Sabbatical Project Report

Spring 2012
Instructor: Tracy Henninger-Willey
Project: Improving Technology Skills

Summary: My project was a multi-faceted one that grew and morphed as represented by the graphic I created above. I started out with a goal, which was to learn to develop Computer-Assisted Language Learning applications for iPhone and other Mac platforms (large blue circle in the middle). I made some strides in learning Java and gained a basic understanding of the art of computer programming. However, as I got more deeply involved in this topic I realized that the type of sophisticated Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) application that I wanted to create would require more skills than I could develop in a one-term sabbatical. As a result, I modified my project to develop a wider range of basic knowledge about a variety of technology helpful to language teachers rather than an in-depth programming knowledge in just one area. The project gained breadth as represented by the smaller circles above and included: Taking several online classes, learning more about video production, researching CALL and reading research, and finally exploring the role of social media in language learning.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

I began my sabbatical by reading *The Art & Science of Java: An Introduction to Computer Science* by Eric S. Roberts and taking a free online class through Stanford University called Programming Methodology. The plan was to start there and move on the course iPad and iPhone App Development. However, I found some decided drawbacks to taking a free online class. Four weeks into the class I was still trying to program a robot Karel to pick up a newspaper and meeting with limited success. Ironically, I was studying a new language in a computer-assisted environment. My study was turning more and more into an experiential Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) by the day.
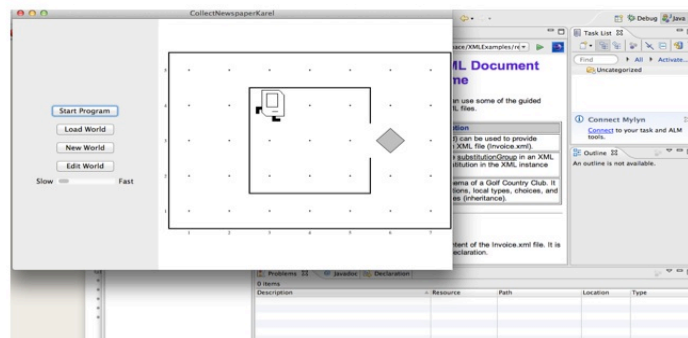
When it became apparent that I was a slower study than anticipated at learning Java, I turned to something more manageable, and began exploring a variety of simpler technology that was more readily available but time-consuming to learn and really develop a level of comfort in. That led me to take a face-to-face class at Lane on Digital Storytelling with Sandy Jensen and take and participate in some free activities and classes through the DS106.com (Digital Storytelling 106) and other websites providing creative commons materials, ideas and creative projects.
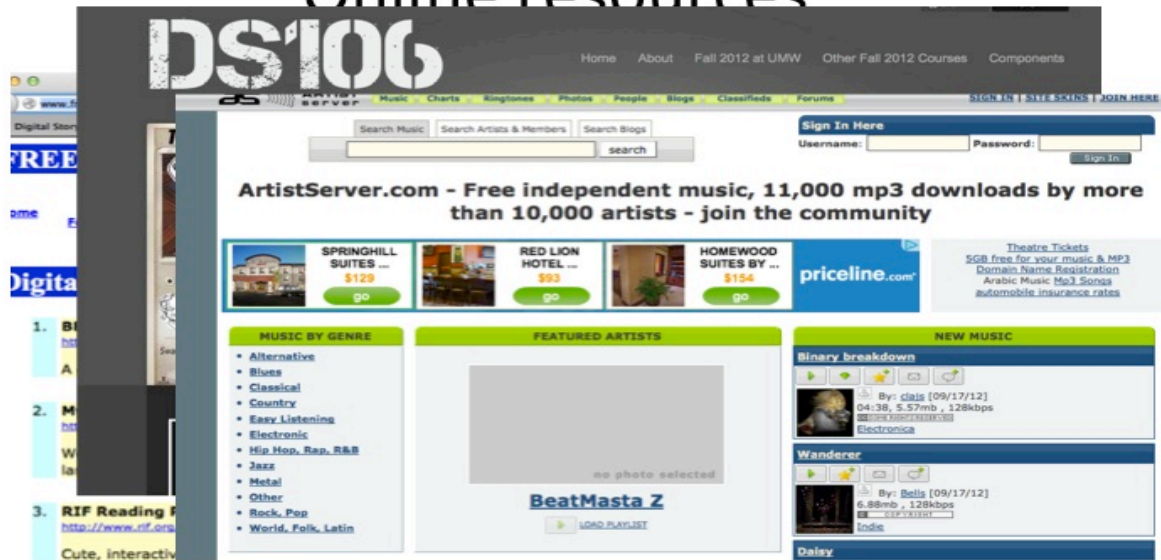
Digital Storytelling Workshop

I created my first digital story (see http://pln.lanecc.net/souloflane/2012/06/13/my-first-day-at-lane-9-11-2001/), and began to develop my technology skills in a more tangible way than I had when working on Java. I began to reflect upon my failed Java experiment and I came up with the following takeaways I could use in developing my own courses and eventually my next video and in the future if I teach an online course:

Computer-Assisted Learning Takeaways

- Videos and pictures are very helpful even when it's a lecturer demonstrating something and writing on a board
- What would have been helpful:
  - Feedback at shorter intervals
  - Going over homework
  - Addressing FAQ (or FP-frequent problems) and offering email support
  - Answer keys

Even though I didn't learn the content I wanted to in the course, it was a great experience to be a student and see what was missing that would have made it a more successful experience for me. These things were doable and don't require an incredible amount of programming knowledge. I tried to use them as I embarked upon my next project: creating a video to teach a grammar point. I created a video explaining the present progressive tense and used my dogs and Flickr.com for visual prompts.
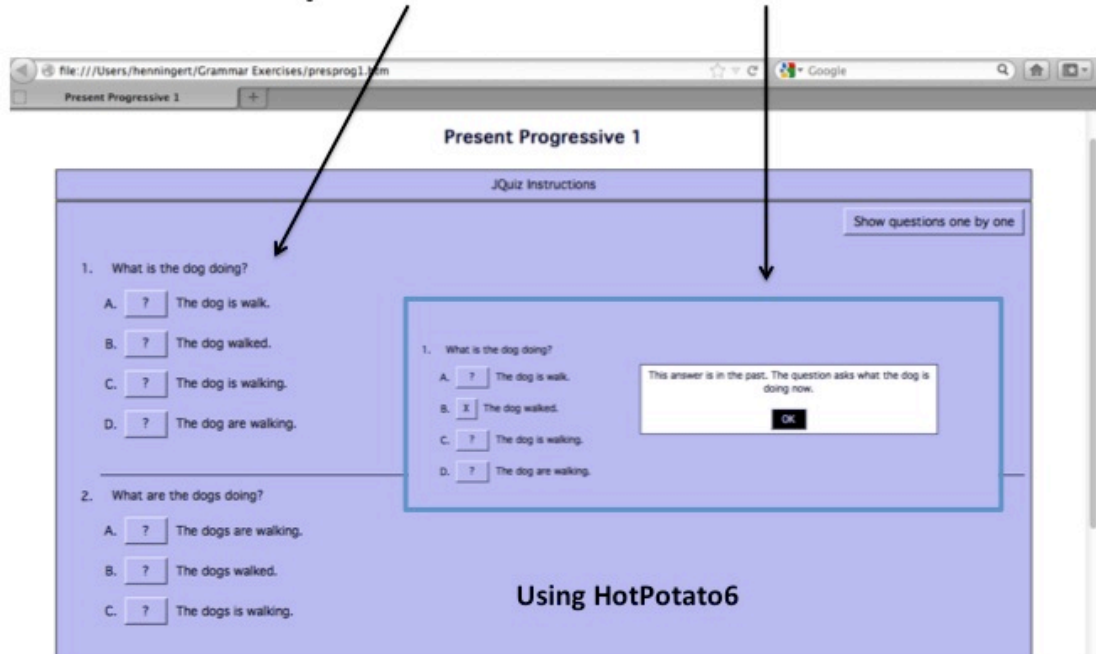
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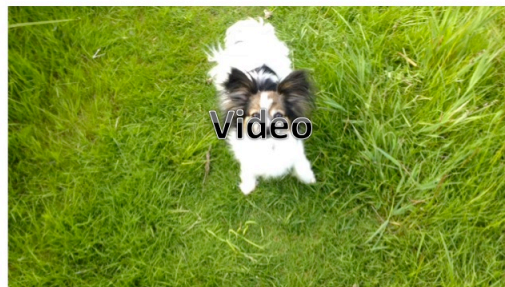
This video can be viewed on Youtube at http://youtu.be/StGwHMN9BNc

I also created an accompanying grammar practice exercise using Hot Potatoes, which I also learned to use on my sabbatical. This software allows you to create exercises that provide practice and feedback for students.

After sharing versions of this video and the online exercises with several low-level language learners, I learned the following:

- I didn't need to slow my speech as much as I thought.
- Students liked the parts where they could fill in the blanks and then get immediate feedback.
- They found value in the practice-feedback (they thought they understood until they got to the practice and feedback section)

I had successfully turned my unsuccessful Java-learning experience into something I could use to develop my own materials.

Finally, I also explored some social media that has promise in the classroom. I learned how to create a website on Wordpress and a simple blog on Blogger. I also did a lot of reading which I normally don't have time for in Reading Instruction.

A Sampling of Results

Since coming back from sabbatical, the following is just a sampling of what I have been able to do as a result of my leave:

- Given a workshop on Digital Storytelling at the ORTESOL (Oregon Teachers of Speakers of Other Languages) conference (see the Prezi from this presentation: http://prezi.com/bsdduf6dtivj/digital-storytelling/?kw=view-bsdduf6dtivj&rc=ref-30987269)
- Created a blog with students entitled the How to do it! Blog where they can post their process essays: http://rw7howto.blogspot.com/
- Started a digital storytelling project in our Reading/Writing 7 class using iMovie, sharing with teachers and writing out tutorials where students have been creating digital stories to share with classmates and others in the community. A link to some of their stories (those who have signed release forms), are here: http://lccopencomputerlabesl.pbworks.com/w/page/61405520/Digital%20Stories%20Fall%202012
- Created a commercial project using iPads to create commercials and have opportunities to practice spoken English in an Oral Skills class.
- Incorporated far more technology into my classroom. There were so many little pieces I was able to put together because I had time to explore. I know how to use sites like http://Quizlet.com so much better for working on vocabulary. It has a great app that students can access and can see flashcards I have created for them on their smart phones.