

Confessions of a Qualitative Researcher: Reflexive Photography and the Exhibition of Culture in Schools

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Introduction

In their introduction to the Handbook of Qualitative Research, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) identify five phases¹ that define the research process, adding that “behind all but one of these phases stands the biographically situated researcher” (p. 19). My biography as a qualitative researcher began long before I entered the doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the fall of 1998, and I can situate my early interest in the exhibition of global cultures in K–8 schools to my second year as an ESL teacher at a high school in Toronto, Canada where, in 1991, I was selected, with other teachers from the district, to participate in a workshop on multicultural and antiracist education. One of the goals of the four-day workshop required each participant to facilitate and plan events at their school that would engage the school faculty and student body in conversations about issues related to diversity. As someone who had traveled extensively throughout Latin America, Europe, and Asia, and who had attended numerous exhibitions of culture, one of the ideas generated that year was a “Cultural Variety Night” where high school students and members from various racial and ethnic groups would perform “traditional” music and dances for the school and local community. The event, which lasted over three hours and involved the participation of more than 100 students and performers from the wider community, was a sell-out and by every indication a “success.” However, it was not until some seven years later, during my first year

in Madison, when I received an invitation from the office of International Students Services to participate in a cultural outreach program, that I began to critically examine my involvement in the design and implementation of these events. Because the focus and interest of my graduate studies was multicultural education, I attended the meeting and listened with interest to students from several non-Western countries discuss the types of activities they had participated in when visiting local area schools. Some spoke to the high school students about issues relevant to their country, some performed dances for middle school students, while others worked with elementary students to make traditional handicrafts. Their experiences immediately brought back recollections of a cultural event that I had planned several years before and I realized how similar the format of this cultural program was to the one I had organized. More significantly, as I looked around at the faces of the students, I realized that, apart from the program director, I was the only other person in the room from a “first-world” country. As a result, I began to think

¹ The five phases of the research process are the researcher as multicultural subject, theoretical paradigms and perspectives, research strategies, methods of collection and analysis, and the art, practices, and politics of interpretation and presentation.

about my own participation in the design of such events and to question whether such programs were actually perpetuating, rather than challenging, issues such as colonialism and racism that I was reading about in the graduate courses I was enrolled in. Although I was never asked to speak at a local school that year due to the tremendous demand for international students from Muslim countries after the tragic events of September 11th 2001, my experience with this program was the initial reason that I became interested in examining these cultural events from the perspective of a researcher.

In this article, I do not intend to debate the epistemological, ontological, or methodological premises of qualitative research or challenge its validity and reliability. My aim is to share with the reader some of the insights I have gained through my experience of using photographs as a research tool during a year-long investigation of cultural events at three universities and schools in the Midwest of the United States. My article is divided into two alternating sections: the ones in plain text, provide a description of the project; while the sections in italics, compose a commentary, from the perspective of the researcher, aimed at offering some insights, drawn from my experiences in using qualitative research for doctoral research.

Methodology

In order to determine how students and staff at educational institutions ascribe meaning to the cultural events at their schools, I used a method of research based on Collier's (1967) technique of qualitative analysis referred to as photo-elicitation. Photo-elicitation is a methodological tool that incorporates visual data in the form of photographs, film, or videos into interviews in order to "elicit" information from participants. The conventional uses of photo-elicitation in the interview process are illustrated in Harper's *Working Knowledge: Skill and community in a small shop* (1987) and in Gold's examination of the relationship between two subpopulations of Vietnamese refugees in *Ethnic Boundaries and Ethnic Entrepreneurship: A photo-elicitation study* (1991). This technique requires the researcher to assemble a set of photographs on the assumption that the images will have some significance for the subjects. The photographs are shown to individuals and groups, who are then interviewed to explore their attitudes towards the images. After the interview, the researcher interprets their responses to particular images and attempts to incorporate these conclusions into the data to be analyzed. My study employed a slightly different technique called "re-

flexive photography." The difference between photo-elicitation and reflexive photography is that in the latter case the images are produced by the research participants rather than the researchers. For Harper (1987), photographs produced by research participants are "reflexive" photographs because the subjects share in the definition of the meaning of the photographs during the interviews, and are thus said to "reflect back" from the subject (pp. 64-65). A major advantage of using this technique over more conventional photo-elicitation methods is that it enables the research participants to document their experiences through photographs. As a result, it removes the problem of researcher bias, as it is the participants who take the images used in the interviews.

Commentary

The question of when to take a research methods course during my doctoral studies was one that I wrestled with during my entire graduate program. In my first year, the majority of my time was spent on trying to make sense of different theoretical paradigms, many of which I had never heard before, and I felt that I was not ready to identify a suitable topic for my research, let alone select the method I would use to investigate it. My major advisor recommended I take a course in statistics, and while I found it quite helpful in conceptualizing possible approaches to research, it was not until my second year, when I took an introductory course on qualitative research, that my research methodology began to take shape. The course provided a general overview of the different epistemologies and methodologies of the field. It also included a number of books and articles on qualitative research, case studies, and ethnographies, various chapters from the Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), and opportunities to practice interview and observation techniques. A documentary theory class taken outside the School of Education helped increase my interests in visual culture and the methods associated with its study. I also developed more interest in exploring and working with "alternative" methods of generating data.

It was not until my third and final year of coursework, and the last class before my qualifying exams, that I finally settled on the idea of using images as a research methodology. My decision to use reflexive photography as my principal research strategy was supported by my observation that many teachers, students, members of community, and university personnel were taking photographs either to document an experience for the school or to use later in promotional materials. I have often wondered whether I would have decided to use this methodology had photographs not been an integral part of schools' cultural programs. The lesson

I learned here, is that in addition to taking courses and reading handbooks and articles on qualitative research, it is also possible to develop potential research strategies from careful observation of the particular phenomenon under investigation.

I soon discovered that simply reading about a particular research methodology was no guarantee that the process would go smoothly. The literature offered few answers to questions I had when problems arose. Reflexive photography seemed straightforward enough in principle—all I had to do was to give each research participant a disposable camera, provide them with guidelines for participating in the study, and then collect the cameras at the end of the day. One consequence that the literature failed to mention was that in giving participants responsibility for taking all the images I had no control over what pictures the participants were taking. This was especially worrying as there was only one opportunity to document a cultural event. When I walked around each school on the day of the event and looked at the range of displays and performances, I felt myself hoping that one of the participants had taken a picture of a particular set of objects. When I attended a presentation I felt myself wishing that someone would take a shot. Several times, I was tempted to grab a camera and take a picture myself; but I resisted the urge. Naturally, having to rely on someone I didn't know for data caused me great anxiety, and I wondered whether I had made the best decision. But as soon as I saw the images from the first research site, I knew that I had made the right decision and that my fear of not getting good photographs was unwarranted: the set of images more than adequately documented the phenomenon (see photographs A and B).

By using disposable cameras instead of digital ones, I was able to ensure that participants would take a set number of images and that they could not erase any. They were also inexpensive and readily available, though there was no guarantee that they would work properly or that the flash would recharge after each picture was taken. I thought about using a more expensive camera, but after seeing some of the photographs taken using the disposable cameras, I was convinced that there would likely be a similar percentage of images that were either too dark, too light, or with an index finger blocking part of the image. After looking at the more than 700 images taken from the three research sites, I was confident that there were sufficient numbers of photographs with a range of subjects that could be used in the eventual analysis of these events.

Design and Structure of Cultural Outreach Programs

My research project began with the selection of three outreach programs designed by universities in the Midwest of the United States for students in K–12 school

communities that are ethnically and racially “homogenous” (>90% White²). Generally, these programs are coordinated and organized by the universities international students’ service personnel who are often in direct contact with international students. Undergraduate and graduate students often serve as coordinators for the various activities and act as intermediaries between the international students and the program directors. At the beginning of each semester, international students are solicited by university personnel and faculty to participate in these outreach programs. These programs are promoted as opportunities for these students to enhance the cultural awareness of students in school communities and as opportunities to expand their contact with “American” students. In addition, the university sends information and brochures to administrators and teachers in local K–12 schools informing them of the availability of their outreach programs. The participation of international students is typically voluntary³ and visits are generally scheduled when a specific request from a school has been received for an individual to speak to students about a particular country or current issue. One university in this study, however, actively recruits international students from overseas to attend their institution and in return for their participation in the outreach program, they receive a significant reduction in tuition. International students involved in these programs generally do not receive any training from the university prior to the school presentations.⁴ Information on how to design and conduct a workshop is usually gathered through informal conversations with other international students from their home country who have prior experience working in the program. They can also discuss issues with university personnel and graduate students responsible for coordinating the events. While teachers and administrators from local elementary and middle schools may be involved in discussions about dates,⁵ locations, and areas of interest, university personnel and

² Demographic information about each potential research site was obtained from profiles of each community and from the United States Census (2000).

³ International students who volunteer their time do not receive any remuneration for their participation. Some universities do offer students transportation to the school while others may offer a small stipend.

⁴ Of the three universities involved in the study, only one provides training to international students via a mandatory weekend workshop on how to design and tailor information to a particular grade or panel. Students who are interested in participating in class presentations must complete this credit course that they also pay for as part of their tuition.

⁵ Interestingly, all of the events in this study took place on a Friday. One event was both morning and afternoon while two were conducted only in the afternoon.

international students on campus are generally responsible for the design, content, and structure of the presentations and workshops. The role of the school is typically one of “support.” Individual teachers or school committees arrange for the scheduling of students during the day and coordinate with the parent teacher organization (PTO) to provide refreshments and assist in getting the school ready for the event.

Commentary

The selection of potential research sites can be a time-consuming process for any researcher and one with significant implications for their investigation. My decision not to look for research sites locally was based, in part, on the fact that many graduate students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison were already conducting research in neighboring schools. In addition, I was interested in comparing different approaches to the design of these cultural events, it would be necessary for me to look at universities in other states in the Midwest. Of course, this decision meant that I had to scroll through a number of university websites to determine whether they had a cultural outreach program, and once I had selected one, I would have to drive long distances to meet with university faculty and school administrators to discuss my research agenda. In two cases, after doing all the preparatory work—after looking at information online and then taking the time to visit—I was unable to include the school and university in the study due to factors such as program design and date of event. In the end I was able to locate and work with three sites where there was little or no research underway. Of course, it meant a lot of driving for me. A number of factors were important in choosing the type of qualitative research I wanted to conduct; for example, whether I would do a case study or ethnography: I had to travel to get to the schools and universities, the events occurred on one day of the school year rather than over the course of the academic year, I had limited funding to visit out-of-state research sites, and I was interested in examining the design, structure, and implementation of a range of programs that were geographically isolated from each other. I had to consider the amount of time I would be able to spend at the schools and universities, the types of data I was interested in generating, and the types of relationships with the research participants that were necessary for an investigation of these events. After reading a number of ethnographies, I realized that I would be unable to meet the criteria required for an ethnographic study due to the limited amount of time I would be able to spend at each research site. I decided that a case-study approach would be the most effective.

Once I had selected the research sites and defined the type of research I wanted to conduct, the next major challenge was to obtain access to the sites and participants needed for the study. I naively assumed that after I had satisfied the criteria for The School of Education’s institutional review board (IRB), this documentation was sufficient and would comply with each institution’s guidelines for conducting research. I had signed copies of my proposal from my committee, sample consent forms, and approved IRB documentation. However, I soon discovered that while the universities and schools were generally satisfied with the forms, these documents did not guarantee automatic access to a potential research site and that each institution had its own criteria for conducting research that I had to meet prior to beginning the study. For example, one school district had its own IRB and forms that had to be turned in at specific times of the year. Another school required a meeting with the district curriculum coordinator and the school principal. All that was needed in a third district was a telephone conversation with the superintendent of the school board, who gave his permission over the phone. To complicate matters further, while I had satisfied all the university’s criteria for conducting research, I would often not know who to contact at a school until the university had received a request for a speaker from a teacher at one of the local elementary or middle schools. This meant that there was often a very short time between finding out the name of the school the university was visiting and date of the event to begin the process of contacting district personnel to get permission to conduct my study and sending out of the necessary consent forms. Given the uncertainty of the process and the chance that I would not be granted access to one of the identified research sites, I found that I had to contact additional universities and schools, and complete additional sets of IRB forms. Although this demanded extra travel time and work, it gave me further options to deal with unexpected situations. In one case a university decided to bring some elementary students from local schools onto its campus to attend a cultural event. This made it impossible for me to contact the schools and obtain the necessary consent forms signed in advance by all participants.

International Day, K–5

The international day at Jackson Elementary School⁶ was organized by the local state university and involved more than 80 international student participants. The program consisted of individual classroom presentations

⁶ All school names used in this article are pseudonyms.

in the morning, a lunch of authentic Malaysian cuisine, and a cultural finale in the school auditorium in the afternoon. The classroom presentations⁷ were 25 minutes in length and generally focused on one country or region of the world, although some presentations involved the participation of international students from as many as three different countries.⁸ The structure of the presentations included the following elements: a greeting and introduction by international students wearing traditional clothing;⁹ the use of a globe or map to locate the country, capital, and landmarks; a discussion of the meaning of the country flag; a language exercise where elementary students would count up to five and/or greet each other in the presenter's language; an overview of the exhibits, which included cultural objects, books, posters and photographs; an opportunity for elementary students to try on a variety of national costumes; and an introduction to, and demonstration of, a game or activity. If time permitted, students and teachers could ask questions.

Although it was the second time that the local university had visited this school to conduct the daylong event, for most school students at Jackson it was their first experience with international students. The day consisted of moving from classroom to classroom with teachers. Each student carried a "passport" on which to write down information about each country. They also had the presenters write a few words in their language as proof of the students' visit. At the end of each presentation, the principal would inform students that their visit to the country was over and that the "plane" was getting ready to "depart for the next destination."

The cultural finale consisted of a flag parade, dance and music performances, a fashion show, and a song that everyone sang on the theme of difference. In the flag parade, which began with the first "International Day" back in 1989, international students carried a flag onto the stage in the auditorium and announced the name of their country. Dance and music performances included exhibitions of Tai Chi, a Nepalese dance, and a guitar solo. A number of students from Jackson Elementary School had been selected to wear "costumes" provided by the university and representing various countries.¹⁰ As both international and elementary students exhibited their clothing on stage, they each gave a short commentary on their attire. The finale concluded with an international student leading a rendition of the song "Love in Any Language,"¹¹ which reflected the theme of diversity.

Commentary

Qualitative research is a process that requires the ability to adapt and respond to unanticipated events. I had spent weeks leading up to conducting my first study of these cultural events making sure everything would be ready to go on the day of the study. This included testing, checking, and numbering the cameras; collecting consent forms and gathering the names of the students, international students, and teachers; sending out consent forms to parents of children who didn't want their child photographed; and going over the schedule for the day with the school principal and the program director of the outreach program. It was an exciting moment for me as this site represented the start of the process that I hoped would provide me with the data necessary to write my dissertation. To make sure things were in good order, I arrived at school an hour early. However, as soon as I stepped into the school office, I was informed that a parent of one of the student participants had called and decided that my "sample size" was too small and that his child would not be participating. I called the parent and we had a conversation about the study, but I was unable to change his mind. Two international students and one elementary teacher were unable to attend due to illness. My immediate concern was to find replacements before the day started as I had stated in my proposal that there would be at least three elementary students, three teachers, and three international students taking photographs during the study. As I accompanied the principal and the program director to find individuals to replace the original participants, I realized that I should have anticipated the possibility of people not showing up by making a backup list of additional participants. Although things did not match the ideal situation that I had in mind, we were able to find individuals who agreed to take photographs. As the volunteers

⁷ Classroom presentations were from the following countries: Bangladesh, China, Hong Kong, Brazil, Colombia, India, Japan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Malaysia, Turkey, Poland, Nepal, Angola, Ethiopia, Sudan, Pakistan, Thailand, Korea, Taiwan, Palestine, Jordan, Syria, and Tunisia.

⁸ For students in grade K-2, the classroom presentations included "African Market," Bangladesh, Japan, South America, Turkey/Poland, Nepal, Malaysia, and Thailand/Korea/Taiwan. The schedule for students in grades 3-5 consisted of the following presentations: Kyrgyzstan/Latvia, Kenya, Nepal, China/Hong Kong, "Malaysian Restaurant," Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, and Syria/Tunisia/Palestine.

⁹ The wearing of "traditional" clothing is mandatory for all students participating in the classroom presentations. While most are informed of the need to bring clothing prior to their arrival in the United States, most have to write home to their families and have it sent. Depending on the country and culture, the purchase of a traditional garment can be an expensive investment for an undergraduate/graduate student.

¹⁰ A number of students in the fashion show provided their own outfits. Teachers were also encouraged to wear clothing from another country during the day.

¹¹ Patti Sandhi wrote the song, the lyrics can be found at <http://www.lyricsmp3.net/D24000/kk23799.htm>.

were signing their consent forms, I had all the participants meet me before they went into the classrooms to give them their disposable cameras and to discuss the guidelines for the day. I explained that they were free to document the event as they saw it; they should not let anyone else take pictures with their disposable camera; and they could take as many images on the roll of film as they wanted to, though they were not required to finish the roll. It is impossible for me to determine what impact these “replacement” participants had on the study, but I was sure that I had additional names of people to work with at the other two sites.

Cultural Awareness Event, K–5

The cultural event at Banyan Creek Elementary School consisted of four 30-minute presentations by international students from the local university. This was the third time the event had been held at the school, and it was planned to coincide with United Nations’ International Week. Teachers were provided with information about each of the presentations prior to the event, which ranged from Indian games and clothing, to shadow puppets from Indonesia, to songs from Honduras. While each class could sign up to attend one, two, or three of the presentations to be held in various locations throughout the school, no class attended all four. The presentation entitled “Indian Games” consisted of students playing “kho-kho,” an improvisation of tag in the school gymnasium. The other three presentations were designed with the following elements: a flag of the country; a visual display of cultural objects, such as souvenirs, photographs, t-shirts, posters, postcards, and clothing; an activity involving elementary students in a performance using shadow puppets or participating in a regional dance; discussions about general living conditions in the country; and time for questions from students during and at the end of the presentation. Students moved from one presentation to the other with their teacher without any form of documentation, such as a passport or notebook, to record information. At the conclusion of the event, international students packed up their materials and returned to campus.

Commentary

The process of conducting research requires flexibility and an understanding that a research proposal is precisely that, a proposal. When I submitted my proposal to my committee, I stated my interest in generating data on the perspectives of three different groups: international students, elementary or middle school students, and school faculty. At the first research site,

there were sufficient numbers of international students available to participate in the study, particularly to take photographs and then to be interviewed. However, at the second site, with only four students presenting, there were no additional students available to take photographs. This raised an important dilemma for me because I had the following question in my proposal: How do international students, elementary students, and staff members perceive the performative nature of these cultural events? How would it impact my study if international students were unavailable to take their own photographs? Given the inherent constraints of this outreach program in that it relied on the voluntary participation of international students, and the fact that the students presenting were unable to see the other presentations, it meant that only students and teachers were available to take photographs and be interviewed. Furthermore, of the three research sites in the study, only one had international students available to take photographs. The question for me as a researcher was how I could address the perspectives of each group if there was less data available from one of the groups. In order to maintain the integrity of the study, and to address this issue, I included the data collected for each group, emphasizing the perspectives of students and teachers and noting the difficulty I had in generating data from international students. I was disappointed that I was not able to fully achieve all of the research goals stated in my original proposal. However, the experience did challenge me to respond to several unanticipated situations by modifying my research while, at the same time, maintaining the integrity of the study.

Global Outreach, 6–8

Although it was originally advertised as an event for music students only, the 45-minute presentation at North Glendon Middle School was open to all students and included topics that went beyond music such as topics on South Africa. The presentation, designed by two international students from South Africa and the director of the outreach program at the local university, was intended to provide middle school students with a general overview of the African continent, with specific emphasis on southern Africa. As soon as they arrived at the auditorium, the presenters set-up their materials on tables at the front. These included posters on apartheid and objects from the region. Off to one side they displayed a large political map of Africa. The presentation consisted of the following: an overview of the geography of Africa with an emphasis on southern Africa; introductions and greetings in Xhosa, one of South Africa’s official languages; an overview of living conditions in black townships

through a story about a young boy named Themba¹² who had moved from the rural countryside to work in Johannesburg after his father failed to return from working in the gold mines; a talk about apartheid and its effects on people who were classified as “colored;” a rendition of the South African national anthem while middle school students stood and saluted the flag; and an opportunity for students to view displays of posters on apartheid and a range of cultural objects, including textiles, jewelry, and wood carvings from South Africa. The majority of the approximately 100 students in attendance then returned to their scheduled classes while the music students performed pieces from Africa in the music room. One of the presenters translated the lyrics of the songs into English and provided a commentary on the song’s social and cultural context. During the informal performance, presenters were invited to sing along while the middle school students played their instruments.

Commentary

The process of conducting research is not just about generating data. Just as important is maintaining sincere relationships about the intent and nature of one’s research with all participants involved. As a researcher, I was candid with all university personnel and school faculty about my interest in examining these events and did not hide the fact that I had questions about their program design, about whether they were actually meeting their stated goals, and providing students with opportunities to challenge stereotypes. I was interested in looking across all the programs and not focusing on just one. In response to a discussion I had about the rationale for my study, one university faculty member stated that it did not matter what I found because “they were going to continue with the program the way it was.” While I encountered some reluctance from university personnel about the nature of my study, as no one had conducted a study of the university program before, there was one program director, who, despite the information I had provided to her, was “suspicious” of my intentions in conducting the investigation and with the overall aim of my research. As a result, it was difficult at times to get information about upcoming visitations to schools, find out the names of international students who had participated in the program, and obtain replies to requests for an interview time.

I had met with all the international students who were participating in the event at this research site and had provided them with an overview of the study and its goals. All students were given the option of not participating in the study, and I was sympathetic when one student informed me that she did not want to be photo-

graphed. However, when she then claimed, unreasonably, that the research was exploiting her, I was at a loss for words. Until then, I had met no resistance to any of the requests I had made any of the participants, and I was dumbfounded by this person’s reaction to the study, in spite of the fact that I had sent her information by email and letter weeks before the event. As I had already spent considerable time making arrangements for the study and sending out consent forms to everyone, rather than changing the research site, which would probably have meant waiting months for another request from a school, we agreed that teachers and students would not take photographs when this person was presenting. The fact that the final set of images did not document this part of the program appears not to have had a significant impact on what participants discussed during the interviews, as this person decided only to talk about a book with the middle school students. Interestingly, I came to discover that this person’s objections were based on the fact that she was not being compensated for her participation. In any case, I was in no position to offer her any money as this is a question each researcher must answer when submitting forms to an IRB, and I had made no provision for such an eventuality.

Some Final Thoughts on the Research Process

In the introduction to this article, I stated that one of the reasons for me to research these outreach programs came from my desire to examine my own involvement in the design of such events. I would like to conclude by sharing some thoughts and insights that I have gained about the research process and the impact it has had on my ability to answer this question. In terms of a research methodology, I firmly believe that reflexive photography was the most appropriate methodological tool for an investigation of these cultural outreach programs in spite of the hurdles that I encountered. I do not believe that I could have generated such informative data if I had relied on a quantitative approach, such as a survey. The main reason for this is that the photographs not only helped the participants discuss what they saw in the image, but more importantly, they led to conversations that were often unexpected and unanticipated. For example, a number of the participants commented on the displays of cultural objects and their similarity to exhibitions of artifacts from non-Western societies they had seen in museums.

I have come to see qualitative research as “endlessly creative and interpretive” and that the photographs generated offered me unique possibilities that are both “artistic

¹² Sacks, M. (1992) Themba. New York: Lodestar Books.

and political” for writing the dissertation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 23). For example, *Let us now praise famous men: Three tenant families* (Agee & Evans, 1960), a portrait of depression-era sharecroppers, begins with a set of photographs that both stand apart from and reinforce the narrative. Using this model, my dissertation begins with 20 to 25 images, one picture to a page. The photographs are self-explanatory. They are representations of the cultural events. While I had originally intended to analyze the data from one theoretical perspective, the information generated from the interviews and an analysis of the photographs offered me the opportunity not only to draw analogies between these displays in schools and cultural exhibitions in museums, but to use an additional framework from which to examine and critique these events. In reading the interview transcripts of the students, teachers, international students, and university personnel, I discovered that the data from the study revealed the following points: a) there is no theoretical framework or model that guides the organization, design, and structure of these popular programs; b) programs offered by the office of International Student Services or ethnic studies departments often replace program that are developed locally by schools; c) programs represent an unthreatening approach to multiculturalism and presenters are encouraged by university personnel not to deal with controversial issues or topics; d) international students have not been included in conversations with university personnel about how they want to represent themselves; e) no formal evaluations of the programs have been conducted to determine whether they are actually meeting their goals of prejudice reduction; f) all three programs, despite being geographically isolated, have very similar approaches to exhibiting the cultures of non-Western societies; g) students and teachers retain superficial information about the presenters and the cultures represented. Given this information, I have come to the conclusion that the cultural event I organized more than 10 years ago was conceptualized using similar as-

sumptions and perspectives to those found in these current programs about how to represent peoples from so-called “third world” countries. I have also found that the continued use of such programs in school communities that are predominantly white may significantly impede the opportunity for students to develop the analytical tools necessary to examine their own role in the continuation of injustice and oppression in the world.

My experience conducting this first qualitative study using reflexive photography has led me to look at the use of this methodological tool to examine these types of programs at universities throughout the United States, and as an approach to investigate popular weeklong and month-long multicultural events, such as International Week or Black History Month. My hope is that this work will lead to a fundamental re-examination of the structures of these popular programs and to assessments of their impact on students in classrooms across the country.

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