

Stories Matter: Conceptual Challenges in the Development of Oral History Database Building Software

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Abstract: *Stories Matter* is new oral history database building software designed by an interdisciplinary team of oral historians and a software engineer affiliated with the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. It encourages a shift away from transcription, enabling oral historians to continue to interact with their interviews in an efficient manner without compromising the greater life history context of their interviewees. This article addresses some of the conceptual challenges that arose when developing this software.

Table of Contents

- [1. Introduction](#)
- [2. Why *Stories Matter*? Evaluating Existing Database Tools](#)
- [3. Conceptual Challenges in the Development of *Stories Matter*](#)
 - [3.1 Guiding principles](#)
 - [3.2 Anticipating and meeting the needs of oral historians](#)
 - [3.3 Fostering transparency](#)
 - [3.4 Choosing a name](#)
 - [3.5 Seeking stability](#)
 - [3.6 Retaining humanity in *Stories Matter*](#)
- [4. Introducing *Stories Matter*](#)
- [5. Conclusion](#)
- [Acknowledgments](#)
- [References](#)
- [Authors](#)
- [Citation](#)

1. Introduction

Alessandro PORTELLI (1981, 1991, 2006) has responded to critics of oral history by declaring that its reliance on orality, narrative form, subjectivity, the "different credibility" of memory, and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee are strengths and valuable resources, rather than weaknesses, as argued by traditional historians whose work relies on archival research (PORTELLI, 2006, p.32). Furthermore, PORTELLI maintains that oral historical methods produce more nuanced analyses, due to their ability to preserve important forms of communication, such as "tone and volume range and the rhythm of speech" that carry implicit meaning and social connotations that are absent in written language (p.34). [1]

Yet despite these many strengths, Michael FRISCH notes "[the] Deep Dark Secret of oral history is that nobody spends much time listening to or watching

recorded and collected interview documents" (2008, p.223). Favoring the convenience that text offers—it is a fast and easy means through which an interview may be accessed—"the shift from voice to text [has been] ... extensive and controlling," and for some, even natural (FRISCH, 2006, p.102). This textual engagement however has come at a price: the rich and varied meanings behind the stories and exchanges that have been shared between interviewers and their subjects have been lost. Transcripts not only fail to convey the essence of the interview space, but also serve to "flatten the emotional content of speech" (PORTELLI, 2006, p.35). Ultimately, privileging transcripts over voices results in a significant loss of the meta-narrative meanings inherent in interviews at an early stage in the post-interview period. This becomes particularly evident when faced with the realization that few oral historians take the time to create verbatim transcripts that include mention of shifts in body language, emotion, and tone in the interview space. [2]

In an attempt to address the shortcomings of transcription, a growing number of oral historians have begun to seriously consider how digital applications may offer new ways of engaging with the orality of interviews.¹ A select few have been involved in software development, building or adapting various digital tools that allow scholars to focus on their interviewees and specifically, the elements that make oral history different. Unfortunately, in our estimation, existing database tools such as *InterClipper*, originally created for marketing focus groups, have proven to be frustrating to use and expensive (see Section 2). As a result, an interdisciplinary team comprised of a software engineer and several oral historians was assembled at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS) at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Led by Steven HIGH, Canada Research Chair in Public History, this team recently launched new, easy-to-use, open source software called *Stories Matter*. This software was created in two phases: in phase I, completed in May 2009, oral historians could download the software and build oral history databases on their local computers; and in phase II, completed in March 2010, researchers could upload their databases to the Internet, access them remotely, and merge their work with others. This tool represents the culmination of a five-year effort (HIGH & SWORN, 2009; SWORN, 2008). How we got here, and specifically, the conceptual challenges that we negotiated along the way, are the subject of this article. [3]

1 One only needs to look at the discussion log of the h-oralhist list-serve to understand the degree to which oral historians remain wedded to text. In a recent exchange, John D. WILLARD, Associate Director of the Martha Ross Center for Oral History at the University of Maryland, writes: "My opinion is that transcripts are the key to making an interview intellectually accessible. It has little to do with fragility of a recording. If you don't get my point try doing a keyword search on a digital recording. It is through the written word that most people 'consume' oral history and by which research is actually completed. Recorded tapes, even excellent interviews, sit on the shelf, in a box, in the drawer. It is by producing a transcript that scholars actually use the material." (Message posted on h-oralhist on 28 April 2009: <http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl?trx=vx&list=H-Oralhist&month=0905&week=a&msg=nxXR%2bKzqDZolpR/Uso7iKg&user=&pw=>).

2. Why *Stories Matter*? Evaluating Existing Database Tools

The first step in the development process was to conduct a review of existing video database building tools; this review began in 2005. In 2006, however, COHDS started to experiment with *InterClipper*, an audio-video documentation tool that was developed initially for focus-group recording and analysis in the market research industry. David SWORN and Alan WONG, two graduate students who conduct oral history interviews in their research, were hired to use this tool to create a database that consisted of a dozen interviews—about seventeen hours of footage—with displaced and retired workers, clerical staff, and management from a corrugated paper mill in Sturgeon Falls, Ontario, Canada. In building this database, SWORN divided the interviews into clips, and the clips were then indexed using tag terms; FRISCH (2006, p.104) has used the analogy of a "well-organized text-based reference book" to describe this process. [4]

Following this, HIGH "test drove" the database in his Oral History seminar at Concordia University in fall 2007. After they were given some contextual information about the Sturgeon Falls Mill Closing Project, the twelve graduate students enrolled in this class were encouraged to explore the software and reflect upon their experiences (HIGH & SWORN, 2009). In their critiques, the students raised four primary concerns. The first related to their desire for transparency: several students commented on the need for more contextual information regarding the creation of both the sample database and the software so that they could better understand their purpose. The second criticism related to the interrelated subjects of path and sequence: students stated that working with interviews that had already been clipped meant that they often found themselves floundering for direction within interviews because the original context pertaining to the interview and the interviewee was unavailable to them. The third criticism emerged from the realization that clipping interviews resulted in their fragmentation, and thus meaning was lost due to the absence of the life history context. Finally, significant challenges were reported when dealing with the indexing that was imposed upon users by the software: it was regarded as being too scientific considering the great degree of subjectivity involved in database building. Of these criticisms, the first three were fundamental and irresolvable problems with *InterClipper*. A final determining factor emerged from the expense and the time associated with using *InterClipper*.² Since the license holder must receive and manually stream each interview into the database before users can work with their interviews, creating a database quickly became a costly and time-consuming process beyond what would normally be experienced with transcription. As a result of these considerations, HIGH decided that this database software could not be a long-term database solution for oral historians. [5]

In the meantime, Dr. Elena RAZLOGOVA, co-director of COHDS, received a grant to create a Firefox plug-in for audio and video files in the popular research

2 See Michael FRISCH's work with *InterClipper* through the Randforce Associates: [The Randforce Associates](#), [InterClipper](#). Also see the work being done by Elena RAZLOGOVA on *Vertov* at Concordia University's Digital History Lab: [Concordia Digital History Lab](#). George Mason University's Center for History and New Media and its development of *Zotero* should also be added to this discussion: [Center for History and New Media](#), <http://chnm.gmu.edu/zotero/>.

tool *Zotero*. *Vertov* currently exists in a beta version only.³ Nonetheless, it has a number of features that are quite relevant to the needs of oral historians. A good example is its ability to allow users to relate files, like journal articles, images and online media, to a given interview. This is a function that emerges out of its association with *Zotero*. Additionally, it has a fairly intuitive user interface, which makes the tool easy to understand and anticipate for technologically-inhibited people. For the most part, early experiences with *Vertov* suggest it will be a positive addition to the few database building tools available to oral historians. However, the COHDS team found that the software could not yet handle large video files and had a tendency to crash when the user attempted to move frame-by-frame through an individual interview. The presence of other small bugs also had a serious impact on the usability of the software.⁴ Moreover, the interface was inflexible in so far as it was created for one purpose and we were attempting to adapt it to fit the needs of oral historians. [6]

In our final efforts to identify a database tool that would meet the needs of oral historians, we examined a number of database projects for their potential applicability—including the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation⁵; The Infromedia Digital Video Library at Carnegie Mellon⁶; and The History Makers⁷—and determined that they were primarily archival in nature. While they were representative of a vast amount of interview-based information, their primary purposes were to house collections, and, on occasion, allow members of the public to view select portions of interviews that spoke to the projects' thematic or regional foci. For researchers who were interested in working with their own interviews or searching existing interviews for clips on particular subjects that could be easily integrated into classroom curriculum, for example, there was nothing online that could meet these needs. [7]

3 More information on *Vertov* can be found online at: <http://digitalhistory.concordia.ca/vertov/>.

4 The first problem emerged when working with a medium length interview of one hour and forty minutes. It was immediately apparent that the time marker was too large and imprecise to allow users to move backwards and forwards within the interview by small amounts of time. When team members tried to compensate for this difficulty, by using the arrow keys on the keyboard to move frame by frame, the software crashed repeatedly. Another option was to simply alter the time manually. This was however a fairly time consuming and inefficient process that required a lot of trial and error to create clips. Editing clips, meanwhile, proved impossible. Each time team members tried to edit a clip, the original clip remained the same and a new clip was created with none of the original information. Meanwhile, in instances where clips overlapped, the media player would pause at any point of overlap and have to be restarted manually by pressing play. Next, when working with multiple interviews in a single project, we discovered that information spaces, such as the notes field, were not updated when we switched between interviews. Specifically, the information from participant A would still be visible even after we selected and began imputing information related to participant B, and so on. This created a substantial space for user error if this bug went unnoticed. For a reflection on the trials and errors of database building with *Vertov* see the *Stories Matter* blog: <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/storiesmatter/>.

5 The online database created by affiliates of the Shoah Foundation can be found online at: <http://www.lib.umich.edu/help/svha/>.

6 The online database created by affiliates of the Infromedia Digital Video Library can be found online at: <http://www.informedia.cs.cmu.edu/>.

7 The online database created by affiliates of The History Makers can be found online at: <http://www.thehistorymakers.com/>.

3. Conceptual Challenges in the Development of *Stories Matter*

As a result of these experiences, HIGH decided to forge ahead with the creation of in-house database software: *Stories Matter*. From the start, he envisioned a collaborative process of software development that would ensure a tailor-made product for oral historians. In the absence of a "digital historian" of the kind that William TURKEL (COHEN et al., 2008) spoke of in a recent "Interchange" on the promise of digital history published in the *Journal of American History*, it became clear that the Centre would need to hire a software engineer. Instead of contracting this work out, we advertised to employ an in-house software engineer to work at COHDS. Jacques LANGLOIS, of Kamicode software of Montreal, joined the Centre as the programmer-in-residence in September 2008, bringing with him extensive experience designing video games, but none in oral history. To ensure that the product under development was "by and for" oral historians, we also hired two oral historians on small, part-time contracts (5-6 hours per week)—Dr. Stacey ZEMBRZYCKI and Kristen O'HARE—to collaborate with LANGLOIS every step of the way.⁸ Subsequent exchanges between team members focused upon the shortcomings of existing database tools, the software's potential user base, the meaning, content, and form of oral history, and the analytical tools that historians would require if they were to engage with their interviews on multiple levels. In this process, the team was directed largely by the work of FRISCH (2006), who has discussed these levels of analysis in depth, referring to them as both content- and meaning-driven. [8]

3.1 Guiding principles

The guidelines that emerged from our weekly interdisciplinary meetings were central to *Stories Matter*. First, the development team decided that *it* would be based in free, open source software, and thus widely available to academics, professionals, community members, and students of oral history and related disciplines, regardless of their economic status. Second, we recognized the importance of developing software that would be compatible with Macintosh and PC operating systems, so as to enable a wide user base. Third, we identified the tendency for many oral historians to work with audio and video recordings, and thereby concluded that *Stories Matter* would have to be compatible with mp3, flv, and avi file formats.⁹ Knowing that our targeted user base would likely have a minimal understanding of technology, it was crucial that the software be both easy to install and intuitive, so as to avoid alienating users. Finally, we agreed to make *Stories Matter* available in French and English to attract oral historians

8 Biographies of all team members, as well as audio recordings of the team's exchanges and blog entries that reflect on the project itself, may be found on the *Stories Matter* [website](#).

9 We decided on mp3 and avi because we believed that these were the formats most commonly created by the audio and video recorders used in the field. However, in its earliest form, Adobe Air was only compatible with flv and mp3 files, and so *Stories Matter* was limited to these formats. Over time, however, LANGLOIS created a conversion tool within *Stories Matter*; it converts avi files to the flv format. We intend to expand the number of video and audio file formats that can be used with *Stories Matter* in the near future, as Adobe Air continues to improve.

working in both languages—a necessity for an oral history centre based in Quebec.¹⁰ [9]

To meet these needs, LANGLOIS decided to use the relatively new cross-operating system runtime platform, [Adobe Air](#). This decision, while meeting the initial requirements specified by the development team, meant that LANGLOIS was forced to develop *Stories Matter* with very little support from other programmers, as few people had experience working with the fledgling software. This would have ongoing repercussions for our ability to meet deadlines for *Stories Matter's* different components, as LANGLOIS repeatedly found himself forging ahead in uncharted territory. [10]

3.2 Anticipating and meeting the needs of oral historians

As the team sought to effectively integrate functions specific to the discipline into accessible and intuitive database software that could be used both locally and through the Internet, it became apparent that we were envisioning two distinct database tools and thus two phases of development. The first phase resulted in a downloadable database tool that individual users can download and run on their personal computers. This database tool is therefore "local," in so far as individual oral historians can determine the terms of their database building and access their private collections of interviews. [11]

The second phase of *Stories Matter* gives users the option of working with a web-based version of the tool, allowing multiple database builders to simultaneously create and analyze a single database related to large-scale projects, such as the [Life Stories of Montrealers](#) Displaced by War, Genocide and Mass Human Rights Violations Project.¹¹ In addition, the second phase also allows community members to access these databases via the Internet. Our hope is to encourage teachers, students, and other interested communities to utilize and integrate these online interviews and clips into their work. Each tool, therefore, serves a particular need and is intended to ensure the widest possible diffusion of *Stories Matter*, with the ultimate goal of persuading oral historians to rediscover their interviews, rather than rely on transcripts. [12]

To meet this goal, *Stories Matter* was conceived as requiring nine main features,¹² including:

10 Should *Stories Matter* prove popular among oral historians, the development team is open to having the software translated into languages other than English, French, Spanish, and Dutch to further expand the user base. Our collaboration with Belgium's BNA-BBOT team led to the Dutch translation.

11 This five-year, Community-University Research Alliance project will interview 500 Montrealers displaced by war, genocide, and other human rights violations.

12 The following discussion of *Stories Matter's* features was drawn from Jacques LANGLOIS' "Software Requirements Specification" document. It may be accessed through the following link: http://storytelling.concordia.ca/storiesmatter/?page_id=233.

1. a *Project Control Panel* that would allow users to manage their projects;
 2. an unlimited number of *Project Layers* that would not only serve as the main data containers but also define the parameters through which users would be able to interact with the interviews contained within;
 3. an unlimited number of *Interview Layers* that would be comprised of either video or audio files and a comprehensive user interface;
 4. a *Clip* function that would allow users to create clips within interviews according to subject matter, time period, speaker, etc.;
 5. several *Information Spaces* wherein users would be able to archive information pertaining to the interviewee and interviewer, as well as the user's notes and reflections;
 6. a *Tag Cloud* that would list key terms being mentioned in projects, interviews, and clips;
 7. a *Search* feature that would allow users to search easily among projects, interviews, and clips for discussions of relevance to the user's particular research interests;
 8. an *Export* feature that would allow users to export clips to their desktops or back-up the contents of their databases on an html document that would then be easily used in a presentation or in the making of a website; and
 9. a *Merge* feature that would allow multiple users to collaborate online to build a shared database, and if desired, make this database accessible to the public.
- [13]

While these features have evolved over the course of the project, ensuring a high standard of usability, their presence has remained integral to the software. Central to their evolution was the desire that these features be integrated into the software in a way that would not distract users from interviewees and the life history context behind their narratives. Previous oral history database tools have been criticized for having a distancing effect between interviewees and their users, and so the development team was determined to explore options for addressing this shortcoming. As a result, the team decided to not only make the media player a central feature of the interface, but also situate any clips that were created within the larger life history context of the interviewee. To do this, we stressed that any information entered in the *Interviewee Biography* and *Notes* fields remain visible to users at all times. [14]

3.3 Fostering transparency

Meanwhile, in an attempt to foster transparency and leave a historical record about the unique software development process in which we were engaged, we have, from the project's inception, publicly reflected on *Stories Matter's* evolution on its blog: <http://storytelling.concordia.ca/storiesmatter/>. Powered by [WordPress](#), this is a virtual space where interested users can meet members of the team and track *Stories Matter's* progress. Team members have regularly posted reflections on the project's development and progress, and uploaded audio recordings of most of the project's meetings as well as the various documents that have been

central to the development of the software. In addition, the team has been documenting the behind-the-scenes history of the project on [Basecamp](#), project management software. Essentially, this record of e-mail exchanges, which tend to focus on timelines, obstacles, successes, and all of the software's versions, form the basis of a virtual archive that will be made available to future researchers. [15]

3.4 Choosing a name

Finally, choosing a name played a central role in early discussions about the software. Given the ways in which databases are associated with quantification, we wanted a name and a logo that would speak to the uniqueness that each and every life story deserves. The following logo was formulated to symbolize the software:



Figure 1: *Stories Matter* logo [16]

We chose the name *Stories Matter* to emphasize the power of the spoken word. The logo is also representative of this belief: the large "O" in the logo, which is the signature of COHDS, signifies the orality of oral history and also resembles the shape of a mouth and the formation of a storytelling circle. Since *Stories Matter* was designed with collaboration and public engagement in mind, the non-hierarchical circle thus serves as a fitting symbol of the principle of sharing authority that shapes all of the endeavors that occur at COHDS (on sharing authority see FRISCH, 1990; CORBETT & MILLER, 2006; THOMSON, 2003; HIGH, 2009). [17]

3.5 Seeking stability

In January 2009, three "database builders" were hired to test the software while building a database prototype drawn from the interviews conducted by the Montreal Life Stories project. Given COHDS' commitment to interdisciplinarity, the three new members came from diverse backgrounds: team leader, Erin JESSEE, who was then a doctoral candidate in the humanities working with survivors and perpetrators of genocide in Rwanda and Bosnia; Dr. Claudia GAMA, who has a Ph.D. in computer science, was a key member of the post-production team of the Montreal Life Stories project; and Allison EADES who was a Master's student in

applied human science specializing in collaborative processes. Over the course of the winter term, the database building team merged with the existing development team, bringing a new intensity to the process. Due to delays in software development, all members of the expanded *Stories Matter* team began to test the software and build databases that would meet the specific needs of the Montreal Life Stories project. [18]

An important conceptual challenge emerged as the development team attempted to shift into building a database prototype. What represented a "stable" version of *Stories Matter* was not as clear-cut as one might imagine. For members of the database building team, a stable version of the software was understood to be one that would allow users to build databases in an efficient and intuitive manner. Thus, the usability of the software was paramount. For LANGLOIS, however, stability referred to software performance, meaning that it did not crash or generate constant error messages for a period of at least three days, and that any work we did could be saved and carried forward into subsequent versions of *Stories Matter*. These differences in professional/disciplinary norms proved frustrating for everyone. If *Stories Matter* was to become a viable alternative to transcription, as intended, we would require very precise functionality in order to work quickly in our tasks as database builders. If this was not accomplished, we feared that oral historians would never adopt *Stories Matter* as a resource. [19]

We experimented with several different methods for logging bugs that we encountered while building databases. Initially, LANGLOIS introduced us to a bug tracker he created using [Google mail](#), which allowed the database building team to communicate directly with LANGLOIS in an organized manner about any bugs or enhancements that required his attention. Bugs were ranked as either critical priority and requiring immediate resolution, medium priority and requiring resolution prior to the next release, or low priority and to be added to the wish-list for future releases. LANGLOIS checked the bug tracker on a daily basis so that he could clear any critical issues that emerged as promptly as possible. [20]

Over time, however, we began to realize that the aforementioned forms of communication and bug tracking were less efficient than we would have liked. Since we had several people working as part of the database team, there was always potential for us to accidentally repeat the same bugs in the tracker by assigning different titles to the issue. This meant that LANGLOIS spent a lot of time clearing repeated bugs instead of improving the software; Daniel LORENZO, Kamicode business partner and software engineer, provided much of this support during the second phase of development. [21]

As a result, the database building team stopped using the tracker and began working more closely together. Our new method was to develop a single document at the end of each working day that broke down the identified bugs according to the layer in which they occurred. This meant that bugs were listed as we encountered them in the software, beginning with the project layer, and followed by the interview layer, session layer, clipping feature, and so on. The resulting document allowed LANGLOIS to work more methodically and efficiently

within the software to clear critical issues and smaller bugs as they presented themselves to the user. As such, he was often able to fix the bugs and release a new version prior to the start of the database building team's next workday. [22]

3.6 Retaining humanity in *Stories Matter*

As the database building continued, we engaged in an ongoing assessment of *Stories Matter's* ability to highlight the greater life history context of the interviewees whose narratives we were working with. Since the software includes a clipping function that allows users to create convenient sound-bytes for integration into class presentations and lectures, we were concerned that users would be tempted to ignore the greater life history context of the interviews that they encountered in the software. To avoid this tendency, we made a series of conscious decisions in the interface and organization of *Stories Matter*, which were intended to focus users' attention, as much as possible, on the interviewee and the various ways they communicated their stories. [23]

First, we decided that the media player should be central in *Stories Matter*, so that when working with video files users would be automatically drawn to the image of the interviewee, allowing them to focus on additional forms of communication, such as tone of voice and body language. Second, we decided that regardless of whether the user is working with a whole interview or a brief clip, they should always be able to simultaneously view certain fundamental information related to the interviewee, such as a brief biography, a thumbnail photograph taken from the interview, and any notes entered by the user. Third, we requested a project browser that would allow users to quickly access short and long summaries of any existing databases, interviewees, and individual interview sessions. Finally, we included a tag cloud that draws upon the notes and indexing terms entered during the database building phase to direct users to specific interviewees, interview sessions, and clips that speak to their research interests. These features allow users to quickly develop a familiarity with the project and the individual interviewees, making it easier for them to direct their research within the software. [24]

It is important to note, however, that in the database building phase, our attempts to make the experience of working with *Stories Matter* more humanistic is less apparent. Due to the vast amounts of information being entered, the focus shifts away from deep listening and engaging with the interviewee. The database building team still found themselves listening to the interviews quite closely, but instead of watching the videos, their attention was constantly being drawn elsewhere as they filled in information required by the software, added indexing terms, or created clips. However, once the necessary database has been created in *Stories Matter*, and all relevant information has been entered, users will find their attention focused on the interviewees and their life histories. In this regard, *Stories Matter* will prove to be an incredible resource for educators who are looking to supplement lectures with relevant clips, and for researchers and scholars who require first-hand commentary on particular themes of relevance to their studies. [25]

4. Introducing *Stories Matter*

Despite these challenges, we launched *Stories Matter* in two phases, in May 2009 and March 2010. In its present form, *Stories Matter* is free, open source software that is compatible with Macintosh and PC operating systems. It allows for the archiving of digital video and audio materials, enabling users to annotate, analyze, evaluate and export materials, as well as tag, index, search, and browse within interviews, sessions, and clips or across entire collections. This software enables oral historians and other interested communities to interact with audio and video recordings of interviews in a way that emphasizes individual interviewees as central to the stories being narrated. In addition to interacting with whole sessions, users are able to make clips according to personal criteria, and then create personalized playlists of clips that speak to specific themes. A convenient search tool also allows users to locate clips, sessions, interviews, and projects that speak to their particular interests. Users can export the results of their work in several different formats for easy use in presentations and website design. Finally, a new feature of *Stories Matter*, made possible during its second phase of development, is online functionality, allowing multiple users to collaborate on building a single database according to their assigned user roles. Users now have the option of installing *Stories Matter* on a local server, assigning various user roles to their collaborators, and allowing community affiliates and other interested parties to contribute toward building a database.¹³

¹³ We invite you to access our sample database as a guest. This may be done by installing *Stories Matter* Phase II and selecting *login*, in the upper right hand corner of the software. Next, in the login window that appears, leave the first two fields blank. In the third field, titled *server URL*, enter "<http://storytelling.concordia.ca/database/>" and select *login as guest*. From there, you will be able to view our Training Workshop, though without publisher or project manager access you will be unable to make any changes to the content.

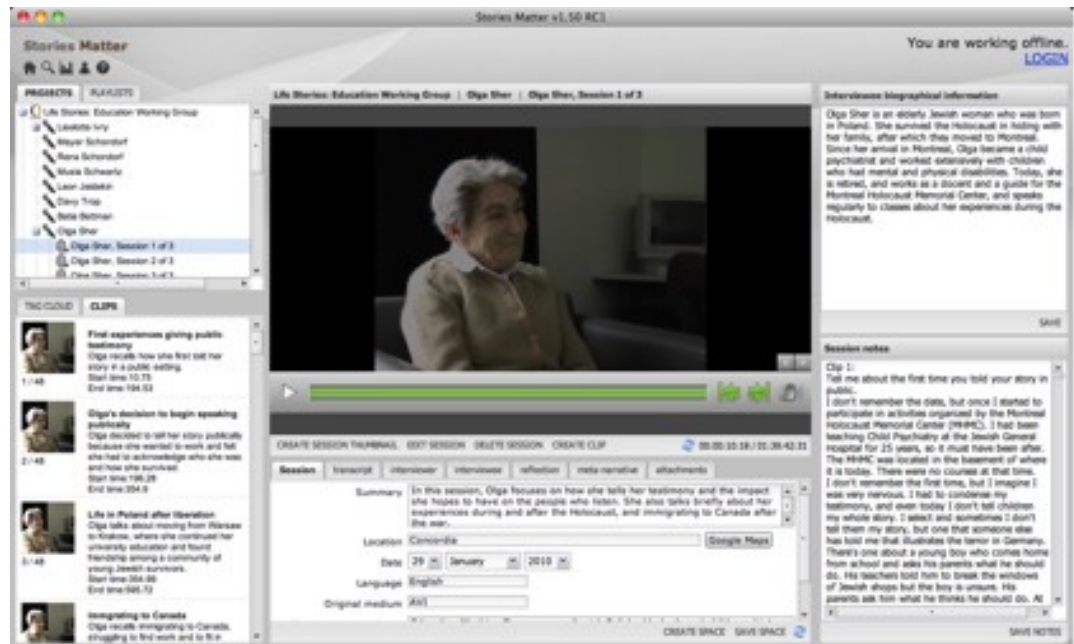


Figure 2: *Stories Matter* interface [26]

This interface emerged as a direct result of the shortcomings identified with existing oral history database software. *Stories Matter* resolves a number of the criticisms we identified in these tools: it represents a shift away from archival software; and it facilitates the archiving of interviews. Users are able to create clips and playlists, and then export any relevant clips to their desktops, to be used in presentations and websites.¹⁴ Users can also generate a basic html document based on their project(s) and it can be easily converted into an interactive website aimed at dissemination and public engagement. Finally, the second phase of *Stories Matter* offers users a number of enhancements, such as DublinCore¹⁵ compliance, online access from remote locations, and the ability to assign different user roles so that they may control the access that research collaborators and community affiliates have to the database. All of these features enable users to continue to work with their interviews long after they end, without necessarily requiring the interviews to be rendered into transcripts, though writing out the transcript remains an option within *Stories Matter*. The process of creating projects and rendering interviews into convenient clips requires about the same time commitment as writing out transcripts. However, the potential uses for interviews in *Stories Matter* far outweigh that of transcripts due to the clipping and export features. Additionally it does not involve the loss of meta-narrative information. [27]

14 Stacey ZEMBRZYCKI, for instance, used *Stories Matter* to clip her interviews for use on this website: <http://www.sudburyukrainians.ca/>.

15 Dublin Core is a widely used standard developed in the disciplines of library and computer sciences that allows for greater ease when cross-referencing pre-established fields of metadata. For more information, see <http://dublincore.org/documents/usageguide/>.

5. Conclusion

With the completion of *Stories Matter* phase I and II, we have attempted to resolve a number of the methodological shortcomings that affect most oral historians after their interviewing is complete. The methodological and conceptual ground that has been gained in this process is substantial, and fills a void in the work on digital history and oral history database tools. However, our primary intent in presenting *Stories Matter* is to encourage a shift away from the use of transcripts, and the loss of meta-narrative qualities that this practice necessarily entails. Ultimately, we seek to inspire a return to engaging with the original interviews. Though the use of *Stories Matter* cannot completely recreate the experience of being in the actual interview, we have no doubt that it will greatly enrich the quality of oral historical research. It is intuitive software that enables non-technologically savvy people to maneuver among and between interviews in their collections and integrate clips into their presentations and websites. Such features are particularly relevant for public engagement and teaching. [28]

Stories Matter also makes collaboration among researchers possible. A convenient and intuitive database tool, it allows them to make their interviews, for the purpose of group projects, accessible online. Of equal importance *Stories Matter* permits members of the public, such as teachers, community leaders, artists, and activists, to download interviews and clips and integrate the voices of interviewees into their educational work. Exposure to these narratives will invariably change how people think about the past. [29]

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