The Consortium

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Social Studies Explorations – A Professional Journey

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Hidden Stories
Using Digital Historical Narratives to Teach Thinking

Submitted by Brenda Dyck

Guiding Question:

How will teachers create a social studies program that meets the needs and reflects the nature of 21st century learners?

Abstract:

Essential to the effective implementation of the new Social Studies Program of Studies is the infusion of technology and its timely challenge to create a program that meets the needs and reflects the nature of 21st century learners. Since digital media plays a significant role in the lives of the digital generation, teachers need to explore how this tool can be harnessed to advance historical thinking and engage students in exploring historical consciousness.

"Stories provide a vital opportunity to bring history to life. Through stories, people share information, values and attitudes about history, culture and heritage. Stories are communicated through legends, myths, creation stories, narratives, oral traditions, songs, music, dance, literature, visual and dramatic arts, traditions, and celebrations. They can include or be supported by biographies, autobiographies, archives, news items, novels or short stories. In social studies, stories provide students with opportunities to understand the dynamics of peoples, cultures, places, issues and events that are integral to Alberta's history and to contemporary society."

Alberta Program of Studies (2003)

Professor Henry Yu is a man with a mission. Yu has been piloting a program at the University of British Columbia that is focused on recovering the lost or ignored voices of the many Chinese Canadian immigrants who helped to establish, build and support the economy in the province of British Columbia. Through INSTRCC (Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian studies), Yu and his colleagues have initiated a teaching and research program that is building an awareness of British Columbia's past and future in Pacific Canada. Yu points out that even though Chinese Canadians "have lived continuously in BC since 1858, they still only enter our historical consciousness as gold miners and railway builders. The question I ask of myself in my research and of my students in my classes is: What were they doing the rest of the time?"

This same question could be asked about many other groups of Canadians such as the First Nations people and non-European immigrants to Canada. And that's exactly what INSTRCC is doing. These hidden narratives are being uncovered by researching digital archives, registries, and museums and by talking to the ancestors of those whose immigrant voices have never been heard. Using audio, video, historic photographs and text to showcase their research findings, these *historical archeologists* are reminding Canadians that our understanding of Canadian history is often one-sided and is in need of expansion. These digital historical narratives have brought to life many hidden narratives and, in doing so, have preserved and profiled stories previously reserved for well-known historical figures like Samuel de Champlain, George Étienne Cartier and Louis Riel. Yu claims that this digital documentation is a "new grammar for speaking about and to the world."

> *"I realize there is more to history than … textbooks, there are voices, people, places & things unlike any before or since. Hidden in the shadows of these dusty phantoms are the lives of those who came before us, so that we might be here now."*
>
> *Preservice Teacher, University of Alberta*

Using Digital Media to Teach 21st Century Learners

Teachers across the world are tapping into the value of using digital media to share the voices of people from the past and present. Like those involved with UBC's INSTRCC program, Alberta's teachers have the opportunity to establish inquiry-based classrooms where teachers and students use digital media applications like MovieMaker, PhotoStory or IMovie, to explore, capture and share overlooked stories or perspectives from Canada's past. These technology tools not only redefine communication and storytelling but help teachers meet Alberta's Program of Studies mandate to create a social studies program that meets the needs and reflects the nature of 21st century learners. Just as the 19th and 20th centuries were alive with writers using the power of words to bring their stories to life, today's highly visual youths have discovered a three-dimensional medium where images and sound merge together to communicate stories and factual information. Our job is to merge this interest with the curriculum we teach.

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Creating a Digital Historical Narrative

Step One:
Digital historical narratives begin with a central "burning" historical question that will portray one or more points of view found within under-explored histories. Fueled by historical evidence, emotional content and voice and/or music, the story is based on carefully researched content, and portrayed using images, video clips, diary entries and other primary sources.

Step Two:

> *"There is always the possibility of tension between a useful history and a truthful history."*
>
> *Peter Seixas*

For the next step in the digital historical narrative process, students will examine pertinent historical photographs with a keen eye, using one or more of Peter Seixas' six historical concepts to guide their exploration. These six conceptual considerations will help students further clarify their burning question and will guide them on the search for the voice or perspective they want to portray in their digital story.

- Establish Historical Significance
- Use Primary Source Evidence
- Identify Continuity and Change
- Analyze Cause and Consequence
- Take Historical Perspective
- Understand Moral Dimensions of History

From: Benchmarks of Historical Thinking: A Framework for Assessment in Canada by Peter Seixas http://tinyurl.com/284hgx

Step Three
Before students chose the images they will use or launch into using the digital media, it is important that they establish a solid storyline. Premature use of technology will result in a weak story that is dominated by the glitz of technology. Education technologist, Bernajean Porter, reminds storytellers that a digital story must be remembered for its soul, not the bells and whistles of the technology tool. Porter's storyboarding template is an excellent tool for mapping out the story within the digital historical narrative. http://tinyurl.com/35ea3c

> *"This project helped me think outside the book- I hope to pass that on to my students."*
>
> *Preservice Teacher, University of Alberta*

Step Four
For this step, students will choose the images and music that they will use. Students will need to cite their sources at the end of their project and if their digital historical narrative will be published on a web site, they will need to ensure that all images and music are free from copyright restrictions and, if not, ensure that they have obtained permission to use them.

Copyright rules and citing sources: http://tinyurl.com/3yjb2b

Step Five
Equipped with a burning question, a clear sense of the perspective they want to portray and a cache of carefully chosen images and music, the storyteller is ready to create a 2-3 minute digital historical narrative using MovieMaker, PhotoStory or iMovie.

Digital historical narratives can be used to:

- Introduce a new unit of study or for review purposes
- Teach skills such as perspective-taking, critical thinking and the interpretation of historical accounts
- As a prompt for a discussion or writing assignment
- Highlight under-explored historical events or to challenge students to consider an alternative point of view
- Provide a digital project format for Grade 5-12 students to begin their own historical investigation with the teacher's guidance

In *Theorizing Historical Consciousness* (edited by Peter Seixas), Jocelyn Létourneau and Sabrina Moisan suggest that it is imperative that history teachers learn how to move beyond teaching history from a single perspective, or a collection of facts to be memorized for a test. By incorporating the use of digital historical narratives into social studies instruction and learning, teachers are not only expanding students' perspective beyond the dominant perspective, they are meeting the needs of 21st century learners, a unique group of learners who feel a close affinity to digital media and the use of technology to support and express their learning.

> *"It became apparent we were creating a narrative describing a time and place using the clues left to us by history."*
>
> *Preservice Teacher, University of Alberta*

Annotated Resources, Web Sites, Books, etc.

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Examples of Digital Historical Narrative: Created by preservice teachers from the University of Alberta https://www.library.ualberta.ca/digital-initiatives/digital-collections

Komagata Maru: Created by a preservice teacher from the University of Alberta, this project demonstrates the use of digital media to capture the often overlooked Komagata Maru incident from 1914. ***Link no longer available***

Hidden Stories: A Historical Narrative Project: This technology-supported project walks students through the steps of creating a digital historical narrative. ***Link no longer available***

Digital Historical Narratives: http://tinyurl.com/3xge95

The Initiative for Student Teaching and Research in Chinese Canadian Studies (INSTRCC): From the University of British Columbia https://instrcc.ubc.ca/

History's Fracture Mirror: Peter Seixas
Link no longer available

Doing History with Wah Chong's Washing and Ironing, Peter Seixas http://tinyurl.com/2eh59x

Biography

Brenda Dyck is a teacher, university instructor and technology integration coach from Calgary. Author of *"The Rebooting of a Teacher's Mind,"* Brenda writes the "Hotlinks" column in Middle Ground magazine, a publication of the National Middle School Association. She is a regular columnist for Education World and Classroom Connect. An international speaker on teaching and technology, her professional contributions earned her the winning place in the 2004 Global Junior Challenge in Rome, Italy, for her telecollaborative project *"We the Children …"* Brenda has been a finalist in the Global SchoolNet's Shared Learning Awards in 2003, 2004 and 2005 and was chosen by Surfaquarium as one of the Top Ten Online Educators for 2005.