ESOL: The Net generation

Exploring the impact of digital media on young ESOL learners

Can digital media, which young people are so addictively engaged in, enhance language learning?

Abstract:

In this report, I attempt to examine how language learning can be effected with a group of 16-19 year old ESOL learners using digital media via a popular social media site, in this case Facebook, where it was noticed that learners engaged key language skills: reading, writing speaking and listening. The report thus draws upon definitions of digital literacies in comparison to print media; looks at what is and how we view technology; and how these interface with pedagogical frameworks and language teaching approaches, all three of which principally sharing the commonalty of communication and dialogue.

Methodology:

The project was based on findings from three full-time ESOL classes with class sizes of an average of seventeen. The learners were between the ages of 16-19 across the span of three years.

Its findings were:

- The more learners read, write and actively engage in a language, the better they become at it.
- Because of the heightened, and in many cases, addictive engagement in digital literacies, there was an enhancement in language development and exam successes accordingly.
- Social media proved to be an effective, extended platform for communication and a dialogical pedagogical framework
- Learners respond more to a dialogical, conversation driven, and in some cases, polyphonic teaching and learning framework
- There were heightened opportunities for communication via social media creating a community of learning which extended beyond the classroom increasing motivation, exposure to language, inclusivity, engagement and motivation
- It was not the technology that had a motivational impact, but the content and relationship learners had with the technology

Recommendations

There have been six main recurrent themes in the successful usage of social media and language teaching and learning:

1.   Increased exposure to language

The more a learner immerses into the language, the more chance they will have to practise it. The use of social media including its dopamine induced (Peck, M 2012), high frequency in

usage allows learners to be exposed to more English including vocabulary, phrases, idioms, modelling grammatical structures and different stylistic devices with a high level of enjoyment and in many cases, addiction.

2.   Digital IQ

The learning is very student-centred focusing on their strengths, intuitive and autonomous ways of learning

3.   Engagement

Learning content based on learners' interests invites a high level of engagement using a tool that is frequently used, a lot more than a book ever is.

4.   Assessment

Teachers can use different forms of digital media such as the production of language in social networking sites as an authentic means of assessment as it looks at the production stage of language learning.

5.   Literacy skills

In order to use digital media, one is required to essentially read and write. The more a learner is practising these new literacies, the higher the chances of gaining proficiency and a competence in language.

6.   Teaching methodology

The type of teaching methodology is essential in maximising the success of using digital media pedagogically. As the social-cultural phenomenon is that of communication, a dialogical approach proved to be most successful. I found that the Dogma teaching approach and its precepts stays true to the communicative method of language learning and maximising language production.

"Popular culture and mass media are part of the experiences that students bring with them to school and should be embraced and critiqued within the formal educational curricula."

Jeff Share

There is a growing controversy over the use of social media in education, particularly Facebook. On the one hand the prevalence of digital media in general is often dismissed due perhaps to a lack of understanding of technology. Some argue for its integration and others would prefer not to use it at all. It might appear that the main reason behind this controversy is the lack of solid empirical research about the overall value not only of Facebook specifically but also other popular social networking in education, especially in language teaching and learning. There has, however, been some research about the potential of digital media and social networking in education, yet only a few studies have specifically addressed its role in pedagogy in language teaching and learning.

Facebook, as an example, has admittedly been making a number of inroads into education over the last few years. Whether for or against its use in education, students are deeply immersed into this social network. Through the domain of the internet and in the form of digitalism, it has become part and parcel of their everyday lives. Students 'craft' online lives that seamlessly merge with their 'offline' world. This technological revolution has given a new lease of life to 'literacies' transforming it from something which is paper-based to something alive and dependent on electricity and an internet connection. Our responsibility as teachers and educators is to help learners leverage this medium and benefit from it educationally and not be afraid of its use in education. Students are very quick to adapt to this medium given the chance. Students have long made up their minds about Facebook and we   cannot   change   it.

With times changing rapidly, one of the characteristics of a successful teacher must be adaptability. Teachers need to adapt their teaching methods to embrace new circumstances and students' emerging learning needs. The use of digital media, social media and new literacies in education is a huge challenge, but not an insurmountable one. It can be turned into a great learning tool for our students and this is exactly what this project is hoping to achieve.

I am based in a large further education college in West London boasting a large ESOL department. The department delivers a number of courses ranging from part-time day/evening to full-time. The department is further divided into two more groups of the larger young learners' provision, catering for 16-19 year olds and adults. ESOL learners

arrive in college at different levels, as categorised by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), beginning at Pre-Entry followed by Entry 1/2/3 then Levels 1/2 with Level 2 being the highest achievable level in ESOL. Level 1 is the equivalent of a GCSE grade C and below and Level 2 has the equivalency of grade C in English.

I have been teaching the 'young learners' provision since its inception in 2007. Learners are from extremely diverse backgrounds but can typically be characterised into two geographical categories: economic migrants, predominantly from Eastern Europe, and asylum seekers or refugees. The majority of the latter tend to be from countries such as Afghanistan, Kurdistan and Somalia. There is a nominal group from other places such as South America, and the Far East.

In 2010, I was teaching on a typical day in an average size class of approximately 17 Entry 3/ Level 1 'young learners', rowdy and excitable on a good day, melancholic and cantankerous on many others. This particular day was like most others. Learners were disengaged in the lesson, withdrawn and in their own 'worlds'. Many of the learners, although disengaged in the lesson, were very much engaged in their mobile devices or logged onto a computer, focused on something completely unrelated to the lesson. Some were on a social networking site of some sort, digital media where they were viewing a video, texting or sending instant messages. I could see I was losing the battle so I stopped my lesson and asked with a genuine interest what they were so engaged in, whilst at the same time reflecting on my own teaching methodology. My primary interest was not the technology, or a particular technological tool but the potential learning that could take place, the sociocultural practices of young people in their everyday lives and how these could best interface with educational and learning expectations (Pachler 2011).

The learners did not seem to have a definitive reason as to why they found digital media more engaging despite their '*naïve expertise*' (Pachler 2011) they had developed in their everyday lives. So I set out to analyse the tools and media they used and, more importantly, see if I could use this to engage and motivate language learning. The results were quite staggering. On analysing the use of digital 'tools' I found that learners were principally engaged in these digital 'literacies' at a dramatically higher rate than that of printed literacy. I felt that the recognition of this could be capitalised on in terms of teaching and learning, although, one of the potential problems was how the technology was perceived by teachers, most of whom, appeared to feel inept and isolated from the new 'habitus' (Pachler 2010). Secondly, my question was whether it was the technological tools that were having an impact or the relationship these 'young learners' had with technology and how this interfaced with their learning. I will be using the term 'digital media' to refer to a wide range of technologies such as: social networking sites (in our case predominantly Facebook), YouTube, mobile devices and the internet in general.

On analysing the use of digital media with these learners, I found that young learners were not necessarily experts in technology nor would they regard themselves as such. I found

that the use of digital media spanned a wide range of users from extremely diverse age ranges, ethnic and educational backgrounds. It is thought that learners from less developed countries who possess no or very little educational background would be by definition less adept in the use of digital media than those from developed countries possessing an educated background. After interviewing a sample group of 50 of our learners. I found that this could not be further from the truth. The majority of learners regularly engaged with digital media - 94% of them had an email account and 90% of them had and were actively using a social networking site. The vast majority of them used Facebook whereas the others used a social networking site based in their own country. Over 94% of learners regularly used the internet including YouTube and search engines such as Google. Furthermore, over 95% said they regularly texted and around 80% owned a smart phone. There was no correlation between those who used such technologies and their ethnic backgrounds, educational experience or age. Previous research agrees with this e.g. the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication found that there were no effects of ethnicity or demographic factors on children's engagement CMC (Plester & Wood, 2009). There was, however, a difference in the amount of time spent in the use of such technologies where it was found that young learners spent considerably more time using the internet and its variant applications than adult learners. Another startling find was that almost all of the learners who used digital technologies had no previous experience or education in ICT. In fact some 15% came from non-literate backgrounds.

In order to understand these singularities in terms and the variances in usage, it is important to understand what or how technology, in addition to 'literacies', is understood and what its implications are in the world of language learning.

The dichotomous divisions are often termed *'digital immigrants'* (those who are new to technology) and *'digital natives'* (those who are fluent in its usage) *(*Pransky 2001*)*. Other terms coined for digital natives are: 'Digital residents' (White & Le Cornu, 2011) 'Digikids' (Marsh 2005), 'Generation Txt' (Thurlow, 2003) and as in the title, 'The Net Generation' (Rosen 2007). The two camps view technology from two different perspectives. The first see technology as a set of tools to perform a particular function. *These tools are often portrayed as mechanistic, exterior and autonomous…that accomplish tasks and create products.* Digital natives', on the other hand, experience technology as '*intimately entwined with their social and biological lives' (Hogan, M 1998).* The question thus arises: is it technological determinism or a social determinism (Bromley, 1997; Bruce 1993) that facilitates the relationship between us as teachers and technology?

With my learners over the past three years, there seems to have been a distinct difference between the engagement of technologies or digital media and ICT skills. There is also a difference between technology and technological product. The focus of this project is and has always been on the learning of young people and not so much on the technology. In this sense we can assuage the fears of evidence based teaching advocates and so called *technophobes* in saying that we are not claiming that using a particular technological product will enhance learner's language acquisition. Rather, it is the social and cultural practices in young people's everyday lives and how this can best interface with learning (Pachler 2012). This engagement in language is not unique to language learning in general.

With this view, I noticed the distinction between ICT skills such as word processing, constructing a graph or other typical features found in an Office package and the wet nurse engagement of technology as young people experience it. Also the generational difference of how technology is viewed. I think it is essential to clarify the difference between the two in order to bridge the gaps in understanding if indeed we profess a student-centred and communicative approach in teaching and learning.

> ‘*Technology is not technology if it happened before you were born.’*

> Ken Robinson

What our parents, the *baby boomers* (those born between 1943-1960) deem technology will not be the same as what we, *generation X* (1961-1981) see as technology. Similarly what we see as technology is not necessarily the same as generation Y or the Millennials (1982-2004) succeeding us (Strauss & Howe, 1991).

Maureen Hogan (1998) speaks of *the disappearance of technology* where the more we focus on that technology the more it fades into the background becoming embedded in everyday discourse and activity. Consider the phone. Its initial introduction was an exciting novelty allowing new and interesting but nonessential actions. ‘Why would I need to … when I can…?’ questions arose from its traditionalist consortiums indicating a preference to remain in an intellectual or habitual comfort zone rather than embracing a new social habitus. But later, with the new technology’s ubiquitous usage, it transforms from a novelty to a habit and in some cases a necessity. In fact, *the greater its integration into daily practices, the less it is seen as technology at all…The disappearance effect is evident when we consider whether a technology empowers people to do things that would be difficult, even impossible otherwise* (Hogan 1998).

This is very evident in our young learners who do not see things like digital media and mobile devices as anything ground-breaking due to its everyday usage. This is so to such an extent that new words or verbings have come into the language such as ‘google it’ ‘Facebook me’ or ‘tweet it’. The problem seems to lie in the way we view the technology as we are not used to creating an unhealthy gap between teachers and learners.

'Two quite opposite qualities equally bias our minds – habits and novelty.'

Jean Bruyere

With many new technological products being churned out, often in the interest of the profit margin of the technological industry and pushed by consumerism, the products from ipads to the apps they produce '*needs to be subjected to a dose of level-headed scrutiny'.* (Thorbury, S, 2011) http://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/tag/technology/ Whilst working on this project, I found myself being increasing engrossed in the latest technological product to the extent that I could not keep up with the countless products and applications as it is far too impractical to implement on a practical level. I had to stop, take stock and really question whether these products can genuinely enhance teaching and learning, not to mention if there is any evidence-based practice to support this. In addition to my own experiences with the classes I was working with, I found that there were many other *technophiles* jumping ship veering into *technoscepticism,* reflectively concluding that '*You can't motivate students with technology because technology alone isn't motivating. Worse yet, students are almost always ambivalent toward digital tools. While you may be completely jazzed by the interactive whiteboard in your classroom or the wiki that you just whipped up, your kids could probably care less.'* (Ferriter, B 2012) https://smartblogs.com/education/2012/08/17/are-kids-really-motivated-technology/

I feel the greatest challenge in this project has been getting other teachers on board to possibly consider a different pedagogical approach due to this widening gap between two social cultural worlds. As with many of us, strangely more so in teachers, we find ourselves set in our comfort zones as we have become experts in what we know. Learning and trying something new ironically, perhaps could be too taxing for the teacher possibly justifiably considering time constraints and working in a target driven culture. Although this comes at the cost of the learner's learning where '*one of the critical problems in traditional schooling practices is the excessive amount of decontextualized information, indirect and abstract knowledge, and second hand experiences confined in classroom contexts',* (Barab, 2002) and for young learners particularly "*image is ever-increasingly appearing with writing and screens are replacing the page and the book as the dominant media"* (Kress 2008: 344-5).

With the emergence and recognition of a digital IQ (L2 Think Tank) and a 'new habitus of learning' (Kress 2012), not only are there different ways of learning but the digital revolution has seen an evolution of literacy from the traditional sense of the word where literacy tools are becoming embedded systems. Maureen P. Hogan (1998) notes that for most people, writing means typing on a personal computer or a mobile device, reading browsing a newspaper on the internet and researching means accessing a library database via a

modem. Through its embedding, the technological tool has become invisible to the user through its habitual use and semiotic (Gee, 2008) new multimodal literacies (Buckingham, 1993) prevail.

When was the last time you saw a teenager who wasn't looking at their mobile phones?

David Crystal

Consider the amount of time a person, or 'millennials' in particular, are engaged in some sort of digital device, be it updating a status on social networking site or composing a number of text messages. David Crystal's research on text messages exemplifies the impact this has had in literacies where his research broke many stereotypes held about young people. It was found that the earlier you give a child a mobile phone and the more a person texts, the better the literacy scores. Crystal conducted this research over ten years ago before the prevalence of social networking sites where people are now engaged in new literacies more than ever.

There may be a contention that the contentment of such literary devices lacks depth, such as supposedly meaningless Facebook updates. Again, Crystal asserts that there is always a meaning behind a literary construction in addition to finding the opposite where the research showed that the average texts where 20 – 25 words long. Hogan (1998) also notes that the sentences we write describe our social life as surely as the cave paintings of Lascaux or the Mayan calendar tells tales of earlier social worlds. Furthermore, as far as language teaching and learning is concerned, often the communicative competence is often what is assessed as a teaching and learning, more so than the message where the focus of development is at a word, sentence and text level.

I got into trouble a while ago for saying that I thought the internet led to increased literacy - people scolded me about the shocking grammar to be found online - but I was talking about fundamentals: quite simply, you can't use the net unless you can read.

Margaret Atwood

Although there may not be a unanimous definition of what literacy is, we may be able to conclude that literacy has changed from reading and writing printed language (Kress, 2003) to a wide spectrum of communicative practices, (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Again, we see an emergence of two distinct camps, one with a very a traditional, puritan perspective of what literacy is, and should be, and the other with a more liberal view linking literacy to a social and cultural habitus. John Humphrey's view on text messaging illustrates the first camp, asserting texting wrecks 'our' language (2007):

"It is the relentless onward march of texters, the SMS (Short Message Service) vandals who are doing to our language what Gengis Khan did to his neighbours eight hundred years ago. They are destroying it: pillaging our punctuation; savaging our sentences, raping our vocabulary. And they must be stopped".

In ancient times, literacy in its restricted sense was confined to a small elite. With the hope of holding on to this knowledge or power, it appears that this elitism or elitism in general, has not completely subsided across time. One of the definitions of 'New Literacies' is that it is a new socially recognised way of generating, communicating and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation in Discourses (or, as members of Discourses) (Lancshear & Nobel 2006).

If we were to describe the printed media, such as a book, and digital media to an alien who has no concept of either, we would find two very distinctly varied definitions despite both essentially serving the same purpose. One of the key differences between the two types of literacies is that one is linear by its nature and restrictive in its teaching, learning and utilising, ending quite literally at a full stop. It begins from the left and ends on the right. To read more, one has to physically turn the page overleaf and begin the whole process again. If one would like more information on a topic of interest in that book, they would have to find and retrieve another book and begin again and this process of further reading could collate into a library full of these books. That book thus becomes the 'holy grail' of that particular aspect of information. It must be physically carried and cared for wherever it needs to be accessed and referred to. Although, many of these books are disregarded once they have served their purpose.

On the other hand, digitally written information has a completely different dynamic. It is non-linear, as with language learning (Ke & Holland, 2006), exponential and multifaceted in its makeup and design where you have hyperlinks for references and further information, as seen on a Wikipedia entry. It scrolls from top to bottom and another 'page' is a new platform to the entire World Wide Web. A screen of multiple pages or tabs can equate to libraries in printed information. It can be accessed and referred to economically using any mobile device. Moreover, it can be accessed by anyone in any era, updated and commented upon. Anyone anywhere in the world with an idea or opinion can digitally publish their work or views which can be accessed by the same amount of people. Literacy has gone from a historically exclusive skill of the elite to something accessible to the mass population. A comparison can be made with the industrial revolution and the invention of the printing

press with the addition that the power to print has shifted another level from the elite, to the notary to anyone with access to the internet.

Education is communication and dialogue. It is not the transference of knowledge.

Paulo Freire

There have been a variety of very distinct and varied forms of language teaching methodologies and approaches ranging from the Presentation Practice and Production (PPP) modal, task based learning, the discovery method, the lexical approach and Dogma to name but a few. Generally all of the methodologies have been under the umbrella of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or the Communicative approach. CLT is usually characterised as a broad approach to teaching, rather than as a teaching method with a clearly defined set of classroom practices. As such, it is most often defined as a list of general principles or features. One of the most recognised of these lists is David Nunan's (1991) five features of CLT:

 1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.

 2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.

 3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.

 4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.

 5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

These five features are claimed by practitioners of CLT to show that they are very interested in the needs and desires of their learners as well as the connection between the language as it is taught in their class and as it used outside the classroom. Under this broad umbrella definition, any teaching practice that helps learners develop their communicative competence in an authentic context is deemed an acceptable and beneficial form of instruction. Thus, in the classroom, CLT often takes the form of pair and group work requiring negotiation and co-operation between learners, fluency-based activities that encourage learners to develop their confidence, role-plays in which learners practise and

develop language functions, as well as judicious use of grammar and pronunciation focused activities.

In the mid-1990s the Dogma 95 manifesto influenced language teaching through the Dogme language teaching movement, who proposed that published materials can stifle the communicative approach. As such the aim of the Dogme approach to language teaching is to focus on real conversations about real subjects so that communication, or a dialogical pedagogical framework (Bakhtin, M 1991), is the engine of learning. This communication may lead to explanation, but that this in turn will lead to further communication.

Dogme has ten key principles.

1. **Interactivity**: the most direct route to learning is to be found in the interactivity between teachers and students and amongst the students themselves.

2. **Engagement**: students are most engaged by content they have created themselves

3. **Dialogic processes**: learning is social and dialogic, where knowledge is co-constructed

4. **Scaffolded conversations**: learning takes place through conversations, where the learner and teacher co-construct the knowledge and skills

5. **Emergence**: language and grammar emerge from the learning process. This is seen as distinct from the 'acquisition' of language.

6. **Affordances**: the teacher's role is to optimize language learning affordances through directing attention to emergent language.

7. **Voice**: the learner's voice is given recognition along with the learner's beliefs and knowledge.

8. **Empowerment**: students and teachers are empowered by freeing the classroom of published materials and textbooks.

9. **Relevance**: materials (e.g. texts, audios and videos) should have relevance for the learners

10. **Critical use**: teachers and students should use published materials and textbooks in a critical way that recognizes their cultural and ideological biases. (Thornbury, S 2005)

There are three precepts that emerge from the ten key principles.

Conversation-driven teaching

Conversation is seen as central to language learning within the Dogme framework, because it is the "fundamental and universal form of language" and so is considered to be "language at work". Since real life conversation is more interactional than it is transactional, Dogme

places more value on communication that promotes social interaction. Dogme also places more emphasis on a discourse-level (rather than sentence-level) approach to language, as it is considered to better prepare learners for real-life communication, where the entire conversation is more relevant than the analysis of specific utterances. Dogme considers that the learning of a skill is co-constructed within the interaction between the learner and the teacher. In this sense, teaching is a conversation between the two parties. As such, Dogme is seen to reflect Tharp's view that "to most truly teach, one must converse; to truly converse is to teach". (Meddings and Thornbury, 2009)

Materials light approach

The Dogme approach considers that student-produced material is preferable to published materials and textbooks, to the extent of inviting teachers to take a 'vow of chastity' and not use textbooks. (Thornbury, S 2005) Dogme teaching has therefore been criticized as not offering teachers the opportunity to use a complete range of materials and resources (Gill, S 200). However there is a debate to the extent that Dogme is actually anti-textbook or anti-technology. Meddings and Thornbury focus the critique of textbooks on their tendency to focus on grammar more than on communicative competency and also on the cultural biases often found in textbooks, especially those aimed at global markets (Meddings & Thornbury 2009). Indeed, Dogme can be seen as a pedagogy that is able to address the lack of availability or affordability of materials in many parts of the world (Templer, B 2004). Proponents of a Dogme approach argue that they are not so much anti-materials, as pro-learner, and thus align themselves with other forms of learner-centred instruction and critical pedagogy (Thornbury, S 2009).

Emergent language

Dogme considers language learning to be a process where language emerges rather than one where it is acquired. Dogme shares this belief with other approaches to language education, such as task-based learning. Language is considered to emerge in two ways. Firstly classroom activities lead to collaborative communication amongst the students. Secondly, learners produce language that they were not necessarily taught. As such, the teacher's role, in part, is to facilitate the emergence of language. However, Dogme does not see the teacher's role as merely to create the right conditions for language to emerge. The teacher must also encourage learners to engage with this new language to ensure learning takes place. The teacher can do this in a variety of ways, including rewarding, repeating and reviewing it (Meddings & Thorbury, 2009). As language emerges rather than is acquired, there is no need to follow a syllabus that is externally set. Indeed, the content of the syllabus is covered (or 'uncovered') throughout the learning process (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009).

While working on this research project, I tried a variety of teaching methods both independently from the project and in conjunction with it. I found that a monological teaching framework, and more pertinent to language learning, conventional teaching methodologies such as the PPP model and the use of course books were proving to be very

ineffective with the young learners primarily due to the fact that they felt disengaged from the content and materials due to its lack of relevance. There was thus no real dialogical engagement with the subject-matter and materials and hence learning was limited. Indeed tasks were being completed, but only a limited part of the communication (with communicative competence in mind) was a real production of the language which learners would be able to embed and relate to a wide variety of contexts outside of the classroom. There was a separation between a learning task and a learning intention. Focus was on completion of a task as opposed to the learning aim or intention. Learners, consequently were unable to link their language learning to a real life communication be it spoken or the written word as was manifest in their Facebook entries and digital literacies as a whole.
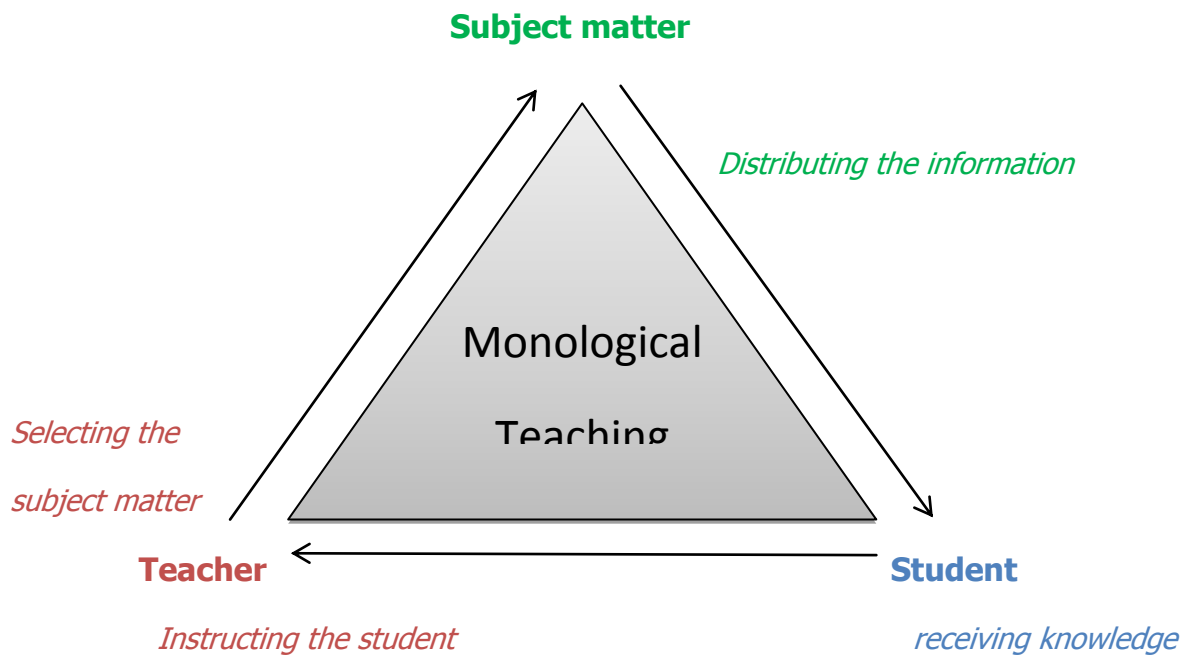
However, the principles and main precepts of the Dogme language teaching as a pedagogical approach interfaced extremely effectively with language learning and digital literacies. The precepts of language teaching being materials light, conversation driven and the use of emergent language, lent itself to the use of New Literacies in particular social networking. Conversations continually take place on social networking site dialogically where ESOL learners share interests and use language to describe, express opinion and comment. An example of this can be a video clip, an article, picture or a statement. Extending this interest and communication in the classroom sees an amalgamation of informal learning and a more structured development in language and communication. Therefore, a classroom and learning as such is no longer restricted to the four walls within a limited time, but it is now a multifaceted learning community. Furthermore, capitalising on the learner's digital IQ saw a polyphonic (Bakhtin, M 1991) approach where learner's digital expertise fed in to the lessons and subject matter resulting in a further increase in engagement and communication. Polyphonic teaching framework was found to engage with all three components to the learning matrix which included the teacher, learner and technology.

Reflecting on this, Bock (2010) put forward a case for a pedagogy of social inclusion drawing on Friere (1972) looking at 'changing horizons, potentials and affiliations of individuals and groups at the margins of society… in order to connect them with groups in mainstream society' (Bock, 2010:32). Incorporating new literacies and social media saw exactly that with young ESOL learners often completely disconnected to mainstream society and often excluded due to language barriers from the negative media.
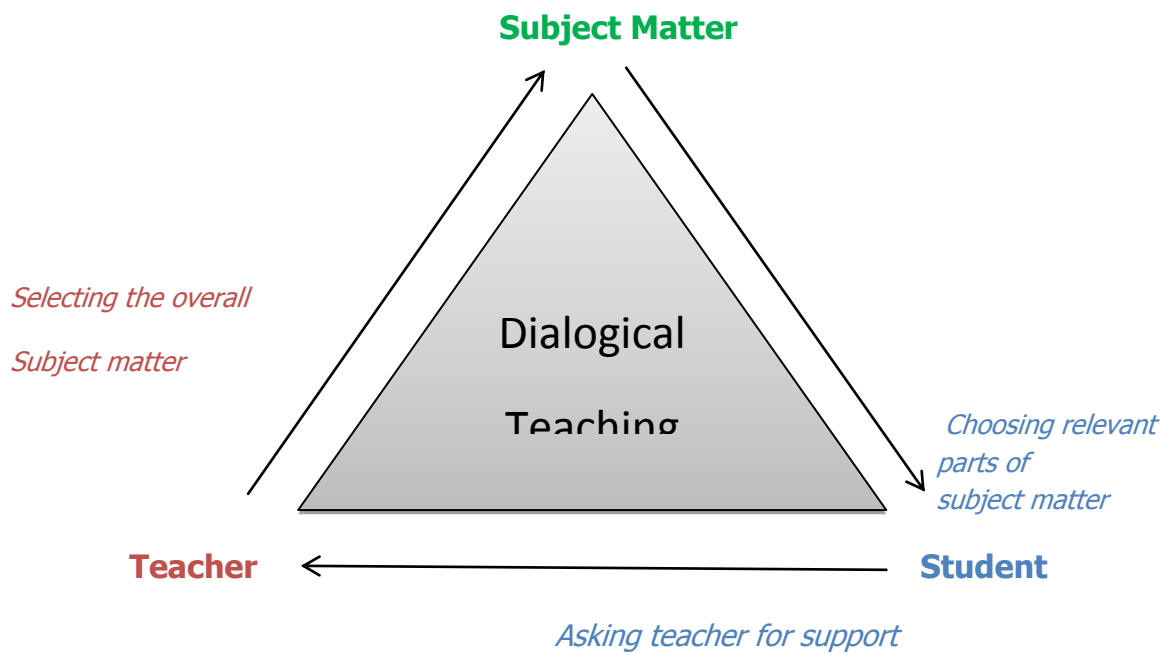
As well as opening the classrooms doors to a world of different modalities, the project allowed learners to recognise and celebrate their own learning expertise gained through their repertoires of practice required to develop mastery in their consumption as well as production and distribution of literacy (Pachler, 2011). In recognising and incorporating the social and cultural practices outside college and interfacing with their learning in class we saw an enhancement of a habitus of learning with very positive results.

With this new habitus, it allowed us to implement other affordances and teaching methodologies such as flip teaching a lot more easily. Flip teaching is a form of blended

learning which encompasses any use of technology to leverage the learning in a classroom, enabling the teacher to spend more time interacting with learners (Bersaghian, 2011). This is commonly done by the teacher creating or selecting a video on a given subject which is viewed by the learners then discussed in class. Alternatively, extension activities of lessons in the form of video or texts are shared on oft-used social media site enabling learners to develop their learning and interests.

Subject matter

Distributing the information

Monological

Teaching

Selecting the

subject matter

Teacher   **Student**

Instructing the student   *receiving knowledge*

Aims and objectives are identified by the teacher as with the subject matter. The student learns what the teacher has planned for him to learn.

Subject Matter

Selecting the overall
Subject matter

Dialogical
Teaching

Choosing relevant
parts of
subject matter

Teacher ← **Student**

Asking teacher for support

Student's knowledge is developed in dialogue with teacher's knowledge. Learning is student-led and in conjunctions to the teacher who acts as a facilitator.

Subject Matter

Selecting the
subject matter

Polyphonic
Teaching

Selecting the
subject matter
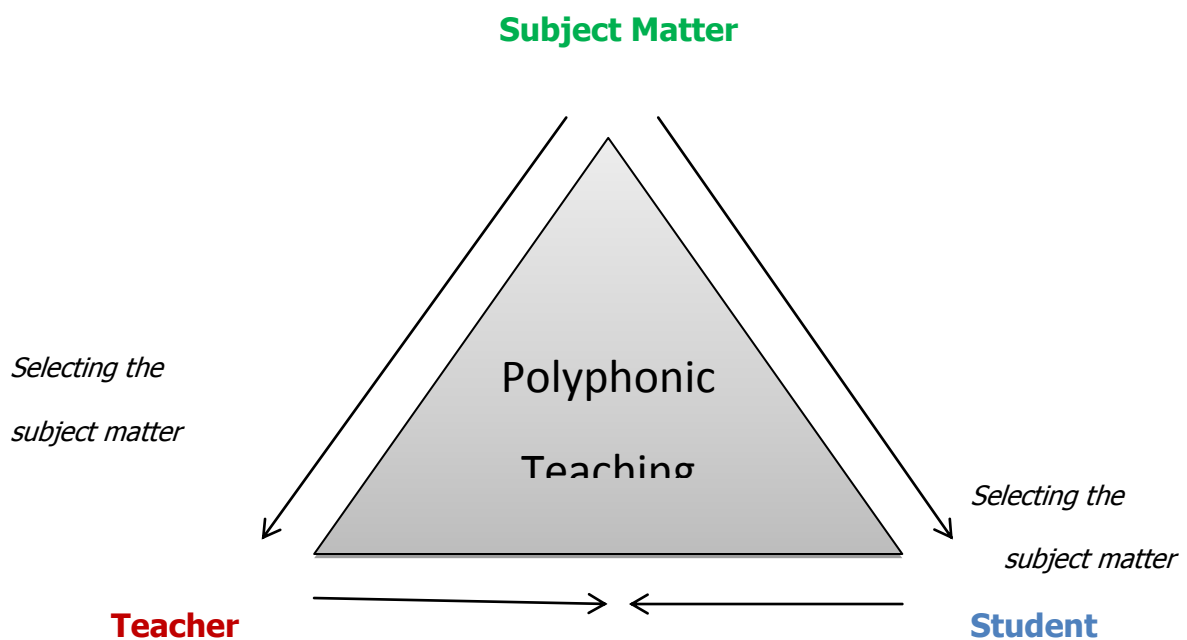
Teacher → ← **Student**

The teacher and student jointly select subject matter. Knowledge is created through an equal exchange of experiences and perceptions.

Out of the slimy mud of words… there spring[s] the perfect order of speech.

T.S. Eliot

The class I was teaching set up a Facebook account for me specifically for the class and teaching and learning purposes. We learnt that Facebook is so much more than vapid status updates. Below is a list of activities and resources that manifested:

1. **Information gathering**: including the use of sites such as Wikipedia, learners asked participants on Facebook such as finding qualitative data.

2. **Remote lectures**: learners tuned into remote lectures and presentations from around the world.

3. **Museums**: Learners followed along with local and international museums, art galleries, exhibits, and more for enriched learning especially before a class trip.

4. **Following politicians** and other public figures and celebrities: Class studied the election and used Facebook to follow politicians on the local and national scale. Learners even had the opportunity to interact with the candidates, posting questions and getting feedback.

5. **Learning games**: Many educational games were used such as those on the Learn English British Council website.

6. **Public polling**: Learners and teachers researched and polled friends and family members by simply asking questions on Facebook.

7. **Applications**: Flashcards, Courses such as those created by the British Council were extremely engaging and effective learning tools.

Projects & Assignments

Facebook was used as a platform for learning where learners did the following:

9.	**Book reviews**: reviewed and reported on books that were assigned in class, sharing what they've learned with the rest of the class.

10. **Journal entries**: learners posted regular journal entries to share with the class via a classroom Page or Group.

11. **Exam practice**: Learners prepared for exams by teacher posting exam practice activities on Facebook.

12. **Reading summaries**: After each reading assignment, learners posted a summary of what they've just covered.

13. **Broadcasting college news**: Learners took on a classroom journalism project to report on campus news, events, and more.

Sharing

29. **Archived videos**: Important lectures, slides, and more shared and saved on Facebook.

30. **Document class trips**: classes shared the tasks of taking photos, notes, and more to share in a Facebook report on the activity.

31. **Highlighting vocabulary**: vocabulary review was studied by posting words and definitions, such as word of the day or vocabulary learnt in class

32. **Archived discussions**: classroom slides, discussions, and more were archived so that learners can refer to it if they missed class or need to review.

33. **Posting educational content**: Teachers posted educational videos and links for concepts that are currently being discussed in class.

Collaboration & Discussion

39. **Feedback session on assignments and activities**: Learners were asked about what they thought about a new assignment or activity on Facebook.

40. **Writing workshops:** Learners participated in writing workshops with peer review and teacher oversight.

41. **Practiced language with native speakers**: learners connected classroom with English speakers from around the world developing reading and writing skills.

42. **Encouraged online participation**: quieter learners came out of their shell by participating in Facebook discussions.

43. **Taking classroom polls**: used for comprehension questions for a various activity in class and online.

44. **Guest speakers**: Facebook was used to track down old students and professionals where learners were able to ask questions.

45. **Students discussed work through Notes**: On Facebook Notes, learners published their work, tag classmates, and get feedback on what they've written.

46. **Homework help**: learners asked for help on homework by posting on a class Facebook where teachers can get involved as well.

Classroom Management & Organization

52. **Post events**: classroom event and important dates such as exams were set on your learners' calendars by creating a Facebook event.

53. **Positive updates**: When a certain class or group did particularly well, this was celebrated and acknowledged with a Facebook status message.

54. **Continued discussions**: discussions held on Facebook and continued in class and vice versa.

55. **Reminding learners to come to class**: Learners who were frequently late or absent were reminded to make it on time to class.

The result of using social media i.e. Facebook with my learners was a lot better than I expected. Its initial intent was to engage with the learners harnessing their opportunities to use language on a different domain. What also manifested was the way students learn and engage with literacies. As mentioned above, a dialogical teaching methodology was developed which further engaged learners and well as exposing them to more language as illustrated in these case studies:

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1. In my Level 1 young learners class, the majority of learners were young men between the ages of 17 and 19. The predominant interest for these learners was video games with which they spent most of their free time playing. If they were not engaged in playing them, they were researching how to pass a particular level either by reading a walkthrough or watching a YouTube clip. Much conversation was taking place in and out of class (on Facebook) concentrating on this particular game.

I found a TED talk by Daphne Bavelier, a brain scientist entitled 'Your brain and computer games' which I posted on Facebook with a comment: 'It's official: computer games are good for you. Check this out!' Tired of hearing all of the negativity surrounding computer games, all of the learners viewed the formally presented TED talk noting all the points on how research has shown that playing games such as Call of Duty substantially activates different parts of the brain whereby the player gains and develops many different skills than a non-player. Subsequently, the learners were exposed to formal language, a requirement of the Level 1 examination, including vocabulary, phrases and particular aspects of grammar, formal presentations skills, listening for comprehension and to respond and many other aspects of language learning which were capitalised on in class. Through this, learners also had an extensive debate online with other people on Facebook who had also viewed the talk but disagreed with its findings. This thematic communication continued in class which was

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welcomed by learners and myself, and gave me enough materials to cover the requirements from the syllabus and that needed for the speaking and listening, reading and writing exam.

2. I set up a task for the learners in which they had to prepare for the Level 1 Trinity ESOL examination. In one of the four parts of the exam, learners have to prepare a presentation describing a process using the passive tense, sequencing and a variety of other linguistic features. I asked the learners to create a YouTube clip describing how to complete one part of a computer game they were playing. The learners were already adept at using YouTube, how to create and upload videos, much more than I was. I supported the learners with the language requirements which they had to utilise in their three minute YouTube clip. The clip required them to use a range of literacies, for example, recording the description, adding subtitles in describing the video.

3. A young learner from an entry 2 ESOL class addicted to texting. This learner was from a non-literate background unable to read or write in his language. He had been here for three years. A lot of his literacy competence was gained using digital media such as mobile technology. In fact, the mobile phone he used had a function called predictive text. This is where the phone predicts the word you are going to write after you have written the first few letters in addition to helping with the spelling. Furthermore, with this particular phone, the letters as they are typed in would drop upon the line allowing making it very visual and vivid in its construction. Because of the frequency of this particular learner in reading and composing texts, and the heightened addictive exposure to literacy and language, his ability to spell words correctly was far above average and would consistently score above 95% in literacy test especially in spelling.

On the whole, I found that embracing digital media, learners' naïve expertise (Pachler 2011), maximising exposure to language based on learners' interests and by using a dialogical teaching approach such as the Dogma language teaching approach, learners are essentially exponentially exposed to and engaged in learning the language where learning is immersive, situated and embodied (Gee 2011). In addition to this, the social media platform allows an extensive and authentic platform of assessment where I can see the learner's competency in language production and the success of lessons focusing on a particular language point.

As there was a heightened exposure and engagement to the language, the rate of learning was drastically increased with the learners participating in the project as was predicted. In fact, the findings indicated that the more a learner engaged in the digital literacies within social media, the quicker they were able to learn especially with regards to the reading and writing skills. A fourth case study illustrates this:

4. Student A, an eighteen year old from Pakistan who had been in the country for three years. He had completed some education in his country but had no formal schooling here in the U.K. other than attending ESOL Entry 2. He came into my class at Entry 3. He was quite

disengaged as a learner and found it difficult to focus in class and lacked study skills. He was an avid user of Facebook prior to starting Entry 3, although he did not have any interest in integrating with British culture including films, television, music, and also did not have many English speaking friends where he could practise speaking in English. He was thus quite isolated and limited in his social integration with people from a similar cultural background.

His Facebook feeds and friends were similarly limited until we opened a Facebook group exclusively for the class. All nineteen learners from the class joined the Entry 3 / Level 1 Facebook group and had 'friended' each other. Instantly A's social network had grown and he started communicating online with other learners. As the lessons were based on learners' interests, I was able to engineer specific materials in the form of articles, clips and questions which would engage A's interests and thus expose him to the language. A went from never reading anything in English outside of class to reading at least three articles a week and viewing one video clip ranging from three to ten minutes. In addition, A was able to review things that had been covered in class including notes, pictures of board work taken in class, and learnt a minimum of one word per day formally through the 'word of the day' status update which I had posted. He also messaged or emailed members of his class on a daily basis where previously the only time he would write English would be for a task in class. If A was struggling with a particular aspect of grammar for example, either picked up by the teacher or which he expressed himself, he would complete an online activity to gain more proficiency. This was then monitored by his language production in class and online.

Seeing an improvement and enjoying the collaboration and engagement, A felt encouraged to engage using his English further and started 'liking' pages of interest such as cricket news where he would receive updates on all the latest cricket news in his newsfeed.

A successfully completed his Entry 3 examinations, including reading, writing, speaking and listening in six months, whereas the course usually takes a year. Furthermore, he completed the Level 1 speaking and listening module in six months including the reading and writing exams which he took as an additional option recommended by the teacher due to his accelerated progress.

However, although most of the learners use social media, predominantly Facebook, there were a small number of learners who did not enjoy using social media. In one case, there was one learner who was from a very strict family background where her parents did not allow her to have a Facebook account. Another learner had absolutely no interest in integrating with others online or outside of class. This did put these learners at quite a disadvantage as not only were they not able to participate as much as the other learners but their exposure to English was consequently limited. That said, over the three years I have been using digital media with three sets of classes with an average of seventeen learners, these were the only two learners who did not engage. There was also a group of learners who did not engage in digital media, specifically social media, as they did not see a need. This most commonly was due to the fact they did not know anyone who they could 'friend' often due to them being new to the country. Although this was easily solved as the learners when entering the class, they had a new and diverse network of other members in the class where a learning community was established.

The other drawback of social media in terms of literacy and language development is that most of what is written and read is often limited to a few sentences affecting cognitive function and an inability to read longer text as social media focuses on sensation as opposed to cognition (Greenfield, 2011). However, as James Gee 2010, highlights, language and communication are heavily dictated by the discourse community which can be developed, altered, accommodated and essentially engaged by groups of people depending on the situational need. This can be illustrated with the TED talk talking about the benefits of computer games which was a formal address but learners had no hesitation in listening to comprehend and respond to it, exemplifying situated learning (Gee 2010) and even Krashen's input hypothesis (Krashen, S 1977). In addition, if these sentences were totalled to a number of sentences read per day, it could equate to an equivalent of a couple of pages per day. In terms of the brain's cognitive development, there is no conclusive evidence to support the apprehensions as it is too soon to say (Crystal, D 2011).

Traditionally the book has been central and e technology marginal. With young people, it is the other way round. 'I can read anywhere.' The two spheres, I think, should carry equal weight in addition to there being a disappearance of that technology where only literacy remains. But this cannot be done if there remains an alienation to technology without recognising its language and literacy content.