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Save Our Schools Rally Chicago, March 27, 2013

Todd Alan Price, *National Louis University*

Abstract: Using a video camera, I documented the historic *Save our Schools Rally Chicago, March 27, 2013*. Included was a march led by President Karen Lewis of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU), interviews respectively of Reverend Jesse Jackson, a special education teacher-Diana, and a healthcare worker, and footage of community members performing civil disobedience. Perhaps most compelling are the voices of students—high school seniors—who spoke eloquently against school closings.

Keywords: Curricular text(s); qualitative research; visual ethnography; cartography; documentary form

Introduction: Video Content as Curricular Text

To the sound of bugle and drum, a phalanx of marchers kept time to the band, clapping and parading down the streets of Chicago. On this day, March 27, 2013, the group gathered expressed their considerable discontent with the Board of Education, appointed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, and the plan by the mayor and board alike to close 54 schools from the Chicago Public School District (CPS).

I aimed a video camera and with this video documentary footage, *Save our Schools Rally Chicago, March 27, 2013*, hoped to capture the commitment to halt the closings, etched on the faces and expressed in the voices of that moment. I did so with the intent to try to represent in one portrait what is increasingly being characterized as the resistance to corporate education reform in the USA. The video documentary footage featured here is particularly personal to me, because as a teacher education faculty member at a Chicago University, it is evocative of the proud labor and social justice history, as well as a colorful illustration of a renewed movement.

To be certain, the slow march down Clark Street was not entirely new, it was typical of other marches across Chicago over the last several years that I've witnessed and participated in since teaching here. Indeed, I've been able to document several such responses by community members to what had become the predictable, ongoing, withering attacks on teachers. But in another sense this march was atypical, largely because it followed a broadly successful, community-supported teacher strike of 2012. Furthermore, it represented the conclusion to a number of citywide hearings that were ostensibly seeking input on the proposed school closures. The public had turned out in great number to these hearings, largely to oppose any such plan.

Reverend Jesse Jackson

The culmination of this historic episode, the protest to save the schools, is reminiscent of the long struggle for civil rights in Chicago that began with Dr. Martin Luther King, often with one of his protégés, Reverend Jesse Jackson, at his side. That struggle notably included protest over discrimination and segregated housing as well as substandard schools for people of color. Ever since King's tragic assassination, Reverend Jackson has labored onward, carrying the torch and continuing the struggle.

Thus it seems apropos to foreground this history because the latest struggle for public education is one of the defining civil rights movements of our time.

In the first segment of the video, Jackson strolls arm-in-arm with Lewis of the CTU. In recognition of the symbolic imagery of civil rights struggle past and the reality of the civil rights struggle present, Jackson's participation on the march was not only laudable but also notable. Perhaps unbeknownst to the Illinois folks gathered that day, he had also "put on walking shoes" (a rather infamous line attributed to President Obama, who actually declined to march on the picket line) during a similar rally for public education in Wisconsin in support of the teachers there. That protest aimed to counter Governor Scott Walker's attacks on public education and teacher unionism . . . an event I also documented.

I thought it appropriate then to acknowledge Jackson's stridency by conducting an impromptu interview. In reference to mayoral control of the Board of Education, he pointed out that Chicago was the only city in the state with such a system. His words were succinct and prophetic: "this is a top-down oligarchy . . . it should be a bottom-up democracy."

Diana CPS School Teacher

Equally poignant and even more personal to me were the words of a former adult student of mine. A special education teacher, Diana, argued that none of the schools should be closed down. Her position was that the arguments for closure were specious, especially those that claimed “underutilization” of school facilities. She reflected on her students and their great need: “I’ve got 26 kids in my classroom with varying and special needs . . . to suggest that [a classroom with] 20 kids is underutilized is ridiculous . . . because that [20] seems like a perfect number and would allow me to move kids incredibly.”

High School Students Chicago Public Schools

In another segment, I was a passerby, merely dropping in on an impromptu interview conducted by another videographer. The insightful comments of two students, each from Chicago’s underserved schools. One young man uttered these sentiments:

I think Rahm Emanuel needs to see the student standpoint on this. He’s thinking for himself, he’s thinking about his billionaire buddies. Closing schools and merging schools you’ll have students . . . you’ll have 5, 6, and 7 years olds that will now have to cross these gang lines to get back and forth to school everyday . . . why would you subject someone so young to that danger?

The interviewer casually asked his female friend “why do you care?” to which she replied that even though she was graduating, she still cared for the younger classmates who had to continue to live in the neighborhoods whose schools were taken away.

Service Employees International Union Healthcare Worker

To cap off the event, in the last segment I spoke with a service employee who, carrying a sign, picketed on the sidewalk. With her union

sisters, she argued for an end to Mayor Rahm Emanuel's rule, "we put him in, and we will put him out." Asked if this proposed closure of schools was indeed an attack on labor, she vigorously agreed, stating, "if we don't come together, and stick together, no one is going to have a job."

A colleague, seasoned activist, book publisher and writer, Lew Rosenbaum, wrapped up the version of events that day with an article in *The People's Tribune* that included these words:

The movement is escalating its tactics in the fight to stop the school closings. That's why 100 people got arrested March 27. As tactics escalate further, we are keeping our eyes on the national political battle. To thwart the local closings and privatization we'll need to fight for a national plan to fund all public schools equitably.

Method: Video as Tool for Social Inquiry

As a tool for documentation, video is without peer. I describe briefly some of the considerations of this tool for social inquiry and curricular research.

A Panasonic digital camcorder was used which provides a certain gravitas to the scene. A large camera (unlike today's small, simple camcorders, which offer other features and benefits), it harkens back to the VHS camcorders of the past, when producing video was largely for the purpose of making a documentary and rendering events that would otherwise not be "seen". Hauling a large, but reasonable light camera such as this one with comfortable eyepiece provides a sense of making a movie.

The editing process used for this video included using a prosumer editing program called I-Movie '11, which allows for simple edits, modest computer-generated effects, including basic titling and standard transitions (fade out, blend). Furthermore, and more importantly for timely rendering of an event as newsworthy, this software is easy to digitize the video, to export and then to upload as a video stream (I use YouTube) quickly.

As with many traditional and contemporary qualitative forms of inquiry, it is important to note that making a video documentary represents only one take (Cuban director Santiago Alvarez proudly aimed his work in this direction, as *Toma Uno*). There is no objective reality; it is inherently impossible to be inclusive of all facets of a context (e.g., Barone, 2001; Britzman, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Gershon, 2013). Similarly, documenting this event meant that inevitably some voices will be unheard in the interpretation and presentation of this movement. By choosing some voices, others are unheard. So conducting documentary work in video leaves unresolved the struggle over representation, or what I term the curricular lens.

Discussion: Video as Curricular Lens

The implications of video as curricular lens are significant. On one hand, video is omnipresent and—given to digitization—accessible to nearly everyone. The hyper-enhancement in self-representation (through Facebook, for example, and through what is popularly referred to as the ‘selfie’) . . . is staggering. The ability to record, using an ever more tiny digital imagery capturing device, to then edit, export, upload and download for viewing, for the world to see . . . is truly powerful. On the other hand, the potential for harm is great; video is synonymous with monitoring and surveillance, and it is this feature which poses the greatest challenge for teacher education as teacher candidates are expected to produce “evidence” of their effective teaching practices (the edTPA). It is troubling when video is narrowly understood to be evidence and curriculum is reduced to that which is observable (Price, 2014).

Yet the emancipatory possibility of video production and deconstruction offers an expansion of possibility and compliments Huckaby’s (2009b) seminal work on public pedagogies as presented through the lens of documentaries. The video in this case becomes the literal and metaphorical curricular lens to discuss the political (Apple, 1993; Freire, 1998; Huckaby,

2009a), epistemological and ontological ways that pedagogies and every day practice(s) affect our lives, bodies and being (Huckaby, 2009). As media continues to become more ubiquitous in the everyday lives of our students and schools, there is significance in the academic use of digital media becoming a part of the way knowledge is constituted within the representations of academic work (Gershon, 2011; Pink, 2007). In sum, if documentaries and other forms of mixed media do not play a crucial role in the intellectual climate of contemporary inquiry and curricular work, how will the crisis of representation (Marcus, 1998; Marcus & Fischer, 1986) continue to affect our ways of knowing?

My sense is that video will continue to inform our senses and as such has earned a space for deliberation at the table of curriculum studies. From the analog to the digital, non-static media becomes complex phenomena, taking a place besides static media: educational literature and print-based curriculum studies texts. Not new (educational television and instructional film have hovered around since Edison) but striking a different chord, setting a different tone . . . video creates a multi-dimensional space for representation, inquiry and expression. Frozen yet generative, the moving pictures of the documentary form pose(s) novel challenges and exude great potential to break down the walls of the classroom, (re)opening critical opportunities for teaching and learning . . . as well as sustaining critical social justice struggles for posterity.

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