The Qualitative Report

Volume 23 | Number 2 Book Review 16

2-22-2018

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Palacios-Alfonso, Y. d. (2018). A Blueprint for Research Success: Review of Introduction to Community Oral History. *The Qualitative Report*, *23*(2), 502-504. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3421

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A Blueprint for Research Success: Review of Introduction to Community Oral History

Abstract

The *Introduction to Community Oral History* targets the novice researcher. The book provides a blueprint for the process of qualitative research. Also, the authors present examples for each step to engage the reader from start to finish. Lastly, I point out the strengths and weakness of the book.

Keywords

Community, Oral History, Qualitative Research, Book Reviews

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This book review is available in The Qualitative Report: https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss2/16

The Qualitative Report 2018 Volume 23, Number 2, Book Review 4, 502-504

A Blueprint for Research Success: Review of *Introduction to Community Oral History*

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The Introduction to Community Oral History targets the novice researcher. The book provides a blueprint for the process of qualitative research. Also, the authors present examples for each step to engage the reader from start to finish. Lastly, I point out the strengths and weakness of the book. Keywords: Community, Oral History, Qualitative Research, Book Reviews

Introduction

Lichtman (2013) states that qualitative research is based on verbal and visual communication to answer questions. She further explained that qualitative research explores humans in a natural setting rather than in a controlled environment (Lichtman, 2013). Janesick (2015) describes oral history is a way for interlopers to tell their narratives.

Introduction to Community Oral History (MacKay, Quinlan, & Sommer, 2016) is useful for the individual who wants to explore the use of primary resources. Primary resources in a community oral history project means interviewing someone who can account for an event that took place in a specific time to provide meaning on their viewpoint of the event. The process of a community oral history is about seeking individual's interpretations of the truth related to that given time in history. *Introduction to Community Oral History* (MacKay, Quinlan, & Sommer, 2016) is for the novice or experienced researcher, who is searching to bring another layer to the history for in-depth analysis. The process will take the researcher to retrieve information on a first-hand account of individuals as a collective story. I created *Table 1* for highlighting the big ideas from each chapter. To read into the cycles about the process, I suggest reading all the volumes to feel confident about each cycle of the process. In addition, the toolkit provides a plethora of information to get started on a community oral history project step by step.

MacKay, Quinlan, and Sommer's (2016) *Introduction to Community Oral History* describes oral history as methodology of research. MacKay, Quinlan, and Sommer (2016) introduce the major concepts of a community oral history project in this entry-level. I enjoyed reading about who the authors are and their relationship to community oral history projects. Each author brings their level of expertise into the level series. For example, May Kay Quinlan is a journalist; Barbara W. Sommer is a public historian; and Nancy MacKay is a librarian.

They define oral history in the series as the following:

> [It] is [the] primary source…. of a participant in an event …in the context of time and place to give it meaning. It is recorded for the purpose of preserving the information and making it available to others. (MacKay, Quinlan, and Sommer, 2013, p. 11)

Summary

The chapters were short and easy to read. Chapter 1 describes the methodology of community oral histories as another way to document research through first-hand accounts of human interaction during a phenomenon that took place in history. In other words, this process

is more than retelling information from law cases, newspaper articles, etc. It's the human essence of interpreting the truth and how vital that information is for others to learn. Therefore, the importance of preserving human account is imperative for community oral histories. Chapter 2 points to the importance of gathering information from an interviewee as a primary resource. Chapter 3 explains the importance of volunteers for a community oral history project. Volunteers are an essential element during all the cycles of this project. Volunteers are at the heart of gathering the data; therefore, volunteers need proper training. Moreover, the importance of knowing where to store the community oral history project was discussed. The authors provide an array of examples of where to possibly store the final product. In Chapter 4, technology is described as a great tool to document a community oral history project, but the technology aspect is not the driving force for the project; it's just an accessibility component not to be confused. In Chapter 5, the authors clarify the importance of preplanning as an essential component of preserving an oral history project. The person or persons in charge of the project should think about how this information can reach masses by preserving its contents; therefore, the community oral history project requires adequate storage. In Chapter 6, the authors discuss the topic of ethical consideration. Ethical considerations must be given top priority before conducting an oral history project. The authors describe how the project is framed as fundamental, and the reasons why the project is important must be addressed at the earliest stage of the project. In Chapter 7, the authors discussed the importance of best practices for conducting oral history projects from start to finish.

Table 1. A recap of the community oral history process

Documentating reserch	•by first hand account of a phenomenon •intrepreting their side of the story
Interviewee	•as a primary source of information •to give meaning of their experience
Volunteers	•need training •select each individul based on strengths
Technology	•great tool •a need for tranining
Preservation	• storage of interviews •storage of the project
Ethical consideration	•the purpose of the project (meaningful) •understanding a participant's point of view

Strengths

The authors do a great job at providing a step-by-step process of the community oral history project. They explain in detail the important parts of the process that are crucial to the success of the project. For example, the most problematic issue would be finding a location for this information to be stored for future generations; it could potentially create havoc on a project if this is not known from the beginning. Therefore, careful planning of where the artifacts will remain is one of the top priorities before beginning the community oral history project.

Another feature in the text that I enjoyed was the appendix. The authors provide visual examples of templates and explain the usage for each. In addition, I believe the best part of the book is that the authors provide a top ten list of resources. The resources are organized in a meaningful way. For example, each reference is related to a subheading, so if I needed clarification on a topic, the lists of words are under that subheading.

Weakness

The authors left me wanting to know more in-depth information about all the topics. Lastly, the book suggests visiting a webpage that contains sample templates. On my quest for these templates, I had no way to access the templates. However, I believe the book is a great tool for anyone that wants to conduct a community oral history project.

Conclusion

I was surprised by the amount of information inside Volume 1 of the series. Again, I was left with wanting to know more about the process of conducting a community oral history project. The book *Introduction to Community Oral History* (MacKay, Quinlan, & Sommer, 2016) planted a seed of how I could impact my community. This toolkit entails the necessary steps of conducting a community oral history project. Again, the authors highlight the importance of interviewing someone who lived in a specific time that may account for how an event took place to provide meaning on their viewpoint of that event. The process of a community oral history project is to seek individual's interpretations of the truth related to a given time in history.

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Author Note

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Article Citation

Palacios-Alfonso, Y.C. (2018). A blueprint for research success: Review of *Introduction to Community Oral History*. *The Qualitative Report, 23*(2), 502-504. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss2/16