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## A Place to Be Together: Cultivating Spaces of Discomfort and Not Knowing in Visual Analysis.

The Collaborative Seeing Studio.

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### Abstract.

*This article describes our transmethodological practice and the affective space of making and making sense of visual research in community. We purposefully embrace complexity and richness in visual data analysis, rather than seeking to reductively avoid doubt and uncertainty. To do this, we bring multiple ways of seeing together into a collaborative, poly-vocal construction. Our 'studio' is designed to be a safe space for risk and creativity. We are at different levels of experience and confidence, but we all learn from each other. Seeing collaboratively depends on translating our ways of reading visual material "out of our heads" and "into our shared space." In the sense that we love what we are doing, we revel at opening ourselves to new possibilities. In-Progress: Victoria Restler Narrates a Collaborative Seeing Studio Session. Wendy Luttrell leads us into collaging as both metaphor and tools of Collaborative Seeing. We end with a brief reflection.*

**Key Words:** Visual Research, Participatory Methods, Not Knowing, Collaborative Visual Analysis.

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# A Place to Be Together: Cultivating Spaces of Discomfort and Not Knowing in Visual Analysis.

The Collaborative Seeing Studio.

## Prelude.

We had submitted the first draft of this article to the *Outlines* editors at just about the time that it was becoming obvious that the world-wide COVID19 pandemic would make it impossible, at least for the time being, to advocate for the complex, in-person, face-to-face, layered interactions that we describe here. In fact, we are now using 'Zoom'—a virtual tool—to think about how to respond to thoughtful criticism of our draft from the journal's reviewers. While we still intend this article to be an invitation for others to create their own "Collaborative Seeing Studio," we wonder how we can best adapt the tools of the virtual world to those that we describe. In making this adaptation, we also worry that there are vested interests that would profit from replacing, with virtual collaboration, the live interactions of learning and knowledge-building spaces. Addressing directly the "you" who reads this article, we hope that you can find our experiences useful in thinking about how valuable are face-to-face encounters; how nuanced and three-dimensional we are in real life.

## Introduction

The Collaborative Seeing Studio is a group of emerging and established scholars engaged in multimodal research with a special emphasis on the visual. This article describes our transmethodological practice and the affective space of making and making sense of visual research in community. Sharing our understandings in a group seems so obvious and everyday and ordinary—it could easily pass by without our paying much attention. In this article we want to pay attention to these interactions in order to cultivate and nurture their richness. We came together in 2010 at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (although we later grew to include members from other institutions) orbiting around the processes and pathways of doctoral training. Our group formed alongside and in dialogue with the rhythms and demands of institutional academia—the stages and ever-pressing timelines of doctoral education, academic publishing and advancement.

The Collaborative Seeing Studio has included Wendy Luttrell, Claire Fontaine, Emily Clark, Rondi Silva, Victoria Restler, Ivana Espinet, Scott Lizama, Tran Templeton, David Chapin, Gene Fellner, Helen Kwah, Asilia Franklin-Phipps, Maya Pindyck, and Kay Gordon.

Here is an embedded hyperlink for the Collaborative Seeing Studio Website: [CSS WEBSITE](http://www.outlines.dk/) All through this article you—our reader—will find embedded hyperlinks indicated with bold, blue underlined capital letters.

We are beginning-, Mid-, and End-Career practitioners, and for a time, some of us were research assistants supporting Wendy's longitudinal visual ethnography "Children Framing Childhood" (Luttrell, 2020). We overlapped in classroom spaces as 'professors' and 'students' and 'peers;' we had relationships as 'advisors' and 'advisees' and friends. But the Collaborative Seeing Studio offered a different kind of space and pace and way to be with each other.

Practically, we have mostly gathered in person at regular and shifting intervals. We have audienced individual and collaborative projects focused on topics including high school "dropouts," (Silva, 2016), the educational experiences of newcomer youth (Espinete, 2017), and girls' digital media practices (Fontaine, 2015) to name a few. We have shared drawings and videos, photographs, tracings, and digital maps. We have worked, to be sure, but we have also shared meals and tea and spent time. As an interpretive community, our practice has grown around sharing and viewing each other's often-in-progress visual and multimodal analysis. We have come and continue to come to this space precisely in moments of discomfort and not knowing, to voice our wet-clay-words, and join eyes, to learn and look together.

Yes, we depend across the board most heavily on words to express what we see and to communicate with others in the group. But we also let each other know some of what we are seeing through our hands and faces, bodies, collage images, sketches, juxtaposition, gestures—smiles, silences, frowns...

This article aims to bring you, reader, into the space and feeling of the Collaborative Seeing Studio. To share some of the ways we have thought about this work, the materiality of it, the scholars and makers that have shaped our thinking and making. We come at it from different angles, layering images with text in the "disjunctive narrative" (invoking Charles Garoian's evocative phrase) of collage (Garoian, 2004, p. 25). This article is a collage. It is a visual collage in the relationship between image and text and the dialogic fat and thin columns that structure the page.

We paste together a range of writing styles—academic, inspiration/review, commentary—and visual work—documentary film stills, book-jackets, and an envelope sketch—to show, describe and analyze how, as a transmethodolgy, we embrace collaboration, and uncertainty in visual data analysis. We present these different styles and media here to echo the variety of visual materials and modes that we take up in working together and individually.

We authors have consciously chosen to not write here in APA style because that style tends to convey the impression of a single, detached "scientific" voice from on high, speaking with confidence and distant authority [eschewing personal pronouns, Times Roman 12-point type, reliance on sequential word logic alone without much emotion...]. We reject what David has termed. "authority citations"—the practice of thin referencing (long parenthetical citation lists) meant to signal a kind of expertise to readers. Our article aims to challenge that impression because our trans-methodology of "not knowing" and embracing multiple voices seeks a different, less certain position. We take up the right-hand bicycle lane of the page to offer generous citations, to describe images, to post parenthetical explanations, doubts, or competing commentary.

The article is also a collage of “I’s” and “We’s” as we move (sometimes haltingly, like the jagged tear of a paper’s edge) between individual and collective projects, positionalities and perspectives. The “I’s” and “We’s” reflect the tensions of working together inside of and up against the individualized and individualizing structures of academic systems and institutions. In the following section, we begin with an overview of our practices, approach and theoretical orientations through the three words we have named our group—Collaborative Seeing Studio—considering each word in turn. We then offer a case study taken from one of our 2013 meetings in which Victoria Restler presents in-progress work on the visual study of teacher value and evaluation. Using film-stills and audio transcription (captured in a 6-minute video by David Chapin and Rondi Silva), alongside her contemporary reflections and analysis, this section aims to bring readers into the sensory rhythms of our work. Next, Wendy Luttrell moves us into collaging as a way to showcase the complexity of audiencing. Finally, we offer a brief conclusion.

### The Collaborative Seeing **STUDIO**.

What sort of place is supportive of interaction? While Conference Rooms and formal academic meeting rooms are certainly intended for interaction, we experience many as falling short. The formality of a designated meeting room may seem intimidating. Some feel “abstract” and expressive of the personality of no one; hard-edged examples can seem coded as “white” and “male.” We might consider a “Lab” as a model for group work, yet there can be an underlying sense of a laboratory as being a place away from the quotidian world. Laboratories do sometimes convey a message of a positivist orientation to research and knowing (the scientist in his white coat).

The image that holds for us is a “studio” in the sense of “artist’s studio.” A place for making, for handiwork, and creative practice. Full of potential, creativity, productivity, and comfortable for interaction—happily messy—a “configuration of possibilities.” (Bakos, Bozic & Chapin, 1987). As a place to work creatively together, the Collaborative Seeing Studio has convened in different locations, at different times, but all of them with a sense of domestic comfort, easy communication, and close interaction.

Over time our studio space has included a family table within a kitchen surrounded by sunny windows; sharing a round table in an academic office with a chalkboard and lots of books and plants growing; a living-room couch with comfy chairs and a baby crawling about in an apartment.

In, “Asylums,” Erving Goffman (1961), defines spaces as being characteristically “Frontstage,” (where we present our more polished public performances) and “Backstage” (where we put on lipstick or cry). In a way the Collaborative Seeing Studio is “Backstage” to our more public or more arranged selves—yet it is also “Frontstage” in that this too is a performance, just as this written article has both characteristics...

If, in English, we had the equivalent of the Danish word, “Hygge,” we would use it.

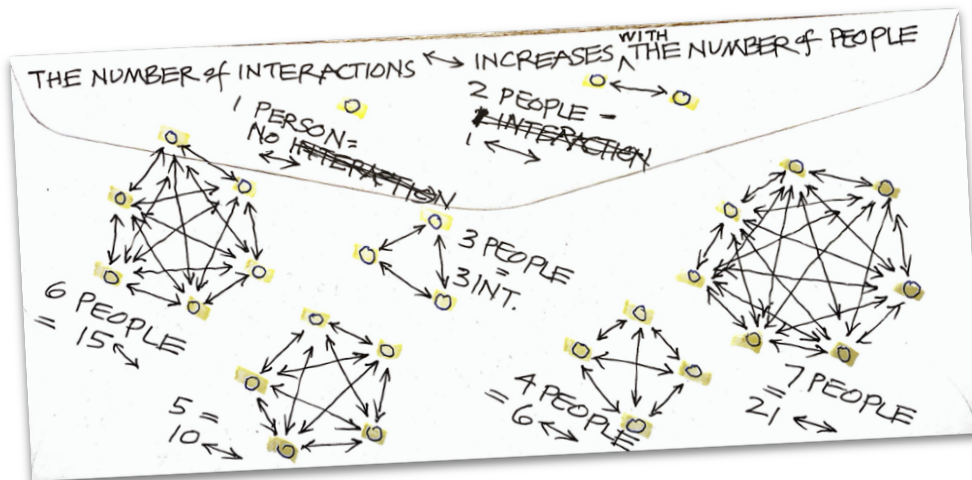


Each place “belonged” to someone who acted as host—host in the sense of being concerned about and paying attention to the comfort of each person and to whether anyone cared for a cup of tea. We have always needed tools—tools that are everyday available: an internet connection for distant participants as well as access to archival materials and look-ups, someone willing to take notes, sometimes poster paper or tracing paper and marker pens or scissors and glue... And we do need to be somewhat insulated from disruptions, noise, cell phone calls...

Taken together the places we have found comfortable are in some ways extensions of our approach to doing research. In our “studio” we want to blur the lines between art and science; between creativity and hypothesis-testing experiments; between the personal and political. We have found lived-in, down to earth places that let us feel comfortable in taking the risk of self-revelation, saying what comes to our minds, knowing that we may be challenged or championed, but not disregarded or denigrated.

We don’t have a fixed “style” of operation or rules to follow. For one thing, we have never been precisely the same group from time to time—people have come in and people have left. We are open to an evolution of style, welcoming change as the group itself changes. Because there are always those new to our scene, we are checked regularly on the use of clear language and avoiding off-putting lingo. In the same vein, working together to create the [CSS WEBSITE](#) or to create this written article leads us to think more analytically about how we work.

We struggled for words of comfort and dispositions that would ease the strain. These included: being willing (and even enjoying) to sit with uncertainty; Vasudevan might put it this way: “dwelling in the imaginative space between declarative acts of knowing and not knowing” (Vasudevan 2011, p. 1157).



The number of potential interactions (“I”) increases with each increase in the number of people in the group (“n”) according to this equation:  $I = \frac{n(n-1)}{2}$ . While there is only one possible interaction in a group of 2, for a group of 5 people there are  $\frac{5(5-1)}{2}$ , which is  $5 \times 4 \div 2$  which = 10.

## The Collaborative **SEEING** Studio.

As artists, architects, media educators, art historians and visual researchers, we appreciate the sensory act of “seeing” with a kind of reverence. We view seeing as a complex process of meaning-making, involving any number of comparisons, judgements, recollections, perspectives, presumptions, and insights. Now, an additional layer of complexity is to add the involvement of some number of people...five or nine or seven... seeing and communicating as a group, allowing us to socially charge the visual world with emotion and value, understanding and confusion, losses and desires. The very moment we collaborate, we realize that there are many ways of seeing; the moment we agree to see as a group, we realize that we see things differently because we bring different backgrounds and different perspectives; every aspect of who we are—gender, sexual orientation, age, ability, race, ethnicity, class—and what has shaped us comes into play. Our professional lives alone cross disciplinary boundaries—urban education, sociology, architecture, psychology, photography, linguistics.

For seeing and making sense of our seeing, we use words—words that intertwine with images. We take to heart John Berger’s statement that, “Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak.” This is important because, as we will be claiming, our collaborative seeing depends on our using words between us to build our understandings. But Berger goes on to say, “...the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled.” (Berger 1972:7). This “never settled” position can be a discomfort, but we advocate embracing that discomfort in the name of achieving richness and complexity—a “need to know more stance” (Luttrell, 2010) towards visual data and materials, the multiple meanings of research makers/ collaborators/ participants, and our own and each other’s perceptions.

As we talk about seeing, we use different words and different shades of words to tell each other what we see. What we see is influenced by what others see. We expand the seeing of each other. We form an uncountable assemblage of dynamic relationships—between us, together with the objects and images of study, with the words and expressions and metaphors that we engage to communicate what and how we see to each other, all of the webs of thinkers, makers, participants that we link to in our gathering space.

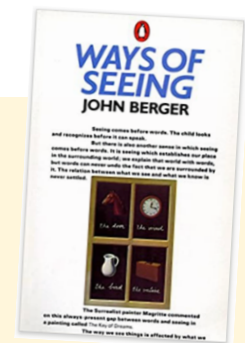
The point here is that once we have a collaborative group engaged with visual materials, we very quickly have enormous potential interaction to dialogue in many, complex and nuanced ways, creating layers of meaning and

In a methodologically oriented textbook, Banks (2007) describes, “Positivist and interpretivist approaches,” (p. 22) and devotes Chapter 3 (p. 35) to “Approaches to studying the visual,” including, “Approaches from cultural studies...” (p. 39), “Formalist methods,” (p. 44), including, “Content analysis...” (p. 45), and later, “Reflexivity.” (p. 50). Sturken and Cartwright (2018) title their Chapter 2, “Viewers Make Meaning,” (p. 51), and there grapple with how thinkers approach this issue through the 20th century. In both these excellent books, the assumption [nowhere stated as otherwise], seems to be that the method being described is individual or singular, not collaborative. This lack of attention to collaboration also prompts us to write this article.

### **WAYS OF SEEING**

John Berger  
1972

So many of us have learned to see through interactions with the seeing of others thanks to John Berger. His work is fiercely political and focuses on our being active members of a critical audience. And John Berger was never vague about what he wanted us—along with others—to see. By looking at paintings, he radically deconstructed representations of class and power in society, always challenging us to dig below the surface and see what often is intended to be hidden. To do this he used a popular BBC television show to directly challenge the “high art” interpretations of museums and art critics.



multiple possibilities. The kind of collaborative seeing work we describe in this paper is an example of a transmethodological approach that aims to draw out, lift up, and preserve the multiplicity of meanings co-constructed in and through research—the sort of research that germinates in interpretive communities (Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan, 1995).

In this “Seeing” section, we write as if all these words are spoken in a sense of mutual creativity and community. Of course, words can be also used as weapons—how often we have realized too late, after a meeting—that we silenced or shut down another member of the group.... Words can be used to obscure rather than clarify, or like academic jargon, can require familiarity with particular theories or writers to interpret. But then, like a life preserver in a stormy sea of words, someone in the group might have the presence of mind to say, “I don’t understand what you are talking about.”

### Interlude: How I see (David)

We, each of us, see things differently. In the Collaborative Seeing Studio, we invite and nurture multiple ways of seeing and analyzing, believing that we will contribute better as we are influenced by each other’s ways. These past months, during this pandemic, I’ve spent some time in Ohio at an old summer cottage on Lake Erie. While there, I added to some existing shore protection using concrete as a building material. Doing this stimulated thinking about how I see.

Part of what I built was of concrete...concrete poured into wooden forms. But what was important in what I actually designed and built—the wooden forms themselves—was the void; that which was not there. The purpose of the wooden forms is to contain the emptiness that the concrete flows into and occupies, fills and solidifies. Once the wooden forms are removed the new shape of solid concrete emerges. Because I have done this many times over many years, I know that I have a knack for seeing “negative” space directly—the space between. How I see is certainly related to my being an architect. Most architects are probably adept at seeing the physical volume of space that is defined by the solids of walls. But I doubt that very many architects—some, but not many—have had extended experience in building their own forms and pouring their own concrete. So, yes, to a degree I think that how I see is defined by my being an architect, yet I also think how I see is shaped by my specific experience over time. Of course, architects are not the only beings who see the space between. Artists in general and Gestalt Psychologists and Typographers all make claims to similar ways of seeing.



Forms built of wood, important for the volume of empty space they create. D. Chapin photo.



The solid is remembered, made visible. The void is forgotten. D. Chapin photo.

Take a moment to look at this typeface. It is named, “Skia.” The individual letters are interesting for their shapes. There are a lot of curves. There are no serifs, and the strokes are about the same weight throughout. For me this is a friendly, deceptively simple, contemporary-looking face. (Designed, as it happens, in 1994 for Apple Computer.) Look especially at the spaces between the letters. Look at the layout of this page before you with its different clumps of sentences and paragraphs and spaces between. Some people spend their whole creative life designing these forms and these spaces between.

As a male growing up, I needed feminism to see the misogyny all about me—it was there all along, but for me it didn’t register. As a Euro-American, I was only recently taught to see the absences (perhaps the “neutralities?”) that create and sustain “whiteness” in the everyday world. As a gay teenager in the 1950s, going to the movies, I really needed to learn to read representations of sexuality from a different, outsider’s position. Early on, my niece, born brain damaged (as then described), led me to a deep understanding of the interplay between peoples’ abilities and their environments—affecting my understandings of “affordances” as a researcher and designer all my professional life. Evolving as a pacifist and resisting the Vietnam War opened my eyes to the grinding, unrelenting symbols of fascistic authority coming at me—coming at all of us—from all around us. These life experiences surely figure now in how I see and allow me especially, I think, to add to seeing more of the in-between in space, images, and words.



The Association Typographique Internationale identifies [SKIA](#) as a “Modernist” typeface is in the “Humanist” category, according to its “Vox” system of classification.

Wikipedia.

### The **COLLABORATIVE SEEING** Studio.

The theory and practice of collaborative seeing was developed by Wendy in her longitudinal study, *Children Framing Childhood (CFC)*. [CFC WEBSITE](#) The project put cameras in the hands of racially/ethnically diverse young people growing up in working-class, immigrant communities in Worcester, MA, USA to document their family, school and community lives over time (at ages 10, 12, 16, and 18). The project generated an extensive audio-visual archive [2,036 photographs; 65 hours of video- and audio-taped individual and small group interviews of the thirty-six participants talking about their images; and 18 hours of videos produced by a subset of participants at ages 16-18].

Wendy designed a reflexive and flexible frame for ethically engaging the CFC archive. It is perhaps best captured in a video in [CFC COLLABORATIVE SEEING](#) that accompanies the book that she eventually published (Luttrell 2020).

It is frustrating for me, Wendy, to try to put into words all that the video captures about the project and collaborative seeing approach—its situatedness, sense of movement through time, its grounding in a particular place, its use of now-ancient technology, and its glimpses of the kids and their images, to name but a few.





Collaborative seeing combines an epistemological stance that complicates the notion of a singular author's voice or 'eyesight'; a set of methodological tools and protocols; and an analytic process which aims to address the structural imbalances of power embedded in research relationships. Collaborative seeing is committed to preserving the multiplicity of meanings that are co-constructed through the process of multiple audiencings of the materials described later in this paper. It is fueled by the questions: Whose way of seeing is this? In what context? With what degree of power, authority or control? Toward what purpose? And with what consequences?

Collaborative seeing offers an approach that is relational, iterative and dialogic, meant to pry open curiosity rather than judgment. The tools of collaborative seeing emphasize criticality and creativity—making space to identify and contend with dominant narratives and visualities, and social forces of inequities and injustice that shape individual lives and cultural representations. Importantly, as a practice, collaborative seeing seeks public engagement, prompting viewers to reflect upon their own ways of seeing, their assumptions and biases; to step back and consider alternatives and possibilities (Restler & Luttrell 2018).

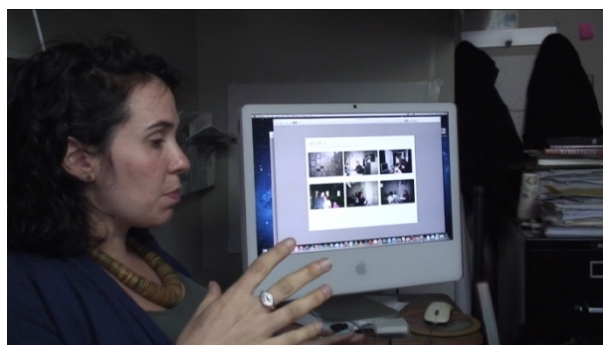
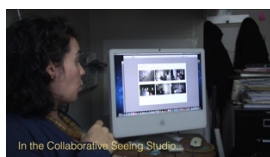
As we noted earlier, our Collaborative Seeing Studio came together initially to support Wendy's study. We helped to design and facilitate its last phase of the study (Looking Back) and became invested in the project and in publishing co-authored papers about its findings.

As a group, part of what drew us together was this shared commitment to the value and complexity of seeing and making sense in community—to the theory and practice of Collaborative Seeing. Even as our rhythms and routines shifted—alongside the ever-advancing pace of institutional demands—we kept coming back to "collaborative seeing." Adding stones and sticks to the building of this practice, worrying the theory between our fingers.

## In-Progress: Victoria Restler Narrates a Collaborative Seeing Studio Session.

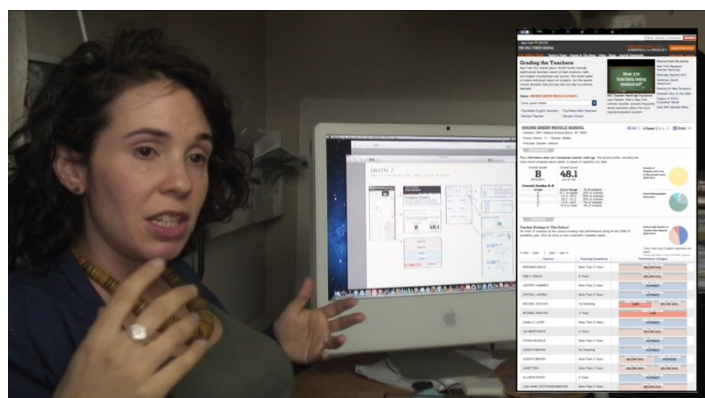
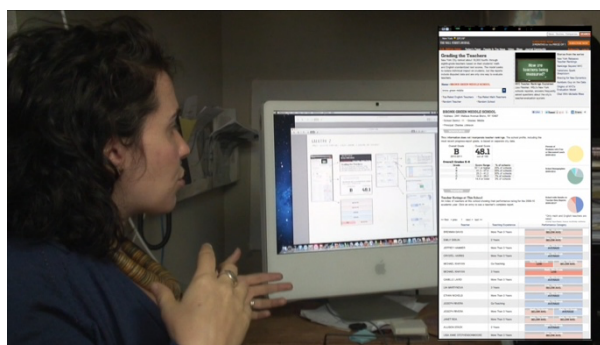
For a time, David would film our Collaborative Seeing Studio meetings and sometimes he fashioned these recordings into short clips--lightly editing, adding captions and images for context and clarity. In one of these six-minute videos, shot in 2013, I (Victoria) am presenting work in progress. The frame opens close up on my profile, navy shoulder, mop of dark hair, pink cheek turned to the large computer screen at the center displaying a grid of six photographic images.

David's documenting was part of a broader project concerned with understanding approaches to visual research and analysis. These videos and our collective viewing and discussion of the videos were also part of our group's interest in understanding and articulating our work together and why it felt so creative/productive/critical...



Victoria: *I mean, I--have a lot of questions about it.*

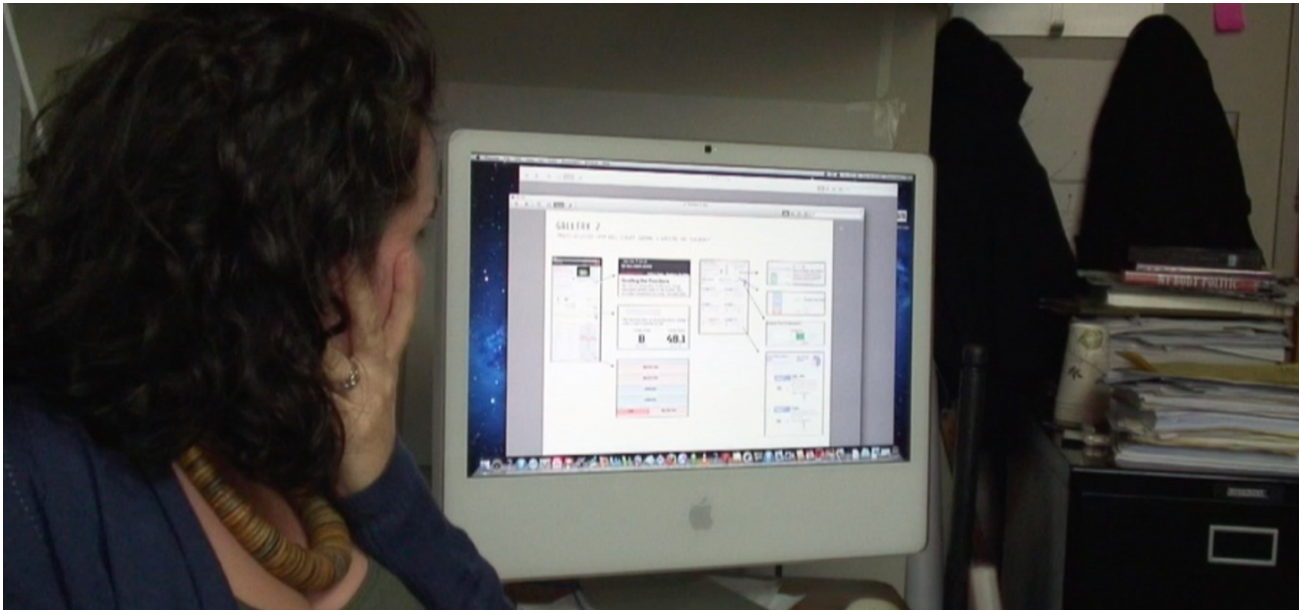
I am interested in the visual culture of teacher evaluation, and at this meeting I am trying out a new approach to visual analysis in preparation for my dissertation proposal. For some time, I have been working with 'screen grabs' from *The Wall Street Journal's Grading the Teachers*, exploring how this visually rich, searchable platform mobilized image and design to tell stories about teachers' value-added ratings and the work of teaching more broadly.



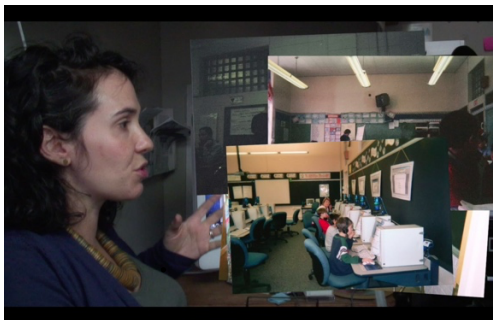
*I started out by grabbing a bunch of images from a whole bunch of different um, media sites...that published teacher ratings. And so I was sort of interested in the different ways that those ratings are*



*visualized and the aesthetic tools that are brought to the visualization, and thinking about the sort of idioms of science and [how] that whole language is being applied to teacher rating.*



Today I am introducing a new element. Putting these slick, smooth infographic-y images in dialogue with photos taken by ten- and eleven-year-olds with disposable cameras in the early 2000s. The photos come from the image archive of Wendy's longitudinal Children Framing Childhood project: [CEC PHOTO ARCHIVE](#). They depict teachers and school spaces, and they are accompanied by audio and video interviews in which the children describe the pictures and answer questions.



*I went through a process of looking through all the photos and making groups of different photos that have to do with school in different ways...as a way of categorically organizing the images.*

Later, I zeroed in on images of and about teachers and teaching, pairing this gallery of six images with audio transcripts of the child-photographers describing the photos. I was interested in the ways that these children represented their teachers and teaching in general.

I turn towards the screen, voice in my chest, words slowing.

*Victoria: I think my biggest concern at this point is...ummmm...is like, what the purpose is... or like how I justify putting these two categories of images together. You know, they're so different. They serve such different purposes...ummm. And I don't...And I don't want to suggest that like, they're like, that they're equivalents or that they can speak to each other directly. Is there a way to talk about teaching that acknowledges all of these other pieces you know...?*

I came to know these images intimately in two ways: first by working as a research assistant with Wendy, organizing the archive, and helping to collect data in a third phase of the project; and also by enrolling in her course on Visual Research where we engaged the multimodal archive as a way to learn and practice visual analysis.

All through these first 2 minutes and 34 seconds of video, my hands are in near constant, off-tempo motion--pointing up from the lower left screen spinning; juggling some kind of feeling/ idea; four fingers pushing into the side of my face, thumb under chin, leaving a reddish trail as they reach around to smooth my hair, holding it back in a low ponytail, before letting it drop, hand still perched atop my head lightly rubbing the back of my skull; left hand coming to rest at the tip of my nose.



Fuzzy, uncertain moments like this one are a regular part of our Collaborative Seeing Studio (CSS) meetings. *Does this make sense? Can you even do that? I'm not sure about... What do you see/think/hear? What will the traditionalists say?* Wrapped up in these questions and my own busy hands are different shades and tones of discomfort and not knowing.

And I want to pause here--in the vulnerable space of stumbling words to tease apart some of the ways that Collaborative Seeing (as methodology) and the

These hands are digital cut-outs taken from 6 video-stills. They also function as a tool of multi-modal analysis—tuning into (and slowing down) with embodiment and gesture as a way of 'reading' the video.

Collaborative Seeing Studio (as relational grouping) welcome emotional and methodological uncertainty into our collective practice. Many others have written importantly about the fear associated with qualitative analysis; the destabilizing qualities of doctoral education; and the value of mistakes, failure and uncertainty in research and art practice. We argue that there are special discomforts for researchers working transmethodologically and, likewise corresponding value in making space for sharing and working through these uncertainties in community. In the following section, I pull out three kinds of “not knowing,” that come through in this video representation and shape our collective and collaborative seeing work.

### Codes.

I see my students in my face and throat and gestures. My- Their hesitation, a tentative quality. My belly isn't visible in the frame, but I know from my face that I am pregnant—about seven months along with my first child. I was at a moment of precipice in my life and body and in my graduate career also. The proposal and ABD status and the shift from reading and analyzing other people's work to making my own.

One piece of this discomfort is coming new to the rules and codes of research and doctoral procedures. There is that old saying associated with education about learning the rules in order to later break them. Sometimes that is a conservative argument for the status quo, but there are seeds of truth. What kinds of risk-taking will be considered innovative and fresh and what kinds may be labeled “un-serious” or “not rigorous” or “not research”? One shorthand for this ‘persistent doubt’ in our space is the notion of “The Research Police” a phrase coined by founding Studio member, Rondi Silva. Referencing “The Research Police” becomes a way to gently tease ourselves, and also to call out real and imagined academic gatekeepers. “*Will they let me complete a portion of my research proposal in the form of a password-protected audio-visual blog?*” is a question both about whether it may be “taken seriously” and simultaneously about whether it is allowed.

For transmethodological researchers, for those of us working outside or upstream of the dominant framings of “data” or “methods” or “literature” or “analysis” or “dissertations” or “studies,” we need spaces to both hold each other in the vulnerability of the work and also learn and strategize on how to work within existing and sometimes unfriendly structures.

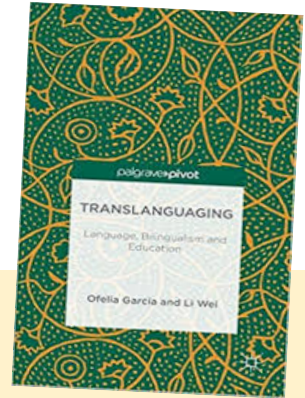
A lingering and persistent doubt—is this even research?—hung in the air of our CSS conversations. We aren't the only ones who have voiced this question:

“Is this even research?” which has been posed to me several times across various settings with emphasis placed alternatively on each of the four words: *Is this even research?* *Is this even research?* *Is this even research?* *Is this even research?* On that evening, the spirit of the question hinged on the word “even,” which laced the delivery with an air of deep-seated doubt. Such skepticism toward unfamiliar ways of knowing can afflict each of us if we do not remember to remain vigilant in cultivating our ways of unknowing. Such a stance may seem anathema amidst the constant pressures to perform a knowing self—as graduate students eager to gain recognition as emerging scholars; as junior faculty pursuing tenure; as established teachers who have been rewarded for pedagogical consistency; as leaders in a field they helped to found. Where are the spaces for wondering, for uncertainty, for unknowing in these performances of self? (Vasudevan 2011: 1169).



## (Multimodal) Translanguaging.

One challenge and rich possibility in multimodal academic research is the imperative of words, and the process of moving between different modes and media to make meaning. We “put various media and modalities in dialogue to see what they have to say and teach each other, to hold up and draw out the affordances of each medium—what is best expressed as written word? What comes through in the digital photograph?” (Restler, 2017). In practice, multimodal translanguaging requires both moving our creative ideas out of our heads and into conversation, and also pairing image and media with verbal language.



Garcia and Wei  
2014

### TRANSLANGUAGING.

Garcia and Wei define translanguaging as, “...the way in which bilinguals use their complex semiotic repertoire to act, to know, and to be.” (p. 137) In the way that multilinguals draw strategically on a varied repertoire of social and linguistic practices to think, learn, and communicate effectively, multimodal scholars may also draw on a range of media, modalities, visual and textual grammars and dialects to make sense of data.



Part of what we do for each other in the Collaborative Seeing Studio is to act as mirrors, to speak out in words what we see and hear. Back around the table—Ivana Espinet, Claire Fontaine, and David Chapin take turns re-stating and re-framing.

Ivana begins: *Both [are] representations of teachers and teaching. Right?*



Yes. This descriptive phrase is like a stake in the ground.

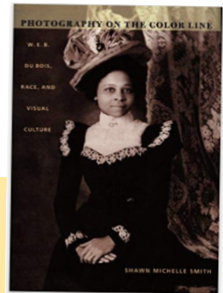


Claire continues, speaking back and re-situating my words: *You talked about images of teachers or images of teaching. And then in each of them you made a little bit of a leap, like a linguistic turn to pedagogical images. Teaching us, as a public audience, what are the things that we should be caring about, you know when we're thinking about our children in schools? And the images by the children [are also] pedagogical images, that can operate in a similar way, teaching us, you know, what other things we could be looking at when we're thinking about our children in schools...*

Ahhhhhh. How do these representations of teaching, also teach us as viewers? How do they each draw our eyes to "what we should be caring about when we're thinking about our children in schools?"

Ivana: *But in terms of 'what do we value about teachers,' this [referring to the publicly published metric images] represents a certain kind of value. And if you look at the images that the kids made ... what they might say about their images ... they clearly are thinking about what they value in a teacher in a very different way.*

Right, these are different kinds of value--value-added teacher ratings in dialogue with the qualities that a group of middle school students values in their teachers.



**PHOTOGRAPHY  
ON THE  
COLOR LINE:  
W.E.B. DU BOIS,  
RACE, AND  
VISUAL  
CULTURE**

Shawn Michelle Smith  
2004

This powerful indictment of interminable American racism is constructed by unearthing and bringing into juxtaposition three antagonistic ways of representing Black Americans: as dignified, agential subjects of an exhibition created by DuBois to challenge racial stereotypes; as stylized head-on and profile "criminal" mugshots of "scientific" origin; and as the lynching victims of mawkish white mobs reveling at the moment of human death. Smith's analysis is stunning in part because she demands that, as we see across these different forms of representation, we see far more than we might see in any one alone. It should be said that Du Bois's Paris Exhibition photographs are stunning by themselves...



David: *There clearly are issues about power and making massive amounts of money in politics and lobbying and, you know, the various testing companies and all that stuff, but it also seems like there's something even deeper than that about the kind of human beings that somebody wants to see produced...*

(Nodding). Because although the children's images are explicitly relational, the value-added quantitative metrics also carry particular ideas and ideals about who and how teachers and students should act and be. Looking back now, seven years later, I recognize the significance of this session in the course of my thinking and research. My toe in the pond of visual analysis, in some ways foreshadows my dissertation work and my use of art and media as tools for both making sense of and representing the research. And conceptually, a key theme that comes out of the discussion (spoken by each member around the table) is about metrics of value--the visibilities, invisibilities and representational distortions of teacher labor. This theme acts as a through-line to the question that I developed with a group of radical educators two years later and posed to New York City teachers, "What do you do that can't be measured?" What do you do that is unseen through the neoliberal logics and values of schooling?



Working with a group of ten critical educators, we posed this question of, "What can't be measured," to NYC teachers and posted their replies in video, text, and visual formats on a Tumblr site called: [THOSE WHO CAN](http://www.outlines.dk/)





Self.

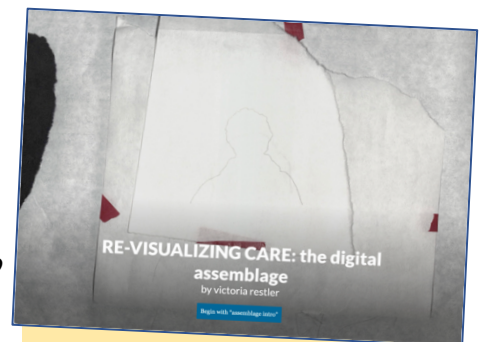
Wendy: *But you are intentionally bringing these into dialogue with each other because they have different metrics, a different calculus about what is the value of teaching or teachers or...*

Victoria: *I mean I think that's really true and I think it just makes me pretty nervous to say that out loud. Hearing you say that, I'm like "Obviously." I mean that's obviously why I'm bringing them together, like "duh!" But even just voicing that makes me feel like, "oooh I'm opening myself up to some major criticism and like the hard-liners'll get me or something. (nervous laughter).*

Embarrassment. Relief. Saying the thing that I am scared even to say, which is that I am scared.

Wendy replies: *I think it's the, it's the, times and this school reform ... regime, right? That you're afraid to speak against.*

In the moment, I agree. Off screen on the video, I hear my voice saying "right.. Right... yeah." But perhaps that's because it feels easier (less wimpy) to be afraid of the multi-headed hydra of neoliberal education (Picower & Mayorga, 2015) than of speaking my voice or of "the research police." Now I think it is a combination—layered "not knowings" in multimodal research. A tangle of discomforts with research codes, multimodal practice, and my emerging researcher identity that comprise my fear. And yet, these not knowings are also another facet of the neoliberal schooling regime, of raced and gendered ideas about what forms of inquiry, what kinds of knowing *count*. The Collaborative Seeing Studio—in its collective approach, centering of visual and arts-based practice, and welcome orientation to discomfort and failure—rejects and resists the neoliberal value structure of teaching, learning and knowing. As visual and arts-based practitioners, these collaborative spaces are vital for strategizing, learning, and being together in the vulnerable, uncertain work of transmethodological research.



My 2017 dissertation includes both a print document and a companion digital assemblage. This open-access, multimedia work is accessible at: [REVISUALIZING CARE](http://www.outlines.dk/REVISUALIZINGCARE)

## Wendy Luttrell on Collaging: A Metaphor and Tool of Collaborative Seeing

In this section I (Wendy) reflect upon collage-making as a personal as well as collaborative journey. Collaging helps me address the question—“Whose way of seeing is this?”—to move between ideas “in my head” and in “my mind’s eye” to ideas created “between” and “with” others.

I took up collaborative collage-making in the final years of analyzing data from my longitudinal study, Children Framing Childhoods (CFC). [CFC WEBSITE](#) For me, collage making (in both still and then video formats) intentionally blurred the borders between research and art. In this article we have contended that collaborative seeing is a transmethodology; collaging is one of many creative processes that can be used. In my case, collaging intentionally combined analysis and evocation, looking and feeling, ethics and aesthetics; it enabled me to express what I was seeing, re-seeing and re-imagining from different audiences (the kids, school staff, teachers-in-training, graduate students, Collaborative Seeing Studio members) who engaged the CFC visual archive: [CFC ARCHIVE](#)

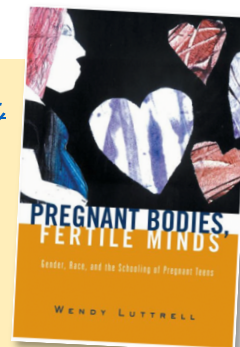
In the first instance, collaging forced me to slow down my viewing of the images. Cutting around the edges of each detail in a photograph, put me in mind of sociologist Howard Becker’s advice to take the time to actively look, not stare at a photograph; to name everything in the picture and to write up notes. Then Becker suggests, *“...following the naming of things with a period of fantasy, tell yourself a story about the people and things in the picture. The story needn’t be true, it’s just a device for externalizing and making clear to yourself the emotion and mood the picture has evoked, both part of its statement.”* (Becker, 1986, p. 232).

Collage-making was an important device for externalizing; it was tactile and embodied, affording a more intimate means for me to actively look rather than stare. Touching pieces of the images put me in mind of how the kids had touched, cradled and caressed the edges of photographs or pointed to specifics within a photograph that they placed special significance to. I had been hard pressed to put into words my understanding and feelings about the kids’ relationship to their photographs. I have written elsewhere about collage-making as a means to “ensoul” what I saw and to identify with the kid’s ways of seeing (Luttrell 2020, p. 255).

My aim in collaging was to evoke these emotions, mood, and connection to the life worlds and daily scenes of family and school life photographed by the kids. These

*Pregnant Bodies,  
Fertile Minds:  
Race, Gender  
and the  
Schooling of  
Pregnant Teens.*

Wendy Luttrell  
2003



I first used collage making as part of my research with pregnant teens. The “girls” (as they called themselves) made collages to answer the question, “who am I?” and used their images as a means to “speak back” to an “imagined audience”—those who might negatively judge them. Their exchanges about their collages circled around issues of stigma, shame, racism, sexism, as well the excitement, pride, joys and anxieties of pregnancy and motherhood.

“The ultimate descriptive task, for both artists and scientists, is to “ensoul” what one sees, to attribute to it the life one shares with it: one learns by identification” (Evelyn Fox Keller (1983, p. 204) describing the work of botanist Barbara McClintock.

photographs, all too often seen by others as mundane or “ordinary,” held layers of extraordinary meaning and value in the eyes of the child photographers. Collaging helped me intermingle what I saw in what the kids showed me—I believe the young people wanted audiences to see their families and schools with regard rather than with indifference, dismissal or disregard.



*An homage to the tools and materials of collaging.*

This photograph was taken by my collaborator and CSS member, Emily Clark. Like any photograph used in visual analysis, it does not speak for itself. It is more than a “documentation” of the tools and materials used for collage making. It tells a story about a process, composed and framed at one moment in time. Indeed, Emily and I laughed about her orderly display of things I searched throughout the house for: different sized scissors, scalpel, X-Acto knife, razor blade, the blue cutting board, the pencil and marker, different papers to be used as the background of a collage. This photograph puts an order into what was actually a disorderly, in some ways haphazard, serendipitous and always surprising process. What I like about this photographic homage to collage-making is how it juxtaposes two elements of the art of analysis: measurement and meaning. I see “measurement” represented by the blue cutting board with its metrics and straight edges that were helpful for spacing, cutting straight lines, and establishing scale.

The emphasis on “meaning” is suggested by the variety of cutting tools, reminding us that not all “cuts”/ edits of an image (or for that matter transcripts of an interview) are the same; some cuts are more carefully sculpted or more



close to the bone than others in order to preserve and communicate the intention or inflection or feelings being expressed. Experimenting with different backgrounds was a centerpiece in our collaging process. In this case, I found a scrap piece of water-colored paper to play with different textures, colors, and relationship between “background” and “foreground.” In parallel terms, researchers, whether conscious or not, create meaning by how we contextualize our findings, putting some things in the background and others in the foreground.

I chose two sets of the kids’ images for collage-making: the “moms in kitchens” and “teacher in classroom” photographs. The resonance of, interplay between, and similar choreography in these two scenes of everyday life, with women as central figures, had drawn my attention. After printing out each set of images onto 8x11 paper stock, I painstakingly cut up all the elements of the photographed scene and put the pieces into little plastic sandwich bags for me to work with. The slow work of cutting apart and reassembling classroom and kitchen spaces forced me to contemplate how creating a sense of family and school belonging is achieved through so many details, both organizational and aesthetic, that make a kitchen or classroom space one’s own. Later, opening each sandwich bag would surprise me, re-seeing the photograph as dis-assembled pieces out of context that I was so used to seeing. To reassemble the pieces, I played with different backgrounds, the spaces between elements/pieces, the scale, etc.

An important personal story is that I turned to making collages during a debilitating flare up of rheumatoid arthritis during which time using the various implements for cutting and assembling bits and pieces was much needed occupational therapy for the pain; it helped to build strength into my hands. At the time, writing through the pain was too daunting, while cutting and assembling felt doable, if not restorative.

As part of collaging “teacher-in-classroom” photographs, I became more keenly aware of the teachers’ distinctive yet overlapping gestures and postures. They were photographed at center stage in classroom space, always smiling, which I had noticed but not with such force. I also noted how much their postures, while instructional (writing on the board, holding books) also conveyed teacher’s entertaining and engaging manner, in the kids’ words, “to make learning fun” and show teachers were “nice.” In one collage I layered all the teachers on top of each other and surrounded them with pieces taken from different classrooms to create a composite classroom scene.



Tina Campt  
2017

Images have “voices” that reward being “listened to.” As historian Tina Campt puts it, “listening to” photographs goes beyond visual scrutiny: “It is an ensemble of seeing, feeling, being affected, contacted, and moved beyond the distance of sight and observer.” (2017: 42). Professor Campt mines unlikely photographic archives created originally for the surveillance and control of Black subjects. Slowly and carefully, she hears lives unwilling to be defined by their labels.



But still collages, like that above, felt unsatisfying. I wanted to see the pieces in motion, not as fixed, to more closely approximate the lived realities of classroom spaces and activities. I also felt it was important to animate the process with my hands, not only to make my role transparent, but to open a space for dialogue about my social and racialized position vis a vis moms and the teachers. There were other resonances I hoped might be galvanized by my hands, including drawing attention to the work of mothers and teachers that transcends the division of labor that our culture sets up between “hand, brain, and heart” (Rose, 1983). Care labor in homes and schools is manual and mental; physical, emotional, spiritual, aspirational; just as is the labor of research and knowledge production.

To create a sense of “aliveness” in these spaces, I envisioned background, ambient sounds of classrooms and kitchens, as well as weaving in the voices of the children. But I couldn’t accomplish what I had “in mind head” by myself.

### **Collaboration was the most important tool in the analytic kit.**

Emily set up her video station in my living room and we spent months creating the videos based on the moms-in-kitchen and teacher-in-classroom photographs: [FEEDING THE FAMILY](#) and: [NICE IS...?](#)



This picture of the video station captures other key tools and materials in the video collaging process. Lighting was always an issue (too much, too little, casting shadows), as was positioning the video camera's tripod (zooming up close, near, far); both are apt metaphors for thinking about the analytic and creative decisions researchers make. In this picture, we are using a brick—a familiar school material/texture—to shoot a classroom video collage. Over the course of our work together we would test out many different kinds of backgrounds, especially in the moms-in-kitchen collages—a paper towel, a piece of linoleum, a cast-iron surface, a plastic cutting board to incorporate the visual vernacular of the kitchen spaces photographed. Once we were satisfied with the video collage, Emily worked on the soundscapes herself, while I sought clips of the children's voices to be layered in.

Emily and I (Luttrell & Clark, 2018) have written about creating the video collage: [DWELLING IN SCHOOL](#). We discuss decisions, dilemmas, and ethics of the creative/artistic license we exerted when using the children's photographs. My point here has been to emphasize the creative role of collaging as part of an analytic tool-kit, with collaboration as a centerpiece.

### Audienicing and the "Afterlife" of Images

My (Wendy's) collage-making is only one example of the complex life of the archive of images produced through the *Children Framing Childhoods* project. [CFC INTERLUDES](#). These images have had a rich "afterlife," to use the words of Mitchell et. al. (2017, p. 184).



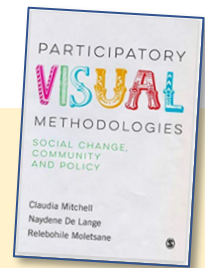
Built into the research design was an opportunity for the young people to view their images in different contexts, with different viewers, and over time: (i.e., in a one-to-one interview with a research team member; in small groups viewing each other's photographs without adult direction; and finally, as teenagers reviewing their childhood pictures, remembering and reinterpreting pictures from a past time, place, and self). The kids also curated images for public exhibitions at their school; at City Hall in Worcester; and in university gallery settings.

The purpose of these multiple audiencing sessions was threefold: (1) to trace how the young people used their images for different purposes in different contexts, for example, to address/perform multiple identities, to gain status, establish their belonging and worthiness; (2) to afford them maximum editorial authority over which pictures would be used to represent them to a public audience; and (3) to maximize their assent in the research process (Luttrell, 2010; Luttrell, Restler, & Fontaine, 2012; Lico and Luttrell, 2011). These multiple audiencings offered insight into the young people's intentions, emotions, and agency as well as their perspectives about the relationship between home, school and community life, defying one-dimensional readings of their lives and learning. Their visual presentations and accounts are imbued with innocence and experience; vulnerability and toughness; "foreign-ness" and "all-American-ness"; and "goodness" and "badness," to name a few. Rather than a linear or "fixed" self-presentation, improvised intersectional identities were set side by side in unsettled relation, and an awareness of how their lives are all-too-often misperceived by others (Lico and Luttrell 2011; Luttrell, Restler & Fontaine, 2012).

I used the CFC archive for instructional purposes, with teachers and staff at the Worcester school; teachers in professional development sessions, and graduate students learning to conduct different types of visual analysis. Across all these settings I organized the viewing process in a way I hoped would lead to questioning, if not retraining, 'researcher' and 'educator' lenses and gazes which can (but not always) be stilted if not harmful—all too often white, Anglo, middle-class, color-evasive, evaluative and standardizing.

Members of the Collaborative Seeing Studio were a differently positioned audience of the children's images, not only because some had been research team members, but because of the dynamics of our monthly meetings. These settings were not so "guided" or "instructional" as much as "exploratory" affording a wider space for dialogue, discernment, not knowing, uncertainty and self-reflexivity. Our studio sessions felt like keeping-company-with images

**PARTICIPATORY  
VISUAL  
METHODOLOGIES:  
SOCIAL CHANGE,  
COMMUNITY  
AND POLICY.**



Mitchell, De Lange, and Moletsane.  
2017

This book reviews many of the visual tools and methods members of the CSS used and adapted including, photo-voice, participatory video, drawing/mapping, and digital storytelling, as a means to ensure public engagement in both research and policy making. It is a great resource for people working across health, education, environmental and sociological research.

and ideas and extending a sense of generous hospitality about what was “inside the head” and our efforts to find creative/analytic expression.

### Reflecting Forward.

The audiencing contexts that we describe in this article—within the collaborative seeing studio and beyond—help us appreciate the non-linearity of seeing and re-seeing; the imperative of preserving multiple layers of meaning; the power of what others can teach us when they are the producers, interpreters, circulators, exhibitors, and analysts of their own and each other’s images (Luttrell, 2010: 234); and of the vulnerabilities, blind spots, deficit lenses, and responsibility to account for power and privilege in the process of visual analysis.

The aim of collaborative seeing as a transmethodology is not to find the single “right” or “correct” form of visual communication, as much as to create a space for dialogue, disagreement, not knowing, exploration, and self-reflexivity—a configuration of possibilities. To have experienced this very special place of ongoing exploration is to know that such a relational space for creating and sharing knowledge can exist. But it is not something that we have at all times in our lives or would even want to be permanent; we do need to know that it is possible and *can* exist—it *may again* exist.

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