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ABSTRACT

This paper contains materials and describes a project that allowed teacher educators to model collaborative, integrated curriculum for preservice teachers by holding a retired teachers' tea. The preservice teachers were from a secondary English methods course and an elementary Social Studies methods class. While honoring retired teachers, preservice teachers would interview the guests and seek first-hand knowledge of these teachers' contributions to education through data gathered during the interviews. As a result, the language arts and social studies methods classes were united in creating oral history. Examples of related materials to assist in organizing the activity are attached, including invitation form letter, forms for students, interview checklists, thank-you form letter, guidelines for oral history interviewing, interview guide, and oral history data sheet. (Contains 34 references.) (JB)

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Association of Teacher Educators

Summer Workshop

August 5-9, 1995

Williamsburg, Virginia

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Taking Responsibility for Our Profession:

Challenge, Compromise, Conflict

Consensus

"Modeling Collaboration in Curriculum Integration:

Retired Teachers' Tea"

(A Retired Teachers' Tea unites language arts and social studies strategy classes in creating oral history.)

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Modeling Collaboration in Curriculum Integration Retired Teachers' Tea

Teacher educators are challenged to model collaborative, integrated curriculum for preservice teachers. Commitment to holistic literacy learning and integrated curriculum motivated the two presenters to engage in a plan involving students from two different teacher education classes in a joint learning activity. As a result, collaborative learning in the classroom was implemented; collaboration among teachers was in evidence; and, collaboration in education research was accomplished.

The decision was made to involve preservice teachers from a secondary English methods course and an elementary Social Studies methods class in a joint venture to plan and carry out a "Retired Teachers' Tea." While honoring retired teachers, preservice teachers would interview them and seek first-hand knowledge of these teachers' contributions to education through data gathered during these interviews. As a result, the language arts and social studies methods classes would be united in creating oral history.

Purposes

1. To involve teacher education students in collaborative planning of integrated, holistic curriculum
2. To honor retired teachers by entertaining them and by acknowledging their contributions to education
3. To develop oral history of education in one geographic area
4. To give an example of infusing multiple perspectives into teacher education

Examples of related materials to assist in organizing the activity are attached.

Dr. Val Brunelle and I engaged in a dialogue in which we discussed the challenges of setting up a collaborative project through which we could unite our university education classes in a joint learning activity involving action research.

After reviewing the literature, we decided on an oral history project that would involve Dr. Brunelle's elementary social studies methods class and my secondary English methods class. Preservice teachers would interview and compile oral histories for retired teachers. The project was under way!

Challenges involved were many and encompassed a wide range of activities such as making arrangements regarding project explanation and pairing of students; time, place, date, and refreshments for the actual get together; contacting retired teachers and pairing them with preservice teacher pairs; developing oral history interview guidelines and questions for the actual interview process; and so on. Sample letters and forms and a selected bibliography are included.

After the actual interviews were conducted and the histories taken, student pairs wrote follow-up reports sharing information and insights. After Dr. Brunelle and I reviewed the draft copies of individual reports and thank you letters, student pairs mailed these to retired teachers as a culminating activity.

This activity was worthwhile for a number of reasons. Those cited most often by our preservice teachers and retired teachers involved seeing life's narratives as a context for gleaned a "new" meaning out of the present situation in light of the "old" experience. Stories that were told were relived, and in the telling, these stories presented new meanings for the listeners as they related them to their experiences. Theory and practice were coming alive for the students as they listened to the retired teachers' stories of teaching and learning.

Outline of the Presentation

1. Introduction
 - A. Purposes of the activity
 - B. Relationship to conference theme
- II. Rationale
 - A. Constructivism in teacher education
 1. mandate
 2. theoretical framework
 - B. Contributions of interviewing to content areas
 1. Language arts
 2. Social Studies
 - a. History
 - b. Diversity
- III. Collaboration in teacher education
 - A. Organizing the activity
 - B. Teaching interviewing
- IV. Teachers' stories as research
 - A. Purposes
 1. history
 2. ethnography
 3. professional voice
 - B. Considerations
 1. benefits
 2. limitations
- V. Conclusion
 - A. Outcomes
 - B. Discussion

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Guidelines for Oral History Interviewing

1. Determine the purpose of the interview.

The purpose of our interview process is to understand as much as possible about the educational system in this area from approximately the 1920's through the present. The first interview will focus on constructing the general framework of understanding of the perspectives of our interviewees as students and then as teachers. If future interviews do occur, they might focus on particular domains of meaning such as literacy education or some other category of meaning which emerged from analysis of the data.

2. Understand the historical framework of the informants' lives.

Many of the teachers you interview may have lived through a time of tremendous change (Mehaffey, et al., 1978). Some may have endured one or two World Wars and a depression. It is possible that some have gone from horse drawn wagons and buggies to modern air transportation and the space age. Many of them were teaching when our schools were integrated and bussing became part of our educational history. They have valuable information and personal perspectives on our educational system. We want to ask questions which give them the opportunity to share their knowledge with us.

3. Generate a list of possible questions which can be an interview guide.

If possible, the majority of your questions should be open-ended to allow the interviewee to respond fully. The interview guide must not be used mechanically. A guide is simply a list of areas to explore. Your questions should assume an order which shows a responsiveness to the informant's input and still provides data on the questions related to your research topic (Spradley, 1979).

4. Listen very carefully to the interviewees' responses.

Rephrase their statements to clarify points. You might respond with statements like "I hear you saying that..." or "I believe you said that...". In addition to being sure that you are receiving and recording data correctly, your responsiveness will free the informant to share on a deeper level. Your follow-up questions need to elicit clarification of symbols and terms and allow the informant to help you understand their meanings.

5. Ask enough follow-up questions to be sure you understand the interviewee's statements.

Clarification of information is sometimes a necessary element of the interview process. As you listen, try to construct a time frame in which the informant's feedback may fit. If the stories become confused or the time sequence seems unlikely to you, begin to interject questions which allow the interviewee to explain his or her statements more fully. If the interview begins to wander away from educational history, redirect the process by asking a question closely related to the topic.

6. Keep your focus on the informants and their stories.

Maintain almost constant eye contact with the person being interviewed. Occasionally check your guide to be sure you are not missing any important points. Nod, smile and offer other types of affirmation like saying "Yes," "Thanks," "That's interesting" or "Please continue." As soon as possible, begin to use the same terms, labels and identifiers as your informant is using (Spradley, 1979). Let the interviewees know when they are giving helpful information. Ask questions which focus on the meaning that experiences, people or terms have for them.

7. Conclude the interview by thanking the informants for their time and the valuable information. If you foresee an ongoing relationship (Spradley, 1979), consult the informant to determine an appropriate time for your next contact.

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Interview Guide

Students are encouraged to generate questions which they believe appropriate for the interview process. The following is an example of the type of questions which might be included.

- _____1. Do you remember someone reading to you in your home?
- _____2. If so, who read to you?
- _____3. What kinds of materials were available for reading and writing when you were a child?
- _____4. Do you believe that having (or not having) someone to read to you influenced your feelings about school?
- _____5. How did having this person read to you affect your relationship with him or her?
- _____6. Do you remember "playing school" with other children or by yourself?
- _____7. What kinds of activities were included in playing school?
- _____8. How did your home environment seem to relate to the world of school?
- _____9. What is your first memory of school?
- _____10. How did this experience shape your feelings about the concept of school?
- _____11. Do you still associate any smells, sounds or tastes with those initial memories?
- _____12. How would you describe the physical appearance of the interior and exterior of the facility?
- _____13. What were the type and quantity of supplies?
- _____14. What was the configuration of the school and the system?
1-8? 1-6? K-8? 1-12? other?
- _____15. How many teachers did your elementary school have?
secondary?
- _____16. What qualifications were required for teaching at that time and in that location?

- _____17. What types of transportation were available to you and your classmates? How did the majority of you get to school? Do you have any special memories of those trips to and from school? How far did you travel in each of those situations?
- _____18. What were the content areas at each level of schooling?
- _____19. Did you have a favorite subject as a student? as a teacher? What do you believe contributed to those feelings?
- _____20. Did you have any male teachers? If so, did they differ in their approaches to teaching?
- _____21. What type of discipline did you observe being utilized at various levels of education? (an area to be explored based on responses)
- _____22. How long was the typical school year? Why?
- _____23. Which teacher had the greatest impact on your life? Why?
- _____24. How would you describe typical interactions between students and teachers?
- _____25. If you could have changed one thing about your school experience, what would it have been? as a student? as a teacher?
- _____26. What was the dress code for the school? How did most children dress?
- _____27. What was the usual procedure at lunch time? What were typical items packed in school lunches?
- _____28. How many years did the majority of children attend school?
- _____29. Reviewing the decades of your life--_____, _____, _____, _____--what events in each one impacted education? How did society, schools and students react?
- _____30. What are your memories of the education provided for other racial, ethnic, religious or socioeconomic groups in your area?
- _____31. Was religion taught in the schools where you attended or you taught?
- _____32. What do you believe influenced your decision to become a teacher?

- _____33. What kinds of academic experiences were provided to equip you for teaching?
- _____34. Who funded the schools where you attended and where you taught?
- _____35. What was your first teaching assignment? How would you describe it--pay, benefits, responsibilities, colleagues, administration and students? Compare and contrast that initial teaching situation with your other experiences.
- _____36. What are the most dramatic or radical changes that you have witnessed in our educational system? (possible areas to explore--attitudes? equipment? expectations? teacher responsibilities? students?)
- _____37. If you could return to the point of decision, would you again become a teacher?
- _____38. Is there any object that symbolizes your teaching career? What is its meaning to you?
- _____39. Now that we stand at Robert Frost's place "where two roads diverge," should my classmates and I take the one that leads to teaching? If we do, what advice would you give us?
- _____40. I am very interested in your views of language arts (or another area related to your research questions). May we explore that area?

Possible areas for elaboration are grouping, materials, directives, assessment, parental attitudes or instructional strategies.

Signature _____

Date _____

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Oral History Data Sheet

Interviewee: _____

Address: _____

Phone: () _____ Zip
 Area Code

Date of Birth: _____ Place of Birth: _____

Date of interview: _____

Place of interview: _____

Interviewer: _____

Release Form

I hereby release to _____ for whatever
scholarly or educational purposes may be determined, the tape recordings,
transcriptions, pictures, video rights and contents of this oral history
interview.

Signature of Interviewee

Special Restrictions:

Name

Address

Date:

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Examples of related materials to assist in organizing the activity are attached.

Sample of Invitational Form Letter

Heading

Dear :

It is our pleasure to invite you to a tea at _____. We want to bring together those of you in our community who have experienced successful teaching careers with students who are "on the brink" of entering the profession. You have invaluable information about education in our area which is available from no other source. Our students want to talk with you to gain your point of view on events of the past.

The tea is to be held on the _____ campus:

Date
Time
Location.

When you arrive, we will spend time having refreshments and visiting with each other. Then our students are looking forward to interviewing you individually. They want to gain your interpretation of the changes that have taken place in the field of education. The students will write a paper based on the interview and mail a copy to you.

You are an important resource who can provide a wealth of information to our students. We are excited about having them meet with you, and we hope it will be an enjoyable time for you as you gather with friends from the past and make new friends for the future.

Please call _____ at _____ as soon as possible to let us know if you are able to attend. We look forward to seeing you on _____, _____!

Sincerely,

Retired Teachers' Tea -

Student Partners

Name _____ Name _____
(English Methods Student) (Social Studies Methods Student)

Telephone: _____ Telephone: _____

Address: _____ Address: _____

Please use the space below to schedule necessary meetings for completion of paper.

Social Studies Methods due
English Methods due



Interview Checklist

One student in the pair assumes responsibility for completing the activities listed below:

- _____ 1. Label tapes with the side numbers and the names of the teacher informant and the interviewer. More than one tape may be required.

- _____ 2. A preliminary check of the tape recorder is essential. Volume is included in assessment of the recording situation. The microphone is to be placed in an appropriate location for both the informant and the interviewer.

- _____ 3. The interview begins with completion of the Oral History Data Sheet. Informants are to be assured that their anonymity will be preserved.

- _____ 4. Take field notes as a supplement to the tape recordings.

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Sample of Thank You Form Letter

Heading

Dear:

We want to thank you for your attendance at the teachers' tea in _____ and your participation in the oral history project. Your presence meant so much to our students and to others in attendance.

As we have read your stories, we have been inspired anew. Your dedication to our profession and to the children you taught reminds us of why we teach. As many of you may have noticed, our students were deeply moved. They spoke of your character, unselfishness, and perseverance, in spite of all obstacles.

Enclosed you will find our students' reports of your stories. Please accept their writings with our sincere gratitude for your willingness to inspire the teachers of tomorrow!

Sincerely,

Encs.

END

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