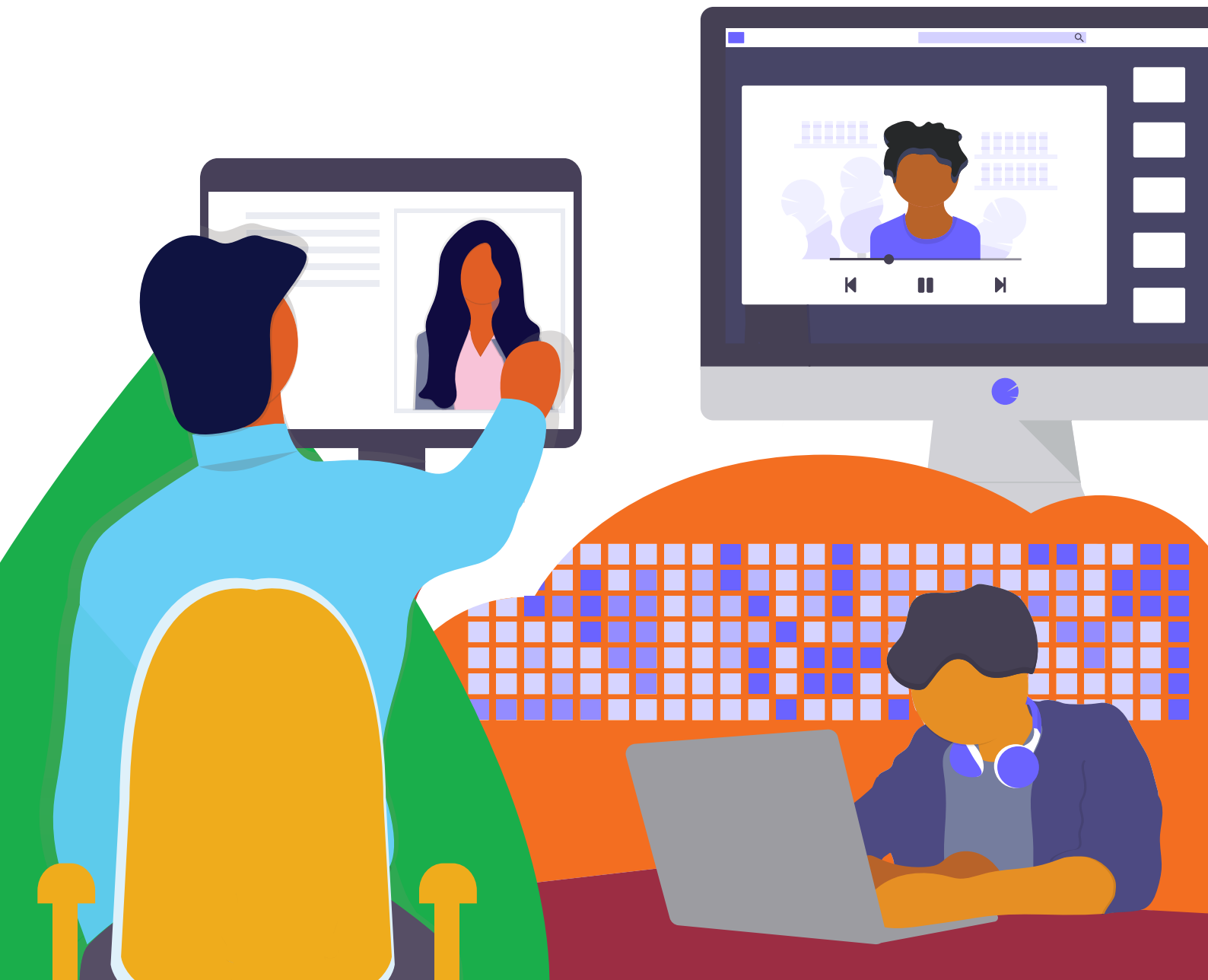




# Principles of the Teaching and Learning **Project Plan** during the COVID-19-related restrictions for students and for academic staff



# 1. Introduction

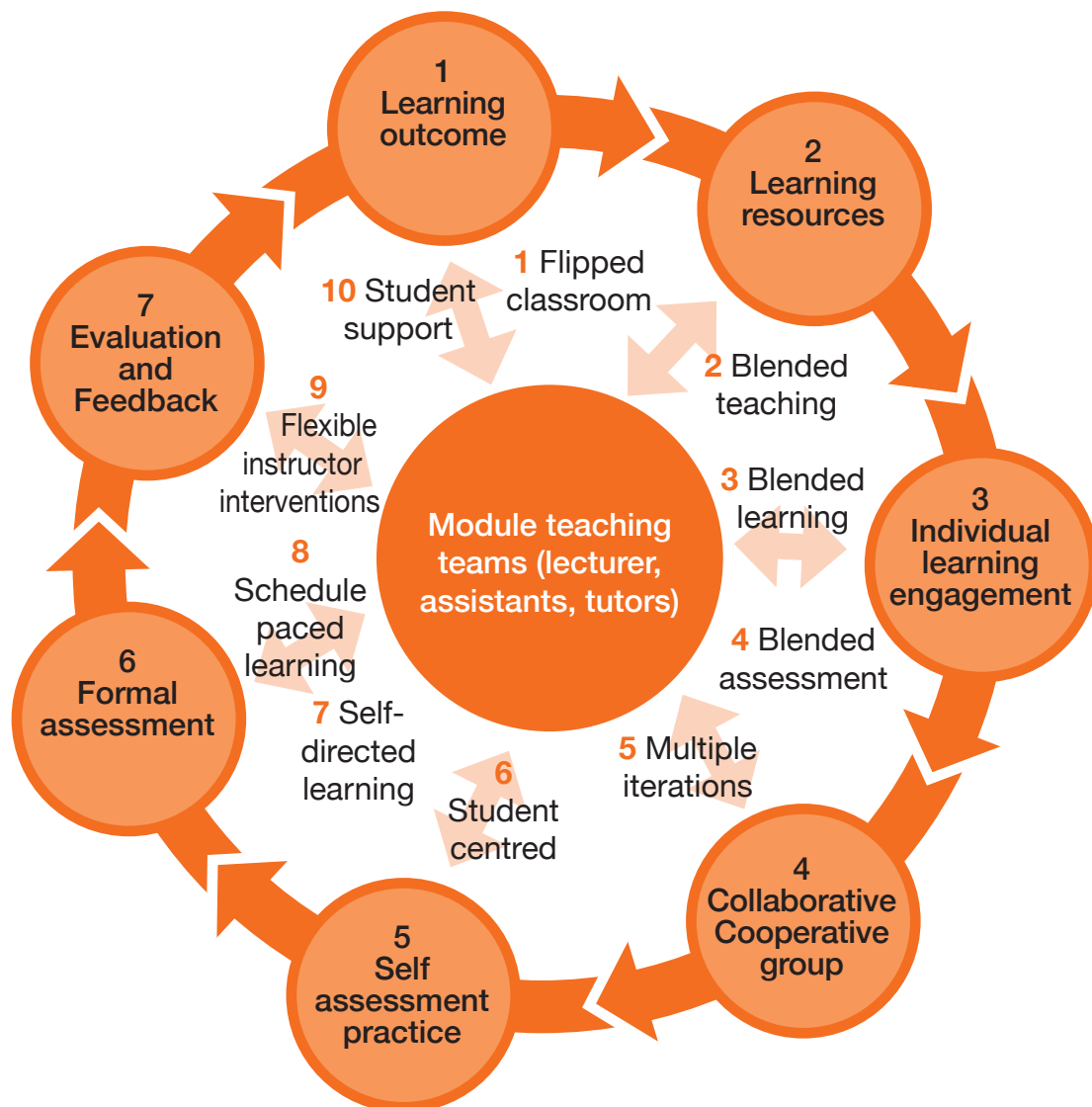
As we approach the official launch of the UKZN remote teaching and learning mode, it is important that we reflect on it closely after the dry-run: what we shall do, how we shall do it, who will provide guidance for the good practices enshrined in the plan, and importantly, how we shall collect the monitoring and evaluation data that will be used to determine how well we are faring in our novel venture.

It is important that we learn from initial practices soon in order to improve our system, going forward. While this communication is aimed at addressing these considerations, it is also a way of inviting all students and staff to be ready for a good start after a good dry run. The Executive Management Committee Teaching and Learning Task Team is grateful to the University community for all your contributions, which have taken us to where we are now. This communication seeks to outline principles to address best practices, management, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting for the plan. We do recognize the expertise of our staff and stakeholders, which will be useful in your individual and group comprehension of the principles for the benefit of our students.

There is growing anxiety about the way in which the remote teaching and learning will be managed. It is clear that measures have to be put in place to ensure best practices, and to avoid less ideal practices. University autonomy and academic freedom are always averse to excessive controls, correctly so. This must always be balanced against the effects of potentially negative practices on the reputation of the University and stakeholder relations. It is therefore a well-considered view that the principles for management and regulation of the implementation of the remote teaching and learning project should be articulated for everyone. This document aims to provide a brief outline of such principles for the project.

Figure 1 presents an ideal cyclical model of online learning and teaching that we are aspiring towards. We recognize all of the excellent work already completed by academics in migrating their materials to Moodle. Academics are encouraged to assess the delivery and learning practices in their modules, using this model, as we migrate our practices towards the gold standards of online learning.

The remote teaching and learning plan outlines a flipped classroom approach in which blended learning is enshrined. Essentially, this approach focuses on students performing a number of predetermined learning activities including reading and self-assessment. This is augmented by focused teacher-facilitated interactions to ensure that all aspects of the learning outcomes have been achieved. In addition, the required self-assessment practice around the set of learning outcomes defined in the module guide as directed by the teaching team leader must be realized. Active participation of students in the engagement and consultation with the lecturer and peers are some of the enablers used to ensure that learning proceeds at the required pace. This should ideally culminate in brief joint sessions conducted periodically for questions and answers, and for the preparation of students for assessments.



1. A blended learning and flipped classroom pedagogy
2. Multiple iterations of the basic cycle of learning engagement
3. With flexible intervention by, or consultation of the teaching team
4. A seven-point learning cycle
5. Underpinned by ten key principles

**Figure 1:** Conceptual presentation of the proposed online learning pedagogy

## 2 Principles of remote teaching delivery and learning practice

This section of the communication outlines the principles of how this is done in ways that optimize learning under the tuition of the various teaching team leaders who are responsible for the modules. The following questions, also expressed as checks and rationale in Table 1, are meant as guiding principles for students, academics, and academic managers in the Schools and Colleges, under the guidance of the College Deans of Teaching and Learning.

**Table 1:** Principles expressed as checks and balances

No	Checks	Rationale
1	<b>Is the electronic module guide uploaded with clear learning outcomes and a clear assessment plan? Is the learning and teaching pedagogy clearly described in the module guide with all the learning resources (standard and recommended readings, applications and software, open-source materials available online, etc.)?</b>	The module guide is the primary guidance document for students. They will use it to navigate the online learning platform. It guides students on learning outcomes, resources, standard and optional activities (readings, discussions, engagements, etc.), assessment plans schedules, and weightings.
2	<b>Are all the learning outcomes as clearly defined in the module guide, serving as the basis for providing the initiation of the student activity in each iteration of the flipped classroom activity?</b>	The learning outcomes are the central focus of the remote teaching and learning plan. All learning activities of students and guidance activities of teaching teams are centered around them to ensure that they are achieved.
3	<b>Are students directed to all the resources they need to achieve each of the learning outcomes in the learning management system, and are these resources within the capacity of the supplied student data?</b>	Students will engage with the learning resources on their own and will seek any assistance regularly from the teaching team using electronic means. These will include standard and recommended readings, applications, software, and open-source materials available online.
4	<b>Are the learning activities, and implicated assessments set at an appropriate level of Bloom's Taxonomy for the level of study?</b>	The remote learning activities are guided by the teaching teams using Bloom's taxonomy of outcomes or any appropriate classification.
5	<b>How does the course team ensure that learning pace is maintained and how do the students access assistance to keep going? Are intermittent engagement and consultation performed?</b>	The course team interrogates the student learning cycle regularly to ensure good progress and achievement of learning outcomes. Students consult regularly for the same purpose.
6	<b>Are students given self-assessment tasks? Are these tasks successfully completed? Are remedial and corrective courses of action provided for students continually to ensure that these assessment tasks are successfully completed?</b>	Self-assessment tasks are critical for the achievement of the learning outcomes, and are considered to be the most effective method for learning. This is based on the superiority of "learning by doing" over rote or other methods.

**Table 1:** Principles expressed as checks and balances (continued)

7	<b>Does each iteration of the emergency teaching and learning cycle have a combined platform for joint engagement, such as questions and answers and for preparation of students for assessments?</b>	One joint session where all students are able to engage with the teaching team is recommended, for example for questions and answers, and also for the preparation of students for assessments.
8	<b>Are the assessment methods and dates clearly articulated in the module guide? Is the blended assessment approach used, i.e. different methods of assessments rather than one single method across all formative and summative assessments?</b>	The module guide should contain a special section on the assessment plan, listing the dates, weightings, types and other details of the formative and summative assessments and how these come together to form the final mark.
9	<b>Is general feedback on the module given timeously for students? In addition is assessment feedback given timeously for students? Are the feedback sessions communicated to students on time?</b>	The methodology outlined in principle 7 comes highly recommended with the same caution given there. The standard time-table slot should be used to schedule such sessions.
10	<b>Is the student-centered approach enshrined in the remote teaching and learning plan directing students to engage with their learning activities under clear direction from the teaching team leader, as articulated in the module guides?</b>	The remote teaching and learning plan of the UKZN is student-centered in that it focuses on student learning which informs the activities of the teaching teams aimed at timeously responding to learning needs identified in principles 7.

No	Checks	Rationale
1	<b>Have you resolved the development of a learning plan, strategy and schedule? Have you checked your plan with someone else, such as a fellow student or a member of the teaching team, e.g. the lecturer, tutor or peer mentor?</b>	Make the resolution to continue with your studies in the new and exciting mode of learning. Literature shows that the online mode is more successful or at worst on par with the face-to-face model. Ask someone else to check your plan, strategy and schedule.
2	<b>Have you planned for the diversity of your modules, given that your semester curriculum has already been established?</b>	Consider your modules carefully to determine the approach for each as modules differ in terms of the most appropriate learning approach for each.
3	<b>Have you arranged your environment for learning? Have you negotiated with other people with whom you share living spaces to cater for your needs?</b>	Create an environment that will optimize your learning within the limitations of time, space and other factors of your immediate environment.
4	<b>Are all prescribed readings thoroughly done to get the essence of the learning from the readings? Are any problems from initial readings resolved by the recommended readings or additional readings?</b>	Read prescribed sections or texts. Read also the recommended and any additional readings to try and resolve learning problems that are lingering unresolved from the prescribed readings.
5	<b>Are all the self-assessment exercises fully done? Did you do additional self-assessment exercises from the recommended and additional readings?</b>	You will have accurately gauged your learning achievement by successfully completing as many self-assessment exercises as possible.
6	<b>Have you determined your learning difficulties? What are the issues that remain unresolved? What are the questions that have not been answered? Where did you get stuck in the self-assessment exercises, and what answers can help you along?</b>	Learning takes place best when learning material is interrogated, when students ask questions to resolve specific issues, which will enable them to proceed with learning upon resolution. Do not wait, ask the question immediately and get it resolved.
7	<b>What is your initial capacity to learn on your own? What are the issues that prevent progress with self-directed learning? Did you recognise the benefits of learning on your own? How can you use these benefits to your learning advantage?</b>	Discover your ability to learn online on your own and identify your needs for assistance, direction, and the resolution of issues that prevent you from proceeding with your own learning. Reduce the initial dependence on assistance and direction.

**Table 2:** Learning principles expressed as prompts and recommendations (continued)

No	Checks	Rationale
8	<b>Are you requesting help and getting it? Are you reaching out immediately when you cannot resolve an issue to progress with your learning? Are you refusing to get “stuck”? Importantly, are you getting the help and assistance from the right source?</b>	Discover the truism that there is more help available for learning on your own than via face-to-face, and it can be achieved in more directed ways, more specific ways which go directly to your specific difficulty, as opposed to generic and broad.
9	<b>In addition to your self-assessment achievements, have you identified achievements in your learning capability? Have you listed the ways in which you absorb and retain information, the ways in which you apply or integrate it with your knowledge and use it to learn more? Have you identified your learning strengths? Are you using them? Have you written them down so you are aware of them?</b>	Learning proficiency will improve dramatically with this mode of learning and there is a need to identify not only the learning weaknesses and ways of resolving them, but, more importantly, the emerging learning strengths and how to use them to advantage. Do you have stamina, memory, and problem-solving skills? Use them all to advantage! Keep a record of them and add as you progress.
10	<b>What are your defense mechanisms against those elements that challenge your learning project? Are you in touch with your own as well as provided psychosocial learning support mechanisms?</b>	Guard against lethargy, discouragement and self-defeating practices. There is discouragement out there. Note it, record it, oppose it and develop resilience against it. Get help when it gets tough.

## 4 Management of remote teaching and learning

In the context of the general university organogram, the management of the remote teaching and learning project is devolved as shown in Table 3. As the overall coordinator, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Teaching and Learning reports to the Vice-Chancellor on this project. The College deputy vice chancellors have College oversight on the project and they too report to the Vice-Chancellor on this project. Within the colleges, and working with the Academic Leaders of Teaching and Learning in Schools (supported by cluster/discipline academic leaders and programme coordinators), the College deans for Teaching and Learning have the responsibility of coordinating the project, making sure that it takes off, is implemented as planned, and that there are no bottlenecks, while accounting to the DVCs. Academic leaders provide a strong communication link between the College office and the schools, through special committees or task teams while assisting the DVC for communication with the Executive Management Committee. It is also important that the student coordination system is fully activated so that the class representatives frequently liaise with lecturers and students in their classes. This will enhance meaningful communication with the Student Representative Council as needed. Clearly, the academic teaching and learning and cluster/discipline leaders are going to play the implementation coal-face role in the project, where they will be of the greatest support and data collection value for monitoring and evaluation. For more details on the remote teaching and learning plan, please visit the University Teaching Online Portal at <http://utlo.ukzn.ac.za/utop.aspx> and the University Learning Online Portal (ULOP) at <http://utlo.ukzn.ac.za/ulop.aspx> supported by the UKZN Teaching & Learning Office.

**Table 3:** Management and coordination of the remote teaching and learning plan

No	Manager	Coordination	What to ensure
1	VC	DVCTL accounts to VC	Oversight
1	DVCTL	Overall coordinator. Updates VC	Conclude all plans
2	CDVC	College oversight. Updates VC	College capacities/resources
2	CDTL	College coordinator. Updates CDVC and DVCTL	College activities
3	DHOS	School coordinator. Work with CDTL. Both update CDVC	School activities
4	ALTL	Discipline/subject coordinator. Updates DHOS	Discipline/subject activities
5	Lecturer	Class coordinator. Updates ALTL	Class dry-run activities
5	Class Rep	Student Coordinator. Updates SRC. Liaise with lecturer	Class Student issues



