Spar

Public and Digital Humanities in Southwest Washington State

Case Study:
Method: collaborative curriculum development between university and K-12
Rationale: open access and value to public audiences is part of the ethos of DH
Scope: hyper-local: 12 invited districts, 9 site visits, 3 participating schools
Process: site visits → draft → test → revise lesson plans → post to public site

Findings:
• Technology access often outpaces corresponding curriculum development
• Leverage expertise in research and in practice differently to support student learning
• When relationship between course texts and DH tool is clear, student engagement is high

Context:
In the small logging towns of rural southwest Washington, the term “spar” holds deep significance in cultural memory. In the early 20th century, loggers used the tallest and most stable tree in the vicinity as the starting point for each operation. This tree, called a spar, was the foundation upon which everything else depended. As the name of this project, Spar communicates a sense of place and symbolizes the high stakes and potential challenges of building new educational infrastructure. In Grays Harbor County, located just 90 minutes from Seattle, unemployment rates are the highest in the state, and 58% of students are eligible for free and reduced lunch. This indicates the socioeconomic context in which educators are working to overcome a historical disconnect between rural students and opportunities to pursue higher education.

How might tools and resources developed in Digital Humanities be meaningfully adapted for use in the high school English classroom?

Our lesson plans begin to answer that question. They ask students to create word clouds, mine a text database, critically assess sentiment analysis, and build narrative maps.

Participating Teachers:
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spartrees.wordpress.com

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