

## THE INTEGRITY, PROFILE, AND POTENTIAL OF ORAL HISTORY IN EDUCATION RESEARCH

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### ABSTRACT

Oral history is by no means a new methodology, but its increasing use has prompted concerns about the reliability of evidence, the ethics of use, and an increasing awareness of the complications involved in analysis. An examination of the uses of oral history and its potential contribution to research within the History of Education is examined within a framework of recent developments in interview method and historiography. The researcher also draws on her own experience with oral history to explore and critically comment on the integrity of oral history data and different approaches to analysis.

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#### Introduction

Many eminent educational historians are encouraging their colleagues to

reflect on the directions their discipline has taken, why it has moved in those directions and where it should go. Barbara Finkelstein, Harold Silver, and William Connell have recently examined ideologies and typologies in the writing of the history of education, drawing attention to the traditions and theoretical frameworks that have shaped the discipline. The 'crisis of knowledge' and controversy over epistemology in sociohistorical inquiry has had its impact on the way historians view their method, and these developments have resulted in some education historians breaking new research ground, and asking new questions as well as approaching old ones from different directions. Those historians whose research currently focuses on nineteenth century education (and that is the majority in Australia to date) are restricted to written sources, which mostly exclude the voice of children and parents, and teachers in non elite positions, although samples of their voices have been found in the course of reinvestigating official archives, especially Education Department Special Case files, and through the discovery of private collections of personal documents. However, for those who undertake twentieth century research in such areas as the history of classrooms, education in non traditional settings or school to work transition, a major source of information is the verbal account - the oral history interview.

Oral history projects can be daunting for several reasons: the oral historian is put on the defensive, the current literature is confusing, the projects are untypically costly for the historian in time and resources, and the historian is forced to grapple with new aspects of research design and research ethics. This paper was conceived because the author has recently discovered, in an attempt to obtain adequate funding for a large-scale oral project, that not only do some historians reject oral history outright, and so force the oral historian to go on the defensive, but that there is little knowledge in the research community generally about developments in history method. Naturally there is a political side to research funding as well and this impinges on the granting of research monies, but what did seem to emerge was that other academics take the general view that historians immerse themselves in the written sources to the exclusion of specific thoughts about their research design. This view can partly be attributed to the seeming reticence of historians to explain their research outside their discipline. This failure in communication becomes a problem when historians have to compete with other disciplines for research funds. Certainly historians who are using the interview as a key source must be prepared to explicate and defend their methodologies for reasons that will become clearer later in this paper. Suffice to say at this juncture that one of the outcomes of the so-called 'paradigm wars' in educational research is that in qualitative research there is a growing emphasis on the importance of systematically specifying research design and procedure (harmoniously integrating this within and throughout the text) in order to best communicate the integrity of such research to the broader academic and educational community.

Among historians oral history still has prominent critics and Ronda Jamieson's claim that the 'roar' has become a 'murmur' is not entirely borne out. For the sceptics the main question is whether or not oral testimony constitutes evidence, but there is another source of critical

comment as well. Many of oral history's strongest and best known advocates have lately subjected the techniques and processes of interpretation involved to intense scrutiny. In addition, the oral historian would be unwise to ignore the scope and seriousness of criticisms aimed at the research interview in other disciplines.

An analysis of recent literature pertaining to the interview reveals that critical comment relevant to oral history tends to fall into three broad categories: 'The nature of historical evidence', 'Reliability and methodological rigour' and 'analytical focus'. The intent in this paper is to examine them for what they can contribute to the informed use of oral history and to assist education historians to delineate more clearly its role in future research in the history of education. Along the way the author will draw on her experience in gathering and analysing oral testimony.

### The Nature of Historical Evidence

Oral history is used in many non academic research contexts, among them adult literacy programs, community history development, awareness raising and empowerment. In the public history arena there is more attention given to the use of oral history as a method and a notable number of handbooks, articles and even tapes have been published that focus on how to conduct an oral history interview (including the type of equipment to use, interview style and transcription). These can be supplemented by other research interview guidelines for the social sciences. Oral history continues to grow in popularity, but the approach to the use of oral accounts has often been naive in the extreme, and it is the naive approach that appears to be the type of oral history that some academic historians assume that their colleagues will utilise, almost as if all their historiographical training has flown out the window. In the course of defending a recent research proposal involving a large number of oral history interviews it became clear to the author that what was worrying one of her peers most was whether or not she would choose to ignore documentary evidence. The answer was no, and more will be said on this in the next section on methodological rigour.

The collection of 'stories' has long been the province of the folklorist, the life-history the province of the sociologist and anthropologist, the clinical interview the province of the psychologist and medical researcher, and the methodological information about these forms of interview tended to be written specifically for their specialist audience. Historians began to search out, and make sense of, this information when their research questions required them to collect oral testimony. This crossing of disciplinary boundaries often raised more questions than it answered and not everyone felt comfortable about it or the changes it implied. Some of the antipathy towards oral history is the reflection of a negative response towards a shift away from the largely ideological belief in the veracity of the written source. For many historians the existence of truth is 'an article of faith' and as 'absolute as the world is real'. The taken-for-grantedness of historical research design is also very much tied to a faith in the objectivity of the historian's approach; an

objectivity that is exemplified in the historical footnote. Young historians have long been exhorted to subject each document to the rigours of internal and external examination, to search for corroboration and verification, but rarely, if ever, in a (non quantitative) historian's work would you find information about the processes by which evidence is treated or how interpretations are arrived at. Debates on theory have been far more prevalent than the discussions on design and while most historians are willing to elaborate on their theoretical perspective, few are explicit about how they do history or how they arrive at their research focus, often retreating to the role of 'inspiration'.

Historians, in the spirit of positivism have recognised and debated the nature of historical knowledge, but have abstracted the problems and distanced themselves from them. This has been possible because written documents represent a time and place removed from the historian's influence. Oral history draws the more uncomfortable questions, especially relating to the subjectivity of the historian and their evidence, into sharp focus. Elizabeth Tonkin, from the standpoint of social anthropology, prompts historians to begin to explore the structuring of historical representations or accounts, not 'in a knock-down spirit', but in a truth seeking one. Tonkin provides conceptual direction, urging us to accept that 'truth' has many faces, but also that it 'must have a face', namely a specifically embodied argument, and that histories are: 'arguments created by people in particular conditions'. Stanford takes a very similar line pointing out that the importance of language in history means that we have to see historical facts or truths as inhabiting the world of words and the world of things and that this renders truth as multifaceted. The face that is ultimately selected by the historian reflects much about them as well as about their methodology. He argues that the more we understand about 'how a historian has done the work, the better we can penetrate what the work is about'. Such comments hold value and comfort for the oral historian who has to come to grips with many different aspects of assigning meaning.

In the pages of the Oral History Association of Australia Journal, some benchmark articles have addressed the criticisms of the use of oral testimony. Henige, Lummis, and Seldon and Pappworth, also address the range of criticisms and advantages of oral history. Lummis, taking up the most common concern, namely whether or not oral testimony constitutes authentic evidence, counters the sceptics by arguing that 'problems of authenticity in oral evidence are simply the problems of documentary sources made plain', although he makes a point of also stressing the need to use oral evidence in conjunction with documentary evidence. Just as two people reading the same document may arrive at different interpretations, so two people listening to a tape recording will do the same. Historical research involves interpretation at many levels and in that way oral evidence is not very different from documentary evidence. However, Lummis argues that oral history, because it encompasses the totality of lived experience, provides more chance than documentary history of revealing the distribution of phenomena and relations between individuals and social forces.

For the historian seriously contemplating oral history the most productive critical comments in recent years tend to crystallise around two

themes. The first is connected with memory and the fact that when people recall or reminisce about the past they do so through many experiences lived since then. The second is that the gathering of oral history is contrived, an interactive event where the interaction will shape the nature of the data. These aspects will be briefly addressed here and in more depth in subsequent sections.

The oral historian's desire to provide as accurate an account of events in the past is no less than that of other historians. Lummis, for example, goes to some lengths to determine what is closest to hard data that can be obtained from oral evidence. Lummis would agree with Tonkin that a professional historian cannot just scan 'the recollections of others, for useful facts to pick out like picking the currants from a cake', however that if one shares the informant's conventions of interpretation, meaning can be determined and the facts emerge. If that is the case it is possible to distinguish between 'fact' and fiction given that historical facts are products of 'human judgements both about events or states of affairs and about statements appropriate to them'. What parts of an oral history account are less affected by the filter of the present and the interactive nature of the event? Lummis refers to memories of material things as facts. Examples might be the organisation of a classroom, specifics of lessons, and unadorned comments about classroom interactions. For example an interview with Norma yielded the following:

I would get the children to do a play. I would tell them a story. I would go over the characters. We'd work out the story ourselves. We'd start saying, all together, the conversations that had been in [it] - I'd always tell stories that had a lot of conversation in them, and then we'd say it over and over again and the whole class would get use to repetitive speech. And by the end of all the preparation the children would be able to put the whole drama together. That took a fair amount of skill to be able to do that, and (laughs while saying this) it didn't always work. It depended on the class.

Many oral historians refer to the value of incidental information - details that emerge when informants cast around for specific answers to questions. Lummis argues that without direction in the interview, and specifically the memory prompts used by the historian, this harder data would not emerge. There is no question that the probing of the interviewer will have an impact on what is recalled, while relations between interviewer and informant will impact on the manner of the telling, for as John Murphy points out: 'the oral historian, or interviewer, is actually present to witness and procreate the narrative, and hence is always implicated, always an accomplice'. Other forms of information obtained from oral testimony relate to direct and indirect experience, but this falls more within the ambit of analysis and will be referred to in the last section.

The interaction between historian and respondent has been seen as a weakness by those who believe in the possibility of determining truth from past accounts by virtue of their removal from the present, but when we assess the motivations of a writer we usually have much less information to go on than when we interview someone, especially if the oral historian has

the chance to further interview that person. Another weakness is seen to be the fact that when a person recalls their past, they are doing so through dynamic interaction with the present, that they are making sense of their past - assigning meaning, whereas a document is a product of time and place. The user of the verbal testimony can recognise, through narrative structures, when and how a person is making sense of the past, thus they can obtain information about the impact of time and place on the observer. However, rather than just meeting such criticisms, the greater challenge lies in determining if, and how, the other types of information contained within the interview can be used by the historian in appropriate and meaningful ways.

### Reliability and Methodological Rigour

Much has been written about how best to go about an oral history interview to ensure a profitable outcome that is acceptable to other historians. Oral history generally is subjected to the same rigorous internal and external criticism applied to documentation but, because the historian is a participant, there has been the need to draw on other conceptualisations of credibility and trustworthiness. Key among them is 'reliability' particularly as it is used in relation to quantitative researchers' uses of the interview. In quantitative research reliability refers to consistency of measurement, the extent to which the results are similar over different forms of the same instrument (interview schedule) or occasions of data collection. The aim is to minimise the impact of chance or other variables. Validity is a judgement of the appropriateness of a measure (ie, Does it measure what the researcher intends that it should?), thus it is situation specific. These quantitative concepts have often been very crudely transformed into variants applicable to the research interview in qualitative contexts. In respect of the oral history interview reliability is referred to by Alice Hoffman as the consistency with which an individual will tell the story on a number of occasions, and validity as the degree of conformity between the reports of an event and the event as recorded in other primary resource material. Lummis tries to be less quantitatively oriented, speaking of validity and reliability in the 'broadest sense', but does not really examine the use of such concepts past that point.

Such definitions tend to throw the onus of 'proof' on to the respondent to demonstrate they can repeat a performance given the same stimulus and provide a match with more authoritative sources. Is data to be rejected merely because it cannot be corroborated from documentation, especially given the patchiness of such sources? The historian's answer must be 'not necessarily', but every effort should be made to check. The author can cite an extreme case in point. In the course of writing a biography she found that the subject's children could not recall any point at which their father had been unemployed, yet significant gaps in the official documentation of his working life strongly suggested that he had been, particularly when other evidence indicated that he had been transferred to a job that humiliated him. A sense of responsibility to the subject's memory prompted the researcher to withhold the material from publication and undertake a speculative search. Two years later after

systematically going through hundreds of boxes that just might provide a clue, a single handwritten entry in a duplicate of a personnel log (a survivor from what seemed to be somewhat random confidential destruction procedure) proved his children correct. However, why did the author not rely on the children's testimony? Because there were elements that were not consistent, spots where memory was clearly patchy, and because of the context, ie, children in the fifties were not often privy to their parent's problems. All evidence whether oral or documentary requires weighing up in line with the demands of the research question and on the basis of holistic and appropriately contextual examination.

Given that each interview is a unique event, it can never be exactly duplicated. Reliability as defined above is not very helpful to the historian, which brings the discussion back to research design in history. Historians, in line with researchers using fieldwork methods, should take a more flexible approach to reliability and validity to reflect more closely the sort of data they are collecting, and the integrated nature of the data collection and ongoing analysis in historiography. Reliability issues in the form of consistency of the researcher's interactive style, data recording, analysis and interpretation of participant meanings, will usually, and should, occur through all phases of the research. Validity to the oral historian should not pertain so much to the somewhat misperceived 'realities' of documentation but to mutuality of meaning between the historian and their informant - their shared understandings of reality. In order to achieve this the interview approach must allow informants to provide understandable accounts of social and historical experience. Lummis insists that oral history's value as evidence must be established within its own authenticity not just against other evidence and that its strength is that it is a coherent source, that the connections informants make in the course of the telling are real and known because they are united in one experience.

'Triangulation' is term that is fairly new in the oral history literature, and is a method of improving validity commonly used in participant observation based research. It relates to gauging and weighing up the trustworthiness of the data through, not only cross validation between documentation and oral testimony, but between transcripts, data collection strategies and theoretical schemes. The general thrust of triangulation accommodates the holistic treatment of the interview. In conclusion, oral history interview processes have to be clearly conceived, as well as monitored and evaluated in a very conscious way to ensure the generation of useful and meaningful data.

A final, and somewhat separate point relates to the question of ethics, which arises because oral history does represent a departure from mainstream historical method. Historians have always had a pretty free reign to use documentary evidence, although many archives have quite recently included a clause in their permission documents requiring the historian to submit a draft to the archivist before publication. When historians come across information they feel goes beyond the pale, it is their own sensitivity that becomes their censor. Nonetheless they have access to very personal information even among seemingly innocuous official correspondence. Whether or not the person in the past would have cared for

anyone to read it other than the intended recipient is a moot point given that they cannot be asked. Oral historians, on the other hand, have to be more sensitive, even if it incurs a heartbreaking loss of data when a person changes their mind, or insists that a comment is off the record. Most oral history associations have developed standard ethical guidelines including procedures for obtaining release of the information. However, a release form sometimes threatens a respondent more than reassuring them. For example, the author has sometimes had to reassure an informant that they still have every right to publish their own history. Sometimes the informant takes the option to include a confidentiality clause, but even that is rare. Moreover, very few sixty to ninety-year-olds have wanted to read their transcripts, even though most times that would be most helpful to the process of verification. Luisa Passerini has noted that age impacts on an informant's desire to get 'hands on' to a transcript. The younger the informants in her study the more concerned they were about the content and structure of the transcript.

Thus Oral Historians have a responsibility to their sources, but the importance the historian gives to establishing the historical record fits somewhat uneasily with ethics practices applying to interviewing in other disciplines. It is of great importance to build up archives of accessible oral history recordings. Oral historians have a responsibility, not only to their informants, but to later generations of historians, to conduct highly competent, well recorded, interviews. The existence of such oral archives reassures the user of the authenticity of the data in a way that a transcript archive can not and accessibility is important for purposes of verification and reanalysis. This archival expectation can cause problems with university ethics committees. For example, I recently received notification from an ethics committee that they accepted my research proposal to conduct interviews (given that I had provided all the relevant protocols), but they insisted I give the informants the date when I would erase the tapes despite information that explicitly stated that the release form covered the issue of the archiving of the tapes. This experience is but another example of the frustrations to be faced by the oral historian in the nineties.

### Analytical focus

Two key developments with respect to the analysis of interview data will be dealt with here and both specifically relate to the interview as a speech event. The first is discourse analysis, the second flows from that and relates to tapping the deeper and symbolic meanings contained within the life story as is it told.

In an informative and clearly written text on the research interview, Mishler made the point that the interview must be seen as a speech event and not a behavioural one, the latter being a hang-over from quantitative research. An interview treated as a behavioural event allows fragmentation of the information and its separate treatment, as in the case of the standardised, wholly structured interview. Such a treatment specifically directs the attention of the researcher to their techniques, and the belief that better techniques will result in the discovery of consistent,

duplicable data. Treating the interview as a speech event, by contrast, highlights the structures or forms of systematic organisation that reflect the operation of rules of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. In short, researchers have to pay attention to linguistic and para linguistic features, and the interaction between interviewer and interviewee. For as Mishler points out, assessing meaning requires 'analysing the interview process so that we can begin to understand how meaning is grounded in and constructed through discourse'. If the researcher is successful in this it will lead to the development of stronger theories and more valid generalizations based on interview data, and I would suggest more valid historical generalisation as well.

Briggs in *Learning How to Ask*, emphasises that adequate applications of interviewing techniques must presuppose a basic understanding of the communicative norms of the society in question, which in turn suggests that the oral historian should strongly consider careful scrutiny of the interview for indications of problems in mutual understanding caused by cultural differences and power relations. He stresses that what can be obtained from an interview includes both referential and indexical meaning. The referential function of language lies in its ability to indicate persons, objects events and processes, but the indexical meaning is context dependent. Context is evident in the use of irony, prosody, syntax, gesture and so on. For example, a person's tone can express a great deal more than, and possibly even the opposite of, what the words themselves convey.

Interview discourse is highly indexical because meaning is dependent on prior questions, the social situation and the relationship between informant and interviewer. Briggs warns that researchers who ignore the possible impact of such factors, and particularly the communicative norms and competence of their informants, just because they speak the same language and live in the same society, are playing a dangerous game of self-delusion. Given that education historians usually fall into this category, the point has obvious importance. The author has had to consider this when dealing with interviews on the topic of school life in the thirties and forties. The situation of the academic (teacher) asking questions of people about their school days, which in turn had such strong overtones of the teacher as the dominant and authoritative figure, raises questions about how the informants might make sense of some aspects of their past (eg, academic achievement, interactions with teachers) when faced with another teacher authority figure. with teachers.

Both Briggs and Mishler stress the need for holistic contextualised interpretation of interviews with special attention to metacommunicative features in order to achieve a better grasp of the broader pragmatic significance of what is said. It goes without saying that historians cannot, and should not, have to become sociolinguists, sociologists and anthropologists, to interpret the verbal account. Nonetheless, taking heed of what these groups are telling us about the research interview should serve to make improve our awareness of the interpretative pitfalls that will affect the integrity of our historical accounts. There is a strong case for multiple forms of analysis to complement the evident concern among oral historians about interview technique.

Oral history also throws the historian into another situation of unease, namely how to treat myth, symbolism and the human psyche. Lummis's concern about placing too much emphasis on the subjective nature of oral evidence is representative of many historians' concerns about dwelling on the informant's present state of mind:

If oral history is definitionally distinct from life history because of its concern with the past rather than present consciousness then it also needs to be separated from 'oral Tradition' because oral tradition's major focus is on the past beyond the recall of one lifespan.

Oral tradition has a relation to reality which is different from accounts of direct experience. For Lummis direct experience is the 'central subject matter' of oral history. Lummis consigns debates about language, symbolism, and myth into the too hard basket commenting that such debates are common to all forms of communication and not just oral history, and that a time will come when they enter 'into general discourse' and so will enter 'the realm' of oral history. However, just as Lummis was publishing those words, the time had already arrived according to other historians.

Raphael Samuel and Paul Thompson in their introduction to *The Myths We Live By*, a volume based on papers presented at the sixth international oral history conference held at Oxford in September 1987, emphasised that what had become important to oral historians at that gathering was the manner of the telling, as well as what is told, about the past. They regarded this extension of the historian's interest as a challenge to the accepted categories of history:

As soon as we recognise the value of the subjective in individual testimonies we challenge the accepted categories of history. We reintroduce the emotionality, the fears and fantasies carried by the metaphors of memory, which historians have been so anxious to write out of their formal accounts. And at the same time the individuality of each life story ceases to be an awkward impediment to generalisation, and becomes instead a vital document of the construction of consciousness, emphasising both the variety of experience in any social group, and also how each individual story draws on a common culture: a defiance of the rigid categorisation of private and public, just as of memory and reality.

Unleash myth, and it seems we discover a psychic dimension that shapes human thoughts through the force of narrative. Narrative analysis provides insights into, for example, the temporal orientation of the informant, whether the experience they relate is first hand or second hand (direct or indirect), collective memory, fantasy or a particular performance for a particular and personal end. Historians are encouraged to 'listen more acutely', noting a break from one form of narrative construction to another because that can signal the move from recalling the 'facts' into an imaginative reconstruction, or where desire and symbolism is breaking in.

Wide reading of the academic oral history literature indicates that most oral historians (albeit unconsciously) are aware of the role of narrative construction, for example, that people condense time when telling

a story or utilise metaphors and word play, that there are 'silences' and so on. Such things show up when the historian reads the account for internal consistency or cross checks against other evidence. On the whole this type of information or 'dreamwork' has been regarded as of limited use except in the way it can contribute to the holistic impression of the credibility of the evidence. Few historians have seriously contemplated the possibility that history can bridge the social and political with the personal and intimate. Simon Featherstone in his close analysis of an interview with Jack Hill demonstrates that to interpret meaning in terms of explicit statements is to ignore the social constructions evident in the narrative and its performance. He concludes that historians should consider a synthesis of approaches to textual material.

Aware that there are barriers to acceptance with respect to this type of analysis and, in particular, criticisms that the mythical and symbolic dimensions of memory evoke 'a false past', Samuel and Thompson counter by reassuring other historians that a 'high proportion of the rich detail in a typical life story remains objectively valid', implying that the use of traditional methods will show this. However, they stress that the oral account sometimes provides 'the only good evidence we have from an undocumented, hidden world'. In addition:

every life story is also potential evidence for the subjective, and even the unconscious. We do not have to choose one and jettison the other. Oral memory offers a double validity in understanding a past in which, as still today, was embedded in real experience: both growing from it, and helping to shape its perception.

For the many historians who have accommodated oral history within traditional historiography, paradigmatic shifts of the type outlined above and the unfamiliarity of discourses generated within other disciplines infuse a degree of confusion into their world, most particularly when they begin to feel they are being called on to psychoanalyse their informants as well. They have collected huge amounts of detail, the thick description that Lummis refers to, in the quest to arrive at more meaningful accounts of the past, but Samuel and Thompson maintain that even stock incidents are better understood 'in terms of narrativity' than in terms of 'some empirical notion of truth; that 'specific cultural universals can take us closer to past meanings and the subjective experience of past actors than thick description.

Interestingly, historians appear to be more comfortable when they deal with the public realm of myth, and in recent years have shown, in relation to education policy for example, just how the rhetoric does not match with reality. In an attempt to develop a perspective on agency historians have studied cases of individual resistance and have raised questions of conformity to idealised constructs such as the 'good woman teacher'. Oral history provides an opportunity to explore the tensions and the convergence of myth at the public and private levels, and opens up possibilities for new, possibly better, explanations of past events, which also have salience for the present.

The author has recently begun a modified narrative analysis of twenty (two to six hour) interviews with women who taught in the fifties. She was

prompted to treat these lengthy interviews in this way because conventional historical analysis could not help to explain one particular finding. Previously she had utilised sections pertinent to the women's Teacher Training College experience to write a work-in-progress paper for a recent conference. What struck her at the time, and what she has endeavoured to explore since, was that the great majority of women felt that teacher's college was of little use to them. They indicated that it provided them with many things, for example, a social life, some cultural enrichment and some important insights into teaching, but that its' contribution was somehow incidental to being a teacher. These young women all had a strong idea of what teachers did and should do, so much so that there was a fable-like quality to their descriptions. Teaching comes close to having a mythic quality, not only in their memories of the past, but in their present as well. Their view of teaching had been formed before they went to college, and persisted pretty much intact after they left, and right through to the present day. The significance of this finding is not entirely clear, but it seems to have some implication for an understanding of present day perceptions of 'the teacher' and teacher training.

## Conclusion

Oral history can play a critical role in the history of education, especially now that we are defining education in a very broad sense to incorporate all forms of learning and teaching and not only education in formal institutionalised settings. Oral history may provide a source when there is no documentary evidence, thus oral testimony may strongly feature in an historical account, or provide balance or corroboration when used in conjunction with other sources. In more recent years much attention has been focussed on the ways in which the oral account can provide many layers of information and ways of knowing about the past, thus throwing into question traditional notions of what is evidence. The concept of context is critical to meaningful historical interpretation, but with respect to the oral account context takes on a further and special meaning, namely that the account has its own and identifiable context based in the present. It has been demonstrated that to concentrate on explicit statements is possibly the least meaningful use of the oral source in historical explanation. Finally the integrity of oral testimony lies more in its reflective use by the historian than in its demonstrable authenticity and accuracy, and this in turn has implications for the way in which we go about writing history. Historians have been involved in methodological experimentation, but as Finkelstein indicated in 'Historians as Mythmakers' it has not been very evident in the History of Education. Historians have been more involved in contributing to the development of public myth than systematically exploring it. The growing profile of oral history as a research method is now forcing some of the more challenging issues of historiography to the surface.