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Making documentaries about educational disadvantage: ethical and practical issues

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In 1993 a team of educators from the University of South Australia was awarded a DEET funded Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT) National Teaching Development Grant to produce a series of videos about teaching literacy in disadvantaged schools.1 The project arose from our concern that our pre-service and in-service courses about literacy and schooling failed to foreground educational disadvantage. Our research had shown that teachers working in disadvantaged schools frequently claimed mainstream approaches to literacy pedagogy did not work in their contexts. Teachers' work in developing children's academic performance is not the same in all

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contexts (McCrae, 1990). New teachers felt unprepared to work in disadvantaged schools (Comber et al, 1991). The Christie et al (1991) project of national significance found that such issues of social justice were largely absent from university courses on language and literacy. Local action research projects where teachers from disadvantaged schools investigated their practices highlighted teachers' uncertainties and stress levels (Hill, 1992).

Yet our experiences in schools had told us that some of the most innovative teaching of literacy was occurring in disadvantaged schools (Connell, 1994). One estimate claims that at least one third of Disadvantaged Schools Program funding is devoted to literacy-related projects. At the same time the media continued to condemn state schooling and to produce a literacy crisis. Various state-wide tests continued to document that children disadvantaged by poverty were statistically more likely to perform in the lower bands of the range on mainstream literacy assessments (Education Department of South Australia, 1992).

In this context we developed our project which was funded by DEET/CAUT. Our aims were:

- to produce a series of videotapes which deal with teaching literacy in disadvantaged schools for use in preservice and inservice courses
- to demonstrate the kinds of decisions teachers wrestle with and how they resolve their difficulties
- to raise questions as well as documenting successful practice
- to involve school teachers, tertiary teachers and student teachers in making the documentary in a collegial action research approach.

In this project we attempt to represent the perspectives of those who work in disadvantaged schools: students, student teachers, parents, teachers, principals. We also represent the perspectives of those whose workplaces are concerned with economic disadvantage, such as the Brotherhood of St Laurence and the Disadvantaged Schools Program and Targeted Populations Unit. In particular we seek their views on literacy, poverty and schooling.

In making the videos we did not intend to sanitise footage but to foreground the problematic as well as document approaches which we saw as hopeful, optimistic and effective. Our explicit agenda was to improve our own teaching by foregrounding issues of poverty and educational disadvantage, which the Christie (1991) report had indicated are often ignored in tertiary literacy education. To do this we needed to understand more about literacy, poverty and schooling; to investigate what was known about literacy and poverty; and equally important to examine what was not known. We needed to examine why and in what ways literacy and poverty are put together in educational, political and welfare discourses. We aimed to educate ourselves in the

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process of producing the videos.

The project is multilayered. We aimed to make the production of the videos a change process for the producers, the participants and the students who are the major target audience. We involved student teachers, lecturers from different faculties and campuses and staff, parents and students from disadvantaged schools, policy makers, consultants from charitable organisations, bureaucrats and educational researchers. Our aim was to produce multivocal documentaries in which different views are heard. From the outset it was an ambitious undertaking and fraught with risk.

The project as research text

The project was funded by CAUT to improve teaching. Yet we have also seen it as an occasion for research: for praxis. We are aware that in adopting this approach we are challenging that binary opposition between research and teaching perpetuated by such funding bodies as ARC (research) and CAUT (teaching).

Lather (1993:12) argues that the boundaries between emancipatory inquiry and liberatory teaching are necessarily blurred as researchers employ more interactive approaches. Anyon (1994) also argues that:

If theory and practice are to be integrated, then practice itself ought to be a primary resource from which these theoretical recommendations that are made are drawn. ... mainstream opposition between theory and practice is falsely premised. (Anyon, 1994:118)

In their first editorial of The Australian Educational Researcher the new editors (Blackmore et al, 1994) suggest that there has been an absence of praxis-oriented discourse in Australian educational research. They note also the absence of work which deals explicitly with social justice. In addition Hunter (1994:18) claims that academics

often fail to see the significance of the mundane and the everyday. Further he argues:

If academic theorists have any contribution to make to this process then it will not lie in the discovery of uncompromising principles but in providing accounts of the negotiations that overlook neither their complexity nor their worldliness.

Our plan was to work with student teachers on practicum in declared disadvantaged schools and to document the practices and the difficulties involved in the everyday work of teachers. This paper represents our attempt to re-read our project through a research frame and in particular to point to issues we faced as tertiary teacher researchers working to improve our own practice and as producers of

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educational documentaries with an explicit social justice agenda. In researching the project we have drawn on Ruby's (1992) analysis of the dilemmas faced by anthropologists and documentary film makers. Ruby raises many questions about documentaries being 'windows to reality' and points out that film makers are authors of socially constructed messages even as they strive to produce multivocal texts. He argues that the move to give authority to the subject who was there has now reached an extreme point.

There is an unspoken assumption about the validity of interviews, particularly with those outside the mainstream. These films seem to suggest that what subjects say about themselves and their situation is to be taken at face value. (Ruby, 1992:49)

He cautions that "What people say about themselves is data to be interpreted, not the truth." (Ruby, 1992:49)

In our project to produce documentaries about educational disadvantage we had to face many complex political and ethical dilemmas as the project continually shifted across the boundaries of theory and practice, research and teaching, author directed and collaborative work, documentary as teaching instrument and as ethnography. Ruby's work is helpful in providing ways to help us conceptualise the socio-political dimensions of these shifts.

Ruby (1992) suggests that there is a range of positions from which the documentary film maker has historically approached the task of documentary film production. He suggests that these positions can be categorised in three ways: documentary as art form, as social service and as political act.

Documentary as art form

It is the imperative of producing a documentary as art form which partly explains why non-specialists in media production such as our research team involve a professional production house in the making of educational videos. Our two successful grant applications for the making of educational documentaries in 1993 and 1994 have included budgets for the engagement of a professional video production house.2 These budgets, approved by a DEET panel which also agreed that professional producers should be involved, include the allocation of significant sums of money for filming on location but also for post-production, a process which allows the incorporation into the documentaries of high production values in image, graphics and music.

During filming and post-production a production house has a powerful say in what they would view as the aesthetics of the matter. This is seen as their area of expertise. This is what we amateurs are paying them for. However, as researchers and scriptwriters and partners in the editing process, we have increasingly come to understand that such

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matters, which may be regarded by some as the art of video production, cannot in fact be separated from matters of ideology and politics.

Points of discussion and even argument between the researchers and the production house over such matters as the 'look', the sound and pace of the film - matters which they see as issues of aesthetics - are, from our point of view, points which sometimes also mark key ideological tensions. It is here, then, that the other positions posited by Ruby come into play: documentary as social service and as political act.

Documentary as social service

Both the making of our educational documentary videos and our research into their production and reception is undertaken from a clearly articulated socio-political position. Our work is based on principles of equity and social justice. We work in schools and the university with teachers and students in the hope of making a difference to educational outcomes for students in disadvantaged schools.

We see our educational documentaries as performing two clear tasks. Firstly, they make a contribution to the changing of teaching practice within the university sector - the express purpose for which they were funded by the DEET Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching (CAUT). Secondly, they perform a kind of social service to schools and other agencies working with communities living in poverty. The documentaries address issues which are of key concern to these people and they put these issues of literacy, poverty and disadvantage on the public agenda in a popular medium, a medium which is accessible to the range of stakeholders.

Ruby (1992) suggests that although it is difficult on ethical grounds to justify making films about the private acts of the socially disadvantaged, politically disenfranchised, and the economically oppressed, "the act is condoned by society because of the assumption that the act of filming will do some good, will cause something to be done about the problems" (Ruby, 1992:44). That is, the act of making documentaries about these groups is condoned because it is seen be performing a social service and leading to political action.

On the other hand, Ruby cautions that there has as yet been little research about the impact of documentaries. In response, we must declare here that although we are working from the assumption that there will be beneficial results from our videos, we are not yet in a position to substantiate or refute his point as we have not yet undertaken a thorough investigation into the documentaries' reception by and impact on the intended audiences.3

Documentary as political act

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Although Ruby (1992) separates the three positions he maintains can be adopted by documentary makers: documentary as art form, social service or political act, it could be said that the first two are, each in their own way, particular kinds of political acts. Ruby suggests that much of the present work by documentary film makers is reflexive and centres on self-examination4 and that this is part of a general situation in the artistic and academic world which has been described by a range of social theorists as a "crisis in representation" (Clifford, 1986). Ruby summarises this by suggesting that in the past documentary film makers and viewers shared the assumption that it was possible to discover and report the truth about others; that documentaries were made up of uncontested statements of facts and were considered to be official versions of someone else's reality (Ruby, 1992:46).

If, on the other hand, we begin from an understanding that documentaries are not windows on to 'reality' but are articulations of a particular point of view, what are the implications for us as producers of them? If we accept that reality is a social construction,

we must accept that in making educational documentaries about disadvantaged groups we are active in such a construction of 'the other' - the so-called 'disadvantaged' other.

Our politics in this project, an underlying commitment to equity and social justice, suggests to us that we need to find ways to make documentaries in which we do not speak for others. But in making educational documentaries with the purpose of teaching those in a privileged (and possibly uninformed) position about literacy, poverty and disadvantage, we cannot avoid speaking about the subjects of our videos. At best we can try to find ways to speak about them and with them that are congruent with such a politics.

In the terms of film medium and form, while recent film theory and textual analysis has focussed on the postmodern phenomenon of the blurring of genres and the hybridity of genres, including the lack of clear distinction between fiction and non-fiction, drama and documentary (and the coining of such new terms as docudrama and infotainment), Ruby suggests that this is not how documentary is viewed by its popular audience. In his discussion of collaborative documentary film making, Ruby maintains that 'the public' still believes that documentary films can be objective, and that while this is so "the documentary has the additional obligation never to appear neutral " but must, like post-modern meta-fiction (Waugh, 1984), try to find ways to make explicit the mechanisms of its own production (Ruby, 1992:47).

Taken to its logical conclusion, such a view would result in films which, while being overt in their acceptance of authorial

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responsibility, nonetheless work to demystify the image as truth bearer and make overt the fact that the film is a "vehicle for the transmission of a message constrained by the range of social expression possible within a society." (Ruby, 1992:47) The feminist documentary film maker Trinh Minh-Ha takes issue with this argument, maintaining that it is an impossible task:

The question at issue is that of greater or lesser falsification. Although the selection and treatment of the material being filmed already indicate the side s/he chooses (with its ideological bias and constraints), lesser falsification - such as editing in the camera (sic) or exposing cuts as black spaces in the structure of the film - often implies no falsification. (Minh-Ha, 1991:56)

Although it is perhaps possible to envisage technical possibilities by which a film can make its constructedness more rather than less overt, what would it mean to make overt such matters as: who wrote and speaks the voice over; what factors were involved in the choice of the 'expert witness'; how were the interviews structured, who did the interviewing and what questions were asked?

Further, in the case of our project, what exactly does our 'authorial responsibility' entail? What can authorial responsibility mean in relation to a project which involves a range of collaborators, relies on the goodwill of teachers and schools, includes a relationship with a production house and their 'expertise' and has public and financial accountability to an arm of the state, a committee of DEET?

These are some of the questions we feel the need to address as we consider the process of making educational videos as a research text.

Producing the documentary text: dilemmas faced

Immediate dilemmas which arose in the planning stages of the videos were at once theoretical, ethical and practical. They included naming parts of the school population as disadvantaged; decisions about how to represent the student and parent communities in disadvantaged schools and decisions which related to our use of the video medium. To be more

specific we faced questions like:

- Are we going to use the term 'disadvantage'? Isn't that promoting a deficit norm in itself?
- What images of children will we show? How can we ensure that poverty is not sensationalised or prettied up?
- How will we protect the identities of children and their schools? How will we ensure 'informed consent'?5
- What are we asking of student teachers?
- How will using the video medium affect what we do? To what extent can

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the video medium produce a multi-vocal text and the depth of problematisation we sought?6

On naming 'disadvantage'

Several members of our reference group for the project were concerned about the word 'disadvantaged' which appears in the project title - Teaching literacy in disadvantaged schools: getting it on the tertiary agenda. It was suggested that to speak about a school or members of the school population as 'disadvantaged' promoted deficit norms and that use of the term 'difference' might be better. The argument was to move towards diversity, to be positive in our naming of the subjects of our study. Further if the word disadvantaged was used in communications with parents about the project or on the final footage weren't there major ethical concerns about identifying people as poor?

Considerable debate occurred around this question. We were aware that to use the term 'difference' may not be an acceptable solution. We agree with McLaren and Lankshear (1993) that:

celebrating difference without investigating the ways in which difference becomes constituted in oppressive asymetrical relations of power often betrays a simpleminded romanticism and "exoticization" of the Other. (McLaren and Lankshear, 1993:408)

Other members of the reference group argued that to use the word 'difference' was to avoid naming the problem. Already the word 'poverty' was avoided in educational discourse. The Disadvantaged Schools Program (from which we had taken our terminology) kept the issue visible. Thus even before we commenced filming we were very much aware of the political nature of this project and the multiplicity of ways in which our work might be read. The tension between reproducing what might be taken as deficit discursive practices and producing something credible, recognisable and supportive of current educational projects such as the Disadvantaged Schools Program was not easily resolved.

Tait (1993:6) writing about 'street kids' explains the problem with ethnographic work which takes non-mainstream groups as its object of study.

[T]he very production of these cultural categories is necessarily normative -thereby- adding to the catalogue of depictions of the abnormal through which the desirability of the norm is augmented.

We are very aware of our own discursive practices, the words we use, the questions we ask. In writing scripts, choosing titles and selecting footage we are making decisions about naming. Our partial 'solution' is to problematise the ways language is used to maintain disadvantage, including the texts we produce ourselves. Thus in our first video words

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such as 'literacy' and 'poverty' become targets for scrutiny. We attempted to present multiple perspectives on these constructs which would work towards disrupting myths about 'the literacy crisis' and truth claims where literacy is the solution to poverty. Informing student and teacher audiences whilst simultaneously problematising educational discourses proved to be complex and difficult.

On representing the 'disadvantaged'

A major issue in the production of the video were our competing agendas. On the one hand we believed there was a need to present a tale that would make a difference in the minds of teachers and student teachers about poverty and literacy. We wanted to challenge deficit myths about children living in poverty and their intellectual and academic potential. Thus we did not want to represent people living in poverty as to blame for their poverty; nor did we want to represent the children as living in chaos and deprivation which would prevent them learning at school. At the same time we did not want to produce a documentary which would lack credibility.

We had previously been involved in the production of educational videos and had been told that the literacy pedagogical practices we were advocating were not believable because the teacher in the video turned her back on the class. The teachers who responded to the trial footage claimed they had to keep watch on the children in their class or behaviour problems would immediately occur. Teacher viewers also noted the way children were dressed; the state of the classroom and its resources; how many students were in the class; the number of adults; how many of the children were members of visible minorities; the number of non-English speaking children. Thus viewers do more than watch the video, they deconstruct the context of its production ; they construct a narrative which compares and contrasts with their own realities and identities. So we faced some dilemmas:

Should the children look poor?
What do poor kids look like?
Should the schools look poor?
What do poor schools look like?
Should we show children misbehaving or attending?
Should we show teachers struggling or teaching confidently?

If it was to be credible then it had to be 'authentic', but we could not allow its authenticity to put any of our collaborating communities at risk. We could not for example show recognisable students acting inappropriately just to make the video believable; we could not show student teachers failing dismally on their practicums just to make the video more 'real'. Ironically, to have shown these scenarios which are often associated with disadvantaged schools we would have had to employ

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actors. In any case we were committed to demonstrating and publicising the positive, innovative and productive things that are happening in disadvantaged schools. Ultimately we could not assume that anything we produced in this medium would be seen as authentic. In fact it may be that we realised too late what Reid and her colleagues argue:

In this sense we may need to tell very good tales - tales that will take our readers up from where they are and move them, emotionally and intellectually, away from everyday understandings of the 'classroom and 'classrooms'. These need to be 'fantastic' rather than realist-fragmentary tales of strange classrooms, and stranger practices, made strange perhaps by a shifting in the narrative position of the teller to accommodate the contradictions of contravision, so that the discursive constitution of both tales and tellers is made clear. (Reid et al, in press:32)

If it was to make a difference in people's minds we would need to depend on the administrators, teachers, parents and students who worked in disadvantaged schools to speak for themselves. The best we could do perhaps was to make literacy, schooling and disadvantage a problem and dispel any totalising 'solutions'. In the process of making the videos we brought different groups of people together in conversation to examine what we 'knew' and what we didn't. The product of our research, the videos, would perhaps start further and different conversations in

other sites. The best we could hope for was that new alliances of educators would begin to work together for the needs of disadvantaged students; groups who were prepared to have our knowledge about literacy schooling and poverty disrupted.

A transformative politics needs to mobilize individuals through their affective investments in certain issues rather than through essentialist claims around the authenticity of identity through direct experience (McLaren & Lankshear, 1993:400).

Student teacher as co-researchers: why not?

An integral part of the design of the project was the inclusion of student teachers, their university practicum lecturers and classroom teacher supervisors in the planning and collecting of film footage. In our bid to produce 'authentic', 'credible' videos for teacher and student teacher audiences we decided to work with student teachers in disadvantaged schools. The aim was to see school sites afresh and problematically through the eyes of student teachers. As lecturers and teachers 'supervised' the student teacher we would be there as well to document instances of their planning, their classroom teaching and their de-briefing. Student teachers would also interview children in their classes, on camera, about life at school, literacy and how teachers could help them learn. Thus the footage would model

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collaborative planning and review. It would demonstrate student teachers learning from children. Student teachers would in fact act as ethnographers interviewing administrators, teachers, parents and children. Later we would capture on video the student teachers watching themselves teach on videotape and analysing their practicum experience. Learning from critical reflection on practice would be modelled in the final video product. It sounded like a great proposal.

In practice there were a number of issues we had not anticipated fully. How would we manage to have students placed in disadvantaged schools and with teachers where we knew things worth filming were happening (given our social justice and literacy agendas)? How would we be sure to get from our volunteer student teacher researchers, young people who were articulate, confident enough to put themselves on the line in this way and also ensure that we included male and female student teachers, student teachers from minority backgrounds and so on? Ultimately viewers are ruthless. Apart from these logistical problems there were other issues.

Space allows us here to deal with only one. We had not anticipated videotaping student teachers at work and then deciding not to use the footage. It happened. A number of students whom we filmed really struggled on their practicum. Not all the students were competent enough in their teaching for their work to be useful to other students. In their interests and in the interests of other students we simply couldn't use the footage. Perhaps if the students themselves analysed the classroom scenes with assistance from their lecturers it might be retrievable. We tried it. The student teachers who had performed well out on practicum were able to critically reflect on their teaching and how they might have improved it. Those for whom the practicum had been difficult were not yet able to talk about it in ways that were useful for others. What were we going to do with footage of classroom teaching that we found ourselves unable to 'script' in a way that we considered would be helpful to either the participants or the intended audience?

There were other problems as well. Because we taped lessons which the students had planned themselves we simply got whatever they did. This created other difficulties. How could we use for example classroom footage of a lesson for girls only, planned and taught by student teachers, which reproduced limited versions of female identity? If the student teachers had been able to deal with this issue in their de-briefing then perhaps we could have used it, but they didn't. We

could of course have used the footage anyway. We had their permission. Other students could have critiqued it. However we were not prepared to make vulnerable student teachers targets in this way.

We decided to present student teachers who could articulate their position and critically reflect on their classroom practice. In

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addition in several cases we included footage of practices where the student teachers had taken on difficult topics or made special attempts to construct learning situations where school literacy was relevant and useful. Problems solved? We were not prepared for the disappointment of student teachers who had been filmed, but then not included in the final products. To be included, filmed and then left out cannot have been an empowering experience for students struggling to develop a teaching identity. There are then some casualties of our struggle to be 'authentic' with other people's lives and work.

Is informed consent possible?

For our CAUT project we used the legal and ethical protocols suggested by the production house. Participants who were filmed, or their legal guardians in the case of children, signed an agreement of understanding about the nature and purpose of the video and the vesting of copyright in the project team. Although this was named a 'consent' form, it is interesting to think about who was giving consent to what and who was being protected, by/from whom and from what.

Our intention had been to 'protect' the identities of the children and schools which were, by virtue of their participation, being publicly labelled as disadvantaged. Further, these children being described as living in communities living with high levels of poverty were to be fixed for some considerable time to come in a medium which is notorious for its accessibility and unregulated use.

What are the implications, for example, of documenting an early intervention program designed to assist boys in Years 3-5 who are behaviour problems because of difficulties with learning, personal relationships and reading and writing? How is the issue compounded by the fact that this program has been designed partly as a result of parental requests made on the basis of their own perceived inability to 'manage' their sons? What if these parents are themselves participating in a separate but related school-based literacy program and the school suggests we document that as well?

We can only concur with Ruby that the notion of 'informed consent' remains a vexed question in documentary film making. Ruby's conclusion is that it may be only the makers themselves who are in a position to judge whether the people in their films might be adversely affected. He argues that "Advice, consent and co-operation are necessary but not sufficient when dealing with the potential for exploitation." (Ruby, 1992:50)

The video medium: selecting images and telling tales in the editing suite

Our work on the process of video making as research text suggests that we may have underestimated the degree to which we viewed the video

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medium as a transparent one and were complicit, in ways we did not realise, in the shaping of particular kinds of video texts.7 We were not aware of the material and political consequences which might result from adhering to the routine conventions of image selection and story-telling in the video medium. In particular we were not always aware of the range of ways in which the techniques of production, including camera positioning, use of voice over and use of subject experts and expert witnesses as 'talking heads', were journalistic conventions which we had bought into as the result of engaging a particular production house and its associated 'expertise'.

Although the tension between the imperatives of the professional video maker and the researcher is rarely made explicit, our research into the practice of our documentary production suggests that the editing suite is a key site for understanding some of the politics of video-making. It is here, at the off-line editing stage of the process, that an unspoken but powerful pressure is almost tangible. Here the researchers are urged to collaborate in the production of conventional video and documentary texts, texts consisting of short cuts and fast grabs, and to make a transition from slow, naturalistic, unedited footage to simple, rapid sequences with short, clipped voice-over. That is, there is some pressure on the researchers to comply with the professionals' view of what an audience will accept and, conversely, will not tolerate in the medium.

That the production house has a good deal of influence over the choice of 'appropriate' images selected for inclusion in the final edit of a video is perhaps self-evident because it is in their domain, the editing suite, that a very obvious, overt aspect of selection occurs as images are chosen or discarded, used as filmed or edited to remove repetition or other visual or verbal 'flaws'. On the other hand, the scripting about what will be shown and in what order, and what will be said and by whom, has already been decided by the researchers as they write the script. That is, many of the decisions about selection have already been made. What influence, then, is it possible for the editing process to have, per se?

In the editing suite the client is given suggestions about which shots to use as overlays, the visual accompaniment to a voice-over or music. This choice results in the selection of a few seconds of 'suitably framed' shots from several minutes of unedited footage which is deemed to be less suitable and able to be left out. It often happens, for example, that it is the production house's suggestion about which shots of children should be used in overlays. We have come to understand this choice as sometimes being made on the basis of aesthetics; that is, the faces chosen are those of the children who look 'photogenic' to them as professionals.

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It is important not to underestimate the effect this can have, for example on the reinforcing of the stereotyping of children as cute' or of the disadvantaged as those who are marked by a difference which has a visual marker - such as skin colour. In this way the medium itself, and the practices surrounding its production and reception, serve to invite our unwitting complicity in reinforcing connections between disadvantage and colour. And this can happen even though the researchers have consciously taken the position that making a documentary is political act and have tried to undercut notions of text transparency by providing critical and questioning messages in the script. The use of the medium does constrain both the tale and the manner of its telling.

Concluding remarks

Making educational documentaries is difficult. Making educational documentaries about disadvantaged communities with goals of 'transformative' action is an ethical nightmare. In our analysis of the production of educational documentaries as a research text we have become more aware of issues of representation and the constitutive nature of discourse. We continue to explore:

In what ways are our own discourses as literacy researchers disguised by self-interest and defined by the exclusion of the voices of others? (McLaren & Lankshear, 1993:388)

Like ethnographies, documentaries as product may be conservative. Legal, moral, ethical, aesthetic and educational discourses are at work

to keep the outcome 'safe'. We couldn't afford to get things wrong in terms of legal constraints. We couldn't afford to get things wrong in terms of demonstrating our professional knowledge about literacy. Yet of course there was much that we did get wrong. We have to hope that in our work we did not neglect an ethical discourse (Gee, 1993) - that our work has not harmed others and that it does not produce advantage for us at the expense of others. Yet ethnography and documentary have the potential for cultural critique. We have to hope that the video outcomes of our research will be the sites of new and better conversations which make a difference to teachers and students working and learning in disadvantaged schools.

We are convinced that there is more work to be done in researching the implications of collaborative educational projects, particularly when they are premised on a commitment to social justice, involve complex, intersecting sets of stakeholders and use the visual media. We concur with Goodman's assessment that:

Scholars not only are faced with questions about how to generate projects worthy of social inquiry, how to enter particular educational

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settings, and how to find informants in these settings, but also must question the rationality used in developing presuppositions about social reality, the ethics of their work, power relationships between themselves and those whom they observe, and the reporting of their experiences. (Goodman, 1992:118)

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1 The 1993 project Teaching literacy in disadvantaged schools: getting it on the tertiary agenda was carried out by Barbara Comber, Lynne Badger, Susan Hill and Helen Nixon, University of South Australia.

2 In 1994 Lyn Wilkinson, Flinders University of SA, joined the team for the project Student teachers, literacy learning and social justice . Together the 1993 and 1994 projects will produce a series of six self-contained videos.

3 Although we did invite collaborators to review footage and provide feedback at some stages in the process there was not time to allow this to happen at every stage: between filming days, in response to drafts of scripts, in response to first edits, in response to off-line edits. Time and budget constraints meant that we were unable to incorporate changes after the second major edit. Further, we were unable to map the reception of uncut and cut footage in any systematic way. What we have recently done - but not yet incorporated in any way into the package - is interview several of the key school-based participants for their views on the process and the product.

4 Dennis O'Rourke's The good woman of Bangkok and associated criticism provide an interesting Australian case history in this regard. See, for example, Martin (1992), Ansara (1992), Berry (1992-3).

5 Informed consent is a vexed question in documentary making. Ruby's conclusion is that it may be only the makers themselves who are in a position to judge whether the people in their films might be adversely affected. "Advice, consent and co-operation are necessary but not sufficient when dealing with the potential for exploitation." (Ruby, 1992:50)

6 In retrospect, perhaps CDRom and multimedia technology may be better suited to the kind of non-linear, postmodern textuality we envisaged. We wanted to make possible for the users of the videos a range of ways of engaging with them. In the event we attempted to do this by presenting alternate views and using questions in the script, by suggesting alternative ways of conceptualising key terms and concepts, and suggesting differing ways of watching the videos, including

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stopping them at various points and suggesting a range of critical questions that could be asked of the videos at these points. The "process" is included in the book that accompanies the videos Literacy, diversity and schooling (Comber et al, in press:1994)

7 It may also be relevant that two of the videos were edited by a member of the project team who had not previously worked in the capacity of script writer or as joint editor with a production house.