

## Teaching digital literacy (a review)

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As the information age expands, so language learners are doing more and more learning online. However, they are not just learning how to use a foreign language. They are learning how to use a new methodology, online learning, to build their knowledge of the language and develop language learning skills to work with this relatively recent tool. Nik Peachey specialises in developing online activities for language learning that students and teachers can use in class or in distance learning. One of his recent online courses, delivered in an infographic, is about how to develop study skills for the 21st century. It explores the factors that influence existing study skills and encourages students to take part in online research into effective study skills techniques. Key skills developed include the ability to study and research online, the ability to read and understand digital information, the ability to check the credibility of online information, the students' ability to carry out online research and to

represent their findings visually and the ability to extract information from research and create informative text based on their findings. There is a teacher's presentation, a student's version of the presentation, and an infographic, all of which can be accessed online. The course offers a model that can be used by teachers, by students researching information and creating texts, and also for teacher training programmes.

Each programme is provided as a lesson plan. The lesson plan for *Studying How to Study*, as Peachey entitles it, contains seven tasks. The first four can be used independently as classroom reading or discussion activities. They involve a discussion task to get students thinking about the topic, a reading task to develop skills in scanning texts for specific information, and a reading task encouraging students to identify and summarise key points in a text. A follow-up discussion task allows students to exchange information on key things they have

learned from the text. The last three tasks are research tasks involving online investigation and take longer. First is a research task, guiding students through the process of researching and corroborating online information. Then follows a research task, which guides students through the process of creating research and producing and disseminating results. A final writing task helps students summarise what they have learned. The basic text for study is an infographic presenting information into research into study skills and methods, and is highly visual and accessible.

The *Lesson Plan* which follows is clear, comprehensive and detailed and consists of the questions which the teacher can use in class to help the students focus. The fact-finding reading scanning exercise asking what different figures in the infographic refer to is especially interesting. It was slightly alarming for me as a teacher to learn that 81% of students check emails during lessons and in a 70-minute lecture students actually spend an average of 17 minutes on their computers doing non-lecture related activities. Students are asked to find study tips in the infographic and to summarise them. There are ten. The study tips are available online at <https://payhip.com/b/oxeb>.

An important skill in using online resources for information is developing the student's ability to question and check information. Part of this is learning how to access the online references

behind the research. First, Peachey recommends students exchange information in small groups, raising issues they doubt or that they feel need further corroboration. He suggests the students check at least five facts in the infographic (particularly those they are doubtful about) and research the original reports to check that the factual information has been used accurately. He asks the students to make notes on what they learn, including the URL, the name and date of the publication or resource, the name of the author and the student's assessment of the credibility of the information. The students can then create their own research questionnaire, and Peachey offers free downloadable templates in the lesson plan. Students can also create their own infographics to present the results, the templates for which Peachey once again provides. The lesson ends with a writing task in which the students reflect on what they have learned. However, as Peachey recommends, this is not just an essay but an article for a blog or a student magazine. In other words, the outcome is practical. Peachey also gives advice on how to structure the text with an introduction, recommendations on how to improve study skills, things to avoid doing and how to write a conclusion. Also, he reminds us, never forget to credit any sources of information you include in your article.

The lesson plan is written for teachers and students of English but can be adapted to any language and

to any academic discipline, including science. It is bound to increase study skills efficiency and is incredibly easy for the teacher to access and use.

Peachey's digital lesson plans don't just cover digital study skills. They also include language teaching lesson plans on a variety of topics at all levels. In his most recent publication, *Street Art Project*, Ana Maria Casoria has produced an eight-slide detailed lesson plan with an infographic helping EFL secondary school children learn and use descriptive adjectives. Once again, the lesson plan is presented as a project involving online research and the topic is how people describe adolescents (i.e. secondary school children).

Although the lesson plan is aimed at students of English as a foreign language, it can easily be adapted for students of other languages than English. To begin with, the class divides into groups and each group has to think of either positive or negative adjectives to describe adolescents. Next, students in the positive groups pair off with students in the negative groups and compare notes. Then they look at photos of a teenager displaying various moods and try and match their adjectives to the images.

This is a good opportunity for the teacher to correct vocabulary and also to teach relevant grammatical differences, such as the difference between *bored* and *boring*, for example.

A discussion follows where the students in groups talk about what adjectives are commonly used to describe adolescents, who describes them and how they feel. This is where the street art comes in and where the students go online. The teacher asks the students to go online to research street art sites (Ana Maria's lesson plan provides the URLs, all free access) and find images to answer questions listed in the lesson plan. For example, '*Find a street art image which illustrates how adults see adolescents*'. The students research and then create their own short online presentation, using the images they have found online, to describe their view of themselves and of how others see adolescents. When they have finished, they show their presentations to their group or to the class and discuss the results. This is a wonderful opportunity for students to discuss real life images, learn to understand and use adjectives in a dynamic way, and use their online skills as a learning tool. Above all, it helps them learn about themselves, their community and about adolescence and how people see it – so it feels active and real. It takes the language out of the academic box it is so often confined to in the classroom and allows it to breathe the air of the outside world.

Nik Peachey doesn't just deal in vocabulary. He also uses his online lesson plans to work on grammar differences. His *A Girl by the Window* lesson plan practises the difference between the

present perfect continuous tense '*I have been looking for a job*' and the present perfect simple tense '*I have found a job abroad*'. The topic features a young Asian girl in a shopping mall at night standing by a shop window, her face reflected in the window pane. Students have the opportunity to discuss her past, how she lives now and her future, as well as how she feels and what she is thinking about. The students are also encouraged to use online resources such as brainstorming apps to share ideas, word cloud apps to search for words, and even a messaging

thread that they can continue and complete. If as a teacher you are into online resources and your students almost certainly are, I cannot recommend these lesson plans too much. They are inexpensive, clear, stimulating and encourage online research and the development of critical awareness and presentation skills. The perfect antidote for the dreaded 'Friday Afternoon' class. Above all, the adaptation of a communicative methodology and task-oriented learning to an online format opens up a whole new methodology of learning appropriate to our digital information age.