

Arts and Humanities: Humanities at the 2009 Conference

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Plato, Aristotle, Harry Potter, Ulysses S. Grant, and—appropriately for Arlington, Va.—Robert E. Lee, were present at the 2009 Professional Conference of the NCSSSMST.

At a meeting designed to explore connections in STEM education, we humanities types were gratified to find eight sessions devoted to the arts and humanities as well as several others with a civic or humanistic component. Integration and inclusion, it seemed, were in the air, embracing not just science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, but philosophy, language, rhetoric, and the fine arts as well.

The diversity of interests and approaches taken in these presentations was striking. Among the presentations offered, Diane Gerard explored teaching Harry Potter along with Plato and Aristotle in a foundation course in Western Philosophy for tenth graders at the Alabama School of Math and Science. Virginia Wilson, Jim Little, and Alison Blaine of the North Carolina School for Science and Mathematics, explained the development of a writing rubric for an Intensive Writing course. A session given by Daniel Moix and Donna Hutchinson of the Arkansas School explored the value Web 2.0 as a tool for teaching the Civil War, while Ronny Risinger of the Liberal Arts and Sciences Academy of Austin discussed the use of amateur radio to enrich humanities teaching. Lisa Rocchio and Francisco Uceda of the Bronx High School of Science explored techniques for teaching languages at STEM schools. Gary Lauter of the University of Tampa talked about the ways that his institution explores relationships among the arts, humanities, and sciences.

Among the sessions that I attended, two seemed of especially far-reaching significance. Susan Owens and her colleagues from the Anne Arundel

STEM Magnet High School in Maryland discussed the development of a required fine arts course that utilizes scientific concepts. As interesting as the course itself was their explanation of the impetus behind it. It seems that stakeholders in their school had complained that engineering graduates were lacking in creativity, and insisted that the arts be included in the school curriculum as a means of fostering innovation and imagination in future engineers. So who still wants to argue that the arts are expendable in education?

Another presentation with broad implications was given by Corey Alderdice and Tim GOTT of the Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science in Kentucky. Drawing on a book by Daniel Pink, their presentation emphasized the importance of developing the whole brain by incorporating humanistic education, as well as social and emotional nurturing, along with scientific education. “Empathy,” they emphasized, was a quality that they wished to nurture in their science students. Skeptics should read *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley for an account of what can happen when scientific intelligence is developed at the expense of the social being.

Apart from these individual sessions, the spirit of the humanities infused the entire meeting due to the proximity of Washington, D.C. and the NCSSSMST’s new commitment to shaping educational policy. The humanities, we should remember, have traditionally been preparation for civic involvement. As the organization expands its involvement in public life, it will be calling upon that tradition.