

Digital Literacies for Pre-Service High School English Teachers



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Overview

This series of lectures serves as a course component for the Senior Phase and FET English Method course at the University of Cape Town, which forms part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) professional teacher education qualification. It consists of 5 lectures presented at strategic times throughout the year. The purpose of the course is to provide pre-service English teachers with an opportunity to critically discuss the integration of Digital Literacies into the high school English curriculum. The course component has a dual teaching outcome: 1. Addressing the digital divide within the English Method classroom and providing an opportunity for the pre-service teachers to engage in Digital Literacies practices themselves; 2. Creating awareness of the digital divide within the high school classroom and discussing various methods that enable learners to engage in effective Digital Literacy practices. The course is built on discussions where the class could voice their varying perspectives, anxieties and experiences, especially after their teaching practicals. In this way, knowledge is built collaboratively. Although rudimentary theory is incorporated in the

curriculum, the class focuses mostly on the practical aspects of Digital Literacies within the specific context of the high school English Classroom. Numerous methods for Digital Literacies integration, whether for the students' own use or for their learners', are scrutinized and critically evaluated.

Assessment for the course component (discussed in detail below): the students have the opportunity to produce a digital story in the form of a video, which is discussed in detail in class, or they could create a digital resource of their own choice that is applicable to the English classroom context.

Teaching and learning context

The material is presented in the form of Powerpoint presentations with a reference list of the appropriate literature at the end of the presentations. The backbone of the course is however the classroom discussions. It is therefore important that these discussions are carefully facilitated in order to encourage critical thinking about Digital Literacies practices in the high school English classroom. The discussions are usually initiated through questions that are displayed within the Powerpoint presentations. Multiple perspectives on the topics are encouraged whereafter students are presented with the relevant theory or methods that address the topics.

Note regarding the use of videos: In some cases, videos could be used in order to either initiate a discussion, to illustrate a method, or to provide an outside/expert perspective. These videos should be carefully chosen and the students should be allowed to comment on the value of these videos within the context, for this practice connects actual teaching practice. The videos that have been used in class are not included in the course material, for lecturers are encouraged to search for or produce videos that fit their specific classroom. Descriptions pertaining to the subjects of the videos have been included below and examples have been included in some cases. This field is constantly changing so it is important that up-to-date material is included where relevant.

Course objectives:

1. understand some of the theoretical concepts of Digital Literacies;
2. understand the theoretical concepts associated with the integration of Digital Literacies into the high school English Classroom;
3. gain an overall idea of the crucial sociocultural factors surrounding Digital Literacies integration as described in recent literature;
4. critically evaluate various methods of integration;
5. engage in Digital Literacies practice that are relevant to the high school English classroom context;
6. build confidence to integrate Digital Literacies into classroom practice.



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Classes of the course component

This section briefly summarises the most important aspects of each class and should be used in conjunction with the Powerpoint presentation associated with the class.

Class 1: Introduction to Digital Literacies in the high school English Classroom

The first lecture provides an opportunity for the students to discuss their perspectives of Digital Literacies, followed by a short introduction to the most prominent views on literacy, the changing view of what counts as literacy and a short introduction to New Literacy Studies (NLS). Some of the challenges surrounding the integration of Digital Literacies are briefly discussed. This leads to the provision of the most popular definitions of Digital Literacies by explicitly focusing on the theoretical shift from “Computer Literacy” to “Digital Literacies”. From this point onwards, the discussions focus on the integration of Digital Literacies into the high school English classroom context. A theoretical planning cycle for integration is introduced, followed by a discussion focusing on how to facilitate integration practically. The students are then provided with an outline of the course component. It is important to mention to the students that they should challenge themselves and have fun. They should also feel free to voice their opinions regarding the facilitator’s integration of Digital Literacies over the course of the year for this habit will encourage them to reflect upon their own practices.

Suggestions for videos:

1. A video introducing Digital Literacies. The videos that could be found on sites like Youtube, Vimeo and TedTalks all vary in quality. It is appropriate to deliberately show badly produced or ineffective videos in some cases, for the students could then discuss the quality of these videos and debate whether the videos are useful within the specific context.
2. A short video discussing what it means to be digitally literate in the 21st Century.

Class 2: Integrating Digital Literacies into a lesson plan

The second class builds on the theoretical framework introduced in the first class. However, the focus in this class is on the theoretical planning cycle for integration and the practical application of the theory. The class is centred around a discussion of the facilitator’s lesson plan for the class and how

decisions regarding Digital Literacies integration have been made. Students are encouraged to comment or criticize the facilitator's choices and make suggestions on how the integration could have been improved.

Activity:

1. Group work: students should discuss how they would integrate Digital Literacies into a grammar or short story classroom. Each group gets the opportunity to draw a set of available resources from a hat. This encourages them to be creative within the confines of set boundaries. An example of a set of available resources: "The school has a computer room containing 40 computers with limited access to the internet. Most of the learners have access to computers at home, but only 60% can surf the web from home. Almost all the learners have mobile phones with basic internet access."

Suggestions for videos:

1. Videos that connect with the learning outcome of "get the students thinking about Digital Literacies in their own classrooms". Three videos that vary in quality could be used in this case and students should be encouraged to discuss the value of the videos in reaching the learning outcome.
2. The activity mentioned above is quite taxing and could be followed by a video that breaks away from the topic of integration slightly. A thought-provoking video on the future of learning could be useful at the end of the class.

Class 3: Digital Storytelling

The third, fourth and fifth classes depart slightly from the theory and provide the students with an opportunity to scrutinize and critically evaluate various practical methods of Digital Literacies integration. The first method that is introduced and discussed in detail is Digital Storytelling. The class takes the form of a workshop. It starts with an very important discussion of how Digital Storytelling could be relevant to the English classroom. The focus is on teachers using Digital Storytelling to teach aspects of the curriculum as well as learners producing Digital Storytelling videos themselves in order to reach various learning outcomes. Definitions of Digital Storytelling are provided followed by an introduction of the 8 steps of Digital Storytelling. After a discussion of how Digital Storytelling could be adapted for badly and well-resourced schools as well as how it could address the digital divide, the students carry out the first 5 steps of Digital Storytelling in class.

Activities:

1. Group work: students have to discuss how digital storytelling could be adapted for badly and well-resourced schools. They then have to discuss how it could address the digital divide in the high school English classroom.
2. Individual exercise: students have to draw pictures illustrating their current views of their lives.
3. Individual exercise: students draw a “River of Life” where they illustrate their journey as pre-service teachers, focusing on how they reached the point where they decided to become teachers.
4. Group work: each member of the group has to tell the story of their “River of Life” to the other members of the group. The other members then have the opportunity to comment on the story or ask questions.
5. Individual exercise *or* Group work: students have to complete a storyboard for their digital story. At this point students could decide whether they want to complete their videos individually or in groups.

Suggestions for videos:

1. A video that explains what Digital Storytelling is. It could be useful if the lecturer creates his/her own video. In this way, the pictures from the Powerpoint presentation could be incorporated into the video, connecting the video with the classroom. The video could provide information regarding the definition of Digital Storytelling while being an example of a form of Digital Storytelling in itself. The video could be produced in a low-tech fashion.
2. Hi-tech examples of Digital Storytelling could be shown in order to inspire students and to show them what is possible. It should be made clear to the students however that they are not expected to produce videos of that quality.

Class 4: Critically evaluating websites

The purpose of the class is to create an awareness of contemporary issues surrounding the internet. It focuses on the students’ perspectives on the World Wide Web and how they think their learners will cope with the difficulties they are faced with when conducting searches for academic purposes. The concept of the “digital native” is revisited in order to discuss its relevance to South African English classrooms. This is done in order to establish to what extent South African learners may or may not experience problems when conducting internet searches. Two methods that could help learners in adopting good internet practices are discussed: guided/semi-guided/unguided internet tutorials that could be done in class and; using and adapting a critical evaluation checklist when conducting searches. Examples of these methods could be found in the Powerpoint presentation.

Activity:

1. Group work: students must use their laptops, cell phones or other devices to search for two sources that discuss the Elizabethan context. They must informally evaluate these websites, providing two examples of an academically “good” site. Each group must explain how the sites could be useful when learners have to write a paragraph on the social context of “Macbeth”.
2. Group work: students must use the checklist provided to formally evaluate various websites where the writing process is discussed. They must provide two examples: one academically “bad” site and; one academically “good” site. They must report to the class how they used the checklist in making their decisions.

Suggestions for a video:

Videos that lighten the mood of the class are recommended. “Scam” videos that look like they could be academically sound could be shown to show how easily one could be tricked into believing something that is factually untrue. Videos by “The Onion Network” could suffice for this purpose.

Class 5: Social Media in the English Class

The class aims to address the controversial issue of whether or not social media should be integrated into the English class and how this could be done. The purpose is to allow the students to collaboratively derive at creative ways to integrate social media seeing as there is a lack of concrete methods described in the literature. Students are encouraged to be open to suggestions regarding the topic, regardless of their possible skepticism. Along with this, the idea of social media paradoxically being “something personal” is discussed and ways to circumvent privacy issues, that arise when social media is used in class, are suggested. The difference of various social media platforms are discussed in order to create an awareness that knowledge of these differences could be the key to knowing how to integrate these platforms. An example is provided of how Tumblr could be used effectively in the English class without infringing the teacher or learners’ privacy. Finally, the place and purpose of collaboration and interactivity are discussed. This discussion should ideally lead to an awareness that collaboration and interactivity should not necessarily be present within the physical classroom only (using traditional methods), but that social media could provide ample opportunity for digital collaboration and interactivity outside the classroom.

Activities:

1. Group work: students draw two social media platforms from a hat as well as a topic (taken from the English Senior Phase or FET curriculum). They have to provide creative ways of integrating these platforms in order to reach specific learning outcomes by drawing on the differences between these platforms.



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2. Individual work after class: students are encouraged to comment on whether and how social media could be integrated by visiting a blog that has been pre-designed by the facilitator. It could be explained to them that, once sufficient ideas have been received, the facilitator will compile their ideas and post it on the same blog.
3. Individual work after class: students are encouraged to create various digital identities in order to separate their identities as teachers from their private lives. They are also encouraged to apply these identities on Tumblr in order to regularly provide their learners with helpful resources and to allow their learners to comment on these resources.

Suggestions for videos:

1. There are many videos that advocate the use of social media in the English classroom that never actually provide suggestions for methods to do this. One or two of these videos could be shown in class to create awareness of how difficult it is to actually integrate social media successfully, despite the apparent affordances that these videos present to the viewer.
2. A clip from a video by William J. Ward (see Powerpoint presentation) could be shown in order to provide an expert opinion regarding the reality of social media integration.
3. In order to provide an example of digital collaboration and interactivity, video examples where this type of activities occur could be shown. Clips from Jason Gordon Levitt's "Hit Record on TV" could suffice for this purpose.

Assignment for module: Creating a digital resource

Develop a single digital resource. It could be a digital story or it could be a classroom resource to use in teaching English at a grade level chosen by you. This assignment may be completed collaboratively or individually.

1. The primary purpose of the digital story would be to share an insight/explore some dimension of your own life/journey in relation to

- education and/or English. Your projected audience would be fellow PGCE students. The basis of the assessment will be clarity of reflection about teaching/ learning/English teaching/becoming a teacher; creativity, effectiveness, awareness of audience
2. The primary purpose of the classroom resource would be to facilitate learning/ engage your learners on a specific topic. This resource would form part of a lesson, The basis of the assessment will be clarity of thinking about content/skills/analytical approach; creativity; effectiveness; suitability for the classroom.
 3. Feel free to be creative and to *play*, but keep focussed on your primary purpose and audience.
 4. You are free to use multiple sources from the internet etc. but do not copy other digital presentations.

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