What is Oral History 3
My approach to Oral History 4
Sequence: Oral History Project 5
Conducting the Interview 6
Topics to consider 7
Topics ctd 8
Topics ctd 9
Challenges 10
Learner Testimonies 11
Tools of the Trade 12–15
History: subject of choice? 16–18
Oral history can be defined as the recording, preservation & interpretation of information, based on personal experiences and opinions of individuals interviewed. It may take the form of eye-witness evidence about the past, but can include folklore, myths, songs and stories passed down over the years by word of mouth. It is an invaluable way of preserving the knowledge & understanding of the experience of individuals.

Oral history can give a voice to individuals and groups who are sometimes marginalized in ‘conventional’ histories – the working classes, women and ethnic minorities, for instance. It can provide new information, alternative explanations and different insights which are of enormous value.

Your aim should be to place the individual's experiences or perspective within a larger historical or social context.
MY APPROACH TO ORAL HISTORY

➢ History too often seems like the study of long lists of names, events and dates. Learners seldom get the chance to act as historians who record and interpret history for themselves and for others. I tell my learners to act like detectives who are trying to find answers to questions that they have formulated.

➢ They search for information and collect it, but most important, they draw conclusions from facts. Many learners have a hard time understanding events that they have not experienced. It is therefore imperative that the learner selects a topic which is of interest to him/her.

➢ Conducting an oral history offers learners an opportunity to play “reporter”, and to reach out to the older generations in their own families and communities, in order to learn more about a specific event / topic. I remind my learners that not everybody has played an active role in history, but by living during a particular period in history they have experiences to relate. It is these experiences that they have to tap into and around which they formulate their projects.

➢ Not all learners enjoy an advantaged background and it is for this reason alone that I offer my learners topics that cover a range of different experiences. Since many of my learners come from the informal settlements that have mushroomed in and around Reservoir Hills, I am aware that they do not have access to the electronic media hence limiting their experiences. Included in the selection of topics are those that can be accomplished with little or no formal research.

➢ The idea behind an oral history project is to pique the interest of the learner to such an extent that he/she is excited, motivated to get going with the task at hand. Regular monitoring keeps the interest alive.

➢ Workshopping the Assessment Grid with learners makes them aware of the tools used to assess the project.
SEQUENCE FOR ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

- Choose & Confirm topic with educator.
- Formulate a key question around your chosen topic.
- Plan the project. Construct a time frame / deadlines
- Conduct background research on your topic. (visit library) (this will assist you in formulating questions for your interview)
- Formulate potential questions & confirm same with educator.
- Select & approach potential interviewees.
- Conduct your interviews.
- Process material obtained from your interviews.
- Evaluate research and interviews
- Organize & present report.
- Seek the assistance of educator at any stage of the project if needed.
Assemble the tools that you will need to conduct interview. (pencil, pen, recording equipment, release forms etc).

Make a personalized checklist of things you must remember to do before, during, and after the interview.

Verify your appointment a day or two before the interview.

Make sure the interviewee understands the purpose of the interview and how you intend to use it. This is not a private conversation.

Listen actively and intently.

Allow silence. Give the interviewee time to think. Silence will work for you.

Ask one question at a time. Do a follow up on the question if necessary.

Start with less probing questions. Make your interviewee comfortable.

Have the interviewee sign the release form before you leave.

Copy borrowed photos / documents and return the originals.

“There are some essential qualities an interviewer must possess: an interest and respect for people as individuals, and flexibility in response to them; an ability to show understanding and sympathy for their point of view; and, above all, a willingness to sit quietly and listen.”

Paul Thompson, The Voice of the Past: Oral History
TOPICS TO CONSIDER

(own topics can be selected provided it is authorised by educator)

- Apartheid
  How did people experience apartheid?
  What is the legacy of apartheid?
  How has apartheid as a system shaped the society in which we live today?
  To what extent is it fair to still blame apartheid for things that go wrong today?
  What role does the ANCYL play in democratic SA?

- Chinese industry
  What impact has the Chinese industry had on the SA economy?
  What attracts the Chinese to open businesses in SA?

- Informal settlements
  What relationship, if any, exists between the informal settlement dwellers and their predominantly Indian neighbours?
  Is the Govt doing enough to assist informal dwellers?
  Why have informal settlements mushroomed mainly in previously predominated Indian areas?
  What is life like in an informal settlement?

- Domestic workers
  Do domestic workers know their rights?
  Is the Domestic Workers Union doing enough to educate domestic workers?
  Are domestic workers being exploited in SA?
  Why are domestic workers in SA mainly from the African race group?
  Will other race groups, besides that of the African, be involved in the domestic service in the near future?
Tenants
Do tenants know their rights?
How effective is the Tenants Association as a body?
Are tenants being exploited in SA?

BEE fronting
What is BEE fronting?
Why do businesses/individuals get involved in BEE fronting?
What factors encourage the practice of BEE fronting?

BEE
What is BEE?
Why was BEE introduced in SA?
Who has benefited from the practice of BEE?

Afrikaans in danger
Is the Afrikaans language in danger of becoming extinct?
What role does Afrikaans as a language have in a democratic SA?

Integrated society
Have we become the “rainbow nation” that Nelson Mandela envisaged?
To what extent has the RH area become integrated?
Why are multi-racial marriages frowned upon in certain societies?

Places of Worship in and around Reservoir Hills
What role does religious tolerance play in the society in which you live?
What are the origins of a religious site in your area?
Topics ctd

- **Role of Women**
  What role have women played in the struggle against apartheid? Are there any women in your area that should be recognised for their service to mankind? Is there a future for women in government?

- **Xenophobia**
  How do SA react towards foreigners? What impact do foreigners have on SA society? Why do we have so many illegal immigrants in SA? What expectations do illegal immigrants have in SA?

- **Ex-model schools v/s state schools**
  What is the history behind the origins of ex-model c schools? Is there a difference in the quality of education offered in ex-model c schools compared to that of state schools? Why do many non-white parents send their children to ex-model c schools?

- **History of Transport**
  What is the origins of the Indian bus transport? Why has the taxi industry become so popular in a post-apartheid society?

- **Democracy**
  How successful is our new found democracy? What are the challenges facing our democracy?

- **Globalisation and the traditional African race**
  How has the traditional African embraced / been challenged by globalisation? How has globalisation changed the traditional African lifestyle?
Keeping track and monitoring the large numbers of learners doing the project was a task. Had to allocate time after school hours for groups of learners.

Motivating learners and convincing them to buy into the project requires a lot of innovative techniques.

Assessing projects from different cultural diversities (white, indian, coloured and african) proved to be a learning experience for me.

Negotiating topics with learners is always time consuming.

Getting learners to adhere to due dates can be frustrating.

Authenticating projects – ensuring that the projects produced are truly the work of the learner and not lifted from the internet or done by the parents.
History is the only subject that is content driven but allows for freedom of expression/creativity/originality. I found the oral history project stimulating and rewarding. My mum was rather surprised at how involved I got doing my project.

Pooja Maharaj (grade 11)

It was as if I was a junior Debra Patta. I felt so important conducting my interview. My project (Do people vote according to their race group) allowed me to explore ideas that I have always thought about but had never had the occasion/reason to investigate.

Parhallo Makhubela (grade 12)

I found the experience stimulating. Conducting the interview with Phyllis Naidoo has changed my opinion about the role Indian women played during Apartheid. I feel proud to have known her.

Cuan Persad (grade 12)

From the moment that I selected my topic, I was anxious to get going. I had so many ideas that the completed project took a life of its own. It was an experience I will never forget.

Waseem Amra (grade 12)

I did a project about the SALT MARCH. During my research I learnt not only the history of the event but also a lot about the Indian people. I have grown to respect Indian culture and regard Mahatma Gandhi as an icon to be emulated.

Tanya Engelbrecht (grade 12)

This project helped boost my confidence. Interviewing people of stature was at first daunting but as soon as I got started, I realised that I was given a rare opportunity to do something I may never do again. I loved the idea of playing reporter.

Kirthi Moonilal (grade 12)

This project gave me a career direction. My experiences during the interviews were so exciting that I realised that I want to study journalism after matric. My topic regarding the Informal Settlements in Reservoir Hills also made me aware of the social problems that informal dwellers experience.

Nolwazi Mtolo (grade 12)
TOOLS OF THE TRADE

› HOLISTIC GRID USED FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.

› MONITORING FORM – USED FOR THE PURPOSES OF KEEPING A CHECK ON THE PROGRESS OF THE PROJECT.

› RELEASE FORMS – FORMS USED TO OBTAIN THE PERMISSION OF INTERVIEWEES TO USE THEIR TESTIMONIES.
HISTORY: SUBJECT OF CHOICE???

- Learner Distribution Roster 2011
- Course Selection Sheet 2012
- Tricks of the trade? Motivating learners to offer the subject at gr.10 level.
The art of motivating Learners to offer history at senior level

Over the past 11 years I have aggressively promoted the Subject.
Kindly indulge me while I share with you some of the methods I use to encourage learners to choose History as a subject in gr. 10.
• I vary my teaching methods so that lessons are interesting and innovative.
• Learners are exposed to historical movies & documentaries.
• Excursions of a historical nature are planned.
• Speakers are invited to share their experiences at assembly.
• History learners take full responsibility of assembly on public holidays.
• Regular exhibitions of History projects are put on display.
• I often give my gr 9 learners snippets of what they can expect in grades 10 to 12.
• Senior learners act like ambassadors of History by sharing their experiences in the subject with gr 9 learners.
• Debating forums are encouraged to tap into present day politics and share their opinions on items making the news.
• Selected Historical milestones eg. Womans Day, 150yrs Celebration of the Indian Arrival in SA. Human Rights day are celebrated in grand styl(using only the efforts of History learners.)
• Excellent Matric results encourage other learners to choose History.
• The History room is bright & filled with interesting political, historical, cartoons, charts etc.
• I actively promote my subject whilst doing relief duty. Relate events in History that fascinate learners. Competitions & creative expressions in the form of poems, short stories, posters are encouraged.
• I devote at least 10 minutes every day revisiting the previous days main headlines in the daily newspapers. Learners are eager to contribute to the
Concluding Remarks:

Future of Oral History

The future of Oral History looks bright and challenging. The sagas of Malema, Tutu, and many others are going to provide our learners with enough material for future projects. May I also add that politics & history are inextricably intertwined. History learners are definitely tomorrows politicians.

My concern however is the latest CAPS document. At present, the Heritage and Oral history project as separate entities gives the learner an advantage. Total assessment for both is 50 marks for cass. The CAPS document has grouped both the components together with a total mark of 20. (Many learners who do not fare well in formal testing are going to be at a disadvantage).

History as a subject has to be aggressively promoted in the classrooms. By refusing to do so we deny the learner the ability to empower himself with the knowledge of where he comes from, and the events / people that have determined the course of his life.