

This Technology we all Wash With: The Efficacy of Leveraging WhatsApp in Delivering a Master’s Module

Vitallis Chikoko

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6135-6172>

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has struck a significant blow to the traditional face-to-face approach to teaching and learning. The crisis demands an immediate shift towards greater use of e-learning platforms. Among such platforms is the social medium WhatsApp, a Facebook-owned messaging, voice and video application available on all smart phones. This platform is comparatively cheap and readily available. Research evidence shows that some university lecturers have used WhatsApp as a teaching-learning platform. However, in most such cases, it has been used as a supplementary teaching-learning approach with undergraduate students. In this paper, I examine the evidence from a study of the efficacy of using WhatsApp as the main teaching-learning approach in delivering a Master’s module at a South African university. The study involved an analysis of the WhatsApp messages the students and lecturer exchanged during class sessions. This data were scrutinised through two theoretical lenses, namely the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) theory and the Activated Classroom Teaching Approach (ACT). Findings show that students were very comfortable and active using WhatsApp for learning. The module’s learning objectives were achieved. I conclude that this platform is capable of engaging students in deep learning. Therefore, it is an asset. However, there can be information over-load and if not well-managed, this can lead to chaos.

Keywords: WhatsApp messages, efficacy, assets, activated classroom teaching, affordances, pedagogical approach

1 Introduction

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused an abrupt suspension of the traditional face-to-face method of teaching and learning in many countries. However, education cannot wait. Today's challenges in general, and the current crisis in particular, demand the use of e-learning platforms (Barak 2018; Collins & Halverson 2018). Digital platforms such as social media applications are changing the communication landscape quite rapidly (Sayan 2016). In this digital era, learning is no longer an individual journey, but a process that allows students to interact and flourish (Siemens 2005). In this paper I draw from a study of my own experience of delivering a postgraduate (Master's) module to discuss the efficacy of using WhatsApp as a pedagogical approach. WhatsApp is a cross-platform messaging and voice-over service (Sayan 2016). It allows users to send and receive text and voice messages, make voice and video calls, and share images, documents, user locations, and so on. The word 'pedagogy' literally means 'to lead a child' (Blewett 2016). In modern times it has come to mean the way in which we teach and assist people in learning, whether children or adults. In this paper it refers to the way my students and I engaged in seeking to assist them to learn.

The paper unfolds through seven sections. First, I give a brief background to the study. Next, I specify the research problem. This is followed by a short literature section about teaching with technology. From there I move on to the theoretical framework. After this, I describe the research methodology. Next, I present and discuss the findings. I end the paper with concluding remarks.

2 Background

Before the advent of COVID-19, I would never have contemplated using WhatsApp as a pedagogical approach. When a crisis invades and disrupts our hitherto comfortable, or at least manageable lives, we often feel helpless and in the process lose sight of the assets in our midst that we can leverage to address the challenge. COVID-19 arrived after I had just started teaching the module. Students received a detailed course outline including reference sources and topics to research and present on. The two main modes of delivery were originally to be face-to-face lectures, followed by students' seminar presentations. I had delivered the first three lectures as per schedule, but not

without trouble, thanks to on-and-off students strikes. The first seminar presentation had also been done. Enter lockdown, after conducting one Zoom session it became abundantly clear that a sizeable number of my 22 students would be left out because some could not access that facility, and others reported that it would be too costly to them. Apart from the disruptions, students had had what I thought was a very good grounding to the module and they had ‘warmed up’ quite well. The immediate challenge was to find a way to maintain the momentum as much as possible. In that connection, I decided to try Whatsapp as a teaching-learning approach, a platform which both of us (the students and myself) use daily in our social lives, hence metaphorically wash with. It was in my case and that of the students, a journey hitherto untraveled. Initially, we had formed a WhatsApp group largely for purposes of alerting one another about trends in the students’ strikes, and of course for other logistical purposes.

As I commenced the journey of delivering this module through WhatsApp, I asked myself the hard question: What is the efficacy of adopting the WhatsApp platform as a pedagogical approach? This question became the driver of the study I report on in this paper, a research journey whose central problem I articulate in the next section.

3 The Problem

As enshrined in the module course outline, by the end of the module students should have achieved the following:

- A sound knowledge base and understanding of Educational Leadership, Management and Policy issues.
- Ability to search for, critically analyse and evaluate knowledge in that field of study.
- Ability to engage in disciplined and systematic thinking about educational issues in South Africa.

I did not know whether or not the WhatsApp approach would be a strong and vibrant enough approach to enable the achievement of these outcomes, hence the focus on its efficacy as a pedagogical approach.

But what has literature out there to say about learning through digital

platforms in general, and WhatsApp in particular? I turn to this matter in the next section.

4 Learning with Technology

What can technology do for us in teaching and learning? In a model they called the Actant-Activity Affordance model, where the actant is the participant, which, in this case, is the student, Blewett and Hugo (2016) have identified five key affordances. They define affordances as what technology can do for teachers or lecturers in teaching. Affordances are the intentional, or unintentional things we can do with technology. They help us as teachers, not simply to substitute, but to re-define the possibilities regarding how we teach with technology.

Accessibility affordance: According to Blewett and Hugo (2016), this refers to the ability to gain access to the learning space. They call this the central affordance. It is crucial to realising the other four affordances. The WhatsApp platform was the most accessible technology to all my students in the circumstances we found ourselves in. It was equally accessible to me as facilitator. In that regard, it was the central affordance.

Connection affordance: This refers to solidifying the connections between participants. In the case of the present study, we exploited the opportunity that WhatsApp was the cheapest means of communication. Even where connectivity is generally weak, WhatsApp tends to remain available. Therefore we could easily connect.

Communication affordance: This, the authors say is about allowing the participants to express themselves within the learning space. Through the WhatsApp affordance, within time-framed sessions, students and I would exchange messages in response to a topic at hand.

Control affordance: This relates to opportunities to control activities in the learning space by providing or negotiating conformity. In each of our sessions, a group of three or four students would lead. Within the group, each student led a sub-section of the main topic. I would come in with some guidance as appropriate. Any other student would also request the group to focus on some

issue of their interest. Where the conversation digressed, every one of us shouldered the responsibility to write and call for a return to the issue under focus.

Construction affordance: This relates to activities that open up the learning space by constructing other learning spaces or content. In our case, each session acted as a challenge to those that would lead the next ones. It was expected that discussions should deliberately link previous, current and future topics. In response to conversations in one of our sessions, for example, one student sourced and shared with the group the organogram of a large organization as a way of addressing topical organization-structure-related questions raised.

From this rich model, it is clear that technology enables both person-to-content and person-to-person connections. The reciprocity involved increases the density of the conversation and solidifies the connections created therefrom. It also adds density to the content itself (Blewett 2016) as one issue leads to another. These negotiated connections are the basis of learning in online spaces.

Technology enables a shift from a pedagogy of consumption towards one of creation. In the former, the student simply consumes ready-made content. In the latter, content is the negotiated result of many contributing individuals, as learning is no longer about ‘the content being correct but rather being in a state of correcting’ (Blewett 2016:6).

Studies show that many face-to-face institutions of higher learning in Africa have now adopted formal e-learning platforms. Ngubane-Mokiwa and Khoza (2016) cite Ghana’s University of Education, Nigeria’s Open University, Kenya’s University of Nairobi, and Mozambique’s Catholic University as examples of such. Similarly, Mpungose (2018) cites South Africa’s UNISA, University of Cape Town and University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Mpungose (2019) studied first-year university students’ experiences regarding whether Moodle or WhatsApp was the preferred e-learning platform. Findings reveal that while Moodle was the official teaching-learning platform, students struggled to use it. They preferred the informal platform-WhatsApp which they were very familiar with. Students were much more responsive to informal WhatsApp groups they created than to Moodle.

The Efficacy of Leveraging WhatsApp in Delivering a Master's Module

In a study on university lecturers' use of Moodle as a teaching platform, Khoza and Mpungose (2018a) report that students did not find the discussion forums user-friendly. Instead, they opted to create WhatsApp groups among themselves, for more convenient discussions and sharing of ideas.

Benson and Morgan (2018) studied the efficacy of WhatsApp as a supportive teaching-learning platform. They found that the application served as a useful student networking space for collaboration. Similarly, Basitere and Mapatagane (2018) have also found that WhatsApp has the potential to promote student-lecturer engagement.

After scrutinising these previous studies, two main issues emerged which became of great interest to my study. Firstly, the researchers studied the role of WhatsApp as a supplementary teaching-learning mode of delivery. In the present study, I position WhatsApp as the main teaching-learning approach. Secondly, all studies have found WhatsApp to be very useful for both student-student and lecturer-student engagement at undergraduate level. In the present study, I explored this matter further at postgraduate level, including how students fared in seeking to grasp subject content.

This research journey required theoretical lenses or analytical tools through which to understand the pedagogical efficacy of the WhatsApp platform. I turn to this in the next section.

5 Theoretical Lenses

I adopted a two-pronged theoretical framework, namely Kretzmann and McKnight's (1993) Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) theory and Blewett's (2016) Activated Classroom Teaching approach (ACT). Below I briefly describe and contextualise each of these theories.

5.1 The ABCD Theory

Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) crafted this ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development) theory in the context of community development. In seeking solutions to community problems, the theory advocates a focus on that community's strengths, assets and on its capacities rather than its deficiencies or deficits. By focusing on its assets, the community will leverage development therefrom. A community's small triumphs or potential are ideal

starting points to trigger development therein. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) explain that the ABCD approach entails a systematic process of identifying and detailing resources (both individual skills and organizational resources) and strengths in a community. They emphasise that the ABCD fosters the building of interdependence by way of identifying ways that people can use their talents positively and use them to empower others. Mathie and Cunningham (2003:474) have the following to say about the ABCD:

... [it] lies within the premise that people in the community can organize to drive the development process themselves, by identifying and mobilizing existing but often unrecognized assets thereby responding to and creating local opportunities.

The ABCD approach builds on the assumption that people have strengths and capacities in one form or another. They also have around them, resources, however meagre, trivial or otherwise, they can leverage. Therefore, as Ammerman and Parks (1998) put it, recognition of these strengths and capacities is a key motivator for people to take proactive action about their own situation. According to Eloff and Ebersohn (2001), the ABCD is a bottom-up approach that shifts the focus and emphasis from a service perspective to an empowerment trajectory by way of mobilising various assets to bring about desired change. It places the focus on the inside as opposed to the outside, thus putting community members in control. Consequently, development in the community is understood as dependent upon, and a direct result of the power of the individuals and the collective that make up the community (Aigner, Raymond & Schmidt 2002).

In the context of this study, the module made students and lecturer a community. We were faced with the problem of COVID-19, which obliged us to first adhere to the national state of disaster, and a short while later, to contend with a fully-fledged lockdown. These sudden but highly impactful developments took us out of our comfort zone of face-to-face lectures. However, teaching and learning had to go on. Collectively we had to find an alternative. The one potential asset we had in common was the WhatsApp platform. Thus, I use the ABCD theory to determine whether this platform was an appropriate asset in delivering the module. However, to determine this, a second theoretical prong about how deep learning can be achieved through e-learning, was necessary. I turn to this next.

5.2 The Activated Classroom Teaching Approach (ACT)

This approach, developed by Blewett (2016), is a framework or set of digital age pedagogies that enable teachers to teach successfully and effectively with technology. The framework consists of 5 layers set atop the traditional teaching approach, namely consumption. Each layer is a pedagogy – a way of approaching teaching and learning in today's classrooms. The model is set from lower to higher levels in terms of the increasing cognitive investment and related activities required of student engagement. In reality, the pedagogies are interconnected and to often used together.

Consumption layer: This is where students merely consume and reproduce content. This is the lowest layer. Technically this layer is not part of the ACT pedagogies. It is just a point of reference. Granted, there will always be a place for consumption in teaching and learning. However, the ACT pedagogies are enacted through increased activity from one layer to the other, thus they sit above the consumption layer.

Curation pedagogy: According to Blewett (2016), this pedagogy seeks to shift learning from pre-packaged content to engaging students in the process of content curation. This entails the development of such skills as finding, active reading, filtering, and categorising knowledge. It is about adding value to information. Students are active learners in the process.

Conversation pedagogy: Blewett argues that not only does this pedagogy entail an active process with multiple parties involved; it also produces an artefact, the conversation transcript. As a result, it encourages participation, providing multiple learning opportunities both during and after the conversation.

Correction pedagogy: This pedagogy shifts from traditional approaches that espouse *correct* content towards an approach that encourages learning through *correction*. This means content is incrementally improved. It encourages the development of important skills such as determination, motivation, and belief. Once more, active participation is the mainstay of the process.

Creation pedagogy: This pedagogy encourages the creation of content rather than the mere consumption thereof. It involves a blank-to-artefact process. For example, instead of learning through watching a video, students learn through

creating videos. This pedagogy is highly engaging and cognitively challenging.

Chaos pedagogy: This is the pinnacle of the layers. It requires the most cognitive investment. It is about connections and meaning making. It is about not trying to control the mess but learning in it. It is the most challenging as students are presented with the most choices, the least order; the most information, the least control. The central tenet is meaning making.

In addition to overlapping, these pedagogies have important features in common. They are all about connecting, networking, communicating, posting, creating, sharing, etc. These *-ing* words are all about activity and producing. The WhatsApp platform serves to achieve all the said common features. To illustrate, it connects people. It is a means of networking. We communicate through it. We send and receive messages through it, and so on.

In this study, I use the ACT approach in seeking to understand the nature of the WhatsApp interactions we have had in the module. I am aware that some amount of consumption is evident, but as the approach advocates, I look for any evidence of curation, conversation, correction, creation and chaos. I do so with full awareness, as the theory suggests, that the pedagogies are not neatly pinned into separate boxes; instead, they are interconnected and therefore often happen together. Blewett (2016) reports of 21st-century skills. These are higher order skills, competences, and learning dispositions that have been identified as being necessary for success in society. The skills are to do with encouraging deeper learning, where learning shifts from being simply about content consumption and reproduction, to reasoning and complex problem solving. Blewett further reports that an analysis of the key 21st-century skills for the modern student reveals the following as critical: Collaboration, Communication, Creativity, and Critical thinking. These all align perfectly with the ACT pedagogies. Thus, in the study I examine the evidence in search for such skills.

The research journey followed a certain route, which I report on in the next section.

6 Method

As I report in the Background section, the module in question was originally to be taught in the face-to-face mode. The WhatsApp model was therefore Plan

B. The present study is only about the work we did to replace the face-to-face mode of delivery. The study did not include the assessment component. Again, as I reported earlier, a foundation regarding the character of this module had already been built before the lockdown, therefore the methodology I describe here is to do with how students went about presenting their seminar topics and the subsequent discussions the class engaged in.

Students had been allocated module themes to research and present on. A minimum of two and a maximum of three students were allocated a theme, depending on its breadth. Within the theme, each student handled a specific sub-topic. On the presentation day, each student was allocated their own time to present. The themes were arranged in the order in which they were to be presented, so each group knew in advance when they were to present. The course outline issued to every student clarified the expectations of a seminar presentation as follows:

- Presentation of a clear, coherent and comprehensive coverage of the topic.
- Ability to relate the topic to other sub-topics within the same theme, and to other themes in the module.
- Evidence of wide reading and clear understanding of the content and issues of the theme.
- Critical-mindedness in the treatment of knowledge and its application.
- Informed responses to fellow students' and lecturer's questions during the discussion session.
- Demonstration of sound presentation skills.

The requirements for the class were stipulated as follows:

- The student that is not presenting on a given day is **REQUIRED** to have read around the topic at hand and to contribute meaningfully to subsequent discussions (Chikoko 2020:8).

During the WhatsApp phase of the module, these expectations were maintained. Presenters emailed their PowerPoint presentations to the class and to the lecturer, including a summary in each case, of the key issues emerging, two days before the presentation day. On the latter day, at a specified time, the lecturer sent a welcome WhatsApp message to the class and invited the first

presenter to post their introductory message. Thereafter, the class engaged with the presenter through either voice or text WhatsApp messages. The engagement entailed asking questions, making additions, querying some things, disagreeing, explaining, etc. There was no particular order, so everyone needed to be on their cell phone, either reading a sent message or texting their own as well as working on their computer referring to the PowerPoint presentation. Each presentation was allocated approximately one hour after which the lecturer sent a message to close and to introduce the next presenter. At the end of the day's sessions the lecturer sent a tutorial letter to the class commenting on the quality of the presentations, posing a question or two to each presenter and to the class respectively, for discussion in a follow-up session that would take place three days later, so everyone was required to do some reading in preparation thereof. In the latter session, a similar process as described above was followed. After that session, the lecturer wrote and sent a second and final tutorial for that theme. Among other things, this tutorial crystallised the content, highlighted implications and posed some challenges for the attention of the next team of presenters.

At the end of each session day, every member of the class had a record of all the messages exchanged during the virtual class, including comments by the lecturer, on their cell phones. In the module course outline and during the introductory session, it was emphasised that any communication during classes was strictly for learning purposes and for the consumption of members of that class only.

For purposes of this study, the WhatsApp messages exchanged in class constituted the data. This places the study squarely within the qualitative research realm. It was a case study of one postgraduate class.

To study the messages, I adopted a content analysis approach. Content analysis is a study of documents and communication artefacts such as text, picture, audio and video to examine patterns. Content analysis is a tool used to determine the presence of words, themes or concepts within some given qualitative text. Sources of data could be interviews, fieldwork notes, conversations, etc. To analyse such data, the text must be coded or broken down into manageable categories (Columbia University-Population Health Methods).

In analysing the data, I adopted Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic model. The model is also supported by Miles and Huberman (1994). The model unfolds from familiarising oneself with the data all the way to writing the re-

The Efficacy of Leveraging WhatsApp in Delivering a Master's Module

search report as follows:

Familiarising self with data: I listened to the audio recordings and transcribed them, and read and re-read transcriptions. I read and re-read the WhatsApp text messages. This is a process of data reduction (Miles & Huberman 1994).

Generating initial themes: Having familiarised with the data, I developed preliminary codes drawing excerpts from the messages.

Searching for themes: Thirdly, I collated the codes and organised the data into more stable themes.

Reviewing themes: Fourthly, I re-examined the data seeking to decide whether to combine, refine, separate or discard initial themes. I ensured data coherence within themes and identifiable distinctions between them. This was a process of evaluating the themes (Miles & Huberman 1994).

Defining and naming themes: At this stage, I named the themes and gave them clear definitions. This is a process of data display (Miles & Huberman 1994).

Producing the report: Finally, I adopted the themes to present and discuss the data in response to the research question.

With regard to ethical considerations, I was granted permission to conduct the study by the University. I obtained ethical clearance from the University's Human and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee. I obtained informed consent from the students concerned, for using their WhatsApp messages.

In the next section I present and discuss the findings.

7 Findings and Discussion

In this section, I present the findings according to themes that emerged from the data analysis process. I attempt to examine these themes with a view to seeking to understand the quality of learning as described in the theoretical framework section. The data unfold through eight themes, namely: Class attendance, Production of an artefact, Chaos, Adding to the discussion,

Clarifying one's position, Seeking clarity, Expressing own understanding, and Analysing issues, in that order. Where names appear in the conversations, these are pseudonyms.

7.1 Class Attendance

While attending class is a basic expectation in all face-to-face learning contexts, it cannot be taken for granted in virtual classes such as the ones we had in this module. I found it quite encouraging that in almost all the sessions, there was 100% attendance. I can therefore safely say that from the outset, that accessibility affordance (Blewett & Hugo 2016) was provided for. Also, learning in this context was certainly no longer an individual journey (Siemens 2005). In a few cases where some students could not attend, they informed me in advance. I did not mark any formal register, instead, attendance showed through a participant's initial WhatsApp text or voice message. So, in addition to registering attendance that way, one was already contributing to the discussion at hand. Because the class had 22 students, the minimum number of texts and voice messages per session was usually 22. While I cannot rule out the possibility that a student's first text or voice message could have been simply about registering one's presence more than anything, there was also evidence that many students were already engaging the content at hand.

7.2 Production of an Artefact

The digital conversation pedagogy, unlike the traditional face-to-face one, is a highly activity-filled process with many 'players' involved. Out of the process, an artefact is produced – the conversation transcript. In the case of this study, the conversation transcript is the full package of WhatsApp text and voice messages exchanged in class sessions. This package provides multiple opportunities for learning during and after the conversation. To illustrate, the following is what I wrote to the class at the end of one session:

In this session alone, there were 320 WhatsApp messages exchanged. This is massive. Well done to all of you.

The preceding quote is an indication of a highly participative teaching-learning process that occurred on that day. There was abundant student-lecturer

engagement (Basitere & Mapatagane 2018). Given the 22 students in the class in question, it means that in that particular session, each of the students on average contributed close to 15 texts. In a typical face-to-face class, it is highly unlikely that a student would speak, let alone write that much. If a student were not in the 320-message class, they would obviously have lost out on the vibe of the live virtual session, but they would still have received all the messages as long as their cell phone was accessible. These messages would be assets (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993) in each student's subsequent learning going forward. Therefore, I can safely argue that I see elements of Conversation pedagogy in the engagements we had with this class.

7.3 Chaos

The sessions were not always smooth sailing. We all had to contend with a plethora of messages. We needed to keep on referring to the PowerPoint slides. We needed to think on our feet as it were. We had to compose and send texts. To some degree, we all suffered the absence of Blewett and Hugo's (2016) control affordance. We were overwhelmed. The following were some of the teething problems as expressed by the students.

My comrades, aren't we supposed to be discussing based on Shu's example of Education policy?

Colleagues, today's session is confusing I think I did not quite understand the brief.

Am I correct that we are discussing the analysis of policy formulation?

It looks like we have deviated from the focus of the day, are we still on Policy analysis?

These messages show that there was need to have things clarified. Without the necessary clarity, construction affordance (Blewett 2016), where learning activities open up the learning space by constructing other learning spaces or content, would not be possible. In this regard, I allowed students to arrive at some clarity among themselves and in most cases, this was achieved. In such cases my job was to give assurance that we were going in the right direction. In other cases, I had to provide the needed clarity. All in all, deep learning entails navigating through these uncertainties (Blewett 2016). Thus, to some degree, such processes are characteristic of all the five pedagogies.

7.4 Adding to the Discussion

One characteristic of the WhatsApp messages was to do with students weighing in to add on to the discussion at hand. The following are examples.

Adding and supporting with an example:

Dear Colleagues, just to add on to what Mw has just said: a norm (in the context of the school) could also mean a principle to regulate a specific kind of behaviour that may not be desirable in some instances. For example: a school may choose to make a policy by forbidding the usage of cell phone devices by learners in the school.

Just to add on what my colleagues have said; policies simplify decision making. Policies ensure that decisions made for schools are in line with school goals. If we look at the policy for Teacher development, for example, the managers, namely principals and HOD, plan ahead for necessary training that should be available to teachers as they are being guided by policies.

Just to add, colleagues, organisational structure defines how activities such as task allocation, coordination and supervision are directed towards the achievement of the organisational aims. For example, an effective school organisational structure involves better work distribution and efficient management control.

Contributing to defining a term:

Just to add on your definition. Policy analysis is a technique used in public administration to enable civil servants, activists, and other to examine and evaluate the available options to implement the goals of laws and elected officials. The process is also used in the administration of complex policies.

Adding by way of interpreting:

I also need to add that in the case of Policy analysis with regard to PPN, the policy model that seems prevalent is the elite model, because the elite model is a top down model that is used by those in power and who are more advantaged to determine how those in the bottom end of

The Efficacy of Leveraging WhatsApp in Delivering a Master's Module

the ladder can function. In the case of PPN therefore, learners, including those with special needs, aren't represented but instead their needs are presented in the voices of the teacher unions who in turn represent the teachers.

Through giving examples, attempting to add value to a colleague's definition of a term, and through adding by way of interpreting, there seems to be evidence of the exercising of skills beyond consumption pedagogy. These texts show some amount of ownership of the content and what it meant. Going back to the ACT approach, I see elements of curation pedagogy here. This seemed to have been made possible because students found the WhatsApp learning platform user-friendly (Khoza & Mpungose 2018a).

7.5 Clarifying One's Position

There were times when students corrected what one thought was a misinterpretation of their point(s).

Indicating to a colleague that the original question was not what they interpreted it to be but going ahead to address the new issue:

The question for Mw was not that, but to answer your question, Noho, in the absence of policies in school or in the education system at large there would be a lack of structure and functioning which is necessary to provide the education needs in an institution order must be maintained and the needs of stakeholders must be adhered to. I hope you have been answered.

Signalling a loss of focus in the discussion:

I get u my comrade, but I think our main focus here should be the question of: what do we understand about policies being Managerial, financial, political and administrative mechanisms in ensuring that the desired goals are being achieved.

Signalling a misunderstanding:

No, Comrade Nsa. I don't think that you heard me correctly. What I

meant was that the execution of the Finance policy, I did not say it is the SMT that either validates or adopts the finance policy. I repeat: My focus is on the execution.

The three preceding texts seem to suggest that the authors had confidence in what they had contributed, and were determined to ensure that their colleagues understood the messages in the original sense without undue defensiveness. This is consistent with the presence of communication affordance (Blewett & Hugo 2016) where the student is allowed to express themselves within the learning space. In the Correction pedagogy, important skills such as determination, motivation and belief are developed. There seems to be such elements in the texts in question.

7.6 Seeking Clarity

There were many instances when students sought clarity from fellow students' presentations or texts. The clarification sought was largely to do with concepts, models, and policies. What follows are typical examples thereof.

Lan, may u please give us clarity on concepts of school as an organisation?

Using Ale's definition, Is it correct then to say a school has many structures which are formal and informal?

Lo, can you brief us more on the Instructional model and how it would work, also citing an example?

Zan, please will you consider my example here? I think it can assist clarify your question.

Good afternoon, Lin and colleagues I understand these models are like approaches to analyse the policy content, policy making processes checking each policy stage would you simplify this process by showing one example.

So, will it be correct to say from this discussion that PPN as a policy after an analysis is not without its faults and it needs review?

Do you think it is possible to have a bottom-up approach to influencing culture?

But colleagues, when we say the way 'we do things around here',

The Efficacy of Leveraging WhatsApp in Delivering a Master's Module

whose voices are included and whose voices are excluded in this phrase???

Could you elaborate more on the subject of PPN ... in the context of policy implementation?

The search for clarification suggests that students were not merely consuming content by accepting the status quo. They saw gaps and actively sought to fill them through obtaining greater clarity. They actively participated in the clarification-seeking process. They sought examples in order to make more meaning to the content. They sought to achieve content curation (Blewett 2016) where they would be able to own the knowledge. In such activities, I see elements of both Curation and Conversation pedagogies.

7.7 *Expressing Own Understanding*

Amidst the WhatsApp conversations are texts that show attempts by students to express their own understanding of the issues under discussion. Here are some examples.

According to my understanding, policy analysis also checks strengths and weaknesses of the policy.

In my understanding, policy analysis isn't only used when there is a problem. Policy analysis can also be used to determine what makes a policy succeed. By analysing this, it is almost like a referencing tool to policy makers to see what works, in which context.

Giddens (1989) states that culture is like glue that binds society through common understanding of an accepted way of life by certain groups of people which differs from other groups. I subscribe to this view.

By putting across their understanding of issues, these students suggested that they were ready for their views to be put to test through the lenses of their colleagues' understanding of the same. They were thinking. They were engaging with content. They were processing knowledge, and in some cases, providing literature sources to back up their views. This is by no means teacher-centric, a characteristic of Consumption pedagogy. There is

evidence of finding, active reading and filtering. These are characteristics of Curation pedagogy.

7.8 *Analysing Issues*

Some texts show evidence of students engaged in analysing issues. The following are some examples.

Explaining the ideal process of change:

Yes, you cannot want to change everything in one go but slow, consistent changes are likely to last. If a leader wants to change the organisational culture, with just good ideas he/she will not go far, you need the buy-in of all stakeholders therefore people must be assisted to see value in the new ways and therefore adopt them wholeheartedly. Change will always come with resistance; a leader needs to be persistent in his/her efforts.

Explaining the need for school-community cooperation:

According to a recent policy brief from the National Education Association (NEA). When schools, parents, families, and communities work together to support learning, students tend to earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and enrol in higher level programmes.

Analysing a concept with illustrative examples:

There may be two ways of viewing the location issue. On the one hand we can say location does have an impact because of beliefs of people generally and their attitude towards education in rural areas. What if it is one of the areas where girls go up to Grade 10 and then are shipped off to be married, what if it is those areas where learners are just aiming to get to Grade 12 and have no further ambitions thereafter. That would affect their attitude towards learning. On the other hand, I would also agree with you that there are schools in areas that are despondent and yet they perform well. However, I would still ask whether those schools are the norm or the exception?

Identifying the root cause of school failure:

I mentioned this point above, colleagues. Most township schools do not take time to deliberate and CREATE the school culture. They continue with their business depending on individual educators and SMT members. If you ask the entire school population the values of the school, no-one knows them. Take school assembly in Secondary schools educators don't even attend. There is no common purpose of what will be achieved by it.

Explaining the building of culture:

Your classroom already has a culture. The kids are very aware how Meneer acts in certain situations and what Meneer will say if this or that happens. You need to evaluate those things that you want to be a norm, believe in your classroom and condition your kids through your own actions, talking and careful planning to make them realise how things are done in your classroom, what is acceptable and not acceptable and be persistent about it. It will eventually become a norm and therefore a culture.

In all the pedagogy levels, it is crucial for a student to develop analytical skills. It is a characteristic of higher order learning. Such learning is characterised by one's ability to explain, relate, analyse, theorise, illustrate, and so on.

8 Conclusion

This paper sought to examine the efficacy of leveraging WhatsApp as a teaching learning platform. The previous studies I reported on involved studying the use of WhatsApp as a supplementary teaching-learning approach. In the present study, I involved this platform as the main approach. As I reported, some groundwork for delivering this module had occurred before lockdown. I believe that this played some part in the successes achieved during the WhatsApp era.

The WhatsApp platform was evidently accessible and user-friendly for all students. This is consistent with findings in previous studies (Basitere & Mapatagane 2018; Benson & Morgan 2018; Khoza & Mpungose 2018a;

Mpungose 2019). Therefore, it was an asset to their learning (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993). In my judgment, the platform substantially provided for all the learning affordances as constructed by Blewett and Hugo (2016), namely accessibility, connection, communication, control and construction. Through it, students were able to multi-task: read, think, compose and send and receive text/ voice messages. It enabled students to communicate, collaborate, act creatively to address challenges and think critically. Evidence suggests that class engagements involved more than consuming content. Students asked one another questions in search of clarity and they invested in being party to the provision of answers. These are skills associated with both Curation and Correction pedagogies. Evidence also shows that a lot of student interaction occurred. The more they interacted, the bigger and more nuanced the artefact – the text package – became. These are engagements associated with Conversational pedagogy and to some extent Creation pedagogy. The study therefore suggests that the WhatsApp platform is capable of involving students in deep learning.

The approach was not without its constraints. There was evidence of information over-load by way of many WhatsApp messages coming through within a short space of time. It was difficult for both the lecturer and students to timeously process such information. Some students were faster than others in both processing information and making their contributions. However, because the information was immediately captured, students had the opportunity to come back to it later. Overall, I felt that to use this platform for teaching and learning, there is need for more preparation and management than I initially had envisaged.

Acknowledgement:

My gratitude goes to all the students in the module who allowed me to use the WhatsApp messages they contributed in class sessions.

References

- Aigner, S., V. Raymond & L. Schmidt 2002. ‘Whole community organizing’ for the 21st Century. *Community Development* 33, 1: 86 - 106.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330209490144>
- Ammerman, A. & C. Parks 1998. Preparing Students for More Effective Community Interventions: Assets Assessment. *Family & Community*

The Efficacy of Leveraging WhatsApp in Delivering a Master's Module

Health 21, 1: 32 - 45.

<https://doi.org/10.1097/00003727-199804000-00006>

- Annamalai, N. 2019. Using WhatsApp to Extend Learning in a Blended Classroom Environment. *Teaching English with Technology* 19, 1: 3 - 20.
- Barak, M. 2018. Are Digital Natives Open to Change? Examining Flexible Thinking and Resistance to Change. *Computers and Education* 12, 1: 115 - 123. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2018.01.016>
- Basitere, M. & N. Mapatagane 2018. Effects of Social Media Network Site on Student's Engagement and Collaboration: A Case Study of WhatsApp at a University of Technology. Paper presented at the ECSM, 2018, 5th European conference on social media.
- Benson, V. & S. Morgan 2018. Measuring the Social Impact: How Social Media Affects Higher Education Institutions. *Social Media Marketing: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice*. New York: IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-5637-4.ch055>
- Blewett, C. & W. Hugo 2016. Actant Affordances: A Brief History of Affordance Theory and a Latourian Extension for Education Technology Research. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning (CriSTal)* 4,1. Available at: <http://doi.org/10.14426/cristal.v4i1.50> (Accessed on 24 April 2020.)
- Blewett, C. 2016. ACT Online Course. Available at: www.activatedacademy.com. (Accessed on 20 April 2020.)
- Braun, V. & V. Clarke 2006. Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, 2: 77 - 101.
- Chikoko, V. 2020. *Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to Educational Leadership, Management & Policy*. Master of Education Course Outline, School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Collins, A. & R. Halverson 2018. *Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology: The Digital Revolution and Schooling in America*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Columbia University. Population Health Methods. Available at: mailman.columbia.edu/research/population-health-methods/content-analysis. (Accessed on 29 April 2020.)
- Dewey, J. 1986. Experience and Education. *The Education Forum* 50,3: 241 - 252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131728609335764>

- Eloff, I. & L. Ebersohn, 2001. The Implications of an Asset-based Approach to Early Intervention. *Perspectives in Education* 19,3: 147 - 157.
- Khoza, S. & C. Mpungose 2018. Use of the Moodle Curriculum by Lecturers at a South African University. Paper presented at the ICEL 2018, 13th International Conference on e-learning.
- Kretzmann, J.P. & J.L. McKnight 1993. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. Chicago: ACTA Publications.
- Mathie, A. & G. Cunningham 2003. From Clients to Citizens: Asset-based Community Development as a Strategy for Community-driven development. *Development in Practice* 13, 5: 474 - 486.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452032000125857>
- Miles, M.B. & A.M. Huberman 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. London: Sage.
- Mpungose, C.B. 2019. Is Moodle or WhatsApp the Preferred e-Learning Platform at a South African University? First-year Students' Experiences. *Education and Information Technologies* 25: 927 - 941. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s106-39-019-10005-5> (Accessed 4 July 2020.)
- Mpungose, C. 2018. *Exploring Lecturers' Reflections on the Use of Moodle to Teach Physical Science Modules at a South African University*. Doctoral Dissertation: University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban.
- Ngubane-Mokiwa, S. & S. Khoza 2016. Lecturers' Experiences of Teaching STEM to Students with Disabilities. *Journal of Learning for Development-JLAD* 3, 1: 37 - 50.
- Sayan, H. 2016. Affecting Higher Students Learning Activity by Using WhatsApp. *European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Services* 4, 3: 88 - 93.

Vitallis Chikoko
Education & Development Studies
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Durban
chikokov@ukzn.ac.za