

Multimodal Pedagogy for English Teachers: new ways of integrating digital technologies in teacher education

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Rationale

Recent research has tended to emphasise the digital proficiency of university students. Nevertheless, studies have shown that, in countries with stark economic divides, it is problematic to assume that all students are “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001:1). There is a danger that students who are “digital strangers” may be disadvantaged because they are unable to utilise technology effectively in their academic work (Czerniewicz & Brown, 2013:1). It is therefore important that the engagement with digital technologies should be integrated into classrooms in higher education contexts.

The concept of the digital stranger extends to teacher education. Providing space for engagement with ‘the digital’ by pre-service teachers is complex due to the dual purpose for its integration: (1) professional teachers are expected to integrate digital resources in their classrooms, while (2) they have to enable their learners to engage with digital technologies in ways that will be expected of them in the 21st Century. Engaging with digital technologies has therefore become crucial to teachers’ professional development.

The shift from ‘digital literacies’ to ‘multimodal pedagogy’

The resources you are about to view were used in the 4th year of an on-going project aimed at integrating ‘digital literacies’ into English teacher education. Typically, this integration would consist of 4 to 6 contact sessions forming a course component within an English teaching method course (part of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education professional qualification), culminating in the students completing a digital classroom resource, or a digital story video.

During the classes, we started suspecting that the strong focus on ‘the digital’ could be counter-intuitive, because foregrounding it too much de-contextualises it; in the 21st Century, ‘the digital’ has become entangled within an array of other practices, some of which are not necessarily digital *per se*. We have also realised that calling a course component ‘digital literacies’, might have caused upfront resistance, resulting in lessons focusing on the alleviation of anxieties, rather than fostering creativity, which has been our core intention since the project’s inception.

We therefore redesigned ‘digital literacies’, resulting in a brand new ‘multimodal pedagogy’ curriculum: a way of integrating the digital in literacy teacher education that focuses much more on its intertwinement with multiple other practices - a more realistic depiction of digital technology use in teaching, foregrounding creativity and effective communication through a meta-awareness of modal affordances in the classroom, as opposed to just ‘using digital technologies’.

Class summaries and annotated lists of resources

It is our pleasure to share short summaries of each contact session, followed by an annotated list of resources you will find on the OpenUCT platform and elsewhere:

Class 1 – Introduction to Multimodal Pedagogy for English Teachers. Students first critically discuss loaded concepts like “tech savviness” and “creativity”. The notion of multimodality is presented to them, while they connect the concept with the English classroom context. They interrogate the rationale behind ‘digital literacies’ becoming ‘multimodal pedagogy’. There exists a strong focus on identity and the South African school context.

Resource: **Powerpoint Slides** called “Introduction to Multimodal Pedagogy for English Teachers”. These slides consist mostly of reflection, discussion and task prompts with occasional references to theoretical constructs.

Class 2 – Critical Evaluation of Websites. Students critically reflect on how they experience engagement with internet sources, expressing themselves using drawings. They then engage in hands-on search activities using their own devices, utilising and adapting a provided checklist (see Powerpoint presentation for a link) to evaluate websites. The South African English school curriculum is foregrounded in all activities. A model lesson plan of the class is provided for their continuous interrogation. A hand-out of how internet (and other) sources function during lesson planning is discussed.

Resources:

1. **Powerpoint Slides** called “Critical Evaluation of Websites”. Reflection, discussion and task prompts.
2. A model lesson plan **hand-out**. The actual, hand-written lesson plan of the class. Students are encouraged to track the lesson, making notes on the hand-out.
3. ‘Functions of sources’ **hand-out**. A diagram created by Ed Campbell to help students make meaning of how sources function during lesson planning and teaching. The diagram is discussed in class.

Class 3 – Multimodal Strategies in Poetry Teaching: A Modelling Class. The facilitator models a multimodal poetry lesson, while the students make notes using text and images. “A poem for my mother” by Jennifer Davids is annotated, drawing on various multimodal resources (from Google Images, YouTube, Vimeo or elsewhere) to illustrate how these resources change or extend the meaning potential of the imagery in the poem. Students could ask questions during the demonstration. They also reflect on prompt questions posed to them via projected Powerpoint slides.

Resources:

1. **Powerpoint Slides** called “Multimodal Poetry Teaching – A Modelling Class”. Instructions on how to engage with the modelling class, including prompt questions.
2. Final **annotated poem**. An example of what the final annotation of a poem could look like, after drawing on multimodal resources to deepen its meaning potential.

Class 4 – Reading and Viewing (Flipped Classroom). Students are expected to watch a video prior to class. This video has been created by Ed Campbell especially for this course component. The video focuses on how multimodality and digital technologies could be used in teaching William Shakespeare’s “Othello”, specifically modelling the use of video and

interactive whiteboards, while providing strategies for incorporating internet sources. After a general discussion about the use of video in lessons, a debate about the benefits and downfalls of a flipped classroom ensues. Students then engage in group work (see prompt questions hand-out).

Resources:

1. “Digital Literacies in the English Classroom – Othello” **video**. Students watch this video prior to class in order to prepare them for an in-depth discussion class. You can find the video here: <http://bit.ly/2zDuZIY>
2. Prompt questions **hand-out** for group work. Each group is provided with a question that they have to collaboratively answer in a short presentation.

Class 5 – Digital Storytelling. Students visually represent their journeys to becoming teachers, telling their stories during group work and providing feedback on other students’ stories. They are introduced to digital storytelling, taken through the steps of the video-making process and familiarised with Creative Commons and the digital tools they could use in the making of their videos. They then engage in group work where they adapt digital storytelling for various contexts as well as multiple areas of the English school curriculum.

Resources:

1. **Powerpoint Slides** called “Digital Storytelling”. Prompt questions for reflection, summaries of what digital storytelling is and mapping out of the processes involved.
2. Prompt questions for group work **hand-out**. Questions prompting them to adapt digital storytelling for various contexts and multiple areas of the English school curriculum. The hand-out includes a blank template for storyboarding.

Class 6 – Strategies for Teaching Creative Writing (Flipped Classroom). Once again students are expected to watch one of Ed Campbell’s videos prior to class. The video focuses on strategies of teaching creative writing, drawing on multimodal resources and connecting with multiple areas of the English curriculum. It also models practices involving interactive whiteboards, social media and tablets (using apps). After a discussion about the video, a practical class ensues. Students adapt the strategies mentioned in the video for various contexts and purposes. They then engage in two writing exercises during class time (see slides).

Resources:

1. “Digital Literacies in the English Classroom – Creative Writing” **video**. Students watch this video prior to class in order to prepare them for a discussion and practical class. You can find the video here: <http://bit.ly/2ke9Dz3>
2. **Powerpoint Slides** called “Strategies for Teaching Creative Writing”. Reflection and writing task prompts.



References

Czerniewicz, L. and Brown, C., 2013. The habitus of digital “strangers” in higher education. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 44(1), pp.44–53.

Prensky, M., 2001. Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants Part 1. *On the Horizon*, 9(5), pp.1–6.