

GRADUATION WITH DISTINCTION PROJECT

DOCUMENTARY STUDIES

To: Committee Members, Professors Alma Blount, Ken Rogerson, and Alex Harris

From: Cat Crumpler

Date: Friday, April 16, 2010

RE: Documenting the Growth of the East Durham Children's Initiative (EDCI) through
Photography



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Forward and Acknowledgements

I would like to begin by thanking everyone for taking the time to read this supplemental writing to my photographic essay, the captions of which can be viewed in Appendix A, for my Graduation with Distinction project with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University for the academic year of 2009-2010.

Additionally, I would like to extend my greatest thanks to the entirety of the East Durham Children's Initiative (EDCI) for allowing me to attend all of their programs multiple times. Special thanks to Mr. Barker French for introducing me to all the wonderful programs, and being both my liaison and guide around everything in the past fall. Also a thanks to Ms. Wanda Boone, Ms. Ellen Reckhow, and Ms. Minnie Forte-Brown for letting me attend many a formal meeting over the past year, and being so understanding of my presence. A big thanks to Principal Cassandra Fogg at Y.E. Smith Elementary school for allowing me to participate in and photograph a great many tutoring sessions during the Museum Club this year, and my appreciation to Ms. Kim Ingram and Ms. Evelyn Rojas for inviting me to the Incredible Years and Welcome Baby classes, respectively. Also, my gratitude to Mr. Michael Reckhow for keeping up with my Picasa website to update the EDCI's webpage with my photos as they were available. A thanks to the representatives from *America's Promise* for allowing me to follow along on their tour in March, and yet another thanks to Ms. Wanda Boone for being my introduction to the *Learning in Future Tense (LIFT)* program. Finally, an enormous thanks to three of the best professors Duke has to offer, thee of the greatest teachers I've ever had the pleasure of learning from, and also my Graduation with Distinction Committee members: Professors Alma Blount, Ken

Rogerson, and Alex Harris. An additional thanks to all of the people at the Center for Documentary Studies as well for four amazing years; to Professor Charlie Thompson for keeping me in the Capstone loop regardless of if I was a member of his class; to Harlan Campbell for calming me down every time the printer broke, and to Mr. Allen Creech for fixing all of my network woes.

Introduction

“The East Durham Children’s Initiative (EDCI) is focused on a 120 block area (893 acres/ 1.2 square miles) east of downtown Durham bounded by Alston Avenue on the west, Holloway Street on the north, Miami on the East, and Hoover and 147 on the South. It is largely consistent with the YE Smith Elementary School attendance zone. According to the 2000 Census, the focus area had a population of 7,133 with 71% African American and 18% Hispanic. The estimated population for January 2009 was 7,888.

The per capita income in 2000 was \$11,184, 50% of the citywide per capita income. The median household income was \$25,616, 62% of the median for the City of Durham. Of the 2,636 housing units, 669 (25%) were owner occupied, 1,698 (64%) were renter occupied, and 269 (10%) were vacant. The Hoover Road Community run by the Durham Housing Authority, which has 54 units, is in the EDCI. There have been a number of housing initiatives by the City of Durham and Habitat for Humanity in the past eight years that have helped to revitalize the housing stock and expand home ownership opportunities.” (Overview of the EDCI)¹

Background Information regarding the Achievement Gap in East Durham and the EDCI

The district served by the EDCI in East Durham demonstrates some of North Carolina’s lowest statistics regarding their education programs. The North Carolina Report Card

¹ EDCI (2010)

data for 2007-2008 reports that Y.E. Smith Elementary school, the elementary school focused on by the EDCI, is the second lowest performing elementary school in the district with an average of only 16.2% of 3rd-5th graders performing at or above grade level in reading, and only 38.5% in math. These same averages in the district are 41.4% for reading, and 56.1% for math, while state averages are higher still, at 55.6% for reading and 69.9% for math.²

These staggering statistics show that a large majority of Y.E. Smith elementary students arrive at middle school exceedingly unprepared. Students from Y.E. Smith Elementary largely attend Neal Middle School, which is the lowest performing middle school in the district, and then, later, go to Southern High School, the lowest performing high school in 2007-2008. At Neal there are 109 students, and of these 90 students (83%) are below grade in reading and 78 students (72%) are below grade in math. Furthermore, 47 students (43%) from the area have poor attendance (under 94%). Southern High school has a student body of 166, where 71 students (42%) have both low grades and credits earned. Additionally, these Southern High students attendance rate is exceedingly low. Given this combination of low grades and lack of credits, many of Southern's students will have difficulty graduating, will become discouraged with their academics, and will

² Statistics From EDCI (2010).

more than likely drop out of school. Throughout the district, at all three schools, a majority of students are on free or reduced lunch: 83% at YE Smith, 69% at Neal, and 61% at Southern.

Research has found a direct correlation between students on free or reduced lunch and their lower academic performance. “Having an above average proportion of free and reduced lunch students increases the likelihood of a school not meeting growth [targets for student achievement established by state formulas] by 27%” (Johnson & Ward, 1998).³ Low performance could be attributed to students’ having less balanced day-to-day nutrition which would therefore affect their ability to perform at their highest mental and academic abilities. Their free or reduced lunch status also suggests they are susceptible to other maladies of high-poverty lifestyles, such as unstable home environments or parents that work late, both of which could affect sleep patterns, ability to do homework, and overall focus.

The founders of the EDCI saw these pervasive, previously unaddressed issues in the 120 blocks of the EDCI and recognized the need for the development of education programs in East Durham that would fill that void from a very unique perspective. The EDCI was not founded by educators and parents alone. it was was also created by concerned Durham natives and community members who are neither current teachers, nor parents

³ Johnson, S., Ward, M. (1998).

of students in the Durham Public School systems. The leaders of the EDCI are Ms. Wanda Boone, co-founder of *Durham Together for Resilient Youth*, Ms. Minnie Forte-Brown, professor at North Carolina Central University, Mr. Barker French, educational philanthropist, and Ms. Ellen Reckhow, Durham County Commissioner. All of these individuals are Durham residents concerned with the achievement gap prevalent in certain Durham neighborhood schools. Their, and the EDCI's, goal is that every child in the EDCI's targeted area will graduate high school and be college or career ready.

The EDCI is modeled after Geoffrey Canada's *Harlem Children's Zone* (HCZ), which promises to bring every child within their 100 square blocks from "cradle to college" by providing programs to all ages that keep children and parents invested in the Harlem children's education. The HCZ provides children and their families with access to educational programs as early in the children's lives as possible in order to break the cycle of generational poverty. They provide programs for children at all stages of growth in order to keep children and youth invested in education and to prepare them for college and, later, the job market. The HCZ has shown amazing success, so much so that President Obama's administration has announced a *20 Promise Neighborhood Program* which aims to reproduce the success of the HCZ.⁴ The EDCI has hopes of being one of these neighborhoods, which provide substantial one year planning grants to not for profit, community based organizations, like both the HCZ and EDCI.

⁴ Louis, Betina Jean

Canada's amazing success in Harlem has been a major inspiration to the EDCI, as they model their ever-expanding programs after his program's structure. The success of the *Harlem Children's Zone* can be seen through the organization's growth, as stated on their webpage:

"The HCZ Project began as a one-block pilot in the 1990s, then following a 10-year business plan, it expanded to 24 blocks, then 60 blocks, then ultimately 97 blocks. The goal is to serve 15,000 children and 7,000 adults.

The budget for the HCZ Project for fiscal year 2010 is over \$48 million, costing an average of \$5,000 per child."⁵

The EDCI hopes for similar growth and success by working with residents of the community and other key stakeholders and partners. The EDCI has developed a plan to create a continuum of services from birth through high school, to prepare students for college or a career.

For my Graduation with Distinction Project I have documented the initial growth of the EDCI's programs to benefit the low-income populations of East Durham, as well as East Durham's commitment to overcoming the constraints low poverty has put upon its children's education. The timing of my documentary project is especially important in the first full year of programs under the EDCI.

⁵ The Harlem Children's Zone. (2009)

Introduction to the EDCI through Documentary Writing

Driving down Main Street, past Brightleaf, past the construction of the Main Street known to the Duke Community, you enter a different neighborhood. The neighborhood Duke students have a tendency to fear, the neighborhood that continues to increase Durham's crime-rate, the neighborhood that the wealthy of Durham by and large chooses to ignore, and the neighborhood that is trying to better itself. A mile and a half down this side of Main Street is Y.E. Smith Elementary. At 4:30 the traffic circle is still bustling with after-school pick-up activity. Visitors at this time can have difficulty finding parking. You pass the busses, the line of children waiting for their parents, the disgruntled teacher trying to get her wards home safely, and you take a right into a parking lot behind assorted out buildings. Walking back up towards the school, you hear and see children laughing, chattering, bouncing balls, teachers calling.

You see and hear the same sights and sounds of any privileged elementary school. What you do not see and hear are stereotypes. There is no hostility. No poor grammar. No violence in the hallways. No slouched pants. However, at 4:30, upon entering the school you also hear silence. Classes are over, and when you eventually locate the front office there is jovial talk of a free afternoon. The friendly office assistant encourages you to sign in the visitor log, even though at 4:30 it is more of a formality than a requirement, as the office will close before your visit is over. Back out in the silent hallways you run the risk

of getting lost. Without prior knowledge, there are no landmarks, no orienting sounds or smells, and no visible staircases. Should you choose the wrong door, you run the risk of getting locked out, in a closed courtyard, with a fence you will have to hop should you be without the key to the lock. But should you choose the correct door you will be led down a flight of stairs. Familiar childish noises will begin to invite you farther. You walk passed a display of dinosaur pieces - fossils, drawings, and replicas - and a collection of rocks, following the children's voices.

You are led to the end of a hall, with three classrooms full of children, first and second grade in one room, third and fourth in another, and fifth all to itself. Here the second graders are learning probability, the fourth graders are learning maps, and fifth graders are writing book reports. You would never guess that a little over a year ago, Y.E. Smith Elementary School was testing in as one of the lowest ranked elementary schools in the state of North Carolina. You would not know that many of their district's fifth graders read at a third grade level, that their third graders were performing at a first grade level, and that the school was a casualty in the war against closing America's achievement gap.

No, by listening to the tutees in Y.E. Smith's "Museum Club" tutoring program, you would never know that a year ago many of them were struggling through school. The children

ask great questions, the tutors respond with care, affection, and poise, and you can see everyone is invested in Y.E. Smith's education programs.

In the past year, Y.E. Smith's academic programs have skyrocketed with the help of a local Non-Profit, the East Durham Children's Initiative (the EDCI). Through increased funding and help making contacts with tutoring services and national programs, the EDCI has aided Y.E. Smith in conquering the achievement gap. On October 23rd, 2009 Y.E. Smith Elementary officially donned the title of Museum School, meaning they have proven their commitment and dedication to the practices of hands-on learning and a strengthening of their academic performance on a statewide and national scale. This is only the beginning for Y.E. Smith. The school continues - independently and with the help of the EDCI - to prove its excellence and close the achievement gap in East Durham.

Y.E. Smith Elementary is not the only educational partner the EDCI has in the Durham area. Their motto "Cradle to College," emphasizes the organization's commitment to helping underprivileged children in underserved communities maintain access to education throughout their lives, beginning when they are young and guiding them all the way through college. Though the EDCI is a new program, they have already begun expanding their services past strictly in-school or after-school programs for children. On Tuesday and Thursday mornings, the EDCI has sponsored parenting classes, deemed

“The Incredible Years,” “Welcome Baby,” and “Baby College.” Here parents of all racial, ethnic, and language backgrounds can find a parenting class for support with their little ones. On Tuesdays, at Antioch Baptist Church on Holloway Street Ms. Evelyn Rojas teaches Hispanic mothers secrets to parenting, and how to help their children excel both academically, but also in day to day life skills.

The EDCI’s parenting classes equip mothers with tools for a multitude of parenting scenarios, from when their children are unruly to how to help them stay on top of their schoolwork. All of these things have been accomplished within the last year, as the EDCI is a new and growing organization. They have identified the need to close the education gap, and members of the organization have pledged themselves to this cause.

In turn, I have been documenting the EDCI programs and activities for the past year. Through my photography I aspire to raise awareness of their cause within the triangle area, as well as assist them in fundraising. My work has been accepted with open arms at the locations I’ve photographed for the EDCI, and any that were initially awkward, as a couple of the tutoring classrooms were, have opened up over time.

The EDCI is doggedly working on their mission of having programs that take children from “cradle to college,” and they have already expanded their programs from those

targeted specifically at children and infants to all age groups. Already, in only a few months they have implemented new programs, such as *Motheread* – an adult literacy program that helps increase literacy in parents by promoting reading together with their children at home, *Living in Future Tense* (LIT)- a program aimed at increasing high school students' involvement with technology and their community, as well as college counseling services. Through increased marketing, advertising and awareness throughout the surrounding Durham, and Duke, community, I am hopeful that my photography will help the EDCI achieve their goals of bettering the lives of every community member in East Durham.

Medium and Methods

This documentary project was conducted using still, digital photography. Two digital cameras were used to complete the final product, primarily a Canon 5D, a digital SLR camera, but supplemental photos were taking with a Canon G10 when it was better suited due to its convenience and more compact size. The methods of photography were primarily characteristic of street photography, where the vast majority of photographs are candid. These photographs were gathered by repeatedly visiting EDCI programs and immersing myself into their culture. Over the course of the year I have collected over eight thousand photographs, and ultimately chose a series of twenty-five for my photographic essay, but submitted roughly two hundred to the EDCI via Google's online

photo sharing program, Picasa. For the EDCI's uses I focused on the more technical side of the programs, and attempted to show who did what and where: tutors tutoring, students learning, the EDCI's committee members discussing the futures of their programs, and other routine activities for the organization and its constituents. However, narrowing these photos down to an increasingly small selection and ordering them took more concentration. For the purposes of my photographic essay I chose pictures that represented the emotion of those involved in the EDCI's programs. This involved many close ups and portraiture of the program participants. To order my twenty-five selected photos, I attempted to avoid a narrative or chronological sequence. Instead, I focused on common emotions evident in my subjects, represented through facial expressions, body posture, hand gestures, and like shapes to guide the viewer's the eye through the sequence without any jarring visual disconnects.

Following in a Photographic Tradition of Social Advocacy

My documentary style has taken influence from many documentary traditions, but I particularly follow in traditions of using my photographic work for social advocacy and progress. I see Jacob Riis (1849-1914) as the father using photography as a tool for social advocacy, and of using documentary photography to promote change in the status quo. Riis used photography to show the inequities of the slums of Mulberry Bend, New York, and his photography argued that the housing in the district needed to be improved, and

the slums abolished. Many of his tactics are questioned, as they were very intrusive. He is known for his “raiding parties,” where he would join the sanitation department on their nightly trips to the Bend, and surprise the poverty-stricken tenants in the slums with his rudimentary flash created by using gunpowder. While these are indeed invasive practices, there is no doubt that his photography did lead to immediate policy changes that rid Mulberry Bend of its slums and improved the quality of housing in the area, therefore ethics aside

Additionally, in the vein of social work Lewis Hine was a major inspiration for this project with the EDCI. While Hine has many renowned photographs, his project on child labor is one of his more famous. Hine was determined to show the social injustices of working children in the early 1900s. This was a particularly challenging feat, as industries didn’t want their behavior publicized. To overcome this issue, Hine would dress up in unassuming roles, like that of a bible salesman, to gain access to the factories where children worked. While my project didn’t require anything nearly as sneaky, Hine’s commitment to using documentary photography to better the lives of children was a major influence in my work with EDCI. Child labor is not the most pressing issue of modern youth, but I would argue that the ever-widening achievement gap is as dire of a concern today as child labor was in Hine’s day. The opportunities of our country’s children are being grossly limited through the associated problems of poverty, which

include underserved school systems. A commitment to bettering education for our children is needed as badly today as child labor reform was needed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

One other tradition in social advocacy I follow in is that of Dorothea Lange, a photographer and Paul Taylor, an economist and writer who eventually became her husband. During the Great Depression they travelled together through the dust bowl and put together a body of work that ultimately affected laws for migrant labor in the west. That work was also gathered in the book, *American Exodus*, which was written to chronicle the plight of migrant workers and to foster social change. By combining statistics, straightforward writing and interviews with the subjects themselves, with Lange's evocative and beautifully seen photographs, the two together created a template for combining writing and photography in a body of documentary work. I attempted to model not only my photography after Lange, but also the beginning of this report after Taylor through combining statistics describing elaborating on the issues in East Durham and my own documentary writing style, designed to illicit an emotional response to the progress made by the EDCI in the past year.

This project with the EDCI has been the epitome of my social advocacy work through photography. Previously I have focused on projects that remove me from my daily routine, but not necessarily projects that have a greater purpose. My projects have taken

me outside to the Hillsborough apiary, to the North Carolina Mountains to participate in a shepherding festival, and to the far corners of Durham in the wee hours of the morning. I've tried to capture the activities that flourish around me, but that I might otherwise have ignored. I particularly seek out situations where I can practice social photography, like street photography, but set in nature. The blend of human emotion and vibrant natural colors are very appealing and welcome in my work, and this practice with social photography later prepared me to use my documentary work for social advocacy, as in the case of the EDCI.

In this light I often follow the footsteps of Tomasz Tomaszewski, a modern travel photographer for National Geographic from Poland. Tomaszewski spends most of his time photographing different aspects of life in his home country in an attempt to fully represent his people where he believes they fail to do so themselves. He has focused on dairy farmers in the countryside, and miners in small coal towns. Most importantly, he has tried to emphasize what the brain drain from his country has done to the dynamics of their class system, as most of the educated middle class has vacated the country for more promising futures. While my photography has yet to be quite so poignant, I hope I have begun to make it so through this specific project. Using photography as a tool to better your community, that of your city, state, or country, is an admirable practice and I seek to accomplish this through my work.

My desire to photograph within my own communities, and experiment with advocacy through documentary work was also spurred on by another modern influence: the photography of Alex Harris. While Harris has committed some of his time to photography in other countries, particularly in Cuba, he often focuses his projects on his own backyard of the American south. As a southerner myself I find this work particularly inspiring, and Harris's work constantly encourages me to reexamine that which is immediately around me, and how my photography can help bring it into a new light. Harris's use of photography in association of the work of non profit organizations like Civic Ventures or the North Carolina Housing Coalition, or his early work with sharecroppers in North Carolina, is also a major inspiration behind my year's work with the EDCI. Additionally his style has greatly influenced my own through my studies with him, as I have spent two years and four courses studying with him.

My project and my photography borrows from many traditions, and it has been the study of these traditions afforded to me by Duke University and the Center for Documentary Studies (CDS) that make my work both uniquely my own, and also a mosaic of those photographers I model my work after. It is in this way that my Distinction Project thoroughly touches on all that I have learned in my time at the Center, and why this project is the culmination of my career at CDS.

Conclusion

This project, thoroughly grounded in the traditions of my documentary studies education, has been successful in its goals. While my goals and the EDCI's goals diverged at places, both were reached successfully. For the EDCI, I was looking to produce documentary work that they could use in their fundraising ventures on their website and in grant applications, in brochures and other assorted informational materials, whereas for my documentary work at the Center and for this project I sought a more emotional response, to reach an audience that might know little or nothing about EDCI or Durham schools. I achieved this by creating a kind of mosaic of photographs, a series of pictures that make connections between expression, gesture, emotion, and color, while also speaking to the mental and academic growth of the EDCI's participants. Though these two aspects of documentary work are not mutually exclusive, they require a different mindset when choosing pictures for the final body of work. The photographs in the fundraising aspect for the EDCI require focus on the more technical ins and outs of the EDCI's programs, where what I was looking for was much more focused on people, their reactions, and interactions.

In the end both of these goals were satisfied through the selection of specific pictures for the differing goals. Not only did I produce a body of printed work to suit this documentary project for my Graduation with Distinction, but also I have consistently

provided the EDCI with photographs all throughout the year via Google's Picasa. These photos have been used on their website, but more importantly they may also serve a purpose in the EDCI's grant writing initiatives. My documentary work can already be seen on the EDCI's website, and may be used in future grant applications, such as those submitted to *America's Promise* and the *Promise Neighborhoods*, to get increased funding for further expansion of their programs, as well as some other pending grants. Therefore, upon my work's use in these grants, and the EDCI's subsequent receipt of these grants, I will consider my work a valuable contribution to bettering the education system and closing the achievement gap in East Durham.

Works Cited

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- 3) EDCI (2010). Overview of the EDCI. Retrieved from <http://eastdurhamchildrensinitiative.org/Overview.html>
- 4) The Harlem Children's Zone. (2009). History of the Harlem Children's Zone. Retrieved from <http://www.hcz.org/about-us/history>

Appendix A: Captions⁶

1. Portrait of the EDCI's Chairs and Organizers
2. "The Diary of a Worm" posters are hung by the 5th grade tutees in the YE Smith Elementary's Museum Club tutoring program
3. A performance by the kindergarten class for Y.E. Smith's Museum Club
4. A little brother attends a Y.E. Smith's museum club event in support of his older siblings
5. A Y.E. Smith Tutee thinks hard before answering a difficult math question
6. A little girl balances her take home lunch given to her family courtesy of the EDCI
7. Teachers watch over their students during a performance at Y.E. Smith
8. Performances are showcased by student groups at the a community event hosted by the EDCI
9. The children (below) play at daycare while their mothers (left) attend the Incredible Years parenting class at Antioch Baptist Church
10. A tutor keeps her tutees focused at a tutoring session in YE Smith Elementary's Museum Club tutoring program
11. Homework Half-Hour during YE Smith Elementary's Museum Club tutoring program.
12. Fifth graders are taught the mechanics of multiplication during Y.E. Smith's Museum Club tutoring program
13. A Tutor at Y.E. Smith helps a 2nd grader subtract correctly, with the help of his fingers
14. A teacher with Y.E. Smith leads her wards to their next activity
15. The son of a musician affiliated with the organization KidzNotes converses with an organizer.
16. Second Graders at Y.E. Smith's Museum Club tutoring participate in interactive learning during after school sessions

⁶ Please note – the photographs associated with this paper were taken with the permission of subject or legal guardian

17. The YE Smith Elementary first graders are led outside
18. A classroom on the bottom floor of Y.E. Smith Elementary School participates in after school tutoring.
19. The son of a Welcome Baby student plays with trains in day care while his mother has class.
20. In daycare during the Incredible Years parenting classes, a supervisor in the nursery helps a child put together a puzzle
21. Children are picked up after daycare.
22. Second grade tutees at Y.E. Smith elementary school wait to be called on in a lesson on probability vocabulary
23. The student speaker at Y.E. Smith's Museum Club Ribbon cutting walks back to her seat from the podium.
24. Y.E. Smith Elementary School gathers in front of their school to celebrate their inauguration as a museum school