

## Preface

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Ethnography is simultaneously one of the most exciting and misunderstood research methodologies and research products within educational research. What initially appears to be a straightforward process of 'hanging around' and writing about what has been seen and heard, with deeper familiarity, becomes a far more complex process. There are continual debates about how high quality ethnographic work should be conducted and presented, but there is also broad agreement. That broad agreement is illustrated within this volume.

This volume draws together chapters from a group of ethnographers of education. The chapters present individual views about the main aspects of doing ethnographic research, and each is based upon and illustrated by the authors' recent ethnographic research. While the authors share broad agreement about the nature of ethnography and how it should be done, there are also differences in emphasis between them. This is inevitable in a jointly written book such as this, and should not be seen as a weakness. As the nature of ethnography is heavily contested, it is instructive to offer insights into some of that contested terrain.

The first chapter of this book gives a general introduction to the nature and history of ethnographic work in education. It argues that ethnography is particularly appropriate for the investigation of many aspects of learning and teaching as there are strong similarities between the way people learn and the activities of conducting ethnographic research.

The second chapter covers three interlinked areas. It discusses the importance of choosing an appropriate site and offers advice on how to gain access to these sites in an effective yet ethical manner. It then discusses ethical issues which have gained in importance over the years, such that researchers are now much more reflexive about what they are doing and their possible effects on others.

Sara Delamont's chapter considers one of the two main ways in which data are generated in ethnographic work. Her discussion of observation and of fieldnotes uses her own recent work on *Capoeira* teaching as the main example. Similarly, Martin Forsey uses his recent ethnographic study of an Australian comprehensive school in crisis as his main example illustrating how to do interviews within ethnographic settings.

This is followed by a chapter by W. Douglas Baker, Judith Green and Audra Skukauskaitė on a growing area of educational ethnography that focuses on the

use of video and other technologies. The chapter by Mats Trondman uses the unusual analogy of heart bypass surgery to explain the role of theory. For him, theory is seen as the blood that flows through the heart of ethnography. He then discusses ways in which 'diseases' within ethnography can be cured.

The chapter by Bob Jeffrey shows how a particular six-fold characterisation can be used as a structure for observation and recording within ethnographic fieldwork. He uses examples from his creative learning work to show how the framework can be used. Finally, Dennis Beach examines the problems of writing and representations. He shows that concern with representation is far from new, yet there are particular issues when one wishes to present the results of critical ethnographic research.

Together, the authors of this book hope that it will give new insights to those already familiar with ethnography, and provide stimulation and advice to those newer to the field.