



Affect Landscape Teaching in Portsmouth: A Literary Immersion Experience with Digital Technologies

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Abstract

What role does literature play in today's society? In the digital age, the new literary paradigm encourages the development of competent readers in an immersive learning environment. This study aims to provide scientific knowledge on how teacher-researchers develop their literary education teaching practices by incorporating ICT in European universities. Method: The constructivist paradigm supports the research process with a qualitative multiple case study methodology. The first case is linked to the application of Affect Theory in the teaching of Holocaust Literature through the creation of an immersive environment. Results: Three blocks of descriptive analysis bring together the corpus of data according to a triangulation of results between the dimensions of territory, subjects and method. The protocol designed includes interviews, life stories in Spanish and English; direct observations of teaching practices, audio recordings, participation and documentation. Discussion: Given the conceptual difference between immersion in the literary and technological spheres, it is found that the PDI has progressed in a literary experience that not only evolves in a multiple immersive space but also manages to equip its hermeneutic community with critical thinking, thanks to the emotional involvement capable of engaging them in the reality of the Holocaust.

Keywords: virtual learning environments, literary education, educational innovation, teacher training, civic competence.

1. Introduction

This research is designed to investigate and interpret how digital technologies are being incorporated into the teaching of literature across universities and colleges within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Globally, the academic discourse already highlights a substantial range of innovative pedagogical approaches—spanning from the use of traditional print materials to highly immersive virtual environments like the metaverse. This technological shift is not merely changing tools; it is actively generating new communicative forms (discursive genres) and fundamentally altering the ways students read and compose texts (reading and writing modalities), thereby defining the skills of a modern, digitally competent literary reader (Colomer, 2001; Eco, 2002; Giusti, 2015; Martínez Carratalá & Hernández Delgado, 2020; Nussbaum, 2006; Scolari, 2013). Research efforts have been concentrated across two significant scholarly domains: pedagogy concerning the instruction of literature and the emergent "new learning ecologies" that form the foundation of immersive digital spaces, such as virtual or augmented realities (Valverde et al., 2015). The "new canon" of literary education advances the notion that students must engage with literature through a mindful, deliberate experience. The ultimate goal of this approach is to cultivate active and engaged citizens who are adept at navigating and contributing within these flexible, immersive environments. The central, unifying element in this process, the key to comprehension, is the spatial dimension. This 'space' effectively unites the learning experience by allowing a group of interpreters, a hermeneutic community, to share an immersive narrative experience (Ryan, 2004). In this context, the application of Affect Theory in the teaching of Holocaust literature has been selected as a case study, analysing the valuation of a natural learning environment and its transposition to the pedagogical act in an immersive digital environment.

2. Method

The study employed a constructivist case study methodology because it was the most logical way to define the research group and explore the topic. The fundamental reason for choosing this method is rooted in the belief that the reality under investigation—specifically, the teaching of literature with new technologies—is not a fixed, objective truth. Instead, this reality exists solely in the shared understanding (intersubjectivity) of all people involved: the teachers, students, and the researcher.



Therefore, the research focuses on this "constructed reality," meaning the unique interpretations, observations, and personal experiences of each participant (informant). This approach makes it possible to gain a deep and comprehensive understanding of the educational phenomenon by considering and reconciling the multiple viewpoints that emerge.

The research used a qualitative cut-off point to carefully define the criteria for selecting its case studies. The selected cases primarily feature university-level teaching experiences that prominently involve literature, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and immersive pedagogical methods. Data has been collected with a significant humanistic component: mastery of strategies, the ability to interpret literary texts, and the capacity to create literary artefacts in an immersive environment. To guarantee scientific rigour, the study employed holistic processes, utilized multiple data sources (such as reviewing documents, direct observation, personal participation, and general reading), and ensured data triangulation—comparing and cross-referencing information from these various sources to confirm consistency and validity.

The research focuses on a highly specific and unique subject: the application of Affect Theory within a course on Holocaust Literature at the University of Portsmouth in the United Kingdom. Because of this distinctive nature, the study is categorized as an intrinsic case study, meaning its value lies in exploring this one particular, unique situation, rather than generalizing its findings to other contexts. Furthermore, this case is also longitudinal, meaning it involves the study of the phenomenon over an extended period of time.

3. Results

The Centre for Literary Studies at the University of Portsmouth is devoted to advancing research and innovation in the field of English literature. Its work employs diverse theoretical frameworks, including eco-criticism and spatial and environmental theory, to analyze how elements like landscape and physical surroundings influence both culture and national identity as reflected in literature. In particular, the Affect Theory approach has been applied to affective landscapes in literature in the module on Holocaust Studies. The results obtained have been divided into three blocks of descriptive analysis, covering the dimensions of territory, subjects, and method.

The **initial section** of the study, titled "Territory", was designed to establish the context for applying Affect Theory and its corresponding teaching practices. This contextual analysis was performed by examining two broad dimensions: 1-the institutional dimension: this looked at categories related to the university's operational framework, specifically its institutional identity and the degree to which it is influenced by European teaching standards (such as those within the EHEA); 2-the curricular dimension: this focused on the educational content itself, assessing categories related to the development of key student proficiencies, including reading, literary, digital, and civic skills. In the **second section**, the perspectives of the informants with a teaching dimension were analysed, developing the theoretical framework of reference for teachers (PDI) and nine subcategories that explore different aspects of the learning process. In the **third section**, the learning environment of Literary Education with ICT has been addressed. It has been deemed appropriate to adopt the term territory, which encompasses the concept of social value, to indicate the learning environment of the immersive literary experience. Two categories are distinguished: learning places and immersive spaces, which includes the subcategory of the hermeneutic community. Here, the technological dimension is highlighted in terms of improving the teaching-learning process, teacher and student training, and the description of ICT equipment. The cognitive-emotional dimension completes the section.

To collect the data, a protocol was used that included interviews and life stories in two languages, Spanish and English, as well as direct observations of teaching practices, audio recordings, participation and documentation. These results have important implications for the development of competent readers in an immersive learning environment, demonstrating the effectiveness of incorporating ICT into literary education.

3. Discussion

The data confirms that the design of learning spaces is centered on the student experience. These spaces, when equipped with the necessary technological resources, can be effectively transformed into powerful learning environments.

The teaching researcher utilized technology to create an immersive understanding of Holocaust literature. This "immersive journey" began with the careful selection and sequencing of various media,



including novels, memoirs, films, and documentaries, which were integrated into the module's plan. Similarly, the students' experience began with a deep immersion into the texts, starting with novel reading. The teaching researcher (**PDI**) initially aimed to spark interest by introducing a real-life account of a teenager in a concentration camp, followed by a graphic novel to visually convey the horrors of the Holocaust. This eight-week period of reading immersion provided dedicated time for critical reflection, class debate, and collaborative shared reading.

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) has significantly broadened the learning opportunities for the hermeneutic community (the group of interpreters/students). These tools allow them to engage with texts and content by listening, watching, searching for information, and communicating, all within both structured (formal) and unstructured (informal) learning environments. With this foundation in place, the now well-prepared community has moved on to a deeper phase of literary immersion. This phase includes engaging with supplementary materials like films and documentaries, and crucially, participating in a seminar with a Holocaust survivor.

The intense emotional involvement experienced during this entire process is proving vital; it is actively laying the groundwork for the students to develop into mature and capable literary readers.

ICT continues to be present in the assessment phase: a collaborative learning experience with a creative approach. Each group of three or four students has collaborated on the creation of a creative portfolio based on an additional text in which they can express their opinions, acting as free citizens and taking on the role of makers, following the guidelines of the Do It Yourself philosophy.

In short, we see the creation of an immersive learning environment, where a collaborative, dynamic and immersive literary experience has been developed through the calibrated and integrated use of technologies.

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