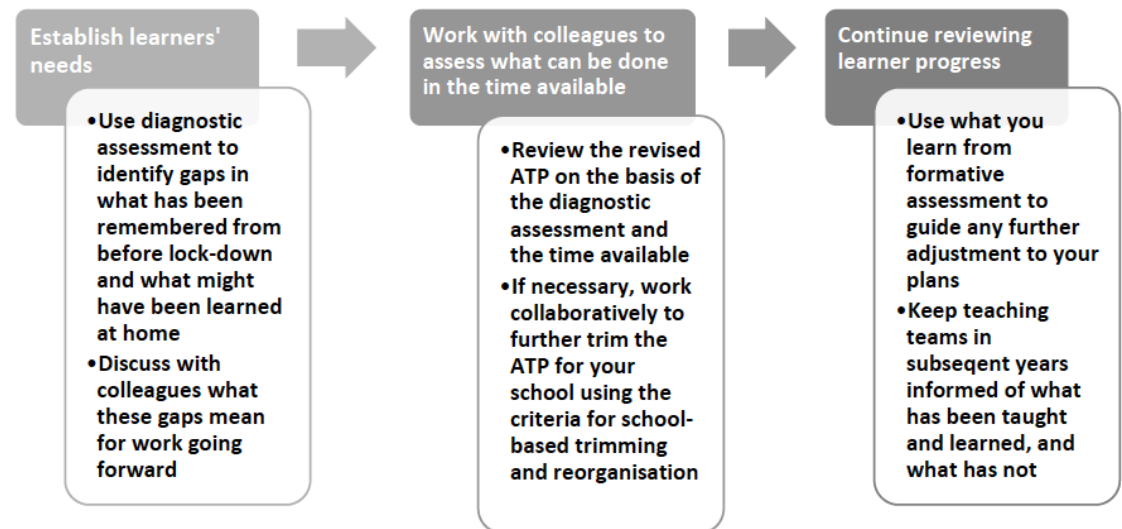
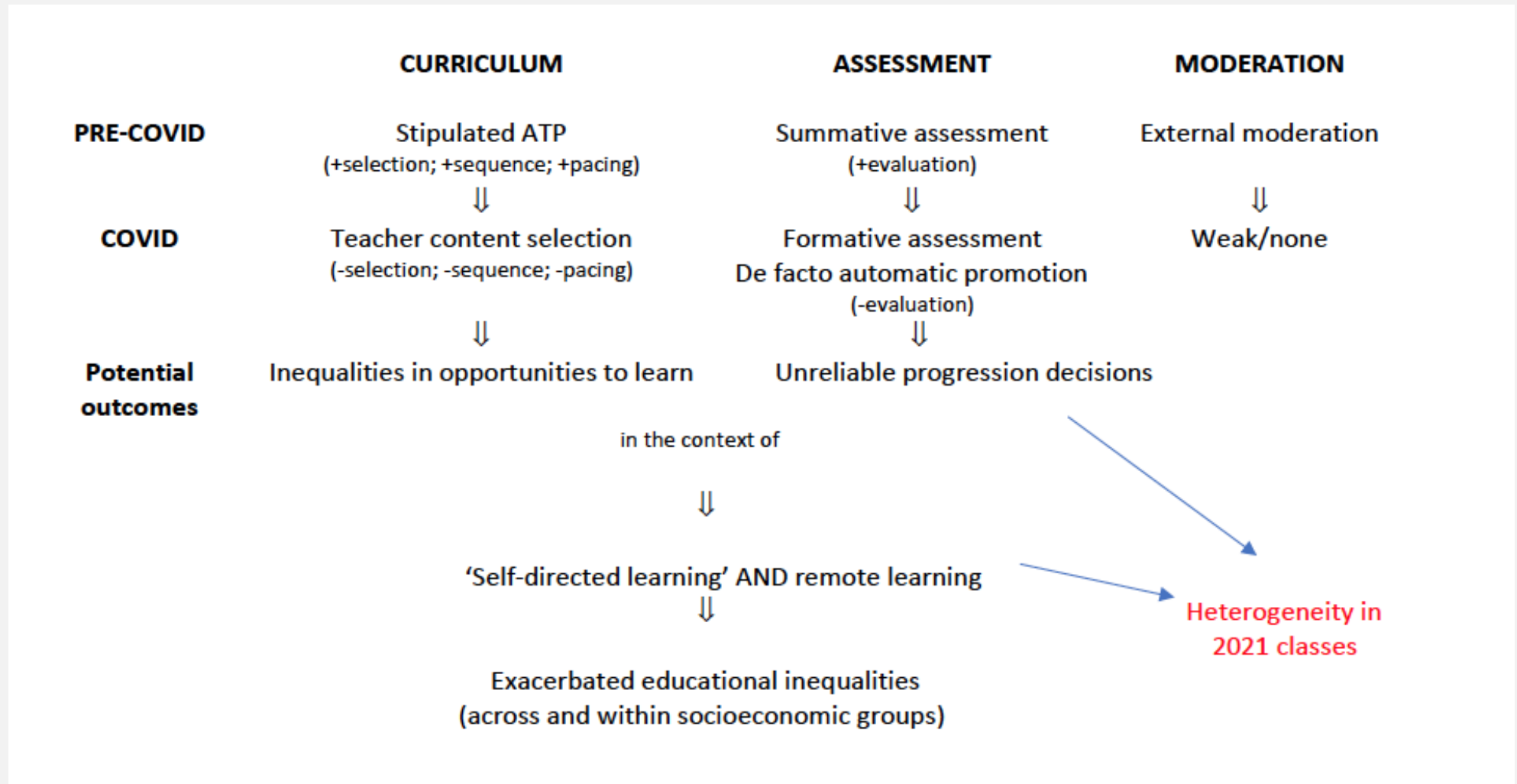


Figure 3: Planning teaching lessons post the lockdown

# CURRICULUM SHIFTS & IMPLICATIONS



# WHAT IS TO BE DONE TO SUPPORT CURRICULUM RECOVERY AND LEARNING GAINS?

- Instructional time
  - Act quickly
  - Acceleration
- Instructional content
  - Simplifying curriculum
  - Foundational learning
- Instructional level
- Remote solutions
- Assessment
- Psycho-social needs

# CURRICULUM PRINCIPLES

<b>Differentiation</b>	Should districts or schools engage in different programmes of curriculum/learning recovery depending on an estimation of how much instructional time was lost?
<b>Remediation</b>	Should the previous grade's content be taught prior to or at the same time as grade level content? If prior to, when and how is the transition from one grade level to the next made?
<b>Acceleration</b>	Should an accelerated programme of intensive instruction be used to catch up content and learning at in key subjects or at key levels?
<b>Streaming</b>	Should learners be grouped according to learning loss / grade level competences given large and heterogenous classes
<b>Subject targeting/suspension</b>	Should certain subjects be temporarily suspended depending on their implications for progression across grades, with concept-rich subjects prioritised and skills-rich subjects suspended / integrated?
<b>Content trimming</b>	Should curriculum be simplified by identifying critical or core content / concepts / skills within subjects?
<b>Assessment</b>	What form/s of assessment should be prioritised for recovery? When, how and at what level/s should assessment be done?

# RECOMMENDATIONS

- Timetabling models
- Curriculum differentiation
- Subject-targeting & curriculum trimming
- Assessment
- Targeted accelerated learning
  - Reading in the early grades
  - FAL in Grades 4 and 5
  - Grades 11 and 12
- Targeted, *additive*, low tech strategies for remote learning



## 2021 – WHAT TO WATCH

- Early grade reading and mathematics levels and accelerated opportunities
- FAL competence
- Grade 11 and 12 performance (incl heterogeneity issues; class sizes)
- Remote strategies?
- Deepening of inequalities