




# A tool to enhance the planning of children's literature lessons for Setswana as Home Language



## Authors:

Elma Marais<sup>1</sup>   
 Carisma Nel<sup>1</sup>   
 Dolly Dlavane<sup>1</sup> 

## Affiliations:

<sup>1</sup>Department of Language Education, Faculty of Education, North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

## Corresponding author:

Elma Marais,  
 elma.marais@nwu.ac.za

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**Background:** Universities, specifically faculties of education, have the responsibility to ensure that student teachers are introduced to the complexities involved in planning conceptually sound, coherent and cohesive lessons.

**Objectives:** The objectives of this study were to determine how prepared students teachers are to plan children's literature and develop a tool for use by teachers specializing in Setswana to support them when planning and preparing for children's literature lessons.

**Methods:** A Qualitative case study design was chosen for this study.

**Results:** The results of this study indicated that primary pre-service teachers in South Africa do not receive cohesive and coherent as well as intensive preparation in the planning of lessons focusing on children's literature. In addition, most primary pre-service teachers were not familiar with the titles, some genres and levelled questioning techniques used in planning children's literature lessons. The results indicated that student teachers studying at a distance and specialising in Setswana as a Home Language were experiencing difficulties relating to the literature planning and preparation.

**Conclusion:** Skillful planning, entails taking into account the knowledge and developmental level of learners, their specific social and cultural contexts, knowledge of subject matter and learning goals, as well as knowledge of teaching strategies and practices.

**Keywords:** Lesson Planning; Setswana; Children's Literature; Evaluation; Genre; Primary School.

## Introduction

Research evidence stating that poor learner performance in schools is because of 'many teachers' lack of understanding of and inability to adequately convey the content knowledge of the subjects they are teaching' is becoming more evident in South Africa (Deacon 2016:3). This research is supported by international consensus that one of the most important variables affecting educational quality is the competence of the teacher (Darling-Hammond 2006). Darling-Hammond (2006) proposes that the development of good teachers and exposure to quality teaching should take place at universities offering Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes. However, Darling-Hammond acknowledges that the training offered within teacher preparation programmes can vary significantly. The Initial Teacher Education Research Project (ITERP) study findings support this statement, indicating that the content of programmes in South African institutions varies widely (Taylor 2014). Taylor (2014) states that:

Evidence has accumulated over the last two decades to suggest that in-service interventions have had limited impact. This understanding, in turn, has led to a growing realisation that the greatest opportunity for improving the quality of schooling lies in strengthening initial teacher education. (p. 6)

ITE programmes in South Africa are currently facing scrutiny with regard to subject content depth and rigour (i.e. language and mathematics) as well as regarding the work-integrated learning component of the Bachelor of Education (BEd) programme (Nel 2018). Research indicates that courses offered within teacher preparation programmes do not adequately prepare student teachers to plan for effective instruction (Duncan 2010; Maphosa & Mudzielwana 2014; National Council on Teacher Quality 2010) and support student teachers in their development of the skills to plan and prepare effectively and coherently (Holm & Horn 2003; Jones, Jones & Vermette 2011) because a strong relationship exists between teacher planning and learner achievement, and ineffective planning practices learnt in teacher preparation programme modules or courses may manifest once student teachers begin teaching within their own classrooms (Jones et al. 2011).

It is difficult to overstate the importance of planning. Sardo-Brown (1996:519) defines planning as 'the instructional decisions made prior to the execution of plans during teaching'. Danielson

(2007:27) states 'that a teacher's role is not so much to *teach* as it is to *arrange the learning*'. According to Danielson (2007), teachers who excel in planning and preparation:

[D]esign instruction that reflects an understanding of the disciplines they teach – the important concepts and principles within that content, and how the different elements relate to one another and to those in other disciplines. They understand their students – their backgrounds, interests, and skills. Their design is coherent in its approach to topics, includes sound assessment methods, and is appropriate to the range of students in the class. (p. 27)

In research conducted by Chesley and Jordan (2012:43), teachers stated that, 'We didn't know how to plan for instruction'. Findings from the ITERP study also indicate that within the teacher preparation programmes that were reviewed, there was limited information on lesson planning in both the Home Language and First Additional Language methodology course materials. The use of micro-teaching as a practice-based opportunity was also negligible (Reed 2014:27). Student teachers' ability to deliver developmentally appropriate instruction depends on their ability to plan coherent and cohesive lessons. To plan, they will have to learn to sequence their content and align it with appropriate instructional practices relevant to the content being taught. Effective planning also ensures that the needs of all learners are catered for and that differentiation is addressed.

Good planning is crucial if student teachers need to have an impact on the learning of the learners. Although experienced teachers can, perhaps, manage to 'fly by the seat of their pants', they cannot do so for long (Danielson 2007:57). However, there is not much research addressing exactly how student teachers are taught to plan in courses offered within teacher preparation programmes. The aim of this article is, firstly, to report on student teachers' views of their preparedness for teaching children's literature lessons; secondly, to report on how lecturers or their substitutes prepare the student teachers for planning to teach children's literature lessons; and, lastly, to determine how subject advisors support teachers for planning and preparing children's literature lessons. The outcome is to present a tool that can be used as a resource to assist them in their planning and preparation of children's literature.

## Conceptual framework

Shulman's (1987) model of pedagogical reasoning and action steps provides a conceptual framework for this study. The pedagogical reasoning and action steps are processes and practices that can support student teachers as they 'work' from their initial understanding of the content in their subjects to develop pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman (1987) identifies five processes that teacher educators may focus on while scaffolding student teachers' development towards competence in lesson planning and enactment:

1. comprehension
2. transformation
3. instruction
4. evaluation
5. reflection.

According to Shulman (1987:14), the

[V]iew of pedagogical reasoning is from the point of view of the teacher, who is presented with the challenge of taking what he or she already understands and making it ready for effective instruction. (p. 14)

The journey to the development of pedagogical content knowledge growth starts with the importance of the comprehension of content knowledge. To effectively teach the content, student teachers must have mastered the content in breadth and depth. Once they understand the content, they must transform the content knowledge in such a way that it can be taught to learners in a comprehensible manner. During this process, student teachers need to know their learners (i.e. cultural assets, diverse needs and interests, developmental levels, etc. ) to deliver their lessons at the correct level and make instructional adaptations where required. Pedagogical content knowledge is also about recognising what specific learning activities and pedagogy work for the type of content and skills being taught in the lesson (Mishra & Koehler 2006). Transforming knowledge into a learner-friendly format is essential for pedagogical practice. Instruction is the enactment process and includes many pedagogical aspects such as managing the classroom, providing clear explanations and examples, and focussing on the gradual release of responsibility in the learning process (McVee et al. 2015). Evaluation focuses on student teachers' checking of learner understanding. Reflection should allow student teachers and in-service teachers to reflect on what was successful, what can be improved, more efficient methods of materials, classroom and content management, etc. (Shulman1987).

## Planning children's literature lessons

Children's literature should be an essential component of every primary school curriculum and should not merely be included at the whim of the teacher or just to pass time (Cremin et al. 2008; Hancock 2000; Leu et al. 2003; Stan 2015; Waugh, Neau & Waugh 2016). The existing Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements for the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase allow for instructional time, specifically for the integration of children's literature into the daily or weekly timetable, and indicate a range of stories as well as information and graphical text (Department of Basic Education 2011). Teachers' competency should include the ability to enhance learners' reading choices, habits and positive attitudes. In addition, their competence should include knowledge of authors, titles, genres and the variety of texts available for children (Akins et al. 2018; Cremin et al. 2008; Cunningham et al. 2004). Research indicates that teachers need to read widely and be familiar with a variety of book titles and genres in order to support the reading development of young children, and this should include the reading of specifically children's literature (Collins & Safford 2008; Cremin et al. 2008; Ripp 2016). In her study, Marais (2014) indicates that teachers responsible for Afrikaans as Home Language and First Additional Language from grades 1 to 6 and subject advisors were unable to identify

titles, genres, narrative elements as well as recommend developmentally appropriate texts to learners in the identified grade levels. Marais (2014) also found that teachers' knowledge of children's literature was limited to their knowledge of their own childhood favourites. In addition, Akin et al. (2018) pointed out that there is a gap regarding the genres that teachers know specifically with regard to multicultural and historical fiction. McCutchen et al. (2002:210) state that, 'If teachers are to create and maintain a literate environment for their students, we might expect teachers to be knowledgeable about children's literature'.

The research seems to indicate that ITE programmes are neglecting the inclusion of children's literature within the curriculum. Within the South African context, this statement is supported by results from the ITERP (Deacon 2016; Reed 2014). According to Reed (2014), children's literature is given limited attention at the institutions that were part of the ITERP study. Reed (2014:27) states that, 'This situation is a cause for concern given the importance of developing learners' interest in reading'. Research seems to indicate the importance of the inclusion of topics focussed on encouraging reading widely, knowledge of children's books, when and how to use texts, recommending books to learners appropriate to their language, social, personality and cognitive developmental levels (cf. Marais 2014).

## Methodology

The following research questions were formulated for this study:

- How prepared are student teachers to plan and prepare for teaching children's literature lessons?
- How do lecturers or their substitutes prepare student teachers for planning and preparing to teach children's literature lessons, specifically related to:
  - lesson format
  - familiarity with genres in children's literature, narrative elements and criteria for choosing developmentally appropriate children's literature.
- How do subject advisors support teachers for the planning and preparation of children's literature lessons?

## Research design

A qualitative case study research design was chosen for this study because the aim was to address 'how' related to preparedness of children's literature planning and preparation, student teachers', lecturers or their substitutes as well as subject advisors' (Yin 2009:1). One teacher preparation programme formed the bounded context of this study.

## Sampling

Non-probability sampling was used to collect information from participants identified to participate in this study, and which ensures that data collected are not biased or skewed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2007). Purposeful sampling was utilised in choosing participants based on the needs of the

research and the requirements related to participants' 'typicality and possession of a particular characteristic being sought' (Cohen et al. 2007:114–115). A total number of eight lecturers teaching Setswana, English and Afrikaans as Home Language, and English and Afrikaans as First Additional Language ( $N=8$ ), or substitutes participated in this study. Two language subject advisors from a school district in close proximity to the university also participated in the study. Student teachers in year 1 ( $N = 60$ ), year 2 ( $N = 45$ ), year 3 ( $N = 25$ ) and year 4 ( $N = 15$ ) of the BEd Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase programme participated in the study. A total of 78% ( $N = 113$ ) of the participating student teachers were enrolled in the BEd programme offered at a distance; the remaining 22% ( $N = 32$ ) were on campus student teachers. The student teachers specialised in English, Setswana or Afrikaans as Home Language. The students enrolled for the BEd degree are situated across all provinces of South Africa.

## Data collection methods

In this study, four data collection methods were used, namely, focus group interviews, semi-structured interviews, an analysis of WhatsApp messages and document analysis. A focus group interview was held with the language lecturers and the substitutes to determine how they prepare the student teachers for planning and preparing to teach children's literature lessons, specifically related to format of lessons and familiarity with genres in children's literature, narrative elements and criteria for choosing developmentally appropriate children's literature.

Two focus group interviews were also held with first, second, third and fourth year full-time on-campus students to determine their preparedness to plan and prepare for teaching children's literature lessons.

Semi-structured interviews were held with the two language subject advisors in order to ascertain their points of view and perceptions related to teachers' preparedness to teach children's literature in the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase.

In this study, WhatsApp messages were analysed and interpreted by the researchers to give voice and meaning to the distance students' points of view in terms of their preparedness to plan and prepare children's literature lessons.

Document analysis of  $N = 45$  lessons plans was made to corroborate the focus group interviews, the semi-structured interviews and the WhatsApp messages.

## Methods of analysis

Data were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Seven steps were followed in the analysis procedure, firstly, prepare the data (all data were transformed into written text and choices were made in terms of what to transcribe and what not to transcribe – non-verbal communication was not transcribed); secondly, define the unit of analysis (themes were used as the unit of analysis in this study); thirdly, develop categories and a coding scheme (open, axial and

selective codings were utilised); fourthly, test your coding scheme on a sample of text (sample text was coded and consistency and accuracy were checked by a qualitative research specialist); fifthly, code all the text (coding was controlled and checked repeatedly); sixthly, assess your coding consistency (consistency of the coding was checked to ensure that errors and fatigue did not play a role); and seventhly, draw conclusions from the coded data (the focus here is on sense-making of the identified themes and uncovered patterns) (De Wever et al. 2006; Henning, Van Rensburg & Smith 2004; Miles & Huberman 1994; Patton 2002; Schilling 2006; Thietart 2007; Weber 1990).

## Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained for the project via the research ethics committee at the university where the study was conducted (Ethical clearance number: NWU-00344-17-A2).

## Results and discussion

The focus group interviews held with the lecturers and substitutes responsible for teaching literacy and language within the Foundation Phase and the Intermediate Phase indicated that they made reference to planning lessons in the methods module. However, none of the lecturers indicated that they gave detailed attention to lesson planning, specifically the planning of lessons where children's literature was a focus. The English First Additional Language lecturers in the Intermediate Phase indicated that they support their full-time students with lesson planning.

We don't have time. Our focus is on the content knowledge that these students must get. (Lecturer 1, female, age 54)

We do lesson planning, but it is not done in depth. (Lecturer, female, age 38)

When they go out for teaching practice, we just let them plan the way they want or use the planning method of the mentor teacher. (Lecturer 1 and 2, female age 54 and age 38)

I just have to check that they did include their lesson plans in their portfolios. I don't have to assess it per se. (Lecturer 3, female, age 52)

During the methodology periods for the full-time students, my focus is on teaching the strategies and methods they can use when teaching children's literature lessons. (Lecturer 4, female, age 44)

The whiteboard sessions for the distance students cover the essential content they need for exam preparation – we do not do lesson planning at all. (Lecturer 5, female, age 47)

I don't think planning is really done in a coherent way in any module – I guess we assume they can do it. We just tell them the main things that are the goal, the methods and strategies to include, the activities and so on. (Lecturer 6, female, age 45)

The lecturers and the substitutes indicated that the university frowned upon the prescribing of too many texts. They also mentioned that they do not require the student teachers to buy or read children's literature. One lecturer sends her full-time contact student teachers to the library to take out children's literature and also includes an assignment in which they have to justify their choice of text related to a specific

grade level (i.e. readability) and they also have to write their own historic literature texts for use in the classroom.

Students are not familiar with children's literature. They can give you the titles of the very traditional stories such as Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, and so on. These are usually the texts that they read as children or that were read to them.

They even do this in Setswana – they give me the titles in English.

The distance students are not required to read any children's literature.

I have to adapt the distance students' assignment because I can't send them to the library to take out books and read. (Lecturer 4, female, age 44)

When asked whether the student teachers were taught to ask different types of questions when focussing on children's literature, the lecturers responded that 'this should be taught by the general education lecturers – curriculum studies'. The Setswana lecturers also indicated that the student teachers were familiar with the following narrative elements, characters, theme or plot and setting:

During teaching practice, they only do character, plot and setting. They say that is all the mentor teachers require them to do. They have to stick to the departmental workbooks, because the subject advisors check up on them [the teachers].

It is so difficult to just get Setswana texts that to introduce the student teachers to things like vocaliser and narrator or even the importance of illustrations is just too much.

We have changed the coursework to now include a lot more children's literature, but we do not focus on teaching them about planning – they do that during teaching practice. (Lecturer 1, female, age 54)

The semi-structured interviews with the subject advisors indicated that they advised teachers to make use of the departmental workbooks because the schools cannot afford to buy children's literature because it is expensive. They also mentioned that there were not many texts available in Setswana. When asked about what types of genres they wanted the teachers to include in the lessons, they answered 'lots of culturally relevant stories'. The subject advisors were not able to give examples of five children's literature titles (only the traditional English titles such as Goldilocks and the Three Bears, etc.) and they considered the focus on 'illustrations' to be a means of accessing the meaning of the story or to 'guess' the vocabulary. One subject advisor mentioned that within the workbooks stories are included but stated that because the teachers do not choose these stories themselves, they do not always know what is important for learners to know. She stated:

[T]hey've got nothing to read you know and uhm I, I, I try to explain to them you need to build up a variety of books of different levels so that you build up a graded system so children can come in and take a book that they feel comfortable with and then later they take a more challenging book you know. That's what I'm trying to and also that they can use authentic reading material you know they can use stories from magazines and they can use a cereal box actually or a Simba chips packet you know



but they mustn't tell me that there's nothing to read ... (Subject advisor 1, female, age 56)

When asked about the importance of lesson planning, the subject advisors indicated that they were only interested in the files of the teachers. The focus was on the inclusion of the correct documents being included in specific files. The planning should include dates, week numbers and the specific topic that forms the focus of a lesson or what is done during day programmes within Grade R:

The teachers must put the things in the files in the way that we tell them to. (Subject advisor 2, female, age 54)

The teachers must do weekly plans and show what they do when. (Subject advisor 2, female, age 54)

The focus group interviews with the contact student teachers and the analysis of distance students' WhatsApp messages indicated that they were fairly familiar with some narrative elements:

When we prepare our lessons we focus on the characters, plot and setting. That is what the teachers did when we were at school and if we ask the learners questions on these things, the lecturers and our mentor teachers seem to be satisfied. (Student teacher 1, female, age 22)

The lecturers tell us to make sure we 'hook' the learners with good introductions. (Student teacher 3, female, age 28)

I don't talk about illustrations. (Student teacher 4, female, age 21)

I will not be able to tell the children what types of books to read or even give them some guidance on titles. (Student teacher 5, female, age 58)

At the school where I was they had a Diskonto Book Sale and the Setswana learners chose sticker books or books in English. (Student teacher 6, female, age 24)

With regard to planning their lessons, all the distance student teachers commented on how difficult it was and that they were not sure what was required of them. These comments were similar for student teachers from year 1 to year 4:

I don't know what I should write under Learners background knowledge – I just wrote that if the book is about snow and I know the learners in the township won't know this, I will explain it. (Student teacher 4, female, age 21)

Do I just get the learning objectives from the CAPS document? (Student teacher 7, female, age 20)

I don't know what the lecturers want when the template asks for the procedure when planning – I just tell what I will do and what the learners must do. I tell them about the worksheets I will use and what questions I will ask the learners – like you know; Who is the main character in the story? Where does the story take place? Was the boy happy or sad? (Student teacher 8, female, age 33)

I know – sort of – what to do for English, but in doing my Setswana lessons I am a bit lost. (Student teacher 2, female, age 25)

The information on planning we get is either in English or Afrikaans, but we battle in Setswana. (Student teacher 9, female, age 30)

I do not know how to plan for a literature lesson te; what does the lecturer want – Eish, the teachers at school tell us they just say we are doing a story in the workbook. (Student teacher 10, female, age 23)

In this one module they tell us about planning, but it is general stuff and the lecturer can't help us with the language content we must plan – we suck it out of our thumb. (Student teacher 11, female, age 21)

The student teachers struggled to indicate what features a 'good' book has and what criteria they need to use when choosing a book. It is clear that the student teachers do not have enough knowledge to make informed decisions on good children's literature and the value that children's literature could add to the classroom. It was also evident that the student teachers struggled to plan lessons using children's literature – the lesson plans focussed mainly on naming and describing the main characters and linking this to a language element (e.g. tenses). From the research conducted it is evident that the student teachers are not familiar with the different genres and sub-genres within children's literature. Student teachers are uncertain about the classifications of children's literature and the value that each genre has for the development of a child:

I don't know any historical literature – maybe it is something with Tata Mandela? (Student teacher 12, female, age 34)

I just know *Itumeleng A Tla A Thusa and Noga* – I saw these at a school. They are stories. (Student teacher 13, female, age 29)

The lecturers do not tell us about different stories in Setswana. (Student teacher 14, female, age 33)

An analysis of the student teachers' lesson plans indicated that different aspects such as lesson aims, resource materials (e.g. literacy or language workbooks), learner activities and assessments were addressed. The analysis corroborated the statements made by all the participants. Planning only referred to the book that was chosen for discussion (e.g. *Re a tshameka*, *The Three Little Bears*); the questions that the student teachers asked were at the lowest cognitive level; across grade levels, there was no variety in the genres chosen. The students also focussed on the most common aspects of the stories such as character, plot and setting. There was very little evidence about active engagement of the learners or about developmentally appropriate choices for texts.

Planning and preparation involve more than simply writing down on a piece of paper what should be done for the day, or during the week. Planning includes various aspects such as in-depth knowledge of learners, the availability of various resources, including technology resources, knowledge of content, knowing how to select learning goals, choice of learning activities, strategies and practices as well as planning for assessment. The research results clearly indicate that planning is 'not something that most people know how to do intuitively or that they learn from unguided classroom practice' (Darling-Hammond et al. 2005:176). It seems as if the teacher preparation received by these student teachers has promoted a simplistic conception of lesson planning as discrete components needed to be considered without any coherence. These findings are similar to those found by Rusznak and Walton (2011) related to students'

lesson planning. The results clearly indicate that lesson planning is not done in a coherent, cohesive and subject-specific manner within this training programme. In addition, the comments made by the student teachers studying at a distance indicate that they are at a disadvantage concerning the preparation and exposure they receive with regard to lesson planning and also children's literature in general.

The results also indicate that the Peter effect (Applegate & Applegate 2004) is relevant to this study as one cannot be expected to find what one does not possess. The student teachers cannot be expected to plan and prepare children's literature effectively if their 'role models' are not modelling effective practice.

## A tool for use when planning and preparing Setswana children's literature lessons

A tool was developed for use by pre-service student teachers; however, the tool can also be used by in-service teachers and lecturers who specialise in Setswana as Home Language. The tool includes information related to different genres, the most important attributes of the genre, the aim of the genre and the different types. In addition, narrative elements, as well as possible questions that student teachers may consider including when planning and discussing the selected genre, are included. An attempt has been made to display the most important information in a user-friendly manner and to use the layout of a wheel where the segments indicate the differences between the various types of genres as well as the narrative elements (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

The tool has been developed by the first author, and the third author was responsible for checking the accuracy and relevance of the information for Setswana pre-service student teachers. The tool is available electronically as well as in hard copy to ensure that student teachers' preferences as well as accessibility to and familiarity with electronic devices were taken into consideration.

In Figure 1, on side 1, the genres, the main characteristics, the purpose (i.e. narrative elements prominent in specific genre), the types (i.e. sub-genres) as well as the way in which the genres may be evaluated are illustrated. Side 1 can be turned by a spinning action to show only one segment at a time so that student teachers can easily see the information relevant to the specific genre that is to be the focus of the lesson. Side 1 is divided into seven segments, with each segment focussing on a specific genre. For the sake of completeness, a decision was made to include all genres, even though all the genres are not necessarily addressed in all phases of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) curriculum. The seven segments are picture books, traditional literature, fantasy, reality literature, historical literature, biographies and drama. Each segment is divided into five parts, namely, recommend teaching phase, characteristics, purpose, evaluation and narrative elements, and types or



FIGURE 1: Genres.

sub-genres. The parts, therefore, indicate which phase the type of genre is most suitable for. The characteristics of the particular genre are then indicated, as in the case of picture books where the illustrations are an essential part of the book, or a picture book may even have no text at all. The purpose of the genre is mentioned, as well as the reasons why teachers would use the particular type of genre. It is further indicated what the most important elements are that should be examined when the type of genre is evaluated, and, lastly, the sub-genres of the specific category are pointed out. This tool does not aim to be the only source of information, but may serve as a quick guide to assist student teachers with their planning of children's literature lessons when no resources are available while they are on teaching practice. In addition, the purpose was to ensure that when student teachers plan their lessons while on teaching practice they



FIGURE 2: Narrative elements.

had access to a user-friendly tool that could at the very least ensure that content knowledge planning was accurate and that important concepts were addressed during the enactment of the lesson.

In Figure 2, the narrative elements are highlighted for the student teacher. Side 2 is divided into nine segments. Each segment explains a specific narrative element that is important in children's literature. For the sake of completeness, a decision has been made to include all the elements as well as how illustrations can play a role. The nine segments are readability, narrator, vocaliser, characterisation, setting, time, events, illustrations and theme or topic. Each segment is divided into two parts, namely, features and teacher can ask. The features include a brief outline of what each element entails and how it may affect the story.

The second part, 'teacher can ask', relates to the different types of questions the student teachers can ask regarding the specific element. For example, if the focus is on the narrator, the student teachers may ask: 'Who is telling the story?'

## Conclusion

Universities, and specifically faculties of education, have a responsibility to prepare student teachers so that they can enter the profession with the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed to successfully teach children in a developmentally appropriate manner. Student teachers must be able to plan and deliver instruction to all learners in order to ensure success for all learners. The inclusion of children's literature in ITE programmes is a significant problem, and the support that student teachers need in order to ensure that their impact on learners is successful will necessitate a far greater commitment to quality teacher preparation than what is currently the case.

Student teachers and in-service teachers who have difficulty in locating appropriate text may consider the following websites:

- <https://digitallibrary.io/>
- <https://storyweaver.org.in/>
- <http://www.africanstorybook.org/>
- <http://www.worldreader.org/what-we-do/worldreader-mobile/>

Student teachers require practice-based opportunities during their training to ensure that they develop the competences necessary to plan effective lessons. They also need to receive effective feedback to ensure professional growth. The preparation and support provided to student teachers studying at a distance, and also specifically student teachers studying African languages, in the case of this study – Setswana – requires attention. Planning per se and the planning of children's literature occur via osmosis; however, it occurs when instruction on planning is part of a structured programme (i.e. learning from and in practice). Teacher preparation programmes must assume responsibility for ensuring that pre-service teachers are ready to enter the profession so that they can implement responsible practice.

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## Authors' contributions

E.M. conceptualised the development and design of the planning tool. C.N. conceptualised the research project,



performed the literature review, identified the research methodology and initiated the writing up of the article.

D.D. edited the Setswana tools for language and content accuracy.

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Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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# Preservice teachers use of WhatsApp to explain subject content to school children during the COVID-19 pandemic

CARISMA NEL<sup>1</sup>

ELMA MARAIS

*North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa*

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South Africa went into lockdown on 27 March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is unlikely that thousands of preservice teachers will be able to complete their teaching practicum during 2020 at schools. In this action research study, we investigated a two-week teaching practicum experience that was completed via WhatsApp by 12 students. During this time, the student teachers were supervised and monitored by university teaching practicum lecturers and mentored by school mentor teachers via WhatsApp. The results indicated that all participants perceived the teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp to have contributed to the formation of a community of practice that resulted in feedback and assessment being focused on a core teaching practice, namely explaining subject-specific content. Guidelines are provided for universities or teacher training providers who have work-integrated learning components to show how a teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp can be integrated into their training programs.

**Keywords:** Work-integrated learning, core teaching practices, WhatsApp, COVID-19, teaching practicum

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The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many universities in South Africa to consider online learning for their thousands of students in order to ensure successful completion of the 2020 academic year (Asma, 2020). Many professional programs offered at higher education institutions consist of two core components, namely coursework and work-integrated learning. Most universities in South Africa have been able to move the coursework components into an online mode while at the same time trying to address factors such as lack of access to devices, data and electricity (North-West University, 2020b). Lecturers have had to adjust their courses to comply with the principles of being mobile-friendly, low tech, low data and low immediacy in order to reach the diverse student population (North-West University, 2020c). The teaching practicum (a component of work-integrated learning) within initial teacher education (ITE) programs (education programs that students enrol in after exiting the school system), on the other hand, have been a far more challenging component to address because of the necessity to place student teachers in schools.

South Africa went into lockdown on 27 March 2020. Student teachers at North-West University were scheduled for their teaching practicum session from 31 March to 23 April 2020, and also for a second session in July. However, universities are debating whether it will be feasible as well as safe to place thousands of student teachers in schools across the entire country for their teaching practicum sessions (Department of Basic Education, 2020). The current health crisis is forcing universities to be creative in the way that they approach the various challenges they face. The purpose of this article is to report on a project where the teaching practicum component of a Bachelor of Education (BEd) program was conducted via WhatsApp.

## TEACHING PRACTICUM AND WHATSAPP

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has created a number of challenges for university and schooling systems around the world. Most universities as well as schools were “forced” online during this difficult time, taking university lecturers, student teachers, teachers, parents and learners out of their

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: Carisma Nel, [carisma.nel@nwu.ac.za](mailto:carisma.nel@nwu.ac.za)

comfort zone. A university in the North West Province of South Africa indicated that it would resort to online learning for its students in all programs offered at the university (North-West University, 2020a). As part of student teachers' BEd (four-year initial teacher education program) course requirements they have to complete six weeks per year of school-based teaching practice (North-West University, 2019, p. 23). The work-integrated learning component of teacher training programs in South Africa is referred to as the teaching practicum. The teaching practicum is seen as a purposeful, organised, supervised and assessed educational activity required for the completion of an ITE program that integrates theoretical learning with its applications in the workplace (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). During this time, they are placed at professional practice schools that partner with the university. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2020, p.1), "The Teaching Practice (TP) or Work-Integrated Learning component of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes is likely to be significantly impacted, as the national lockdown period coincides with the time that many ITE students are engaged with TP/WIL in schools."

In the majority of ITE programs around the world, universities collaborate with schools in order to support student teachers during the teaching practicum that takes place at the schools. School-university partnerships have been "... touted as essential to the successful development, implementation and refinement of clinically based teacher education programs" (Maheady et al., 2019 p. 356). Student teachers are usually supervised, monitored and mentored by mentor teachers at the schools and by university lecturers during their teaching practicum (Lawson et al., 2015). Wenger's (1998) Communities of Practice (CoP) theoretical framework forms the foundation for this study. Wenger, Trayner, and de Laat (2011, p.9) defined CoP as a "learning partnership among people who find it useful to learn from and with each other about a particular domain. They use each other's experience of practice as a learning resource". For Wenger (2004, para 14), the community constitutes "the group of people for whom the domain is relevant, the quality of the relationships among members, and the definition of the boundary between the inside and the outside". In order for the student teacher, the mentor teacher and the university lecturer to constitute a CoP, they must come together around ideas or topics of interest (the domain) and interact with each other to learn together. In addition, Wenger (2004, para 15) defines practice as "the body of knowledge, methods, tools, stories, cases, documents, which members share and develop together" to address recurring problems in their specific contexts. Wenger (1998) contended that individuals' engagement in a CoP always entails a process of negotiation of meaning which takes place in the convergence of two processes: participation and reification. Participation involves acting and interacting, and reification involves producing artifacts (such as tools, words, symbols, rules, documents, concepts, theories, and so on) around which the negotiation of meaning is organized. Wenger, White, and Smith (2009, p.57) noted that learning in a CoP "requires both participation and reification to be present and in interplay".

In the DHET (2020) communique, universities were encouraged to collaborate with schools to find innovative ways to ensure that teaching practice can still be successfully completed during the COVID-19 period. The majority of the schools in South Africa were not geared for online teaching and teachers and administrators were frantically enrolling for courses to find ways to ensure that they could support their learners during this time (Pearson South Africa, 2020). Many schools took to Zoom and Google Classroom while the Department of Basic Education initiated various radio and television lessons (Brodie et al., 2020; Hlangani, 2020). From a review of one university's communiques and the Department of Higher Education and Training (2015) policy and communiques as well as personal communication with schools, it became clear that universities and schools would have to react to the challenges posed by COVID-19 using innovative ideas as well as collaborating to ensure that final year

student teachers can complete their teaching practice as well as supporting schools in their own challenges to meet the needs of school children during this period.

Establishing or scaling up remote or online learning strategies are a sector-wide response to sudden interruption of educational processes as a result of unexpected COVID-19 school and university closures (UNESCO, 2020). The potential of technology to address the education “crisis” in Southern Africa has been the subject of much debate in the popular press, policy circles and academic fora (Burns et al., 2019; Department of Basic Education, 2018; Jantjies, 2020; Wright, 2016), especially for those populations with least access to education. Jantjies (2020) states that, “COVID-19 has shown that technology is no longer a luxury but an important component of the education process”. The increasing uptake of smartphones in Sub-Saharan Africa has become an integral part of the contemporary life of student teachers, university lecturers, teachers and learners for engaging with social media (Porter et al., 2016). Kemp (2020) indicates that 98% of active social media users in South Africa access it via mobile devices. According to Kemp (2020), WhatsApp is ranked the top messenger app around the world. There were 22 million social media users in South Africa in January 2020, and 89% of users used WhatsApp. WhatsApp is a messenger application that works across multiple platforms like iOS and Android, and this application is being used among undergraduate students to send multimedia messages like text messages, pictures, video clips, and voice notes (Bere, 2012; So, 2016). It allows communication between group participants without the need for unity in place or time. Participants are free to choose when they want to access the information posted and can view and interact with other group members regarding the information delivered at any time (WhatsApp Inc., 2020). When learning material is provided via mobile phone it should be presented in bite-sized chunks which are succinct and precise (Stahl et al., 2010). WhatsApp is a suitable tool to facilitate this form of learning. Bite-sized materials are stored on the student’s device for easy access. Students can conveniently revisit these materials at their own pace and time. The North-West University teaching practicum model is practice-based and requires student teachers to enact high leverage teaching practices while on their teaching practicum at professional practice schools. High leverage practices (HLPs) have been defined as those practices that are essential to effective teaching, that student teachers can learn to enact and that are fundamental for supporting the learning of the learners in the classroom (Ball et al., 2009). Explaining content is a high leverage practice that can be enacted in a bite-sized form using WhatsApp and does not require school children to be physically present in a classroom.

According to the University of Michigan (2020, para 2):

Making content explicit is essential to providing all learners with access to fundamental ideas and practices in a given subject. Effective efforts to do this attend both to the integrity of the subject and to learners' likely interpretations of it. They include strategically choosing and using representations and examples to build understanding and remediate misconceptions, using language carefully, highlighting core ideas while side lining potentially distracting ones, and making one's own thinking visible while modeling and demonstrating.

Explanations in teaching intend to share knowledge and understanding with learners who have the intention of learning; explanations, therefore transform expert subject-specific knowledge into a different but connected type of knowledge, comprehensible and more accessible for learners (Ogborn et al., 1996). Clarity of the components of an explanation implies that the features, patterns and structure of the content are illustrative and focused (Sevian & Gonsalves, 2008). If the ideas are difficult to understand, teachers might have to slow the word flow (Mohan, 2013). This necessitates using coherent and understandable language for the learners, and concepts being presented using



developmentally appropriate vocabulary for the learners. Cabello and Topping (2018) outlined the following structural elements of an explanation, namely the coherence and cohesion, the sequence, the accuracy, the completeness and connection with learners' knowledge. They also emphasised explanation representational supports such as analogies, metaphors, examples, images, and voice inflections (Cabello & Topping, 2018).

The purpose of the present study was to determine the perceptions of mentor teachers, student teachers and university lecturers with regard to the implementation of a teaching practicum experience presented via WhatsApp.

## METHODOLOGY

### *Research design*

The action research model which best fit the study was Schmuck's (2006) proactive model, where the research is inspired by new ideas and is comprised of three phases (initiation, detection, and judgement) and six steps. In proactive research, creative problem solving and innovative practice, precede data collection; however, the desire to risk doing something new often stems from past, preconscious data collections. In the initiation phase the collaborators reflect and brainstorm together as they complete two steps, namely list hopes and concerns, and try a new practice. The first of six steps is listing hopes or goals that the teachers strive for, such as being able provide subject-specific content explanations to learners while they are at home. Concerns would be considered barriers that need to be overcome, such as primary school learners lack of access to technology and their inability to access platforms such as Zoom. In the second step a new practice is chosen and implemented. An example of this is the teaching practicum using WhatsApp. During the detection phase, step three entails collecting and tracking data through WhatsApp surveys, artifacts (e.g., video clips) and written reflections. Analysis of the data is step four of the proactive action research model and is where the collaborators check on what the data means. This took the form of a WhatsApp video call with the collaborators. In the final judgment phase, the collaborators completed step five and step six. In reflection, step five, the collaborators reflected on their feedback and assessment of the student teachers subject-specific content. Reflection helps inform step six, fine-tuning the practice, wherein collaborators chose to tweak the feedback process by adding a rubric to ensure consistency in the assessment process based on the information collected during the previous steps in the action cycle.

### *Participants and Sampling*

In this study purposive sampling, also called judgment sampling, was used in order to deliberately choose participants that possess certain qualities and that were located in specific contexts. One school in the Cloudy District in the North West Province of South Africa was selected to participate in the study. The school was chosen because it functions as a professional practice school for the faculty of education which entails accommodating final year students for their compulsory teaching practicum placements. The teachers within the school also regularly collaborate with faculty of education lecturers on district professional development initiatives. Two teachers responsible for teaching English Home Language and Afrikaans First Additional Language at the Sunshine Valley School volunteered to participate in the study. One of the teachers is also the head of Grade 4 and she was responsible for establishing the Grade 4 parent WhatsApp group in order to communicate with the parents during the COVID-19 lockdown period. The researchers are two teaching practicum lecturers at the North-West university responsible for the work-integrated learning module of the BEd programme with specialization in Foundation Phase (Kindergarten up to Grade 3) and Intermediate

Phase (Grade 4 up to Grade 6). The lecturers are also English Home Language and Afrikaans First Additional Language specialists. Twelve student teachers who would have completed their teaching practicum sessions at the Sunshine Valley School were selected to participate in the study. The student teachers were situated across three countries (South Africa, Namibia and Botswana), and within seven of the nine provinces in South Africa. All student teachers were in their final year of the program and specialised in either the Foundation Phase (Kindergarten to Grade 3) or Intermediate Phase (Grade 4 to Grade 6). An independent person, a parent at Sunshine Valley School, sent a document to all the participants via WhatsApp explaining the collaborative purpose of the study, and what would be required from each of them. Participants indicated their consent by signing a consent form and sending it to the first author via WhatsApp. Participation was voluntary and any participant could withdraw at any time without providing reasons. Ethical clearance was obtained from the university ethical committee as part of a larger work-integrated learning national project.

#### *Data Collection Methods*

The following data collection methods were used in this study: surveys sent via WhatsApp, semi-structured interviews via WhatsApp video call, artifacts (e.g., video clips) sent via WhatsApp, and written reflections sent via WhatsApp.

The purpose of the WhatsApp survey conducted with the mentor teachers during step 3 of action research cycle 1 was to determine their perception of the teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp. One open-ended question was sent at a time via WhatsApp. Questions such as: What concerns do you have related to the WhatsApp teaching practicum? In what way does the WhatsApp teaching practicum differ from the face-to-face practicum? A WhatsApp survey was also sent to the student teachers to determine their perceptions of the teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp. Questions such as: What problems did you have when preparing your lesson for presentation via WhatsApp? What was your perception of the feedback you received from the mentor teachers and the university lecturers? What was your perception of your ability to explain subject-specific content in bite-sized format? A semi-structured interview via WhatsApp video call which lasted five minutes was held between the two mentor teachers and the two researchers to discuss the themes emanating from the data and the possible adjustment of the teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp. The video clips developed by the student teachers were collected to analyse the subject-specific content explanations. The one-page written reflections of the mentor teachers, the student teachers as well as the researchers own reflections on the WhatsApp teaching practicum experience were collected in order to determine their perceptions of the teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp.

#### *Data Collection Procedure*

The following steps were followed in action research cycle one: During step 1 the researcher and the two mentor teachers participated in a five-minute WhatsApp video call. The mentor teachers expressed their hope to collaborate with the researcher to try and find a way they could support their Grade 4 learners with the learning of the new terms content in two subjects, namely English as Home Language and Afrikaans as First Additional Language. The grade head mentioned that she had started a WhatsApp group for the Grade 4 parents. They sent homework to the learners via their parents' mobile phones. The reason was that the teachers did not want the learners to contact them on their personal numbers, and the school also has a no mobile phone policy. The teachers mentioned that some of the parents were saying that their children were struggling to understand the new content because there was no teacher to explain it to them. The teachers were concerned about the learners and wanted to

find better ways to support the learners with the learning of the content. They mentioned that they could not use platforms such as Zoom or Skype as most parents were not familiar with them. The researcher also expressed her hope to try and find an alternative to the school-based face-to-face teaching practicum which would not add to the current stress and workload of the school teachers.

During step 2 the two teachers and the two researchers participated in a second WhatsApp video call lasting approximately five minutes. The purpose was to share ideas of a possible alternative approach to the school-based face-to-face teaching practicum which could no longer take place due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but which would also address the hopes and concerns expressed by the school teachers. The first author proposed a teaching practicum experience conducted via WhatsApp which could emulate the face-to-face teaching practicum where a student teacher would be required to present a lesson which focused on explaining new subject-specific content to the learners. The explaining of the content would be done as a PowerPoint presentation with voiceover and it would be sent via WhatsApp. The first author then sent a WhatsApp message to the student teachers to outline what was expected of them. After consent was obtained from all participants the project began.

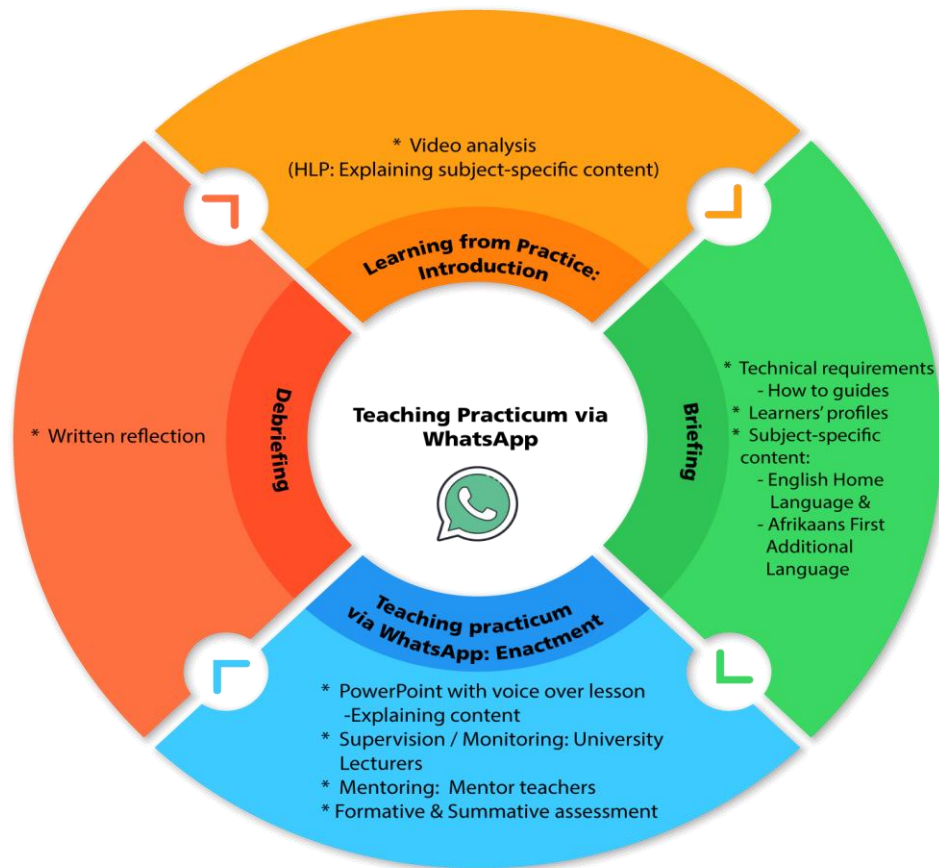
During step 3, a WhatsApp survey was sent to the two teachers who would fulfil the role of mentor teachers to the 12 student teachers as well as to the student teachers.

During step 4, the data that was collected via the WhatsApp survey was analysed to determine the themes that were identified in the participants' responses. Step 5 and step 6 overlapped and were linked to step 4 in that a semi-structured interview via WhatsApp video call was held between the two mentor teachers and the two researchers to discuss the themes emanating from the data and the follow up actions that needed to be taken. The mentor teachers and the researchers decided to tweak the teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp, by following a teaching practicum learning cycle (See Figure 1) and developing a rubric to guide feedback and summative assessment which accommodated the concerns expressed during the WhatsApp surveys and the semi-structured interviews via WhatsApp video call. The use of the learning cycle formed part of action research cycle 2.

During the introductory part of the learning cycle, the student teachers were sent a five-minute voice over PowerPoint mp4 video clip, explaining the different types of adjectives for Grade 4 English Home Language, as an example of the way their lesson had to be enacted. Explaining core content was chosen to align with the need expressed by the teachers at Sunshine Valley School. The next part of the learning cycle was focussed on briefing the student teachers in terms of the technical requirements of the lesson that they had to present via WhatsApp. "How-to" guides were sent via WhatsApp (e.g., How to compress a file using Handbrake) to the student teachers. Students were also given information about the Grade 4 learners profiles. The mentor teachers also identified a number of topics (e.g., parts of speech, an introduction to fables and reading strategies) that they would be covering with the school children during the COVID-19 period, and they also provided information about the learner profiles to ensure that the student teachers' lessons were culturally and linguistically relevant for the Grade 4 learners. The next part of the cycle was focused on the enactment of the teaching practicum. During this part of learning cycle, the student teachers sent their lessons (PowerPoint presentations with voice overs) to the university lecturers for feedback. Each student teacher had to send two lessons; one English Home Language and one Afrikaans First Additional Language lesson. The university lecturers provided feedback on the quality of the subject-specific content explanation by using a rubric which focused on the following components of an explanation: coherence and cohesion, the sequence, accuracy, completeness and connection with school children's knowledge, as well as their use of



FIGURE 1: A teaching practicum learning cycle via WhatsApp.



analogies, examples, images and voice inflections. The student teachers made changes if required by the university lecturers and then resubmitted their lessons. Once the university lecturers were satisfied, they sent the lessons to the two mentor teachers who provided feedback using the same rubric. The feedback was sent to the student teachers via the university lecturers. As soon as the lecturers and the mentor teachers were satisfied, the mentor teachers posted the student teachers' lessons, together with the relevant worksheets and homework that the mentor teachers developed, to the parent WhatsApp group for the learners to access. Learners could provide feedback on whether the WhatsApp lessons helped them to understand the new content. Feedback was sent by the parents to the mentor teachers who then forwarded the feedback to the lecturers who passed it on to the student teachers. The last step of the learning cycle entailed the student teachers, mentor teachers and university lecturers writing a one-page reflection on the teaching practicum via WhatsApp.

#### *Data Analysis*

When analysing the data, the guidelines provided by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017, p. 94-97) were used for doing content analysis. The initial step of the content analysis entailed reading and re-reading the transcribed WhatsApp video calls, the WhatsApp surveys, the artifacts as well as participants written reflections in order to get a sense of the whole. The text was then divided up into meaning

units. This was followed by labelling the condensed meaning units by formulating codes and then grouping these codes into themes such as feedback and assessment.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of the data after action research cycle 1 revealed the following themes:

### *Challenges and Concerns*

The student teachers and the mentor teachers indicated that they had a number of challenges after the implementation of the first round of WhatsApp lessons. The student teachers stated that “ I didn’t know how to compress the video clip, or if I converted the PowerPoint properly,” and “I struggled to know whether my lesson was at the correct level for the specific group of Grade 4 learners.” The mentor teachers stated that “I think some of the video clips were a little long and the student teachers tended to ramble on.”

The comments made by the mentor teachers and the student teachers were taken into consideration when devising the learning cycle which formed part of action research cycle 2 (See Figure 1). An introductory part was included to ensure that the teaching practicum requirement, the development of a lesson in the format of a PowerPoint presentation with a voice over, was modelled to the student teachers. A second part was added, namely a briefing section which addressed the technical challenges and concerns expressed by the student teachers and the mentor teachers. Research conducted by Widodo (2019) indicates that students find WhatsApp easy to use, it saves them time and they can easily send documents and videos to their fellow students. The technical changes made in the current study were, therefore, easy to address because short “how to” guides enabled the student teachers to make the necessary technical changes to their video clips without needing the physical support of a technology specialist.

### *Content Explanations*

The responses made by the student teachers related to the subject-specific content explanations included: “we have never explicitly focused on explaining content in any of our courses,” “we have never received input on our choice of activities and examples,” and “we don’t know anything about sequencing our explanations or if they are clear to learners.”

The mentor teachers stated that “some of the explanations are too complicated for the Grade 4 learners,” and “some of the examples chosen were not appropriate as they could confuse the learners.” The lecturers stated that “the students don’t seem to be adapting their explanations to reach the learners,” and “they seem to be teaching as they do in their micro-teaching periods, namely to their peers.”

The results seem to indicate that the opportunity to practice or enact lessons during coursework is limited for the student teachers. Their inability to adjust to the level of the children indicates that the few opportunities they have during micro-teaching lessons at university are aimed at the level of their peers. The findings seem to support statements made by researchers that most teacher education programs are not organised and structured to systematically support student teachers in learning to use effective high leverage practices such as explaining content (Grossman et al., 2009; McLeskey & Brownell, 2015; Nel, 2018).

### *Assessment*

With regard to assessment, the student teachers stated that “I didn’t know how I was going to be assessed and on what exactly.” The mentor teachers stated that “I found myself wondering how I should assess the video clips content only and exactly what about the content.”

The results indicated the need for a rubric that could be used to guide feedback, but also assist with the assessment of the student teachers’ lessons. During the second action research cycle a rubric was developed and sent to all participants. Assessment of student teachers’ competency is at the best of times a contentious issue (Jönsson & Mattsson, 2011). Research indicates that in order to increase the reliability of rubrics used for performance assessment they should be analytical, task-specific and have relatively few quality levels (Jönsson & Mattsson, 2011). The rubric developed for use in this study complied with these requirements.

### *Feedback*

Several student teachers commented on aspects related to feedback, including: “feedback was very quick,” “we have never been asked to respond to feedback before,” and “previous feedback was very general with nothing about the accuracy of my explanations or the choice of my examples.” The mentor teachers commented that: “I found myself really critically looking and listening to what and how they were explaining,” and “my feedback was very focused, and in writing, whereas usually it is a quick general oral overview.” The lecturers commented that “students usually don’t have to react to the feedback that we give,” and “I could actually see how the students addressed my feedback.”

The findings seem to indicate that the quick feedback from both the lecturers and the mentor teachers enabled the student teachers to respond immediately. They also had to respond to the feedback by making adjustments to their lessons and this was something that none of the participants had experienced before. During traditional teaching practicum, the student teacher would usually have two different university lecturers assess their lessons and provide feedback. Growth and development could therefore not be determined and the way in which the student teacher responded to a particular lecturer’s feedback is never ascertained. Similarly, research conducted by Gon and Rawekar (2017) and So (2016) indicates that feedback using WhatsApp was immediate, relevant and far more focussed.

### *Community of Practice*

The student teachers’ responses indicated that a community of practice is something that can be achieved while observing social distancing. Their comments included “I have never felt so close to my lecturers and mentor teacher,” and “I literally had them in the palm of my hand.” The mentor teachers stated that “we are working with the lecturers and student teachers in a far more coherent manner” while the lecturers stated: “I really collaborated with the mentor teachers in an explicit manner,” and “we hardly ever achieve the level of meaningful interaction that we achieved with this project”.

The perceptions of the mentor teachers, student teachers and university lecturers indicated that the teaching practicum via WhatsApp facilitated the establishment of a community of practice where emphasis was placed on collaborating, supervising, monitoring and mentoring in a far more coherent and cohesive manner than during traditional workplace-based placement. Participants were zoned in on “the work” of teaching, namely explaining core subject-specific content, learning from one another, having immediate access to one another, and sharing ideas. The results are supported by a study conducted by Thaba-Nkadimene (2020) that examined the influence of WhatsApp on collaborative



pedagogy and social networking among preservice teachers and supervisors during teaching practice. Thaba-Nkadimene (2020, p. 15) states that “WhatsApp created a collaborative learning space amongst preservice teachers wherein content and pedagogical information, videos and teaching materials, and lesson plans were shared.” Bansal and Joshi (2014) examined college of education students’ experiences of WhatsApp mobile learning and found that the use of WhatsApp increased students’ social interactivity with each other and with the instructor, and this facilitated collaborative learning. According to Rambe and Bere (2013, p. 546), WhatsApp fosters a unique social presence that is qualitatively and visually distinct from email systems in that lecturers can play a central role in the WhatsApp learning environment by managing the learning process, providing feedback, and encouraging participation. The advantages and WhatsApp’s popularity suggest that it could be used to support student teachers’ during an adapted teaching practicum necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in developing countries that might have economic and infrastructure constraints. The findings of this study suggest that a teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp can facilitate the formation of close-knit community of practice between university lecturers, mentor teachers and student teachers, where the work of teaching and learning of school children is enhanced.

## GUIDELINES FOR UPSCALING

A pandemic is the quintessential adaptive challenge and requires creating opportunities for innovative practice. In addressing this adaptive challenge, collaboration is essential and requires everyone to step up and get out of their comfort zones in order to get ensure that student teachers can complete their teaching practicum in line with accreditation requirements and school children receive the necessary support to ensure that learning takes place. The following technical, partnership and practice-based guidelines are provided for universities or teacher training providers who have work integrated learning as a compulsory component of their programs to consider when upscaling a teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp or similar platform that will fulfil requirements of low cost, low tech, and accessibility to all partners:

### *Technical Requirements*

- All participants should receive training on how to make PowerPoints with voice overs, how to compress videos and how to save the PowerPoint as an mp4 video.
- All video clips must be between four and nine minutes in length.
- Participants should be made aware of the effect of media on cost and accessibility. During the project a maximum of 30MB was utilized by participants. The size depends on the student teachers’ use of visuals, music or animations.

### *Partnership Requirements*

- Professional practice schools should be identified or volunteer to participate in the adapted teaching practicum experiences.
- Partnerships should enhance communities of practice.
- Lecturer to student teacher to mentor teacher ratio should be considered. For example, in the BEd Foundation Phase program at the university in the North West Province a total of 639 student teachers in their final year have to be placed for teaching practicum. One lecturer per 20 student teachers translates into 32 lecturers that are required to mentor these students. In addition, if five student teachers are placed at one school with five mentor teachers, 128 schools will be needed to participate in the teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp.

### Practice-based Requirements

- Lecturers and mentor teachers should agree on the core teaching practices that will form the focus of the teaching practicum experience (e.g., explaining content, etc.).
- Mentor teachers should provide topics, aligned with the school curriculum, that will form the focus of the core teaching practice(s).
- Rubrics should be developed to guide formative and actionable feedback on the core teaching practice(s).
- The roles and responsibilities of university lecturers and mentor teachers (e.g., supervision, monitoring, mentoring, assessment, etc.) should be clearly delineated.

### CONCLUSION

Learning to teach is a complex process, and the COVID-19 pandemic has complicated the process even further. The pandemic has changed the lives of learners, teachers, parents, university lecturers and student teachers, with all of them now teaching and learning from home. The manner in which the teaching practicum is conducted cannot be business as usual and must be replaced with creative solutions and flexible innovations, aimed at encouraging meaningful and relevant teaching and learning in times of crisis. A teaching practicum experience via WhatsApp has indicated a way in which a university and a school, as site of workplace-based placement, can work together to benefit all partners including the school children. During the teaching practicum experience the university lecturers, the mentor teachers and the student teachers were required to communicate, collaborate, supervise, monitor and mentor more purposefully than during traditional face-to-face school placement. The experience assisted with the formation of a community of practice where all participants were focused on enhancing the learning experience of the school children. The student teachers developed a closer relationship with the university lecturers as well as the mentor teachers due to the WhatsApp enabled social presence of these key figures in the teaching practicum experience of the student teachers. Implementing a teaching practicum via WhatsApp in times of crisis can ensure that effective supervision, monitoring and mentoring can continue with valuable communities of practice developing between the core partners

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