

Chapter 16

Transforming Assessment in Response to COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

Assessment plays a critical role in teaching and learning. Continuous assessment advocates for a sustainable learner engagement in a cyclical manner that provides information on performance, feedback, as well as critical support that serves to engender mastery of skills. Continuous assessment encapsulates the use of both formative and summative assessment. COVID-19 compelled teachers as agents of educational change to fundamentally rethink the enactment of assessment within the context of remote teaching and learning. This chapter reflects the transformation of assessment practices adopted by purposively selected teachers at South African schools in response to formidable instructional challenges induced by COVID-19. The empirical inquiry is underpinned by the technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) framework. While teachers expressed fundamental appreciation of the key pedagogical affordances of technology integration in remote teaching and learning, they bemoaned the lack of professional capacity required for a meaningful enactment of technology-mediated assessment.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic posed unprecedented and enormous challenges to teaching and learning, particularly in the schooling sector. Teachers and learners struggled with the transition to the virtual domain. The prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic critically exposed existing socio-economic disparities in South Africa in particular. These socio-economic disparities permeate various sectors of the economy,

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and the primary education sector is no exception. While the COVID-19 pandemic is a fundamental challenge of global proportions, it provided a meaningful opportunity to rethink key modalities through which assessment in education is provided. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic compelled teachers to fundamentally transform their pedagogical practices as part of the transition to online teaching and learning on virtual digital platforms. Mulenga and Marban (2020) posit that the pandemic served as a game-changer in terms of the transformation of pedagogy across the globe. The advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) provides opportunities for teachers to engage in extensive systematic professional development to facilitate a move towards mandatory blended learning (Avgerinou & Moros, 2020). However, the COVID-19 pandemic compelled all teachers to embark on an arduous task to develop their knowledge and skills required to navigate online teaching and learning on virtual digital platforms on an ad hoc basis. A description of the context of schooling in South Africa is provided, coupled with a reflection on the transition to remote teaching and learning. The transition to remote teaching and learning provided the intellectual space to rethink assessment practices in South African schools fundamentally. This chapter reflects key assessment modalities adopted at South African schools affiliated with the Horizon Educational Trust. In response to the fundamental instructional challenges induced by the COVID-19 pandemic, the chapter explores the evolution of the transformation of assessment in response to COVID-19.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic posed formidable challenges to teaching and learning in a global sense. At another pragmatic level, the pandemic critically exposed the prevailing socio-economic disparities in various vital sectors such as education and training in South Africa. The prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the provision of quality education due to the lockdown imposed by the South African government to curb infection. While a substantial number of school learners have been left behind due to lack of access to appropriate bandwidth or technological devices, others have been able to accelerate their digital learning through sophisticated software, access to high-performing devices, and highly trained teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic compelled teachers to embrace digital transformation to make a transition to remote teaching and learning. In addition, the provision of social interaction opportunities that essentially allow learners to stay in contact with their peers is psychologically crucial during this crisis (UNICEF, 2020).

By its very nature, transition to remote teaching and learning requires teachers as crucial agents of educational change to harness key pedagogical affordances of technology-mediated assessment. Harnessing key pedagogic affordances of technology integration in teaching and learning remains a key strategic imperative. However, the South African education system was inadequately prepared for the disruption brought about by the prevalence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, remote teaching and learning took hold in various schools in South Africa to find alternative ways that technology could help navigate the disruption induced by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mhlanga & Moloi, 2020). By extension, the disruption induced by the COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on the meaningful enactment of assessment as a critical component of teaching and learning within the broader South African context.

Assessment plays a pivotal role in the teaching and learning process as it is a key mechanism through which constructive feedback is provided. There is a critical need to consider the impact of the transformation of assessment practices during the teaching and learning process to achieve quality and inclusive

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