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TAU Institutional Project Report
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1. **Project Title**

CONSCIENTIZING AND CAPACITATING LECTURERS ON HOW TO DIGITALIZE THE ASSESSMENT OF SCHOOL-BASED LEARNING.

2. **Introduction and background**

School-Based Learning (SBL) commonly known as Teaching Practice (TP) forms an integral part of a teacher education programme. According to the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (2015) student teachers are required to spend between 20 and 32 weeks in schools over the four years of a BEd degree. The students need to be assessed while they are at school as they have to demonstrate their ability to teach their specific subject specializations. Furthermore, the assessment of teaching practice needs to be developmental with students being assessed twice for a specific specialization.

The lecturers engage the students in pre- and post-lesson discussions to talk about the lesson plan, what went well during the lesson, what still needs attention and also to finalize the mark that will be allocated to the student. Increasing student numbers, rising fuel prices and the impact of the pandemic have made it very difficult for lecturers to assess students in schools for all the prescribed assessments as it was conceptualised during the program development. In the Faculty of Education, we experimented with using technology to assess School-Based Learning. This created some challenges as not all lecturers were able to employ the technology and there were fears that the process would become too technocratic – going against the humanising pedagogy principles that underpin our curriculum in the Faculty (Sathorar, 2018). However, the value of using technology to assess School-Based Learning could not be ignored as it saved time and cost. This highlighted the need for lecturers to be empowered on how to use technology to assess School-Based Learning in a way that will support the development of student teachers and where the humanising approach is not jeopardized.

Thus, this project aims to conscientise and raise awareness about how staff can use technology to assess students for SBL – as opposed to physically visiting them at school. Furthermore, the project will create a platform for lecturers to be workshopped and capacitated on how to use technology to assess students online for SBL while still maintaining a humanising approach.

3. **Project objectives**

- To present the project to Faculty Management and to get their support for the project.
- To conscientise staff and raise awareness of how technology can be used to assess SBL.
- To present a workshop to capacitate staff with the skills required to use technology to assess SBL.

4. What changes does the project intend to bring about?

- To conscientise staff and to raise awareness about using technology to assess students for school-based learning.
- To capacitate staff to use technology to assess students for school-based learning.
- To streamline the school-based learning process in the Faculty of Education at Nelson Mandela University by making it more time and cost effective while still applying humanising pedagogy principles.

5. Project Design

A participatory methodology was and continues to be used in the project. This entails involving those who will be impacted by a decision to participate in the decision-making process (Wood and Zuber-Skerritt, 2013). Participatory methodologies are inclusive, accessible to all, aimed at social justice, supports informal, self-directed learning, based on contemporary cultural context, that encourages communities of learning, collaboration, and cooperation (Zuber-Skerritt, 2018). This project applied a Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) approach and Kemmis and McTaggart (2014) see this approach as a practice-changing method that aims to form communicative spaces and encourages transformation.

The target population was the 67 full time, permanently employed academics in the Faculty of Education plus the 38 part time academics who assist us with assessing SBL in the Faculty. Purposive and criterion sampling was used to select 63 academics to participate in the project. The selection criteria required academics to be responsible for the assessment of SBL for BEd students. Thus, 63 lecturers were invited to the 3 workshops that formed part of the project plan. 57 lecturers attended the first workshop, 60 attended the second workshop and 59 attended the final workshop. The intention is to present the findings of this pilot project and an analysis of the lecturer experiences of utilizing technology to assess school-based learning to Faculty Management and thereafter to Faculty Board in order to seek permission for the digitalization of SBL to become a permanent feature in the SBL process. The project findings and proposed changes to the SBL process will also be presented at the institutional Learning and Teaching committee.

The social justice imperative of the project is to ensure that all students are assessed fairly and in the same way – with no other factors like classroom set-up and school context influencing the outcome of the assessment as all that the lecturer will be able to see is the student presenting the lesson. The social justice objective of the project is further addressed through collaborating with ICT Department with the Faculty to provide Eduroam to our partners schools so that students have equal access to WI-FI to present their lessons online. The provision of Eduroam to partner schools will also assist the schools with their educational endeavours.

6. Description of process followed

Based on the problem identified in the introduction I conceptualised a proposal for my TAU project that would respond to the problem experienced in my Faculty with regard to assessing School-Based Learning. After receiving approval from my TAU advisor, I presented the proposal to the Faculty Management Committee (FMC) for approval. I referred to data collected during an experiment and explained the project

plan indicating that a series of workshops would be implemented to conscientize and capacitate staff regarding assessing SBL online.

Subsequent to receiving FMC approval I called the first project team meeting on 15 September 2022 to discuss my proposal with the proposed team that would help me implement the project. Everyone was keen to commence the project and our first task was to set up meetings with NWU and UP to gather information regarding how they went about conscientizing and capacitating staff to do online assessments for SBL. These meetings happened online during October 2022. This helped us to prepare for the first workshop that was scheduled for 24 November 2022.

Workshop 1 took place on 24 November 2022 and was focused on conscientizing and raising awareness amongst lecturers regarding the use of technology to assess SBL. The social justice imperatives to do online assessments were highlighted and an explication on how to maintain a humanising approach was also provided. Furthermore, I established what lecturers already knew about the technology that can be used to assess SBL and what their fears were about using it. Changes is not easy and thus, the workshop strived to help lecturers unpack the value off using technology to assess SBL while still applying humanising pedagogy principles. Lecturers who used the technology previous explained and demonstrated to others how they did it, including setting up pre- and post-assessment meetings to discuss the assessment with students. There were some lecturers who still had reservations about assessing SBL online. However, at the end of the workshop all present agreed on the importance of introducing our students to relevant technology that is used at other universities because it makes our students 4IR relevant and could give them the edge in the employment market. Thus, my evaluation of the workshop was that despite some reservations lecturers were generally positive about the possibility of using technology to assess SBL and agreed to attend a training workshop in January 2023.

Workshop 2 took place on 10 February 2023 where staff were given an opportunity to engage in hands-on practical training on how to use the technology to assess SBL online. Lecturers were required to work in pairs (one being the lecturer and one the student) to set up an online assessment. They could ask questions and request individual assistance to help them set up the online assessment. They then had to go into different rooms to see how it will work as well as take note of how the set-up needs to be on the side of the student to adhere to privacy laws and the POPIA Act requirements. The lecturers appreciated the practical, hand-on opportunity to set up online assessments as it gave them an opportunity to ask for assistance or clarifying questions. At the end of the workshop lecturers expressed their appreciation for the way in which the workshop was conducted and thanked the presenters for helping them get a better understanding on what will be required to assess SBL online. It was decided that at least one assessment per BEd student will be done online for semester 1. Lecturers were informed that the project team will be on stand-by to assist with setting up online assessments as well as to provide support with challenges experienced during implementation. This also contributed to allaying fears.

Lecturers have since been implementing the decision to assess at least one SBL lesson per student online. Various challenges have been experienced including the shortage

of data, loadshedding and staff struggling to set-up online assessments. The project team assisted lecturers as best as they could. A third workshop took place on 20 June 2023 to evaluate lecturers' experiences of doing online assessments for SBL and to establish if there are any suggestions on how the process can be improved. The findings of this workshop and the analysis of lecturer experiences revealed that 62 out of 63 lecturers did at least one online assessment for SBL for their BEd students in Semester 1. Lecturers mentioned several challenges they encountered including weak internet signals, lack of student data and loadshedding that required in most instances a re-scheduling of the lesson. Lecturers felt positive about the intervention and was eager to further engage in the use of online assessment for SBL. They felt that with further refinement and support this will greatly assist in saving time and cost for the Faculty but also expose our students to the relevant use of technology also used by other universities.

7. Achievements and Challenges

Faculty Management approval for the project was obtained and subsequently two workshops were held. During workshop 1 lecturers were first conscientized about the social justice imperatives of assessing SBL online and during workshop 2 they were capacitated to set up online assessments. Lecturers have been implementing the decision to assess at least one SBL lesson per student online for semester 1. A third workshop was held on 20 June 2023 to evaluate lecturer experiences of assessing SBL online and to establish if there are any suggestions to improve the process. A further workshop is planned for the end of 2023 to establish how we can increase the utilization of online assessment going forward and how we can formally incorporate it into the Faculty SBL plan.

Some challenges that were experienced included students and staff who did not have enough data to do online assessments. Loadshedding also caused several challenges when it interrupted online assessments: causing assessments to be re-scheduled. There were still some staff who had trouble setting up and doing online assessments for SBL. Finally, there were also schools who had issues regarding privacy laws and the POPIA Act when it came to the live online sessions.

8. Recommendations

I intend putting forward a request via my Faculty Management Committee to our institutional ICT Department to extend Eduroam to schools where students do SBL so that data cannot pose a challenge to assessing SBL online. Furthermore, students and staff will be encouraged to take note of loadshedding schedules when scheduling online assessments. It is also envisaged to have a dedicated stand-by tech support person who could assist staff who experience challenges to set up online assessments but also to be available if staff experience challenges during sessions. I contacted the university Legal Department to provide guidance with regard to the privacy laws and the POPIA Act. They advised that if the camera focuses on the student teacher rather than the learners it should be in order. However, we are also now looking into the use of an Avatar programme that will block the learner faces with a cartoon character – so you will still be able to hear the voices and see the interaction between the student teacher and the learners but not see the actual faces of the learners. It is also

recommended to have a workshop with our partners schools to brief them about using this programme to support the privacy laws. Finally, it is also envisaged to have a workshop 4 towards the end of the year to see how the use of online assessments for SBL can be increased and included formally in the SBL plan of the Faculty.

9. Conclusion

Engaging in this project was a good learning experience for me. Some of the objectives have already been achieved but new ones developed during the process. This involves increasing the use of online assessments for SBL, including it into the formal SBL programme and also looking into using an Avatar programme to support privacy laws and meeting POPIA Act requirements. The project has already brought about change in the Faculty with the biggest change involving lecturer perspectives about online assessment for SBL and their willingness to try and do online assessments. It is envisaged that the project findings and outcomes will be shared with Faculty Management, Faculty Board and the Institutional Learning and Teaching committee to request that assessing SBL online becomes a permanent feature of the Faculty SBL plans.

10. List of references

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