

Summary of 2017 Kaili Oral History Workshop

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Group portrait before the Passing-through Cave: a papermaking site since Tang Dynasty

Background

EEF held 3-day Oral History Workshop in Kaili No.1 High School, Kaili, Guizhou Province from August 18th -20th, 2017 , as the climax of the 2017 summer training of “Footsteps: Listening to Memory of Local Culture” program. This program is dedicated to implementing an oral history project-based learning course for 8 rural secondary schools, as a major vehicle for inquiry-based and community-centered learning. The summer training was launched on July 10th,2017, with 5 weeks of teachers’ self-training and course project dry run, followed by a 3-day face-to-face workshop, to support 16 seed teachers to learn oral history methods and process, and oral history teaching, in order to deliver the one-year oral history course starting Sept. 2017. The 3-day workshop aimed to guiding the teachers to practice key steps, reflect on the process, and provide feedback to improve the course design.

Process

Prof. Liyun Hu from Yunnan University, together with Yu Zhang and Vicky Wu from EEF facilitated the workshop. Among 16 seed teachers who have particular interests in historical and cultural heritages in their communities, about 2/3 participated in oral history related workshops and projects before. Before the workshop, they did recommended readings and completed the interview training. They did the initial interview, did some background research, and completed the 1st interview.



Teacher Xu, an oral history greener from Tongwei No. 1 High School is sharing his findings and reflection

During the workshop, they practiced interview analysis, further background research, and forming interview outline of the next interview. Next they also practiced writing the historical narrative and historical reflection. They shared with the group the stories they discovered and reflection on the process. There was also a session for the teachers to provide suggestions to improve the course design.

On Day one of the workshop, Kaili No. 1 High School seed teachers shared with the group their experience in academic/professional development for teachers and students by teaching research project or national contest based on EEF oral history projects. The 2 hour session for this needed topic was very well received.

Two tours were arranged for this workshop: a tour of local culture inquiry-based learning projects and the library (including folk custom maker space) of Kaili No. 1 High School on Day One, and a tour of Ancient Papermaking Village and Batik Institute on Day Three. We made the cultural preservation “Why” and “How” the common theme of these tours, because many of the student oral history interviews will be about local culture and past lifeway. The tours especially the Day Three ones were very well received.

Impact

16 seed teachers, equipped with oral history knowledge and experience, started to conduct the first step of 1-year oral history course with about 130 students in schools in Sept. 2017, including recruiting students and introducing students to oral history and sample oral history products of secondary school students. The 2nd step, interview training, will follow in Oct. 2017.

Feedback

1. All the participants gave the workshop an overall rating of 4 or 5 among 1~5 scale, with 77% of them rating 5.
2. 62% of the teachers mentioned that through the tours they found significant value of preserving traditional culture such as ancient papermaking and batik, touched by the ancient yet very fine techniques and products, and the craftsman spirit. They also noticed the double-edged sword of commercialization and reckoned that educating students to disseminate the culture is an important part of the preservation.
3. The successful case study of Kaili No. 1 High School academic/professional development has stimulated at least two schools to follow suite.
4. When asked “What have you learned?”, teachers spoke highly of the systematic step-by-step oral history guide, esp. steps including background research, interview reflection, interview analysis, deriving further interview questions, and historical narrative writing.
5. Teachers’ feedback also indicated improvements needed for the training, some of which reflect challenges they were facing:
 - a) Simplified, streamlined process and forms, considering time and energy spared from over-burdened high school study is scarce;
 - b) Lowered expectation of background research, esp. for background information on local environment, considering most students have no research training and experience;
 - c) Explaining the profound in simple terms, to match the students’ cognitive level;
 - d) More interview training based on exercise, so they will learn how to do such training for the students;
 - e) More case studies and experience sharing;
 - f) More sharing among schools and among teachers;
 - g) Schools need more coordination from EEF for this course, so the exams won’t take up the course time, and students may need more incentive from EEF in order to balance the heavy load of work compared with other selective courses/clubs.

Along with the implementation of the course, EEF team is paying close attention to a), b) and d) above. As for c) and g), they are more of issues to deal with in the 2nd iteration of this course. We will keep using wechat and edmodo to facilitate e) and f).