

Full Voice. Intersection of Digital Literacy and Culture

Column

The humanities can be described as the study of human culture. This study allows us all to make meaning of the world we live in. While many disciplines provide the opportunity to gather facts and data, the humanities allow us to create individual meaning from our experiences in art, literature, philosophy, and history. We risk the loss of values and morals within our culture as well as a collective understanding of people without the humanities in education. In order to gain this understanding, it is imperative that we study art, poetry, and literature to offer a way for individuals to explore how they fit in the larger culture. School librarians are strategically placed to offer ways to think critically about the philosophies of humankind of the past as well as shaping the ways in which we think about our future in education.

The Every Student Succeeds Act has brought the humanities to the forefront once again with a focus on a "well-rounded education." A resurgence of teaching skills such as empathy and self awareness along with social and emotional aspects of learning had a reawakening in the educational landscape, providing a pathway to building curriculum that brings to light the value of moving our focus beyond STEM. We know that in order to understand our world it is essential for students to be able to think critically and analyze information. Many of these students have been raised with the idea that Google is the only "source" they need when searching for information. In my experience, teachers are also strongly aligned with this mindset when they enter the field of education. Educators take technology classes that oftentimes leave them feeling as if they are doing their students a disservice if they are not teaching them to use Google. This intersection of technology, digital literacy, and understanding culture is one that offers an opportunity for librarians in the K-12 landscape.

I have often referred to Teaching Tolerance's social justice standards when I collaborate with educators to guide curriculum development with a focus on equity (<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/social-justice-standards>). I recently came across their framework for digital and civic literacy skills (<https://www.tolerance.org/frameworks/digital-literacy>). With the political climate and the complexities of world conflicts and alliances as well as the necessity for media literacy, I am compelled to push through this framework along with the social justice standards and think about how by using them together, a school librarian can impact the learning within the humanities curriculum in the school—specifically history, ELA, and the arts. This intersection offers the opportunity for librarians to use their expertise in digital, media, and information literacies to assist students in making meaning of the steady stream of information they encounter daily.

In the 2018 Project Information Literacy News Study, 93% of college students reported receiving their news on a weekly basis through conversations with their peers (whether in person or face to face) and 89% are accessing news through social media. According to Project Information Literacy, "the findings suggest that young news consumers are 'multi social' in their access and pathways to news on social media." The report also found that there are many other ways that students are finding their news and the frequency varied. These ways consist of social media, online newspapers, discussions with professors and librarians, television, radio, podcasts, and print materials (Head et al. 2018). In thinking about this, I approached our journalism teacher about developing curriculum together for the three course levels of journalism. We often co-teach for research in her ELA courses and now we are moving toward working together in the journalism courses. The integration of the digital and civic literacy framework and social justice standards from Teaching Tolerance will provide the opportunity for students to not only become more self aware but to also become better able to understand and grapple with complex moral issues and the complexities of humanity.

Work Cited

Head, Allison J., John Wihbey, P. Takis Metaxas, Margy MacMillan, and Dan Cohen. *How Students Engage with News*. Project Information Literacy, October 2018. https://www.projectinfoilit.org/news_study.html

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