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Electronic literacy practices in English teaching: a case study

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ABSTRACT

This research is a Qualitative Case Study which investigates the electronic literacy practices of one English teacher and two Grade 10 English classes in a Muslim High school outside of Johannesburg. This study seeks to find out what the forms of electronic literacy used in the classroom are and for what purposes these are used. It is also aimed at investigating how the students in the English classroom engage with these forms of electronic literacies and whether or not gender plays a role in their engagement.

This study draws on work in New Literacy Studies, particularly theories of literacy as social practice, Multiliteracies and multimodality as well as current research in the field of electronic literacy. Although there have been numerous studies in the fields of electronic literacy and digital literacy in developed contexts like the United Kingdom and Australia, there is a paucity of research in South Africa in the field and particularly in the area of electronic literacy in the English classroom.

The main sources of data were: classroom observations from which field notes were created and group interviews with the students as well as an interview with the English teacher. The findings of this study reveal that being electronically literate in the English classroom means having access to sophisticated forms of technology not only inside the classroom but also outside as well as having a certain degree of fluency around computer use. The forms of electronic literacy used by the English teacher and the purposes for which they were used demonstrate his pedagogy in English and the social forces that shape the production of this pedagogy. The research shows an expansion of the teacher's role in the English classroom as he is no longer only 'a mediator of learning' but a mediator of technology. The status of the text has also changed as the 'disappearance' of print-based texts from the classroom was noted with the foregrounding of visual texts and hypertexts. It was found that the students on the whole were engaged with the technology used in the classroom and expressed a preference for its integration into their lessons as opposed to the traditional 'reading and writing' practices. Additionally, students' engagement did not vary according to gender.