Course Syllabus

Edit

Critical Digital Literacies, Schooling, and Identity (EDUC 2302)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course will examine the relationship between literacies, schooling, and identity in relation to an evolving digital media landscape that demands a critical lens toward texts. We will consider what it means to read and write the *word and the world* (Freire, 1969), in a digitally constructed reality. We will collaboratively explore the deictic, participatory, networked, global, and multimodal nature of digital literacies and the implications for classrooms and other learning contexts. To do so, we will critically examine how literacies are situated and how these sociocultural understandings illuminate issues of power and privilege. This course will be grounded in Critical Constructionist praxis (see below), and therefore you will learn to compose and deconstruct a range of digital artifacts (e.g. digital stories, games, podcasts), engage in critical analysis of digital artifacts, and think about how to design digital experiences to nurture learning and literacy.

What will we do together?

1. Explore and understand literacies as multiple, socially situated, deictic, and multimodal.
2. Construct the relationships between schooling, literacies, and identities.
3. Critically examine the relationships between literacies, learning, and identities.
4. Interrogate the way literacies are taken up in schools versus how they are practiced outside of schools.
5. Compose and deconstruct a range of multimodal texts and consider the pedagogical possibilities of these texts for teaching and learning across educational contexts.
6. Engage in making, tinkering, play, composing, writing, reflection, feedback as critical praxis.

What can we know and learn together?

Together, we will explore how digital media and technology shape and mediate our everyday personal, academic, professional, and social lives. We will use theory as an explanatory lens- to help us 'look' through it to notice what resonates and what conflicts with our own lived experience. By interviewing a

person about their digital habits, we will examine different cases of the ways digital media and technology shape and impact how we live, communicate, solve problems, access information and participate in everyday social activities. Through our examinations of online practices, we will explore questions like: How are digital literacies practiced across spaces/places? What are young people doing with digital media, for what purposes, and to what ends? How are issues of race, class, gender, sexuality – and the intersections of these – intertwined in our digital lives?

Over the course of the semester, class members will engage, discuss, challenge, and (de)construct theories about how meaning making happens in and around the contexts of digital media. We will investigate these questions collaboratively, bringing our varied experiences and life histories to bear in asking questions like: How are audiences and authorship shifting in light of newly mobile, global, participatory, distributed, and collaborative practices? How are social relationships, discourses, and identities constructed and performed in and through digital literacies? How is knowledge constructed by, for, and with young people in digital contexts and whose knowledge (and literacy practices) count? Who is able to participate in digital contexts and in what ways?

Students will attend carefully to how people participate in varied digital contexts, carrying out a research project that explores how people make meaning locally and globally in digital communities. Throughout our joint investigations in online practices, we will explore questions like: How are digital literacies practiced across spaces/places? What are young people doing with digital media, for what purposes, and to what ends? How are issues of race, class, gender, sexuality – and the intersections of these – intertwined in our digital lives?

The modules require you to participate in a variety of digital contexts as we explore the pedagogical implications of digital media. Class members will create and maintain public professional identities and participate in online communities of practice. We will also try out a variety of digital tools as we think together about the new mindsets and practices entailed in integrating them into classrooms, asking questions like: How can our understanding of youth participation inform teaching and learning? How are schools incorporating digital literacies into institutional spaces? What role might we play in fostering and supporting critical participatory acts?

What can we do together?

Together we will construct our understanding of digital literacies. We will make and compose, deconstruct, and examine the assumptions, beliefs, and theories that inform our everyday literacy practices. We will also try out a variety of digital tools as we think together about the new mindsets and practices entailed in integrating them into classrooms, asking questions like: How can our understanding of youth participation inform teaching and learning? How are schools (and other learning institutions both formal and informal) incorporating digital literacies into institutional spaces? What role might we play in fostering and supporting critical participatory acts?

What are the theories or ideas that guide this course?

This class is rooted in *Critical Constructionist Pedagogical Praxis*, a theoretical space I hope to develop further as we engage in this class together. To be **critical** is to examine, to look closely, to question why something is the way it is, instead of taking it at face value. Paulo Freire talked about criticality as the way we read both the *word and the world*. What Freire meant was we cannot engage in any discussion of literacies without recognizing the role of power and authority in our understanding and practice of literacies. **Constructionism** was coined by Seymour Papert, whose prescient work (detailed in texts like *Mindstorms, 1980)* predicted the powerful role that technology, namely computers, would have on how we learned and how we could make sense of ideas. But he also realized the potential for technology to facilitate creative production or *making*. To that end, Constructionism is a theory of learning that argues *we learn through personally meaningful making.* Paulo Freire (2003) defines praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (p. 51). Freire asks us to not just do but reflect and be actively engaged in the process of understanding and deconstructing our understanding of the world. We will engage in critical praxis throughout this course. We will read, write, reflect, make, play, and share, and continue to ask how, what, why, about our practices. In doing so we can deepen our learning. I am excited to teach this course, because as bell hooks argued, "the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy" which resonates deeply with me. If we engage in critical and respectful dialogue we can learn more.

COURSEWORK

As a student in this course, you are responsible for engaging with all of the assigned texts, completing your assignments in a timely manner, and engaging with your peers. There are three ways we will engage in an exploration of digital literacies and learning in this course: I) community and class participation II) milestone activities:

I. COMMUNITY AND CLASS PARTICIPATION (50% of your grade):

Throughout this class we will be cultivating a learning community that is rooted in respectful and thoughtful engagement of ideas, opinions, and experiences. We will be engaging both asynchronously, during the week through reading and discussions and other activities together. Each week we will read and explore various topics together to deepen our understanding and perspectives on assessment and evaluation. We will do so in three main ways: **1) Responses to text 2) Participatory Activities 3) Digital Compositions**

  - ***Response to Text (1)***: these are an opportunity to critique, reflect, make connections to practice/other ideas you are interrogating in other coursework and contexts, and pose questions.

- **Digital Journal:** Throughout this course you will keep a digital journal where you will respond/reflect/post examples. At times I will give you a specific prompt, where you might answer several questions and synthesize those responses into one paragraph as part of a class assignment. At the end of the semester, you will read and annotate this journal. Make sure you date entries and include the prompts so that you can follow your own journey of reflection and critical analysis of the

texts, concepts, and theories we engage with in the course. This journal is guided by the underlying philosophy that *writing as thinking*.

- ***Perusall Readings***: Reading together, using the practice of *social annotation*, is to support you in shared sense-making. It is also modeling a practice this is increasingly common (and possible!) due to the technology we have. Reading together is also an essential component of community building and shared sense-making. **You will post at least three questions/comments using the questions/comments/quandaries structure as well as respond to two peers (unless otherwise specified).** Initial responses to readings must happen by Fridays of a particular week, comments by Sunday evening. You will be guided by the following structure in your responses:
  - Connections: how does the current text relate to other concepts/ideas/texts in our course or even in your everyday practice?,
  - Questions: what are you left wondering about? What do you want to learn more about?
  - Quandaries- what are things you disagree with or push up against your existing understanding.

- ***Digital compositions (2)***: This class considers the increasingly multimodal, complex, and hypermediated nature of digital literacies. To that end, you will engage in a range of digital writing and composition to think about the literacies implicated in a range of composing activities. This will include designing your own simple Scratch game, producing a transmediation, creating a TikTok video, and so on. Some technology you will be familiar with, in other cases, you will be unfamiliar, and will need time to try out and tinker with the tool before you compose something. Take each digital composition as opportunities to engage in *praxis.* Consider the process you have to engage in to make something, the design approach, the implications for teaching and learning. We will share everything we make, so embrace the challenges, be creative, and push our thinking with your creations.

- ***Participatory Activities (2)*:** In most weeks you will engage in peer-to-peer dialogue to support your understanding of key concepts, structures, and ideas. This will most often be done through posts on Canvas, **Padlet (http://padlet.com/)**, **MURAL (https://app.mural.co/)**, or occasionally using Flip (previously flipgrid) to engage in sharing/critique or reflection. Your responses will build on the texts that you read/watch, as well as ongoing themes and ideas that are emergent in the course.

  Peer Feedback: Throughout this course, you will give and get feedback on your ideas, questions, insights, and learning from our peers. Think of your peers as providing windows into your work – they will see/interpret your ideas in ways that you don't anticipate, this will help you rethink and examine how you are conceptualizing and communicating your ideas. In other words, your peers offer another source of course content. In addition, together with your peers (and myself) you will be actively engaged in using a range of online tools and resources to explore new ideas, concepts, theories, and practices. When you comment you are offering insight into your perspective, and building on your own lived experience and expertise, and the same is true for your peers.

When otherwise not specified, we will be using the: *I like, I wish, I wonder* feedback structure. These comments should be respectful and focused on the work but also offer critique that goes beyond 'this is good' or 'I like that.'

Weekly assignment submission deadlines: Anything that requires peer feedback will be due by Fridays. Comments to peers must be complete by Sundays. Feedback will be back to you by Tuesdays the following week, so you have enough time to incorporate into your work.

Grading: The focus in this class is on helping you engage in Critical Constructionist Praxis- to construct, deconstruct, and reflect on texts and artifacts composed by you and others. Therefore the above assignment marked as complete or incomplete. However, the criteria for complete is: 1) has fully responded to the articulated prompts/activity 2) has engaged in thoughtful and critical analysis 3) has written or composed in a clear and accessible manner 4) has drawn on the texts, concepts, and ideas in the class 5) has engaged in thoughtful, respectful, and critical feedback. If all of these criteria are met, you will get a complete. If not, you will get an incomplete, and have a chance to revise the assignment within 2 days of grading. To make it easier for grading, there will still be an underlying point value for all community participation assignments that will total 50% of your grade.

II. MILESTONE ASSIGNMENTS

Researching Digital Lives Project (50% of your grade)

Your culminating assignment in this course is an investigation into a young person's practices with technology. The goal is to learn more about the ways that youth engage with digital media, focusing not just on the tools they use but the ***how, where, when, and why of their engagements***. You should aim to learn more about how this young person sees the world, using the method of portraiture that Davis (2011) describes in her article. Your final composition will be a 3-minute (max!) digital story. Other components of the assignment will include your interview questions, your storyboard, and a data analysis of themes that emerge from your interview that you will pull together in a 2-page think piece. Your project will consider these broad questions:

- What is it like growing up in a digital era?
- How do people negotiate their worlds using various tools and engaging in a variety of practices?
- How are their lives shaped/mediated/informed by technology and digital media?
- How do people's digital lives and experiences align in relation to schooling versus out-of-school spaces?

In terms of a process, here are the overarching steps you will engage in:

1. Read Katie Davis (2011) piece and identity a young person you will interview and a rationale for why. You will also give feedback to your peers.
2. Create an interview protocol, give and receive peer and instructor feedback, revise your protocol.

3. Conduct your interview (audiorecording or via Zoom, etc.) and then transcribe the interview (or clean up transcription if you use something like Zoom to conduct).
4. Write a think piece that connects key themes in your interview to the themes/concepts/theories in the class materials.
5. Compose a rough cut of your digital composition and give/receive peer feedback.
6. Revise and finalize your digital lives project.
7. Submit your own self-assessment on the digital lives project.

Grading: The think piece will comprise 20% of your grade, the final digital story (along with the other components e.g. storyboard, interview transcript, sample data excerpt), and self-assessment will comprise the other 30%. The final composition will use the same rubric you use for your self-assessment. The think piece will use a separate rubric.

EXPECTATIONS ON PARTICIPATION

Use of Texts to Substantiate Arguments

If an assignment asks you to leverage or build upon the texts in the class then you should be effectively drawing on quotes, examples, or synthesizing ideas from a text. You will use APA citation style for any references or in-text citations that you use. Here is an example: “Critical digital literacies ask us to interrogate the underlying power structures, histories, and contexts that inform a text. In doing so we are able to see that reading and writing are always inherently political (Freire, 1969; Patel & Bean, 2007). In our current moment, as we see education under attack, cultivating critical literacies is a way to ensure young people can see themselves as having agency… (see: Muhammed & Lee, 2016).” For support, I strongly encourage everyone to take advantage of the excellent writing services available at the **Pitt Writing Center (https://www.writingcenter.pitt.edu/)** . (Everyone will go as part of your think piece writing!)

Weekly Assignments

Our course will be managed through Canvas, a learning management system. Each week, you will begin your work by reading the module overview. This page describes the theme or set of key ideas for the week, the list of texts (e.g. scholarly journal articles, blog posts, podcasts, videos, social media posts, etc.), and highlights assignments. Most weeks, one of the materials will be an overview video from me connecting some big ideas and highlighting key themes. You are expected to engage with all the material for each week. The content has been intentionally paired down so that it is manageable within a week.

Late Assignments

Assignments can be late by a day or two (maximum), but you should email me if you need an extension beyond that. The pace of this course is fast because it is so short. Therefore, if you don’t have feedback

on something, you might not be able to move forward. At other times, my feedback may change your decision-making. Therefore, barring any extenuating circumstances, please engage with the work in a timely manner to ensure you feel supported to move forward with the rest of the class and plan accordingly for assignments you think might require more time on your part.

Grading

See above for specifics of grading.