

Why Ethnography?

- A Method useful for interpretative or objectivist research.
- Empirical Research – being there – being where?
- Long term involvement – learning by doing
- Developing intimacy – a quality of relationship.
- Methods@manchester page for ethnographic methods:
<http://www.methods.manchester.ac.uk/methods/ethnography/index.shtml>

Fieldwork

- An attempt to understand the lives of others by living with/like them (participant observation).
- The fieldworker is often in the position of exile or ‘professional stranger’.
- Accident and happenstance can be as important as planning.
- There are real limits to what a particular fieldworker can learn in a given setting.

Being in the field

- Human subjects in everyday life – in context (not in labs, not in texts)
- Place as setting – contexts in which things happen.
- Places as meaningful environments – contexts which are produced by people in practice.

Participant Observation

- Involves learning to live with ease and familiarity in a particular setting.
- Using the self as “scientific instrument”
- Builds on personal involvement – shared understandings.
- Living through particular relationships
- Focus on the other person’s point of view

Fieldwork Skills

1. Language
2. Being a Novice
3. Hanging out – patience
4. Openness to local agendas
5. Keeping a critical edge/distance – “going native” not advised.
6. Systematic recording of observations –Notes, fieldnotes, recording (tape and video).
7. Mapping relationship between DETAILS and PATTERNS

Quality of Ethnographic Observations

- Five Criteria of ‘Subjective Adequacy’
 - **Time** – the longer the time spent with a group the greater the likelihood of adequacy.
 - **Place** – Being close to a group increases likelihood of adequacy
 - **Language** – the greater the fluency and familiarity with its idiom, the more reliable one’s observations
 - **Intimacy** – the greater its degree, the more accurate is ones interpretation of meaning
 - **Confirmation** – the more one can confirm consensus with a group regarding interpretation the more substantive ones findings.

Ethnographic Research Questions?

- What are the cultural dimensions – ideas, practices, processes?
- How do those involved understand the wider picture of what is going on?
- Common Sense – what do people take for granted?
- You might want to consider the following issues:
 - your “field-site” – where will you do this study?
 - how will you introduce yourself to those you are studying?
 - who are you studying? how do they see you?
 - focus on the details that you might otherwise take for granted – both the physical space and what goes on there.
 - what kinds of relationships are developed?
 - what kinds of exchanges are involved between those present?