Chapter 6
Integrating Digital Literacies Into an Undergraduate Course:
Inclusiveness Through Use of ICTs

Meke I. Kapepo
University of Cape Town, South Africa

Tabisa Mayisela
University of Cape Town, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to share a successful case of how ICT was used for educational inclusiveness by students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds. This chapter further illuminates how students could be supported in acquiring digital and academic literacy skills, within a discipline context. Lecturers often find it difficult to define digital literacy beyond the use of ICT in a classroom, or understand how students' acquisition of digital literacy skills could be supported or further expanded into students' academic literacy skills. This piece of work therefore, provides insight to academics, researchers and students, on how: (1) ICT could be integrated into the curriculum; (2) digital literacy could be embedded into the curriculum; and (3) students could be supported in acquiring graduate attributes and skills that make them fit for the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

The ubiquitous use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in the knowledge-driven business world, poses a dire need of graduates with the necessary literacies that deem them fit for such workplaces. It is therefore important to investigate how higher education could possibly equip students with these literacies, particularly, on how the curriculum could be designed to potentially foster these literacies. ICT integration into the curriculum is an overarching phenomenon in higher education, and literature on this demonstrates the shifting in meaning of integration, ranging from the use of computers

and networks as tools for teaching and learning, to the appropriation of ICT to enhance different pedagogical approaches and student learning experiences (Venkatesh, Croteau, & Rabah, 2014). Recent studies further demonstrate how emerging technologies are being used in South Africa to enhance student learning in higher education (Bharuthram & Kies, 2013; Bozalek et al., 2013; Cloete, 2014; Czerniewicz & Brown, 2013). Irrespective of ICT being integrated into the curriculum, there is limited literature on how higher education fosters the development of students' digital literacies that are required for learning and subsequently, the workplace. Bozalek et al (2014) confirm that there is a disjuncture between curriculum design and what is required of working professionals, hence a recommendation to incorporate authentic tasks to promote contextually relevant learning. It is in this context that educational researchers have increasingly motivated for the integration of these digital literacies into the curriculum (Kirkwood, 2006; Beetham et al. 2009). Brown and Mayisela (2015) suggest that one of the possible means of addressing this, is by having Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) broadening their conceptualization of digital literacy beyond computer or technology literacy because the concept of digital literacy "encompasses a range of practices, including computer literacy, information literacy, media literacy, communication literacy, visual literacy and technology literacy" (p.16).

According to the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC, 2014), digital literacies are "those capabilities, which fit an individual for living, learning and working in a digital society" (JISC, 2014). The Open University, UK, describes digital literacy to include the "ability to find and use information (otherwise known as information literacy) but goes beyond this to encompass communication, collaboration and teamwork, social awareness in the digital environment, understanding of e-safety and creation of new information" (Open University, 2012). Integrating digital literacies into the curriculum therefore, implies that the curriculum is more likely to foster authentic and multimodal learning experiences (Chase & Laufenberg, 2011). The literature suggests that students have a greater opportunity to take control of their own learning, and are better able to acquire academic and digital literacies iteratively, when these are embedded in practical tasks made available through authentic projects. For instance, related literature (such as Kirkwood, 2006) on developing students' digital information literacy skills suggest that these skills be developed in the context of the course or discipline because that allows students an opportunity to learn how to "frame pertinent questions with which to evaluate and select appropriate sources" for the course. Furthermore, research conducted by Ng (2012) on teaching digital literacy to pre-service teachers at a university in Australia revealed that students acquired technology and cognitive skills, and also created useful artefacts that they could use for their future teaching when placed in schools. As Brown and Mayisela (2015) noted; there are few emerging pockets of work around digital literacy in some South African HEIs. Hence, there may be limited research on the integration of digital literacies into the curriculum in South African HEIs. The purpose of this chapter is to make a contribution to this effect.

An approach of integrating digital literacies into an undergraduate curriculum to develop and support students' academic and digital literacy skills is presented. It does so by discussing how ICT can be used to enhance educational inclusiveness of first year higher education students who hail from predominantly less privileged socio-economic backgrounds. A project based authentic task was developed to teach e-commerce concepts to a group of undergraduate students in the faculty of Commerce. The course provides an introduction to information systems where information systems are described from a business perspective. Teaching electronic commerce concepts to students with limited knowledge and almost no prior exposure to ICTs is challenging because at times students cannot relate to theory concepts explained in class. These challenges stem from students' backgrounds and their education (with less-resourced

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