



WORDS CONNECTING GENERATIONS

ORAL HISTORY KIT

1. ORAL HISTOR



Definition

'Oral History collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews.' D. Ritchie

It's the systematic collection of living people's testimony about their own experiences.' J. Moyer

Anti - definition:

It's a folklore, gossip, hearsay, or rumor.

It's a historical fact. Oral historians don't have to verify their findings, analyze them, and place them in an accurate historical context .

So: In oral history the point is that the interviewed person tells not a history generally speaking, not, how was like, only what for him happened, what alone experienced.

During the conversation with the witness of history the researcher should not or to treat his statements as the only correct, neither not to exaggerate the criticism of the credibility of the narration.



2. GETTING STARTED - MAKING A PLAN

- Describe and specify the purpose of the interview/s. Think about central question your research will concentrate on.
- Set up the time frame (but expect to listen whole-life story of the interviewee).
- Think about equipment you will need and the way of archiving recordings.
- Think about the end results and idea how to use the recordings/how to publish them.
- Do the check-list of things you should not forget before, during and after the interview.
- Have enough time and resources, as it might be that you have too less time to create something.
- Be aware of language barriers, as language barrier makes a good outcome difficult (not only foreign languages, but speaking „different“ languages due to educational background, dialect etc.



3. PREPARATIONS FOR INTERVIEW



- Conduct preliminary research using non-oral sources (literature, magazines, newspapers, archives - also photos, posters etc.)
- Produce a target group of interviewees and identify a clear theme. How will you select the people you will interview? Contact potential interviewees, explain your project, and ask for help. Having names enables enough contact time in advance to do background research on your subject and prepare interview questions.
- Choose the kind of recording that you need to produce and then choose your equipment. Does it need to be broadcast quality? Does it need a long life? What can you afford? Use an external microphone and always check the equipment before interview.
- Practice interviewing with someone you know, to feel more comfortable and confident during the 'real' one.
- Make sure, you are using the „right“ format while filming, make clear to choose the format, which will enable you to edit and show it easily.
- As the interview might produce results, you haven't expected: who decides which parts of the interview are useful and which not?
- Involve voluntary interviewees at the selection of the right fragments, which would be difficult without interviewee.
- Some interviewees are too well prepared and lack being spontaneous.
- Not every information was interesting/necessary in the eye of the interviewer.
- Bad planning of the story → hard to follow.

4. THE INTERVIEW



- Select location for the interview (avoid rooms with loud heating or air system, other conversations, chiming clocks etc.). Selected location must be comfortable for all involved in the interview.
- Begin speaking only after you have verification your equipment is recording (video cameras should be used only with approval of interviewee – never record secretly).
- It's important that the interviewee understands the purpose of the interview and how you intend to use it.
- Begin with a statement of who, what, when, and where you are interviewing.
- Listen actively and don't rush the interviewee - silence is also meaningful.
- Take notes; ask for photos, documents etc. for copying them.

5. AFTER THE INTERVIEW



- Label the recording with name, date and place as soon as possible.
 - Transcribe or index the recordings. Make copies of all work. Store separately.
 - Analyze the interview and verify facts. Compare your results with your research findings.
 - If you agreed on that, give the interviewee a copy of recording or transcript. Send thank-you note.
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- Think about long time storage of recordings – local archive, local Oral History club...
- Interviewees chose very selected parts of their lives e.g. just good parts or the one interesting for them.
- If an interview is too short, the interview will just give basic life information, but not something substantial most of the time.

6. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION - LITERATURE, LINKS ETC

<http://www.inthefirstperson.com/firp/index.shtml>

a free, professionally published, index of close to 4,000 collections of personal narratives in English from around the world.

<http://www.bl.uk/learning/histcitizen/foodstories/index.html>

food related oral history stories from British Library Sound Archive

http://www.mediathek.at/ueber_die_mediathek/wissenschaftliche_projekte/aktuelle_projekte/menschenleben

mainly about gathering the biggest possible number of recordings of people who live in the Republic of Austria.

<http://www.bl.uk/reshelp/findhelprestype/sound/anaudio/analoguesoundrestoration.pdf>

the manual of analogue restoration techniques

<http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/>

Oral History in the Digital Age – the latest information on digital technologies pertaining to all phases of oral history process + easy 'getting started' guide

<http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/training/equipment.html>

advice on oral history recording equipment

Projects:

<http://zivapamet-liberec.cz/>

To read (a very selected literature):

http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/oral_history.html

<http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/oral-history-creative-non-fiction-telling-the-lives-of-the-sugar-girls/>

Mercier, Laurie and Madeline Buckendorf. Using Oral History in Community History Projects, 2nd ed. Carisle, Pa.: Oral History Association, 2007.

Sommer, Barbara W. and Mary Kay Quinlan. The Oral History Manual. Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press 2002.



Charlton, Thomas L., Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, eds. Handbook of Oral History. Lanham, Md: AltaMira Press, 2006.



Freund, Alexander and Alistair Thomson, eds.. Oral History and Photography. New York: Palgrave Macmillian 2011.

Hamilton, Paula and Linda Shopes, eds. Oral History and Public Memories. Philadelphia: Temple University Press 2008.

Shopes, Linda. "Making Sense of Oral History," History Matters: The U.S. Survey Course on the Web,
<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral.htm/>.

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This communication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

