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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses video documentary as an alternative research method for exploring critical issues in education. The critical issues that are discussed are the in-school curriculum versus the nonschool curriculum, the devaluation and absence of the cultures of people of color, and the absence of student voice and alienation from the curriculum. Several examples of video documentaries are discussed. As education research continues to develop, it must cultivate a greater appreciation for the wisdom and experience of students and the quality they add to the understanding of their learning environments. Video documentary is one tool to bring this about. (Contains 55 references.) (SLD)

Investigation of Critical Issues in Curriculum through Documentary

By

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AERA 2001 Conference

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Abstract

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Paper Presented at the AERA annual conference in Seattle, Washington, April 2001

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Investigation of Critical Issues in Curriculum Through Documentary

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In keeping with this year's theme of "What we know and how we know it," our paper looks at video documentary as an alternative research method for exploring critical issues in education. The critical issues that we focus on are the in-school curriculum versus the non-school curriculum, the devaluation and absence of the cultures of people of color, and the absence of student voice and alienation from the curriculum.

Video Documentary as an Alternative Form of Research

Qualitative research is concerned primarily with meaning. (Glesne, 1999) It seeks not to prescribe or predict, but to describe and understand. Whereas quantitative research assumes a positivist orientation, wherein "a fixed, measurable reality exists external to people," qualitative research is interpretive in nature, and "portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing." (p. 5). To comprehend the nature of these constructed realities, qualitative researchers "regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (p. 5). In other words, they seek to better understand the meaning people give to their experiences. Qualitative methods call for the extensive observation, exploration, and interpretation of some phenomenon of interest. It is work that William Ayers (2000) has said is more like a search than *re*-search.

Investigators choose to use qualitative methods for a variety of reasons. Creswell (1998) outlines eight reasons that an individual might decide to undertake a qualitative study, which include the nature of the research question (a "how" or "what" question rather than a "why"); the need to present an up-close, detailed view of a topic; the desire to study individuals in their natural setting; the preference to present information in a literary style; and an interest in taking on the role of active learner, "who can tell the story from the participants' view rather than as an 'expert' who passes judgment on participants." (p. 18) In recent years, increasing numbers of educational researchers have utilized qualitative approaches in their studies, and qualitative methods have gradually gained more acceptance and legitimacy in the educational research community. Ethnographic designs, case studies, biographies, and narratives--among other

qualitative approaches--are now employed with frequency in studies of schools and schooling. (Jaeger, 1997).

Despite this growing acceptance of qualitative inquiry, a debate has persisted over the appropriateness of non-academic forms of writing, and other artistic renditions, as research. Can fictional writing, such as a novel, be considered research? How about theater, visual art, film, or video? Kilbourn (1999) asserts that fiction, so long as it contains the qualities we expect of a thesis, evidences self-conscious method, and coheres as a whole, should be acceptable to satisfy the doctoral thesis requirement. More generally, Eisner (1995), citing examples from literary genres and film, suggests that too hard a line is drawn between what is viewed as research and what isn't, pointing out that even "scientific" inquiry often contains artistic qualities. And Barone and Eisner (1997) argue persuasively for a place at the educational research table for arts-based inquiry, including non-written forms of expression.

In their defense of arts-based inquiry, Barone and Eisner (1997) focus most of their attention on written prose, but this is not, they point out, because other forms of expression are less valuable as research--it is because existing examples of them are scarce. The authors encourage us to broaden our definition of what counts as research, pointing out that "neither language nor number have a monopoly on the means by which humans represent what they have come to know" (p. 90). Our experience of the world, Barone and Eisner suggest, is "multisensory," and it follows that inquiry into that lived experience should reflect its multisensory nature. Media such as video and film are interpretive and evocative, and allow their audiences to understand and make meaning in ways that are not possible with literal language. If, as Barone and Eisner suggest, the primary aim of educational research is to further understanding so that educational practice can be improved, is it not possible that a film or video that furthers such understanding be considered research?

It is our position that video documentaries provide an accessible forum for exploring critical issues in education, and that artfully produced documentaries that increase our

understanding of educational phenomena should be considered research. As technology has made high-quality video recording simpler, even for those with limited technical backgrounds, its potential value to the research community has become greater. Eisner (1998) has acknowledged the persistent separation that exists between the work of educational researchers, who publish in technical, densely worded, narrowly circulated journals, and practitioners, whose focus is often limited to their day-to-day classroom realities and who largely view researchers as “strangers in their midst” (p. 171). The utilization of video as a means of documentation could help bridge this gap between the work of researchers and teachers. It could serve as a “translation” medium in the age-old theory/practice divide, helping to bring theoretical ideas into the realm of “common sense” and making research come alive for classroom teachers.

In addition, video provides a powerful tool for giving voice to marginalized members of the community and for informing the public about critical issues faced by today’s youth (Saunders, 1997). Because of its potential to move and provoke audiences emotionally as well as intellectually, video documentary also seems an ideal medium for research that serves an advocacy function, for inquiry that is empowering to its participants. Rappaport (1990), cited in Ristock and Pennell (1996), describes research that empowers as that which is “committed to identifying, facilitating or creating contexts in which heretofore silent and isolated people, those who are ‘outsiders’ in various settings, organizations and communities, gain understanding, voice and influence over decisions that affect their lives” (p. 2). This is research done not solely for research’s sake, to further a career, to ensure tenure, to present at a conference, or to impress one’s peers in the academy, but research that is in and of the world, research that makes a difference, research that matters. It is this sort of inquiry that we, as current and former classroom teachers, believe is of vital importance in the field of education.

Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary, directed and co-produced by Los Angeles public school teacher Laura Angelica Simón in 1996, is, we believe, an excellent example of the potential of video documentary as educational research. The video looks at the impact of

California's anti-immigrant initiative, Proposition 187, on students, teachers, and community members at the Hoover Street Elementary School. Simón, a teacher at Hoover, narrates *Fear and Learning*, which centers its narrative on four people: Mayra, one of Simón's former students and an undocumented immigrant from El Salvador; Arcelia, a Mexican-American activist teacher who grew up in the community; Diane, a white teacher who supports 187; and Carmen, a Mexican immigrant parent who does volunteer work at Hoover.

So just how does *Fear and Learning* qualify as research? Based on Glesne's (1999) predispositions of interpretive inquiry, we would suggest that Simón's documentary fits the bill much more adequately than many academic studies that pass themselves off as qualitative research. First and foremost, *Fear and Learning* is concerned with the meaning its participants make of Proposition 187 and related issues. Director Simón includes multiple voices in the film, each of whom constructs reality through her own lens (and then through Simón's). The purpose of the film is not--indeed cannot be--to predict or generalize. Instead, Simón is interested in particulars, in contextualizing Proposition 187 and exploring how it impacts a handful of people in a single Los Angeles school. She is after understanding, not causal explanations, and her work is interpretive on multiple levels: the participants interpret their experiences for Simón, who--through selective camera angles and editing, choosing what to include and what to ignore--interprets them for her audience. We--the audience--then add our own interpretation to what we see and hear in the finished film.

In addition, it is apparent that Simón began her project not with a hypothesis or theory, but--again in keeping with interpretivist predispositions--with an interest in a particular phenomenon. In an interview in *Teacher Magazine* (1997), Simón explained her motivation for making *Fear and Learning*. "In the whole debate [surrounding Proposition 187]...I didn't see anybody talking to the kids," she said. "Nobody was listening to them, nobody was hearing how much of an emotional and psychological burden we were creating for them. Nobody was giving them a voice." Utilizing a naturalistic approach, in which she observed and interviewed

participants in their natural settings, Simón accomplishes that and more. She seeks out the complexities of her chosen phenomenon, broadening her “study” to include not only the voices of students but of teachers and community members as well. And the vivid images of Hoover Elementary and its surrounding community, Pico-Union, that are woven throughout *Fear and Learning* are, we would argue, the visual equivalent of what Clifford Geertz called “thick description.”

As for Simón’s role as “researcher,” she does not pretend to be detached or distanced from the story she tells. Her positionality as a teacher at the school, as a child of immigrant parents, and as a community member are made explicit in her narration of the film. Simón is clearly empathetic toward Mayra and the other undocumented students at Hoover, and concerned about the potentially damaging impact of 187, but her consciousness of her situatedness actually pushes her to portray the complexities of the controversy in her film. “People on both sides [of the 187 debate] were angry at me,” Simón told *Teacher Magazine*. “But I didn’t see this film as a piece of propaganda. In fact, it’s not even a political movie in my eyes. It’s a historical movie. It captures a time and a place. It is a time when society decided to do something in a school, which really divided the school. And the place is right here. I wanted to show this world, and let people make up their own minds. It’s not for me to choose it. Reality lives in the gray; the truth is never one way or the other.”

Of course, *Fear and Learning* is not without its problems (but then again, neither is any other piece of research, whether interpretive or positivist). The taping of the video footage took place over three consecutive weeks, a period of time some qualitative researchers would argue is too brief to document the temporal changes that inevitably mark any fieldwork site (Glesne, 1999). Ethical questions arise around the use of young children such as Mayra as primary informants, and it is unclear in the film how this matter was handled. A scene that shows a young boy crying as he tells of witnessing a friend getting killed also raises concerns over ethics. Some might question Simón’s decision not to appear in the video (even though her narrative voice is

heard throughout), or argue that there is not enough analysis in the piece, perhaps claiming that Simón goes overboard in allowing the images and words of her participants to “speak for themselves.”

Despite these possible shortcomings, we believe *Fear and Learning* should be considered an example of educational research. It is, unquestionably in our estimation, an original contribution to knowledge--more specifically, to the natural history of what it means to be a teacher and a student in an immigrant community in the xenophobic times in which we live. In fact, we think it is precisely the type of research that more of us in the educational research community should be doing: research that speaks a language teachers and parents can understand, that bridges the gap between academics and practitioners, and that has the potential to bring about positive change in the quality of education we provide to all of our children.

The In-School Curriculum and the Non-School Curriculum

In this section, we will discuss the components of both in-school and non-school curricula, and how teachers can draw from students’ experiences outside of class to engage children in learning in the school setting. The in-school curriculum consists of overt, hidden, and null curricula, as well as extracurricular activities. The non-school curriculum refers to the experiences that promote learning outside of school (Schubert, 1997).

First, the overt curriculum refers to that which is explicitly taught. In public schools, overt curricula are developed based upon national, state and/or local standards which are organized by subject matter. For example, Illinois has developed academic standards for English language arts, mathematics, science, social science, physical development and health, fine arts, and foreign language (Illinois State Board of Education, 2001).

In the urban classroom, teachers use a variety of modalities to foster their curriculum including traditional and progressive learning activities. In addition to maintaining records, participating in parent conferences, attending staff meetings, and performing school duties, Martin Haberman (1996) argues that educators perform twelve instructional functions. These

include “giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, settling disputes, punishing non-compliance, marking papers, (and) giving grades” (Haberman, 1996, p. 119).

Taken together, these functions constitute what Haberman refers to as a “pedagogy of poverty” (1996, p. 119) in urban schools, undergirded by a “logic” that is explained in the following syllogisms:

- 1) “Teaching is what teachers do. Learning is what students do. Therefore, students and teachers are engaged in different activities.
- 2) Teachers are in charge and responsible. Students are those who still need to develop appropriate behavior. Therefore, when students follow teachers’ direction, appropriate behavior is being taught and learned.
- 3) Students represent a wide-range of individual differences. Many students have handicapping conditions and lead debilitating home lives. Therefore, ranking of some sort is inevitable; some students will end up at the bottom of the class while others will finish at the top.
- 4) Basic skills are a prerequisite for learning and living. Students are not necessarily interested in basic skills. Therefore, directive pedagogy must be used to ensure that youngsters are compelled to learn their basic skills.” (Haberman, 1996, p. 121)

We offer the following responses to the above syllogisms:

- 1) Teaching and learning may be experienced by both the teacher and student (Michie, 1999). It is problematic when a teacher is of the opinion that s/he has nothing else to learn or cannot learn from students. Teachers stop growing when they limit themselves in that manner. Students can teach educators about their worlds outside of class. By doing this, they let their teachers know what their needs and interests are. This can inform the teacher about how to engage students in learning by making it more meaningful to them. According to Spring, “By never engaging children in discussions about what they think, authoritarian parents and teachers prepare children to be unthinking objects of history” (1999, p. 149).
- 2) When teachers view a major portion of their work as having students follow directions, what they are doing, in effect, is teaching students to be followers, not critical thinkers. This, in turn, serves to prepare students for a labor force in which they are the workers instead of leaders of corporations (Anyon, 1997)
- 3) This syllogism lends itself to the “at-risk” labeling of students. If we think of our students from a deficit standpoint, it can lead to teaching less rather than more. (Delpit, 1995)
- 4) Directive pedagogy teaches children facts by rote instruction, an activity that neither inspires nor requires critical thinking or any interaction (questioning, etc.) with the concepts being learned. Regarding a phenomenon made popular by Max Stirner, Spring states, “Stirner refers to any thought that an individual cannot give up as a ‘wheel in the head’... A wheel in the head controls individual

will and uses the individual rather than being used by the individual (1999, p. 40).”

Second, within overt curricula are hidden curricula which include the impact of socialization on learning (Jackson, 1968) and what is conveyed by subtle messages from teachers as they model behavior. Consider the following:

- What do students learn when teachers only model authoritarian behavior? They learn to follow the lead of authority (which alone is not a negative phenomenon).
- What do students learn when silence is mandated as the only appropriate behavior? They learn to be passive recipients of knowledge.
- What do students learn when curricula revolve around the chapters in a book? They learn that textbooks are the main source for the acquisition of knowledge.
- What do students learn when teachers teach from a script? They learn that in teaching and learning there is no place for creativity.
- What do students learn when their voices are not considered in creating curricula? They learn that student voice is not valued in the creation of curricula.
- What do students learn when curricula are limited to depictions of a dominant culture and the way in which that culture views the world? They learn to accept and value the dominant culture. According to Taxel, “... schools confer preeminence on the language forms, world views, ideological, historical, and cultural perspectives of the dominant social groups, thus legitimating – as logical, natural, and/or the result of merit – the power, prestige, and status of these groups in society” (2000, p. 302). According to Delpit (1995), invisibility is a problem in the curriculum. Students of color do not see themselves represented in the curriculum.
- What do students learn when curricula are void of popular culture? They learn that the interests of students are not taken into consideration in the development of curricula.
- What do students learn when curricula provide limited or no consideration for multiple intelligences? They learn that the manner in which students acquire knowledge is expected to be the same for everyone, and that students who cannot learn in the same manner as others have deficits.
- What do students learn when the arts are relegated to the null curricula? They learn that art is not important.
- What do students learn when they have no say in how schools are run? They learn that school is a place where student voice is not valued.

(The above questions are rhetorical. The “answers” given represent a point of view, but are not intended to be definitive.)

Third, the null curriculum refers to that which is not taught (Eisner, 1979). When considering all that is not taught, though the list is non-exhaustive, let us consider a few topics

that might relate to a body of students (and could stand alone as classes or be incorporated into subject matter across the curriculum, but often are not):

- Alternative lifestyles
- The politics of race, class, and gender
- Economic independence
- Building and maintaining good credit
- Parenting
- Careers
- Relationships
- Decision-making
- History from non-mainstream perspectives
- Dysfunctional families

Again, a lack of knowledge about students' worlds outside of school and the silencing of students' voices make it difficult for teachers to create curricula that speak to the needs and interests of students.

The null curriculum also pertains to "mainstream" subjects such as fine arts. Even though most states have a standard for fine arts, very often art is either eliminated due to a lack of funding or minimally taught as a separate subject as opposed to being incorporated into the curriculum across content-area. The fact that fine arts are often the first subjects to be cut or minimized demonstrates to students that art is considered superfluous. According to Eisner:

Perhaps the most important contribution that my immersion in the visual arts has made to my views of education is the realization that neither cognition nor epistemology can be adequately conceptualized if the contributions of the arts to these domains are neglected. Those of us professionally socialized in education, not to say the culture at large, have lived in a sea of assumptions about mind and knowledge that have marginalized the arts by putting them on the back burners of mind and understanding... Curricula in which the arts are absent or inadequately taught rob children of what they might otherwise become.

(Eisner, 2000, pp. 37-42)

Fourth, extracurricular activities are a part of the in-school curriculum inasmuch as the school sponsors them and they usually take place within the school or on school grounds (Schubert, 1997). Often these activities include sports, arts and crafts, club affiliations involving ethnic groups, drama, language, etc.

Although schools are considered to be traditional settings in which learning takes place, much of what children learn is acquired outside of school (Schubert, 1997). As previously stated, the non-school curriculum refers to experiences that promote learning outside of school. Sources of non-school curricula are families, peer relationships, communities, mass media, hobbies, jobs (for older children), and membership in organizations (Schubert, 1997).

Gonzalez' (1993) teacher research on the funds of knowledge is a good example of how teachers can discover a wealth of learning opportunities present in the homes and communities of their students. (Funds of knowledge refer to the many sources of knowledge that are present in the homes and communities of students.) In Gonzalez' study, a team of teachers went into the homes of some of their students to conduct ethnographic research; after which, they shared their findings with one another and a team of university researchers to collaborate on ways in which to incorporate the findings into activities for their curricula. In doing this, not only were they able to engage their students in meaningful learning activities, but they were also able to build a level of trust with students and their parents.

Entrance into students' homes and communities also informs teachers regarding the mores, traditions, family values, peer relationships, hobbies, jobs, mass media, and club affiliations of their students; all of which, are sources of learning, and aspects of each can be incorporated into learning activities in the in-school curriculum.

According to Delpit (1995):

- 1) Educators need to know about their students' lives outside of school to determine social context and know the students' strengths that are perhaps hidden in school activities.
- 2) A problem that educators who are not from the community in which they teach face is the problem of ignorance of community norms. This ignorance fosters the formation of mistaken images/perceptions of parents and students.
- 3) We have created institutions of isolation, and we need to connect the school with the home and community.

Miller (1993) advocates a child-centered curriculum in which children are viewed as individuals, and their experiences outside of the classroom are relevant inside of the classroom.

Foster (1995) also advocates teaching the whole child. The student image that a teacher views in the classroom represents only a small portion of the total child. Awareness of the popular culture, mass media, home life, and communities that are a part of childrens' lives could serve to bridge the gap in both communication and knowledge. It could also pave the way to engaging students and making them active participants in learning, while enabling teachers to have a better understanding of the whole child.

Within a broader context of issues in *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary*, one story line follows a student (Mayra) from the school into the community. Through this video portrait, the multiple levels of the child's life unfold in the midst of an investigation of critical issues regarding racism, immigration, and bilingual education in the larger society. When the camera leaves the school, and follows the student into the community, we see her in a manner that the school environment prohibits us to view. In her "real" world, there is an ever-present threat of being discovered by the U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization, and deported. How can a teacher with only a limited (in-school) knowledge about the child's life circumstances begin to address her needs and build trust?

Through the Eyes of the Future is another example of a video documentary. It was produced by African American youths at ACT Charter School in Chicago's West Garfield Park neighborhood. Under the leadership of their teacher, these children took cameras into the community and interviewed business owners and residents as they showed scenes of daily life in the community (which included a scene involving an African American youth being harassed by police). The videographers also used this program as a forum to voice their opinions about the issues of racism and regentrification in Chicago. The teacher of these students took advantage of the funds of knowledge present in the students' communities to enhance their learning in the social sciences, language arts, communications, and technology as she learned about issues of importance to her students and certain realities of their lives.

Individually, the teachers who sponsored the projects leading to the creation of these videos learned about some of the critical issues facing their students. As is typical of qualitative research, the findings cannot be generalized in the traditional, “external validity” sense; however, each video has a powerful message to all educators/researchers: there are critical issues that affect children outside of the classroom that are relevant inside of the classroom.

The Devaluation and Absence of the Culture of People of Color

The ideals and values of this country are reflected in our educational system, as formal education, i.e. schooling, is aimed at reproducing the social fabric of this society, even if that fabric is one that is flawed (Willis et al., 1993). Some would argue that that fabric is one in which differences in regard to social class and race are perpetuated; thus, people from working class backgrounds are taught a curriculum that does not engender critical thinking and elicits satisfaction with the status quo, steering them to blue collar occupations. However, those from more affluent backgrounds are taught a curriculum that teaches them to challenge systems and make their own rules; thus creating critical thinkers who become the leaders in society (Anyon, 1996). This provides evidence that the curriculum that is taught in American schools is primarily concerned with reproducing the social order, not necessarily critical individuals (Boykin, 2001; Watkins, 2001; and Willis, 1993). Curriculum is created with the goals of society in mind and rarely are the voices of the students heard though they are expressing their disconnection and discontent with their learning experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1994 and Michie, 1999). In fact, voices of teachers are oftentimes absent in the construction of the curriculum as well, leaving the harsh reality that much of the curriculum that is developed and passed on to schools, is created in isolation and without the voices and sentiments of those most affected by it, the students (Freire, 1998).

Though the absence of students’ voices is an issue for students of all races and ethnicities, students of color are especially marginalized because their lived experiences are not among those that are represented in the text that they encounter on a daily basis (Banks, 1998; Ogbu, 1978 and

Hilliard). In fact, much of what is termed education today can be more rightfully called assimilation, as students of color daily face cultural issues as fundamental as language differences in school (Fine, 1986; Fordham, 1988; and Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Thus, resulting in an education experience that teaches, sometimes overtly, that the cultures of people of color is inferior and needs to be replaced by eurocentric models (Asante, 1987; Ogbu, 1978 and 1995; and Evans, 1985). What does the American schooling experience do to and for students of color and their perception of self? Does it educate for a sense of social upliftment and justice? Does it prepare them for a world in which they face social inequities? More importantly, what do these students think about the curriculum and how it shapes their perceptions of themselves and the world around them?

Towards a More “Culturally Relevant” Curriculum

It is clear that in American schooling experience is aimed at establishing certain ideals and values in the minds of students and that the curriculum is a means to that end. As Boykin states:

In the American public education system, schooling is more than the confluence of reading, writing, and arithmetic, so to speak. Indeed while these activities are going on, the schooling process also conveys certain ways of viewing the world, ways of codifying reality... It offers blueprints for living and for acceptable ways of functioning... It determines what is to be valued and esteemed and what are the proper forms of deportment and conduct. In short, there is a profound socialization agenda in schools, a cultural socialization agenda (Boykin, 1994; Hilliard, 1995; Banks & Banks, 1995). Thus, schools are not about reading, writing, and arithmetic per se. They are about the business of conveying such activities as they relate to certain cultural vantage points and as they are embedded in particular cultural substrates. Public schools were never conceived to be a culturally neutral exercise.

(Boykin, 2001, p.192)

However, these ideals and values do not align themselves with those of people of color since the curriculum excludes or marginalizes them, sometimes leaving students torn between the values of their culture and those eurocentric values presented in school. Everyday, students are faced with the competing curricula of their culture and school (Branch, 1996 and Liston & Zeichner, 1996).

In a study of student teachers, Liston and Zeichner showed that many prospective teachers come into the classroom, after being taught a university curriculum that devalues people of color, and openly voice their desires for students to leave their culture behind and assimilate:

...Estella needs to change. Her parents need to let her go. She needs to leave her past and culture behind in order to succeed... Estella's life will be wasted if she ends up like her parents... Estella needs to assimilate to the predominant values of American culture. Estella and her family live in the United States and if they are going to thrive here, they need to recognize the values and structures of this society.

(Liston & Zeichner, 1996, pp.10-11)

Thus, students of color sometimes experience a curriculum where their culture is absent or devalued and that is further perpetuated by teachers who have not been taught the value of other cultures. How do these realities affect these students' perceptions of themselves and the world around them?

Voices of Students of Color

We hear the voices of curricularists and teachers speaking out on the devaluation or negation of the cultural experience of students of color, but where are the voices of the students who are the most affected by the shortcomings of the curriculum? It is almost as if this marginalization and exclusion is happening to a group of unconscious people; however, nothing could be further from the truth. Students, even at the elementary level, are aware of the absence of their culture and the devaluation of it. As this exchange among two African-American sixth grade students in Ladson-Billings research shows:

Second student: Yeah, but you know how they're always talkin' about great things from Europe and how all these white people did so many great things, but you never hear about the great things from Africa. They talk about Egypt but they talk about it like it's not Africa.

Lewis: Why do you think that's so?

Second student: Well, because everybody can see the great things the Egyptians did, like the pyramids, so then if you just talk about Egypt maybe people won't think about it as a part of Africa.

Third student: What does that prove?

Second student: I didn't say it proved anything. I'm just sayin' that if you make people think of the Egyptians as white then you will think that only white people can make great things.

(Ladson Billings, 1994, p.85-86)

In this interaction, we see the political consciousness and social awareness, a consciousness that understands the social context in which they are living and equips them to interrogate what they are being taught and the motivations behind those teaching. As the second student states the motivations are negative and aimed at distorting and controlling African-American students' perceptions of self, "you will think that only white people can make great things." These are the reflections of a twelve-year-old and it is encouraging to know that he has these critical thinking skills. He echoes the same sentiments as did Carter G. Woodson more than sixty years ago when he wrote:

In history, of course, the Negro had no place in this curriculum....No thought was given to the history of Africa except so far as it had been a field of exploitation for the Caucasian. You might study the history as it was offered in our system from the elementary school throughout the university, and you would never hear Africa mentioned except in the negative.

(Woodson, 1933, p.21)

The disheartening part is that this is still the case decades later, and it bellows the exclamation that changes in the American school curriculum and its representations--or lack thereof--of people of African descent, as well as other people of color, is occurring in slow motion. However, the negative impact of the eurocentric curriculum is moving at warp speed as students struggle for academic achievement (Fine, 1986).

Students are also reflecting on the pressure to assimilate and believe in the eurocentric ways of being presented in educational settings, as well as the social inequities they face as people of color as one Latino student writes:

First of all I would like to say that many people have different ways of showing our culture. We also have different ways of showing our background. Just because I am partly American inside, I don't think that I am American, even though I was born one....I don't get treated well by teachers who are prejudiced. Many teachers get mad because I talk in Spanish in the room....each president doesn't do anything for the poor Mexican-American people. The president also

gives more money to the rich and less to the Mexicans. So if you're an American-Mexican, it doesn't mean that you're fully American. Then keep thinking that way and don't let anyone stop you from thinking that. So be proud that you're Mexican. I am.

(Michie, 1999,p.83)

The lack of continuity between school curriculum and the cultural experiences of people of color is recognized by educators and students alike; however, the void still remains to a large extent. Though there is a movement toward culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy and an inclusive curriculum, there is more work to be done to make this a reality for all students of color. The need for culturally responsive educational experiences is being voiced—even by the students themselves. They are aware of their marginalization; they are aware of how the American curriculum is failing them, and they are speaking out about it. The more pressing question remains, is anyone listening to them?

The Absence of Student Voice and Alienation from the Curriculum

Pedagogic research has long queried teachers, parents, administrators, policy makers, political leaders, and students to better understand the problems of cultural disconnection in the classroom and slow rates of learning in depressed urban areas, as indicated in national standardized tests (Anyon, 1997). But while researchers listen, analyze, and report what students are saying, there doesn't seem to be evidence of its general acceptance as consequential data to policymakers, or of its application in the child's learning environment (Walsh, 1991). In discounting the perceptions of children, we hobble ourselves as teachers/researchers, and diminish students' roles in their cognitive, social, and moral development. Denial of the worth of their voices' reflects back to the child, developing a negative and depreciated perception of their competence, communication, and acceptance (Erikson, 1966).

The individuals least questioned, on all matters pedagogic, are the real consumers for whom educators all work, the children. As agents of learning teachers offer students an interpretation of knowledge, but don't always consider the consequences of what and how they say things in class. What is at times neglected is the information teachers offer schoolchildren about

themselves--through the way they act in class, among their peers, and in daily routines within the school community. Teachers present students with lessons, but don't always consider the ways in which wisdom is imparted, or biases reflected in opinions, expressions and attitudes with the children in class (van Manen, 1986). Without student input, teachers have a poorer appreciation of their home environments and will likely be insensitive to or unaware of their social and emotional needs.

When teachers disparage low paying jobs at fast food restaurants and the people who work there, do they consider that some of those workers are the parents and siblings of their students? In class discussions are other cultures or countries defined as backwards, savage, or corrupt? Student input adds resources teachers need to better communicate with children and facilitate their learning.

It seems that many pre-packaged lessons on multiculturalism are generalist in nature, alien to the communities they are meant to serve, and indifferent to their culture. Rarely are the experts consulted members of, or representative of the school student bodies that will be using the curricular material. This disenfranchisement from their own education seems analogous to a doctor taking patients' pulses by holding someone else's hand. Any assumption that the children are not sophisticated enough to provide useful information ignores the demonstrated complexity of a child's thoughts in play, social exchanges and in the navigation of their own world (Schwab, 1996 and Zentella, 1997).

In our current environment of high-stakes testing, the primary focus of education is on the end results rather than to the conditions that impact learning. In American schools today, progress, as demonstrated on standardized tests in Reading and Math, appears to be its most important product. Social, cultural and emotional development is pushed back, at least until the tests are over. Issues that confound students' learning -- poverty, housing, transiency, ethnicity, language, and race -- and the ways students perceive of themselves in the learning environment are rarely central to school board plans or classroom curriculum. Rather than assess children individually

based upon their specific needs and achievement, schools instead use standardized tests of generally proscribed knowledge, to measure students' ability to know and learn. Such assessment tools fall short of discovering the students' individual needs or revealing their impediments to learning.

Increasing students' voices in their own learning is an important issue in the learning environment with regards to positions of visibility and authority in the classroom (Delpit, 1995). The power of authority, its acquisition, and the individual's placement within a culture permeate the classroom. Students, as the least powerful members of the classroom community, internalize the values of the power structure and struggle to find a place within its framework (Freire, 1970). Those with power are least able to see their privilege while those without power are, generally, most aware of its existence. Thus, teachers who see themselves as egalitarian and working for the students' best interests may be completely at odds with the children's cultures or notions of their learning priorities (Delpit, 1995).

Teachers may rigidly control their classroom or share power and still they will act as gatekeepers, dispensing authority and power. Intentionally or not, teachers offer position in the community and cede control, as students conform to their notions of what is correct, worthwhile, and meaningful learning (Delpit, 1995). Students who differ by culture or social status are offered restricted membership in the classroom and discouraged from attaining knowledge in their own language, (van Manen, 1990). Students from outside the dominant culture will see events differently and interpret via their cultural semantics. What is the Native American impression of Columbus, or Manifest Destiny? What does a Mexican immigrant student think of the Alamo or of the Mexican American War? What will be the minority students' impression of voice or their ability to articulate concerns if the majority culture is the only voice deciding what is meaningful?

Student perspective must be a critical element in curriculum design for a democratic society. Democracy relies on individual free expression and the inclusion of diverse talents and perspectives (Dewey, 1916). When we exclude voices from our dialogue on pedagogic issues we diminish the

resources and talents through which we can achieve improvement. We also inhibit participation in our democracy of many who would enrich and regenerate our culture. By excluding immigrant voices from the discussion, we eschew the wisdom of other cultures, and disregard our professed national heritage of tolerance and inclusion. We make it more difficult for new émigrés to join in the body politic of American society and confound their ability to communicate unique views and perspectives.

Many immigrant families entering America today face the loss of legal, economic, and social status (Valdés, 1996). They often go to large urban centers, where the work is, and enroll their children in school systems that are under-funded, under-staffed, and overcrowded. Students and teachers in the already over-taxed system give the immigrants cold comfort and little welcome as they enter the struggle for diminishing resources (Quint, 1994). Each day is an assault on their sociability, visibility, and viability as part of the learning environment. These children face cultural and language barriers to their learning and inhibited development of social interactive and cognitive skills (Vygotsky, 1986). The child's sense of self is impaired as a side effect of assimilation is the adoption of negative self-images and negative attitudes towards their native culture (Erikson, 1966). Over time, students question their worth in the mainstream culture and look for worth, validation, and acceptance elsewhere.

In looking at the absence of student voices in curriculum and learning, we turn again to a video that takes a close look at immigration, children voices, teacher voices, and their interaction within the school community. In *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary*, viewers meet some members of the school's immigrant student population and we see, through their eyes, the community, the school, and the attitudes, actions, and words of their teachers. The documentary also offers the opinions and emotions of the teachers concerning the political and social issues of the proposition. Both teachers and students speak of each other in a politically charged environment, often, at odds over issues of trust, culture, and human rights. Their words provide insight into the values that they hold through seeing their day-to-day actions, at times affected and

at other times unfiltered, as they work and talk within the school community. The interactions between teachers and students reveal a deeper sense of who each is and what their lives are like within the school community. What is not said informs the viewer as much as what is said in the interviews, exposing some of the moral, ethical, cultural, and racial struggles that students encounter in the business and practice of education.

Most revealing in the video are moments of teachers with students in the classroom. In their discussions with students, teachers reveal to the students, and the audience, their personal and public values, their notions of what is American and their notions of what is foreign. Some teachers reflect their hopes and fears they hold for these most fragile learners. Other teachers trumpet their liberality, yet seem indifferent or ignorant to the students' living conditions, their struggle to hold on to their culture, or the conditions that brought them to leave their home to seek a life for their family. One of the teachers responded to stories of logistical problems in surviving as an undocumented immigrant by citing her father's success and questioning their sincerity and their effort. Such teachers do not see themselves inhibiting the child's perception of self as they denigrate the students' language, culture, and home life. Rather, they see themselves as dispensers of pragmatic knowledge, providers of the tough love they think the children need (Hutchinson, 1999).

This dismissal of the students' views is well represented in the segment showing a discussion between the school librarian and some of the immigrant students. The exchange exposes the anger and frustration of the students from being stereotyped and insulted, contrasted against the anger and frustration of a teacher who sees his students as invaders to his homeland and a burden on his culture's resources. There is little confusion over the teacher's or the students' positions. The viewer sees the emotion and perspective of both sides and is able to evaluate the ethical positions in the exchange. As the students challenge his arguments with simple logic, the teacher's veneer of tolerance and liberality peel away from his camera-conscious persona, revealing the anxieties and biases embedded in his final line, "It's *my* country that I'm

living in and I want it to stay nice!” Through such glimpses of teacher/student exchanges, viewers sense the gulf between viewpoints of the school population and the education professionals that set its objectives and direct its operations.

Fear and Learning presents a forum for hearing the voices of overlooked people in the poor inner city neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles. Airing their criticisms, opinions and observations of the system they know does not want them, the video gives the students depth and contextualizes their stories. The viewer is offered a look at the lives of undocumented students, the issues of learning, immigration, race, and poverty and an examination of educational policies and practices that exist and operate in this and other poor inner city school districts. Finally, it reveals to the teaching profession some reflections of our practices and the need for all educators to be more aware of how and what we communicate to our students. As education research continues to develop it must cultivate a greater appreciation for the wisdom and experiences of students and the quality they add to our understanding of their learning environment. Through inclusion of their voices, we begin to see their goals more clearly, better understand their problems or needs, and have a greater chance of helping them navigate within their adopted culture.

Where do we go from here?

In a future study, we will develop a video documentary project that will attempt to give voice to students and allow them to share their life and learning experiences with those who contribute to the shaping of their educational pursuits--i.e., teachers, administrators, and researchers. From the students' own words, we will learn about how they view the curriculum, how it is taught, and their perceptions of its intended purpose. Through examining the environments of the students and their interactions within them (home, school, and community), we hope to see more clearly the disconnections and discontinuity between their school and community experiences.

The research methodology for our video documentary project will be qualitative and interpretive. The video will focus on two primary participants who are elementary school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural or racial minority groups. These students will be verbally expressive and willing to talk about their homes, schools, and communities. Secondary participants (made up of persons in the students' homes, schools, and communities) will also be included. Our research plan is to investigate, through observations and interviews, the students' perceptions of their worlds, the sense they make of their experiences, with a focus on several key issues: How do they view the in-school and out-of-school curricula? In what ways do they feel their voices are honored or ignored in classrooms? What connection, if any, do they perceive between school curricula and their lived cultural experiences? What do "school" and "learning" mean to them? Interviews and footage from the classrooms and communities will be recorded using video camcorders. These recordings, along with field notes, will make up the data for our project.

While the video documentary we plan to produce will not be an ethnography in the strictest sense, it will, as Wolcott (1997) has said, "draw upon ethnographic approaches." Based upon Creswell's (1998) definition of a phenomenological study as one which "describes the

meaning or the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 51), our research could also be said to contain phenomenological elements. Looked at from another perspective, it could be termed a set of case studies of children of color in Chicago schools. What becomes clear is that these qualitative techniques can be difficult to separate out, and can become quite blurry at the edges. For those reasons, putting a label on the precise type of study we will be undertaking isn’t easy; however, it is our hope that the finished video will, in effect, turn up the volume on the muted voices of students.

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Investigation of Critical Issues in Curriculum Through Documentary

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In keeping with this year's theme of "What we know and how we know it," our paper looks at video documentary as an alternative research method for exploring critical issues in education. The critical issues that we focus on are the in-school curriculum versus the non-school curriculum, the devaluation and absence of the cultures of people of color, and the absence of student voice and alienation from the curriculum.

Video Documentary as an Alternative Form of Research

Qualitative research is concerned primarily with meaning. (Glesne, 1999) It seeks not to prescribe or predict, but to describe and understand. Whereas quantitative research assumes a positivist orientation, wherein "a fixed, measurable reality exists external to people," qualitative research is interpretive in nature, and "portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing." (p. 5). To comprehend the nature of these constructed realities, qualitative researchers "regard their research task as coming to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (p. 5). In other words, they seek to better understand the meaning people give to their experiences. Qualitative methods call for the extensive observation, exploration, and interpretation of some phenomenon of interest. It is work that William Ayers (2000) has said is more like a search than *re*-search.

Investigators choose to use qualitative methods for a variety of reasons. Creswell (1998) outlines eight reasons that an individual might decide to undertake a qualitative study, which include the nature of the research question (a "how" or "what" question rather than a "why"); the need to present an up-close, detailed view of a topic; the desire to study individuals in their natural setting; the preference to present information in a literary style; and an interest in taking on the role of active learner, "who can tell the story from the participants' view rather than as an 'expert' who passes judgment on participants." (p. 18) In recent years, increasing numbers of educational researchers have utilized qualitative approaches in their studies, and qualitative methods have gradually gained more acceptance and legitimacy in the educational research community. Ethnographic designs, case studies, biographies, and narratives--among other

qualitative approaches--are now employed with frequency in studies of schools and schooling. (Jaeger, 1997).

Despite this growing acceptance of qualitative inquiry, a debate has persisted over the appropriateness of non-academic forms of writing, and other artistic renditions, as research. Can fictional writing, such as a novel, be considered research? How about theater, visual art, film, or video? Kilbourn (1999) asserts that fiction, so long as it contains the qualities we expect of a thesis, evidences self-conscious method, and coheres as a whole, should be acceptable to satisfy the doctoral thesis requirement. More generally, Eisner (1995), citing examples from literary genres and film, suggests that too hard a line is drawn between what is viewed as research and what isn't, pointing out that even "scientific" inquiry often contains artistic qualities. And Barone and Eisner (1997) argue persuasively for a place at the educational research table for arts-based inquiry, including non-written forms of expression.

In their defense of arts-based inquiry, Barone and Eisner (1997) focus most of their attention on written prose, but this is not, they point out, because other forms of expression are less valuable as research--it is because existing examples of them are scarce. The authors encourage us to broaden our definition of what counts as research, pointing out that "neither language nor number have a monopoly on the means by which humans represent what they have come to know" (p. 90). Our experience of the world, Barone and Eisner suggest, is "multisensory," and it follows that inquiry into that lived experience should reflect its multisensory nature. Media such as video and film are interpretive and evocative, and allow their audiences to understand and make meaning in ways that are not possible with literal language. If, as Barone and Eisner suggest, the primary aim of educational research is to further understanding so that educational practice can be improved, is it not possible that a film or video that furthers such understanding be considered research?

It is our position that video documentaries provide an accessible forum for exploring critical issues in education, and that artfully produced documentaries that increase our

understanding of educational phenomena should be considered research. As technology has made high-quality video recording simpler, even for those with limited technical backgrounds, its potential value to the research community has become greater. Eisner (1998) has acknowledged the persistent separation that exists between the work of educational researchers, who publish in technical, densely worded, narrowly circulated journals, and practitioners, whose focus is often limited to their day-to-day classroom realities and who largely view researchers as “strangers in their midst” (p. 171). The utilization of video as a means of documentation could help bridge this gap between the work of researchers and teachers. It could serve as a “translation” medium in the age-old theory/practice divide, helping to bring theoretical ideas into the realm of “common sense” and making research come alive for classroom teachers.

In addition, video provides a powerful tool for giving voice to marginalized members of the community and for informing the public about critical issues faced by today’s youth (Saunders, 1997). Because of its potential to move and provoke audiences emotionally as well as intellectually, video documentary also seems an ideal medium for research that serves an advocacy function, for inquiry that is empowering to its participants. Rappaport (1990), cited in Ristock and Pennell (1996), describes research that empowers as that which is “committed to identifying, facilitating or creating contexts in which heretofore silent and isolated people, those who are ‘outsiders’ in various settings, organizations and communities, gain understanding, voice and influence over decisions that affect their lives” (p. 2). This is research done not solely for research’s sake, to further a career, to ensure tenure, to present at a conference, or to impress one’s peers in the academy, but research that is in and of the world, research that makes a difference, research that matters. It is this sort of inquiry that we, as current and former classroom teachers, believe is of vital importance in the field of education.

Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary, directed and co-produced by Los Angeles public school teacher Laura Angelica Simón in 1996, is, we believe, an excellent example of the potential of video documentary as educational research. The video looks at the impact of

California's anti-immigrant initiative, Proposition 187, on students, teachers, and community members at the Hoover Street Elementary School. Simón, a teacher at Hoover, narrates *Fear and Learning*, which centers its narrative on four people: Mayra, one of Simón's former students and an undocumented immigrant from El Salvador; Arcelia, a Mexican-American activist teacher who grew up in the community; Diane, a white teacher who supports 187; and Carmen, a Mexican immigrant parent who does volunteer work at Hoover.

So just how does *Fear and Learning* qualify as research? Based on Glesne's (1999) predispositions of interpretive inquiry, we would suggest that Simón's documentary fits the bill much more adequately than many academic studies that pass themselves off as qualitative research. First and foremost, *Fear and Learning* is concerned with the meaning its participants make of Proposition 187 and related issues. Director Simón includes multiple voices in the film, each of whom constructs reality through her own lens (and then through Simón's). The purpose of the film is not--indeed cannot be--to predict or generalize. Instead, Simón is interested in particulars, in contextualizing Proposition 187 and exploring how it impacts a handful of people in a single Los Angeles school. She is after understanding, not causal explanations, and her work is interpretive on multiple levels: the participants interpret their experiences for Simón, who--through selective camera angles and editing, choosing what to include and what to ignore--interprets them for her audience. We--the audience--then add our own interpretation to what we see and hear in the finished film.

In addition, it is apparent that Simón began her project not with a hypothesis or theory, but--again in keeping with interpretivist predispositions--with an interest in a particular phenomenon. In an interview in *Teacher Magazine* (1997), Simón explained her motivation for making *Fear and Learning*. "In the whole debate [surrounding Proposition 187]....I didn't see anybody talking to the kids," she said. "Nobody was listening to them, nobody was hearing how much of an emotional and psychological burden we were creating for them. Nobody was giving them a voice." Utilizing a naturalistic approach, in which she observed and interviewed

participants in their natural settings, Simón accomplishes that and more. She seeks out the complexities of her chosen phenomenon, broadening her “study” to include not only the voices of students but of teachers and community members as well. And the vivid images of Hoover Elementary and its surrounding community, Pico-Union, that are woven throughout *Fear and Learning* are, we would argue, the visual equivalent of what Clifford Geertz called “thick description.”

As for Simón’s role as “researcher,” she does not pretend to be detached or distanced from the story she tells. Her positionality as a teacher at the school, as a child of immigrant parents, and as a community member are made explicit in her narration of the film. Simón is clearly empathetic toward Mayra and the other undocumented students at Hoover, and concerned about the potentially damaging impact of 187, but her consciousness of her situatedness actually pushes her to portray the complexities of the controversy in her film. “People on both sides [of the 187 debate] were angry at me,” Simón told *Teacher Magazine*. “But I didn’t see this film as a piece of propaganda. In fact, it’s not even a political movie in my eyes. It’s a historical movie. It captures a time and a place. It is a time when society decided to do something in a school, which really divided the school. And the place is right here. I wanted to show this world, and let people make up their own minds. It’s not for me to choose it. Reality lives in the gray; the truth is never one way or the other.”

Of course, *Fear and Learning* is not without its problems (but then again, neither is any other piece of research, whether interpretive or positivist). The taping of the video footage took place over three consecutive weeks, a period of time some qualitative researchers would argue is too brief to document the temporal changes that inevitably mark any fieldwork site (Glesne, 1999). Ethical questions arise around the use of young children such as Mayra as primary informants, and it is unclear in the film how this matter was handled. A scene that shows a young boy crying as he tells of witnessing a friend getting killed also raises concerns over ethics. Some might question Simón’s decision not to appear in the video (even though her narrative voice is

heard throughout), or argue that there is not enough analysis in the piece, perhaps claiming that Simón goes overboard in allowing the images and words of her participants to “speak for themselves.”

Despite these possible shortcomings, we believe *Fear and Learning* should be considered an example of educational research. It is, unquestionably in our estimation, an original contribution to knowledge--more specifically, to the natural history of what it means to be a teacher and a student in an immigrant community in the xenophobic times in which we live. In fact, we think it is precisely the type of research that more of us in the educational research community should be doing: research that speaks a language teachers and parents can understand, that bridges the gap between academics and practitioners, and that has the potential to bring about positive change in the quality of education we provide to all of our children.

The In-School Curriculum and the Non-School Curriculum

In this section, we will discuss the components of both in-school and non-school curricula, and how teachers can draw from students’ experiences outside of class to engage children in learning in the school setting. The in-school curriculum consists of overt, hidden, and null curricula, as well as extracurricular activities. The non-school curriculum refers to the experiences that promote learning outside of school (Schubert, 1997).

First, the overt curriculum refers to that which is explicitly taught. In public schools, overt curricula are developed based upon national, state and/or local standards which are organized by subject matter. For example, Illinois has developed academic standards for English language arts, mathematics, science, social science, physical development and health, fine arts, and foreign language (Illinois State Board of Education, 2001).

In the urban classroom, teachers use a variety of modalities to foster their curriculum including traditional and progressive learning activities. In addition to maintaining records, participating in parent conferences, attending staff meetings, and performing school duties, Martin Haberman (1996) argues that educators perform twelve instructional functions. These

include “giving information, asking questions, giving directions, making assignments, monitoring seatwork, reviewing assignments, giving tests, reviewing tests, settling disputes, punishing non-compliance, marking papers, (and) giving grades” (Haberman, 1996, p. 119).

Taken together, these functions constitute what Haberman refers to as a “pedagogy of poverty” (1996, p. 119) in urban schools, undergirded by a “logic” that is explained in the following syllogisms:

- 1) “Teaching is what teachers do. Learning is what students do. Therefore, students and teachers are engaged in different activities.
- 2) Teachers are in charge and responsible. Students are those who still need to develop appropriate behavior. Therefore, when students follow teachers’ direction, appropriate behavior is being taught and learned.
- 3) Students represent a wide-range of individual differences. Many students have handicapping conditions and lead debilitating home lives. Therefore, ranking of some sort is inevitable; some students will end up at the bottom of the class while others will finish at the top.
- 4) Basic skills are a prerequisite for learning and living. Students are not necessarily interested in basic skills. Therefore, directive pedagogy must be used to ensure that youngsters are compelled to learn their basic skills.” (Haberman, 1996, p. 121)

We offer the following responses to the above syllogisms:

- 1) Teaching and learning may be experienced by both the teacher and student (Michie, 1999). It is problematic when a teacher is of the opinion that s/he has nothing else to learn or cannot learn from students. Teachers stop growing when they limit themselves in that manner. Students can teach educators about their worlds outside of class. By doing this, they let their teachers know what their needs and interests are. This can inform the teacher about how to engage students in learning by making it more meaningful to them. According to Spring, “By never engaging children in discussions about what they think, authoritarian parents and teachers prepare children to be unthinking objects of history” (1999, p. 149).
- 2) When teachers view a major portion of their work as having students follow directions, what they are doing, in effect, is teaching students to be followers, not critical thinkers. This, in turn, serves to prepare students for a labor force in which they are the workers instead of leaders of corporations (Anyon, 1997)
- 3) This syllogism lends itself to the “at-risk” labeling of students. If we think of our students from a deficit standpoint, it can lead to teaching less rather than more. (Delpit, 1995)
- 4) Directive pedagogy teaches children facts by rote instruction, an activity that neither inspires nor requires critical thinking or any interaction (questioning, etc.) with the concepts being learned. Regarding a phenomenon made popular by Max Stirner, Spring states, “Stirner refers to any thought that an individual cannot give up as a ‘wheel in the head’ ... A wheel in the head controls individual

will and uses the individual rather than being used by the individual (1999, p. 40).”

Second, within overt curricula are hidden curricula which include the impact of socialization on learning (Jackson, 1968) and what is conveyed by subtle messages from teachers as they model behavior. Consider the following:

- What do students learn when teachers only model authoritarian behavior? They learn to follow the lead of authority (which alone is not a negative phenomenon).
- What do students learn when silence is mandated as the only appropriate behavior? They learn to be passive recipients of knowledge.
- What do students learn when curricula revolve around the chapters in a book? They learn that textbooks are the main source for the acquisition of knowledge.
- What do students learn when teachers teach from a script? They learn that in teaching and learning there is no place for creativity.
- What do students learn when their voices are not considered in creating curricula? They learn that student voice is not valued in the creation of curricula.
- What do students learn when curricula are limited to depictions of a dominant culture and the way in which that culture views the world? They learn to accept and value the dominant culture. According to Taxel, “... schools confer preeminence on the language forms, world views, ideological, historical, and cultural perspectives of the dominant social groups, thus legitimating – as logical, natural, and/or the result of merit – the power, prestige, and status of these groups in society” (2000, p. 302). According to Delpit (1995), invisibility is a problem in the curriculum. Students of color do not see themselves represented in the curriculum.
- What do students learn when curricula are void of popular culture? They learn that the interests of students are not taken into consideration in the development of curricula.
- What do students learn when curricula provide limited or no consideration for multiple intelligences? They learn that the manner in which students acquire knowledge is expected to be the same for everyone, and that students who cannot learn in the same manner as others have deficits.
- What do students learn when the arts are relegated to the null curricula? They learn that art is not important.
- What do students learn when they have no say in how schools are run? They learn that school is a place where student voice is not valued.

(The above questions are rhetorical. The “answers” given represent a point of view, but are not intended to be definitive.)

Third, the null curriculum refers to that which is not taught (Eisner, 1979). When considering all that is not taught, though the list is non-exhaustive, let us consider a few topics

that might relate to a body of students (and could stand alone as classes or be incorporated into subject matter across the curriculum, but often are not):

- Alternative lifestyles
- The politics of race, class, and gender
- Economic independence
- Building and maintaining good credit
- Parenting
- Careers
- Relationships
- Decision-making
- History from non-mainstream perspectives
- Dysfunctional families

Again, a lack of knowledge about students' worlds outside of school and the silencing of students' voices make it difficult for teachers to create curricula that speak to the needs and interests of students.

The null curriculum also pertains to "mainstream" subjects such as fine arts. Even though most states have a standard for fine arts, very often art is either eliminated due to a lack of funding or minimally taught as a separate subject as opposed to being incorporated into the curriculum across content-area. The fact that fine arts are often the first subjects to be cut or minimized demonstrates to students that art is considered superfluous. According to Eisner:

Perhaps the most important contribution that my immersion in the visual arts has made to my views of education is the realization that neither cognition nor epistemology can be adequately conceptualized if the contributions of the arts to these domains are neglected. Those of us professionally socialized in education, not to say the culture at large, have lived in a sea of assumptions about mind and knowledge that have marginalized the arts by putting them on the back burners of mind and understanding... Curricula in which the arts are absent or inadequately taught rob children of what they might otherwise become.

(Eisner, 2000, pp. 37-42)

Fourth, extracurricular activities are a part of the in-school curriculum inasmuch as the school sponsors them and they usually take place within the school or on school grounds (Schubert, 1997). Often these activities include sports, arts and crafts, club affiliations involving ethnic groups, drama, language, etc.

Although schools are considered to be traditional settings in which learning takes place, much of what children learn is acquired outside of school (Schubert, 1997). As previously stated, the non-school curriculum refers to experiences that promote learning outside of school. Sources of non-school curricula are families, peer relationships, communities, mass media, hobbies, jobs (for older children), and membership in organizations (Schubert, 1997).

Gonzalez' (1993) teacher research on the funds of knowledge is a good example of how teachers can discover a wealth of learning opportunities present in the homes and communities of their students. (Funds of knowledge refer to the many sources of knowledge that are present in the homes and communities of students.) In Gonzalez' study, a team of teachers went into the homes of some of their students to conduct ethnographic research; after which, they shared their findings with one another and a team of university researchers to collaborate on ways in which to incorporate the findings into activities for their curricula. In doing this, not only were they able to engage their students in meaningful learning activities, but they were also able to build a level of trust with students and their parents.

Entrance into students' homes and communities also informs teachers regarding the mores, traditions, family values, peer relationships, hobbies, jobs, mass media, and club affiliations of their students; all of which, are sources of learning, and aspects of each can be incorporated into learning activities in the in-school curriculum.

According to Delpit (1995):

- 1) Educators need to know about their students' lives outside of school to determine social context and know the students' strengths that are perhaps hidden in school activities.
- 2) A problem that educators who are not from the community in which they teach face is the problem of ignorance of community norms. This ignorance fosters the formation of mistaken images/perceptions of parents and students.
- 3) We have created institutions of isolation, and we need to connect the school with the home and community.

Miller (1993) advocates a child-centered curriculum in which children are viewed as individuals, and their experiences outside of the classroom are relevant inside of the classroom.

Foster (1995) also advocates teaching the whole child. The student image that a teacher views in the classroom represents only a small portion of the total child. Awareness of the popular culture, mass media, home life, and communities that are a part of childrens' lives could serve to bridge the gap in both communication and knowledge. It could also pave the way to engaging students and making them active participants in learning, while enabling teachers to have a better understanding of the whole child.

Within a broader context of issues in *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary*, one story line follows a student (Mayra) from the school into the community. Through this video portrait, the multiple levels of the child's life unfold in the midst of an investigation of critical issues regarding racism, immigration, and bilingual education in the larger society. When the camera leaves the school, and follows the student into the community, we see her in a manner that the school environment prohibits us to view. In her "real" world, there is an ever-present threat of being discovered by the U.S. Department of Immigration and Naturalization, and deported. How can a teacher with only a limited (in-school) knowledge about the child's life circumstances begin to address her needs and build trust?

Through the Eyes of the Future is another example of a video documentary. It was produced by African American youths at ACT Charter School in Chicago's West Garfield Park neighborhood. Under the leadership of their teacher, these children took cameras into the community and interviewed business owners and residents as they showed scenes of daily life in the community (which included a scene involving an African American youth being harassed by police). The videographers also used this program as a forum to voice their opinions about the issues of racism and regentrification in Chicago. The teacher of these students took advantage of the funds of knowledge present in the students' communities to enhance their learning in the social sciences, language arts, communications, and technology as she learned about issues of importance to her students and certain realities of their lives.

Individually, the teachers who sponsored the projects leading to the creation of these videos learned about some of the critical issues facing their students. As is typical of qualitative research, the findings cannot be generalized in the traditional, “external validity” sense; however, each video has a powerful message to all educators/researchers: there are critical issues that affect children outside of the classroom that are relevant inside of the classroom.

The Devaluation and Absence of the Culture of People of Color

The ideals and values of this country are reflected in our educational system, as formal education, i.e. schooling, is aimed at reproducing the social fabric of this society, even if that fabric is one that is flawed (Willis et al., 1993). Some would argue that that fabric is one in which differences in regard to social class and race are perpetuated; thus, people from working class backgrounds are taught a curriculum that does not engender critical thinking and elicits satisfaction with the status quo, steering them to blue collar occupations. However, those from more affluent backgrounds are taught a curriculum that teaches them to challenge systems and make their own rules; thus creating critical thinkers who become the leaders in society (Anyon, 1996). This provides evidence that the curriculum that is taught in American schools is primarily concerned with reproducing the social order, not necessarily critical individuals (Boykin, 2001; Watkins, 2001; and Willis, 1993). Curriculum is created with the goals of society in mind and rarely are the voices of the students heard though they are expressing their disconnection and discontent with their learning experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1994 and Michie, 1999). In fact, voices of teachers are oftentimes absent in the construction of the curriculum as well, leaving the harsh reality that much of the curriculum that is developed and passed on to schools, is created in isolation and without the voices and sentiments of those most affected by it, the students (Freire, 1998).

Though the absence of students’ voices is an issue for students of all races and ethnicities, students of color are especially marginalized because their lived experiences are not among those that are represented in the text that they encounter on a daily basis (Banks, 1998; Ogbu, 1978 and

Hilliard). In fact, much of what is termed education today can be more rightfully called assimilation, as students of color daily face cultural issues as fundamental as language differences in school (Fine, 1986; Fordham, 1988; and Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Thus, resulting in an education experience that teaches, sometimes overtly, that the cultures of people of color is inferior and needs to be replaced by eurocentric models (Asante, 1987; Ogbu, 1978 and 1995; and Evans, 1985). What does the American schooling experience do to and for students of color and their perception of self? Does it educate for a sense of social upliftment and justice? Does it prepare them for a world in which they face social inequities? More importantly, what do these students think about the curriculum and how it shapes their perceptions of themselves and the world around them?

Towards a More “Culturally Relevant” Curriculum

It is clear that in American schooling experience is aimed at establishing certain ideals and values in the minds of students and that the curriculum is a means to that end. As Boykin states:

In the American public education system, schooling is more than the confluence of reading, writing, and arithmetic, so to speak. Indeed while these activities are going on, the schooling process also conveys certain ways of viewing the world, ways of codifying reality....It offers blueprints for living and for acceptable ways of functioning....It determines what is to be valued and esteemed and what are the proper forms of deportment and conduct. In short, there is a profound socialization agenda in schools, a cultural socialization agenda (Boykin, 1994; Hilliard, 1995; Banks & Banks, 1995). Thus, schools are not about reading, writing, and arithmetic per se. They are about the business of conveying such activities as they relate to certain cultural vantage points and as they are embedded in particular cultural substrates. Public schools were never conceived to be a culturally neutral exercise.

(Boykin, 2001, p.192)

However, these ideals and values do not align themselves with those of people of color since the curriculum excludes or marginalizes them, sometimes leaving students torn between the values of their culture and those eurocentric values presented in school. Everyday, students are faced with the competing curricula of their culture and school (Branch, 1996 and Liston & Zeichner, 1996).

In a study of student teachers, Liston and Zeichner showed that many prospective teachers come into the classroom, after being taught a university curriculum that devalues people of color, and openly voice their desires for students to leave their culture behind and assimilate:

... Estella needs to change. Her parents need to let her go. She needs to leave her past and culture behind in order to succeed... Estella's life will be wasted if she ends up like her parents... Estella needs to assimilate to the predominant values of American culture. Estella and her family live in the United States and if they are going to thrive here, they need to recognize the values and structures of this society.

(Liston & Zeichner, 1996, pp.10-11)

Thus, students of color sometimes experience a curriculum where their culture is absent or devalued and that is further perpetuated by teachers who have not been taught the value of other cultures. How do these realities affect these students' perceptions of themselves and the world around them?

Voices of Students of Color

We hear the voices of curricularists and teachers speaking out on the devaluation or negation of the cultural experience of students of color, but where are the voices of the students who are the most affected by the shortcomings of the curriculum? It is almost as if this marginalization and exclusion is happening to a group of unconscious people; however, nothing could be further from the truth. Students, even at the elementary level, are aware of the absence of their culture and the devaluation of it. As this exchange among two African-American sixth grade students in Ladson-Billings research shows:

Second student: Yeah, but you know how they're always talkin' about great things from Europe and how all these white people did so many great things, but you never hear about the great things from Africa. They talk about Egypt but they talk about it like it's not Africa.

Lewis: Why do you think that's so?

Second student: Well, because everybody can see the great things the Egyptians did, like the pyramids, so then if you just talk about Egypt maybe people won't think about it as a part of Africa.

Third student: What does that prove?

Second student: I didn't say it proved anything. I'm just sayin' that if you make people think of the Egyptians as white then you will think that only white people can make great things.

(Ladson Billings, 1994, p.85-86)

In this interaction, we see the political consciousness and social awareness, a consciousness that understands the social context in which they are living and equips them to interrogate what they are being taught and the motivations behind those teaching. As the second student states the motivations are negative and aimed at distorting and controlling African-American students' perceptions of self, "you will think that only white people can make great things." These are the reflections of a twelve-year-old and it is encouraging to know that he has these critical thinking skills. He echoes the same sentiments as did Carter G. Woodson more than sixty years ago when he wrote:

In history, of course, the Negro had no place in this curriculum....No thought was given to the history of Africa except so far as it had been a field of exploitation for the Caucasian. You might study the history as it was offered in our system from the elementary school throughout the university, and you would never hear Africa mentioned except in the negative.

(Woodson, 1933, p.21)

The disheartening part is that this is still the case decades later, and it bellows the exclamation that changes in the American school curriculum and its representations--or lack thereof--of people of African descent, as well as other people of color, is occurring in slow motion. However, the negative impact of the eurocentric curriculum is moving at warp speed as students struggle for academic achievement (Fine, 1986).

Students are also reflecting on the pressure to assimilate and believe in the eurocentric ways of being presented in educational settings, as well as the social inequities they face as people of color as one Latino student writes:

First of all I would like to say that many people have different ways of showing our culture. We also have different ways of showing our background. Just because I am partly American inside, I don't think that I am American, even though I was born one....I don't get treated well by teachers who are prejudiced. Many teachers get mad because I talk in Spanish in the room....each president doesn't do anything for the poor Mexican-American people. The president also

gives more money to the rich and less to the Mexicans. So if you're an American-Mexican, it doesn't mean that you're fully American. Then keep thinking that way and don't let anyone stop you from thinking that. So be proud that you're Mexican. I am.

(Michie, 1999,p.83)

The lack of continuity between school curriculum and the cultural experiences of people of color is recognized by educators and students alike; however, the void still remains to a large extent. Though there is a movement toward culturally relevant or responsive pedagogy and an inclusive curriculum, there is more work to be done to make this a reality for all students of color. The need for culturally responsive educational experiences is being voiced—even by the students themselves. They are aware of their marginalization; they are aware of how the American curriculum is failing them, and they are speaking out about it. The more pressing question remains, is anyone listening to them?

The Absence of Student Voice and Alienation from the Curriculum

Pedagogic research has long queried teachers, parents, administrators, policy makers, political leaders, and students to better understand the problems of cultural disconnection in the classroom and slow rates of learning in depressed urban areas, as indicated in national standardized tests (Anyon, 1997). But while researchers listen, analyze, and report what students are saying, there doesn't seem to be evidence of its general acceptance as consequential data to policymakers, or of its application in the child's learning environment (Walsh, 1991). In discounting the perceptions of children, we hobble ourselves as teachers/researchers, and diminish students' roles in their cognitive, social, and moral development. Denial of the worth of their voices' reflects back to the child, developing a negative and depreciated perception of their competence, communication, and acceptance (Erikson, 1966).

The individuals least questioned, on all matters pedagogic, are the real consumers for whom educators all work, the children. As agents of learning teachers offer students an interpretation of knowledge, but don't always consider the consequences of what and how they say things in class. What is at times neglected is the information teachers offer schoolchildren about

themselves--through the way they act in class, among their peers, and in daily routines within the school community. Teachers present students with lessons, but don't always consider the ways in which wisdom is imparted, or biases reflected in opinions, expressions and attitudes with the children in class (van Manen, 1986). Without student input, teachers have a poorer appreciation of their home environments and will likely be insensitive to or unaware of their social and emotional needs.

When teachers disparage low paying jobs at fast food restaurants and the people who work there, do they consider that some of those workers are the parents and siblings of their students? In class discussions are other cultures or countries defined as backwards, savage, or corrupt? Student input adds resources teachers need to better communicate with children and facilitate their learning.

It seems that many pre-packaged lessons on multiculturalism are generalist in nature, alien to the communities they are meant to serve, and indifferent to their culture. Rarely are the experts consulted members of, or representative of the school student bodies that will be using the curricular material. This disenfranchisement from their own education seems analogous to a doctor taking patients' pulses by holding someone else's hand. Any assumption that the children are not sophisticated enough to provide useful information ignores the demonstrated complexity of a child's thoughts in play, social exchanges and in the navigation of their own world (Schwab, 1996 and Zentella, 1997).

In our current environment of high-stakes testing, the primary focus of education is on the end results rather than to the conditions that impact learning. In American schools today, progress, as demonstrated on standardized tests in Reading and Math, appears to be its most important product. Social, cultural and emotional development is pushed back, at least until the tests are over. Issues that confound students' learning -- poverty, housing, transiency, ethnicity, language, and race -- and the ways students perceive of themselves in the learning environment are rarely central to school board plans or classroom curriculum. Rather than assess children individually

based upon their specific needs and achievement, schools instead use standardized tests of generally proscribed knowledge, to measure students' ability to know and learn. Such assessment tools fall short of discovering the students' individual needs or revealing their impediments to learning.

Increasing students' voices in their own learning is an important issue in the learning environment with regards to positions of visibility and authority in the classroom (Delpit, 1995). The power of authority, its acquisition, and the individual's placement within a culture permeate the classroom. Students, as the least powerful members of the classroom community, internalize the values of the power structure and struggle to find a place within its framework (Freire, 1970). Those with power are least able to see their privilege while those without power are, generally, most aware of its existence. Thus, teachers who see themselves as egalitarian and working for the students' best interests may be completely at odds with the children's cultures or notions of their learning priorities (Delpit, 1995).

Teachers may rigidly control their classroom or share power and still they will act as gatekeepers, dispensing authority and power. Intentionally or not, teachers offer position in the community and cede control, as students conform to their notions of what is correct, worthwhile, and meaningful learning (Delpit, 1995). Students who differ by culture or social status are offered restricted membership in the classroom and discouraged from attaining knowledge in their own language, (van Manen, 1990). Students from outside the dominant culture will see events differently and interpret via their cultural semantics. What is the Native American impression of Columbus, or Manifest Destiny? What does a Mexican immigrant student think of the Alamo or of the Mexican American War? What will be the minority students' impression of voice or their ability to articulate concerns if the majority culture is the only voice deciding what is meaningful?

Student perspective must be a critical element in curriculum design for a democratic society. Democracy relies on individual free expression and the inclusion of diverse talents and perspectives (Dewey, 1916). When we exclude voices from our dialogue on pedagogic issues we diminish the

resources and talents through which we can achieve improvement. We also inhibit participation in our democracy of many who would enrich and regenerate our culture. By excluding immigrant voices from the discussion, we eschew the wisdom of other cultures, and disregard our professed national heritage of tolerance and inclusion. We make it more difficult for new émigrés to join in the body politic of American society and confound their ability to communicate unique views and perspectives.

Many immigrant families entering America today face the loss of legal, economic, and social status (Valdés, 1996). They often go to large urban centers, where the work is, and enroll their children in school systems that are under-funded, under-staffed, and overcrowded. Students and teachers in the already over-taxed system give the immigrants cold comfort and little welcome as they enter the struggle for diminishing resources (Quint, 1994). Each day is an assault on their sociability, visibility, and viability as part of the learning environment. These children face cultural and language barriers to their learning and inhibited development of social interactive and cognitive skills (Vygotsky, 1986). The child's sense of self is impaired as a side effect of assimilation is the adoption of negative self-images and negative attitudes towards their native culture (Erikson, 1966). Over time, students question their worth in the mainstream culture and look for worth, validation, and acceptance elsewhere.

In looking at the absence of student voices in curriculum and learning, we turn again to a video that takes a close look at immigration, children voices, teacher voices, and their interaction within the school community. In *Fear and Learning at Hoover Elementary*, viewers meet some members of the school's immigrant student population and we see, through their eyes, the community, the school, and the attitudes, actions, and words of their teachers. The documentary also offers the opinions and emotions of the teachers concerning the political and social issues of the proposition. Both teachers and students speak of each other in a politically charged environment, often, at odds over issues of trust, culture, and human rights. Their words provide insight into the values that they hold through seeing their day-to-day actions, at times affected and

at other times unfiltered, as they work and talk within the school community. The interactions between teachers and students reveal a deeper sense of who each is and what their lives are like within the school community. What is not said informs the viewer as much as what is said in the interviews, exposing some of the moral, ethical, cultural, and racial struggles that students encounter in the business and practice of education.

Most revealing in the video are moments of teachers with students in the classroom. In their discussions with students, teachers reveal to the students, and the audience, their personal and public values, their notions of what is American and their notions of what is foreign. Some teachers reflect their hopes and fears they hold for these most fragile learners. Other teachers trumpet their liberality, yet seem indifferent or ignorant to the students' living conditions, their struggle to hold on to their culture, or the conditions that brought them to leave their home to seek a life for their family. One of the teachers responded to stories of logistical problems in surviving as an undocumented immigrant by citing her father's success and questioning their sincerity and their effort. Such teachers do not see themselves inhibiting the child's perception of self as they denigrate the students' language, culture, and home life. Rather, they see themselves as dispensers of pragmatic knowledge, providers of the tough love they think the children need (Hutchinson, 1999).

This dismissal of the students' views is well represented in the segment showing a discussion between the school librarian and some of the immigrant students. The exchange exposes the anger and frustration of the students from being stereotyped and insulted, contrasted against the anger and frustration of a teacher who sees his students as invaders to his homeland and a burden on his culture's resources. There is little confusion over the teacher's or the students' positions. The viewer sees the emotion and perspective of both sides and is able to evaluate the ethical positions in the exchange. As the students challenge his arguments with simple logic, the teacher's veneer of tolerance and liberality peel away from his camera-conscious persona, revealing the anxieties and biases embedded in his final line, "It's *my* country that I'm

living in and I want it to stay nice!” Through such glimpses of teacher/student exchanges, viewers sense the gulf between viewpoints of the school population and the education professionals that set its objectives and direct its operations.

Fear and Learning presents a forum for hearing the voices of overlooked people in the poor inner city neighborhoods of South Central Los Angeles. Airing their criticisms, opinions and observations of the system they know does not want them, the video gives the students depth and contextualizes their stories. The viewer is offered a look at the lives of undocumented students, the issues of learning, immigration, race, and poverty and an examination of educational policies and practices that exist and operate in this and other poor inner city school districts. Finally, it reveals to the teaching profession some reflections of our practices and the need for all educators to be more aware of how and what we communicate to our students. As education research continues to develop it must cultivate a greater appreciation for the wisdom and experiences of students and the quality they add to our understanding of their learning environment. Through inclusion of their voices, we begin to see their goals more clearly, better understand their problems or needs, and have a greater chance of helping them navigate within their adopted culture.

Where do we go from here?

In a future study, we will develop a video documentary project that will attempt to give voice to students and allow them to share their life and learning experiences with those who contribute to the shaping of their educational pursuits--i.e., teachers, administrators, and researchers. From the students' own words, we will learn about how they view the curriculum, how it is taught, and their perceptions of its intended purpose. Through examining the environments of the students and their interactions within them (home, school, and community), we hope to see more clearly the disconnections and discontinuity between their school and community experiences.

The research methodology for our video documentary project will be qualitative and interpretive. The video will focus on two primary participants who are elementary school students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural or racial minority groups. These students will be verbally expressive and willing to talk about their homes, schools, and communities. Secondary participants (made up of persons in the students' homes, schools, and communities) will also be included. Our research plan is to investigate, through observations and interviews, the students' perceptions of their worlds, the sense they make of their experiences, with a focus on several key issues: How do they view the in-school and out-of-school curricula? In what ways do they feel their voices are honored or ignored in classrooms? What connection, if any, do they perceive between school curricula and their lived cultural experiences? What do "school" and "learning" mean to them? Interviews and footage from the classrooms and communities will be recorded using video camcorders. These recordings, along with field notes, will make up the data for our project.

While the video documentary we plan to produce will not be an ethnography in the strictest sense, it will, as Wolcott (1997) has said, "draw upon ethnographic approaches." Based upon Creswell's (1998) definition of a phenomenological study as one which "describes the

meaning or the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 51), our research could also be said to contain phenomenological elements. Looked at from another perspective, it could be termed a set of case studies of children of color in Chicago schools. What becomes clear is that these qualitative techniques can be difficult to separate out, and can become quite blurry at the edges. For those reasons, putting a label on the precise type of study we will be undertaking isn’t easy; however, it is our hope that the finished video will, in effect, turn up the volume on the muted voices of students.

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