

Documentary Filming Process

The process of planning an investigation using documentary film as research incorporates traditional methods used in qualitative investigations to collect and analyze data. The documentary filming process involves all the essential elements of a qualitative investigation namely: 1) site selection – where to film, how to position the camera and microphone; 2) participant selection- who to film and obtaining consent using a consent form or media release form; 3) data collection - recording audio and video using equipment, designing protocols for interviews and observations during filming; 4) data analysis - reviewing and selecting video and audio clips during editing; 5) findings, discussion and recommendations-making meaning of the video clips and context by sequencing selected clips, adding other audio visual elements; and finally, 6) sharing results-disseminating the results through documentary film.

Camera setup

An important consideration for filming is determining if the filming location will be outdoors or indoors. Filming outdoors will require taking into consideration the need for lighting and determine what times the footage can be gathered. Outdoors filming is also used when the local context needs to be captured on camera. The next consideration is the camera setup. Use of a tripod helps avoid unnecessary movement except in cases where a larger area has to be spanned to show the local environment and context. The researcher also needs to make a decision on the positioning of the camera. Video shots can be taken with the camera pointed at the participant with the researcher filming from behind the camera or taken from other angles. The decision is based both on the aesthetic sensibilities of the researcher as well as what the focus of research is. Manual or automatic focus on the camera can be used to frame the shots. Setting the manual

focus on the camera will keep it focused on a particular point and it will remain the same distance from the lens. Automatic focus is useful when filming moving objects. Keeping a subject in focus as they get closer to the lens is extremely difficult to do manually. Autofocus will adjust the camera to refocus on the subject. Framing of the shots is also a researcher's decision based on preference and aesthetics. Generally, framing of individual interview shots can be tight such that the interviewee's eyes are in the top one-third of the frame. Zooming in and out, variations in camera angles are useful for filming sessions within classrooms, event observations and group interactions to capture non-verbal expressions and emotions that can help convey the context as well as real-life conditions.

Capturing audio is another very important part of the filming process. The audio for individual interviews are usually captured on a camera using a clip-on microphone. Shotgun microphones are used for observation of the classrooms, informal interactions and events.

Participant Recruitment

Participants for the documentary are recruited similar to any other qualitative study. The purpose of the study and the documentary filmmaking process is explained to them and the participants are filmed only after obtaining informed consent. Informed consent is obtained using the Media Release form with participants who are over the age of 18, or with the parents or legal guardians for minors in the participant's native language. Since the video tends to be more intrusive than a static image or even an audio recorded interview, it's critical for the researcher to ensure that the participants are aware of the intrusive nature of filming and are comfortable with being video recorded.

Producing the Documentary Film

The video clips are analyzed through the editing process of producing a documentary film. Editing software such as Adobe Premiere Pro or Apple Final Cut Pro can be used to organize and edit the video clips. The data analysis and video editing is done simultaneously and the determination of which clips can be included in the final film is based on the researcher's aesthetic sensibilities as well as the need to tell an authentic story.

The first step in the analysis is to view all the raw video footage and make notes on what is seen in the clips to develop some tentative broad ideas about categories and relationships. The analysis of the footage (data) is done simultaneously with data collection to help identify categories to explore further leading to checking fresh ideas with new participants in subsequent interviews. Reviewing the video footage and looking for themes from the beginning is helpful in selecting the video footage and hone in on specific patterns and themes of interest. The footage can be categorized deductively based on broad areas that the study is aiming to understand and then inductively generated categories based on participants' actions and words.

Categories or *bins* based on the meaning that emerge from the video footage are created. Segments from the video footage that relate to a particular category are extracted as clips and moved to the corresponding bins. The bins contain clips from interviews, focus groups, discussions as well as observations. The clips are reviewed again and grouped together into a sub-sequence based on the interpretation and reflection of the meaning. The themes for the sub-sequence are determined based on the purpose of the study, through the lens of the theories informing the research and also keeping in mind the researcher's bias and positionality. Clips within a sub-sequence are further selected to create another sub-sequence of sub-themes. The

series of short sub-sequences are then reviewed and the final clips to be included into the master sequence for the documentary are selected.

The selection is based on which footage conveyed powerful moments in the research process. Within each sub-theme, clips are selected to be included in the master sequence for the film based on the visual appeal depicting the context as well as non-verbal behavior. The sub-sequences are then put together as a master sequence for the documentary film. In putting together the master sequence, many difficult decisions have to be made about the inclusion or exclusion of clips. The entire selection process is based on the need to create an engaging, meaningful and informative film. The length of the film is also a critical consideration since it is important that the film keeps the audience engaged while ensuring that the meaning emerging from the analysis is retained. The researcher also needs to be very mindful of the selection process and engage in self-checks and reflection throughout the process to ensure integrity of the data. A master sequence of video clips representing the major themes is generated to produce a first cut of the film. B-roll footage is then included in the video creation process to alternate with the interview footage and additional footage obtained wherever more visuals to explain the context is deemed as necessary.

Other important decisions that need to be made are the use of voice overs, titles, background music. While using subtitles, care must be taken to ensure that the text is readable. Restriction of the length of lines that can be seen on the screen and estimated reading speed of the viewers have to be considered before finalizing the subtitles. Voice overs can be used instead of subtitles in clips where the researcher feels that the inflections in the original audio of the participant are important to understand the participant's emotions. Presence of the researcher in an

arts-informed research is considered a positive quality. In the documentary, the researcher can decide to appear as a narrator or interviewer to offer the audience a more rich and personal look into the research. The narration can also be used to bridge different sections in the documentary and to share the researcher's reflections and thoughts. The last step in the editing process is to add background music, title cards and credits. The edited version of the documentary is a view of the themes that emerge out of the analysis of the data.

Documentary filmmaking can bring about a change in the how researchers approach data collection, analysis and dissemination. Documentary film has the potential to mobilize knowledge just like any other traditional research paper when the documentary filmmaking process follows the same path as any research process. Constant reflexivity regarding aesthetic decisions based on the research questions and framework guiding the research helps maintain academic rigor much like traditional research. And finally, documentary films can make research accessible to a wider audience than just academics.