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ABSTRACT
        Through becoming involved in oral history, an
individual develops transferrable abilities that can be applied
throughout a lifetime. The purpose of this paper is to introduce the
concept of oral history with an emphasis on how oral history efforts
can be incorporated into the curriculum to involve students of all
ages. Guidelines for librarians and teachers on how to locate further
information are offered. The discussion includes becoming acquainted
with the methodology; assessing the appropriateness of oral history
in the curriculum; selecting a focus; initiating and directing the
project; and types of oral history projects. The advantages of
including oral history in the curriculum are also outlined:
adaptability of the approach; introduction of a research method;
enhancement of communication and organizational skills; and promotion
of socialization and self growth. (Contains 12 references.) (AEF)

Incorporating Oral History into the Curriculum

by
Loriene Roy
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
The University of Texas at Austin

What Is Oral History?

Oral history is "the recording and preserving of planned interviews with selected persons able to narrate recollected memory and thereby aid the reconstruction of the past."[1] It is a process that aids in the reconstruction of the past and in preserving and documenting culture. Oral history is as old as human memory and as recent as yesterday's news. Oral history is an extension of the art of storytelling. While oral literatures predate the written word, oral history as a research method dates only from the 1940s and the availability of portable recording equipment. Classroom oral history has been documented since the late 1960s.[2] Students of all ages, from elementary grades through graduate school, have experienced oral history in classes across the curriculum.

There is currently much interest in oral history as researchers have, in general, rediscovered qualitative methods of data gathering. Professional organizations in the field of library and information science, including the Music Library Association (U.S. A.) and the Association for Library Services to Children (a division of the American Library Association) have, within the past several years, ventured into large, national efforts to record their history through the reminiscences of key players.

The purpose of this paper is to introduce the concept of oral history with an emphasis on how oral history efforts can be incorporated into the curriculum to involve students of all ages. The final two pages of this article is a pathfinder or guide for librarians and teachers on how to locate further information. Cited are books, articles, indexes, documents, and an organization. These sources should provide sufficient background on the theory, method, and ethics involved in initiating an oral history program. The resources should also provide examples of how oral history has been used in the curriculum and how to locate other such examples.

Both authors have been involved in oral history over a number of years. Ms. Craiglow has been formally trained in oral history

methodology through a women's studies program. Dr. Roy has served as the Oral History Coordinator for a local history museum in Arizona (U.S.A), served as member and chair of the Texas (U.S.A) Library Association's Archives and Oral History Committee, and served on the Oral Record Task Force and Oral Record Project Advisory Committee for the Association for Library Services to Children (U.S.A.). Her professional associations have included memberships in the Oral History Association (U.S.A) and the Texas (U.S.A) Oral History Association. Her articles on oral history have been published in the *Journal of Youth Services in Libraries* and in the *Texas Library Journal*.[3] Since 1989, Dr. Roy has included oral history activities in her graduate course on public libraries and in individualized study work with students in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Texas at Austin.

ORGANIZING AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Becoming Acquainted with the Methodology

The first step in preparing for an oral history project is to read about the technique of oral history. There are a number of good training manuals available, some of which are cited on the pathfinder portion of this paper. In addition to purchasing a manual, each person engaging in oral history should secure a copy of *The Guidelines and Principles of the Oral History Association*, revised in 1992.[4] The Oral History Association (OHA) principles outline the responsibilities of the oral historian to those being interviewed, to the public and fellow researchers, and to agencies and institutions that fund oral history work or house and/or make access to the interviews. The guidelines provide a framework for conduct covering all steps in the oral history project development. Especially relevant are guidelines covering ethical and legal issues and special guidelines for educators and students to consider. The forty-item bibliography at the end of this pamphlet includes English language publications as well as

several publications in French and Spanish.

Assessing the Appropriateness of Oral History in the Curriculum

Once the librarian/educator is versed in the process of oral history he or she must decide whether the methodology fits within the educational institution's curricular goals. This decision is based on such evidence as the institutional support in staffing, equipment, and supplies; institutional approval of innovative teaching approaches; existing curricular mandates; student aptitude and interest; and time available for training, interviewing, and preparing products from the interviews. In some cases, the librarian/educator may choose to engage his or her students in "passive oral history."[5] In passive oral history the students make use of products of others' interviews, reading accounts, listening to tapes, and otherwise becoming aware of the contributions of oral history without actually experiencing the method first hand. Conversely, active oral history projects may involve students in all stages of an oral history program, especially in interviewing.

Selecting a Focus

If the librarian/educator chooses to initiate an oral history project in an educational setting, the next step is to select, with the students, a focus for the project. Generally, oral history projects are thematic, centered on a theme such as an event, or biographical, centered on the personal and unique lives of individuals. There is much blurring between these two broad types of projects. For example, individuals who experienced an event such as a natural disaster are apt to discuss their experience in the context of their own life. However, without a clear, agreed upon central focus or purpose the oral history project may diverge into a number of unconnected avenues. This focus should be in the form of a written agreement on the mission of the project. Once the focus and mission are determined, then the librarian /educator can identify one or more objectives or statements with measurable outcomes that indicate whether or not the mission is achieved. Thus, if the mission is for students to document area veterans' involvement in war, one objective might be, by the end of three months, to have interviewed ten citizens who served in active duty over the past fifty years.

Initiating and Directing the Project

Oral history manuals and publications provide ample advice on how to do oral history. Most oral history projects are headed by someone who serves as a director who handles coordination of effort and record keeping. Some of the important considerations include training students on the skills involved in conducting background research; formulating appropriate questions; handling equipment; conducting interviews; outlining, indexing, or transcribing completed interviews; and editing to prepare written documents or other products from the interviews. Training can include preparing packets of background material on oral history, developing model interviews, organizing workshops by experienced oral historians, purchasing training materials including video tapes, and instituting an ongoing evaluation process including peer review.

Important documents, such as legal release forms, will need to be drafted and approved. A file of potential interviewees will be developed, along with a name authority file to provide cross references between variant spellings, former names, and nicknames. Banks of interview questions should be kept. Evaluation forms need to designed. Equipment will be purchased or borrowed and its use and maintenance scheduled. The director will handle the financial operation, including budgeting, accounting, and fund raising. The director will also handle the disposition of the interviews.

What Are the Products of Oral History?

The primary result of the oral history effort is a document that contributes to the historic record. This contribution may flesh out the traditional historical chronology by providing the personal perspective of someone whose contributions or observations were heretofore undocumented. Such data would otherwise be lost with the observers' or participants' deaths.

Other oral history projects use the archival records to create unique products. Personal research based on oral history interviews leads to presentations and published articles and books. In Oakland, California, adult students in a literacy program were interviewed on their life histories; with the aid of a federal U. S. Department of Education grant, their stories were published in a four-volume set and these biographies were then used as texts in subsequent literacy classes.[6] Appalachian students in Eliot Wigginton's high school English classes published magazines, monographs, and curricular support materials and

produced recordings and programs for radio and television.[7] Community wide oral history projects are celebrated through exhibitions, advertised at festivals, recorded on film, or performed on stage.

Why Include Oral History in the Curriculum

There are many advantages to incorporating oral history into the curriculum. In an experiment comparing high school students involved with oral history and those not using oral history methods in their required United States history class, Lanman found that oral history might contribute to greater understanding of content, especially when the project focuses on the students' ethnic background.[8] He also found that students had a positive attitude toward oral history, welcoming the change of pace oral history affords and motivating some students to continue in personal study of topics after the oral history unit was completed.[9] Using and practicing oral history in the classroom can enhance the educational experience through introducing new skills and augmenting other skills and knowledge.

Adaptability of the Approach

Oral history is a versatile research tool that can be applied in any location or environment that allows at least two people to communicate with each other. Where there is memory and a means to document it, there can be oral history. Oral historians have interviewed a broad slice of human experience: American writers of the Vietnam war, nursing home residents, film directors, Soviet Jewish immigrants, concentration camp survivors, women of northern Ireland, drug addicts, children of Nazis, war brides of World War II, crime victims, black female domestic workers and their employers in segregated American southern states, patients in mental institutions, and people who claim to have seen Elvis since his death. Due to its multidisciplinary potential, oral history methods can be applied to any subject area within the curriculum.

Learning a Research Method

In 1987 the Oral History Association's Committee on Teaching surveyed educators to assess their use of oral history. Results indicated that almost half of college and university teachers returning completed questionnaires (44% or 68 of 155 respondents) indicated that they incorporated oral history assignments in order to teach their students a research method.[10] If a student develops an interest or aptitude in social science research, a student might contemplate careers that build on this learned skill, such as journalism, sociology and social work, history, and anthropology.

Enhancing Communication Skills

Oral history can aid in the development of language arts. In fact, the aim of some oral history projects is not to produce a taped interview but to help students improve their reading and writing.[11] Students practice writing skills when they draft and write invitations to interviewees. They learn to describe themselves and their plans on paper. They analyze their oral speech through transcribing the interviews. In editing the transcriptions, students learn to edit their speech and writing.

They develop skills in asking written questions, following the type of training survey researchers use in their methodology. Thus, they must learn how to phrase questions that are to the point but not leading, polite yet direct, open ended rather than closed. Their oral skills are challenged as they learn to speak with another. Oral history helps students develop active listening skills: the interviewer listens to learn. Not only do they learn to listen to others for content, but students practice carrying a progressive conversation. In listening to themselves on tape they become aware of their tone, phrasing, and use of iteratives (such as basically, um, ah, you know, and don't you know) and lapses in speech.

Enhancing Organizational Skills

Oral history requires that advanced planning and structure be tempered with flexibility. Organizational skills are needed to handle the myriad tasks required in record keeping and seeing a project through from start to finish. There is some structure to oral history but there is also ample room for the unexpected. The list of worries associated with oral history is a lengthy one. Tape recorders can malfunction; needed equipment can be forgotten the day of the interview; batteries can be exhausted. Background noise, panting or barking dogs, unhelpful relatives, electric appliances, traffic, or ringing telephones can minimalize the production quality of an interview. Interviewees may be talkative until the recorder light is on. Interviewers may record over taped interviews; tapes may be erased during duplication or stored under improper conditions and subse-

quently damaged. Advance preparation can minimize some worries; training can assist a person in handling them. While dependent on team effort, oral history pushes self-reliance and often translates into character building.

Promoting Socialization and Self Growth

The hallmark of oral history is the valuing of the individual. Popular culture and media such as music, television and film, promote the personality with the recognizable name and/or countenance; oral history permits the everyday person to speak.

Oral history may help reduce the isolation of modern life. Once involved in oral history, whether as interviewer or interviewee, the participants are no longer solitary. Engaging in oral history can serve as a rite of passage for a young person, an entering into the adult world where one becomes a peer and associate. He or she becomes part of the community of fellow oral historians, part of the community of human experience. This community includes the interviewees, librarians, archivists, and historians involved in the storage and dissemination of the content of the interviews, and the public or audience making use of the oral history interviews or products. Oral history has a great capacity for fostering intergenerational communication, contact between cultures, and cooperative learning. A student's sense of self worth may be enhanced when he or she contributes to a project of acknowledged importance.

By focusing on the interviewee's life and contributions, the interviewer engages in the other and cannot help but learn about himself or herself. In developing the introspective skills required to consider someone else's life, the student may begin to ponder his or her own future. He or she may learn to question and consider alternatives. Students may become aware of some valuable life lessons: that within one lifetime numerous experiences are possible. That others may adopt very different lifestyles from the student's own background and that these lifestyles can also be valued. A person can live his or her life on many levels: as a private, family focused individual; as a person involved in a profession; and as a person involved in the greater community. Oral history may afford the young person the wisdom of perspective.

Conclusion

In summary, oral history has much to offer the curriculum. Through becoming involved in oral history, an individual develops transferrable abilities that can be applied throughout a lifetime. Eliot Wigginton, wrote of a core set of practices in teaching. In conversations with former high school students who had participated in his famed Foxfire project he described t0...when these practices are used well, the result is often the most memorable, formative, intense, educative experience of [the students'] public school lives."[12]

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