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Technology Integration



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Contributing Editors

Digital Toolkits for Teachers

Challenging students to create digital documentary films in history courses engages students in both mastery of content knowledge and higher order thinking experiences. Teachers considering this type of work must contend with the focus on standards-based testing, a wide breadth of content to be covered, the challenge of finding relevant primary source materials, and restrictions related to copyright and Fair Use. This paper explores a resource site for teachers, Digital Docs in a Box, that attempts to mediate some of these concerns and support their students in the creation of digital documentaries. First, we explore the rationale for student creation of digital media, the challenges inherent in these endeavors, and the creation of the resource site. We then overview the structure and use of the site, with an illustration of how a practicing teacher would use one of the documentary kits in the classroom.

Key Words: digital moviemaking, history, primary sources, research, social studies, technology integration

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Introduction

School-age children today have grown up in an era of unprecedented immersion in a culture of digital media. High school seniors today have never known a time without the World Wide Web, DVD's, *PlayStation*, digital cameras, and *iPods*. This experience with and assumed mastery of digital technologies, has led some to describe this generation of students as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). Prensky argues,

It is now clear that as a result of this ubiquitous environment and the sheer volume of their interaction with it, today's students *think and process information fundamentally differently* [italics in original] from their predecessors. These differences go far further and deeper than most educators suspect or realize (Prensky, 2001, p. 1).

The implication is that educators must shift their thinking and, consequently, how they approach their teaching to better connect with and support these digital natives. While some researchers and sociologists challenge some of the assumptions inherent of this characterization of students (e.g. Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008), research does indicate that students today spend a significant amount of time on the Web for a variety of purposes, including gaming, social networking, communicating, collaborating, and researching (Lenhart & Madden, 2005; Project Tomorrow, 2009).

In many cases, however, students are more likely to access, create, and communicate with technology to a greater degree at home than at school (Arafah, Levin, Rainie, & Lenhart, 2002; Project Tomorrow, 2009). Findings from the 2008 *Speak Up* survey of 281,000 K-12 students suggest that students are increasingly frustrated at the perceived limitation of their use of digital technologies in school. Forty-three percent of the sixth through 12th grade

respondents report their technology use in school is limited by overly restrictive school Web filters or firewalls. Thirty-five of sixth through 12th graders report that their use of technology in school is further limited by teachers and 26% suggest that rules limit their use of technology at school (Project Tomorrow, 2009, p. 2). The report goes on to suggest:

It is widely accepted by students that arrival at school means "powering down" for a few hours. After leaving school, they resume their technology-infused lives and leverage a wide range of emerging technologies to fine-tune their skills in communicating, collaborating, creating, and contributing in ways that are never approached during the school day (Project Tomorrow, 2009, p. 2).

Ironically, it is just this kind of digital access; collaboration and media creation that many employers suggest is critical to future success in the work place (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009).

The Case for Digital Moviemaking

Incorporating learning experiences with digital media in schools has potential for both helping students to develop 21st century skills (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009), and to engage students in core content learning in deep and authentic ways. One particular type of work that shows promise in leveraging students' interest in collaborating and creating with digital media in the context of meaningful and authentic intellectual work is through the creation of digital documentary films in the social studies. To create digital documentaries in schools, students often utilize some combination of digital images, video, sound, and narration to create short digital films using free software such as Windows *MovieMaker* or *PhotoStory*, or Apple's *iMovie*. These digital

movies can take the form of documentaries, biographies, research reports, news broadcasts, and public service announcements.

Researchers have begun to document a variety of learning benefits for this kind of work. The authentic and collaborative nature of creating documentaries has been shown to have a positive impact on student motivation and engagement (Burn, Brindley, Durran, Kelsall, Sweetlove, & Tuohey, 2001; Hoffenberg & Handler, 2001; Kearney & Schuck, 2003; Ryan, 2002). This motivation may be due to the opportunities students perceive for creative expression (New, 2006; Reid, Burn, & Parker, 2002), and an increased sense of student ownership (Kearney & Schuck, 2005). Student-created digital films can also challenge students to deeply connect with the content in meaningful and authentic ways (Ferster, Hammond, & Bull, 2006; Hammond & Ferster, 2009; Swan, Hofer, & Swan, 2009; Manfra & Hammond, 2008).

Challenges of Digital Moviemaking and New Approaches

Student creation of digital movies does not come without its challenges, however. First, and perhaps foremost, the current emphasis on high stakes testing, standards-based instruction, and coverage of content in the social studies classroom (Grant, 2007) makes it difficult for teachers to devote large blocks of time to a single project. And while the technology required to create digital films has become easier to use and is more readily accessible for students in and out of school, challenges with the technology can be difficult for some teachers to navigate. Even putting aside these two concerns, deciphering and working within copyright restrictions can be extremely challenging even for the most ambitious and conscientious teachers. In our work in a series of classroom implementations of digital moviemaking projects, we have documented many of these challenges (Swan,

Hofer, & Swan, 2009; Yow & Swan, 2009; Hofer & Swan, 2008; Hofer & Swan, 2007; Swan, Hofer, & Levstik, 2007).

Perhaps recognizing some of these limitations, researchers at the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia have developed a tool to help teachers and students mitigate some of these challenges called *PrimaryAccess*. *PrimaryAccess* is a Web-based tool that enables teachers to build collections of digital historical documents by choosing from existing collections or uploading additional materials for their classes. Students then use the *MovieMaker* feature within *PrimaryAccess* to create, edit, and publish their movies all through a Web browser. Within the interface, students can develop a timeline and/or idea map to help them develop the storyboard for their film. They can then write their scripts, select and arrange pictures on a timeline, narrate, and publish their films. This approach to moviemaking in the classroom helps teachers with some of the technical challenges, and the partnership with archives like the Library of Congress, the Virginia Center for Digital History, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum provides students with safe access to digital materials.

Thinking along much of the same lines, in our most recent work in two fifth grade classes, we've taken a slightly different approach to implementing a digital moviemaking project in a high stakes testing environment. While *PrimaryAccess* is a promising tool, the schools within which we worked did not afford our partner teachers with reliable and extended time either in the school's computer lab or in the classroom to complete the project online. In fact, in each classroom the teacher was limited to the teacher computer and an LCD projector. The teachers' scope and sequence was so tight that they could only afford to spend a total of five days (50-minute periods) on the documentary project. Taking all these constraints into account, we worked with the teachers to develop what we called *moviemak-*

ing toolkits to help to expedite the project and allow the students to do much of their work offline. Essentially, we provided students collections of printed documents, images, and mp3 recordings of period music. The students conducted their research, wrote their scripts, and selected images and music to use in the films entirely offline. Once this work was completed, the teachers employed learning stations to allow the students to cycle through the computer to record the narration and sequence the selected images and music files for their movies. Despite the constraints of time and technology access, the students produced documentaries that not only helped them to develop content knowledge at the same rate of “control group” classrooms, but also to engage in authentic intellectual work (Swan, Hofer, & Swan, 2009).

We were encouraged both by the results of this approach to moviemaking in the classroom, as well as the teachers’ perceptions of the potential for this kind of work in a high stakes environment. With the assistance of a Library of Congress grant from the Midwest Center for Teaching with Primary Sources, we developed a similar set of documentary toolkits for use by classroom teachers and launched the site, *Digital Docs in a Box*.

Digital Docs in a Box

In the summer of 2009, we worked with five practicing social studies teachers to develop a series of digital toolkits that would likely be used in 6th --- 12th grade U.S. History, Civics, or World History classrooms to include on the site. The current structure of the site includes a link to the five digital documentary kits: Civil Rights Movement, The Great Depression, Age of Imperialism, Presidential Inaugurations, and Women’s suffrage. Each kit is anchored in a question. For example, the question students investigate within the Great Depression kit is: *How did photojournalism influence public opinion of the New Deal*

programs? Within each kit, there are a collection of annotated documents, images, and audio clips* primarily from the Library of Congress. Additionally, there is also an overview of the kit and an introduction to the collection. The kits are designed to provide multiple perspectives or viewpoints for each question using a number of sources that are manageable for the teacher and student.

By way of introducing the kits and their utility for teachers, we have asked one of the authors of the kits to introduce the Civil Rights Kit and the ways in which it could be used in a social studies classroom.

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The Civil Rights Digital Toolkit: A Teacher’s Perspective

Each digital documentary toolkit is built around an anchoring question. For the Civil Rights toolkit, the question is: *How did the actions of young people after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision help continue the struggle for Civil Rights?* By design, this question intends to engage students and make the content of the Civil Rights era relevant to their lives by focusing on how the actions of youth affected the Civil Rights movement. The entire toolkit is intentionally organized around this question; documents and images were chosen specifically to encourage student inquiry and allow students to form their own conclusions about the role of young people in the Civil Rights movement. The toolkit overview provides some of the background rationale for the anchoring question and the need for students to

learn about the Civil Rights era in a meaningful way. Students will discover that the events of the Civil Rights movement did not occur in isolation, but were influenced by the conditions of the time and the events that came before it. The anchoring question and the overview provide the teacher and students with a lens through which to view the kit's documents, images, and audio.

Currently, this kit contains eleven primary source documents, including oral histories, quotes and correspondence from famous Civil Rights activists, excerpts from the United States Constitution, and excerpts from notable United States Supreme Court decisions. One particularly touching oral history is from LaVon Bracy entitled, 'I Refused to Allow them to Win' from the Library of Congress' *Voices of Civil Rights*. Ms. Bracy was the first African American student to graduate from Gainesville High School in Florida. Her father was the president of the local NAACP chapter, and in 1964, he won the right for parents to register their children in the all-white high school. He could not find a senior student to volunteer, so his own daughter volunteered. She writes:

On that first day, Dad drove me to school followed by a Gainesville police car. I received stares and was called all kinds of nigger. No one spoke to me. No one sat near me. I could expect each day to have some white male or female spit on me and call me nigger...After about a month at the school, a group of white boys jumped me and beat me bloody. No one offered any assistance. The principal said, 'How do I know that you did not come to school bloody from your home? I did not see anyone mistreat you.' I stayed at home for three days, pondering what to do. I refused to allow them to win. I returned. The year was long, silent, and unhappy. The scars are still there.

Students will read this oral history in addition to others as they investigate how young people impacted the Civil Rights movement and develop their own understanding of the anchoring question.

The Civil Rights kit contains twenty-one compelling images depicting various aspects of the movement from 1954 through 1964. The images include political cartoons from the time period, maps, news headlines, and photographs of iconic events like lunch counter sit-ins; the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas; Alabama's Governor Wallace blocking the entrance to the University of Alabama; and the photograph of Ruby Bridges that inspired the famous Norman Rockwell print. The picture below is of a young African American boy witnessing a group of people marching in protest to the desegregation of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Students using the kit are encouraged to notice the presence of the American flag and to think about how various groups used American symbols to support their causes.



"Little Rock, 1959. Mob marching from capitol to Central High." Bledsoe, John T. August 20, 1959. Library of Congress.

The audio clips that compliment this kit are currently “on hold”. We hope to obtain permissions to add audio clips to the Civil Rights kit soon. Upon approval, we are planning to include clips of well-known speeches by activists, protest songs, period music, and/or oral histories. The audio files could be used by students as content in their documentaries, or as background audio to add depth and dimension to the documentary.

We envision the digital documentary kits being used in the classroom to simplify for students and teachers the process of making digital documentaries. The teacher could begin by introducing the anchoring question and overview to students and allow students to discuss their prior knowledge of the content. The teacher could then have her students investigate the documents, images, and audio contained in the kit prior to formulating the story of the documentary they want to produce. Depending on the availability of technology in the classroom/school, the teacher could provide printed copies of the documents, images, and audio transcriptions for students to use in their pre-planning. A teacher could use the printed resources as part of a learning stations exercise to ensure all students learn the content contained in the kit. Students could then *storyboard* their documentary and plan what images, documents, and audio to determine the scope and sequence of their documentary. The storyboard could also include any text (verbal or on the screen) students will include in their documentaries. Such pre-planning ensures student documentaries are focused and relevant to the anchoring question. In this way, students would begin to put together their own understanding of the kit’s resources and formulate their answer to the anchoring question --- *all before* students get in front of a computer.

Once students have planned their documentaries using the printed documents, images, and audio, the teacher could provide students time in class to put their documentaries together. Ideally, students could have

access to a computer lab or library in the school where they could compile their documentaries with little distraction. Depending on the technology available in the school, the teacher could instead provide class time in which students could compile the digital documentaries on the teacher’s computer while the rest of the class completes another task relevant to the content. It is also important to provide an outlet for students to publish their work. The teacher may want to consider holding a film festival, inviting parents, administrators, and community members to see the students’ work. Teachers could also post students’ documentaries on a class website or blog. The idea of the digital documentary kits is to maintain the integrity of the content while also engaging students in the authentic use of technology. We encourage teachers to use the resources provided on the *Digital Docs in a Box* website in a variety of ways to benefit their various students and situations.

“While we envisioned the kits primarily as a means to support teachers and students in the construction of documentaries, there are a variety of ways teachers might use the digital resources available in the kits.”

Beyond Documentaries

While we envisioned the kits primarily as a means to support teachers and students in the construction of documentaries, there are a variety of ways teachers might use the digital resources available in the kits. In addition to documentary-style films, students could also create biographic films, digital Document

Based Questions (DBQ), public service announcements, or even “on-the-scene” news reports of historical events. Alternatively, students could create museum-style exhibits that would challenge them to select a small subset of artifacts that they see as most essential for telling a story, providing captions and an exhibit summary. These could be done entirely offline or as a Web-based exhibit using a wiki or other Web publishing tool. Students could create annotated timelines, posters, collages, or even music videos. These products could be produced offline, however, the ability to publish, share, and invite comments on their work may be highly motivating, given students’ engagement in social media outside the classroom (Lenhart & Madden, 2005; Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007). In creating any of these kinds of products, the collection of vetted and copyright-friendly resources can mitigate some of the challenges that teachers and students encounter in this type of work.

“We envision the digital documentary kits being used in the classroom to simplify for students and teachers the process of making digital documentaries.”

Next Steps

The *Digital Docs in a Box* site was intended to evolve and grow over time. We are happy to report that the Midwest Center for Teaching with Primary Sources has awarded us an additional Library of Congress grant to continue the work begun in the summer of 2009. Our plan for this summer is to build additional toolkits, as well as “round out” the existing kits by adding additional images and audio files. We also hope to begin piloting the kits in classrooms to understand more fully what

additional elements are needed for teachers and students to be successful in using the kits. While we have been pleased with the initial response from teachers to the kits, we welcome suggestions and feedback from readers of this article so that we better capture the needs of teachers and teacher educators as they engage their students in this kind of work with digital primary sources in K-12 classrooms.



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Websites

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<http://digitaldocsinabox.org>

Voices of Civil Rights
http://www.voicesofcivilrights.org/voices_story_bracy.html