

Title

Contemporary Issues - Using Technology for Discussion, Debate, and Problem Solving in the Middle School Curriculum

Target Audience

This course is intended for pre-service and in-service teachers of grades 5-8.

Prerequisites

To successfully participate and complete the assignments in this course, the learner must:

- Be familiar with taking an online course or have completed the PBS “Practice Learning Online with TeacherLine” course.
- Be familiar with middle school educational content

Course Description

Our role as educators requires us to not only give students information, but to give them the skills and tools necessary to acquire and decipher information on their own. The study of current events in the classroom is a perfect way for students to practice identifying relevant information, analyzing opposing views, forming opinions, and expressing themselves clearly. This course is designed to give educators strategies for incorporating current events, controversial issues, and pop culture into the curriculum, as well as ways to use technology to help students develop discussion, debate, and problem-solving skills. Learners will explore technology-based activities and lessons that focus on contemporary issues. As a final task, they will create their own current events lesson plan that uses technology to foster understanding, discussion, and debate.

Instructor/Facilitator

See instructor/facilitator sheet

Credits

To be determined by college or university

Learner Outcomes

Learners will:

- Understand how contemporary issues—mainly current events, controversial issues, and pop culture—can be integrated into the curriculum to help meet standards.
- Be able to find resources for teaching current events, discussing controversial issues, and incorporating pop culture into their lesson plans.
- Learn how to use technology to help students develop discussion, debate, and problem-solving skills.
- Create a curriculum unit around a contemporary issue, containing technology lesson plans and activities.

Outline of Content and Assignments

After previewing the documents in the Course Information area, learners will proceed to Course Content to complete the following six sessions, working through each session in order. Throughout the sessions, learners are asked to articulate their ideas in various forms: reflections on their ideas and experiences in

their online journals; online discussions that allow learners to glean information from other learners' experiences, and written assignments that are submitted to the course facilitator.

This course is designed to address ISTE's *Educational Technology Standards and Performance Indicators for All Teachers*. These standards define the fundamental concepts, knowledge, skills, and attitudes for applying technology in educational settings.

Session 1: Contemporary Issues in the Classroom

Learners will:

- Define their professional goals and expectations for this course in the online journal.
- Explain their prior knowledge and classroom experiences in incorporating contemporary issues into the classroom.
- Explore and discuss the benefits and challenges of incorporating current events, controversial issues, and pop culture into the curriculum, as well as their personal views on their place in the classroom.

View video

- "Bringing Contemporary Issues into the Classroom"

Read

- "Why Teach Current Events?"
- "Tips for Teaching Controversial Issues" from PBS
- "Controversial Issues in the Classroom"
- "Controversial Issues in Education"
- "Controversial Issues: Concerns for Policy Makers".
- "Shakespeare vs. Teletubbies: Is There a Role for Pop Culture in the Classroom?"

Write in the online journal

- Reflect on professional development goals and expectations for this course.
- Reflect on prior knowledge and experiences with incorporating contemporary issues in instruction.
- Respond to the following: Can you remember class discussions that helped form your initial opinions about certain controversial issues? Did your point of view evolve or change throughout your education?

Participate in the online discussion

- Go to the discussion board and introduce themselves in the "Virtual Cafe" discussion forum.
- Respond to the following: Should teachers express their own views when discussing controversial issues with their students? Will the teacher's point of view skew the students' opinions?
- Respond to the following: Students may love it, but are there disadvantages to including pop culture in the classroom? Can lessons that include pop culture actually meet state standards or prepare students for standardized testing?

Complete activities and assignments

- Course Pre-Evaluation Survey
- Explore Web sites
 - "Interactive Publishing: CNN - September 11 Digital Collection"
 - "CNN.com: Gunmen Open Fire at Colorado School; Some Students Trapped"

Additional Resources (not required)

- George Lucas and the Power of Myth from PBS American Masters
- James Brown: Life and Times from PBS American Masters



- Woody Guthrie – Ain't Got No Home from PBS American Masters
- Children and Media from PBS Parents
- Get Your Web license from PBS Kids

Session 2: The Impact of the Internet

Learners will:

- Explore and discuss the effects of the Internet on student learning.
- Reflect upon personal teaching experiences.
- Examine Web sites, activities, and lesson plans related to current events, controversial issues, and pop culture, and consider their use in the classroom curriculum.
- Explore and evaluate the 5-Step Decision-Making Process, learn how to apply this process to teach students to develop problem-solving skills, and reflect on its application to his or her teaching.
- Begin planning for the final project.

View video

- "Talking About Contemporary Issues in the Classroom"
- "Using Decisions, Decisions Online"

Read

- "The Net Generation and the School"

Write in the online journal

- Respond to the following: Do you ever discuss issues, such as the ones presented in the video, with your students? What do you talk about? What can you do to facilitate meaningful discussions in the classroom?
- Respond to the following: Take a moment to jot down your thoughts on the decision-making process you have just read about. How could the incorporation of this into your teaching help students make more thoughtful decisions? How could these strategies be applied by students outside of school?

Participate in the online discussion

- Respond to the following: How has the Internet changed the way students think, talk, and learn? Think about the article "The Net Generation and the School" and the students you saw in the video.

Complete activities and assignments

- Explore Web page examples from PBS:
 - Frontline's Teacher Center
 - NOW: For Educators
 - Wide Angle: Global Classroom
- Explore Web sites
 - NewsHour Extra
 - ABCNews.com
 - CNN Student News
 - Twenty-Five Great Ideas for Teaching Current Events
 - Learners Online Weekly Online Lessons
 - Decisions, Decisions Online
 - The Media Awareness Network for Teachers
 - Popular Culture Investigations: Fish Out of Water
 - Pop Music Reaches Way Down
 - Cinema: How Are Hollywood Films Made?

Additional Resource (not required)

- Technology Integration: Student Learning from PBS Teachers

Session 3: Using the Web to Access the News

Learners will:

- Review a variety of Internet news sites for use in the classroom.
- Select an Internet news site and explain how it could be used as a basis for a class discussion.
- Discover how software tools can assist teachers as they incorporate contemporary issues into the curriculum.

View video

- "Research and the Internet"

Participate in the online discussion

- Respond to the following: Clearly state how you could use one of the Web sites in this section as a launching point for a class discussion. Include the discussion topic, the Web site, and how you would use the information. What modifications would you make?

Complete activities and assignments

- Explore Web sites (at least 3-4):
 - FRONTLINE
 - News Flash Five
 - NOW
 - Religion & Ethics Newsweekly
 - PBS Online NewsHour with Jim Lehrer
 - The New York Times Learning Network
 - The New York Times News Snapshot
 - MSNBC
- Explore International News Sites:
 - World-Newspapers.com
 - World Press Review Online
 - CNN
 - CNNfyi.com>Student Bureau
 - eSchool News Online
 - The Atlantic Monthly
 - Propaganda Techniques
 - Blue Web'n

Additional Resources (not required)

- AppleWorks Charts & Graphs WalkThrough
- Microsoft Excel Charts & Graphs WalkThrough
- Mapmaker's Toolkit

Session 4: WebQuests

Learners will:

- Examine WebQuests devoted to current events, controversial issues, and pop culture.
- Determine how WebQuests can fit into his or her curriculum, and consider adapting them accordingly.
- Propose a preliminary design for a WebQuest by defining its introduction and task.

View video

- “Using WebQuests in the Classroom”

Read

- “Some Thoughts About WebQuests”
- “A Great Time to be a Teacher”

Complete activities and assignments

- Explore WebQuest activities
 - Explore More: News WebQuest
 - Does the Tiger Eat Its Cubs?
 - Quest for Peace and Diplomacy: A Web Quest on the India-Pakistan Conflict
 - Kosovo War Crimes
 - Evolution: Evidence for Evolution WebQuest
 - The Real Scoop on Tobacco
 - The International Symposium on Environmental Issues - Sydney, Australia
 - Images of Othello: A Shakespearean WebQuest
 - And Now a Word from Our Sponsor - A WebQuest on Propaganda
 - Rock the Vote
 - WebQuest.Org Web Site
 - AT&T Knowledge Network Explore: Filamentality
 - Assessment & Curriculum Tools for Teachers
 - Ruminating on Rubrics
 - Kathy Schrock's Guide for Educators - Assessment Rubrics
- Develop your own WebQuest introduction and task.
- Peer review another learner's WebQuest introduction and task on the discussion board.

Additional Resources (not required)

- “Adapting the Curriculum to Meet the Needs of Diverse Learners” from PBS Teachers
- Misunderstood Minds: Responses
- Triton and Patterns Projects: WebQuests
- Spartanburg School District 3: WebQuests

Session 5: Interactive Presentations and Class Discussions

Learners will:

- Explore national teaching standards across the curriculum related to current events, controversial issues, and pop culture.
- Consider how the teaching of contemporary issues could help students meet the standards.

View videos

- “Meeting the Standards: Middle School Civics”
- “Developing Language Arts Skills with Decisions, Decisions Online”

Read

- Education World: National Education Standards
- NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts
- “Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies”
- NCTM's Standards for School Mathematics
- NCTM Principles and Standards for School Mathematics – Communication
- NCTM Principles and Standards for School Mathematics – Communication Standard for Grades 6-8

- NCTM Principles and Standards for School Mathematics – Connections
- NCTM Principles and Standards for School Mathematics – Connections Standard for Grades 6-8
- The National Science Education Standards

Write in the online journal

- Respond to the following: How could contemporary issues help students meet the standards?

Participate in the online discussion

- Respond to the following: Can contemporary issues and standards truly be integrated or would they be forced? In what subject areas would you incorporate contemporary issues?

Complete activities and assignments

- Explore Web sites
 - McREL Content Knowledge Standards and Benchmark Data

Additional Resources (not required)

- Misunderstood Minds: Reading
- Misunderstood Minds: Writing
- Misunderstood Minds: Mathematics
- ¡Colorín Colorado!
- LD Online
- The Challenge of Standards from PBS Frontline
- Testing, Teaching, Learning? from PBS Frontline
- Parents' Guide to Standardized Testing from ¡Colorín Colorado!

Session 6: The Next Step

Learners will:

- Create a curriculum unit on a contemporary issue.
- Self-assess the lesson plans within the unit according to a rubric.
- Provide feedback on lesson plans created by other learners.
- Assess their learning in this course by comparing your prior knowledge and acquired knowledge.
- Analyze the learning experience in this course by reflecting about their professional goals and expectations.

Write in the online journal

- Reflect on their acquired knowledge from the course.
- Reflect on their ongoing professional goals and expectations

Participate in the online discussion

- Respond to the following: Post a summary of your curriculum unit as well as a short description of your lesson plans in the discussion board and solicit feedback from other learners.

Complete activities and assignments

- Final Project: Learners will choose a contemporary issue and create a curriculum unit for this topic using the Web sites, activities, and software resources from the course. Learners will write a description for how they will teach the issue, incorporating at least three lesson plans that they have created.
- Post-Course Evaluation Survey

Schedule

This course is scheduled to take approximately 30 hours to complete readings, activities, video, assignments, reflections and a final project.

Requirements

Learners are expected to:

- Complete all assignments.
- Maintain an online journal.
- Participate and actively engage in discussions with fellow learners while contributing to the social construction of knowledge.
- Be self-directed and self-motivated.
- Ask for assistance when they need it.

Facilitators are expected to:

- Provide feedback to learners
- Participate in discussions to keep them moving forward
- Provide assistance to learners who need it

Materials (hardware, software, plug-ins)

Technical Requirements

- Word processor
- Internet service provider
- E-mail

Academic Dishonesty Policy

To be inserted by university institution only

Evaluation

This course is evaluated on a letter grade basis, and may be available for graduate credit. See graduate credit details pertaining to specific graduate credit institutions.

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