

ABSTRACT

This mixed methods study set out to investigate the characteristics of a 21st century South African secondary school learning environment that provide rich learning experiences. It is framed through a pragmatic lens and articulates the view of learning as an active, social process. This research was conceptualised around teachers' appropriation of digital technologies and teachers' pedagogical approaches. The examination of their pedagogical strategies included the opportunities to harness learners' epistemological diversity, which speaks to their lived experiences, and ways of making meaning in society. Teachers' appropriation of digital technologies was analysed using Hokanson and Hooper's continuum of media use from representative to generative use, which reflects the extent to which they exploited their digital affordances to enhance and transform learning. Cope and Kalantzis' Learning by Design knowledge processes along with the modes of interaction in Anderson's interaction theorem (teacher-student, student-student and student-content) were used to examine teachers' pedagogical approaches. This study extended the theorem by adding and using teacher-student-content interaction as another mode of interaction.

The research setting for this investigation was 10 English and History classrooms in three private schools and two former Model C schools. The study used a convergent mixed methods design that combined quantitative and qualitative data sources with the latter being prioritised. Qualitative and quantitative data collection occurred concurrently and included detailed classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and a questionnaire survey. The findings revealed that teachers mainly used digital technologies in the representative sense with minimal evidence of their generative use and did not exploit the surfeit of digital affordances. Teachers whose pedagogical strategies included a blend of knowledge processes and modes of interaction demonstrated more transformative pedagogical strategies. The main contribution of the study is a conceptual model of the 21st century secondary school learning environment that speaks to both technology-rich and technology-constrained environments.

Key terms: digital affordances; digital technologies; epistemological diversity; interaction equivalency theorem; knowledge processes; learning environment; rich learning experiences.