

This file presents a series of handouts that I provided for an HES 2005 oral history panel, to illustrate how I attempt to guide students through an oral history project. This particular set was created for an historical component in my Ed 308 Cities, Suburbs, and Schools seminar in 2002, where students interviewed participants from Project Concern, a city-to-suburb desegregation transfer program in metropolitan Hartford from the 1960s to the 1990s. This class project eventually generated an co-authored article with one of my students: Dana Banks ('03) and Jack Dougherty, "City-Suburban Desegregation and Forced Choices: Review essay of Susan Eaton's *The Other Boston Busing Story*." *Teachers College Record* 106 (May 2004): 985-996.

**Overview of the oral history project:** After reading Susan Eaton's *The Other Boston Busing Story* on the METCO city-to-suburb school transfer program, students designed and conducted an oral history project to test her claims against the experiences of Project Concern alumni from Hartford during 1970s-1990s. Nessa Orum, manager of the current program (Capitol Region Choice Program, aka Project Choice), assisted with logistics and inserted a question into our interview guide about alumni's willingness to mentor current students, to benefit her program. Students presented their findings to Orum, Mary Carroll (former exec director of Project Concern), and Renita Satchell (an alumna who helped us revise our questions during a group practice interview). All 10 interview participants received a free copy of their tape / transcript at conclusion of the project, and all transcripts donated to Hartford Studies Project. After the course, two students (Dana Banks and Lauren Gutmann) conducted additional interviews during an independent study in Spring 2003.

## **Oral history interview guide:**

After discussing the book, our seminar created this interview guide, and revised it after a practice interview session with Renita Satchell, an alumna of the Project Choice program who generously granted us her time and cooperation to improve our interview project.

Project Concern Oral Histories

Interview Guide Fall 2002

Before interview:

- Call to confirm time and place for 30-minute interview
- Bring cassette (from Jack) and tape recorder (from AV x2422 if needed)
- Bring this guide, two consent forms, invitation, and metro Hartford map

Beginning the interview:

- Explain our purpose: *We are interviewing Project Concern alumni to learn more about how they remember their experiences in the city-suburb school transfer program.*
- Explain consent form and ask participant to sign TWO copies (keep one, return one)

Interview questions:

### Biographical:

- 1) What schools did you attend as a child?
  - in Hartford or Project Concern (what town?) - and when?
  - when and at what school did you finish high school?
- 2) Briefly describe the neighborhood where you grew up.
- 3) Tell me about your family when you were growing up.
  - any siblings? If so, did they participate in Project Concern?
  - what type of work did your parents do?

### Motivations/Expectations:

- 4) How did you first become a part of Project Concern?
  - how much input did you have in the decision?
  - what was your understanding at the time?

### The Project Concern Experience:

- 5) How did you feel about leaving your community to go to school elsewhere?
- 6) How did you balance living in two different communities during Project Concern?
  - how did the long bus trip affect your daily life?
  - extracurricular activities
  - Did you ever visit the homes of your suburban friends? Did they ever visit your home?
- 7) How did all of this affect your racial identity?
- 8) What kind of support did you receive at the Project Concern school?

Reflecting Back on Project Concern:

Briefly describe your life since participating in Project Concern.

- 9) Did you go to college after Project Concern?
- 10) How has Project Concern affected your choice of work, and workplace relationships?
- 11) Where do you live now?  
-what influenced your decision?
- 12) How did Project Concern influence your ability to build relationships with:  
-people of other cultures?  
-people of your own culture?
- 13) If you could go back in time, would you repeat the Project Concern experience?  
-why or why not?  
- if you had children, would you send them to a similar program?
- 14) If an opportunity arose, would you be interested in forming a mentoring relationship with a student who is currently participating in a similar program? Why or why not?

After the interview:

- Thank participant for donating time and INVITE them to presentation
- Confirm full mailing address where we can mail copy of tape/transcript
- Email or voicemail Jack (x2296) to confirm that interview went OK
- Transcribe tape and post in Project 3 folder **by Tues Nov 12th at noon**
- Deliver the tape and signed consent form to Jack; Return recorder to AV

## **Sample oral history transcript**

After conducting our practice interview, I typed one transcript and reviewed with them the basics of transcribing.

**Project Concern Oral History Interviews**  
by Educ 308: Cities, Suburbs, and Schools seminar  
deposited at the Hartford Studies Project  
Trinity College, Hartford CT

**Renita Satchell, interview with Jack Dougherty and students, November 5, 2002.**

Location: Trinity College classroom

NOTE: This was a practice interview conducted by several students in the seminar to test and refine interview questions before conducting the study.

DB = Dana Banks

GB = Grace Beckett

AHD = Arthur Hardy-Doubleday

HC = Hilary Cramer

JK = Jackie Katz

[discussion of consent form and group interview format]

DB: We were wondering what schools you attended as a child, and [was it] in the Hartford Public School system, or Project Concern?

RS: Okay, I attended elementary school at Northwest Jones in Hartford, which is on Woodland Street. Then, around third grade went to, entered into the Project Concern program and started at, what school was that? Whitman, I believe. And it closed down after that year. And then I went to Louise Duffy to complete elementary school, moved onto Sedgewick Middle School, and then graduated from Conard High School, all in West Hartford.

DB: You finished high school through Project Concern?

RS: Yes

DB: Can you briefly describe for me the neighborhood where you grew up?

RS: It was in the North end of Hartford. . . how do you describe that? Um, it was on Mansfield Street which is off of Vine Street, which is a pretty major street in Hartford. I would say that most of the houses were multi-family homes. I don't know, I know that my parents owned the home that they had, so a lot of the residents owned the properties where they were. And I'm sure if you want other specific information that you might - but it was a black neighborhood - um, but very residential.

DB: Would you describe it as lower-class, or middle-class, or upper-middle-class?

RS: I think it's probably a mixture of lower-middle-class and middle-class.

DB: And what did your parents do, what was your parents' work while you were in school?

RS: My mother worked. . . so far back. My father I know worked at Pratt and Whitney. He was a machinist there, and had worked there most of my life. And I believe that my mother might have worked in the school system. I can't quite remember.

[interview continues. . .]

**Oral history consent form:**

We created this oral history consent form (and a related Institutional Review Board request) to clarify the process for participants and ethical issues involved.

Project Concern Oral History Interviews  
Consent Form

Participant's name and mailing address:

I agree to be interviewed and tape recorded by \_\_\_\_\_, as part of an oral history study of Project Concern alumni and their memories of experiences in the city-suburb school transfer program.

My participation in this project is entirely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

After the interview, the original tape and transcript will be deposited with the Hartford Studies Project at Trinity College and made available to the public for scholarly and educational purposes, unless exceptions are listed below.

[For example, the participant may wish to withhold his/her real name, or to delay the public release of your interview for a certain period of time.]

List any exceptions here:

After the interview, one free copy of the tape and transcript will be mailed to the participant at the address listed above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

For questions, please contact:

Professor Jack Dougherty  
Educational Studies Program  
Trinity College  
860-297-2296

Elizabeth Rose, Ph.D.  
Hartford Studies Project  
Trinity College  
(860) 297-5196

\*\*\* **NOTE:** In subsequent oral history projects, I have revised the text to add a line about copyright:

City-Suburb Oral History Project  
Consent Form (for Bloomfield)

Participant's name:

Mailing address:

I agree to be interviewed for this oral history project on the experiences of city and suburban residents in the Greater Hartford area.

My participation in this project is entirely voluntary and I may withdraw at any time.

I am aware that a tape recording of my interview, an edited transcript, and my photograph will be deposited with the Hartford Studies Project at Trinity College, and made available to the public for scholarly and educational purposes. I understand that the Hartford Studies Project will hold all legal rights (including copyright) to the tape, transcript, and photograph, and may use them in publications and programs, including the internet.

One free copy of the tape, transcript, and photograph will be mailed to me at the address above, and the Hartford Studies Project agrees not to preclude any use that I may wish to make of them. Also, a second copy of the same items will be donated to the Wintonbury Historical Society.

Any exceptions to this agreement must be listed below. [*For example, the participant may wish to withhold his/her real name, or to delay the public release of the interview for a certain period of time*]:

_____ Participant's signature	_____ date
_____ Interviewer's signature	_____ date

For questions, please contact any of the following:

Prof. Jack Dougherty  
Trinity College  
860-297-2296

Hartford Studies Project  
Trinity College  
(860) 297-5196

Fannie Gabriel  
Wintonbury  
Historical Society

Two copies: one stays with participant, one returns to Trinity

**Our standard thank-you note:**

November 25, 2002

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our Project Concern Alumni Oral History interviews. My students and I have learned a great deal from listening to your memories of the program, and we sincerely appreciate the time you generously donated.

As promised, a free copy of the tape and transcript are enclosed for you to keep. If you notice any errors in the transcript, please feel free to contact me to make changes.

Copies of all tapes and transcripts will be deposited at the Hartford Studies Project at Trinity College for future use, unless otherwise indicated.

Sincerely,

### **Analyzing oral history transcripts:**

For my undergraduate students, the most challenging phase of doing oral histories is analyzing the transcripts. Attached are notes that I distribute to my students on this topic, drawn from my article:

Jack Dougherty, "From Anecdote to Analysis: Oral Interviews and New Scholarship in Educational History," *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 712-23.

In more recent years, I've also had students read and discuss the Banks & Dougherty article above as one example of thematic content analysis.

Ed 308

Notes on Ways of Analyzing Oral History

Jack Dougherty

Traditionally, many historians have simply used oral interviews as anecdotal material for their writing. But a new generation of scholars view oral histories as rich sources in their own right, as the basis for making analytical claims about the past.

Three modes of analysis:

#### 1) Thematic Content Analysis

This method draws from qualitative social science. If an oral historian asks the same questions to different groups of individuals, then we can analyze the frequency in which certain themes arise among some groups rather than others.

For example, in the Bulkeley Oral History Project, our students interviewed eight individuals who graduated from Bulkeley High School between 1963 and 1973, a significant decade of historical change in both the school and the surrounding neighborhood. [See Interview Guide]. After interviews, they searched for themes (such as "strong sense of nostalgia for old neighborhood") across all eight transcripts. Based upon the responses of subgroups within the total pool, they were able to make claims such as "Graduates from the early period are more likely to have a strong sense of nostalgia for the 'old neighborhood' than graduates from the later period of our study." The strength of these claims is based upon the clarity of themes prevalent in the interviews, the sampling procedure for collecting interviews, and the size of the total pool.

For more on this method, see Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists* (Sage Publications, 1994); Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (Oxford Press, 1992).

#### 2) Narrative Analysis

This method draws from literary theory, and demonstrates how analyzing oral histories as *narratives* reveals more than the content of the interviews alone. For example, in *Country Schoolwomen* (Stanford Press, 1998), Kathleen Weiler uses this method to understand the intersections between personal and professional lives among female teachers who worked in rural California schools from the 1920s to the 1950s. Weiler interprets oral history not merely as a set of facts about the past but more as a literary self-representation of one's life in the world, to be studied for clues about how women teachers understood and acted upon their surroundings. Her method urges readers to step beyond a traditional search for the literal *truth* in oral history and to become

sensitized to the constructed quality of memory, with all of its inherent contradictions. Weiler observes, "In their stories, teachers present themselves and their life choices in ways that challenge hegemonic definitions of women teachers as mothering, self-sacrificing, and passive; at the same time, the narratives contain unacknowledged contradictions and a kind of dissonance with regard to accepted conceptions of society and gender."

An excerpt from Weiler's interview with Ellen A. demonstrates this thematic tension. When the author asked, "Where do you think you got the idea to become a teacher?" Ellen's response signals ambivalence. Initially, she states, "I have no idea. Just that I wanted to be a teacher." Her words imply that the choice was freely made. But then Ellen adds a second thought: "There were no other jobs open. You either became a telephone girl or you could work in a packing house. . . . That was it." Her recognition of the limitations on women's work at that time, wrapped around a story that initially emphasizes her own free will, illustrates the contradictory influences on her life. Thus reading for narrative styles of self-representation among female teachers offers a richer historical interpretation than does reading for literal content alone.

### 3) Historical Memory

This method draws partly from psychological theory, and is best represented in work by Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories* (SUNY Press, 1991). Portelli investigates oral accounts of the death of Luigi Trastulli, a 21-year-old steel worker from Terni, an industrial town in central Italy, who died in a clash with police in 1949 as factory workers walked out of their plant to rally against the Italian government's decision to join NATO. Portelli argues that "What makes Luigi Trastulli's death important is not its intrinsically tragic nature," since many civilians lost their lives during that decade. "Its importance lives, rather, in the fact that it became the ground upon which collective memory and imagination built a cluster of tales, symbols, legends, and imaginary reconstructions. The most widespread and significant "error" (too common to be explained with faulty individual memories) is the shifting of the date and context of the event from the 1949 anti-NATO rally to the street fighting subsequent to the layoff of two thousand workers from the steel factory in 1953."

Portelli found that several residents of Terni had collectively reconstructed historical memory by connecting Trastulli's death to a 1953 labor conflict, rather than the documented 1949 anti-NATO rally, since the 1953 event symbolized broader concerns in their minds about political changes which jeopardized their jobs. Indeed, oral history is prone to error. But Portelli argues that "The discrepancy between fact and memory ultimately enhances the value of the oral sources as historical documents. It is not caused by faulty recollections. . . but actively and creatively generated by memory and imagination in an effort to make sense of crucial events and of history in general."

## **Oral history paper and presentation assignment**

Here is an example of the type of writing assignment I used in 2002, with follow-up presentations made to Nessa Orum, Renita Satchell, and others who assisted us in creating the oral history project.

### **Educ 308 Cities, Suburbs, and Schools**

#### **Project 3 Oral History Paper and Presentation**

##### **Assignment:**

Based on the full set of transcripts of oral history interviews with Project Concern alumni, create an insightful research question and investigate it using thematic content, narrative, and/or historical memory analysis.

You are encouraged (but not required) to draw comparisons with Susan Eaton's book, and to use any of the handouts regarding Project Concern.

##### **Two products:**

1) Write a 4-5 page paper that:

- introduces your particular research question and your major claim (thesis)
- presents persuasive evidence (often excerpts of direct quotes or paraphrasing when appropriate) and meaningful interpretation

the paper will be evaluated based upon:

- originality and insightfulness of the research question
- strength and accuracy of the supporting evidence and interpretation

PAPER is due in docex folder on MONDAY, Nov 25th at 4pm

2) Create a 3- 5 minute presentation of major points in your paper, with Powerpoint

be sure to include your particular research question and samples of evidence

You may design the presentation in tandem with one or more classmates if you choose, but it must reflect elements of both papers.

PRESENTATION is due in docex folder on MONDAY, Nov 25th at 6pm

the presentation will be evaluated based upon:

- effectiveness in communicating main points to guests in audience

Combination of the two products is worth 20 points.