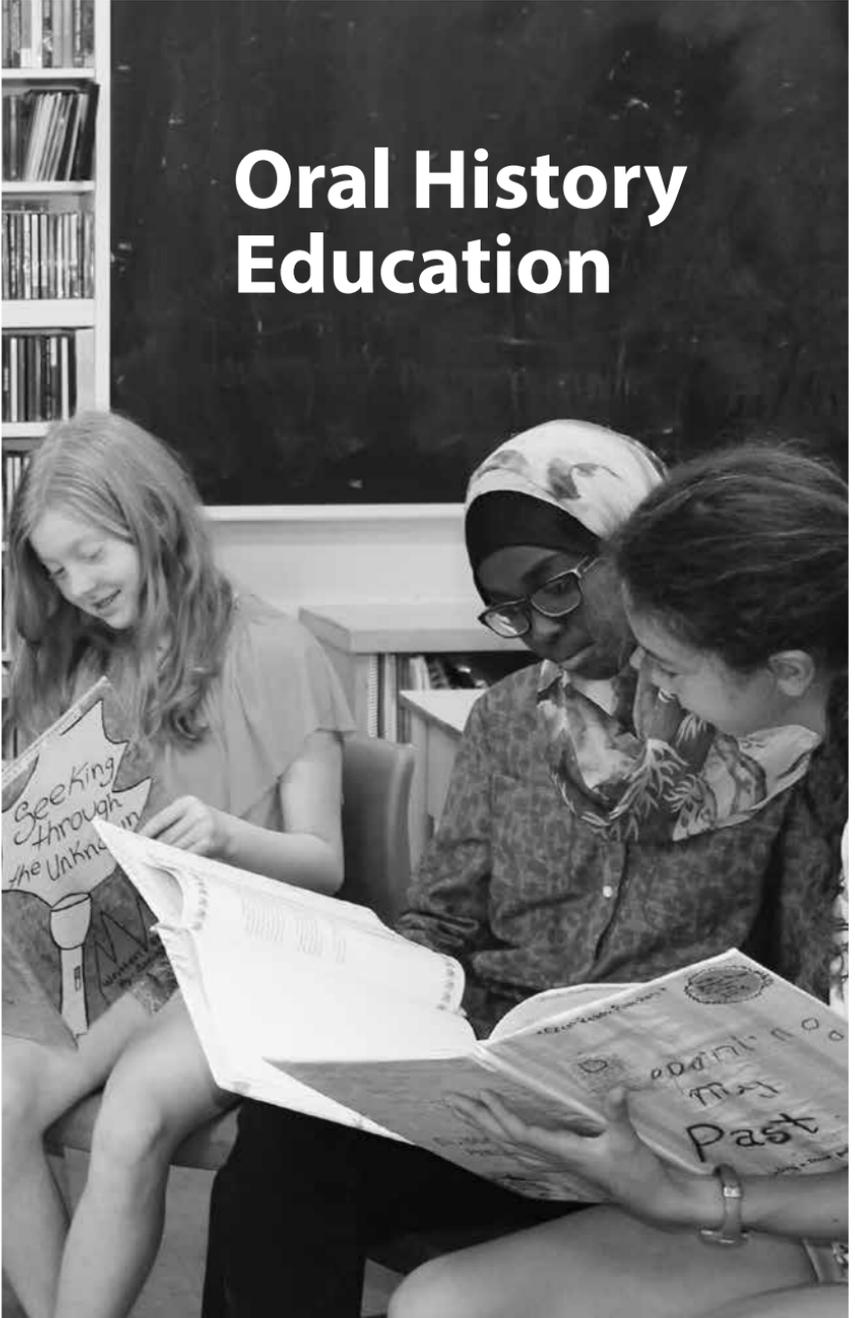


Oral History Education



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INTRODUCTION:

Telling Tales in Schools

Oral history education, political engagement, and youth

"We live our lives as narratives. We do not just tell stories. We are stories."¹

During an election year, questions often arise about how best to engage youth in the political conversations affecting our nation and world today, and in the future. This issue of *Our Schools/Our Selves* provides a timely conversation about the emerging use of oral history education to promote youth democratic engagement within different international contexts. Moreover this collection illustrates the impacts that doing oral history can have for understanding how our relationships with the past influence our decision-making about the present. Often the historically lived experiences of students counter their nation's grand narratives and/or add to them. As such, how might educators draw on oral history as a site of empowerment that in turn opens up spaces for students to become engaged citizens by sharing accounts of past that are still absent within the histories taught in schools? In their work and research with youth, Levstik and Barton call for history teachers to recognize that every student already comes to class with a history, with a capacity for doing history.² Hence if citizens are already doing history, most often as oral history within their families like Brockmann in this collection illustrates, then how can

we enhance their skills as researchers to situate such social histories in relation to the grand narratives that are often advocated for and/or taught through the school curriculum?

The authors in this collection speak to the various ways oral history can open up such curricular and pedagogical spaces of empowerment for both teachers and students to learn alternative histories or accounts of historical events, thus adding to the complexity of their knowledge and understanding of the past, and its relation to the present. If we think of the Ontario curriculum, for example, oral history provides a “best practice” for engaging our knowledge and understanding of the differing historical thinking concepts while also critiquing their limitations.³ Moreover, oral history provides a critical instructional strategy for teachers to go beyond reducing students’ affective engagement with the past to an essentialized technical process for doing history. With the technological shift in schools and in society, and the call for students to be competent with multiple literacies (historical, digital, media, and so on), oral history provides the potential for such curricular and pedagogical innovations and commitment toward social-justice orientated education. As Anderson and Hamilton contend, innovative pedagogies infusing technology and oral history education can both democratize the research process and promote socially responsible citizens.

And yet, what are the conceptual approaches, methodological limitations, and pedagogical possibilities of oral history within formal and informal educational settings from around the world? What are the potential effects of this growing use of oral history education? Why embrace oral history as a curriculum and pedagogy for shaping our understandings of the past? “Oral history is,” Thompson reminds us, “a history built around people...It brings history into, and out of the community.”⁴ In turn, oral history enables teachers and students of history and community to introduce historical evidence from the underside, shift the historical focus, open new areas of inquiry, challenge some of our assumptions and judgments of the past, and bring recognition to substantial groups of people who have been largely ignored.⁵

These were the kinds of curricular questions and issues that brought together an international group of educators, researchers, museum curators, and community practitioners at the *Oral History and Education*

Workshop in May 2015 at the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa.⁶ The six papers included in this issue seek to continue the conversations emerging from the workshop with a broader audience situated within the field of education. In what follows, the authors demonstrate that oral history education can equip young people with the ability to transform national narratives and thus a nation's political future. They ask how oral history education in K-12 and post-secondary classrooms, across multiple disciplines, can provide for democratization and conscientization, two core tenets of democratic engagement.

Oral history is the process of recording, preserving, and disseminating our understandings of the past through life narratives.

What is oral history?

Oral history is the process of recording, preserving, and disseminating our understandings of the past through life narratives. It makes learning history more experiential and inclusive for learners and creates pedagogical spaces that attempt to understand our individual and collective lived experiences with the past as a critical compass for interpreting the possibilities and limitations of our "nation-state's" social development. Historical narratives, grounded in peoples' everyday voices, are transformative. We can see this in our laws, policies, media, and culture. Non-governmental organizations, like StoryCorps, have flourished with a mandate to share life histories "to strengthen and build the connections between people...and to weave into the fabric of our culture the understanding that everyone's story matters."⁷ Government commissions (notably the centrality of survivor testimonies for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada on Indian Residential Schools), the judicial system (for example, the 1997 Supreme court decision in *Delgamuukw vs. BC* accepting that oral evidence could be admitted as proof of Aboriginal title to land), and museums (the Canadian Museum for Human Rights have oral histories of activists as a centrepiece of exhibits) all speak to the power of oral history in shaping a nation's conversations.⁸

As Christodoulou and others in this collection illustrate, oral history

is already happening in some schools and post-secondary institutions. A well-established educational practice within several non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities, which is clear from Kulnieks *et al.*'s contribution to this issue, it was the U.S. Foxfire Project of the 1960s that is credited as being the first formal school-based project.⁹ Despite this early start, it is only in the last 10-15 years that oral tradition, testimony, and life histories are being recognized as an integral and pedagogically innovative approach to doing history. In Canada, for example, one of the strands of the newly revised 2015 Ontario history curriculum is the historical inquiry process which requires students to collect primary sources with specific reference to oral histories.¹⁰ Brockmann's paper illustrates how this curricular objective is taken up in her intermediate classroom using a methodology that exemplifies the difference between teaching and *doing* history with students. The Alberta curriculum likewise asks educators and students to value oral tradition, stories, and community-based primary sources.¹¹ Regrettably, this is without explicit mention of oral history and mostly at the elementary level. But whether doing oral history is an explicit expectation or not, educators, from elementary schools to universities, are increasingly equipping their students with the digital devices, and respective historical and media literacies, to record the lives of people in their communities.

The emerging move toward oral history as a potential pedagogy for doing history is part of a broader shift in history education that focuses on the development of historical thinking skills (rather than the memorization of historical facts). Student-citizens need to be able to assess, as *The Historical Thinking Project* states, "the legitimacy of claims that there was no Holocaust, that slavery wasn't so bad for African-Americans, [and] that Aboriginal rights have a historical basis."¹² Put differently, students need to be able to understand the significance and implications of doing history. This includes a capacity for students to advocate for histories that still remain absent within or at the periphery of the school curriculum.¹³ Oral history can play a crucial empowering role toward this social justice endeavor. As Portelli reminds us, "One of the things that makes oral history different is that while more conventional history is primarily interested in what happened — why was the massacre carried out, in what way, whose responsibility is it — oral history asks another question: what does it mean?"¹⁴ Thus, oral history is a collective methodology that calls upon

individuals and communities to remember historical harms, and in so doing, build the individual and collective capacity of young people to raise social consciousness awareness and in turn support their engagement in the democratic process by building historically and civically informed relationships across generations.

Collective memory, historical consciousness, and political literacy

To understand oral history as a historical methodology that can support the political engagement of young people, the authors in this collection, like Brockmann, Davey *et al.*, and Vodniza, underscore the relationship between youth consciousness and a country's national narrative. Here, we provide a Canadian example. Millions of dollars were spent this past year to mark the 200th birthday of Canada's first recognized Prime Minister Sir John A Macdonald. Why distribute bobble-head like dolls of Macdonald for children to play with? While former Prime Minister Harper called him "a shining example of modesty, hope and success,"¹⁵ historian Tim Stanley has written about Macdonald's desire for Canada to be an Aryan nation with the subjugation of Chinese and Aboriginal peoples.¹⁶ More recently, professors and students at Wilfrid Laurier University are protesting the university's plan to erect statues of Canadian prime ministers on its Waterloo campus.¹⁷ Among other arguments, they point out the contradiction in recognizing that the land belonged to Indigenous communities while adorning it with statues of those who took the land away and perpetuated injustices against Indigenous peoples.

This recent example illustrates the stakes youth have in terms of shaping a nation's future by either *never forgetting* or *strategically remembering past conflicts*. Vamik Volkan argues that groups psychologize or mythologize traumatic events as identity markers for the next generation. From narratives of conflict, be it war or genocide, an imagined community emerges — a psychic security and an "ethnic tent" — that is codified to 'set' the historical record. Schools play a key role. The way students come to understand collective memories of the past — the development of their historical consciousness — is a vital part of how we imagine ourselves as a community. As Theodor Schieder stresses, historical consciousness "refers not only to a knowledge of the past but implies the use of that knowledge to

understand the future.”¹⁹ For example, as Cheryl Duckworth’s research reveals, cultural myths of 9/11 have been transmitted to students in the U.S. to legitimize a militaristic security state since 2001.²⁰

The role education plays in shaping our collective historical consciousness — how we come to individually and collectively understand our past — holds the capacity to fix and universalize our identity. The grand narratives about the past put forth inside and outside the traditional history school curriculum are closed, leaving no room for dissent about what a group values and will act upon, and as such, can be dangerous. But active participation in questioning the social and psychic constructions of our historical consciousness can also enable the prospects of a more social-justice orientated and perhaps sustainable future.²¹ Historical consciousness can, as Seixas makes clear, “turn toward the past in order to break from it”²² or acknowledge the legacy of the past to radically change the present. But to do so requires that educators provide opportunities for students to encounter narratives that “take the world’s complexities, ambivalences and paradoxes, ambiguities and dissonances into account.”²³ Nowhere is this more important than for those committed toward reconciling historical traumas that have been perpetrated between and among different international communities.

Democratization

Within academia, oral history gained traction in the 1960s as a tool for scholars to democratize history — to ‘uncover’ marginalized voices, as demonstrated in this issue by the works of Davey, De Welde and Foote, and Anderson and Hamilton. But many groups, including Aboriginal and feminist, challenged naïve assumptions that oral historians may speak for them. Since Michael Frisch coined the term ‘shared authority’ in the 1990s, oral historians have been more attentive to an expansive notion of democratizing history. Researchers are ‘sharing authority,’ as Steven High has rephrased, to reflect the active making of collaborative relationships and collective decision-making for exploring life stories.²⁴

Oral history projects therefore, based on sharing authority, such as the ones described in this issue, promote democratic relations for education and within our national landscape. Students are required to

co-construct meaning with community groups and create spaces for marginalized voices to be foregrounded through oral history within the histories we take up both inside and outside of the classroom. As such, history becomes more inclusive of contested historical narratives. To this end, it is the participatory and dialogical aspects of oral history education — an engagement with the lived experiences of others — that enables youth to appreciate the impact and legacy of our political choices. Many of the oral history projects described in this issue promote democratic relations through what Low and Sonntag call a pedagogy of listening; a learning process based on the act of extending the ear toward the other.²⁵ It is not a silent or passive process, but rather a model of sharing and address that builds relations.

Conscientization

As the essays in this issue will demonstrate, oral history calls on teachers and students to participate in the processes of transforming their understandings of the (nationalized) historical narratives taught in schools. Oral history facilitates what Freire termed *conscientization*; the development of a critical awareness rooted in learners' lived realities that inspires them to take action against oppression.²⁶ If we recall, Freire wrote about the ways that "marginalized peoples can internalize the historical narratives and cultural identity of the dominant group...this prevents them (us) from being able to name and thus have agency in the world."²⁷ The key role of education, according to Freire, is for individuals and communities to foster a capacity for critical consciousness; problem-based, affective learning that empowers citizens to make, when needed, systemic change.

Oral history education provides a path for conscientization because its relational character demands that students "see the Other in full human moral complexity."²⁸ It "creates openings for different affective relations — such as empathy, humility, and compassion" to advance reconciliation or what Zembylas calls critical peace education.²⁹ Framed differently, oral history calls attention to the ethical dimensions of historical thinking. Oral history affords students and educators opportunities to reconsider the following curricular, indeed ethical question: "What responsibilities do historical crimes

and sacrifices impose upon us today?"³⁰ And it is this humanistic, ethical dimension of oral history education that empowers students with their respective community "to envisage together what a future of coexistence might look like"³¹— a central exercise for any citizen and for the wellbeing of a nation. The oral history projects shared in the following six papers exemplify how oral history education can promote both democratization and conscientization, and thus promote youth democratic engagement in Canada and internationally.

In this issue

In response to such calls for conscientization, we start with Frances Davey, Kris De Welde and Nicola Foote's ongoing oral history project *Histories of Choice*. In this project students participate as active creators of historical records by collecting oral histories of abortion experiences across generations of women in Southwest Florida prior to the legalization of abortion. Davey, De Welde and Foote detail how their oral history project advances students' critical thinking skills and deepens their engagement with and understanding of critical oral histories that inform larger, and more complex political debates. By recording community members' stories, students validate the historical significance of these personal narratives and develop a rich, visceral understanding of reproductive rights history and its relevance to future generations. Similarly, Niki Christodoulou presents the experiences of two secondary school teachers in Cyprus who used oral history to teach the conflict of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Christodoulou argues that the use of oral history in education can engage students in understanding historical events as they are connected to community members' lived experiences. This in turn can elicit discomforting emotions that move students to challenge their prior beliefs, habits and practices that sustain social inequities and thus open up possibilities for transformation.

Andrejs Kulnieks, Dan Longboat, Joseph Sheridan and Kelly Young illustrate how becoming in tune with the places we inhabit through song, storytelling, and poetic inquiry can foster deeper relationship with our natural environment. They make a case for oral history education infused with traditional songs, storytelling and poetic inquiry to support learners in examining pertinent historical information

about where we were, and give us aspirations or directions towards healthy ways of thinking and sustainable living rooted in a deep understanding of our connection with local ecosystems. In a similar vein, Guillermo Vodniza's personal narratives of teaching in Colombia and Canada demonstrate how oral history in K-12 education can help students discover their own Indigenous traditions and cultural identity and develop a deeper understanding of the 'other' in their schools and communities. From interviewing community elders and leaders to creating and reading identity masks, Vodniza demonstrates how oral history can be a process of self-recognition, learning to value the historical contributions of Indigenous communities to the nation, and building connections among students from different backgrounds.

Sue Anderson and Jaimee Hamilton argue for the innovative use of technology in oral history education to create associations between the present and the past and construct the future. They show how collaborative technologies can democratize oral history research by building collaborative relationships and creating spaces for shared decision-making. Drawing on examples from their work in Australia, Anderson and Hamilton demonstrate how the use of digital technologies in oral history education can promote principles of 21st century pedagogies, specifically embodied learning, social responsibility, and life-long learning. Finally, Barbara Brockmann provides a methodology for doing oral history education with Canadian elementary and intermediate students and their families. Her innovative approach prioritizes family as an initial source of historical expertise while integrating the inquiry process, historical thinking, and the writing process. Her approach fosters intergenerational and community bonds within a largely refugee, immigrant, and working class neighbourhood as students analyze reflectively the experiences of their families within diverse social and political contexts. Conducting family oral history, Brockmann contends, allows students

Conducting family oral history, allows students to build a common citizenship from the different perspectives in their communities that are at once local and global, historical and current.

to build a common citizenship from the different perspectives in their communities that are at once local and global, historical and current.

While the papers in this issue make a case for why young people need to tell their histories in schools, we would be remiss not to provide some cautionary notes. Steven High reminds us that oral history does not magically support any kind of analysis.³² One therefore must approach oral history education with clear intentions to actualize the potential in each area. While some curricular supports have been produced, including the use of testimony in a course on genocide for the Toronto District School Board, there is little concrete assessment yet on the implementation of oral history education. Given our knowledge of introducing controversial issues into the classroom, and the overcrowded curriculum in schools, there can be no doubt that for educators this can be risky and difficult work. These are some of the limitations that must be addressed in future oral history education projects.

Nonetheless, we believe that if oral history “encourages active and equal participation of all in the learning community, is experiential and inquiry-based, committed to cognitive dissonance, provocative yet respectful in exchange,”³³ then such narratives can agitate the silence of the oppressive status quo and build a more just future. It is in the development of the interconnectedness of human experience that the above projects encourage learners not to think of historical events, such as human rights violations as a separate reality, but emphasize the legacy of trauma and the place of memory in everyday life.³⁴ The design, implementation, and assessment of these oral history projects demand an education that challenges traditional power relations inside and outside the classroom and creates spaces for engaging and listening to, what might sometimes be, difficult historical knowledge. Oral history education is a means for education to “speak directly to urgent and felt problems in a community’s shared life” and build a path forward for redressing relationships. As we have argued, the work before all of us, as educators, is well worth it if we want to re-story political futures, keeping in mind that “We live our lives as narratives. We do not just tell stories. We are stories.”

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FRANCES DAVEY,
KRIS DE WELDE AND
NICOLA FOOTE

Oral History as Inspiring Pedagogy for Undergraduate Education

There is increasing focus in undergraduate education on active learning and meaningful, multi-layered learning experiences for students through undergraduate research, service-learning/community-based learning, and collaborative projects. The Association of American Colleges and Universities lists among its High-Impact Practices (HIPs) service-learning, common intellectual experiences, and undergraduate research.¹ Canadian higher education agencies likewise focus on active learning, interdisciplinary experiences and hands-on research as innovative strategies that enhance student engagement as well as deep learning, and have practical gains in terms of providing the skills essential to successful future employment.² This emphasis stems in part from the increasingly neoliberal context of higher education globally, in which politicians and business leaders insist on the inculcation of employable skills as a primary outcome of university education. Yet these practices are by no means solely utilitarian; they have been shown also to significantly advance the intellectual development of underserved students, particularly when they participate in multiple HIPs.³

This article explores how oral history can serve as a tool to advance pedagogical techniques recognized as High-Impact Practices, and

argues that oral history should gain greater recognition as a “best practice” in undergraduate education. We detail how, through an oral history project entitled *Histories of Choice* focused on the oral history of abortion, the authors have implemented multiple high-impact learning strategies and fostered high-level transferable skills for undergraduate students majoring in a range of social sciences and humanities disciplines, while also advancing their critical thinking and deepening their understanding of and engagement with complex political and social issues.

Oral history and transferable skills

Oral history as a method for engaging in undergraduate research provides transferable skills that enhance students’ intellectual development and career preparation. The potential of oral history as a mechanism to *demystify* research and provide students with hands-on training and experience has been noted since the field began to gain popularity in the 1970s; it is receiving increased attention from educators in recent years.⁴ Oral history can be undertaken in any location and requires minimal equipment. It affords students unique opportunities to participate as active creators of the historical record, advancing their historical thinking in ways that contrast to more passive engagement with documentary sources. Conducting oral history interviews provides students with first-hand insight into how historical knowledge is produced and contested, while also highlighting the partial and fragmentary nature of primary sources. This intellectual development offers meaning and resonance far beyond the confines of the classroom.

The interdisciplinary nature of our project further advances students’ intellectual skills. Over the past two and a half years, we have mentored more than 30 undergraduate students in *Histories of*

Conducting oral history interviews provides students with first-hand insight into how historical knowledge is produced and contested, while also highlighting the partial and fragmentary nature of primary sources.

Choice. Inspired by leading women's historian Linda Kerber's call to action for U.S.-based scholars to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion, we developed an oral history project to explore the contexts and consequences of this ruling, thereby engaging in both historical and sociological disciplines. With guidance from us — two historians and one sociologist — students collect oral histories of abortion experiences across generations of women, mostly in Southwest Florida.⁵ While we are the primary recruiters for the project, students conduct and transcribe interviews to create a written record that can be coded for analysis and also archived in a university library. The majority of our students further represent the interdisciplinarity that oral historian Claire Bond Potter emphasizes as important for sharing and adapting discipline-specific methods because they are drawn from a range of majors including history, sociology, communications, and theatre.⁶

Our project fosters development of additional, concrete transferable skills. For example, students work in teams of two or three, in which experienced interviewers work with less experienced students. Further, by interviewing narrators of different ages students gain experience interacting with people different from themselves, and learn to navigate generational differences. Students improve their oral communication skills through the experience of conducting interviews, while transcribing interviews helps students think about patterns of speech and the importance of clarity in speech.⁷ The interviews expose students to a wide range of views and experiences on a complex and controversial topic — abortion — thus deepening their critical thinking skills. Learning about the ethics of research on people gives students explicit training that is often absent from undergraduate curricula, while adhering to codes of confidentiality underlines to students the importance of integrity. Students improve their time management skills through taking responsibility for travelling independently to interviews, arriving on time, and adhering to project deadlines.

These research experiences foster skills that resonate beyond academia. A poll of major employers in the U.S. in 2007 showed that companies recruiting new college graduates include among their top hiring priorities: "the ability to work well in teams — especially with

people different from yourself”; “the ability to write and speak well”; “the ability to think clearly about complex problems”; and, “a strong sense of ethics and integrity.”⁸ All of these qualities can be developed meaningfully through participation in oral history undergraduate research, which in Butler and Sorenson’s memorable words provoke “the boundaries of the classroom [to] bend outward”⁹ and include groups who are sometimes excluded from academic settings.

Oral history and the effects of collaborative experiences

Education researchers have shown that collaborative learning and shared research experiences between faculty and undergraduates impact student engagement and retention.¹⁰ Oral history projects in which students and faculty work together challenge students at a high level and engage them on the *front lines* of innovative research. In outlining the need to collect oral histories of abortion, Linda Kerber situates students as central to collaboration: “Working with advisers and archivists...[students] can seek to reconstruct a history that is in grave danger of being lost. The answers they find can contribute to the accumulation of necessary knowledge... their research, and our own, is indispensable.”¹¹

The importance of students as collaborators in the production of knowledge through oral history extends beyond the specific case study of reproductive histories. In *Histories of Choice*, student-faculty and student-student collaborations result in deeply impactful experiences for students as they transcend traditional boundaries simultaneously taking on roles of student and (peer) teacher, follower and leader. In our project we are teacher-mentors, training students in the history and sociology of reproductive justice as well as oral history methodology. We recruit students who are academically motivated and committed to the subject, and we create strict requirements for participation in the project, using contracts to hold students accountable. This rigor limits the project to a select few, and allows us to mentor students individually and collectively. Moreover, students engage in peer mentoring. As most student participants return to the project over multiple semesters, this creates generations of peer mentors and allows for collaborative relationships where students become teachers for each other.

Our project positions students as peers with faculty leaders as well. Students provide the critical labor necessary to progress the project by interviewing narrators and transcribing interviews. Thus, we rely on students to facilitate the best possible interviews and to educate us about their experiences as interviewers. Students negotiate the formation of narratives. They must, as Hayden White puts it, grapple with the “problem of how to translate knowing into telling.”¹² To do so, students forge empathic relationships with narrators, an especially critical step when collecting stories that are both deeply personal and politicized.

Thus, it is the students who grapple with unforeseen hurdles in the interviews, engaging in on-the-spot problem solving within their interview teams. Students realize that even anticipated challenges — a recalcitrant narrator or balky technology, for example — have the potential to ruin an interview. Consequently, a democratic approach to research with students makes *them* the experts, the ones who move our project along, and simultaneously enrich the historical record. The democratizing effect of students on the *front lines* of an oral history project shaped by faculty interests advances a sense of shared authority which is essential to meaningful citizenship¹³ and contributes to our claim that this pedagogy results in *high-impact* learning and is thus a powerful teaching-learning strategy.

Oral history as a mechanism for civic engagement

Oral history can be an exceptional tool for advancing another educational best practice: service-learning, and the related field of community-engaged scholarship. Service-learning blends service to the community with meaningful learning outcomes by teaching civic responsibility. Community-engaged scholarship takes service-learning one step further. According to the Carnegie Foundation, community-engaged scholarship focuses on the “mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.”¹⁴ It starts from the premise that our communities can benefit from using faculty and students as resources, and courses or research projects that advance community needs can be transformative.

The principles of service-learning and community-engaged scholarship mirror those of oral history research in important ways.

Oral history offers to democratize history and fill gaps in the historical record that are left by the exclusion of particular groups from the written record by allowing local communities to participate actively in the construction of their own history.¹⁵ Thus, to participate in the creation and expansion of a historical record, students need to establish and nurture relationships with community members. Through *Histories of Choice* we develop meaningful bridges to community organizations, most notably local chapters of Planned Parenthood and the National Organization for Women. Students have been invited to speak at Planned Parenthood events in our local area, sharing insights from our project with the community. The project has served as a foundation for events co-hosted by the National Organization for Women and our university. These events have fostered cross-generational relationships between the retiree local activist community and our students. And, by recording community members' stories, students validate the historical significance of these and also the importance of community organizations' missions. These applied experiences enhance students' awareness of local issues, strengthen community connections, and provide avenues for students' civic participation. Incorporating civic engagement into students' learning establishes a life-long appreciation for the critical importance of participating in and protecting democratic governance.

Conclusion

Histories of Choice enriches a complex historical narrative by creating a culture of shared authority between students and narrators. Students "respect, understand, invoke, and involve [narrators'] very real authority" so that they may engage a contentious topic from a variety of vantage points, and situate these within a broader historical, social, and political context.¹⁶ Oral history as undergraduate research facilitates the development of transferable learning outcomes. Students gain skills and experiences in critical thinking, research, leadership, communication, collaboration, and civic engagement. While this article focuses on the experiences of undergraduate students, the arguments we make about the value of oral history to pedagogy applies equally to the high school experience. The skills we are highlighting as essential for students to gain jobs after college

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graduation are equally important as college preparation for high-school students. Our experiences in *Histories of Choice* suggest that oral history goes beyond enriching a complex historical narrative; it opens the door to inspiring, innovative pedagogy.

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NIKOLETTA (NIKI) CHRISTODOULOU

Oral History as an Effective Pedagogical Practice in High School

Two examples of inspiration and engagement

The purpose of this article is to exemplify oral history education as best practice for schools, particularly focusing on how oral history supports teachers addressing difficult knowledge. It draws upon my previous work with oral history education, including the Cyprus Oral History Project¹ (COHP) and Archive², which depicted important contemporary historical happenings in Cyprus and their consequences, through people's living memories. COHP was originally implemented in two high school classrooms by two Greek-Cypriot, classical studies, secondary education, female teachers, Amy and Penny,³ certified to teach Greek language and literature, Ancient Greek, mythology, and history.

Oral history, in inspiring emotions, becomes an important pedagogical approach and an effective pedagogical practice at schools.⁴ Emotions, alongside the body and spirit, are forms of knowing and transformation; they can also be a form of social control, as well as sites of resistance and social redress,⁵ and a significant component of a pedagogy of discomfort. "Discomforting emotions"⁶ move students outside their *comfort zones* and play a constitutive role in challenging beliefs, habits and practices that sustain social inequities, and in creating possibilities for transformation.

Further, there are two pedagogical elements associated with using oral history in classrooms, namely *inspiration and engagement*, which epitomize oral history as best practice. The ability to inspire and engage students is connected with Dewey's notion that experience should rest on two central tenets, namely continuity and interaction.⁷ In the context of Cyprus with its conflicting past, protracted conflict, division and subsequent occupation, oral history addressing discomforting emotions, and continuity and interaction of experiences can be a powerful pedagogy.

The conflict in Cyprus or the Cyprus political problem comprises a series of events that led to the invasion of the island by Turkey in 1974. Those events include the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus in 1960, following the 1955-1959 liberation struggle from British colonizers; the 1963-1965 intercommunal conflicts between Greek-Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots; the Greek military coup; and the 1974 invasion and subsequent occupation.⁸ The occupation is historically significant; it was the conclusive act realizing Turkey's plan for physical separation of the population. The result was tragic: thousands of people became internally displaced with Turkish Cypriots moving to the North and Greek Cypriots to the South, and thousands killed or gone missing. For almost 30 years, until 2003, the movement of people and goods between the North and the South was restricted. Today, more than 40 years later, there are military troops and division, making Nicosia the last divided capital city in Europe. Currently, the negotiation efforts to resolve the political conflict are accompanied by optimism and euphoria for a potential solution, the first since 1974, boosted by the positive interest of the EU, the UN, and the U.S.

Two curricular and pedagogical examples

This evidence-based work draws from two curricular and pedagogical examples. Amy and Penny incorporated oral history material beyond the conventional curriculum, using oral histories from COHP as supplemental material in two urban, public school classrooms with their junior and senior high school students in two different cities in Cyprus. Their aim was to teach the conflict in Cyprus, develop students' historical consciousness, reboot their interest toward learning history, and promote the concept of learning from other people's experiences.

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Often there is a risk associated with teaching difficult knowledge relevant to social, political, and historical events, which teachers are not always willing to undertake,⁹ or they do not know how to do it.¹⁰

Reviving national anniversary events

Amy, who had six years of experience teaching secondary education, worked with her Grade 11 students in the context of a student research group.¹¹ The team explored the effectiveness of oral history as an alternative way to revive national anniversary events. The team first completed an action research case study at their school in 2011-2012, which revealed that school celebrations of national anniversaries neither help to develop students' historical knowledge, understanding, consciousness or sensitivity, nor to maintain their interest while observing them.¹² Consequently, the team implemented a remediation action plan to explore the effectiveness of an oral history project as an alternative way to commemorate national anniversaries.¹³ Focusing on the upcoming national anniversary, the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters (EOKA) freedom struggle of 1955-1959, the team formed the oral history group. While the rest of the classes observed the conventional school celebration — often consisting of speeches and performances delivered by few teachers and the most skillful students to the entire school body, in memory of the events — the *oral history group* commemorated this national holiday using an oral history approach, where students conducted a comparative analysis of the results.

Learning about significant historical events

Penny, who had 16 years of experience teaching secondary education, developed her project within the context of her Master's thesis.¹⁴ She implemented an oral history project in two consecutive school years 2012-2014 in five Grade 12 classrooms with both refugee and non-refugee students in an urban high school in Cyprus. The majority of her students' parents were members of political parties, and thus students had rigid political beliefs. The first year, in response to three poems about the 1974 Turkish invasion in their Greek Literature textbooks, Penny narrated in class her personal story relevant to the 1974 period.

Penny was born while “Turkish bombers were bombing mercilessly and uncontrollably”¹⁵ and she and her family abandoned their village 22 days after it was invaded. Her experience triggered many emotions, and students wanted to hear more personal accounts from other people. The students’ interest and enthusiasm prompted their initiation of and engagement with a number of activities including the gathering of oral histories. During the second year, the students engaged in a series of oral history activities centered on the school’s theme “I appreciate, I do not forget, I claim” in remembrance of the 40th anniversary of the Turkish invasion.

Doing oral history as a best practice for addressing difficult knowledge

During the oral history project, seven themes emerged and encapsulated what I would call an *enlightening experience*. First, undertaking an oral history project was an eye-opening experience for the students, and an opportunity to hear about the events first hand. It was “something different than what we were doing for so many years in school...We had the opportunity to hear the events from people who lived them, and share feelings with them” (Female Student, Case 1).

Second, students showed great interest in learning historical narratives, which were more immediate and relevant to their personal lives than what they were learning in a conventional history classroom. “They [students] told me that one can really learn many things through oral history; it is more immediate comparing to the conventional history” (Teacher, Case 2). Third, students realized that history was still alive. It was, as one student described, “in our own homes and... we did not know it... Most of us interviewed our grandfathers and grandmothers who lived during, and often had a significant contribution to, the [1955-1959] fight” (Male Student, Case 1). Fourth, students were moved by a captive soldier’s life story; it awoke their desire to return to their occupied land. They described their encounter with him as a “mind-blowing” experience, which generated conflicting feelings: desire, nostalgia, sadness, and shame. Few students felt that the responsibility and power to change things was on them. Students said, “...through the narration I realized the hardships of war..”

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(Female Student, Case 2), "I was so moved..." (Female Student, Case 2), "It was shocking... It was the first time I confronted the real dimension of the historical events of my country..." (Female Student, Case 2).

Fifth, students were inspired by the teacher's narration of personal experiences teaching in a refugee camp. They had the opportunity to express their views and ask questions about the difficult living conditions for students after the invasion. Students' engagement during the narration was unprecedented; most of them heard such testimonies for the first time. In addition, hearing their teacher's autobiographical excerpt was momentous. Students said listening to her testimony was more interesting than doing history in the traditional, teacher-centered way.

Sixth, students who under other circumstances may have been indifferent became motivated, engaged, and exemplified a new interest in learning history. They participated in the organization of events, gained unique insights about history, and as they strived to learn more about the particular historical events, they delved into discussions, readings, and testimonies. Involvement in the research was a transformative experience for students; they felt "the magic a research process encompasses."¹⁶ It was also an experience that changed them. The following quote was included in their final report to represent how they felt, "[T]he decision and the attempt to understand other people and try to talk about them, makes us already different; we, ourselves, have changed."¹⁷

Finally, students were able to envision new projects, like "an experiential workshop with greater involvement of young people..." (Male & Female Students, Case 2), or projects about "the enclave children of Rizokarpaso" (Students, Case 2),¹⁸ and "the Asia Minor refugees, because the conditions and the experiences they lived were the same as that of our own refugees" (Female Student, Case 2). The activity of envisioning new projects offered them a space to form collaborations and important relationships that wouldn't have occurred otherwise. Inspired by the COHP and our subsequent collaboration, both teachers started using oral history regularly, in the integrated curriculum and in various school events. They, and other teachers who observed their efforts, were thrilled with the new, oral history method they implemented in their curriculum because they recognized its effectiveness. Taking the risk to engage emotions and

get outside their *comfort zone*, the teachers engaged students more deeply in the activities.

However, as with any non-conventional teaching method, the implementation of the oral history method was accompanied with difficulties and risks, including politics, biases, and time restrictions. For example, delving into the events through people's personal stories and inspiring emotions using a method that was new and, thus, outside their comfort zone felt like

Oral history created a comfort zone within an uncomfortable and risky space.

a risk on the teachers' part. Also, teachers explored only the Greek-Cypriot community's stories. Penny acknowledged that the scope of stories read and gathered was narrowed because it was a bit risky to allow politics to get involved. Penny talked about the key role the teacher plays, stressing the importance of preparation and context, "If I was psychologically prepared to face both ideologies [left and right], and if we were not at the school context and we had another kind of debate, we could explore [the full potential of oral history]." Further, time restrictions and the overwhelming feelings associated with the experiencing of deep, personal, ineffable, and often painful testimonies for the first time, did not leave much time for discussion or to deal with conflict. Although remaining on the safe side, the teachers still managed to face some of their discomfort and go beyond their conventional teaching. Oral history created a comfort zone within an uncomfortable and risky space.

Conclusion

Oral history in education is a powerful pedagogy that can be applied to many contexts. In helping students understand historical events as they are connected to peoples' lives, forming experiences that influence one's future, and promoting discussions and sharing of emotions, oral histories inspired and engaged students while simultaneously bringing to the forefront discomforting emotions. All these became curricular materials for teachers and students to work with. While no experience has pre-ordained value,¹⁹ in these two examples, practicing oral history in the classroom became an

invaluable experience for all students; it created an environment that ignited inspiration and engagement.

The ability to see the self and the future through the lives of others,²⁰ gain inspiration from them, and be engaged in the present through the processes of oral history helped students to turn “mirrors into windows.”²¹ A mirror, on the one hand, always reflects what’s already within a particular range. Also, in not allowing us to see what’s behind or beyond it, the mirror obscures the view. There are no openings; nothing new is presented in the mirror except from what’s already *in* there. Windows, on the other hand, present what’s out there and the likelihood to see new openings, spaces, inspirations and imaginations, while gazing toward the future. Students, from feeling trapped in a pre-existing social-political order that determines their fates and subsequent living conditions, like the Cypriot students who for a long time were *looking into a mirror*, the oral histories became windows through which they could see things anew and start envisioning new projects and lives.²³ Engaging students in oral history projects as shown in the examples above, reminds us that education is not a preparation for future living, but rather *a process of living*²⁴ “a life which is fruitful and inherently significant.”²⁵ Oral history is a best practice that can create such future conditions for students.

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**ANDREJS KULNIEKS, DAN
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Oral History Education and Poetic Inquiry

Developing ecologically sustainable literacies through language arts curriculum

The impetus for our article arises from several sources of knowledge and draws upon an ongoing research program that began a decade ago. In this article we draw upon our understanding of the importance of oral tradition in the development of ecologically sustainable curriculum. We seek to understand how oral history education provides a pedagogical medium for learners to engage in poetic inquiry through autobiographical work, traditional teachings, stories and ceremonies, and their relations with natural landscapes. We investigate practices of how oral history education can help humans engage with the places they inhabit and foster a deeper understanding of their connectedness to each other and with their local ecosystems.

In response to a need for innovative curricula and inspiring pedagogies for oral history education in Ontario, we are advocating that the inclusion of oral tradition provides a culturally relational ecological education that mainstream pre-service teacher education can integrate across language arts practices such as story-making, song-writing, storytelling, and poetic inquiry.¹ Poetic inquiry involves poetry as a way of knowing the world and includes sharing our stories

whether these take the form of poems or songs. In other words, poetic inquiry includes descriptions that can move the author or the reader beyond the text into the realm of the imagination and emotion where the artist creates what Sir Philip Sydney describes as “a representing, counterfeiting, or a figuring forth — to speak metaphorically, a speaking picture — with this end, to teach and delight.”²

The importance of storytelling in oral tradition

When ancestral songs are sung as part of everyday life, the stories they tell are to transmit important information into the future. This information is passed along effortlessly. Anybody who has walked along a forest shore, path or a road will have observed that through the act of singing a song, the trek becomes easier. Similarly, work becomes less arduous through a humming and re-humming of a melody. They are preventative medicine when the message a song tells is heeded. A resonance of important information and instructions is evoked from Indigenous knowledge recorded in oral tradition through the performance of song as well as communicating teachings recorded in rhyme.³ As a number of scholars contend, oral tradition is based on the practice of remembering precise information.⁴ For the purpose of this article we are looking at how poetic inquiry helps us consider our relationship to the places that we live and visit within.

Ancestral songs are intended to be sung throughout the course of a lifetime. The focus of a story can remain in flux as the way in which it is told depends on the information the teller decides to convey. Heard at different times, a life story can represent different meanings. The message the storyteller is trying to convey is understood in particular ways depending on the previous knowledge of audience members. Understandings are not intended to be the same for everybody. For example, one can expect that adults will interpret stories much differently than children will. The amount of detail included in stories told to children differs from the same stories when they are shared with adults. Similarly, the tale a storyteller spins can be disguised, depending on the audience and the storyteller’s intentions.

In our experience, songs continue to be part of everyday life. Thoughts that have made their way into language and vice-versa are an embodiment of place. At one time, speaking and singing

were considered to be the same thing. We have the opportunity to learn from Elders who teach us that there are still places where grandmothers who continue to live in numinous environments have not forgotten the skill of singing landscapes as they were sung since time immemorial. Communicating with a wide range of tonalities is kin to the act of speaking. This way of communicating information was not only employed as part of ceremonial events. In addition, language was not seen as a human invention as Olson suggests.⁵ Rather, as Longboat makes clear,⁶ language is a gift from the Sky-world and as such, a gift from Creator, consistent with life on earth. Singing contemporary songs is a pleasurable act where the lessons and teachings embodied by Mythopoetic songs spans back long before human-time. They contain knowledge about the world as it was and continues to be. Beings and the evocation of their instructions that are deemed to be of essential importance through distant time are alive within these ancestral songs. These tell us pertinent historical information about where we were and give us a blueprint of aspirations or directions towards healthy ways of thinking and living that were reliant on a deep understanding of their connection with local ecosystems.

Oral tradition and storytelling as ecologically-centered curriculum

The practice of engaging with different poetic forms, such as songs, is a good way of developing an inquisitive relationship between landscape and language learning. Oral history education infused with poetic inquiry involves traditional teachings about how to live sustainably within the places we inhabit. Ecological learning and inquiry requires the privilege of spending time within non-reconstructed or redeveloped landscapes. We learn to understand landscapes by walking through them not with a desire to change, re-develop and work on the land but to understand how students who are part of settler culture might begin to realize the gifts of life that Mother Earth gives us to explore.

According to Mohawk and Anishnaabe Elders, the most essential aspect of learning the ecology of a place does not begin with empirical facts and figures. More so, this learning involves paying close attention to one's surroundings that enable a development of understanding the intricacies of skills that are essential for sustaining human life.

Today this attention to detail is considered to be a form of art. Learning practices designed to make life easier also help to connect teachings in stories representative of ancestral ontologies and epistemologies. Understanding the geography, history and language of a particular place — that we consider essential to oral history education — involves investing a great deal of time. Here Basso states:

Consider, for example, the following statement by Leslie M. Silko, poet and novelist from the pueblo of Laguna in New Mexico. After explaining that stories “function basically as makers of our identity,” Silko (1981:69) goes on to discuss Pueblo narratives in relation to the land:

The stories cannot be separated from geopolitical locations, from actual places within the land... And the stories are so much a part of these places that it is almost impossible for future generations to lose the stories because there are so many imposing geographical elements... you cannot live in that land without asking or looking at or noticing a boulder or rock. And there's always a story.⁷

Addressing the importance of place in relation to identity formation is an extremely complex task. It is difficult to help learners understand place if educators have not had the opportunity or taken a lengthy temporal interest involved in coming to know the places they inhabit. Thinking about land as a *development opportunity* rather than as a place borrowed from future generations compounds the difficulties of developing an understanding about healthy sustainable relationships with places, as do elements of globalization that are becoming infused in all areas of modern life. The word *development suggests* that the land is better after human contact, change and re-construction. Clearly, this is an ironic term. Part of environmental education should include learning the traditional stories of places, which are embodied in Indigenous eco-poetic traditions of those who know them best because they have lived in relationship with the land since the dawn of human time.

Integrating oral tradition into language arts education

Oral history education is an important practice for developing connections with the places that we live. We offer this poem as

an example of how language arts can help learners consider their own relationships with language. We evoke autobiographical work whereby students reflect upon their own relationships with landscapes by documenting their stories, songs, and poems. Some of the memories that are evoked include collecting blueberries, raspberries, strawberries and mushrooms for preserves and the importance of knowing about various other plant medicines. In creating this poem we move between memories of Elders and grandparents teaching about what they know about food collection and cultivation, both in forests and in gardens, and our experiences at sunrise ceremonies attended on cold February mornings.

Ode to Sunrise

*In darkness we gather
shoulder to shoulder
shuffle around the circle
as light glows from the fire*

*we remember cultural traditions
passed on since time immemorial
minds tune into bird songs
Ceremonies of Thanks to Creation*

*Grandfather Sun
Grandmother Moon
we celebrate with friends
above crisp snow*

*as darkness fades
imagine the warmth of summer days
grandparents leading the hunt for blueberries
jams and jellies shaped from relationships with places lived*

*echoed in song-stories
lessons of gratitude
warmth moves from ancestral songs
connecting time and space*

The practices of story-making, song-writing, storytelling, and poetic inquiry can evoke oral history education in terms of celebrating cultural traditions used to foster sustainable learning practices in public systems of education. Often conceptualized as a pedagogy of place, poetic inquiry experienced via oral traditions reaffirms that we are on Indigenous land. Oral history education that draws upon Elders' storytelling, songs, and other teachings can promote a high level of learning as an essential area of the curriculum by reinforcing that Indigenous stories have deep roots connected with the places where they have grown.

Engaging with focal practices like growing and gathering food as community-engaged learning and action will provide a space for understanding and developing deep relationships with place. Poetic inquiry can be a useful method of becoming in tune with the places that we live. By thinking about place and time of writing, learners will inquire how engaging with the world is influenced by language and historical engagements with the places they inhabit. It is through these practices that we inquire how the process of writing poetry can help students become aware of their surroundings as well as their understandings about how the everyday language they use shapes the world around them.

It is important for educators to provide opportunities for learners to consider differences between oral and literary tradition for example, and what happens when stories are told without the use of notes or transcriptions. From childhood we are told stories to try to tune us into teachings that often stretch far beyond classrooms and the places we live. Stories told around the campfire have a different background than when told after a movie or television programs. Educators and storytellers often find it difficult to compete with technologies that are available for modern mass consumption. Storytelling can still promote a high level of learning as an essential area of the curriculum.

Storytelling brings people together through sharing and communicating ideas and is necessary for culturally-relational ecological education.⁸ Stories that have deep roots and have been retold for a long time have connections with what Abram calls the more-than-human world.⁹ Understandings about the places we live can be a strong beginning for poetic inquiry. Popular culture messages often contain content that has shock value for the purpose of revenue generation,

rather than sharing important information. Although it is important to consider how to interpret the messages stories evoke, we believe that it is essential for learners to become part of oral traditions and practices. Our contention is that curricula that fosters an engagement with oral traditions is an important part of oral history education for ecological sustainability.

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GUILLERMO VODNIZA

Stories That Are Not Told

Everyone has a story, or a story that matters

9. David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception in a More-Than-Human World* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1996).

Too often, funny memories, anecdotes, students' life experiences, and traditional knowledge of parents, grandparents and great-grandparents cannot be found in traditional textbooks and curricula.¹ I believe in the importance of connecting students' lives through oral history and storytelling to recognize and celebrate an individual's culture and heritage. I use oral history and traditional storytelling in my teaching practice to support students in discovering traditional values and identity. Where I come from and the communities to which I belong inform the stories that are part of my teaching implementation. This article illustrates through personal narratives (of growing up in Colombia, and teaching in Colombia and Canada) how oral history and story telling are important pedagogical tools for connecting student to their traditional practices and fostering a deeper understanding of the 'other.' In turn, the ensuing stories serve the dual purpose of locating ourselves as researchers, while also addressing the possible root causes of social injustices within our teachings at school.

Stories not told: growing up in a small Indigenous village

In "Learning to Relate: Stories from a Father and Son", JJ Baker stated: "We are reminded that stories are powerful, and that once told, can never be taken back."² Oral history and traditional storytelling have served as important pedagogical instruments for Indigenous people's democracy. These two elements are vital tools of communicating Indigenous traditional knowledge and cultural practices from generation to generation. I remember a time in my childhood when my grandmother and I went for a walk into the jungle. She wanted to show me the traditional medicinal plants that she used for preventing and curing different illness. Being there, she said to me, "Everything that you see here: trees, rivers, plants, animals come from a story." Years later, I realized through my teaching experience that oral history and traditional storytelling have the power to change the present, as my grandmother mentioned in our conversation in the jungle.

My teaching experiences in Colombia

After receiving my bachelor of education, I taught in a remote village deep in the jungle that was only accessible by canoe and foot in the province of Putumayo. On the one hand, I was confronted with a lack of basic teaching materials such as books, chairs and desks. On the other, the experiences, traditional knowledge, and daily effort many of the children showed toward achieving their educational goals shook up my identity as a teacher. Many of them walked every morning 40, 50, or 60 minutes from their homes to their school and from their school to their homes in the afternoon. Another situation that had an impact on me was when one of my students who had completed Grade 5 became a member of a guerrilla group. (Children joined guerrilla groups as a way of escaping poverty.) I saw him when the guerrilla group stopped the boat where I and other people were traveling on. He (my student) looked at me and lowered his head and went to another place so as to not have to greet me.

Shortly after this experience, I learned to draw on the community's traditional knowledge that taught me as much as it did my students. I developed lesson plans based on funny memories, traditional customs, students' lives and experiences, community events, stories

and memories from students' parents, their grandparents and their great-grandparents, and history of the community — everyone has a story to tell, or a story that matters. We created small books about their traditional way of living and community learning activities.

I decided to invite community members who had played an important role in their community into my class. One of them was an Indigenous Elder who was very well known for her traditional knowledge of medicinal plants and tremendous contributions to support Indigenous cultural identities. She came to my class to share her knowledge with my students about traditional medicinal plants as well as to listen to my students about their traditional knowledge and experiences about nature. We collected all of this information about the medicinal plants. Then, the students and I prepared questions for their parents about what other information we could find about traditional medicinal plants. All my students interviewed their parents and shared what they learned through class presentations. Our final project was to share our knowledge with our community. Parents, grandparents and great-grandparents came to my school to listen to their children's presentation. Finally, parents and students planted those plants in our own school garden.

This project taught me the importance of finding ways to recognize the skills, experiences and talents of students. It also increased the solidarity, communication and respect between members of the community. They recognized for themselves the importance of their traditional knowledge. As a consequence, parents got more involved in the education of their children; the participation of parents in school meetings increased, parents began more educational project initiatives, like family celebration day, family community night, and spring festival sports.

This project taught me the importance of finding ways to recognize the skills, experiences and talents of students. It also increased the solidarity, communication and respect between members of the community.

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Four years later, I began working with students who were at risk. In order to help them develop trust in themselves and others, I asked them to record memories of community Elders and leaders. For the students, this became a process of self-recognition. They learned to see and value the historical contributions that Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities made to the development of Colombia. It was a way of uncovering their brilliance.³

Teaching global issues in Winnipeg

During one of my practicum placements in Winnipeg, and as part of my teacher education training in Manitoba, I developed and taught a Grade 8 unit in Social Studies *Developing Identity and Appreciation of Indigenous Cultures Through Masks*. This unit explored the history, culture and identity of different Indigenous cultures from around the world such as the Haida from the Pacific Northwest, Aboriginal Blacks from South Africa, and Inca from Peru. In my Indigenous culture and others across the world, masks are used to describe practices and beliefs that reflect the connections with the land and natural environment. So, students learned to interpret stories behind masks, express themselves through art, learn from their classmates, and appreciate the importance of their own heritage. For example, one student who belonged to the Métis community wrote:

My Identity:

My mask means my family. They are very caring, respectful and honest. My mask also represents trust, love and courage. These values are part of my family and culture. My mask represents community and relationships. We feel a sense of belonging and support from one another. It is a celebration of a cultural identity and values. It is to learn my own language.

In my final practicum placement I developed and taught a Grade 5/6 integrated unit in Social Studies *Memories and Identity*, and English Language Arts *How can I be a Hero/Role Model?* The Social Studies unit was designed to explore the value of students' culture and identity. I used masks as a way of understanding our own values and differences.



One Indigenous student wrote her feelings about her culture through her art project.

The English Language Arts unit was designed to allow students to explore global issues through studying the life of Malala Yousafzai. By doing so, students were able to realize that many children have gone through different struggles, but also to realize how resilient they are.

I began the first lesson by asking students, "What makes

a hero? For instance, a hero is someone who displays courage, determination, excellence, honour, and kindness. Then, I shared my personal story about my experiences and the challenges that I faced to get access to education, as well as the support that I received from my grandmother.

I continued this lesson by asking the students, "Have you ever had a head pain? Then, let's suppose that we have a head pain now." I then said to my students, "Would it be fair for me to say that my head pain is stronger than yours?" The students replied no because "you did not feel what I feel." The purpose of this exercise was to help students understand the differences in our challenges and struggles, and why things are fair or unfair and how to make positive changes. After a discussion about it, I read aloud the story of *Malala: A brave girl from Pakistan* by Jeanette Winter. After reading the book, the students brainstormed ideas in response to the question,



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“What makes a hero?” Some examples of students’ ideas are:

“A hero is one person who can change the world with wisdom, humanity and courage” (Student, Grade 5).

“It is somebody who understands what respect is. Also, a hero is a person who stands up for other people’s rights” (Student, Grade 6).

“A hero is somebody who doesn’t use the violence, but they use their words to solve problems” (Student, Grade 5).

In the next lesson, students created an original text to communicate and demonstrate an understanding of what it means to be a hero. Using the writing process, they wrote real stories of courage, kindness and hope in the form of a letter. I shared a letter I wrote to my grandmother as an example. Here is an excerpt of a student’s letter:

Dear Alexandra (pseudonym): You always make smile, and you are there for me when I need a friend. Some people say you may be bossy or mean, but honestly, I don’t have reasons why. I don’t think you are any of these things because... I love you. I can take under my wings like I’m your angel guardian and be myself. (Grade 5 student writing to her friend from the same classroom)

Through this project, students were able to bring a large part of themselves into the classroom, and real relationships grew because they found connections with each other. They developed a sense of support from each other, a sense of solidarity, and they felt alive with each other.

My goal in writing this article is to reflect on the importance of building connections between students from different backgrounds. I use oral history and traditional storytelling in my teaching practice to strengthen the identity and sense of belonging of my students. My experiences in the Global South and North have shown me the importance of using of oral history and traditional storytelling in my teaching practices to hear students’ stories. It is a pedagogy that supports, in a respectful way, learning from students, parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. In other words, it begins with a traditional conversation in the classroom, goes out

into the community and the world, and then comes back into the classroom.⁴

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**SUE ANDERSON AND
JAIMEE HAMILTON**

The Theory and Practice of 21st Century Pedagogies in the Oral History Classroom

Introduction

Advances in technology have led to the burgeoning field of digital storytelling and other multimedia, which offer innovative opportunities for conducting and disseminating oral history and for the way it can be taught. In our teaching we have redefined our pedagogical approach to address the increasing need for humanization and socialization in a rapidly desensitized blended learning environment. Ethical considerations have always been at the heart of oral history practice and are ever more important in this digital age. Our aim, therefore, is to produce graduates prepared to enter their various professions as 'good' citizens with the necessary attributes to contribute positively to society. To achieve this aim we argue for the need to introduce progressive pedagogies whilst addressing the challenges of rapidly developing technologies in the teaching of oral history at the university level.

If Donald Ritchie's claim that the use of oral history in the classroom "helps students break loose from their textbooks and become their own collectors of information — and students remember best what they researched themselves" is true, then oral history is both a field of

study and a pedagogy in itself.¹ Oral history, as Woodard makes clear, stands at an additional intersection where, “its emphasis on recording and transcribing interviews, occupies a possibly unique overlap between research and scholarly output. ...[T]he interview is itself an act of research and discovery.”² In turn, teachers of oral history occupy a unique space; one that other disciplines cannot so easily manoeuvre.

The methodology of oral history has applications that can be taken up across the entire gambit of teaching and is used as a pedagogical tool from primary schools through to the tertiary sphere. However, as our world is changing, so too are our students, and so the instructional strategies for teaching and learning must also change to accommodate evolving needs of learners in order to produce competent 21st century graduates. Thus, we need to develop and share progressive pedagogies and pedagogical tools in order to effectively teach oral history in the 21st century. This is possibly our greatest challenge and one with which we should be engaging as a matter of urgency. At the same time, educators need to keep up with rapidly developing technological advances and adapt their teaching methodologies accordingly.

21st century pedagogies: our principles

While it is commonly understood that 21st century pedagogies are built on technology and Web 2.0 tools, blended learning and flipped classrooms, their implementation involves the melding of the relevant underlying pedagogical principles with the technology. The technology is the communication vehicle that enables us to develop creative learning activities that engage and develop our students as 21st century professionals. Our pedagogical position for creating courses is multidimensional and includes elements of 21st century pedagogies, embodied, student-centered and assessment-driven learning. As such, we have synthesized our approach to be based on three key principles: embodied learning, social responsibility, and life-long learning. It must be noted that all examples provided are in an online environment and not face-to-face.

Embodied learning

Creative and innovative learning and teaching involves the whole self in the learning experience. Much learning takes place within informal settings,³ such as a discussion over a coffee, watching a YouTube video or TED talk, reading a blog or designing a mind map. Embodied learning takes the learner on a journey that is visual, oral, social and academic. Through these informal learning practices we develop our 21st century skills, which are vital in a professional setting, yet this type of learning is very rarely reflected in final assessments.

Using the principle of embodied learning is acknowledging the learner is not 'tabula rasa' and comes to us with core existing skill and knowledge sets. It is about respecting and building the student's current knowledge and skill sets, while developing our own pedagogies to reflect the needs of the student. Perception and action need to go hand in hand in order to enrich the learner's experience and capabilities.⁴ When we are designing courses we ensure we move the learner from the superficial level of remembering, understanding and repeating to analyzing, evaluating, creating and applying, through student-centered activities.

Oral history practice is the perfect vehicle for embodied learning as it engages the student actively in a sensory and collaborative experience. As Fletcher and Cambre note, digital storytelling offers "a unique learning experience for students" in that both the narrator and listener "enter the space of the story for the other."⁵ For example, we have had the learner explore their own understanding of oral history ethics then asked them to canvass a colleague/peer/family member's opinion. They are then given a short video, blog or wiki and asked to research oral history ethics on their own. Finally, they are given the *Oral History Association of Australia's Guidelines of Ethical Practice*.⁶ This way, students are given the chance to explore, analyse, evaluate and create new understandings that they can relate to their world in a meaningful way. This embodies the learning by making the learner the centre rather than the content.

Social responsibility

As faculty we have an obligation to promote positive and constructive social responsibility within every course we develop and deliver. We reflect this in our pedagogy by designing and delivering courses which not only build knowledge but also a strong sense of emotional, cultural and social intelligence. An example of this is embedding a YouTube video on the differences between empathy and sympathy and then asking the students to recall a time when they had engaged in both, and how that made them feel. We then invited students to use images and design a four-slide PowerPoint presentation demonstrating their understanding of the difference between empathy and sympathy. They posted their PowerPoints on the course website's discussion board in order to create a shared experience. They were then asked to think about how this would be relevant to undertaking an oral history interview.

We also facilitated learning activities where students are asked to recall a situation where they have felt culturally unsafe and what they did in order to regain that feeling of safety. Subsequently, students must find a song that represented those feelings and post the song onto Padlet (a virtual wall) for other students to share their experience. Nowhere is this more important than in conducting oral history recording. As Steven High notes, this is borne out by the increasing move towards collaborative oral history research and the "move to democratize the research process."⁷ The challenges, however, "lie in how sharing occurs between researchers and the community; the informants, and the readership, viewership, or users, among others."⁸ Nevertheless, collaborative work such as oral history recording "requires the cultivation of trust, the development of collaborative relationships, and shared decision-making,"⁹ attributes of a socially responsible citizen.

Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is a value-based principle that we build into our courses to ensure scholars understand learning is a never-ending process. As educators we are not only building knowledge, we are also building students' capacity to be independent learners and, indirectly,

we are building self-esteem. The lifelong learner is self-directed and self-motivated and becomes self-sustained, confident and employable. We promote this through student-centred and assessment-driven learning. An example of this is when students are asked to research the qualities of a good historian. We ask them to develop a plan of how they would interview in order to gain the information needed. They present their work as a three-minute multimedia presentation that is then assessed. The learning tasks are scaffolded to teach students how to produce a multimedia presentation in conjunction with the necessary oral history skills. Tools such as YouTube are an excellent resource to teach students practical ICT skills whilst they are studying online. Oral history practice also invokes life-long learning in students through its multi-disciplinary nature and its need to constantly evolve the use of technological applications. Recently, for example, students were asked to choose a topic from any discipline they liked and upload a recording to the StoryCorps app.¹⁰ This enabled them to completely engage with the chosen theme whilst exploring new methods of dissemination.

How do we instill these principles in the 21st century classroom?

Several scholars have written about the effects of rapidly advancing technologies and their impact on the practice of oral history generally.¹¹ However, less attention has been given in oral history literature toward addressing the need to adapt our teaching methods.¹² Not all students respond in the same way to new technologies. A survey using cluster analysis conducted by Guthrie examined “how students in the same classroom differ in their preferences for learning technologies.”¹³ He identified the following three distinct groups: those who are driven by a desire to explore new technologies; those who are skeptical of them; and those for whom technology is seen as a means to a learning end. Guthrie concluded, “technology matters for some students, but not for all.” In turn, he saw a challenge in terms of designing learning environments appropriate for the diverse relationships with technologies that can be found in the one classroom.

Teachers draw on differing instructional strategies to respond to the diverse needs of their learners. One author here is in her sixties, and the other is in her thirties. While the younger academic may have

more technological skills than the older, there are still some skills that the older can share with the younger because of the different ways in which we have learned them. Indeed, the younger academic learned a great deal from an older academic at her previous university. Today we all learn from each other.

In addition, for both students and teachers to operate in the new blended environment, teachers need to develop new approaches. In order to address the change in “traditional instructional pedagogies, involving ... teacher-dominated lectures” that technology has created for the teaching of oral history in the 21st century classroom, Lanman and Wendling produced an anthology of oral history education.¹⁴ For them, “The outside world is the classroom through actual investigation as well as virtual exploration via the computer, interactive software, and the Internet....Enter the dawn of a new age of instruction.”¹⁵

In the classroom there is a switch between traditional educator roles and those of a facilitator, because technology drives more self-directed learning. The teacher’s role now has to be more fluid, with the emphasis on guidance rather than directed learning. Students have so many tools at their fingertips that they can take their learning path on a myriad of trajectories, which is exciting for both students and teachers as students learn according to their own interests while teachers’ knowledge bases are expanding as they pursue new lines of enquiry directed by their students.

However, with the increasing trend towards the online environment, the fear is that the teacher is becoming a mere course designer, or perhaps even obsolete. We argue that this is not the case, that there is still guidance needed in implementing the principles of 21st century pedagogies and keeping students on relevant pathways of learning to do this.

Conclusion

Oral history has always been an ideal pedagogical tool to build student research skills and information literacy. It is still ideal to build skills necessary for life in the 21st century.¹⁶ Thus, the more competent and ethically trained practitioners we produce the better, and constant adaptation of our teaching to accommodate new technology is required for this end. The digital revolution offers “exciting ... online

spaces of learning and exchange.”¹⁷ Despite the challenges we face in delivering 21st century pedagogies, embracing the digital revolution is empowering for oral history educators and students alike.

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12. Save for perhaps Barry A. Lanman and Laura M. Wendling, *Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians: An Anthology of Oral History Education* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), Woodard, "The Digital Revolution," and Fletcher & Cambre, "Digital Storytelling."
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14. Lanman & Wendling, *Preparing the Next Generation of Oral Historians*.
15. *Ibid.*, xvii.
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BARBARA BROCKMANN

The Story is Only the Start

Collecting family oral histories in the junior/intermediate elementary classroom

"If this is your land," he asked, "where are your stories?"

Recounted by a Tsimshian Elder to Government Officials.¹

Collecting Family Oral History in the elementary classroom is an integrated historical thinking and language arts inquiry approach which foregrounds the stories families tell each other as the start of a deep learning opportunity. Teachers and students can do oral history as a singular assignment where they add a human dimension and a personal connection to a *big idea* under study or, as a larger and longer project culminating in a curated collection of family stories. In both cases, collecting family oral histories is a best practice for encouraging inquiry processes related to historical thinking, engaging in complex language use around listening and writing as well as fostering inter-generational and community bonds.

My Grades 5-8 students have collected family oral histories since 1994. Their reflections, included as quotes sprinkled throughout this article, illustrate remarkable consistency in what they value about the project. My observations throughout the years confirm that learning takes place on several fronts simultaneously. This paper situates the theoretical framework, describes how to start collecting family oral

history in your class, and concludes with the different ways doing oral history can be a powerful experience for all.

Theoretical framework

“For my mother, the way I know her, you wouldn’t really expect a story like this out of a 40-year-old.” (Julie B., 1994)

“The whole project was about primary source evidence. I never considered my parents as having information worth knowing. I think differently now.” (Calan B., 2014)

The project was initially conceived as a means to develop language skills and use the writing process while situating one’s family experience as a source of knowledge, thereby validating and strengthening family bonds in the largely refugee, immigrant and working class neighbourhood where I was teaching. I wanted to place students’ familial lived experiences as a central foundation of the culture we were developing in our classroom. This was due to my concern over the tendency of students (then, and now) to be at risk of contemporary colonization by the heavy influence of American values put forth in the media, by classrooms where Canadian culture is narrowly addressed only in the history and social studies curricula, and by the “old stock” Canadian historical narratives students’ often experience. Beginning with their family stories, I wanted students to develop a sense of time and place that had personal and historical origins, heightening their overall curiosity and understanding while hopefully avoiding the fate of becoming ahistorical citizens who don’t act in their communities’ best interests.

I was influenced by Carole Edelsky who suggested that shared community knowledge could be a powerful curricular focus.² She drew on seminal examples like the Firefox Project that made the life knowledge of Southern Appalachian Elders the focus of school-based investigation. The key features of such projects included answers that could not be found in a textbook, the need for students and teachers to grapple with categorizing and interpreting data, and topics that are both somewhat familiar and tantalizingly unknown. Other requirements were that the information collected had value to the

community and would consist of multidimensional stages requiring participants to use a variety of language modes. These aspects were built into the design of the collecting family oral history project.

Students' oral history projects inquired into the different historical dimensions of their families' lived experience from the near and far past. In *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts*, the authors refer to six distinct but closely interrelated concepts that encourage students to inquire into the past at a deeper level.³ Framed as explicit questions (see box below), students now have a consistently effective lens through which to view the story. Therefore, instead of simply retelling a family narrative, they are asked to wrestle with historical evidence while making different choices and interpretations. In effect, they are learning to do the work of historians with their family oral histories.

As you research, engage in historical thinking by...

...looking for places where you need to do additional research on the HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE of the era or event, so that the family story can be understood in context.

...asking about the CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE of events and possibly identify causes that are hidden from view.

...thinking about the HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE of your family's experiences so that you can better understand the past.

...exploring CONTINUITY AND CHANGE from then to now: how are things the same? How are they different? Does change always mean progress?

...using PRIMARY SOURCE EVIDENCE through your interviewing techniques and exploration of significant and treasured family objects.

...using GEOGRAPHIC THINKING as you look up location and learn about the different environments of your stories.

How to do oral history in the elementary classroom

Step 1: Choosing the way in

"You should do it all at once." (Marisa, 2014)

"You should spread it out over the year." (Nina, 2014)

Collecting oral history can be included in the curriculum in three flexible ways. The most direct is as a non-fiction Language Arts research and writing unit where students are encouraged to collect a range of stories from a variety of family members. Generally, four to six stories can be processed during five to seven weeks. The final project is a curated collection in a book format. Another approach uses the *big ideas* within History or Geography units to make connections to personal family experiences. For example, a curriculum covering immigration eras or push and pull migration factors lends itself to exploring a family's experiences with migration and colonization.

A cumulative approach incorporates *both* of the above throughout the school year in order to publish the collected stories in May or June. This provides for opportunities to gather stories at times when families naturally meet during secular or religious holidays. Students might also suggest topic areas connected to notable days of the calendar year. For example, the start of the intermediate years is a good time for students to inquire into the social history of their parents' middle school years, while Remembrance Day lends itself to learning about family experiences during times of war or other political conflict. The point is that whenever you call upon students' prior knowledge to uncover what they already know about a topic, they are able to make key connections between their historical inquiries, past family experiences, and contemporary lived experiences researching their chosen topic.

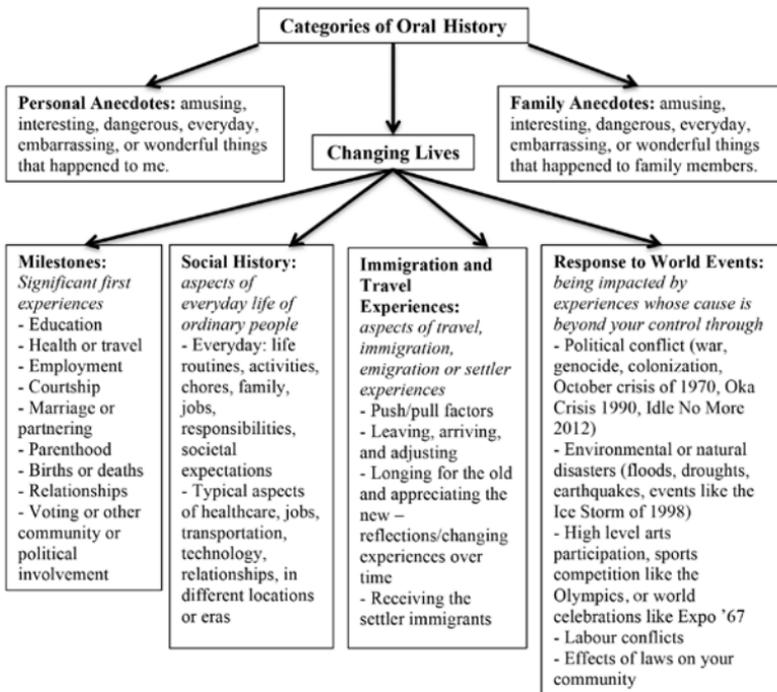
Step 2: Introducing oral history

"Sure I love to tell stories with my friends. But stories with my parents? We just talk about our daily plans. At least we did until we started the project." (Fati, 2009)

OUR SCHOOLS/OUR SELVES

Students already love to tell stories to their friends about the recent past of the weekend or their last sports success. Teachers can build on this instinct by situating it within the context of family and community storytelling practices. Develop a meta-awareness by having students reflect on the type of stories they share with family and friends, including when and where the stories are told. Compare habits both before and after the project. Incorporate and identify examples of oral history regularly in order to expose students to models of expression and validate the uses of oral history in the broader world. This can be done first by sharing anecdotes in the class as part of the *getting to know you activities*. Then, highlight examples and uses of oral history in the broader community as they are revealed in current events. The discovery of the Franklin expedition through the knowledge held in Inuit oral traditions is one such recent example, as is the testimony of residential school survivors as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Teachers and students read oral history sources like the work of Barry Broadfoot or sophisticated picture books for children telling fictionalized accounts of personal experiences that are historically significant. In any of these instances, frame anecdotes or sample texts in terms of *categories of oral history* (see Anchor Chart 1) to get students thinking about the type of story revealed. This will also prompt students to consider areas of inquiry they might like to pursue in their own families.

Categories of oral history



Step 3: Interviewing

"My first thoughts...my parents don't really know anything about this topic, but already as I ask more questions I am finding they have answers." (Kennedy L., 2015)

"I had to make my mother comfortable and then listen carefully to what she said. It reversed the usual order of things. But it worked. And she wouldn't stop talking!" (Anonymous, 2013)

Stories may be gathered in two ways. Students may target a variety of family members using a list of specific but open-ended questions generated in class that are based on the curricular topics under discussion or the different categories of oral history. Stories may also be gathered by collecting the oft-told tales that first appear as personal

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and family anecdotes which students are later taught to analyse. In either case, the dynamic of asking questions and listening closely is at play. For this reason, students will need to be explicitly introduced to interviewing procedures and skills.

Beforehand, students can prepare the interviewee by informing them of the project and topic in advance to allow for *think time*. On the day of the interview, they are encouraged to make the interviewee comfortable (by making tea or performing a chore) so they will be relaxed and ready. During the interview, jot down details or use a recording device. Allow for silence and processing time. Be aware that the interview may go off topic, which is permissible as it may open additional avenues of information. Be prepared to ask for elaboration or clarification. Use photos or documents as an additional avenue to enter conversation. Troubleshoot issues of privacy and boundaries by discussing them beforehand with students. They should be aware that everything shared doesn't have to be written down, and uncomfortable topics may be substituted for other ones. Thank the participant after the interview and show them the final product once the project is complete.

Step 4: Working with the story through the lens of writing process and historical thinking

"I learned to look at the stories through a historical lens that allowed me to compare the past to the present and see how the past affects both the present and the future." (Maddy W., 2012)

"I was surprised by the things I was capable of writing when I used the writing process." (Colin D., 2012)

It is only once the first draft is written that the work of thinking like a historian and shaping the story like a writer begins. Revisiting the stories they collect, students engage in classroom exercises to help them develop and expand the literary quality and historical effectiveness of their pieces. Students also learn from each other as texts are shared in conferences or as class examples to discuss and analyse. Literary quality is addressed through the different stages of the writing process. By examining peer drafts and mentor texts, students

develop and apply the criteria of what makes good storytelling. This includes overall organization, compelling introductory and concluding sentences and descriptive and precise language use. The goal is to develop an informative and personal writing voice for non-fiction text that makes critical connections that leave the reader thinking.

Historical thinking skills are developed at the same time as students look at the content of their historical evidence. The interview itself exposes students to primary and secondary sources and they often *return to the source* for further elaboration or clarification. As well, students are expected to be as precise as possible with details like full names, eras or dates and locations. However, it is not just the factual aspect, but the way students learn to think about those facts that matter most. The following anchor chart helps them select one or more historical thinking skill to help them better understand and shape the story they are telling.

Historical thinking

Step 5: Publishing and celebrating the collection

"All my research and writing deserve to have a permanent place. They deserve to be in a book...My book!" (Cynthia R., 2001)

The stories can be published as individual texts or collected and curated in a family history book. Stories are elucidated by visuals like photos, maps, drawings or book borders. Students gain 'bilingual bonus points' by publishing any number of stories in additional languages. The media aspect of the book project includes: well thought-out titles, touching dedications, table of contents, historian's bio, and comments pages at the end which allow readers to leave a written response. The collection can be hand sewn and bound into hardcover books made of wallpaper, cardboard and white glue. The front cover can be finished off with a gold sticker announcing (self-chosen) awards like the *Governor General's Award for Historical Nonfiction* or the *Globe and Mail Best Books*.

These exquisite books are proudly celebrated at a class book launch that includes parents as guests. The Author-Historians read their favourite paragraph aloud.

Step 6: Self and teacher evaluation

"I'm not really interested in or concerned about my final mark. The learning I already did is enough for me." (Kathleen O'K., 2011)

Students are involved in self-assessment throughout the process. From generating questions, to sharing oral stories and then written drafts, students co-construct success criteria which they apply to their own work. At the same time, student work throughout the process also informs teacher instruction. It is helpful for all involved if the first oral history collected in the class is on the same general topic like *My Parent's Middle School Years*. This allows for common points of comparison and discussion when engaging with the stages of the process and ideas about historical thinking for the first time. The final rubric should include evaluation of learning skills, writing process and writing traits, historical thinking and visual communication.

The powerful practice of collecting family oral histories

"I dedicate this book to my ancestors, in whose footsteps I step as I go on to make my own mark on the world." (Rachel, 2001)

Collecting family oral history has proved to be powerful for all of us in my classroom as the learning occurs simultaneously at several levels. The inquiry process is richly embedded as questions are developed, asked, answered, and then offered as more fodder for wondering. The interviewing process fosters intergenerational bonds while the stories themselves can reveal an unexpected humanity to student interviewers unaccustomed to considering their parents or grandparents as having lived experiences. Complex language skills are developed as students engage in a variety of stages and language modes, inspired by the deep motivation of telling their own family stories. The stories provide the substantive content for expanding historical consciousness. Students think critically as they select and shape data according to the criteria they think is most significant. As discoveries are shared, students build a common citizenship that is paradoxically differentiated by perspectives that are at once local

and global, historical and current. A sense of connection to family and community is engendered and the capacity for an activist pedagogy is built as students learn about and analyse reflectively the experiences of their family within the political, social and environmental conditions and choices of their times.

The story is only the start of the learning, but the fact that the story is one of their own family stories is in itself a *best practice* for junior and intermediate students.

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ENDNOTES

1. Edward J. Chamberlin, *If This Is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?: Finding Common Ground* (Canada: Random House, 2004), 1.
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3. Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts* (Toronto: Nelson Educational, 2013).