Are We Using All the Tools in Our Toolkits? 
Considering Video Recordings for Community Development

Craig A. Talmage, Ph.D.*  
Arizona State University  
Partnership for Community Development  
Craig.Talmage@asu.edu

Mikulas Pstross  
Arizona State University  
Partnership for Community Development  
Mikulas.Pstross@asu.edu

Richard C. Knopf, Ph.D.  
Arizona State University  
Partnership for Community Development  
Richard.Knopf@asu.edu

411 N. Central Ave. Suite 550  
P (602) 496-0550 | F (602) 496-0953  
*Denotes Corresponding Author

Abstract
This CD Practice article calls for the greater incorporation of video recordings into community development research and practice. We present video recordings as both an alternative and complementary tool to capture stories and experiences from community members. We outline the key benefits of video recordings for community development research and practice and reflect on them based on our own experiences at Arizona State University. Finally, we encourage other community development professionals to increase their use of this relatively inexpensive yet often overlooked tool.

Keywords
Community Development Practice, Video Analysis, Video Recordings, Qualitative Methods
Introduction

“The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice, there is little we can do to change; until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds.”

(R.D. Laing, 1967, as cited by Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2004, p. 170)

Community development researchers and practitioners strive to find the best ways to capture the stories and experiences of community members. We encourage citizens, community members, groups, and organizations to use their own capacity to strive for and achieve positive change in their communities (Talmage, 2014; 2015). To do so, we should utilize the most efficient, effective, and impactful methods and tools possible.

This article reminds researchers and practitioners about an often overlooked tool in our toolkits: Video recordings. Video recordings have the potential to give us full pictures of the experiences and stories of community members and more (e.g., attitudes, interactions). Keeping these notions in mind, we reflect on our own experiences using video recordings and explore the merits of video recordings in research and practice for community development.

Video Research in the Community Development Record

It has been said that video captures the “community spirit” (Stillman, 2005, p. 82); however, we have not been able to find many examples where video is being exclusively used in the field of community development. This article will highlight times when video recordings have been used in closely related fields to community development. Moreover, the field has work to do when it comes to documenting successes and learnings from utilizing video recordings. In this article, we will contribute such documentation and encourage greater use of video recordings.

Saunders (1976) first used video recordings for planning and development in community development literature. He used videotape to let youth view their experiences during a local government day. Saunders (1976) documented the reflections of the youth on their local government day experience after they had watched a video of it. Saunders’ (1976) research remains viable today. After viewing and discussing individual reactions, Saunders (1976) concluded that youth and leaders could use the youths’ reflections to motivate them to become more involved in their communities and to determine how to make such experiences more engaging in the future (see also Kudva & Driskell, 2009).

Video recordings have also helped community members learn how their individual actions (nonverbal and verbal) are interpreted by others, particularly colleagues and peers (Rook & McDonald, 2012). For example, Rook and McDonald (2012) noted that peer video analysis was a great reflective tool for educators. Video also allows researchers and practitioners to monitor feelings and behaviors by creating an audio-visual record of individual and group actions, interactions, and reactions that can be dissected and discussed in the interest of development. Earlier, Anderson and Melchior (1995) suggested that interactive videos could be used to help community members gain knowledge of pertinent issues in their communities and connect better with fellow community members.
Our Experiences Shared through Two Different Projects

In our research, we used Griffith’s (2013) list of behaviors to analyze our weekly community development research team meetings and to better understand which portions are most effective or engaging. We accompanied these video recordings with online follow-up questionnaires to collect the very same information. Using both retrospective and observational methods, we found that we could use videos to analyze which portions of our meetings were most successful in capturing the attention and participation of attendants.

Online self-reported moments of engagement matched up well with our own interpretations of the video recordings. For example, nonverbal behaviors (e.g., smiling, eye contact, and posture) lined up with the moments noted in the online questionnaire answers. Verbal behaviors such as speaking and laughing (or not speaking and laughing) were also easy to tie to moments of engagement or disengagement. We were able not only able to capture individual affects, but also interactions among people. In previous pilots, we found that retrospective methods (i.e., survey questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, discussed later) did not fully capture the nuances of these social interactions.

Even with our basic skill levels regarding video recordings and analysis, we found video recordings beneficial for improving meetings. For example, we used the lessons learned in our video recording efforts to better understand the behaviors of our fellow team members and ourselves. We contend that analyzing video recordings can be instrumental for community development workers for creating and evaluating community development programs.

Video is an interactive medium that can be watched and re-watched; edited and re-edited over time (Erickson, 2007; Lemke, 2007). Thus, video recordings can be compiled and reconfigured to support longitudinal community endeavors and endeavors, as well as endeavors that engage community members in telling stories. If the purpose of storytelling in community development is to encourage communities to continue to ask questions after we leave (see Pstross, Talmage, & Knopf, 2014), then video recordings may be a helpful tool in our toolkits.

For example, in 2014, a team of students used video to capture and document stories of diversity in the downtown Phoenix area (Talmage, Dombrowski, Pstross, Peterson, & Knopf, 2015). The film was then shown to stakeholders of that downtown community. The video documentary complemented other traditional scientific and alternative artistic approaches used in that community research endeavor, and reached community members who might otherwise not have interacted with each other. They felt more comfortable sharing their own stories and connecting with each other at the showcase. We continue to use multiple short films and student teams in our events to collect the undiscovered stories of diverse individuals and groups in downtown Phoenix.
A Brief Review of Retrospective and Observational Methods

The case for video is reinforced as we consider the importance of observation in community development research and practice. We begin by briefly reviewing common retrospective and observational methods used in research and practice. Then, we consider how video recordings, an observational tool, can be incorporated in community development efforts. We conclude by providing recommendations for such use of video recordings.

Regardless of the context (e.g., person, community, or event), attitudes and behaviors in communities are commonly measured using retrospective methods (e.g., Sachau, 2007). Retrospective methods include questionnaires, interviews, or focus groups where individuals are asked to recount their experiences or rate items from a list. Respondents usually tell us what they have done or intend to do via scales or checklists on a questionnaire. They might also make some sort of hypothetical choice among presented alternatives.

Retrospective methods have advanced science, particularly so for community development research and practice, but they also have their limitations. Table 1 outlines seven common errors associated with retrospective methods. Participant responses can be riddled with bias, as described in the first four common errors: (1) social desirability, (2) fundamental attribution error, (3) actor-observer bias, and, (4) self-serving attribution bias (see Coon & Mitterer, 2011; Sachau, 2007). Respondents are also unlikely to give a full picture of the factors that influence behavior and attitudes; the claims made in this type of research are likely to be incomplete or inaccurate (e.g., Coon & Mitterer, 2011; Heider, 1958; Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Finally, participants’ answers are often deeply rooted in emotions that affect the accuracy of the responses we receive (Heider, 1958; Ployhart, Schneider, & Schmitt, 2006).

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Issues with Retrospective Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL DESIRABILITY BIAS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tendency of participants to offer ratings or answers they think their questioners will find more desirable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FUNDAMENTAL ATTIBUTION ERROR</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tendency of participants to overemphasize the role of personalities or internal characteristics in explaining a social situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ACTOR-OBSERVER BIAS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tendency of participants to overemphasize external characteristics and underemphasize their own personalities or internal characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PSEUDOMEMORIES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fake memories usually created in our minds to fill in gaps in memories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SELF-SERVING ATTRIBUTION BIAS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tendency to take credit for positive experiences or success and blame others for negative experiences or failures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MISSING/INACCURATE INFORMATION</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our retrospective reconstructions of reality are unlikely to completely identify the factors that influence us, and the claims we make are likely incomplete or inaccurate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HALO/FLOOR EFFECTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The tendency to give inaccurately high or low ratings in survey responses based on irrelevant influences, which can restrict range or skew data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The limitations of retrospective methods can be countered using observational methods. It is one thing to hear another’s recollection of an event, but it is a far different thing to experience it. Observational methods allow data collection as events unfold. Researchers often take on participant observer roles, such as complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer roles (e.g., Creswell, 2000; Gold, 1958; Kearns, 2010).

Observations can be used to count the number of behaviors, to provide complementary evidence to retrospective methods, and to provide contextual understanding for researchers and practitioners (Kearns, 2010). Observers both watch and listen, and by doing so, are participants in some way. In fact, “Ultimately all observation is a form of participant observation” (Kearns, 2010, p. 12). Additionally, other sensations and perceptions might be experienced (e.g., eating community meals, experience food from a new culture, or hearing cultural music).

Observational methods have particular advantages over retrospective methods. They provide a more in-depth access to the context in which individuals experience social reality in their communities. Observations can fill in gaps left by retrospective assessments. The main disadvantage of observations, however, is the amount of time that is required by researchers and practitioners who want to take advantage of them (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2004; Kearns, 2010; Morling, 2012). Table 2 summarizes the advantages and disadvantages of observational methods.

Derived from
Considering Video Recordings as a Tool for Observation

Table 2
Advantages and Disadvantages of Observational Methods

**ADVANTAGES**
- Contextual understanding
- Direct and natural observations of behavior
- The ability to fill in the gaps of spotting recall, which complements retrospective data
- Access to insights regarding behaviors that persons may hide or not be aware of
- Observations of uncommon, unanticipated, or rare but important events
- Replication or further sampling is usually readily available

**DISADVANTAGES**
- Misidentification by the observer
- Reactivity of participants because of the observer’s presence
- Unnecessary or too heavy focus on atypical or non-generalizable events and non-random samples
- Discipline, purpose, and reflexivity required by the researchers to avoid perceptual distortions
- Misrepresentation of or failure to attend to important data (i.e. observer bias)
- Substantial preparation time is required for field work and for observation
- Lack of control over the research situation or the researcher’s eye

Derived from Kayrooz & Trevitt (2004), Padgett (2008), Kearns (2010), and Morling (2012).

Video recordings emerged as a particular tool for research and/or research methodologies more than 80 years ago, when influential Kurt Lewin (1931) first connected his psychological work in filmmaking (Van Elteren, 1992). Even then, Lewin used video to analyze behavior, present and illustrate his concepts to others, and maintain his own personal records (Van Elteren, 1992). Since then, video recordings have been primarily rooted in experiential and phenomenological research traditions (Lemke, 2007); however, they are now permeating other fields closely related to community development and increasing in frequency of use (e.g., Derry, 2007; Lemke, 2007; Spiro, Collins, & Ramchandran, 2007). For example, in urban development and planning, we first saw video recordings used in larger-scale situations by Zube (1979). There is hope for blending these kinds of methods into community development efforts.

Community development researchers and practitioners that have not infused video recordings into their work may be missing out on the wealth of data that can be captured by a now relatively inexpensive tool (Pink, 2001a; 2001b). Video recording methods have been recommended for use in community development since Spurr (1966), but the equipment used in Spurr’s (1966) study with 8mm film – now an outdated medium – would have then cost a considerable sum. Video recordings have since become more affordable, and thus they have become more prominent in research (Pink, 2001b; Spiro et al., 2007). Now, researchers are beginning to take advantage of the video functionalities of their mobile phones, which may be easily accessible to researchers and participants (Peyton & Poole, 2014). Finally, video is easily compressible and portable with little to no loss in quality (Shrum, Duque, & Brown, 2005). For example, mobile phones can now be used for both data capturing and editing (Peyton & Poole, 2014).

Video recordings complement the researcher’s role. If minimal or no participation is needed by the researcher in the field, video recordings are a justifiable substitute (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Video cameras can also be placed strategically in different locations giving observers more control over the situation to capture important moments, preventing misrepresentations and misinterpretations.

According to Forsyth, Carroll and Reitan-no (2009), “Video data can capture the messiness and concomitant richness of social life” (2009, p. 216). Video recordings allow the researcher to visually and audibly analyze and interpret social situations (Heath et al., 2010; Forsyth et al., 2009). However rich a researcher’s field notes are, video recordings have the advantage of replaying a situation to inform a more detailed analysis. Mehan (1993) claims that through video recordings, researchers are “able to see and hear a different version of social life than is otherwise possible” (p. 103). Knoblauch and Tuma (2011) write, “The focus on action and interaction is linked to the specific advantages of video as a technical medium” (p. 417).

In Table 3, we compare retrospective methods (e.g., questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups) and observational methods (e.g., pure observations and video). Comparisons are made regarding the following aspects of research methods: (1) response length; (2) sample size; (3) field work time; (4) auditory record; (5) visual record; (6) analysis time; and (7) need for transcriptions. Both the aforementioned literature and our own experiences informed this comparison.

Video recordings contain a wealth of data that can be analyzed, though the analysis can be challenging at times (Heath et al., 2010; Holliday, 2000; Lemke, 2007). Many aspects of social activities can be analyzed from video recordings; these include, but are not limited to, visual conduct, talk, and props. Video recordings proved...
advantageous in Griffith’s (2013) study of interactions between mentally disabled persons and their caretakers. During the analysis, Griffith (2013, p. 30) designed a check sheet of observable behaviors, which included vocal behaviors (such as loud breathing, crying, laughter), eye expressions (staring, closing of eyes), facial expressions (smiling, frowning), body activities (stretching, turning head away), and gestures (nodding, shaking head, lifting of arms). Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (2010) provide recommendations for analyses and emphasize that video recordings do not necessarily need to be textually transcribed for coding and analyses, especially with the advances in software today (see also Griffith, 2013; Shrum et al., 2005). Finally, video recordings are rich data sources, so data saturation may be reached more quickly than with traditional methods (Heath et al., 2010).

Video recordings are trustworthy data sources. They can be analyzed and re-analyzed using a variety of theoretical-perspectives and can be scrutinized down to the most minute action, image, or detail (Griffith, 2013; Heath et al., 2010; Holliday, 2000; Lemke, 2007). Video recordings can also be used as a source for data triangulation, which is the use of more than one type of data (Denzin, 1978; Padgett, 2008). While users of video recordings should and may maintain audit trails, field notes, and reflexivity (see Pink, 2001b), analyses of recordings might still be best performed by a third party to avoid misinterpretations and misrepresentations (Heath et al., 2010). Those recorded should also be engaged in any analyses of the video recordings to make the process much more democratic (see Margolis, 1994; Pink, 2001b). Additionally, sufficient time and discipline are crucial to prevent the observer from misunderstanding data observed and recorded. Precautions need to be taken as well to prevent those on film from reacting too much to the presence of the observer (Kayrooz & Trevitt, 2004; Kearns, 2010; Morling, 2012). Finally, ethical integrity must be maintained in the collecting, viewing, and analyzing of video recordings (see Derry et al., 2010; Guest et al., 2013).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPICAL</th>
<th>Quantitative Questionnaires</th>
<th>Qualitative Questionnaires</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Video</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response Length</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Medium/Long</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Varies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Size</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td>Short/Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Work Time</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>Medium/Long</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auditory Record</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>If Recorded</td>
<td>If Recorded</td>
<td>If Recorded</td>
<td>Built In</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Record</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>If Recorded</td>
<td>If Recorded</td>
<td>If Recorded</td>
<td>Built In</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis Time</td>
<td>Short</td>
<td>Short/Medium</td>
<td>Medium/Long</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Long</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcriptions</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Notes Required</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Comparison of Research Methods
Recommendations

Table 4 provides a list of practical recommendations for practitioners using video recordings in community settings. In addition to these practical considerations, we recommend that video researchers and practitioners take advantage of guides like those created by Pink (2001a), Shrum, Duque, and Brown (2005), Heath, Hindmarsh, and Luff (2010), Knoblauch and Tuma (2011), and Milne, Mitchell, and de Lange (2012). These guides and others can help those who use video recordings acquire the proper equipment, use appropriate recording processes, and create high-quality recordings. We must also determine our own best practices for video recording in our field.

Conclusion

If we in community development want to remain cutting-edge, video recordings should be a method in our toolkits. Video recordings are an “innovation in research practice” (Shrum et al., 2005 p. 18). Video analysis fights our human instincts toward reductionism; simply put, looking for one single answer, solution, or process to our complex problems. Video recordings bank the practical knowledge of our communities, allowing researchers, practitioners, and community members to see more of their worlds. They are an accessible, flexible, and democratic form of data. They can be shared with funders, policy-makers, and other community development stakeholders. They are records that can be kept and maintained by communities for their own uses. Our work in communities is a visual endeavor; thus, we must take advantage of the full range of tools and techniques that can better our communities in the long-term, and video recordings must be a tool in our toolkits.

Table 4

Recommendations for Practitioners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENVIRONMENT</th>
<th>CAMERA</th>
<th>DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Minimize outside noise and possible sound interference.</td>
<td>• Find a viewpoint that will capture the action.</td>
<td>• Take field notes and use sound recorders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Utilize extra lighting to deal with undesired shadows.</td>
<td>• Use multiple cameras to capture multiple angles.</td>
<td>• Take notes of actions that occur off-camera.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Choose rooms that allow for multiple camera positions.</td>
<td>• Consider a roving camera for moving action shots.</td>
<td>• Utilize multiple observers for note-taking and camera work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Avoid rooms with windows that offer visual distractions.</td>
<td>• Place the camera in a place where it does not draw attention to itself.</td>
<td>• Utilize multiple coders for data analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Preplan the locations of both the sound and video recorders.</td>
<td>• Use an external microphone for higher sound quality.</td>
<td>• Choose a user-friendly video analysis program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inform and gain permission from those being recorded.</td>
<td>• Have extra memory cards and batteries on-hand.</td>
<td>• Store on a secure server with lots of memory.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Lewin, K. (Director) (1931). Das Kind und die Welt. [Documentary]. Germany.


