

Introduction

This co-authored book draws on the published work of three experienced ethnographers whose research projects have focused on the effects of education policy in the U.K. and Sweden. The book traces some of the factors and experiences involved in the process of the development of an ethnographic project focusing on policy developments—from planning, through analysis and writing, to outcomes in the form of methodological articles produced by the authors from their various researches. The book has an introduction and two sections.

We have utilised ethnographic methodology in our research focusing on teachers' work and how it is changing in response to economic, social and cultural pressures. We have chosen this mode of research, involving participant observation, interviewing and immersion in the field for extended periods of time, for sound reasons. What many of the empirical studies of teachers' responses show is that the effects of restructuring of schools and educational systems, and the responses of the teachers to the process are complex and contradictory. Teachers' reactions cannot simply be read off from official policy prescriptions. The pattern of actual restructuring awaits empirical developments. What is needed is detailed studies of what happens when policy reforms are introduced into individual institutions in order to discover 'what is going on'. Policy analysis reveals the nature of education policy at the macro (system/societal) level. However, we need to understand the implications the reforms have for teachers and how they are experienced at the meso (organisational) and micro (personal) levels. This will contribute to policy sociology and will add to our understanding of the processes and dynamics of social change.

Policy ethnography considers policy as a cyclical process and aims to provide an analysis of it in the various phases of the cycle. It offers too, a means of bridging the macro-micro gap since a study focused on the impact of a range of policies in the 'zone of implementation' will tend to expose the constraints and influences of wider societal factors on what teachers do. There is a need also to complement those theoretical studies which have sought to analyse official policy for restructuring teachers' work and its organisation with empirical work focused on how restructuring is being played out in practice. There is a crucial

role here for an ethnographic case study approach. Generally, there has been a neglect of the experiences, perspectives and emotions of actors who are charged with the implementation of policy and the social, cultural, political, economic and emotional contexts in which it takes place. Ethnography is a prime means by which such factors can be understood.

Section i—Policy and the ethnographic process

Without gaining access to educational institutions ethnographic studies could not possibly proceed. In chapter one, therefore, we consider some of the issues which were encountered in gaining access to schools in order to carry out ethnographic work on policy implementation. In chapter two the focus is on the difficult dilemmas of how much time to spend in the field in order to gain immersion thus increasing the validity of the ethnographic account produced in the study. Ironically, ethnographic research on policy is constrained, in terms of time spent in the field, by the policies of research sponsors who often favour short, low-cost research. In chapter three it is noted that it is sometimes argued that ethnography in being focused on the local and particular might be macro-blind and unable, therefore, to contribute to the development of theory. We argue here, that interactionist ethnographic research on education can contribute to our understanding of theory, policy and practice.

Section ii—Policy, representation and dissemination

In this section we argue the strengths of the ethnographic approach in researching education policy, look at the ethnographic policy research process, and explore some of the issues it raises in terms of interpreting and communicating findings of enquiries. In chapter four the inter-related and complex issues of entry, access and interests are reflected upon and explored in the context of a U.K. National inspection. Once having obtained access the search for oppositional incidents, differing reactions and behaviours as well as contradictory data can ensure that the ethnography represents the lived complex reality and can also illustrate the existence of contradictory policy that confounds those at the sharp end. Chapters five and six deal with representations in ethnography. In chapter five a post-modern, post-structural perspective is used to deconstruct representational power and the politics of conviction in literary texts of the ethnographic kind and in chapter six the question of political and ideological articulation in relation to ethnographic writing style is examined. Finally, chapter seven renders the current official emphasis on producing research

findings problematic, not solely to contribute to academic knowledge but to be of use to 'users'. Using the example from our research on stress in teaching we show how problematic is the shift towards more direct collaboration with users, and the highly contested nature of the relationship between ethnographic research, policy and practice.