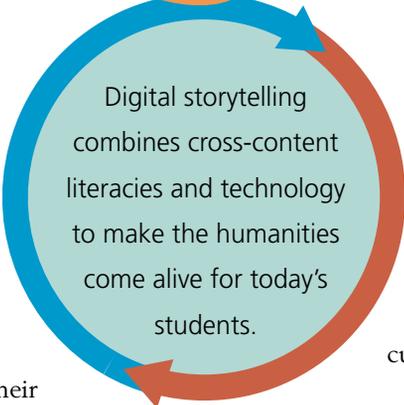


Digital Story TELL



The humanities are founded in words, bits of thought, and stories that introduce us to people in history that we have never met, geographical landscapes we have never seen, and concepts that may have never entered our neurological pathways. The humanities shine a beacon that highlights how others have existed, struggled, and contemplated their survival. These are the stories, rooted in the history of human struggle, that helped a society develop a culture and determine what makes life successful. The study of the humanities allows us to use the lessons of the past to help us address the challenges we face together in our communities, our countries, and our world.

Much current debate in 21st century education centers on the relevance of the humanities because of the emphasis on science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines and their role in workforce preparation. Many educators, however, regard the issue not as an either-or proposition, but as an opportunity, or even a mandate, for interdisciplinary collaboration. For them the question becomes, What can the humanities offer students in the 21st century? It is not about reduction or elimination. It is about the inclusion of multiple disciplines. It is about understanding what inspires individuals to create. It is about providing rich opportunities for self-reflection. Students need to be given an opportunity to learn how to appreciate man's existence through sonnets of splendor. They need to be taught how to chronicle people's experiences through wonder and conjecture. Students need to be given time to imagine life with depth and compassion. Humanities encompass the multiple disciplines that merge isolated subjects into inter-



Digital storytelling combines cross-content literacies and technology to make the humanities come alive for today's students.

disciplinary worlds of blended thought. Stanford education professor and economist Myra Strober (as quoted in Taji, 2011) captured that thinking in very practical terms in her explanation of the interdisciplinary research that is a hallmark of Stanford's educational culture:

When people come together, they can learn new things...put their brains together, and eventually, possibly come up with some new way of thinking about a problem or solving a problem that they hadn't before...because whatever problems we have—climate problems, water problems, poverty problems—those problems don't care about what discipline people are in. (para. 14)

Clearly, the humanities provide schools with the curriculum to teach critical thought, and STEM provides the rigor to think about the world in terms of exactness. In the 21st century, it becomes necessary to add in the digital piece that acknowledges current and future realities and the students' by-now-hardwired mind-sets.

Students have grown up in a media-based culture. Back in 1999, Tapscott made reference to the Net Generation Brain having learned to read images through digital immersion and having increased their ability to speed up their visual reflexes through gaming (p. 97). Media is now moving to real time where individuals move in and out of print-based to image-based content. Real-time material becomes reusable content instantaneously, as networks and composition tools provide faster collections of reusable,

ING

Michael D. King

redistributed media. Every day, students and information gatherers are building and sharing resources through the consumption of a free flow of information that replicates new chunks of information within milliseconds.

A new generation of social publishers is creating vast warehouses of information: digital content that is merged and remixed into new forms of conceptual awareness. This is the generation that will need the courses in humanities to create, publish, and formulate new meanings of the world in which they live, virtually and semantically. This is a generation that will need to be equipped with the digital media tools—such as GarageBand, Audacity, MovieMaker, iMovie—and other compilation tools that will enable them to create multimedia products of their learning experiences through the use of digital storytelling.

Those are the digital media literacy tools that were introduced at Dodge City (KS) Middle School during my first year as principal there in 2008. Technology integration had become the focal point of interest for teachers there and they had decided to establish a strong project that was based on humanities and digital storytelling. The digital storytelling venture was introduced as the Halliburton Project, named after the early 20th century adventurer.

Initially, a large group of enrichment students read chapters from *Richard Halliburton's Book of Marvels: The Occident*, an account of his early expeditions. They then were teamed up in pairs with teachers during a full-day seminar on digital storytelling. Each teacher worked alongside a student as both teacher and student, learning for him- or herself the tools needed to create a digital story. Teachers helped students develop narratives and visual representations of the places Halliburton visited during his explorations. In creating their multimedia projects, students

learned to digitize media content by using picture and video editors. They learned how to mix soundtracks and used microphones to overlay their narrations over digital music and sound effects on an audio editor. The end product was a digital story that was embedded in a place marker on Google Earth.

For the students participating in the Halliburton Project, digital storytelling provided a strong foundation in many different types of literacy: information, visual, technology, and media. Their efforts were evaluated according to a rubric that captured authentic assessments of each student's visible performance on a specific set of criteria. As part of their participation, students also wrote narratives about memorable learning experiences and then analyzed them to identify common criteria in positive (or discouraging) learning experiences.

Immersion in digital storytelling through the Halliburton Project integrated the arts, humanities, and social sciences with digital technology and in doing so provided rich opportunities for self-reflection and creativity for the students of Dodge City. It created high levels of engagement as students worked cooperatively to access information, blend disciplines, create new ideas, build artifacts from their experiences, and formulate models through predicated learning. The experience merged traditional perspectives from the humanities with 21st century digital literacy skills in a meaningful way that mutually and reciprocally validated each perspective—and augured well for the future. **PL**

REFERENCES

- Taji, Z. (2011, January 19). Blending disciplines, 'finding solutions.' *The Stanford Daily*. Retrieved from www.stanforddaily.com/2011/01/19/blending-disciplines-finding-solutions
- Tapscott, D. (1999). *Growing up digital: The rise of the net generation*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Michael D. King is principal of Dodge City (KS) Middle School and a 2012 NASSP Digital Principal of the Year. Follow him on twitter at [digitalsandbox1](https://twitter.com/digitalsandbox1).