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Das mehrsprachige Webportal publiziert fortlaufend Informationen zur historisch-politischen Bildung in Schulen, Gedenkstätten und anderen Einrichtungen zur Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts. Schwerpunkte bilden der Nationalsozialismus, der Zweite Weltkrieg sowie die Folgegeschichte in den Ländern Europas bis zu den politischen Umbrüchen 1989.

Dabei nimmt es Bildungsangebote in den Fokus, die einen Gegenwartsbezug der Geschichte herausstellen und bietet einen Erfahrungsaustausch über historisch-politische Bildung in Europa an.

Excerpt from "Oral History und Jugendbildung" ("Oral History and Youth Education") by Frank Reiniger

In: Ponomarenko, Denis, Frank Reiniger and Barbara Thimm: *Leben mit der Erinnerung. Deutsche und russische Jugendliche interviewen Überlebende nationalsozialistischer Konzentrationslager* (Living with the Memory. German and Russian Youth Interview Survivors of Nazi Concentration Camps). *Weimarer Beiträge zur politischen und kulturellen Jugendbildung* (EJBW-Reihe, Band 1). GlauX-Verlag: Jena 2003. (bilingual, German/Russian). pp. 10-17

This article deals with the question of whether it makes sense to use oral history for extracurricular education. (...) A useful engagement with history should always sensitize pupils and make them interested in their own selves, in the origin of their life conditions, behaviors, patterns of interpretation and possible courses of action. (...) But such understanding usually requires concrete experiences. Understanding is not just an intellectual achievement. It also includes empathy. But the human being can only feel empathy on the basis of a concrete experience. The encounter with a human being who lived, suffered, felt, endured and shaped history, is such an experience. This is essential. Oral history, the conduct and interpretation of eyewitness interviews as a method of empirical data collection and as a physical source of experience through the interaction with interview partners, plays a key role in this regard.

Oral history as a process of production

An oral history project is always a process of production. The participants do not receive ready-to-use sources but create their sources themselves with the interview transcripts. The result, the source and its quality depend on the commitment of the participants. In this way, the participants have to learn that the past and the engagement with it, that is, historical research, is something dynamic.

Sources become what they ultimately are: testimonials created by man under the influence of a variety of factors and with more or less clearly recognizable intentions. It is crucial to be aware that history can only be personally meaningful to those who ask questions, to those who are curious.

Questions and answers

The conduct of eyewitness interviews involves the interplay of different factors that lie behind the term oral history. Therefore, it is crucial that participants become familiar with these factors before carrying out an oral history project.

At first sight, the term oral history only says something about the form in which events are mediated. But oral history is more than just orally transmitted history. First of all, the content of the interview report depends to a great extent on the question(s) asked. Therefore, oral history must be teased out by asking questions. This connection between question and answer must be comprehensible to the participants so that they are able to assess their own role as interviewers. The answer of the interview partner depends on the "How" and "What" of the questions.

But the participants also have to learn to further qualify the answers. A contemporary witness can only report on events that he/she remembers. Oral history is remembered history. The contemporary witness may have heard these remembered events from others or he/she may have experienced them himself/herself. Eyewitness interviews should primarily focus on personally experienced events. In short, oral history is experienced history. In certain contexts it may be interesting to find out what the contemporary witness learned about a particular topic or issue, and at what time. But then in turn this perception becomes a personal experience. The awareness of those issues is the basis of each oral history project.

Interview technique

The problem of the appropriate interview technique in eyewitness interviews has been discussed extensively. In fact, the two fundamentally different interview types also represent two completely different approaches. Whereas in the case of a thematic interview it is recommended to prepare a catalog of questions, the biographical interview requires a more flexible approach, which mainly involves keeping the narrative going, if necessary by asking targeted questions. There also is a distinction between open and closed interview techniques. The open form is not recommended in the development of oral history projects with young people, because it requires a lot of experience and expertise. The closed form, on the other hand, is problematic because the interview easily takes the form of an "interrogation".

Generally speaking, and even more so in the case of work with young people, the half-open or half-closed form is the best approach. The theme is divided into topical sequences. These sections receive titles, which are formulated as key questions. The questions should be asked in such a way that the interviewee gets the feeling of being able to talk freely and in detail. Sub-points are written beneath the questions as an orientation. These points will only be addressed when in the report of the interview partner nothing has been said about them.

Questions arising in the course of the interview should also be asked before moving on to the next topical sequence. In this way, the interviews obtain a more or less solid structure and become easier to interpret and to compare.

The success of this method depends on the interviewer and his/her questions. Each interviewer must be aware that he/she must guide the interview partner through the interview and help him overcome difficult moments of remembrance.

The conduct of interviews

To the greatest possible extent, interviews should be conducted in a personal framework. The number of participants should be limited. In general, this number depends on the distribution of tasks to be performed during the interview - technique, questions and protocol.

Technique: For the recording of eyewitness interviews, mini-disc recorders are particularly well suited because of their good recording quality, small size, precise counter, and easy handling during the play-back, which facilitates the transcription. In addition, the use of directional microphones is recommended to ensure consistent quality. During the recording, one participant takes the responsibility for the technical equipment. Besides switching the device on and off, he

has to adjust the volume and monitor the recording with the headphones.

Questions: At least two participants are in charge of asking the questions, taking turns for whole topical sections, that is, each is responsible for one key question and the corresponding sub-points. A clear division of the questions enhances the smooth conduct of the interview.

Protocol: At least two further participants are responsible for writing the protocol. The purpose here is not to write what is said, but how it is said. The protocol should contain a description of the interview situation and of the participants' conduct. With the interview text and protocol it is easy to recapitulate the whole course of the interview.

Frank Reiniger