

Developing student digital literacies: A pilot course for pre-service teachers

Faculty of Education

Voluntary short course: Digital Literacy Short Course

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Learning activity:
Develop student digital literacies

Learning technology:
Google Suite

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Context

Background

The Faculty of Education has prioritised the integration of learning technologies into the curriculum as part of its strategic vision. Both lecturers and teachers are therefore expected to model and apply digital literacy skills within various classroom and educational settings. Often, however, teachers still lack the necessary competencies in terms of the use and integration of learning technologies into the curriculum (Mishra & Koehler, 2009). It is evident that not only lecturers in the Faculty but also pre-service teacher students should be better equipped with the appropriate skills for the world of work. In 2014, it was therefore decided to develop a digital literacy short course in which students could participate voluntarily to further their current skills.

Subject area

The use of learning technologies forms part of all the different subjects that students at the Faculty of Education enrol for. Preparing students for the demands and challenges of the world of work (working in schools in the majority of cases) provided the opportunity for the conceptualisation of a short course through which interested students could start to prepare themselves for the challenges of the 21st century classroom in terms of the integration of technology. The focus therefore remains on the preparation of students for the world of work but also encompasses a contribution to lifelong learning.

Established practice

Despite the emphasis placed on the integration of learning technologies and the redesign of Education programmes into a blended mode of delivery, uptake remains patchy and a number of students do not have sufficient exposure to the use of learning technologies and how such technologies may be integrated into the curriculum within their course delivery.

The challenge

Preparing students for the world of work and developing graduate attributes remain the principal focus of the Faculty of Education. The integration of information and communication technologies and the resultant ability to observe modelled behaviour in terms of the effective, appropriate

and sustainable integration of learning technologies into the curriculum, however, are still areas of development within the Faculty. An alternative interim measure was therefore conceptualised to provide students with the necessary skills and attributes to integrate a blended mode of delivery seamlessly into their various curricula when entering the world of work.

Advantages associated with the integration of technology

The advantages of integrating learning technologies into learning and teaching go without saying. Evidence of such advantages, however, includes an enriched learning experience, a decrease in the administrative duties of teachers and an improvement in opportunities for student engagement. The challenge was to determine the basic skills necessary for a newly qualified teacher to be able to function optimally in the workplace in terms of learning technologies. By means of prioritising, synthesising and developing deep understanding of the expectations regarding current practices in local schools, a curriculum was conceptualised to empower pre-service teachers not only to obtain basic digital literacy skills but also to develop attributes that would lead them to learn continuously, assess different tools and learning opportunities and have a well-rounded and developed sense of the affordances of particular learning technologies.

Student overview

The six-credit short course is voluntary for Education students. The course comprises five modules (Going Digital, Going Google, Technology Resources, Presentations, and Reflection and Application) and associated assignments. Since 2014, approximately 60 students have successfully completed the course. This includes students from the foundation, intermediate and senior phases.

Learning and assessment activities

Educational approach and learning activities

The aim of the short course is to provide pre-service teachers with the appropriate digital skills to be able to function optimally within the classroom and integrate learning technologies confidently into the various curricula of the different key stages. Framed within an authentic learning paradigm, students attend three Saturday sessions at the Faculty of Education during which they are introduced to different topics highlighted by appropriate learning technologies. The aim of the course is not to train



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students to use particular tools (they are expected to have a basic skills set in terms of technology) but, as mentioned, rather to help them to develop the ability to approach the digital world with confidence and knowledge by knowing which tools and approaches are appropriate for particular learning opportunities.

Emphasis is placed on the role of the facilitator – not trainer, guide or teacher – who engages with the students in the context of the realm of possibilities in the digital world, and collaboration is strongly encouraged. Access to experts and knowledgeable others play an essential role in the course. The facilitator takes the lead in terms of knowledge transfer only rarely.

Authentic learning opportunities are created continuously and students are encouraged to transfer their newly acquired knowledge and understanding to the world of work. Case studies, specific scenarios and opportunities for innovation and creativity are the building blocks of the curriculum of this short course.

Assessment activities

All assessment opportunities are geared towards a final assignment that is authentic in nature. Students are required to create a teaching and learning blog that is appropriate for their particular discipline, interest or responsibility. Peers are encouraged to view each other's blogs and to comment on them, thereby providing valuable formative feedback.

Learning environment

Learning setting

Learning takes place through a blended mode of delivery. This comprises Google Suite (Drive and Docs) as the learning platform and resource repository for online learning and three face-to-face Saturday sessions.

Student experience

Student feedback on the learning experience

Three semi-structured focus group interviews provide feedback on the student experience of the short course.

In terms of similarities, the students in the first course responded favourably

to the nature of the assignments and the opportunities for knowledge creation.

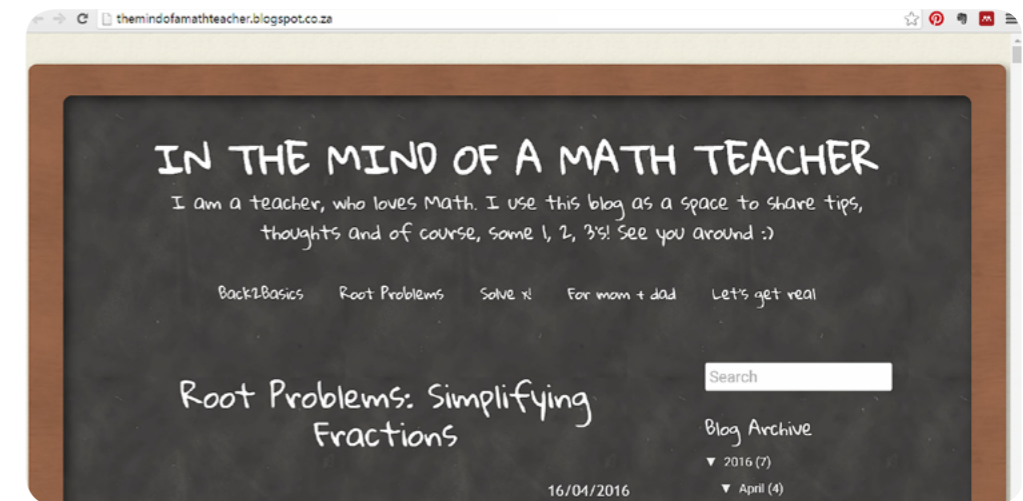


Figure 1: Screenshot of student, Emma Oosthuizen's, blog

They viewed the assignments as applicable within their current context as pre-service teachers and as preparing them both for 21st century learning and for the world of work. This speaks directly to the notion of authentic learning (Herrington & Oliver, 2000) and, specifically, authentic tasks and assignments (Herrington, 2006):

"One of our assignments was to create a lesson plan and use technology in that lesson plan . . . I think that's also just kind of forcing us again to do it practically and then . . . once we were able to . . . this is actually what I can do in my classroom . . ."

In terms of knowledge creation, the students referred to opportunities for cumulative and collaborative knowledge building:

"And it's good for yourself because you consolidate . . . you learn . . . even though it's painful but learning and constructing knowledge is painful. It's when things don't connect and you have to make them connect and that's when you learn and that's good . . ."

". . . it is a collaborative effort between the teacher and the learners . . ."



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so that the teacher can learn as much from the learners especially in the world of technology . . ."

General

Opportunities

The students develop blogs as a valuable resource for all Faculty of Education students, which was further promoted in 2016 as a collaborative resource and repository to be accessed by the Education students.

Challenges

In terms of the sustainability of such a short course, it does remain a challenge for the future. Currently, we are privileged to have the course funded by the Teaching Development Grant, which means that students can attend the course free of charge.

An alternative model is being considered and planned for the near future.

Reference list

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