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Life Stories from the Holocaust: Bringing Oral History into the Digital Classroom

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Jill Goodman and Gail Gradowski
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Life Stories from the Holocaust:
Bringing Oral History into the Digital Classroom

“Synthesizing oral testimony to create a film proposal caused me to think about the Holocaust in new ways. . . . I think the most comprehensive approach to learning about the Holocaust is to listen to oral history, read scholarly work on the practice of oral testimony as well as the art of Holocaust filmmaking and then, armed with such knowledge, envision a thoughtful and powerful Holocaust film. Doing so has impacted the way I think about oral testimony, Holocaust studies, and the Holocaust in general.”
(Santa Clara University student Karen Reyes).

“My favorite part of the class was making the film proposal and trailer. I never imagined how much fun hard work could be. I think that I learned the most about translating Holocaust memoir to film from this process, although I do not think I would have known where to start had it not been for the initial readings. The first-hand experience of trying to take a person’s story and turn it into a compelling movie was extremely difficult. However, I think it becomes fun and interesting because of the passion that you develop for your survivor’s story. After hearing Rebecca’s story, I immediately wanted other people to hear her unbelievable experiences. Creating the film proposal allowed me to feel as though I would be able to get her story out to the world. While I certainly enjoyed the experience, it was not an easy feat.” (Santa Clara University student Mikaela Cavalli)

For over ten years, we – an English professor and a research librarian -- have worked together to integrate into English classes at Santa Clara University the amazing and inspiring oral history testimonies of Bay Area Holocaust survivors. At first, we

invited Anne Grenn Saldinger, the director of the Bay Area Holocaust Oral History Project (BAHOHP), now merged with the Holocaust Center of Northern California (HCNC), to speak to our students in a literature and writing course we called Remembering the Holocaust (and the linked course in Religious Studies, Representing the Holocaust) and we also required the students to do community service work: each student summarized and annotated one survivor's testimony for the organization's archives. Students learned a little about oral history and a lot about their survivor; some, including two Russian Jewish immigrants, were inspired to work as interns for the organization for several years after the class ended. This component of our course was successful and interesting, and we included it as a discreet assignment for a number of years, but we also sought ways to integrate the oral histories more fully into the course design.

This paper focuses on one of our current upper-division writing courses, Visual Media and Holocaust Narrative, which we have just finished teaching for the second time. We will explain our pedagogy in using oral history testimonies and digital stories to teach students about the Holocaust because we think it is an effective way to bring young students closer to the tragic event that is receding in history – to bring them closer through affective, emotional engagement with the powerful life stories of survivors. We also believe that a high level of learning is taking place and that the students' work reflects a deeper than usual level of understanding and an integration of various kinds of learning. The learning that takes place is inherently active, and for some of our students it is powerfully transformative as, in Lynn E. Swaner's words, "they begin to question, test, and reformulate" their old ways of making meaning and, as they do, "their views of

themselves and the world in which they live”(18). We think this course, which uses Holocaust testimonies as an experiential teaching tool, is an effective model that others might want to adopt.

Oral history video testimony is a powerful teaching resource in an increasingly audiovisual culture. It is also a stimulus for research. With its informative as well as performative properties, Holocaust video testimony engages both the intellect and emotion of the students and reveals the dignity and humanity of the interviewees. It is a compelling way to intensify the immediacy of history as it comes alive in the context of a person’s life. The difference is the in-depth story, the emotion that is visible in the survivor’s voice, expression, even the silences; these stories do not present a stereotype of a victim, but rather a survivor, often a warm grandparent figure in his or her own home, today, in our neighborhood, one who has an incredible story to tell. As scholars in many disciplines have been recognizing, narrative is powerful and important. As one student writes, “it is hard to separate oneself from tragedy after uncovering a lost story.” Reflecting the experience of many of the students, another said: “learning from oral history is completely different from reading a textbook.” Because survivors are aging and each year fewer are able to travel and speak personally to classes, their videotaped oral histories now fulfill the mission of education and public memory.

Students are often amazed by the dignity of the survivors and the calm and poised way in which they tell their stories, and they are also intrigued by both the amount of new information they learn and the subtlety of various specific things that they had never heard of before. Speaking generally, one student wrote: “The tape gave me a more personal and specific idea of what life was like, which I had never imagined or thought about

before.” Another wrote: “Before I did the work in this class, I hadn’t viewed the communities of Jewish victims as a complex layering of actions and reactions that we normally associate with the idea of community. I just lumped them all together as human beings that were reduced to shadows of their former selves.” Doing the work for the oral history project forced students to think deeply about the essence of one person’s experience and what he or she hoped to share with the world. Interestingly, students often reflected on their own families and values – in other words, it is a very personal kind of learning. Indeed, in the surveys they wrote for the HCNC, 100% of the students said that watching the tape gave them a “better understanding of the experience of a Holocaust survivor,” and 100% said they responded “on a personal level to watching the tape.” Many clearly grew fond of their subject, and some became passionate advocates for them. One student explained that when he realized that his survivor had been so young, that he had had to make terrible decisions at the age of 19, he “realized that he was younger than I am when he joined the resistance. Knowing that he was younger than I am when he fought the Germans” made his testimony very compelling. For some, the experience was transformative. One student, for example, wrote:

“I came out of this class immensely more aware of myself as a person. Learning about the Holocaust and hearing, reading, and watching the experiences of survivors really helped to put my life in context. I feel as though in life it is so easy to get caught up in the small stuff and drive yourself crazy worrying about things that are of such little importance in the long run. Often times I found myself completely overwhelmed between school, work, love and life in general, but this class has really helped me realize that sometimes it is important to just sit

back and be thankful for everything that I have. Often times I get caught up in the daily grind and all of the stresses of life, and I forget just how lucky I am to be healthy, safe, and loved. These are three things this class has taught me never to take for granted.”

We had a number of specific goals when we began developing this particular upper-division course, English 176, and it is important to note that the thinking and talking took place over many years and in collaboration with Anne Grenn Saldinger and Deborah Kahn at HCNC. Our goals were to use the oral histories more fully than we did in the early courses in order to create an opportunity for deeper learning, to enhance the experiential and community-based learning components of the course, and to fulfill the mandate of the new core curriculum we are implementing by adding a new media component. We also wanted to create a more sophisticated research assignment, one that demands more student engagement and cognitive complexity: higher-order thinking skills (analysis, synthesis, and creativity as well as an opportunity to teach others about what they have learned). We taught the first version of this course in winter of 2008, and the second revised version in the spring of 2009, which is the course we discuss in this paper.

English 176 focuses on the intersection of film and first-hand accounts of the Holocaust, a topic that appeals to undergraduates. It is grounded in the Holocaust testimonies, and the major project, the writing assignment that shapes the course, is a 12-15 page proposal for a documentary film based on the lives of the survivors whose oral histories the students work on. Their film can be about the survivor’s war experience generally or can be focused on some event or segment of that person’s life. In pairs, the

students must use their oral history as a primary source, decide on a focus and theme, do the research, and write the proposal. In other words, the primary material itself takes the students in different and specific directions, and together with their partner, they must determine their own research path (and we as teachers act as their guides and coaches). To go along with their proposals, we ask the students to create a 2.5 minute promotional trailer – a digital story made using iMovie, which we will explain in more detail later. Clearly, the film proposal and trailer could not be done without a number of preparatory, scaffolded assignments, all relating to their work with the oral histories.

Before explaining some of the scaffolding, it might be useful to see the plan of the course as we laid it out in the syllabus:

English 176: -- Visual Media and Holocaust Narratives

Dr. Jill Goodman and Gail Gradowski

Spring 2009

T/TH 8:00 – 9:45 AM

(Professor Ballen’s Media Lab, 2 units; Fridays 2:15-4:00 PM)

Peer Educators: Lynsey Azzarello and Mayra Contreras

Textbooks

Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation
by James E. Young

The Pianist by Wladyslaw Szpilman

Selected Articles

Assmann, Aleida, “History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony”

Bernard-Donals, Michael, “Beyond the Question of Authenticity: Witness and Testimony
in the *Fragments* Controversy”

Fridman, Lea Wernick, “Silence in Language and in History”

Hartman, Geoffrey, “Audio and Video Testimony and Holocaust Studies”

Langer, Laurence, “Deep Memory: the Buried Self”

Laub, Dori, “An Event without Witness: Truth, Testimony, and Survival”

Lubin, Orly, “Teaching Cinema, Teaching the Holocaust”

Stark, Jared “Broken Records: Holocaust Diaries, Memoirs, and Memorial Books”

Selected films – to discuss in class (see complete list on the film assignment)

The Counterfeiters, Stefan Ruzowitzky, 2007

Forgiving Dr. Mengele, Bob Hercules and Cheri Pugh, 2005

Into the Arms of Strangers, Mark Jonathan Harris, 2000

Kitty: Return to Auschwitz, Yorkshire Television, 1979

The Pianist, Roman Polanski, 2002

Shoah, Claude Lanzmann, 1985

Visas and Virtue, Chris Tashima, 1997

Course Description

Scholars have argued that the best way to understand the nearly incomprehensible Holocaust is to study the first-hand accounts of survivors. These powerful and enlightening primary sources – memoirs, testimonies, letters and diaries, even paintings and drawings – are currently studied by lay readers and critics alike. In the last ten years or so, a number of these works have been made into documentaries and powerful, popular films, among them *Shindler’s List*, *The Pianist*, *Europa, Europa*, *Kitty: Return to Auschwitz*, and *Into the Arms of Strangers*. Not surprisingly, there is controversy involved in every aspect of these projects and films.

This writing course will focus on the intersection of film and first-hand accounts of the Holocaust. We will begin by doing community service work with local survivor testimonies from the Oral History Project of the Holocaust Center of Northern California. This work will also contribute to SCU’s collaboration with HCNC to create a digital collection of Holocaust testimonies available to students and researchers through our own library. While working on the testimonies, we will be reading theoretical articles about Holocaust testimony, memoir, and film, and will also examine Polanski’s feature film *The Pianist* and Szpilman’s memoir of the same name as well as a number of Holocaust documentaries.

Written work will include **an analysis essay** in which students apply ideas from the theoretical texts to one of the films in order to examine the challenges of translating personal testimony and memoir into film, **a film proposal for a screenplay** based on their oral history testimony with **a bibliography and a visual presentation** – a trailer made as a short digital story (the trailer will be made in the media lab taught by Professor Mike Ballen), and **a final reflection essay** on their experience with testimony in light of the scholarly work on testimony and film and all of their own work during the term.

Requirements/Assignments

OHP testimonies: indexing, summary, feedback, and transcriptions of 3 key segments (#1) – community service and opportunity to work with primary sources (in pairs)

Informal Response to two films (4-6 pages total)

Analytical essay (#2) – challenges and issues in translating memoir or biography to film (use films and theoretical texts) (6-8 pages)

Proposal for film (#3) – a documentary film on the subject of your OHP – including annotated bibliography and reflection of your research process (in pairs) (12-15 pages)

[Promotion/fundraising trailer for film proposal (#4) – a 2.5-minute digital story (in pairs and to be done in Professor Ballen's class)]

Reflection essay (#5) – reflection on testimony work connected to #2 (looking back at OHP work in light of theory and discussion) (4-6 pages)

Presentation to class (#6) – Discuss OHP tape highlights and film proposal, and show trailer (in pairs)

This design would, no doubt, work better as a semester-long course, but because we are on the quarter system at Santa Clara University, we must squeeze it all into 10 weeks. As you can see from the syllabus, the first part of the term is devoted to doing the archiving work for the oral history project, reading and discussing theoretical texts, watching and discussing Holocaust films, and writing the first formal paper, an analytical essay about Holocaust film based on memoir and biography. Much of the reading, especially the James E. Young chapters and the articles by Assmann, Hartman, Laub and Lubin, enriches and complicates the work the students do with the testimonies and also helps them to appreciate some of the nuances and challenges of the films we watched, particularly *Shoah*, *Forgiving Dr. Mengele*, and *Into the Arms of Strangers*.

One of the most important logistical elements of this class is to begin the work with the oral histories right at the beginning of the term. On the first day, Anne Grenn Saldinger came to our class and explained the oral history project and what the students

were to do for the archive: watch and summarize a survivor's story, annotate it for the database, select 3-5 especially poignant passages to transcribe, and write a reflection on the experience of doing this work. Saldinger also talked about oral history generally and her own research area, the psychological effects on aging survivors of giving testimony. She answered questions about her experience interviewing survivors, and she showed video clips from a number of powerful testimonies. The students were intrigued; their eyes and hearts were open. The same day, Tom Farrell, our librarian for digital projects, talked briefly to the students about SCU's collaboration with the HCNC to digitize and house some of the testimonies in our library for students and researchers at the university and beyond. Right then we assigned the testimonies and gave the students the information they needed from the HCNC website to do the work. We assigned the testimonies in thematically linked pairs: two students worked on testimonies of Polish resistance fighters, two on camp survivors, two on survivors of the Kindertransport, and two on survivors who had been in hiding. Each student had from 3-6 hours of video testimony to watch and work with.

While students were working on their testimonies at home, in class we watched segments from films and discussed the articles about Holocaust film; we also read and talked about memory and the subtleties (and pain and liberating value) of giving testimony as well as the importance of second-hand witnessing. In the fourth week, we assigned an analysis essay to push students to grapple with some of these issues in writing. Specifically, we asked them to write a 6-8 page essay in which they would examine some aspect of the question of adapting Holocaust memoir and testimony to film, either feature/narrative or testimonial/documentary. Besides referring to the work

mentioned above, they could refer to other primary and secondary sources as well, including reviews, director's commentary, and other films. To help them frame a thesis for this essay, we offered the following open-ended questions:

1. What is the effect of using Holocaust testimonies in a documentary? Of incorporating the voices and faces of the survivors, letting them tell bits of their stories? Does the "figure of the witness on screen make the testimony more effective?" And, is "the mediated testimony, filtered through the director's camera lens, as real and as effective as the supposedly unmediated one?" (Lubin). (Beyond the testimonies, what else is provided in documentaries that supplies important context and background information about the Holocaust and about the event or theme, like the Kindertransport or hidden children? How is this material handled?)

2. What is gained or lost in the film version of *The Pianist*? What choices did Polanski make, and how effective are they? (Think about tone, emphasis, choice of actors, music, etc.). In Lubin's words, does the visual representation overcome in any way the "limits of language and therefore communicate beyond words"? Of the memoir and film, which is more powerful, persuasive, and/or important? Is it important to read the book and also to see the film? In which order?

3. In what ways do you think the director influences or affects the vision, theme, focus of the film – when, for example, does *The Pianist* become Polanski's story (of loneliness, survival) as well as Szpilman's? Does it matter if the director's vision influences/shapes (maybe even dominates) the original text? What other aesthetic considerations and demands of narrative affect the overall representation? Are these distracting in any way? Do they detract from the enormity of the events and their horrific nature? From their importance and clarity? Does Polanski avoid what Lubin calls the "pitfalls both of narrative and of visuality"-- the "spectacularization of death" and the "entertainment aspects of fantasy?"

4. Analyze one of the documentaries or feature films and explain why it is or is not effective. How are testimonies used in the film? What about archival footage from the Nazi era? The music? The use of a narrator? Other famous or interesting scholars or survivors? What makes it interesting and compelling, and perhaps more powerful than the original testimonies themselves? (On the other hand, as Lubin points out, maybe the original material, the personal testimonies, would be more powerful). Do you agree with Spielberg in his video *Voices from the List*, that the personal stories (did he mean alone?) are finally more powerful and important than the feature films like his own *Shindler's List*?

5. Address the question of Holocaust film and memoir as history, as constructions of historical truth. Do you think a feature/narrative film such as *The Pianist* or *Defiance* or the *Counterfeiters* is more or less truthful than a documentary such as *Forgiving Dr. Mengele* or *Kitty: Return to Auschwitz*? What kind of truth are we talking about? How

accurate or specific need they be? Who cares? Which is more effective? And thinking about *Fragments* and the Bernard-Donals essay, what about fictional films that evoke the suffering and historical truths of the Holocaust? What about *The Reader* or *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*? Need the film be based on a true story to be effective? Are Holocaust scholars and educators right to be skeptical about fictional and artistic films about the Shoah? What concerns do you have?

The analytical essays the students wrote were impressive in their thoughtfulness and critical rigor, and many of the students pointed out in their addenda that they finished the assignment with even more questions than they started with, which we thought was an important insight about Holocaust research and a sign of their deeper learning. One student, a political science and German major, tackled the question of historical truth and the difference between historical documents and personal testimony. Another examined the way Polanski adapted Szpilman's memoir, and one studied the way Spielberg avoided sensationalism and kept the focus on the experiences of individuals. Some students grappled with the big ethical issues of films about the Holocaust as demonstrated in this passage from a student's paper on Eva Kor's *Forgiving Dr. Mengele*:

“The film ... does not compromise the enormity of the Holocaust by giving aesthetic form to its horrors. Rather it supplements our knowledge with the acknowledgment that its victims were complete human beings; the image of Eva Kor, feisty, flawed and fully alive, forces us to remember not just the victims as they were in the midst of death, but themselves entire, as full human beings. In this way the power of film is triumphant in helping us understand ... the victims' suffering ... and the scope of what was taken. We are forced to remember what they started with and the potential of life after the Holocaust, the potential that millions never realized.”

As mentioned above, the foundation of the course is the film proposal, which we assign next – after the students know their oral histories well and after seeing and analyzing Holocaust films. Midway through the course, we begin seriously thinking and talking about the proposal. Here is the assignment:

English 176 – Visual Media and Holocaust Narratives

Spring 2009

Assignment #3 – proposal for an original documentary film

Proposal Assignment (#3)

This assignment is to write a proposal for a documentary film based on your Oral History Project interview. After working on your testimonies and watching and discussing a number of films, please work with your partner to create a proposal for an original documentary film. Along with brainstorming and talking, begin doing research about the historical context and background of the idea, location and event(s) you have chosen to focus on. This should be a typed proposal – 12-15 pages long (including bibliography) -- concise, clearly written, and in the form described below.

- 1. Title**
- 2. Purpose and Intended audience**
- 3. Subject** -- write a clear one-line description of the story; try to create a compelling mental picture for the audience. (1 sentence)
- 4. Brief Treatment** – describe the type of film and approach, including genre/theme (adventure, survival, war story, biography, etc.), style, method of presentation, mood, and shape of the film. Will there be dialogue, interviews, still photos, artwork, archival footage, diaries, letters, commentary and/or narrative? What kind of sound/music? What kind of lighting? Color? (1 meaty paragraph)
- 5. Setting and Historical Context** -- show your research here. What do you know about that country and city/village at that point in the war? The neighborhood, the community, the labor camp, the concentration camp, displaced persons camps, etc. (about 3-4 pages; cite sources)
- 6. Characters/subjects** – describe how you will use the subjects of the OHP testimonies. Who are these people? Why are they compelling? Why/how do you think the audience will relate to them? What part of the stories have you chosen

to focus on and why? And, will you include other key historical characters? Academic figures? Will there be a narrator? (about 2-3 pages)

7. **Story Synopsis** – not a full script or blow by blow, but an outline of the linear arrangement of related incidents, the line of development that follows the conventions of movie scripts: beginning (introducing the subject and the main action), conflict, complication, crisis, ending (resolution). To help your reader understand your story, please include a description of a few key scenes or one sequence that includes a short series of connected scenes. (4 pages)
8. **Annotated bibliography** in MLA form (at least 8-10 good sources)
9. **Notes/reflection on research process** -- describe your research strategies and process, and explain what you learned about Holocaust research (1 page)

Part of the thinking required for this assignment is creative – imaginative -- and students may also draw on the images and ideas and techniques of the films they saw and read about in the first part of the term. At this point, we also watched the “extras” on the DVD of the Austrian film “The Counterfeiters,” which explains in a very interesting way how the primary materials from one survivor of Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, Adolf Burger, were gathered and used to create a realistic and relatively accurate portrayal of the men imprisoned by the Nazis to work on “Operation Bernhard.” What the students realized when they saw the extra material, this behind-the-scenes look, is that a film proposal also demands that they do research about the area of the Holocaust they are focusing on: the Warsaw uprising, the Kindertransport, or the prisoners’ experience in the Soviet Gulags, for example. In order for them to do this assignment well, we needed to demonstrate to students that the tools they were most comfortable using, Google, Wikipedia, and YouTube, were insufficient. We felt it was imperative to make them more skeptical of what they find on the Internet and teach them how to evaluate what is out there. We also needed to introduce complex library databases they would need, like

Historical Abstracts, and teach them how to use databases they already use, like the library catalog, in more sophisticated ways. To accomplish this, the class was going to need to receive formal instruction from a librarian in the library's electronic classroom as well as repeated class discussions with a librarian about the research process and information sources. And, as we will discuss next, that is exactly what we did. These quotes from two of the final reflection papers express what we aimed to achieve:

“Creating the film proposal taught me more about research in general, and Holocaust research more specifically, than any other class . . . Until taking this class, I always thought of the Internet as the best source of information for research papers. I was addicted to the convenience and availability of online resources. . . .”

“The most beneficial aspect of learning to research the Holocaust for me was identifying and avoiding sources that were not scholarly, reliable, or accurate in their information.”

To get the students ready to do this kind of research, we began by asking them to answer these preliminary questions about their oral histories:

List any places mentioned in your testimony. Places could be countries, cities, camps, anything.

For each of those places, try to specify a relevant timeframe. In other words, you need information about that place during a certain time period.

List any specific historic events that were mentioned in your testimony.
List any historic figures mentioned in your testimony.

If you can think of any images you already know you will want to try to find, describe them here.

List anything else that you can think of now that you know you will want to find out about. Use the back if necessary.

From here, we offered three library workshops and many class discussions. In this way, we taught students the library and information literacy skills they needed to create sophisticated and accurate film proposals. We hope that doing this kind of deliberate research gives students a sense of the complexity of Holocaust study and the importance of careful research strategies. We want students to practice working with disagreement and making judgments about the reliability of sources and texts. Ultimately, the students are responsible for evaluating the quality of the sources and determining which voices are the most important to listen to and which to be skeptical of. This kind of judgment and strategizing is what we expect to see in the annotated bibliographies. And, we did see it in some. Here is an illustrative example of what two students wrote in their annotated bibliography about one of their sources:

Skrzynska, Irena. "A Brief Outline of the History of Women POWs from the Polish Home Army (AK) Held in Stalag VIC at Oberlangen After the Warsaw Uprising." Polish Resistance. Polish Home Army Ex-Servicemen Association. 2 June 2009 <<http://www.polishresistance-ak.org/16%20Article.htm>>.

Irena Skrzynska's article was the only source that specifically addressed life in the Oberlangen prisoner-of-war camp, where Krystyna was held. Skrzynska was a fellow prisoner, so in this article she described details that were rather telling about life in the Oberlangen camp. For example, she recalls that approximately ten women gave birth in the camp during the winter, and that many of the other women donated sweaters and socks so the newborns would have something to wear. Our only concern with

this source is that it seems to be a biographical account of Oberlangen based on the author's experiences, rather than a historically accurate source. We cited several statistics that the author stated, though we made every effort to verify Skrzynska's statistics (which was challenging given that the Polish government was in exile and did not keep reliable records). However, we decided to include this source because Skrzynska's experiences are so similar to those of Krystyna.

Reflecting on the students' success with the library and information literacy aspect of the course, we believe that it was essential to require them to turn in drafts of their annotated bibliographies early in the research process so that we could offer feedback and suggestions. It was also important to organize additional library workshops to teach them more nuanced skills and strategies, to make specific suggestions in regard to their topics, and to give them the chance to work together, ask questions, and hear each other's questions.

It is important that students do much of the course work collaboratively. Students each do the HCNC work independently, and they write their own analysis paper, but from then on, they work in pairs – doing the research, writing the film proposal and bibliography, and creating the promotional trailer. Ideally, as Ede and Lunsford argue in their article, “Why Write . . . Together?”, when students work together on such creative projects, they take more time than when they work alone: they talk more about both the project and the writing when they work together. They read and then talk; they write and then talk some more. Together, they figure out what they do not know and what they need to learn; they figure out what they think. Of course, collaboration takes time,

flexibility, and compromise, but the results are worth it. Indeed, as Lunsford has explained in a more recent article, research reveals substantial evidence for the advantages of collaborative work, many of which apply directly to the work students do in our class. What Lunsford found is that collaboration aides in problem finding as well as problem solving; it aids in transfer and assimilation; it fosters interdisciplinary thinking; it leads to sharper, more critical thinking and also to deeper understanding of others; it engages the whole student and encourages active learning; it combines reading, talking, writing, thinking; and finally, it provides practice in both synthetic and analytic skills (“Collaboration” 49). We are convinced that much of that did happen in our class as students worked in pairs on the proposals and the trailers. To support our philosophy, we made time for students to talk and work together in the class and in library workshops, and also in one of the computer labs at the library on several occasions. Our students also worked collaboratively on their promotional trailers in the media lab attached to the class.

We knew from the 2008 version of our course that the students needed more time to learn from a specialist the technologies for their digital stories, and they also needed sufficient scheduled lab time to actually complete the trailers. And so we added the media lab. Michael Ballen, one of our instructional technology resource specialists, designed and offered a two-unit required lab to give the students instruction in and time to learn the necessary technologies and applications to create their trailers. For Mike’s course, 176L: Holocaust Narratives Media Lab, students committed to approximately two hours a week, and they earned 2 graded units for their work. The first part of Ballen’s course was devoted to learning the technologies -- GarageBand, iMovie, Photoshop

Elements, and iShowU -- that would enable them to capture web multimedia resources, create audio and enhanced podcasts, and write and produce digital stories. The second half was devoted to creating their own trailers for the class.

The lab was successful, and the final trailers were very good. Along with instruction from Ballen, students also had the aid of the two peer educators who had taken the class the year before and had themselves created a trailer. They had experience with iMovie and had a sense of all of the things that could possibly go wrong. Not only did the students have time to learn the various applications in the lab, they also had extra time to watch and discuss sample trailers with Ballen and time to ask questions. Perhaps most important, we had time to treat the first drafts of the trailers the way we did the first drafts of essays – as working drafts that would profit from peer review and discussion. In the case of the trailers, in early May, the students presented their working drafts to the other students in the class and to Mike Ballen and Tom Farrell who all offered feedback. Using a rubric that included all of the criteria by which we would grade the final trailers at the end of the term, they commented on such things as the pacing of the movie, the appropriateness and volume of the soundtrack, the clarity of the story's purpose and main dramatic question, the quality of the images, and the accuracy of the final credits. According to Mike and Tom, the trailers were significantly better after that review. And, indeed, we were all impressed at the final presentation – the digital story trailers were relatively sophisticated, technically quite polished, and poignant in their portrayal of the essence of the survivors' stories.

Our course ended with a symposium, a presentation of the student work. Besides all of the students and the faculty involved as well as Anne Saldinger from HCNC, we

invited some of the parents, friends and other interested faculty. Before the students showed their trailers, they each spoke about the subject of their oral history testimony – they gave the audience a taste of the survivor’s life story and they spoke about what had touched them personally. Together, each pair then explained the concept of their film proposal – what they did with the oral history material, how the research progressed, and why they made the decisions they did. For example, two students who worked with Polish resistance fighters explained that their main character was in some ways a composite of their two survivors, but that they chose to use mainly the story of the young woman, Krystyna Chciuk, because she was just a girl, a very brave girl, when she joined the resistance, and to them her story seemed especially compelling. They also told us about their research process and some of the choices they made in completing their trailer. In these presentations we saw everything come together in the way we had intended, which is evident in the words of those students:

“Holocaust research is simply more involved than that of any other subject. The overwhelming information and data provides a plethora of sources from which to choose. The more research we did, the more committed we were to telling Krystyna’s story honestly and ensuring we did visual justice to those portrayed in our trailer.”

Moreover, from the students’ final essays, reflections on the work they did in the entire course, it was evident that they had all become personally involved and committed to their work, and that the ideas they grappled with at each step informed the next and finally enriched their overall learning. The term was intense and demanding, but the work was all integrated – the work on the oral histories, the reading about theory of

testimony and film, the films themselves, the analysis essay, and the creative work of the film proposal and the trailer (as well as the final reflection essay) all resonated with each other. By the end of the term, it was clear that the students had engaged in deeper learning and had developed some insights about oral history and oral historians, about Holocaust survivors, about the challenges of making honest and accurate Holocaust films, and about the Holocaust itself – about the war, Nazism, anti-Semitism, resistance, collaboration, life in death camps, and human resilience, the value of family, the importance of memory, and much more. The presentations and the reflection essays also confirm our belief that using the oral history testimonies as the center of the course grounds the work in a very profound and personal way. The students worked hard, and we sense that they have been deeply touched; we believe they will continue to learn about the Holocaust on their own and, recognizing themselves as emerging authorities, will also teach others.

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