**Digital Storytelling**

**Sabbatical Project Report**

Winter and Spring 2009

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**The purpose of the project**:

To conduct a storytelling project to build a collection of current stories of resilience in the immigrant/refugee community to be used as curriculum in classes and shared in a digital format to encourage the use of technology.

**The two major objectives for this project**.

1. Gather current immigrant/refugee stories.
2. Research and develop an effective way to share these stories in an ongoing way.

**Plan of work proposed for the first quarter of sabbatical**

* Publicize the storytelling project through the extensive network of students, colleagues and instructors that I have established through years of teaching, writing curriculum and grants, giving workshops, publishing a “best selling” textbook, mentoring teachers, and leading the Developmental Education Program at BCC.
* Work within our program, across campus, with the school district, and with community partners to identify possible stories in our own immigrant/refugee population
* Visit other ABE/ESL and community-based programs to interview immigrants and refugees in completely different circumstances from urban Bellevue.
* Develop criteria and a method for independent submission of audio or written stories.
* Solicit written submission of stories from the reader base of *Northwest News* for inclusion in the newspaper itself and for this storytelling project. (*Northwest News* is a subscription-based newspaper published by the ABE/ESL Program at BCC for ESL readers in Washington and Oregon.)
* Tape interviews, take photographs and get permission for use of materials.

**First Quarter Work and Reflections**

The apparent suicide of my dear friend and close colleague, Lynn Stafford-Yilmaz in mid January, 2009, changed one part of my proposed workplan for the quarter almost immediately. She was the editor of *Northwest News*, and we had planned to work together to solicit stories from the reader base as well as plan for a special edition of the paper highlighting the stories I collected. With her death, new people took over the work of the newspaper and had to focus on just keeping it going. I moved on to concentrate on other aspects of the sabbatical with great sadness at her passing.

In the first part of my sabbatical time, I concentrated on two things: research on resilience and the technology needed to create audio recordings digitally. As I explored the theme of resilience in books such as, *Resilient Adults: Overcoming a Cruel Past*, Gina O’Connell Higgins, and *Resiliency: What We Have Learned*, Bonnie Benard, and spending much time on the web, I concluded that I was really more interested in exploring resiliency with immigrants and refugees with the criteria that Mary Pipher developed in her book, *The Middle of Everywhere: Helping Refugees Enter the American Community*. I also had a 16-page printout of Selected References on Resilience compiled by Jeanette L. Johnson, Ph.D., Research Center for Children and Youth, School of Social Work, University at Buffalo, U.S.A. and realized that looking deeply into this area would be too time intensive given the goals that I set out for my work in digital storytelling.

Next I moved into working on the technological aspect of digital audio recording. At first, I felt as if I were on Mars and negotiating a completely alien landscape. Since I’m a Mac user, I went to the Apple Store to get a recommendation on how to make digital recordings. They gave me some advice, but I ended up researching the entire question on the web. I became very confused. Do I use a laptop? Do I buy a digital recorder? Do I need a microphone? How does the whole thing work? I bought $40 book on sound recording and was still mystified. Most information was above my head and written for auto “techophiles.” The Apple store finally came to my rescue as I signed up for a year of One-on-One lessons on my Mac Computer. I started immediately to learn how to use a sound creating and editing software application called *GarageBand*. I also bought a small microphone called a “snowflake.” I practiced making and editing simple sound recordings until I became familiar (but not necessarily comfortable) with the process.

Finally I felt ready to interview project participants. I identified people through friends, family, and colleagues. I worked hard to find participants at Big Bend Community College in Moses Lake, but the coordinator of the program and the teachers did not follow up with me even though they seemed interested, and we e-mailed back and forth. I couldn’t ever get a time or place arranged even though I was pretty flexible and able to travel to their location. Another colleague at Edmonds wanted to wait until later in the quarter and then got too busy. I was surprised because I thought that finding students to interview would not be so difficult or time-consuming as it turned out to be. The six participants all turned out to be connected to Bellevue College even though this was not my original intent. Individual summaries and an excerpt of the interview for each of the participants is included on the website, *garnetsstorygems.com*. Click on *Conversations*.

Each participant received an introduction to the project and signed a release form to allow me to use the interview for educational purposes and a photo release form. Each participant received a CD of the interview. The interviews lasted around 30 minutes with one going longer than an hour and were conducted in a mutually agreed-upon location. I took a photo of each participant.

Rapport became a problem because I did not know any of the participants except for Ting Chen, a former student. I met with Jaklin Lofti, Ting Chen, and Emilie Tang multiple times before recording. Luis came with his teacher, Mila Tari. Sue Chen and Humberto Esparza were referred by their trusted friends. Both of them have also lived in the United States for many years and were not hesitant to be interviewed. Interestingly, I thought that recording these people on a laptop (obviously visible and with a mic) for a long time would be intimidating. In fact, the opposite occurred with participants relaxing as the interview took its course and gradually turning into the conversation I had hoped for.

I researched the StoryCorps model thoroughly and believe it overcomes the problem of rapport easily by having family members or friends interview each other in the presence of a trained StoryCorps facilitator. On June 21, 2009, my Dad and I took part in a StoryCorps interview in Wenatchee. The facilitator set up the interview, tested all the sound equipment and did the recording. While my Dad and I were nervous at first, after a while the magic of just sitting and talking and listening deeply to each other put us at ease. I tried to do this with Ting Chen and Emilie Tang, and it succeeded to a point, but after a while I became involved in the interview and lost the more neutral role of facilitator.

Unfortunately, I did not review the interviews early enough after each of the recording sessions to know that the sound tracks were not clean. I listened to the first part of each interview to establish the volume before doing another one. I did this without earphones on, and everything seemed to be working well. When I started to edit the recordings with earphones on, however, I heard clicking sounds. Later in some of the recordings, a fan noise could be heard. I went in to the Apple store and we had numerous conversations around this. I tried everything they suggested short of buying an expensive piece of equipment to add to the mic to filter out such sounds. A sound technician in the store even tried to work with the editing software to eliminate these irritating sounds, but to no avail. I also learned that a soundproof room would have been a good idea. I am deeply disappointed in the sound quality of the recordings that I made for the long interviews/conversations.

The editing process also turned out to be extremely time intensive. At first, I attempted to eliminate every pause, “umm” sound, and extraneous sounds such as verbal ticks occurring after “umm.” It was too much, so I cut back in later recordings. The sound tracks also sound a little more natural with pauses and “umm” sounds. I developed a listening log for each of the interview conversations. The purpose of the log was to track what the participant was saying at a particular point in time and how it related to the attributes of resiliency from Mary Pipher’s book, *The Middle of Everywhere*.

**Attributes of Resilience**

1.) Future Orientation; 2.) Energy and good health; 3.) Ability to pay attention; 4.) Ambition and initiative; 5.) Verbal expressiveness; 6.) Positive mental health; 7.) The ability to calm down; 8.) Flexibility; 9.) Being thoughtful about choices; 10.) Lovability; 11.) Ability to love new people; and 12.) Good moral character.

I discovered these attributes were amply evident in the conversations I had with these participants. And, as such, will be incorporated into my curriculum for future ESL classes. The listening log also helped me identify what part of the conversation would be excerpted for use on the website. I wrote a summary about the conversation that I had with each participant and posted it on the Listening Legacies website.

In general, a positive attitude was the attribute that each participant referred to again and again. And, this seemed to create a constructive energy in each one of them that allowed them to plan for the future, be calm in the face of hardship, and find solutions to problems in order to deal with life. They also all displayed a strong sense of identity, an important aspect to successful language learning and a critical characteristic for survival in a completely new culture. They each had their own way of expressing the idea that they believed in themselves. And, at last when the conversations were concluded, it was clear that these participants had deep family ties that sustained them, with the sole exception of Jaklin who appeared to be, more or less, on her own. Yet, even she calls her family in Iran on a regular basis.

These conversations with Humberto, Jaklin, Sue, Luis, Emilie, and Tang made me realize once again the power of the human voice, the gift of a story told and the plan to preserve these moments digitally. They told incredible stories. I recorded them with inconsistent success. And I spent much time listening to them as I worked through the editing process. This deep listening helped me gain much respect for their ongoing journey of resiliency. It also forced me to look at my own life and think about the road ahead as I near retirement and face old age. It was and is sobering.

I ended the first quarter of my sabbatical taking the standard workshop in digital storytelling at the Center for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California, March 19-21. This workshop had a profound effect on me. I prepared for it thoroughly by writing my script for the movie I wanted to do, scanning old photos, and reading the “Cookbook.” I decided to do a movie about Mother’s Day because I wanted to ultimately talk about my mother. It has bothered me this entire year that she died at 61, the same age that I am now. I wanted to deal with that in my movie somehow.

We began the workshop by meeting in a story circle. I was shocked that many of the participants showed up unprepared. And yet, the circle brought out ideas that they were able to incorporate into successful movies. (A good revelation for me!) After that, we were given a short and dirty tutorial on how to make movies in Final Cut Express. We recorded our voiceovers, and then we were off and running. All of us required a lot of one-on-one assistance, especially on the third day, close to quitting time. I struggled with the technology even though we were all using Macs and I’m very familiar with the platform. I was afraid to make mistakes and did not want to risk doing anything that would get me in trouble. The younger participants had no such fears and blithely finished their projects. We had a final showing, and everyone had produced an excellent finished movie. I was happy with mine overall, but I didn’t like the beginning title appearance. When I watched it, however, I realized that it was deeply personal, and, in fact, I was unable to share it for quite some time. I was surprised at this reaction and cannot explain why.

**Plan of work proposed for the second quarter of sabbatical**

* Select and organize stories appropriate for use in developing curriculum.
* Update my web multimedia authoring skills. In my research of digital storytelling, I already know that I have some technological skill gaps. I have developed two websites through self-study on very outdated software. I understand some basic principles of web design, but I currently lack confidence to branch out from what I have already developed. Therefore, I would like to take WEBMM 111 Web Development Foundations [online].
* Develop a website as a space for the stories to published and made accessible to the larger community.
* Create several models of digital storytelling that can be replicated for ongoing sharing and teaching.

**Second Quarter Work and Reflections**

Prior to taking the workshop on digital storytelling, I made arrangements with Marcela Pop, a level 6 (advanced) ESL instructor to work with her students spring quarter to make movies. I wanted to apply the workshop techniques with real ESL students who exhibited beginning to advanced computer skills.

The first major obstacle I encountered was the software. I did a lot of research after returning from California about appropriate software to make movies. I discovered that my Apple Computer had iMovie 08 which was redesigned into a completely different application from iMovie HD which worked like Final Cut Express with a timeline and a voiceover. At the Apple Store, the tutors tried to help me master iMovie 08, but I could see that this was not the educational approach that I needed to take with students.

I called Terri Hull and discovered that BC’s Mac Lab had iMovie HD installed. That was good news, but I didn’t have and couldn’t get iMovie HD on my own computer to practice on. Extreme frustration set in. Then, one of the tutors at the Apple Store, mysteriously came up with iMovie HD and simply installed it on my computer. I was finally in business.

As Marcela was working with the students on their scripts, I was researching a how to use iMovie HD. Daniel Meadow’s lab tutorial was the key. I followed his instructions to the letter and made a movie as a model for the students. I also revised his tutorial so that ESL students could understand and follow it. The students looked at my movie. Then they followed the tutorial and, using my photos and voiceover, made their own movie.

Next the students found photos on Flickr that illustrated their script. We taught them to only download photos using Creative Commons licensing. A few gave me personal photos to scan. I recorded their voiceovers in my office on my laptop using Sound Studio. Since the voiceovers were short, the background clicking and fan noises did not occur. Finally, they searched Jamendo for copyright-free music. They each made a storyboard from a template I created, matching their script to the photos that they wanted to use.

We had to pair up some of the students, advanced computer users with beginning users for some of the time. Two of the newest computer users asked their grandson to help. This created some problems as the grandson did not understand what was needed, and we had to undo some of the work. Gradually, however, they became more proficient and could do much of the work themselves.

iMovie HD is easy to use and gives great results. All of the students had no problem dragging their voiceover onto the timeline and matching the photos to the script. They were completely engaged with the process and used their storyboards to complete this step. One tricky part was making sure that students turned off the Ken Burns effect on each photo initially.

At the end, I worked with the students in small groups. We added the Ken Burns back in to some of the photos, created some transitions, and worked with the volume of the music on the movie. They needed help with this. Students were amazed at how well everything turned out. We saved them in Quicktime so that they could play them on their home computers. The students also knew that the movies would be published on my website.

The evaluations of the project were 100% positive. Students commented:

* That was nice addition for learning English!
* Now I can creating a movie.
* I learned how to do a simple private movie.
* I can do more than I think.
* How I could tell something good to other by movie.
* It’s good thing for ESL students. They could learn more by this.
* I learned how to use Mac. It was a new step for my life. (Several mentioned this.)
* My husband and I thank for you for helping us to make movies for the first time in our lives. We are not used to handling computers, so we could make movies with your assistance. Whenever we see these movies, we will remember you.

Marcela Pop, the instructor, wrote after making her own movie, “I learned that if I am passionate about something, I can inspire the students to put time in what they’re doing and enjoy what they’re doing. It was fun to make the movie! I truly enjoyed it. Thank you for working with me and our wonderful students.”

I was initially quite disappointed in the most of the scripts. I had expected the students to address the issue of resiliency in their stories. Instead, they basically wrote about their heroes. I decided, however, to go ahead and have the students make their movies anyway. I wanted to see how the process would work with a class. I eliminated one script that was plagiarized; otherwise, the scripts are what the students wrote under Marcela’s instruction. We also had trouble with the music. Music selections are quite personal, and some students just couldn’t make the connection that using copyrighted music is illegal. We talked about it, but I think that some of them felt this was a personal movie and that it would be okay. I must confess that I allowed them to use their own music selection in the movie that they took home on their own flash drives. But I changed all the copyrighted music when I published them on my own website. I informed the students that I would do this.

In the last class meeting, I decided to take some time to talk with and listen to the students. It was at that time that I began to realize that their choice of script material made sense to them and had quite personal relevance. For example, I almost scrapped the movie on Princess Diana. I looked for plagiarism in the script, but I couldn’t find any. Then I saw the photos, and they were all professionally shot. However, they were available on Flickr under Creative Commons Licensing. When I talked to the student about her movie, she said that she came to the U.S. with a 6-month old baby and was completely unprepared for life here. Her husband was working all day, and she felt completely isolated with no English language skills. She was homesick and unhappy. At that time, she took inspiration from Princess Diana who also had hard times but was always a “real woman” and a mother like her. When I reflect on this and think about doing this project with my own class in the future, I’m going to make sure that this step of listening is included more towards the beginning of the project. If I had been able to do that with this student, I could have helped guide her to making the Princess Diana movie more personal. The story circle that we participated in during the California workshop is an important step to script development.

In the middle of the quarter, I traveled to Ireland for two weeks. It was not part of my proposal, but it was a huge part of my learning. Charles Dickens once said, “One always begins to forget a place as soon as it’s left behind.” So, in an attempt to hang on to the country and stories that I came to love, I told the story of my trip on a blog. I have never blogged before. And, even more interesting, I developed my own blog on iWeb. Once again, I spent hours in the Apple Store getting help on how to create the blog. iWeb is super easy to use…basically just drag and drop. It turned out well but was a little tedious in the end as iWeb does not use CSS style sheets to control the overall look of the site. I also could not get into the code which was a little frustrating. The blog is linked to my website, and its URL <http://www.garnetstravels.com>. iWeb uses javascript in the navigation bar, so it is not searchable on Google; that’s why I chose an easy domain name for my readers.

This blog experience, plus a little research upon my return, made me realize that this could be another venue to tell a story digitally. And the possibility for interaction with students being able to make comments is very useful. I can visualize using this as a type of story circle, for example.

I will not write about going to Ireland in this report as my blog has extensive information that I researched, personal photos, and my reflections.

I did not take WEBMM 111 Web Development Foundations, but I took BTS 189, Webpage Authoring Tools instead. I worked in Dreamweaver CS3 to develop the Listening Legacies website. I worked feverishly after the movies were finished to get the website together so that I could publish the students’ projects. I had forgotten how time-consuming it is to develop a website from scratch. Luckily, I’m a late night person!

And, on one of those 2:00 a.m. sessions, I called Go Daddy, got a domain name for Listening Legacies and another for my Ireland blog. I decided to set up my hosting service for Listening Legacies with Go Daddy, but I chose Mobile Me for the Ireland blog in iWeb so that all the functions such as comments and RSS feed would work properly.

Once I got the look and organization of Listening Legacies established and some of the content written, I uploaded all the movies to YouTube and embedded the code on my website. Dreamweaver kindly offered to make changes to the code so that it would work in Internet Explorer. I accepted, and then the movies wouldn’t play on PCs. Macs still played them. It took me a while to figure out what the problem was, so I had to go back and re-embed the code and reject Dreamweaver’s offer to change it. Once that was done, the movies played. I was thrilled. I e-mailed all the students so that they could see each other’s movies on the Listening Legacies website even though it was only partially finished.

Next, I tackled putting the recorded conversations on the Listening Legacies website. I made a folder and put in the edited, but full-length conversations along with the excerpts. The folder was at the root level of my website directory. I then wrote summaries of the conversations and followed all the directions for creating the audio players. When I previewed them in the browsers, they worked. However, when I published them, they did not. I then realized that none of the sound files had uploaded. The Tech Services person at Go Daddy helped me upload some of the sound files from the web side because Dreamweaver refused to upload the files trial after trial. I researched the problem all over the web. I contacted my BTS 189 teacher. I contacted Adobe, and after three weeks of back and forth e-mailing they came up with a solution. In the meantime, however, I did a work around. I took the excerpts and made movies and uploaded them to YouTube. I could not do this with the full-length conversations because YouTube limits the size of the sound files. So the sound files of the complete conversations are available only on CD at this time. Adobe suggested that I download a third-party mini flashplayer. I excerpted a piece of the interview I did with my father just to try it, and it worked. I did not go back and redo the movie/sound files, however.

**My Conclusions:**

I met the goal and objectives for my sabbatical even though I did not follow my plans for each quarter exactly. And thankfully, I might add. The learning process takes its own course as it unfolds and the unpredictable nature of it is the engaging, thrilling part.

I believe that the stories I collected from the immigrant/refugee population communicate common concerns and can be used for further study, especially as it relates to the theme of resilience. Students in future classes will be able to work with this authentic and current content to use as a catalyst in developing personal story texts.

I learned that the longer recorded conversations present the best opportunity for students to delve into their lives to tell stories that connect to universal themes. However, working with the sound files is time-consuming and recording in a soundproof room is not always convenient, or even possible. I’m looking forward to working with KCBS and BC Reads fall quarter to record student stories from my speaking/listening ESL class. Working with the station manager, program director, and volunteers, I expect to learn a great deal more about how to work with sound effectively.

Movies are equally as powerful, but much care around script preparation will bring more consistent results. Movies are practical and engaging vehicles of whole literacy development, combining reading, writing, speaking, listening, researching and the use of technology. As I make movies with my classes next year, I will incorporate the lessons learned with Marcela Pop’s students.

As I reflect on this sabbatical project, I realize that technology is still the major issue for me. I met my goal to develop a professional-looking website as a place to gather and publish immigrant/refugee stories. But with each barrier I encountered and researched, I found a whole body of information that I could not access because I could not understand it. I will need to continue to find ways to update my web development skills. Additionally, creating a website is terribly time-consuming and something I would not undertake while teaching a full load. So, Listening Legacies was designed to make it easy to add more digital stories in the future.

Before this project, I thought YouTube was sort of a frivolous website. Now I wonder what I would do without it. Not just because I published all of the projects there, but also for what I learned from other people’s videos. There has been more than one Tech Support person that has simply told me to go to tutorials on YouTube. And, before I went to Ireland, my quality time with YouTube gave me a good idea of what we were going to see and what I could expect.

I had also wanted to learn how to make movies on a PC with Moviemaker. The latest release of this software though does not allow for voiceovers, so it will not be useful for the movie-making process as I had hoped.

My learning experience during this sabbatical was joyful and transformative in every way. This time was a gift for which I will be ever grateful. I am excited to think about future digital storytelling projects that will emerge as I work with students and instructors next year.

As I wrote in my sabbatical proposal, “Ultimately it is my hope that this storytelling project will catch the imagination of others so that through the gift of a story, we can teach and learn from each other, and that this project, will only be the beginning. “