

Chapter 17

Teaching Practicum

Assessment Application: Reporting on a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports on an ongoing case study that focuses on the development of a computer-mediated communication technological solution intended to assess the teaching practicum (TP). The context of this chapter is the TP module at an open distance e-learning (ODEL) university in South Africa. This university is faced with the demanding task of arranging mandatory supervisory visits for purposes of assessment, for more than 40,000 student teachers located both inside and outside of the country. The TP module forms a major part of a teaching qualification as it provides the pedagogical space for students to apply, integrate, and acquire various forms of knowledge. While the traditional “manual model” is still the dominant mode of assessment, at ODeL institutions, it holds grave limitations, leaving thousands of students unassessed which undermines the value of the qualification. Given that, we currently find ourselves in the midst of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, an information communication technology (ICT)-based response to this predicament arguably offers the most appropriate solution. Such a solution would however require innovative design, critical thinking, research, and funding. This chapter reports on the development of an ICT-based project on the verge of being piloted at the ODeL institution concerned, as well as contact institutions. Informed by a theoretical framework that draws on technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPCK), critical connectivity, and open source software (OSS), this chapter responds to the questions: “Why” would an ICT-based instrument offer an optimal solution to TP assessment? and “How” would an ICT-based application offer an optimal solution to the assessment of the TP module? After the first pilot cycle with the prototype application, improvements and refinements will be made before a second pilot run. The objective of this project is to produce a TP application to be used in both contact as well as in distant, remote, and real-time/delayed assessment.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-0238-9.ch017

INTRODUCTION

The Teaching Practicum (TP) module is an integral part of the teaching qualification, providing opportunities for work integrated learning. The context of this article is the TP module at an Open Distance e-Learning university (ODEL): The University of South Africa (UNISA). This university is faced with the demanding task of arranging mandatory supervisory visits for more than 40 000 student teachers located both inside and outside of the country, for purposes of assessment. While the traditional “manual model” is still the dominant mode of TP assessment, at ODeL institutions it holds grave limitations, leaving thousands of students unassessed thereby undermining the value of the qualification. Given that we currently find ourselves in the midst of the 4th Industrial Revolution, an Information Communication Technologically (ICT)-based response to this predicament arguably offers the most apposite solution.

In South Africa the policy guiding the TP module is encapsulated in the document: Minimum Requirements for Teaching Qualification (DHET, 2018). The document defines TP as “practical learning” which involves learning both in practice and from practice. The TP module becomes pivotal to the training of student-teachers, stipulating that “learning in practice” should take place in authentic settings drawing from various learning situations using case studies, audio-visual materials, and lesson observation to assist the student-teacher in practice. Research on the experiences of students and supervisors of TP has often yielded disconcerting results as students in training should not be reporting destructive incidents that may negatively impact on their professional practice (Buckworth, 2017). In a Zimbabwean study (Chireshe & Chireshe 2010) TP supervisors were reported as having assessed students unfairly, while in a study by Marias and Meier (2004), students reported their TP experiences as some of the most valuable moments in the programme. In a study conducted in Norway, the context of teacher assessment has been described as a combination of trust and mistrust that ultimately surfaced in students’ perceptions (Smith, 2018). These seemingly contradictory outcomes of TP, accentuates the need to revisit the structure and content of the TP. In South Africa, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) stipulates that “all assessment tools used should be as free of cultural bias as possible, should be based on explicit criteria regarding what is required of students, and be accessible to all candidates (CHE 2011, 42). The policy stipulates assessment criteria such as fairness, consistency and transparency which should be observed by supervisors. Notwithstanding that the subjectivity element of the assessor/supervisor can never be eliminated, an ICT-based solution would contribute towards greater transparency and fairness during TP assessment.

The European Commission’s conference to enhance technology learning asserted that e - assessment pedagogy should reflect the core competences congruent with 21st century expectations (Redecker et al., 2012). This article reinforces the concern that if teacher education does not incorporate technologies and social media as part of pedagogy, it stands to become irrelevant (Burden, Aubusson, Brindley & Schuck 2016). According to the European Commission’s 2020 plan, the assessment of key competences emphasises not only knowledge, but also skills and attitudes in relation to the context intended as preparation for lifelong learning (European Commission, 2012). Strategically, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has incorporated lifelong learning as a graduate attribute for professional teachers in South Africa (CHE, 2010). Presently, the dominant TP assessment model is in need of upgrading and revision and an ICT-based instrument may be the best option to incorporate 21st century skills and knowledge and to address lifelong learning.

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