Institutionalizing Local Narratives: Community History and Lore for Primary Grades in Dumaguete City, Philippines

Andrea Gomez-Soluta
Department of English and Literature
College of Arts and Sciences, Silliman University

This paper presents the gathered folk and historical narratives from the thirty barangays in Dumaguete City, Central Philippines contributed through the oral history method by 36 elderly natives of Dumaguete when asked to share popular local folk stories and significant events in the area within living memory as well as to recommend narratives in and about the locality that should be passed on to the young as part of their elementary school learning.

Using thematic analysis, the study was able to establish the following common topics and themes running through the local narratives gathered: origin of barangay name; community spirit (with themes of peace and harmony, respect and trust); rhythm of daily life in years past (with themes of prayerfulness and hard and simple but happy life); war experience (with themes of cruelty, survival, courage, and patriotism); and ghosts and supernatural creatures (with themes of woman ghost or enchantress and malevolent creatures).

The quality of the topics and themes drawn from the study's data proves that local narratives are a very rich source of materials for the mother tongue-based History, Culture, and Values classes in elementary schools.

Keywords: local narratives, community history and lore, culture-based learning

INTRODUCTION

The June 2012 implementation of DepEd Order No. 74, s. 2009 known as Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is seen as a positive development in the Philippine educational system inasmuch as this order requires that the medium of instruction in Grades 1–3 should be the pupils' mother tongue. A rationale for MTB-MLE has been provided by UNESCO (2012):

> "Children who receive a strong educational foundation in their mother tongue are in the best position to move forward with confidence, to learn other languages, and to make a contribution to their societies' future. Strengthening early education helps to equip young people and communities with sufficient knowledge, capacity, and self-confidence to engage in decision-making about development and to protect their rights." (p. 39)

Kadel (2010) explains that MTB-MLE is also known as "'first-language-first' in education" because children are initially instructed in their first language (L1) and, later on, in additional languages. This type of education "helps linguistically marginalized communities bridge to the broader society, allowing them to acquire the national language without losing their own identity" (Kosonen, 2009, in Kadel, 2010).

For Benson (2004), mother tongue-based bilingual (or multilingual) programs are tremendously advantageous to young learners since "the affective domain, involving confidence, self-esteem and identity, is strengthened by use of the L1, increasing motivation and initiative as well as creativity." Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) also points out that one positive aspect of MTB-MLE is that it builds on the basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) of children and, thus, they will not be "sitting in the classrooms the first 2–3 years without understanding much of the teaching" which is often the case if the first language is not used as medium of instruction. In other words, children are relieved of the "double burden of learning both the language and the content all at the same time" (quoted in Granali, 2013) because "their own language enables young learners to immediately construct and explain their world without fear of making mistakes, articulate their thoughts, and add new concepts to what they already know" (Nolasco, 2010).

Given the documented advantages of MTB-MLE, the implementation of said DepEd Order makes "Education for All" more achievable to the country's minority groups who are marginalized because of their languages. However, it has also created a need for classroom materials using different Filipino languages. Informal interviews with primary grade teachers handling the Cebuano-based classes in the public elementary schools of Dumaguete City and at the private Silliman University Elementary School revealed that they all found preparation of instructional materials in the vernacular to be very hard and stressful. In light of this, the digital stories[1] of compiled local narratives from within Dumaguete City presented in institutionalized Cebuano – the final output of this research project – will be offered for use in Grades 1–3 classrooms in the locality.

This article presents a thematic analysis of the gathered oral narratives – mainly, local history and lore – since the research team[2] has established that there is still very little written account about the various Dumaguete communities as well as the fact that, on their own, there is much to be learned from these narratives.

ORAL HISTORY AND STORYTELLING

Oral history is a "democratizing concept of history" in that it is focused on "the ignored (or 'historiless') strata of the society, reflecting more on the small history (microhistory), individual experiences, history written 'from below', the everyday dimension, etc." (Weber, n.d., p. 1). Before the 1970s, history was mainly written from elite perspectives. But, with the social movements on equality and justice for all in the 1970s and 80s, oral historians started paying attention to 'history from below' aimed at foregrounding the experiences and voices of those who have traditionally been absent or 'hidden from history' (Rowbotham, 1973 in Smith, 2008). In other words, "'history from below' seeks to take as it subjects ordinary people and concentrate on their experiences and perspectives, contrasting itself with the stereotype of traditional political history and its focus on the actions of 'great men'…" (The Institute of Historical Research, 2008). Presenting as historical accounts their experiences and perspectives is appropriate given that "the real record of history is found in the lives of ordinary people who lived it" (Texas Historical Commission, n.d.). Also, these oral accounts are "valuable as sources of new knowledge about the past and as new interpretive perspectives on it" (Shopes, n.d., p. 3).

One challenge often hurled against oral history is the "accuracy of memory as a historical source." According to Green (1971, in Smith, 2008), people experience the same things differently, so there should be more leeway in the acceptance of the subjectivity of memory. In fact, these subjectivities of memory are actually advantageous in that "oral histories could provide historians with new ways of understanding the past, not just in what was recalled, but also with regard to continuity and change in the meaning given to events" (Portelli, 1979, in Smith, 2008). The unreliability of memory understandably makes oral history, which relies on a 'dialogue' between interviewer and interviewee/narrator, "not the best method for obtaining factual data, such as specific dates, places, or times, because people rarely remember such detail accurately.… It is the best method to use, however, to get an idea not only of what happened, but what past times meant to people and how it felt to be a part of those times" (Texas Historical Commission, n.d., p. 2).

As a method, oral history is also problematic in the sense that it is often interchanged with oral tradition, a body of narratives (stories, songs, sayings, etc.) among a group passed down through the ages while the former "involves eyewitness accounts and reminiscences about events and experiences which occurred during the lifetime of the person being interviewed." But the recollection of past events and experiences cannot be totally disengaged from storytelling in that

> When we ask people to talk about the past, we are asking them to tell us stories from memory. When they do, they often select and emphasize certain features while minimizing others. People do this to personalize their stories for the listener, to make the story relevant to today, or to make sense of their experiences. It is human nature to use stories to explain things. (Texas Historical Commission, n.d., p. 2)

Allen (1992, in Shopes, n.d.), a folklorist, explains that storytelling is a natural aspect of oral history, hence, the significance of oral history lies not in its ability to present facts but, rather, in its "attempt to create a collective consciousness of what is important.… Whether a given story is factually true or not is not the point; rather, its truth is an interpretive truth, what it stands for, or means" (p. 10). In other words, "these stories form the cultural,

mythological, and historical fabric to daily life," according to Cunsolo Willox, Harper, and Edge (2012). The authors maintain "storytelling… should be respected as a way of sharing lived experiences, exploring personal beliefs and values, and discovering place-based wisdom" (p. 7).

Clearly, oral history and storytelling are closely intertwined focusing on ordinary people's recollections of their lived experiences. Both are part of most peoples' sociocultural heritage and also an effective means of communication by and with the very young. Oral narratives[3] are, unfortunately, rarely utilized in today's classrooms. This article argues that there is much to be gained in institutionalizing oral narratives starting from the primary grades.

LOCAL ORAL NARRATIVES

Setting and Key Informants

The key informants in this study were mainly elderly natives of Dumaguete while those who came from other places (mostly from neighboring areas) had been permanent residents of the city for 30 or more years as of 2013 when the interviews were conducted. Most were within the 60–90 age range with more than one-third of them already in their 80s.

The team aimed to interview two informants from each of the Dumaguete City barangays, but this was not fully realized because we were not able to meet some of those whose names were given to us because of either their illness or their being away visiting their children. At least two also refused to be interviewed, with one claiming that he no longer trusted his memory to recount the past well enough to contribute to our project. Moreover, we only had one key informant from each of the barangays comprising the city's commercial district (specifically Poblacion 3, Poblacion 4, Poblacion 5, and Poblacion 6) because there are now very few residential houses in the area and many establishment owners are not from Dumaguete or have not stayed in the city long enough to consider it home.

Common Narrative Topics and Themes

The team asked each key informant three main questions: 1) What folk stories are commonly known in the locality and variations of these stories, if any; 2) What events in Dumaguete within living memory are considered significant

in the locality?; and 3) What oral narratives in and about the locality should be included in the community's elementary school curriculum? Analysis of the gathered oral narratives yielded the following common topics although the last two were not mentioned as often as the first three: 1) origin of barangay name, 2) community spirit, 3) rhythm of daily life in years past, 4) war experience, and 5) ghosts and supernatural creatures. It is notable that almost all the key informants considered their replies to the first two questions as also their answers to the third one.

Origin of barangay name. All the informants considered the origin of their barangay (then called barrio) name as part of the community lore and should, by all means, be handed down to the succeeding generations. Their barangay-naming narratives validate Aldecoa-Rodriguez's (2000) claim that most such narratives in Negros Oriental and Siquijor, in general, and Dumaguete, in particular, were short and exhibited the characteristics of legends and myths. Analysis of the oral narratives gathered showed that the legends surrounding the names of barrios often centered on a prominent community marker – object, site, a group, popular community activity, or even, a purported communal trait – the name of which was adopted or adapted by the barrio. For instance, the supposedly unusually big *Balugo* tree; the solitary *Piapi* tree; the actively flowing springs — "*Junob*[non] *gyud*[4] (truly full of springs)"; the *Kantil* or small body of water that shoots up; *Daro* (plow or till the soil) as the main activity of community members since the area was one vast *darohan* (farm); the tower by the beach that was the lookout place (*Bantayan*) of community members guarding against attacking pirates and other invaders; and the abundant *Bagacay* bamboos surrounding the cemetery.

Other barrio names alluded to these individual markers as well. Buñao, allegedly the Spaniards' mispronunciation of the Visayan term *bugnaw* (cold), described the drinking water that used to be drawn from the communal well. The name *Bajumpandan* is also attributed to the colonizers who supposedly got curious about the unfamiliar good smell wafting from the houses during their initial foray into the barrio. The natives explained their practice of lining their pot with Pandan leaves when cooking rice to give it good flavor and smell. Henceforth, the foreigners recorded the place as *"kini may baho man sa Pandan* (this place has the scent of Pandan)" prompting people to start calling the place with a contraction of the phrase. In a similar vein, *Cadawinonan* was coined in reference to the earliest settlers

in the area who migrated from the neighboring town of Dauin ("originally, it was *Cadauinanon*") while the name *Camanjac* alluded to the *manhak* birds perpetually swarming the barrio's thick bamboo trees.

The name *Talay* recalled how the houses of old – mainly located beside the road – were in one straight line formation *("gatalay ning mga balay")*, and *Tabuk-tubig*, then the trading center for farm produce from various parts of the province, could be reached from Dumaguete, through the Banica River *nitabok sa tubig* ('they crossed the water'). *Mangnao* alluded to the need for people to wash their hands (*"adto mi manghunaw"*) after gathering *"saksak"* (variety of nipa that thrive on fresh water) that grew robustly in the area, and *Banilad* referenced the mats, originally spread by the road for drying corn and rice grains but were swept away by the flood. When the water subsided, the mats were found tumbled all over by the fence *("nasablay didto's alad")*. *Looc* described how the place was surrounded by water or located within water ("*murag na-look, nasulod* (seemed to be choked, isolated)"). On the other hand, one version of the origin of Barangay Motong's name recalled the act of harvesting coconuts (*mamutong*), which abounded in the place.

From among the gathered narratives, there are three barangays named after a purported common trait among the barrio folk. The other version of the origin of Motong goes *"kay pareha sa manok nga mag-mutong ang mga tawo diri* (just like the fighting-cocks, the residents here were easily provoked)." Similarly, Batinguel got its name from the popular notion that people in the area were hot-tempered (*initon ug ulo*). The third barrio, Candau-ay, got its name because *"sige ra'ng ga-away,* dyotay rai sikil mag-away dayon (people here were constantly fighting, simple misunderstandings/disagreements could easily lead to clashes)."

Two barrio-naming narratives could be considered urban legends. One of these is the narrative on Cambagroy (now renamed Barangay Poblacion 6), which sounds generic. The informant shared that there was a party that had an American visitor named Mr. Roy. While he was walking away, the people shouted, *'Come back, Roy'*. From then on, the place was known as Cambagroy. Conversely, the narrative on barrio Luke Wright (now renamed Barangay Poblacion 2) appears to be purely fictional and exhibits the Filipino penchant for making puns. The place was obviously named after Luke Edward Wright, the American Governor-General of the Philippines who served from February 1904 to April 1906, but the legend goes that Luke Wright, a foreigner, was someone who actually stayed in the area and

is known to everyone. His popularity was mainly because of his peculiar walking habit: "*Whenever he walked by, he was always on the right side of the road.*"

The narratives on the names of four other barrios, meanwhile, show the origins to be more in the realm of myths than legends since supernatural elements are featured in each narrative. Barangay Bagacay is eponymous to the specific variety of bamboo that surrounded the cemetery located in the barrio. The *bagacay* supposedly warded off the malevolent creatures *abat, balbal, and kaskas*[5] from preying on the just dead.

Even more dreadful than the malevolent beings was the supernatural creature that lent its name to Barangay Taclobo. This gigantic shell locally called taclobo brought death to anyone passing by while it was opening because it was enchanted.

In contrast, the supernatural characters that feature in the narratives of Bantayan and Calindagan are believed to be divine and dedicated to guarding the people against outside attackers. Both narratives are likely variations of the same myth about a mysterious woman patrolling the beach considering that the two barrios share the same stretch of beach. The Bantayan version speaks of how the woman ghost suddenly appeared from nowhere to help the men at the watch tower defend their place when invaders were approaching. The woman was believed to be St. Catherine, the designated patron-saint of Dumaguete. The Calindagan version presents either a woman astride a gigantic white horse or a half-woman, half-horse creature constantly patrolling the shore on the lookout for pirates coming to kidnap girls working in haciendas. Accordingly, she would gallop or make her horse gallop *(galindag ang dagan)* to warn people that pirates were coming in, so they should hide. The informant emphasized that the community considered the horse-riding woman more believable than the half-woman creature and was convinced that she was actually St. Catherine doing her patron-saint duties.

It is noteworthy that the names of the barangays generally memorialize a positive aspect of the place except seemingly those that comment on a general trait of the barriofolk. However, a closer examination of these latter narratives reveals that these traits, in fact, had been given a positive spin by the natives. Thus, being *mutong, initon ug ulo,* and *sige ra'ng ga-away* are seen in the sense of being brave and fierce serving notice to outsiders not to belittle or take the barrio folk for granted. This meaning was implied

by the Batinguel informant when he said, "it was generally known in town that those from Batinguel were fearless and did not accept defeat." As well, given that myths are meant to impart lessons, the narrative involving the deadly enchanted *taclobo* could very well be the natives' expression of the importance of environmental awareness; that all should be mindful of the environment, so it would not cause them harm in return.

Most of the markers are no longer prominent or, even, totally gone today. But since these are memorialized in the barrio names, even those markers that might have been more grounded in fiction than fact continue to be part of the community lore. That the community elders have passed these on to their descendants is validation enough of their veracity. Thus, although the Barangay Balugo informant admitted not knowing the exact location of the purported Balugo tree, he did not doubt its previous existence explaining he got this Balugo tree story from three local elders. Similarly, the Barangay Piapi informant had not actually seen the Piapi tree but heard from old folks that its stump was still in Purok Anduhaw. The constant referencing of elders/ancestors by the informants is indicated in rejoinders such as "I heard from my parents"; "that was what the old folks claimed"; and "based on what I heard from my grandparents" as well as in the expression "kuno (it was said/claimed)"). Acknowledging their elders is understandable inasmuch as the latter are the keepers and passers of community oral knowledge/records to the younger generations (Hanson, n.d.).

Equally important about this "oral footnoting" is its emphasis on the fact that "oral tradition is a collective enterprise. A narrator does not generally hold singular authority over a story. The nuances evident in distinct versions of a specific history represent a broader understanding of the events and the various ways people have internalized them. Often, oral histories must be validated by the group. This stems from the principle that no one person can lay claim to an entire oral history" (Hanson, n.d., p. 2). Rather, it is community property. Given that embellishments happen in the retelling of the narrative, the existing variations of the barrio-name narratives should, thus, be regarded positively because these indicate that the oral tradition in the area is continuing to this day.

Community spirit. *"Storytelling was something done at home. But for entertainment, people got together with other community members."* This statement by another informant expresses the more private and serious nature of storytelling—parents/grandparents handing down oral knowledge

to their descendants—compared with the entertainment and fun the natives derived from socializing with the community. At the same time, it speaks of the importance they accorded these community bondings.

The informants readily mentioned *baile* as the number one means of socialization in the past not only within their respective communities, but also all throughout the entire town (*"They'd go to dances held in other barangays"*). The dance events were often organized to celebrate fiestas or for pure social bonding, so these were an entire community affair.

The *baile* was not a purely young adult affair. According to several informants, parents would often accompany their daughters to the dance and young women would not attend without permission from their parents. At the dance, a young man also sought approval from the former first before dancing with their daughter. Showing respect to the parents extended to how the partners conducted themselves on the dance floor: *"No dancing to 'sweet' or slow music; only cha-cha and ballroom because the elders would be angry if partners embraced each other while dancing."* The young woman was escorted home as well after the dance.

Asking permission from the young woman's parents was not simply part of the "baile-baile ritual" but was in keeping with the people's prevailing customs and attitudes at that time. Respect for elders was a sacred tradition that the young solemnly observed: *"every time we saw old people, we always showed our respect by touching the back of their hand with our forehead"; "We accorded all our elders high respect, whether or not we personally knew them."* Such attitude made it easy to maintain peace at the bailehan given that the community regarded these dances as respite from a hard day's work and a place to start friendships. Consequently, the frequency of holding the *baile* – a night event held in both public and private spaces that could last up to the wee hours – was never an issue to the townsfolk because it did not disturb their peace.

An informant described the common setup of a public *baile: "The entrance fee was only 20 centavos. The dance, which started at seven in the evening, was held under the coconut trees using Petromax (Coleman lantern; for lighting). Attendees could wear anything as long as it was clean."* On the other hand, the more formal private dance events were held inside big houses and provided guests with dinner and snacks although the entrance fee was much steeper at two pesos per guest.

If their elders had the *baile* for socialization, the children had games

like *dagan-dagan, bulan-bulan, tubig-tubig*[6]. Like *bulan-bulan* or *tubig-tubig, dagan-dagan* – a group game that required everyone to run away from the designated catcher because once caught, one would be declared out of the game – was often played on the beach or on streets during early evenings. Several informants shared that, at times, the adults were with the children especially when the moon was out. Everyone converged on the streets up to the beach and played because there were no vehicles then. Thus, these games were also a community affair given the fact that Dumaguete had no electrification during most of the 1960s, so the more private entertainment provided by television was yet to be enjoyed by people in the area.

Another constant theme that ran through the narratives on community spirit was the peace and harmony prevailing among the barrio folk. At some point in their individual recollections, most informants harked back to the halcyon days expressed commonly as rarity of *mga buluyagon* (people with bad attitudes), absence of *gubot* (conflicts), and real closeness (*suod kaayo*) of neighbors.

A contributing factor in and a consequence of the peace and harmony among the Dumaguete natives in the past was their complete trust in each other. The statement, *"before, there were no walls and fences so it was easy to traverse places"* could be taken as both literal and figurative; there was freedom to move around the "unfenced" community since "everybody (knew) everybody." Like the straightforward routes, community relationship was open and trusting. The absence of physical and symbolic barriers between and among the community members was further elucidated by another informant: *"Back then, windows and doors were not closed… Neighbors all knew each other, so anytime, we could go to each other's houses and talk about what was happening in our lives. We supported each other."*

The unanimous fondness for those "good old days" among the informants is not surprising because the feeling awakens as well as reinforces one's sense of community; one who has no such fond memories will not feel as connected. It is, therefore, understandable when an informant totally blamed outsiders for disrupting the idyllic state of his community: *"these days, those who bother (us) are outsiders."* The desire to preserve a positive perception of the community is part of the function of the key informants as keepers of oral knowledge given that "the sense of community is integral to the oral tradition" (Boyer, n.d., p. 1).

Rhythm of daily life in years past. From the 1930s to the late 1960s, Dumaguete was still sparsely populated, and community members lived

relatively far from each other compared to today's houses standing only several meters from each other. It had neither electrification nor running water system, so people used Petromax or simple burning lamps at night for lighting and sourced their drinking water from wells and springs that were still very pristine. Most washed their clothes and took a bath in the Banica River or in the Buñao Creek, both of which were also clear and unpolluted then. One informant recalled a more innocent and fun time when taking a bath in the river was a group activity for children after helping their elders in the fields:

> *We used to take a bath there; there were always many children bathing in the (Banica) river. After planting corn, we would take a bath as relaxation and because there were no faucets then. Even if our nipples were showing/perking up (sign of puberty), we were not embarrassed taking a bath because there was no malice (among us). We also washed our laundry in this river.*

People on the other side of town, instead, used the big creek in Buñao. As one informant shared, *"If my mother needed to do the laundry, we came to the creek, which was still shallow and clear. We also took a bath here early in the mornings (before going to school)."* But for swimming during holidays and weekends, Dumagueteños went to the beach by the boulevard.

Dumaguete natives then also had to walk most of the time since machine-operated vehicles were still a rarity; only *tartanilla* (horse-driven carriage), caromata and rayos (both are carts for loading heavy farming products usually pulled by carabao), and bicycles were the modes of transportation seen around town. One informant expressed the inconvenience of not having a readily available ride especially to young people because they could not readily roam around. Another revealed that this lack of transportation made her want to quit school because she had to walk a long distance every day to go to school, but her mother would not hear of it.

The absence of basic services and transportation system, however, made life much simpler for the townsfolk because *"People would go to the market, church, recite the rosary then go back home. At 6:00 pm, families would observe the Angelus, have dinner, recite the rosary, then rest. We were home by that time because there was no one else about town."* Another informant said that his family's nightly devotion included prayers to various saints highlighting

the fact that the natives' prayerfulness emanated from their strong Roman Catholic faith. The town generally retired early except when there was a *bailehan* to go to or the moon was full and the community came out to play.

The religious rituals encouraged by the Roman Catholic Church created a distinct and consistent tempo in the rhythm of the natives' everyday lives. Aside from the prayers held among family members, there were also the public ones that engaged everyone in town at specific times each day. An informant described the pattern:

> *There was this religious practice in the past when every 12 noon, the church bells would ring or the fire alarm would sound to remind people that it was prayer time. But at 6:00 pm, during the Angelus, everyone/thing was at a standstill; moving only after the bells have tolled. Everyone prayed; some, even, knelt…. They also observed public praying in the mornings.*

After their religious obligations, retiring early for the day was quite ideal for a townspeople whose main source of living was farming, which the informants termed either "pamaul," "pangdaro," or "pang-uma," producing mainly corn. Many farmers also planted sugarcane, various vegetables (bell peppers, tomatoes, eggplants, string beans, paliya), and rootcrops for both their own consumption and the local market. For some communities, their main livelihood was to raise coconut trees for copra while some men got paid as "tuba-gatherers" or coconut-harvesters. Copra was sold commercially to be turned into other products while *tuba* – coconut wine – was either sold fresh or fermented as vinegar. Retiring early meant being able to wake up early so as to perform these agricultural activities avoiding the scorching midday sun.

The Daro informant stated that, while his community was waiting for the sugarcane to grow, members busied themselves with making bricks and clay stoves, an industry for which the barangay is still known although only a handful of families are continuing this tradition today. In his words, *"I started making bricks when I was just six years old. Up to now, we are still making them. The women usually made clay pots/jars while the men made bricks because the clay pots were not as heavy as the bricks to make… Presently, there are only six families involved in brick-making."*

In contrast, the Looc community was and, still is, dependent on the seaport and not on farming. The residents back then earned their money by

risking their lives daily: *"We used to sell smuggled goods from Jolo. We jumped from the ship after getting our goods. The police would just seize the goods if we got caught."*

In this case, Looc residents were an exception since most in town came from farming families ("Nagtubo mi sa pagpamaol") who did not have much in life (*"I've experienced walking to school barefoot; most of my contemporaries did as well; slippers were a luxury then since these were fashioned from rubber-tires"*). It is therefore not surprising if the image that constantly emerged from most of the informants' recollections of their growing-up years was that of someone who lived a relatively hard life being obligated to help with the day-to-day needs of the family by strict, disciplinarian parents.

The hard part was always associated with their farm work (*"After finishing Grade 4, children were already made to help their parents weed in the farm"*) or household duties particularly fetching water and gathering firewood. What made these duties doubly hard was the long distances they needed to walk to accomplish them, but like their parents' strict rules, these duties were willingly accepted as integral part of their daily lives. The following translated recollections from the informants expressed their daily hardships but, at the same time, their unquestioning obedience to their parents' wishes:

> *— We went straight home after school to help our parents while other kids were still out playing with marbles and rubber bands. But my father had been unceasingly lecturing us not to imitate the other kids who kept playing because we had obligations at home.*
>
> *— When we were still small, we were not free to roam around because our parents would scold us. We could only go out if we were already done with our work. From school, I usually lugged home some wood for our firewood. Cooking rice was my task while my sibling had to carry the water we fetched from the well by hanging the water containers to a bamboo pole that he placed on his shoulders. There were no faucets then.*
>
> *— We were always selling kangkong in huge bundles. I also sold candles. I grew up without my father so my mother and I did all the faming.*

To cope with their physically-challenging duties and the discipline imposed by their parents, the young devised ways so their duties would become lighter (*"We would try to finish our assigned duty – to either sweep, clean or cook – so we could play. We also helped each other, so we could all go and play"*). And they also tried to make their long walks more fun and less tiring by talking and telling each other stories. They played games, too, like the *kayokok or dakpanay*[7] and made a sport of hitting bats hanging on coconut trees using slingshots. Doing their duties together and bonding with their friends, consequently, made them able to take their day-to-day lives in stride and were much happier in the process.

To emphasize that they felt very satisfied with their upbringing, some informants stated their wish for today's youth to emulate the way they regarded their own parents (*"to also be fearful of their parents out of respect and love"*). This way, the former will learn the good values their elders lived by ("mag-amen"; "mag-good morning") instead of "mag-sige na lang ug TV, computer." In other words, the informants perceived today's young as quite disrespectful to their elders and lazy for not helping with household chores.

The informants' perception that their generation had better values than the one at present is to be expected because, according to Kabira, "oral narratives have always been a reflection of a people's worldview at any particular time within their dynamic and changing social spectrum" (cited in Orina et al., 2014, p. 201). Such subjectivity cannot, however, ignore the fact that the informants' happy growing-up memories and their values of old promoted their connectedness to and rootedness in their community. One summed up this general feeling of contentment with their lives when he opined, *"No one wanted to go abroad back then,"* which was obviously in comparison to the troves of Filipinos who joined the trend of going abroad, beginning in the 1980s, believing that they can only fulfill their dream of a better life if they worked outside the country. Many of these expatriates have since opted to stay in their new country permanently and come back to their native land only occasionally.

War experiences. All the 36 key informants shared narratives on their growing-up years and community bonding but only about one-third of them (13 out of 36) recounted their experiences during World War II. This is explained by the fact that only the informants who were already in their late 70s and 80s in 2013 (oldest interviewee was 92 years old) could

possibly have had some personal remembrances of the war that happened in their midst. However, not all those in this age bracket chose to speak about the war. Be this as it may, the gathered narratives in this section reflect the common themes associated with war and wartime stories, wartime situation and survival of innocent civilians, atrocities committed by aggressors, and courage and patriotism of the locals.

In any war, civilians always find their lives drastically altered. This truism is manifested once more in the stories told by informants who were already old enough to understand what was happening when the Japanese Imperial Army invaded Philippine shores. An 81-year-old informant recalled that the outbreak of war in the Philippines happened on December 8 (but did not mention year) and ended in July of 1945. He was in Grade 4 then, but he and the other children suddenly found themselves on extended vacation when all schools were ordered closed. When schools resumed, pupils found that their curriculum had changed: they were now required to learn the Japanese Katakana. Similarly, an 84-year-old informant revealed that she learned "a lot of Japanese, including the Katakana, during the war." Aside from being required to learn enough of Nippongo to be able to communicate with the Japanese soldiers, the townspeople were expected as well to learn the common Japanese custom of bowing to show respect to authority.

Initially, the presence of the Japanese was not resented by some Dumagueteños because the previous batches of Japanese soldiers who camped in the area were good and kind, sharing their food to the locals. But when food rations became scarce, the invaders changed – *"they became hot-tempered"* – and took out their predicament on the townsfolk. The locals have truly become victims of war with the Imperial army curtailing their freedom such as imposing many restrictions, putting up barricades and demanding Filipinos to show passes, and ordering them to get down their houses for inspection. One member of each household was also conscripted to render various services for the Japanese army such as *"manually transporting sand and gravel"* for construction purposes.

Not being able to move around freely and being in constant fear for their lives, Dumagueteños could no longer go about their workaday lives, thus, began to experience food shortage. One informant relived these difficult times:

> *I was still young and it was a painful experience to be surrounded by the Japanese. It was very difficult to move about because the*

> *Japanese were closely guarding us. At 5 o'clock in the afternoon we would already go to sleep. We could not also go out because if the soldiers saw children, they would surely kill us. That time when the arrival of the Americans was nearing, it seemed I would go deaf from the sound of airplanes circling above. We would run away. We would just eat raw banana blossoms because we could not even go near the sea (to fish); it was being guarded by the Japanese.*

Some of the men were forced to go out after dark to look for food for their hungry families *("My father traveled to Oslob by pumpboat to get some food since he had a brother there. He would leave in the evening to avoid being tracked by the Japanese"*) while some decided to evacuate their entire families to Dauin or Siaton passing through the steep Mt. Talinis because the Japanese had not penetrated these areas yet.

The tragic consequences of war were put squarely on one female informant's shoulders when, as a teenager, she was forced to take on the responsibility of her family's survival needs. As recounted:

> *During the war, we helped our parents. We worked so we could eat because corn and rice were scarce. The first time we evacuated, while crossing the Ocoy River, my older sibling slipped and got pierced; he suffered a hemorrhage and died. It was a time of utter confusion and chaos. I had to think and find means of getting food since I had become my mother's right hand. All she knew was to weave.*

Natives who found themselves having to serve both the Japanese and the American – who have landed in Dumaguete by then – armies were also constantly risking their lives for they faced being declared a traitor by either side. One informant told of his grandfather, a barrio official, who was arrested by the American soldiers (part of the United States Army Forces in the Far East, commonly referred to as the USAFFE by the people) for being mistakenly thought of as having delivered to the Japanese soldiers two of their spies. He would certainly have been killed by the Americans if not for the many people who vouched that he had actually been helping the Americans in the past, providing them food rations regularly.

Aside from their own harrowing experiences, some of the informants were also witness to atrocities committed by the Japanese aggressors on

others. The cruel acts perpetrated on the natives included punishments that ranged from being forced to stand for a long time to being stripped naked and made to endure the heat of the sun or, worst, to being killed.

Among the casualties of war, women and children are often the most traumatized for life if they are lucky to survive. The oral narratives of the informants reiterated the victimization of children and women with the innocent children being murdered seemingly for sport ("I witnessed how a child was thrown up then was struck by a bayonet") and with the girls and women being raped as part of the "spoils of war" ("They would take and rape beautiful maidens and kill them afterwards") or "as a weapon because it destroys communities totally" (UN Human Rights Website, n.d.). One informant cited the case of the beautiful Amigo sisters – from a rich and prominent family in Dumaguete – who were both raped and then killed by the Japanese soldiers as proof of the latter's cold-bloodedness.

The Japanese aggressors further terrorized the people by displaying in public how ruthlessly they disposed of lives especially those who committed – imagined or otherwise – transgressions against them ("That time when the airport was bombed during the Japanese Period, the spies who gave the information to the Americans were killed by the Japanese. They were executed at the Boulevard") or by demonstrating their total disregard for the natives' religious and cultural institutions (no proper burial for those killed). Below are excerpts from the translated recollections of the informants illustrating utter inhumanity committed in the name of war:

> — The Japanese were really cruel then. We watched how three people were chained together. While digging their own graves, they were struck by the soldiers' bayonets and thrown into the shallow pit with legs and heads not completely buried; That night relatives took the body of a neighbor who was among those killed and buried him properly. The victims were completely innocent, according to the people. The Japanese were just perhaps really cruel.
>
> — The Japanese killed some people who happened to pass by them on their way to look for food. They just covered the bodies with coconut leaves; the stench of the decomposing bodies spread all throughout Piapi. They just left the corpses like garbage there.

> That time, which lasted around four years, was really a terrible, cruel time…
>
> — There were Filipinos who were coming down from the mountains. They were gunned down by the Japanese whom they met at the crossing of Palinpinon. The dead were buried in a mass grave then covered with a big stone.
>
> — At Silliman, there was the *kimpitay*[8] —-a torture apparatus, where the victim got literally pressed as a form of punishment.

The atrocities of war cause the victimization, traumatization, and death of untold numbers of people. But these extreme situations also bring out courage and patriotism in others. Some of the shared narratives demonstrated examples of how some Dumagueteños defied the Japanese soldiers ("*There were those who would roll up their passes just like cigarettes to avoid getting caught or having it confiscated by the Japanese*") or how others courageously faced the prospect of yet another death (i.e., getting drowned) to escape the aggressors ("*Harvesting clams was prohibited that time but then, there were those who defied the order… They ultimately swam towards the island of Siquijor rather than face death in the hands of the Japanese*").

The acts of bravery and sense of community and country are often the only heart-warming stories that come out from people caught in war zones. From the informants' narratives, it was revealed that the church played a role in helping the townsfolk avoid danger. They understood that if the Cathedral bell was sounded not at prayer periods, it was meant "as a warning that *there were* Japanese airplanes," so everyone should hide to avoid falling bombs. One female informant, who was 14 to 16 years old during WWII, revealed that she and her brother were directly involved in helping the USAFFE by passing on information about the boats docked at the port. She described their ingenious manner of spying for the US soldiers:

> At low tide, I would go to the beach and gather shellfish, shrimps taking note of the boat/s at the wharf. I would describe the wharf to my brother and he sketched it as a message for the USAFFE. And we hid the message in our underwear so that we wouldn't get caught. The message would then be hidden in a tube on a tree,

and so the people from the mountain would know the news here.

The war finally ended in July of 1945, and one of the informants was there to witness the ending of Dumaguete's "own wartime." That day, the natives did not know that the war was already over, so some families were still starting their evacuation to Siaton. Then suddenly, *"We saw that the Japanese were jumping into the boat, and soon after, the American submarine emerged; we cheered and clapped our hands instantaneously."*

"To understand war, you have to hear from the folks who experienced it first-hand," according to Dan Clayton, a History professor at Regis University who teaches the course Stories from Wartime (in Veasey, 2013). Though there were not many of these narratives shared by the key informants in this study, those that were told were enough to piece together a picture of Dumaguete during the Japanese invasion; how the war shackled the natives' lives and brought them terror and tragedy as well as how they banded together to fight and survive. Clapping to show their relief that the war had ended seems too underwhelming a response but, in a sense, quite fitting for a suffering townsfolk wanting only to get back to the old pattern of their prayerful and simple lives.

Ghosts and other supernatural creatures. Among the sets of common narratives gathered from the informants, stories about ghosts and supernatural creatures had the lowest number (10). Four of these narratives are connected with the name of respective barangays so have been included in the section on origin of barangay name. As already pointed out, the story of a woman ghost helping guard the Bantayan and Calindagan shores against invaders is associated with St. Catherine, Dumaguete's patron-saint. The Bantayan informant said that St. Catherine was believed to be holding a very big bayonet when patrolling, while according to the Calindagan informant, the saint summoned bees (*"she'd raise her hands, then a swarm of bees would come"*) to cover the island so pirates would not see it.

There is, however, a spin to St. Catherine's story that reflects Filipino irreverent humor at the expense of the Catholic Church. The Banilad informant claimed that, during the Dumaguete fiesta… windows would be lighted up by nightfall *"to guide St. Catherine on her way to see St. Agustin."* The joke here is that St. Catherine's night prowlings were not purely meant to patrol the beach guarding against invaders; at times, she went to visit her boyfriend, Saint Augustine. Considering that this story borders on the

sacrilegious from the Roman Catholic standpoint, it is safe to assume that it is quite contemporary reflecting the changing attitudes and mindset of people who are no longer as deeply religious as the townsfolk before the 1970s.

As to be expected, the Bagacay barrio name origin is associated with the cemetery and "mga dili ingon nato (*those beings who are not like us — the malevolent and enchanted beings*)." The cemetery is also the setting of many ghost stories among Filipinos. Often such stories involve pretty women in white – hence, dubbed the "white lady" – or black haunting the cemetery road and often flagging down motorists but then suddenly disappearing to the bewilderment and terror of the driver. A version of this woman ghost story, with a humorous twist, was shared by the Bagacay informant:

> *The story goes that once a baile was held in Dumaguete. By midnight, two ladies, who were said to be both very beautiful and dressed in black, appeared and hailed a tartanilla. The ladies told the kutsero to bring them home to Bagacay… Upon reaching the crossing to the cemetery, the ladies alighted, handed over their fare, then turned into skeletons. The frightened kutsero drove away as fast as he could. After a while, he alighted to repair the tartanilla and mumbled, 'I was so frightened.' Unexpectedly, the horse replied, 'Me too.' So, both of them ran for their lives.*

The comic element drowns out the "horror" in this ghost story so it becomes more funny than scary. It also puts on display magic realism—"combining realism and the fantastic so that the marvelous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them" (Faris & Zamora, 2004)—with a distinct Filipino brand.

Another version of the woman ghost narrative, connected with Talay, focused on a woman enchanter/ghost, sometimes appearing as a dog, who haunted a part of the national road (an accident prone area) that ran through the barrio: *"It was told that there was a woman or dog who would cross the road. Then in the hospital, people would say, 'Ah, this happened in Talay again'."* In this story, the woman would purportedly appear from nowhere and suddenly cross the street causing serious accidents or even claiming lives of motorists.

Among the informants, ghosts are not included in *"mga dili ingon nato"*, a phrase meant to describe other supernatural creatures. The latter

commonly resided in trunks of big tall trees or hovered on top like the *kaskas*, according to one informant who used to help his father climb coconut trees to harvest the coconuts. The *kaskas* were a constant presence at night but these creatures were not able to harm the informant and his tuba-drinking friends because *"…we constantly burned coconut leaves to frighten away the kaskas because it is said that there were many of them in olden times, and they were so vicious.*" Two other informants mentioned the talisay as inhabited by "mga dili ingon nato" with one of them saying that talisay trees found in their area had been the resident of one such creature: "*The being would fall in love with a woman but would soon fall out of love upon learning that his object of desire was already married or has a boyfriend.*"

Some supernaturals also resided in a big tree in Taclobo, supposedly containing their palace. The informant described two types of these creatures – the *engkanto* and the *kantasma* or *kapre* – and how they lured humans to their kingdom:

> *Those engkanto—enchanted beings—are the ones living in that large tree. You can't see them and they won't show themselves to you. We get frightened because we are so short, and they are very tall and big. If they want to appear to you, they would appear as beautiful creatures. If you're lured to their tree, you won't be able to come back anymore.*
>
> *The one called kantasma—phantasm or now known as kapre—would stand on the tallest tree, smoking… I had a cousin whose husband went near a mango tree. Their son went after him because he went into a very beautiful carriage wherein a very lovely lady was sitting. In old stories, this would be considered fantasy. But when the mango tree was cut down, the cutter died; there were enchanted beings living in the palace inside the tree.*

In the preceding narrative, the description of the supernatural creatures fits those found in common Filipino myths: residing in big trees, big and tall, and have the ability to disappear/appear at will and change their appearance. The woman-as-enchantress theme is also included in the narrative luring gullible humans.

As earlier pointed out, the reported comingling of malevolent supernaturals with nature seems mainly to teach humans to respect nature, which provides many of their survival needs. In this context, one cannot fault informants who want to entrust these supernatural stories to their descendants to ensure the protection of their environment.

The rich narratives presented in this section prove that the ordinary Dumagueteños who have been rooted in their own land for 60 years or more do have their own worthwhile stories to tell. Most of their stories reflect how connected they are to their land and community. Coming from farming families and being farmers themselves, they have relied on the land during their entire lives spending many hours every day working on it. Often, their only break is to go bonding with the community; otherwise, they retire early and rise early to perform their common-life rituals all over again. From the narratives could also be pieced together an image of the Dumaguete native in yesteryears: someone who has a strong sense of community, respectful, trustworthy, prayerful, attuned to the environment and accepting of the supernatural, and overall, leading a hard, simple, but nevertheless happy life.

CONCLUSION

The push to include oral narratives, particularly local history and lore, in the MTB-MLE curriculum is validated by the rich data gathered in this study. The lived stories of the elderly members of the community offer valuable sources of classroom materials for mother tongue-based History, Culture and Values Education subjects in the primary grades within the locality inasmuch as these are narrated in Cebuano and the pupils can easily relate to them being certainly familiar with some of the local markers and personages mentioned. Having a personal connection with what they are learning in school makes the young not only more motivated to participate in the discussion, but also more articulate and confident in expressing themselves. Consequently, as already pointed out, they become better learners.

But the implications of institutionalizing local narratives go beyond the classroom's four walls and academic achievements of pupils. Local narratives can help mold the children to be more aware and appreciative of their own culture and people as well as provide children a sense of ownership of the folklore and history of their locality. Such feeling of ownership, in turn, can give these children a sense of rootedness in the place that eventually will

hopefully translate to them being more socially- and culturally-involved community members. After all, the past gives ample proof that strong and vibrant communities/nations often arose from a united and socially- and culturally-conscious citizenry.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was fully funded by the Silliman University Faculty Development Grant in Research received through the SU Research Development Center.

REFERENCES

Aldecoa-Rodriguez, C. (2000). *Negros Oriental and Siquijor Island: Legends, beliefs and folkways.* Dumaguete City: Caridad Aldecoa-Rodriguez.

Benson, C. (2004). *The importance of mother tongue-based schooling for educational quality.* Background paper for EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005. Available online: http://www.depedro7.com.ph/uploadedFiles/file/newsletter/72811/Mother%20Tongue.pdf

Boyer, M. A. (n. d.). Native American Oral Tradition. Available online: http://english.sxu.edu/boyer/112_336_rdg_qsts/oral_lit_handout.htm#2

Cunsolo Willox, A., Harper, S. L., & Edge, V. L. (2012). *Storytelling in a digital age: Digital storytelling as an emerging narrative method for preserving and promoting indigenous oral wisdom.* Retrieved from http://qrj.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/10/12/1468794112446105

Faris, W. B. & Zamora, L. P. (2004). *Magical realism: Theory, history, community.* North Carolina: Duke University Press.

Granali, R.J. (2013, June 4). K to 12: Teaching in local language a hit among kids. *Philippine Daily Inquirer.* Retrieved from http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/420033/k-to-12-teaching-in-local-language-a-hit-among-kids#ixzz2jBt9QiKC.

Hanson, E. (n.d.). Oral traditions. Retrieved from http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home/culture/oral-traditions.html?type=123&filename=Oral%20Traditions.pdf.

Institute of Historical Research (2008). History from below. *Making History: The changing face of the profession in Britain Website.* Retrieved from http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/ themes/history_from_below.html.

Kadel, P. (2010, Dec. 9). *Mother tongue based multilingual education.* Nepal:

Language Development Centre. Retrieved from http://ldcnepal.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/MLE-Article-Newspaper-9-December-2010.pdf.

Nolasco, R.M.D. (2010, September 10). Why children learn better while using mother tongue. *Philippine Daily Inquirer.* Retrieved from opinion/columns/view/20100910-291594/Why-children-learn-better-while-using-mother-tongue.

Orina, F. A., Ogendo, G. N., Magato, W. K., & Ombati, J. M. (2014). Emerging themes in African oral narratives: A case study of Abagusii community of Western Kenya. In *Journal of Education and Practice, 5* (16). Retrieved from http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/13099/13659.

Robin, B. (2006). The educational uses of digital storytelling. In C. Crawford et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of society for information technology and teacher education international conference 2006* (pp. 709–716). Chesapeake, VA: AACE. Retrieved from http://faculty.coe.uh.edu/brobin/homepage/Educational-Uses-DS.pdf.

Shopes, L. (n.d.). What is Oral History? Making Sense of Evidence series on *History Matters: The U.S. Survey on the Web.* Retrieved from http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/oral.pdf.

Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2009, March). Why mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MLE)? Paper presented at a meeting of indigenous organizations, Nepal. Retrieved from http://www.tove-skutnabb-kangas.org/pdf/Tove_Skutnabb_Kangas_Why_mother_tongue_based_multilingual_education_MLE.pdf.

Smith, G. (2008). The making of oral history: Sections 1–2. *Making History: The changing face of the profession in Britain Website.* Retrieved from http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/oral_history.html#memory.

Texas Historical Commission (n.d.). *Fundamentals of oral history: Texas preservation guidelines.* Retrieved from http://www.thc.state.tx.us/publications/guidelines/OralHistory.pdf.

UNESCO (2012). *Why language matters for the millennium development goals.* Bangkok: Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education.

United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner (n.d.). *Rape: Weapon of war.* Retrieved from http://www.ohchr.org/en/newsevents/pages/rapeweaponwar.aspx.

Veasey, D. (2013, January 29). Stories from wartime – Iraq and Afghanistan topic of Jan. 29 presentation at Regis University. Retrieved from http://regis.edu/News-Events-Media/News/2013/January/Stories%20from%20Wartime.aspx.

Weber, D. (n.d.) . *Oral history method.* Retrieved from Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Institute of Contemporary History website. Retrieved from http://www.memoryofnations.eu/page/index/title/oral-history-method.

NOTES

1 In The Educational Uses of Digital Storytelling, Robin (2006) explains how digital storytelling (DSt) – "combining the art of telling stories with a variety of digital multimedia, such as images, audio, and video" – can be an instructional tool for teachers and, at the same time, an effective learning tool for students. Teachers can use digital stories as either an "anticipatory set" to get students interested in the lesson that is about to be presented or a "hook" to connect a new material with information/knowledge that is already known. Using digital stories can also help simplify abstract concepts and/or enhance lessons.

2 Jennifer Eve A. Solitana and Joan C. Generoso were the principal interviewers while Hermie Larong-Gomonit was our videographer/photographer.

3 This term will, henceforth, be used to mean both oral histories and oral traditions as done by renowned anthropologist Bruce Miller (in Hanson, n.d., p. 3) instead, of creating a dichotomy between the two.

4 Quoted statements of key informants are all translations from the original Cebuano Language; use of Cebuano terms/statements has been kept to a minimum for the sake of convenience and brevity.

5 These creatures are often taken as one and the same. They are believed to prey on the dead as well as on human heart and liver of the newly-born.

6 Bulan-bulan and tubig-tubig are one and the same game – a game of chase under the moon using water as markers. Commonly done during full-moon and water was used to draw a huge circle (since watermark would stay longer even when players stepped on it), marking the boundary between the guardia (chaser/catcher) outside the circle and the kontra or people confined inside. The goal was for the guardia to catch the kontra without stepping inside/beyond the watermark. Chasing the people around the periphery of the watermark, the catcher stretches one's arm in an attempt to tap the enemies. Once tapped, an enemy was considered caught. As punishment s/he would either become the new guardia or be out of the game. Any player who stepped or went outside the circle would also be out of the game.

7 A Visayan group game composed of two equally-numbered teams with the leader from each team trying to catch members from the other team to add to his/her team. The team that has more members is declared the winner.

8 This word could also be a play on Kempeitai, Japan's dreaded military police force deployed in its Occupied Territories during WWII.