

Working in Classrooms

Teaching, Time and Space

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South African Institute
for Distance Education

Working in Classrooms

Teaching, Time
and Space

Learning Guide

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SECTION ONE

About this module

1.1	Introduction	3
1.2	What can you hope to achieve in this module?	4
1.3	How to work with this module ?	5
1.4	What are the module's study requirements?	8
1.5	Who wrote this module?.....	9

Introduction

1.1

What is this module about?

Time and space are the medium of human existence. Everything we do happens somewhere and takes some time, perhaps a minute, perhaps an hour, perhaps years. All our projects and activities -large and small, serious and playful- are enabled and constrained by time and space. But this does not mean that we are somehow at the mercy of time and space. As human agents– that is as people able to take responsible action – we are able to organize time and space in ways that help us to do things better.

This module explores how *South African teachers* can reorganize the spaces in which they teach, and the way in which time is organized in their schools, to improve learning.

Like other human activities and practices, teaching is both enabled and constrained by time and space. *Working in Classrooms* looks at how arrangements of time and space shape school teaching, and at how teachers, principals, and government departments of education shape the time and space for learning at schools. For instance, a curriculum that requires teachers and learners to achieve outcomes like 'being able to solve problems through collaborative critical and creative thinking' makes very different demands on teaching and learning time and space than a curriculum that requires learning 'facts' by rote. All of you will by now be familiar with the idea of 'notional' time, or the call that more teaching happen outside classrooms, two ideas that weren't present in the rote-learning apartheid curriculum.

A key question in this module is how to arrange school and classroom time and space in a way that best enables teachers to fulfil the purpose of their practice namely enabling systematic learning. The question can't properly be answered without an understanding of teaching as a particular kind of *practice* constituted by concepts like *activities, intentions, agency, practices, formal purposes, and rules*.



This icon indicates the particular week of study in which you should begin working on the section it introduces.

How the module is organized

Section Two of the module builds a conceptual framework that enables us to think about teaching as a *practice* that shapes, and is shaped by, time and space. This framework is crucial for our understanding of situations and issues introduced in the subsequent sections of the module. But it is also crucial for *any* understanding of teaching. We hope that you will use the analysis and examples from Section Two as you work through other modules in the series and, more importantly, as you reflect on your own teaching and its special challenges.

Section Three provides the institutional context that shapes teachers' work. This is the organizations of time and space that are 'given' to teachers – the departmental regulations, the school timetable, classroom shapes and resourcing, and so on.

Section Four argues that these 'givens' can be changed by teachers. It helps deepen your understanding of how teachers can reorganize time and space to enable systematic learning; how teachers exercise their agency and professional responsibility in working appropriately with the time and space that are allocated to them.

Finally, **Section Five** focuses on the contextual challenge of working with large classes in crowded classrooms to achieve systematic learning. Section Five also looks at the importance of enabling learning beyond the classroom and outside of school time.

1.2

What can you hope to achieve in this module?

To some extent, the answer to this question depends on who you are. Perhaps you are a student working towards a teaching qualification. Or perhaps you are an experienced teacher keen to improve both your qualifications and your teaching. You may even be a school principal who wants a better understanding of how arrangements of time and space affect the quality of teaching and learning at your school.

Regardless of whether you are a student teacher, an experienced teacher or a principal, you can expect to achieve the following learning outcomes from working through the module.

1 By the end of the module, you should have an understanding of:

- school teaching as a complex practice aimed at enabling systematic learning;
- how the practice of school teaching is shaped by the arrangements of time and space in schools;
- how disorderly arrangements of time and space prevent schools from fulfilling their institutional purpose of promoting and enabling systematic learning;
- teachers as agents who can take control of shaping classroom time and space to promote and enable systematic learning for different kinds of learners;
- teachers' responsibility in designing learning programmes that go beyond classroom time and space and that enable learners to organize their own environments for ongoing, systematic learning.

2 By the end of the module, you should be able to:

- analyze and interpret problems of teaching and learning that are related to arrangements of time and space;
- use your judgement in conceptualizing a learning programme that takes account of the time and space needed for different learners and different purposes;
- use critical and creative thinking to solve problems related to the arrangements of school time and space;
- organize learning time and space for your own studies.

How to work with this module

1.3

What does the module consist of?

Working in Classrooms includes the following components:

- a learning guide;
- a reader;
- a videotape;
- a workbook.

Learning guide

This learning guide works in much the same way as a teacher does - structuring your learning, explaining new concepts, and encouraging your active participation through questions and activities. It will also tell you when and how to work with the module reader. Scan through the learning guide now. Do so by reading the main contents page and then each section's content page. This will give you an idea of what you will learn.

Reader

A reader, which is rather like a small personal library with carefully chosen and edited readings, will give you a richer and deeper understanding of the ideas and arguments presented in the learning guide.

Videotape

A videotape complements the learning guide by presenting different perspectives on school time and space. It provides you with visual illustrations of some of the key concepts in this module. You will make most use of it towards the end of the module.

Workbook

You will need a workbook, which will be your learning space for this module. This is where you will record your thinking and development, and where you will complete the activities set for each section. To make best use of the workbook as a learning space, you should try to set aside regular, uninterrupted time for recording your thoughts and completing the set activities.

How should you work through the module?

Consider the module as a conversation

We have written this learning guide in a way that invites you to participate in an ongoing and thoughtful discussion, with pauses for reflection and a range of activities to deepen your understanding. In other words, the learning guide is not a textbook with 'facts' and definitions to be learnt by rote. It will work best if you join the discussion actively - by thinking about the questions we pose and the points we raise, by completing the activities, and by inviting colleagues and fellow students to participate in critical discussion and reflection with you.

Try to relate theory to practice

You will notice that Sections Two to Five in this module begin either with examples from everyday life or with familiar scenes or situations in schools. From everyday

examples and familiar teaching situations, we move on to conceptual analysis and theory. Several of the activities ask you to use concepts to illuminate aspects of your own practice. Other tasks aim to hone your analytical skills, without any direct reference to classroom practice.

Arrange time and space systematically for your own learning

Your workbook is your most important learning space for this module. It's up to you to choose and organize a workbook that best enables you to do the required activities in the module and to record your thoughts, questions, and observations. Either a file or a hardcover notebook would be suitable. You might find it helpful to divide the workbook into two main sections, a section for required activities, and a section for your own notes and reflections. You should write the date for each set of notes or reflections. In this way, you will have a record of how your understanding changes over time.

Use the reader as a 'mini-library' to deepen and widen your perspective

The reader has two kinds of readings: prescribed readings that are directly related to the activities in this learning guide and enrichment readings that will widen your understanding of time and space in teaching. Enrichment readings are optional. You don't have to read them to meet the requirements for the module. They are there to whet your appetite for later reading, when you want to widen your perspectives and perhaps only when you have worked through the module.

This module doesn't have the same number of readings for each section:

- Section Two has no set readings at all
- Section Three has several optional readings but no prescribed readings
- Sections Four and Five together have five prescribed readings. This means that you will have to set aside considerably more reading time for Sections Four and Five than for Sections Two and Three.

The importance of active learning

As you work through the learning guide, you will see that we advocate the idea that *new understandings depend on, and arise out of, action*. Because we firmly believe this, we have designed this guide to include many activities that we hope you, as the teacher-learner, will complete. Like all good learning materials, the guide will work best if you *engage systematically with the activities* that are set out for you here. If you don't do the activities, you will miss out on the most important part of the learning pathway we have developed for you.

Reading and writing activities

Most of the activities in the Guide are *reading and writing activities*. It is important that you apply your mind to each one of them and answer the set questions in your workbook.

Follow the instructions given for each activity carefully. You may, for example, be asked to read an article from the reader, or to consider a set of issues raised in the guide from a particular perspective. Follow these instructions but also write down any other comments or thoughts that come to mind as you do each activity. In particular, think of how you can apply the new ideas in your teaching.

The activities you are asked to do are designed primarily to help you to learn something new, or to acquire a new understanding about something. As with the readings, we will sometimes ask you to go back to an activity you have done in your workbook and revise it in the light of the new understandings you have developed. Don't skip this step; it is a vitally important part of the learning process.



You will recognize these activities by this kind of icon in the margin next to them. The recommended time you should spend on each activity is also included.

Thinking activities

At various points in the learning guide, we ask you to *pause* and take some time to reflect on a particular issue. These thought pauses are designed to help you consolidate your understanding of a specific point before tackling the next section of the Guide. They deliberately try and slow you down!

One of the habits many of us develop through our involvement in a rote recall kind of learning is that we rush through things. Once we have read something, we believe we know it. This isn't true. While we may now recognize the idea, we probably don't really understand it in any detail. Work through this guide slowly and thoughtfully. Reread and rethink. This is how we develop a depth of understanding and become able to use the ideas we learn.

Try to link the issue raised in each thought pause with what you have read, with what you have already learnt about learning, with your own previous experience, and so on. Think about the problem we have raised. You might want to jot down your ideas in your workbook so that you can be reminded of them at a later stage.

Activities on the videotape

The videotape contains two sample lessons that will be useful for you to watch to reflect on the use of time and space in the classroom – those shown on the tape as well as other situations that you may be considering.

It is quite easy – and tempting – simply to watch the videotape before working through the module. But this is not the best way to view it, as the learning guide has structured the 'experiences' contained on the videotape into the learning of particular concepts. We will refer you to the videotape by inserting icons in the margin at the appropriate time. Viewing at the appropriate time – with ideas and questions from the learning guide in your head – will make the use of the video much more meaningful.

Reading further

This module is designed as a flexible learning resource. In other words, it is written to be accessible to first-year trainee teachers, but also to be useful to teachers who are already working, but are interested in developing their knowledge of these issues further.

We have made several references in the margins to other texts that provide reading around related issues. Learners who want to deepen their knowledge are encouraged to follow up on these references.

The 'Further reading' section at the end of the module provides an annotated list of a select number of recommended texts that can be used to deepen your understanding of the various issues covered in this module.



An icon like this will appear in the margin when you need to stop reading and reflect on an issue.



An icon like this will appear in the margin alongside activities that require you to watch the videotape.



An icon like this will appear when we refer you to further reading. It gives you a reference to material in the reader or in a book that the writers found useful.

1.4

What are the module's study requirements?

Since the module is about time and space in teaching and learning, some of its crucial study requirements are also about time and space. Where should you study, when, and for how long? Only you can decide on the first two parts to this question. Here are some guidelines. For the prescribed readings, activities, assignments, and making your own notes, find a quiet place where you can concentrate without interruption or distractions. You might find it helpful to make a habit of using the same quiet place at the same time every day or every second day or every weekend (depending on what other commitments you have). Whether you work on the module for an hour or two every day or in a concentrated block of six hours over the weekend, it's important to work regularly and not in fits and starts. In other words, you should set up a routine and stick to it.

In addition to time and space for concentrated study on your own, you should also try to set aside time and space for critical discussion with others. Find places – the school staff room, the college canteen, the steps of the public library – where you can talk to fellow students and teachers about the concepts, issues and arguments, in this module.

The module is designed to take about 120 hours of study. This will take you about six hours a week over twenty weeks or, if you want to work more intensively, twelve hours a week over ten weeks. Throughout the module you will find weekly time guides to help you pace yourself. Here are some guidelines on how to spend the 120 hours:

- Reading time: about 55 hours. This includes reading the learning guide as well as the prescribed readings in the reader.
- Activity time: about 50 hours. This includes the time it takes you to think about what you have read, do the activities, watch the videotapes, and write these up in your workbook. It also includes the time you spend making your own notes.
- Assignment time: about 15 hours. This is the time you will spend writing up the assignments you submit to your tutors.