Documentary Film: The Next Step in Qualitative Research to Illuminate Issues of Social Justice in Urban Education

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Abstract. This conceptual paper explores the unique contribution to traditional qualitative research methodology and urban educational renewal that documentary film can achieve through illumination of issues of social justice and existing inequities in public education in the United States. Through arts-based inquiry, the authors incorporated critical race theory with digital video to explore the truths and realities of schooling for urban students in the Midwestern United States. The purpose of these two film projects was to help educators and community members think more deeply about the socialization of children within institutions, where enduring historical and socio-cultural ideologies may exist. Friend and Caruthers assert that adopting documentary film as a research paradigm creates opportunities to share stories from schools that illuminate diverse perspectives of voice, which can be used to transform school communities.

Keywords. Qualitative methods; urban education; social justice; video research; documentary film.

1. Introduction: Documentary Film as Research

This article introduces a specific approach grounded in post-qualitative inquiry (St. Pierre, 2015) to illuminate issues of social justice and existing inequities in United States urban public schools using documentary film. St. Pierre (2015) devised the idea of "*post qualitative inquiry*" (p. 75) to challenge "'conventional humanist qualitative inquiry,' which I argue has become overdetermined by the publishing industry, university research courses, and journal and books that detail very carefully what it is and how to do it" (p. 75). As a postmodernist project, film crosses, incorporates or reconstructs borders of

different disciplines, research paradigms, geographical locations and cultures (Gribich, 2013). Film captures authentic voices and lived experiences of students, educators, and community members with diverse perspectives in order to share knowledge and experiences that have the potential to contribute to equity and democracy in education. This research approach began as arts-based inquiry, wherein the authors produced two documentary short films, *What Kids / Teens Love and Hate about School*, featuring interviews with diverse students attending urban public schools as they shared their stories and experiences. The films and video excerpts have been screened at professional research conferences and used as teaching tools within educational preparation programs in diverse regions of the United States and in the United Kingdom.

Through arts-based inquiry, the purpose of the use of "dance, theater, drama, film, collage, video, photography . . . . when grounded in a critical performance pedagogy . . . can be used to advance a progressive political agenda that addresses issues of social inequity" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 642). We incorporated critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 2004) with digital video to share the truths and realities of schooling for urban students and to help teachers and educational leaders, researchers, policymakers, and community activists to examine issues of social justice grounded in historical inequities. Researchers have used digital video as an ethnographic research tool for decades (Goldman, 2004; Rosenstein, 2002), providing accessibility to a wider audience than traditional research methods such as publications in research journals. Video also provides the opportunity for viewers to engage in their own meaning-making. In this conceptual article, the authors will share the research methods used to produce documentary films that share stories from schools with diverse perspectives of voice, which can be used to transform school communities.

2. The Enduring Inequities in Urban Schools

There are many people living in poverty in rural parts of the United States; however, approximately two-thirds of the poor live in the nation's inner cities or in "fiscally stressed suburbs and towns" (Anyon, 2014, p. 9). The inner cities or *urban core* regions within the U.S. have become places where disenfranchised groups who cannot escape their impoverished neighborhoods live amidst a decreasing tax base that cannot adequately support the educational and service needs of the community. They are often viewed as constructed *others*, separated from thriving business and community services, and their neighborhoods lack the economic support necessary to provide the means to expand opportunities. Young (1990) explained that otherness develops from the experience of ways "the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the other" (p. 59). When there are economic opportunities in the urban core, the *others* are pushed out of the region to make room for new inhabitants and visitors. An example of such gentrification can be seen in inner cities across the United States with the repurposing of old buildings into loft apartments that are so expensive that rents are in excess of what most middle class families could afford. By demolishing low income

apartment housing and forcing residents to live elsewhere, new shopping and dining facilities take over these city blocks. There is still much work that needs to be done to promote social justice in order to fulfill our nation's vision of an equal chance at life, liberty, and happiness for every citizen.

The same is true when applied to providing every student an equal chance at a first-class education. In particular, the problem confronting urban schools serving higher percentages of Black and Latino males is dire in terms of achievement, assignment to special education, limited participation in gifted programs, school graduation rates, enrollment and completion of college, and other factors that reflect their status in American society (Conchas, 2012; Holzman, 2006; Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007; Noguera, 2012; Rios & Galicia, 2014). Ladson-Billings (2006) posits that even when comparable family incomes exist there is still a gap in achievement between African Americans and Latina/os and their white counterparts based on standardized test measures.

The persistent low achievement, labelled the achievement gap, is one of the most heavily discussed and debated issues in education which has not been examined contextually to determine broader contributors to inequality. Several scholars such as Irvine (2010) and Milner (2013) have explained the phenomenon as an opportunity gap, an issue of deeply-rooted societal biases that have produced educational disparities among students of color. Irvine (2010) insists that other gaps must be closed:

> "Gaps include the teacher-quality gap, the teacher-training gap, the challenging curriculum gap, the school-funding gap, the digital-divide gap, the affordable-housing gap, the health care gap, the employment-opportunity gap, the school-integration gap, and the quality child-care gap" (p. xii).

Recently, the emphasis on the Common Core State Standards Initiative to improve reading and math achievement has emerged across the United States, while some states have opted out of this top down approach (The Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014). There is more involved in the preparation of educators and leaders for urban schools than an understanding of statistics related to student achievement. Investigating schools through the medium of film, while incorporating critical race theory, yields a key to unlocking the hidden stories within the diverse students who attend them.

3. Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) holds that racism exists within societies as a social construction that contributes to inequities in the overall society and in institutions such as schools. The individuals credited with the conception of CRT applied to critical examination of educational contexts consisted of a number of scholars of color (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lynn & Parker, 2006) with an activist agenda, intended to bring about change and social justice (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Ladson-Billings (2000) notes:

> "The gift of CRT is that it unapologetically challenges the scholarship that would dehumanize and depersonalize us…In CRT the researcher makes a deliberate appearance in his or her work….the deeply personal rendering of social science that CRT scholars bring to their work helps

break open the mythical hold that traditional work has on knowledge…CRT helps us to raise some important questions about the control and production of knowledge…particularly knowledge about people and communities of color" (p. 272).

Critical Race Theory has been used in education to critique current policies, curriculum, pedagogical practices, and assessment of learning (Ladson-Billings, 2004).

Storytelling, which is central to our use of documentary film to advance student voice, is used in CRT as a way to express the experiences of ethnically diverse students (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2005). Through the lens of CRT as applied to analysis of interviews and observational data, we were able to apprehend stories of the lived experiences of students in urban settings. Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) describe lived experience as "the result of any transaction between people and the world, emphasizing the subjective significance of the situation on the person.…the subjective side of culture – mediates and organizes behaviours" (p. 33). Using documentary film, we were able to capture their meanings of schooling within urban settings as seen and heard through each student's voice and lived experiences.

4. Meaning-Making and Documentary Films

When creating a documentary project, the filmmaker chooses what to film, whom to film, where to film, and how to film the participant. Blanc (2014) stated that, "the discourse of the documentary filmmakers focuses particularly on the transformation of the person filmed into a character…it should facilitate the introduction of recognizable features to the viewer, i.e. representations of the Other both near and different from ourselves" (p. 127). A definition of documentary film provided by Cantine, Howard, and Lewis (2000) stated that:

"In its most basic sense a documentary is a film in which the filmmaker allows the action or events to unfold naturally with minimal interference… The very process involved in making a film requires that the artist manipulate the subject material to some extent. Differences in documentary style are often a matter of the degree of manipulation the filmmaker chooses to impose" (p. 14).

A filmmaker may choose to appear in the documentary film, and to embrace persuasive techniques as evident in the work of Michael Moore, seeking to influence the audience to address social issues ranging from gun control to health care reform. Griffiths (2013) stated that, "the subjective presence of the filmmaker in the frame emphasizes how reality and representation are indivisible, mutually imbricated, and subjectively grounded" (p. 41).

In order to explore the meanings communicated to the audience through the narrative of a documentary film, one can use "qualitative or interpretive techniques such as semiotics or ideological analysis" (Berger, 2000, p. 15). In addition to film analysis through theories and techniques associated with media studies, documentary films are accessible to and interpreted by a wide audience. The viewer sees images and listens to the voices of documentary film participants, filtering this through prior knowledge, beliefs, and experiences.

The documentary work produced by the co-authors of this article has been centered on the voices of students in urban public schools. Voice may be defined as "meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community. . . . Voice suggests relationships: the individual's relationship to the meaning of his/her experience" (Britzman, 1990, p. 14). This definition focuses on an individual's meanings, relationships, and experiences within the larger community. While the authors' documentary film work has served to amplify students' voices as part of a research agenda, other education-related documentary films have been created with different purposes.

4.1 Davis Guggenheim's *Waiting for Superman*.

An example of the different ways of making meaning from a documentary film focused on U.S. education can be seen in *Waiting for Superman*, released in 2010. An article published in the popular U.S. magazine *Entertainment Weekly* referred to Guggenheim's documentary film as "This Fall's MUST-SEE Documentary," describing the feature-length movie focused on public schooling and charter schools as a "penetrating, moving documentary" (Sperling, 2010, p. 49). Another review described the film as a "moving but vastly oversimplified brief on American educational inequality" (Goldstein, 2010, p. 20), criticizing Guggenheim's one-sided portrayal of "teachers' unions as the villains in the struggle to close the achievement gap, despite their long history of advocating for more school funding, smaller class sizes and better school resources and facilities" (p. 21).

In addition to the debate in the popular press related to the accuracy of claims in the film, meaning-making is impacted by whether a viewer had prior experience as a student, parent, or educator. One U.S. teacher preparation program designed a viewing experience for the film where candidates were also provided with a "*detournement*—i.e., a countertext—that challenged the main arguments of the documentary" (p. 69). According to Trier (2013), "the project clearly caused several students to reconsider their initial agreements with some of the more problematic claims, assertions, and arguments made by *Waiting for Superman*" (p. 71). Many possible meanings are determined by the film itself and the possible meanings of the social and world context outside the film.

5. Documentary Film: Visual Qualitative Research Methodology

The authors claim our work as an arts-based practice that grew out of advances in theory, including feminism, postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, critical race theory, queer theory, and other theoretical perspectives (Leavy, 2015). According to Grbich (2013), "The impact and sensory experience of the image on the viewer rather than an emphasis on the artist's meaning or someone else's interpretation provides the postmodern focus in art" (p. 109). The therapeutic nature of the arts and their healing powers stimulated the "current practice of arts-based research practices" (Leavy, 2015, p. 11). We viewed documentary film as an opportunity to step outside the formalized methods of the interpretive turn forged in the 1980s (St. Pierre, 2015) which tend to block new ways of thinking. St. Pierre (2015) stated, "In fact, the new empiricist might well argue that attempting to follow a given research method

will likely foreclose possibilities for the 'new.' The new empiricist researcher, then, is on her own, inventing inquiry in the doing" (p. 81). Finley (2011) makes the distinction between traditional qualitative research and arts-based inquiry:

> "Communicating the "ordinary extraordinary" (Dissanayake, 1997) through vernacular expressions in the context of mass media popular culture—radio, television, film—does more than introduce dialogues that "automatically contain, constrain, or even liberate us," writes Joli Jensen (2002, p. 198). "Instead these cultural forms are part of an ongoing, humanly constructed conversation about the reality we are shaping as we participate in it" (p. 198)" (p. 443).

In translating traditional methods used in qualitative investigations to collect and analyze data, such as facilitating interviews or focus groups and then transcribing the data, the following procedures are applied to planning an investigation using documentary film as research:

- **Site selection** → The researcher determines where to position the camera "to explore the bounds of space and place where the human body is a tool for gathering and exploring meaning in experience" (Finley, 2011, p. 444).

- **Participant selection and informed consent** → The researcher applies sampling procedures to identify a community of learners for engaging a political project to promote social justice using film and obtains consent using a Media Release form. Participant selection might be based on intensity sampling defined by Patton (2015) as "information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely" (p. 267).

- **Inquiry Phase** → The researcher acquires the necessary equipment and production crew expertise to record high-quality video and audio, and plans filming schedule and protocols (e.g. semi-structured questions that will explore "meaning in experience" (Finley, 2011, p. 444) in a videotaped interview session). Semi-structured interviews, typically organized around a set of predetermined, open-ended questions, allow the researcher to ask all participants the same questions and to contextualize the interview process according to the unique experiences of each participant, which produces a unique set of questions for each participant (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Merriam, 2009).

- **Making Meaning** → The researcher makes meaning of the video images and context to select the clips that best represent theory and concepts – engaging in "conceptual practices" (p. 91), which St. Pierre (2015) suggests lead the researcher to identify those theories and concepts to "think about whatever she wants to think about . . . when confused . . . go back to the texts and reread the theory, to plunge into the words of scholars who inspire (p. 90).

- **Sharing results** → The researcher sequences the video clips and completes a post-production process (e.g. recording narration, adding title cards, etc.) to create the documentary film, then seeks venues to share the results with an audience.

According to Friend and Militello (2015), "Video as a research instrument has the potential to transform research from something we do *to* subjects to something we do *with* participants—co-generation of knowledge through inclusion of authentic voices that can be shared with a wide audience" (p. 91). Smith (2009) cautions filmmakers setting out to support concepts of social justice

through their work; "Despite the intention of the filmmakers, their position of privilege does not consistently provide a perspective from which the representation of the other is acknowledged or challenged" (p. 159). For this reason, seeking to move the research from the interpretive turn forged in the 1980s is warranted for a new empiricism that will challenge the viewers of documentary films generated using these methods to re-examine their own beliefs and understandings about issues of race, class, gender, and other social constructions that support inequities within schools and societies.

5.1. Two documentary film examples: *What Kids and Teens Love and Hate about School.*

These qualitative research methods were applied to the production of two documentary short films, whose purpose was two-fold: (1) to use critical race theory to help educational leadership candidates and community members think more deeply about the educational experiences of elementary and secondary students within urban educational institutions, where enduring deficit orientations are likely to exist, and (2) to enable the film viewers to engage in their own meaning-making of students' voices leading to school renewal based on what students want from their urban schools. According to Creswell (2007), "The focus of all qualitative research needs to be an understanding of the phenomenon being explored rather than solely on the reader, the researcher, or the participants" (p. 3). The phenomena of inquiry for these projects included the experiences of students within both traditional district and charter public urban schools.

Three elementary schools and two high schools located in the urban core of a Midwestern city agreed to participate in the documentary film projects. All students were invited to participate in a videotaped interview using a letter and a media release form that was signed by parents or guardians of the students who wanted to be interviewed. There were 144 students in grades 1 through 8 interviewed for the *What Kids love and Hate about School* documentary short film, and 28 high school students interviewed for the *Teens* project. Questions guiding the interviews were crafted based upon language that could be readily comprehended by students, using semi-structured questioning techniques that included:

- What are things you like about school?
- What are the things you hate about school
- Tell us what would you change about school?
- If you could talk to teachers, what would you say to them?

During the semi-structured interviews, when we asked about what things they liked about schools, contextualized questions often included: What was it that you like about…? How did it make you feel? How did other students respond? Interviews ranged from 25 to 30 minutes with elementary participants and 30 to 40 minutes with high school students. Time was spent at the beginning of the interview to establish trust and rapport with participants.

We listened to students' voices as a critical component for supporting urban school renewal and used a deconstruction process, "exposing a concept as ideological or culturally constructed rather than as natural or a simple reflection

of reality" (Alcoff cited in Collins, 1990, p. 4). As we interacted with their stories, a deconstruction process was used tha aligned with Clandinin and Connelly's (1994) methods for the study of personal experiences:

> ". . . simultaneously focused in four directions: inward and outward, backward and forward. By inward we mean the internal conditions of feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions, and so on. By outward we mean existential conditions, that is, the environment or what E. M. Bruner (1986) calls reality. By backward and forward we are referring to temporality, past, present, and future. To experience an experience is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way" (p. 417).

Making meaning began with theory and concepts, as St. Pierre (2015) suggested and much of our theorizing was guided by Foucault's (1978; 1980) notions of dangerous memories and the capillary function of power; ". . . the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday lives" (p. 39).

Following theorizing about the experiences expressed in students' voices, we sought to identify themes in the video recording through enumerative and thematic coding (Grbich, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013) guided by a sociocultural approach coupled with the use of interpretive frameworks aligned to the elements of race, class, gender, ability, language, disabilities, sexual orientation, and expectations. We listened for these elements in the voices of students and how the elements were connected to dangerous memories connected to curriculum, instruction, and assessment; with attention to issues of power and privilege. As we proceeded with analysis, other meanings were illuminated in the data. Coding enabled us to "retrieve and categorize similar data chunks so [we could] quickly find, pull out and cluster the segments relating to a particular research question…or theme" (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2013, p. 72). Making meaning of the video images and context supported the selection of clips that best represent theory and concepts.

The stories of students in our arts-based inquiry through the lens of CRT revealed their experiences in curriculum, instruction, and assessment; exposing a racialized form of teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2004) that is performed in spaces populated by poor students and students of color to ensure a diet of poor skills that prepare students to be cogs in the wheel of labor while their more affluent peers are trained to be leaders. Students hated worksheets and felt diminished by low level skills; they wanted more hands-on learning, project-based learning, and more choice. Thematic analysis led to an understanding of the students' stories within the context of urban schooling, demonstrating a "broader interpretive framework that people use to make sense of everyday happenings/episodes, usually involving past-present-future linking" (Grbich, 2013, p. 221).

While theorizing about the meanings that may be apparent in the video clips, it is important for the filmmaker to realize that each viewer of the documentary film makes their own meaning after listening to the stories of participants. The two documentary films produced by the co-authors have been

shared at professional organization conferences such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the American Educational Studies Association (AESA). The stories included in the *What Kids Love and Hate about School* (Friend & Caruthers, 2007) documentary film have been used as an instructional tool by educational leadership and teacher preparation faculty within higher education institutions, and as a professional development resource in school districts. After viewing the film and discussing the value of listening to students as part of a school leadership preparation program, one elementary school teacher described her response to the students talking about bullying:

> *I know bullying is a problem in most schools; however, I have made it my goal to create a ridicule-free classroom. After viewing the video, I went to school and brought it up with my students during morning meeting. I told them about the video I watched and asked them if they ever feel this way at our school, even though we have talked about how to avoid it. I was shocked by the students' answers. They told me that bullying was not a problem in the classroom, but the playground, lunchroom, and bus was another story.*

This teacher told her college classmates that she talked with a bus driver regarding a particular bullying situation, and realized that a school leader needs to be responsible for involving all members of the school community to create a positive and safe learning environment. This belief and intervention on behalf of her students was informed by creating a space within her classroom to listen to the students talk about their experiences with bullying, sparked by the meaning that she had formed after viewing the documentary film.

6. Ethical Considerations

In the United States there are protections in place to safeguard human subjects who participate in research investigations. Social Sciences Institutional Review Boards (SSIRBs) housed within higher education institutions have the authority to approve research study proposals. As scholars in the academy who embraced the opportunity to engage in documentary film as research, we initially presented our plans for the *What Kids Love and Hate about School* project to our university's SSIRB. The innovative nature of our methods was debated among SSIRB members, and after a face-to-face questioning session with us, the SSIRB determined that our project did not conform to their definition of research. Instead of the Informed Consent procedures, we were directed to use a Media Release form that was approved by the legal department of our university. The SSIRB decision was that documentary filmmaking did not fall under their authority to approve human subjects research, therefore we have proceeded in our work by obtaining informed consent using the Media Release form with students who are over the age of 18, or with the parents or legal guardians of students who are under the age of 18, provided in the participant's native language.

Technologies for video production now provide individuals who have little or no professional experience or educational preparation with the opportunity to create films that may or may not adhere to ethical standards. Popular platforms such as YouTube and Vimeo enable amateur and professional filmmakers alike to share their work with a global audience. The Internet also allows researchers engaged in documentary film production to communicate

with the general public, thus making research more attainable to the public (Gadanidis & Borba, 2013). Currently, viewers can choose from a plethora of web-based videos, reality television programs, and cable channels dedicated to broadcasting documentary films. According to Ellis (2012), "This increase in the general level of appreciation of how documentary works has also led to sharply different judgements about its ethics. One person's acceptable technique is another person's unacceptable exploitation" (pp. 155-156).

The researcher who engages in documentary film methods must question her own subjectivity and the choices that are made in each stage of the production process, as described by Friend and Militello (2015):

> "The choices are seemingly infinite when determining points of entry during the pre-production phase of the project. Who will be filmed? Where will the filming take place, keeping in mind that the space needs to be large enough to provide depth of frame, and quiet enough to record high-quality audio. What questions will be asked during the interview? Will the researcher appear in front of the camera? Will the interview participant be filmed in a wide shot to include more context, a close-up to capture minute facial expressions, or both?" (p. 92).

Schenkel (2014) examined the notion of "truth and reality" in documentary filmmaking, including the ways in which "techniques associated with fictional filmmaking [music, voiceover narration, etc.] can enhance a documentary's ability to present truth" (p. 70).

Just as peer-reviewed journals publish text-based scholarship that meets a set of criteria that include ethical standards of research, there is a need for documentary filmmakers working in the field of education to adhere to rigorous standards of practice that protect participants in the filming. The *Journal of Video Ethnography*, a juried publication that began in the fall of 2014 title, is one example of a process for refereed publication of films. Similar to methods that gauge the impact of scholarly work published in journals, further work is needed to determine the impact of documentary films intended to illuminate issues of social justice in urban education. Portello (2014) posed the following question:

> "Awards, audience demographics, social media activity, word-of-mouth feedback, legislation or policy change, rallies and other organized events, media appearances, donations to related charities, ubiquity on class syllabi—what data spells out a film's role in social change most clearly?" (p. 56).

As seen with the film, *Waiting for Superman*, despite its media attention there was no impact in terms of new policies or equity of educational opportunities for youth attending urban schools. In order for positive and sustainable change to occur, filmmakers must address the intersections of race and poverty within urban educational settings in the United States.

7. Conclusion: Documentary Film as a Post-Modernist Project

Positioning this project within a postmodernist perspective supports the premise that, "language inevitably and inherently is built on the assumptions and worldview of the social group that has constructed it and the culture of

which it is a part" (Patton, 2015, p. 125). Deconstructionism is a postmodernist task, whereby one takes a text apart through deconstruction to reveal its critical assumptions and the ideologies it serves. Power and privilege are maintained through the control of the language, and those who have the most power decide what counts as knowledge. Amplifying the voices of those who are silenced and less powerful begins to erase powerful texts of deficit theories and stereotyping. Storytelling provide educators and students opportunities to collaboratively talk about difficult issues and things that matter. Underneath all stories is the paradigm of the personal for illuminating and understanding the perspectives of voice which can be used to liberate ourselves and others or to silence more vulnerable individuals. Bell's (2009) types of stories are theories about how people construct the genealogy of race and transmit the stories to others.

Bell (2009) theorized that stories have individual and collective purposes giving us the chance to talk about "issues that are usually seen as out there and separate from us, or that we are afraid to see as part of our lives, such as racism" (p. 109). Through working with a team of individuals wishing to explore how stories about racism are transmitted, Bell and team interviewed administrators, teachers, and individuals who worked in social service type careers. They collected 106 transcripts of the stories about race and theorized about four different story types contained in the data. The stories that White people told were generally about being color blind or not being racist; in contrast, the stories people of color told described how racism affected their lives. The teams' analyses of the stories led to four different types of stories; "stock stories, concealed stories, resistance stories, and counter stories" (Bell, 2009, p. 108).

Stock stories are hegemonic narratives that preserve the status quo. Bell (2009) states, "I also think of stock stories as owning stock. That is, hegemonic stories are stock stories that give White people stock in society in terms of privilege and advantage --- stock that is not available to other folks" (p. 109). The second type of stories Bell (2009) describes as "underneath the stock stories" (p. 112) are concealed stories that talk back to the stock stories. These stories are told from those on the margin, groups of people who live outside the dominant society. To hear the stories about racism from the margins means people must be invited to the center of mainstream conversations (Bell, 2009). The third type acknowledges that there are countless stories of individuals who have fought for decades to counter the stock stories and to promote equality. Many of these stories are grounded in local communities and have not received much attention in history books. Lastly, counter stories (Bell, 2009) drew on critical race theory (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Lynn & Parker, 2006) which aims to help others understand instances of racial inequity by listening to the stories shared by the people who experienced oppression (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Through listening to counter stories those at the center learn about the experiences of people at the margins of the society telling the "story of those experiences that have not been told . . . and used [as] a tool for analyzing and challenging the stories of those in power and whose story is a natural part of the dominant discourse" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2005, p. 72).

Documentary film is not without tensions in the academy where quantitative methods still remain the dominant mode of research, and qualitative research often plays a secondary role to quantitative; even in mixed methods

designs, qualitative research is often viewed as an add-on. According to Haw and Hadfield (2011), "The current discourses tend to position video in either purely a data collection tool or a methodological novelty capable of serving almost any purpose, the Swiss Army knife of qualitative research" (p. 2). Woo (2008) also suggests that just as documentary film may not be seen as "scientific" enough, it is often viewed as not meeting the requirements of artistic expression by arts practitioners. Perhaps, what Woo (2008) has to say about making our work public for audiences is a much more moralistic responsibility of researchers toward their audiences:

> "Whether we are researchers experimenting with different forms or acting as mentors to such researchers, we should not be paralyzed by prevailing notions of quality. Rather we should take the heat when our work does not find an appreciative audience and assess for ourselves whether the criticism can fuel better in the future" (p. 326).

The audience that Woo references is an audience that is beyond the academic community which requires creating forms of work that others are enticed to engage with and learn from.

As Petrarca and Hughes (2014) contend, the audience should extend beyond the academic community and clarify abstractions and complexities that are often difficult to derive from text. One such example from our documentary film involved a fourth-grade student who wanted to transform the basement of the school into a roller skating rink where students could go after they finished their work. While this wish could not be fulfilled, her desire to be more engaged in learning through an activity called 'rocket math' was communicated to the teachers to reinforce pedagogical practices that many students found motivating and that were correlated to improved mathematics achievement results. This same school also had an anti-bullying policy that was not working, according to the stories shared by students, which led to transformative conversations among students and educators to address pervasive bullying issues in their elementary school.

Petrarca and Hughes (2014) argue that the "academy ought to consider documentary film as an alternative form of scholarly work and knowledge outside the wall of the university" (p. 575). They suggest that one way to do this is to align film work with traditional research as a way to support its claim as scholarly work; in other words, film work should be "framed within a research context" (p. 576). They ask, "Again, how do we deal with the traditionalists? How do we convince them that this is research?" (p. 577). More befitting is St. Pierre's (2015) criticism, introduced earlier in the paper, that we have overworked qualitative research to the extent that it blocks our thinking and we can't see the new. She insists that "in conventional humanist qualitative methodology, to be is to know" (p. 77); and while this work is not new, ontological issues were captured earlier in the work of poststructural theorists such as Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, and others. The current work has been termed "as affect theory (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010), thing theory (Brown, 2001), actor network theory (Latour, 2005), assemblage theory (De Landa, 2006) . . . , the new empiricism, and the posthuman (Braidotti, 2013)" (St. Pierre, 2015, p. 77). An urgent question, according to Woo (2008) is, "How can education research (whether arts-based or science-based) be sufficiently

persuasive to stand on its own outside traditional research venues?" (p 326). We contend that adopting the new empiricism is one way of moving documentary film to a home of its own.

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