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**Introduction to *Doing Fieldwork at Home: The Ethnography of Education in Familiar Contexts*: In the Field at Home; Onward, & Bibliography**

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## Introduction: *In the Field at Home*

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In this volume, we attempt to better understand ethnographic research on education in local contexts wherein the researcher has regular contact and social relationships with the intended research participants. Recent disciplinary trends find ethnographers increasingly engaged in research in settings familiar to them, such as their own workplaces, leisure spaces, neighborhoods, and communities. The study of such practices illuminates interconnected methodological, ethical, and analytical dilemmas. It also offers opportunities for methodological innovation, explicates and challenges the effects of educational policies and practices, and interrogates and develops theories about educational structures, policies, and experiences. Our aim is to highlight the agency of educational actors and provide accounts of how the everyday practices of those engaged in education are instrumental in social reproduction.

With the same spirit that undergirded Annette Lareau and Jeffrey Schultz's (1996) edited book *Journeys through Ethnography: Realistic Accounts of Fieldwork*, we foreground ethnographers' narratives and research processes of discovery as well as the resolution of practices, dilemmas, and innovations involved in doing fieldwork. The chapters present an array of "home" contexts across the world, thus engaging readers in similar and contrasting fieldwork experiences that illuminate what it means to do research in familiar contexts. In connection to the advantages and disadvantages of doing such fieldwork,

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we seek to address the conditions under which people do what they do and to ask if there is such a thing as being “too close to home” in one’s fieldwork.

Many ethnographies published since the mid-1980s include rich, thick descriptions of ethnographers’ (familiar and strange) fieldwork experiences, but these are usually presented as appendices or methodological sections of monographs. Our collection of chapters is focused on a growing number of studies and scholars of education who do fieldwork where they live as opposed to faraway places. We are invested in providing different audiences more nuanced understandings of the phenomena they study in such circumstances in connection to the relational contexts of conducting such research.

The authors examine concerns related to conducting research “at home” that are particular to educational research settings. These concerns both overlap with and diverge from other conversations and writings about insider/ outsider ethnography, home as field site, and the like. Anthropology as a discipline has been reckoning with these issues since at least the 1980s and 1990s, when a number of seminal publications questioned the politics and poetics of ethnographic writing, the positionality of ethnographers in the field, and the influence of researcher and interlocutor identities on the nature of ethnographic encounters (Brettell 1993; Clifford and Marcus 1986/2010; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Wolf 1992). Since that time, while doing ethnography “at home” has become increasingly commonplace across disciplines, the specificity of what that looks like in diverse educational contexts has received little sustained attention.

This book contributes multiple entry points into the consideration of doing “home” fieldwork, more specifically with regard to better understanding the localities wherein interaction and relations are ongoing and simultaneous with research agendas. In other words, the chapters in this collection include researchers’ responses to the particular challenges of doing fieldwork at home in proximal sites in which interpersonal relationships and research are sustained over time.

In these contexts, home emerges as a category that is not a given from the start. It is instead negotiated over the course of designing, conducting, and writing up ethnography among researchers and participants who relate to one another according to degrees of affinity and difference (social, political, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial,

educational, gendered, and other). We argue that these alignments and frictions deserve close, critical examination and can lead to rich, methodologically innovative, and ethically sound ethnographic work.

This book aims to inform a wide audience, ranging from educational researchers to university students, to community and school leaders invested in doing research in the contexts of their own “homes.” As such, each chapter provides a window into a familiar world that draws from research and researchers of various backgrounds and disciplines around the world. For example, in their chapter, Vibeke Røn Noer and Camilla Kirketerp Nielsen discuss conducting fieldwork at their places of work in Denmark wherein they both teach—nursing and veterinary educational contexts—and how student- nurses and veterinary pre-professional experiences shape the strategies by which their lives are lived. Noer and Nielsen provide insight into the lives as well as the professionalization of their students and argue that doing fieldwork “at home” fosters this insight.

In their fieldwork, Phillip Ryan and Mary Anne Poe also study their workplace in the American South. They question what it means for two White university faculty administrators in a predominantly White institution (PWI) to examine their university’s racial climate and the impact of its lack of diversity on Black community members. As faculty administrators in social work and intercultural studies, they focus on how the construct of race manifests as lived experience within this context.

Elizabeth Pérez-Izaguirre’s chapter offers an analysis of the interactions between Basque educators and non-autochthonous students in a Basque public school. She examines her positionality as a Basque teacher and educational ethnographer in connection to an educational milieu which includes a high percentage of studentship from immigrant families who are expected to learn Basque. In her chapter, Tricia Gray examines how to leverage the ethnographer’s own local experiences in the context of meatpacking plants and demographic change in her community and school, where she was a teacher. She discusses the subversive tactics the school district and its teachers deployed to stay under the radar of alienating city ordinances that ultimately did not serve all students in a vitriolic sociopolitical context.

The next set of chapters center on resolving relational and methodological dilemmas in high school and middle school classrooms. In

the chapter by Loukia K. Sarroub, she explores high school classroom literacy practices and discourse in a U.S. Midwestern city in connection to low socioeconomic status in an intervention reading program. Focusing in particular on an incident that inadvertently and literally positions the teacher and a young Black male student at odds with one another highlights how doing fieldwork at home changes and brings together social actors over time. In Charlotta Rönn's classroom ethnography in Sweden, she studies students' informal talk in order to understand the role of peer-to-peer learning in lesson-related tasks. Her chapter examines how to gain access to students' informal interactions with their friends and explains their hidden, collaborative coping strategies when doing schoolwork outside of the teacher's hearing.

Chapter 7 in this volume offers ethnographer perspectives of doing fieldwork in home contexts that connect multiple institutions in the same Midwestern community. For example, Claire Nicholas and Surin Kim, two university researchers, engage in a crafts and entrepreneurship workshop series with a local community center in order to foster cross-cultural connections and contribute to the "micro-ecology" of entrepreneurship for local immigrant and refugee communities. They discover and delve into what it means to be accountable while doing research at home, especially in negotiating relational aspects of the research and community involvement.

In Jen Stacy's chapter, she explores how, as a university professor and researcher who is bilingual in English and Spanish in a California university, she negotiated entry into her study with her students. She addresses how as a researcher she represented herself to her undergraduate student-parents in the teacher education program at her university. Her discussion highlights the cultural and academic realities of undergraduate student-parents studying to be teachers and how teacher education programs can be more responsive to student-parents' cultural practices.

The chapter by Stig-Börje Asplund, Nina Kilbrink, and Jan Axelsson combines variation theory with conversation analysis when planning and analyzing the learning processes that take place when a Swedish vocational teacher and secondary students interact in a welding class. The authors focus their attention on the collaboration between the two university researchers and the vocational education teacher who becomes a researcher-teacher in an upper secondary vocational

school, thus turning the ethnographic lens inward to flesh out methodological processes. In turn, Thijs Jan van Schie, in his chapter, examines being a teacher and graduate student who becomes a researcher and ethnographer in a Waldorf school in the Philippines. He discusses the challenges of participant observation and gaining access as a researcher in a Waldorf education site, which is familiar to him in his own country, the Netherlands, but also features cultural differences in the Filipino setting.

The final chapter in this volume, written by Sarah Staples-Farmer, a high school English teacher, examines the challenges of fieldwork focused on court-affiliated youth and their teachers in three detention settings in the U.S. Midwest. She studies youth, who, upon being released and labeled “youth offenders,” make the transition from confinement in locked cells monitored by cameras and juvenile detention officers to high school classrooms. She focuses on how she and their teachers and schools accommodate them to support their success.

Our book engages readers via international contributions from “home” field sites around the world and international authors. The chapters also feature work from early career researchers and those who are more established. Importantly, the various chapters address a wide spectrum of educational contexts—ranging from higher education to K-12 public and private schools to prison schools. The realistic accounts portrayed in each chapter address how local collaborations are instantiated through the research process— from access and data collection to the write-up phases. The major themes that emerge across the chapters highlight (1) positionality and negotiation of multiple roles, that is, researcher, educator, colleague, friend, community member; (2) reconciling multiple, hybrid, and intersectional identities with varying insider/outsider statuses vis-à-vis research participants; (3) resulting power dynamics in connection to relational identities—sometimes conflicting, consolidating, equalizing, and/or elevating; (4) innovative methodological responses to these dilemmas; and (5) integrated research designs and research ethics, offering possibilities for participation and insights on the social impact of research findings. The book’s chapters thus individually and collectively treat and resolve local ways of doing fieldwork at home and highlight the creation and sharing of knowledge among researchers and research participants.

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## Onward

Loukia K. Sarroub

This volume's realistic accounts of fieldwork in contexts that either constitute or become "home" for researchers and research participants alike index a turn toward shared relational meanings that have great potential for further extension and application to places that are familiar. Each chapter in this volume discusses how ethnographers and researchers' knowledge and assumptions about "being" at home in the field invite more nuanced understandings of familiar patterns and "aha" moments. Importantly, the authors in this volume argue strongly for a scholarship of ethnography and education that is grounded in everyday familiar contexts. They also acknowledge their own past and present positions as subjects and agents of those cultural scenes in which they continue to learn with their research participants.

As such, the insider/outsider opposition in doing fieldwork at home is juxtaposed with a continuum of experiences that flexibly bind researchers and those with whom they work, study, and collaborate. As Pierre Bourdieu noted in his afterward to Paul Rabinow's (1977) *Reflections*, "Ethnology will have taken a giant step forward when

all ethnologists understand that something similar is taking place between their informants and themselves” (167). The ambiguity of “something similar” is well-founded as it proposes that relationships in the field are mercurial, growing out of context-dependent interactions that are mediated by language, symbols, power, and the everyday doings of a cultural scene.

Ultimately, researchers reconstruct “home” dialogically with research participants over time because they never leave the field. The field is phenomenologically and literally there, and “being there” in a Geertz-minded way is a question of degree and focus rather than time in the field. When “home” becomes familiar and is no longer a strange option, alternating between the familiar and strange requires reconstituting home and embodying it differently as interactions and the field site are reimagined by all social actors together as they sometimes co-produce the fieldwork data.

As of this writing, fieldwork at home became all the more estranging as people around the world negotiated different kinds of interactions in spaces that they no longer inhabited socially as they had prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, everyday routines such as greetings and paralinguistic elements, sitting, standing, talking, and walking (among others) became objects within the “social distancing” trope, which was indexed by the maintenance of a physical distance of six to eight feet that pervaded all institutions, including schools. People were inadvertently expected to say so much more with their eyes now that their expressions were partly masked by facial coverings.

Importantly, “masked” communication disadvantaged some people more than it did others on the basis of social factors such as health conditions, age, stigmas, or profiling founded on perceived (or actual) ethnic, racial, political, and national identities. How fieldwork practices might change under conditions imposed by a pandemic as researchers and informants convened via technological means such as Zoom remains to be seen. Culture “at home” resides outside the screens of communication and the quotidian practices that shaped people’s home lives, wherein they both lived and worked. In other words, in many places, fieldwork at home changed again in a literal sense—it took place in the researcher’s own domicile, and access to sites vulnerable to a pandemic, such as schools, refugee camps, community centers, hospitals, prisons, and corporate or government



buildings was not possible.

At the same time, education, in one form or another, continues to be enacted, which begs the question: How should ethnographers of education study remote and hybrid educational contexts? If education in the time of a pandemic is itself the object of study, and much of it is likely to be occurring in “home” spaces of teachers, students, parents, as well as “residential” sites of institutions such as schools and prisons, how should ethnographers begin to map, describe, and account via “thick description” the increasingly complex lived world that exists beyond traditional physical boundaries?

At times like these, this looming question inspires finding innovative, multiscale ways (cf. Eisenhart, 2016) to uncover and make visible everyday structures beyond the computer screens and smartphones that facilitate education and communication on the one hand but also mask the lived experiences of those who are not visible as social actors on the other hand. Participant observation along with listening, collaborating, and working with various interlocutors “at home” to foster understanding as part and parcel of ethnography and education continue to be essential and innovative means of doing fieldwork.

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