

HISTORY IN MOTION

What is oral history?

Oral history is a historical and educational methodology that is accessible to all level of learners.

Oral history is a process for recording and preserving first-hand, primary source information in a structured interview setting and making it available to others.

Why use oral history?

Students can make important and valuable contributions to the preservation of the past when empowered with authentic opportunities and properly trained in oral history methodology and process.

- Implements place based education-students work in the familiar thereby learning becomes relevant to their world and history becomes personally relevant
- Fosters connection and elicits pride
- Executes experiential education-historically oriented community service

PLUS

1. It's a great way to engage students
2. It's a great way to engage the community
3. It's a lot less boring than textbooks
4. It's a tool for students of many skill levels
5. It's a way to promote higher-level thinking
6. It's an invitation to be creative
7. It's a way to meet standards
8. It's a lot of work

How can I incorporate oral history into my current or future curriculum?

1. Begin with objectives tied to the curriculum.

Objectives

- Broaden student learning with out of class component
- Use higher level thinking skills
- Strengthen intergenerational dialogue (specific topics/questions when talking with elders)
- Facilitate student research opportunity
- Demonstrate the value of oral history as an educational and historical methodology
- Examine how oral history project allows students to make lasting contributions to the communities in which they live and study and to the historical record.
- Encourage collaborations between schools, other government agencies and private business (funding for video, book)
- Provide students an opportunity to create and preserve a primary source through an oral history interview

- Develop an understanding of the oral history process and the strengths and weaknesses of this historical methodology in comparison to more traditional historical sources
- Allow students the opportunity to deepen their understanding of a particular period of Bermudian history of their choice.

2. Select topic.

3. Begin background reading and readings on oral history (what it is and how do I do it)

Proper data collection (primary and secondary source material).

Interviewers should have a basic knowledge of Bermuda history and greater command of the period contextualizing the event.

Workshop on oral history, linguistics and/or effective communication

4. Construct a conceptual framework (what do you want to know-what overall idea does one wish to know about the event, person interviewed and the period of time?)

5. Compile questions and list of interviewees (set up interview log).

What questions haven't been asked about this particular subject?

6. Contact and interview narrators

7. Shape interview and conditions for the interview

The interviewee should be comfortable.

Interviewer should be dressed appropriately.

The interviewer and interviewee should be the only ones in the room.

Layout all consent forms, writing utensils, equipment and questionnaires prior to interview. BEGIN ONLY AFTER CONSENT FORM IS SIGNED.

If necessary, guide interviewee back to topic but DO NOT interrupt. Allow interviewee to complete thought.

If there is any resistance to a line of questioning, abandon it completely.

Ask all questions on sheet but be able to ask additional relevant questions not listed.

- Ask open-ended questions (do vs. what)
- One question at a time
- Allow interviewee time to answer w/out interruption
- Listen and ask good follow-up questions
- Let interviewee do most of the talking

Ask to have place names and other names spelled, when appropriate, especially foreign names. Try to obtain first names or full names if known.

Ask for follow up details on people and places when appropriate. **Remember outsiders may not be familiar with certain terms, events, places, etc.**

Ask for dates of events.

Always speak clearly and ask respondent to do the same.

Note: some people may be excessive talkers while others are succinct in their responses and some may be uncomfortable talking because of your gender, age or race. It is your job to make them as comfortable and open as possible by being interested in their story, acknowledging they are the authority by asking questions while demonstrating general knowledge about the subject.

8. Have workshop on transcribing
9. Transcribe interviews
10. Preserve interviews (in archival storage bags, boxes)
11. Analyze and Disseminate

Produce newspaper article (NIE), video, book, or website

Conclusion

Curriculum must be tied to the learning.

Oral History is a Historical Process

1. Research/content background (research timeline)
2. Oral History methodology and training
3. Interviewee selection (where do you find the interviewees?)
4. Pre-interview worksheet and meeting
5. Interview questions
6. Interview
7. Transcription
8. Analysis/interpretation/dissemination
9. Archiving/preservation

Goal is to see what interviewee knows