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What does Humanities Technology teach?

Since the beginning of my experience at East Side Community High School, I have often been asked about the nature of my placement. I describe it as a Humanities Technology program, but that label is often too general to answer my colleagues' questions.

I have the pleasure of working with Paul Allison—a twenty-year veteran humanities teacher and of The Writing Project—in this relatively new endeavor. Before he arrived at ESCHS this year, “Technology” meant typing lessons. The computer was seen as a typewriter, a video game machine, or worse an arcane device to be feared and restricted. It has been his, and my goal to change these attitudes, to make technology one of the many vital media our students use to learn language.

“Humanities Technology” is Humanities *through* Technology; as digital media evolve, it is also Humanities *in* Technology. Note that it is first and foremost *Humanities*, the study of language, creation, and human events. Were I to describe what we learn and do every day, it would be difficult to tell ours apart from any good humanities classroom:

- We discuss novels, poems, stories, and current events articles.
- We read, daily and independently.
- We write and respond daily in journals.
- We write critical analyses of texts.
- We write creatively: fiction, poetry, and personal writing.
- We assess and edit our own work, and our peers' work.
- We value drafting and revisiting our work.
- We learn grammar in context of reading and writing.
- We plan and work with other classes to inter-relate our curricula.
- We present portfolios and performances demonstrating our accomplishments.

All of these things take place through the use of computing and technologies. So, at the end of the day, students are not only learning the above, but also learning sophisticated, cutting-edge technologies for Web design, graphic layout, and Blogging (online journaling).

Yes, our class meets in a computer lab; yes, the students use computers every day. Daily computer use is part of the world at large, especially within higher education and demanding careers. But for time, budget, and space concerns, many teachers would want to use technology as a way for their students to learn. I consider myself fortunate that I already have the technological and humanities skills to work in such an environment, but I am not content to be a lone figure. In addition to my students, I am also teaching other teachers to use these approaches in their classrooms.

As an English teacher, I know nothing will replace the many elegant and effective ways of learning about language. Humanities Technology does not exist to replace those methods—rather, it is a *part* of those methods that allows us to create informed, capable students of language.