

Dan Basom

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As this course comes to a conclusion, I believe ethnographic participant observation is a productive strategy to implement when studying education. In particular, I find this approach to be the most useful method of inquiry we have used in this course, because of the depth at which ethnographic participant observation can be studied.

Specifically, this approach to inquiry allows the learner to have a first-hand account of a given situation and allows the researcher to interact with his/her surroundings. For generations, people have learned from reading about other cultures. Reading from a book can be useful for fact gathering or understanding new ways of thinking, yet the reader cannot directly dialogue with the author to have any questions answered or have discussions for further understanding. Critical thinkers interact with the text they read by challenging the author and formulating questions for discussion as they read. This is the basic format for learning about others that is used in the university format. Read, question and analyze, discuss with peers, draw further conclusions, is the method I used most in sociology classes at the postsecondary level.

While reading articles and books, readers may find that they have questions they would like to ask the authors for clarification. While this is impossible to do when reading, unless one has direct access to the author, this is not the case with ethnographic participant observation. With this approach, the learner can actively observe and ask questions directly to those from whom he/she is learning. Without this method, a letter, email or phone call would have to be sent to the author, with no guarantee of a timely reply. Although discussions with peers and colleagues who have also read the material can help shed light on some questions, such discussions can also produce more questions. There is no substitute for receiving accurate and timely information "straight from the horse's mouth", which can be achieved with this powerful educational strategy.

In Vivian Paley's book, *The Girl with the Brown Crayon*, the student leader, Reeny was often frustrated that she and her classmates could not ask questions to their favorite author, Leo Lionni. Had Reeny and her classmates been able to ask specific questions to Lionni himself, they felt they could have better understood his writings. In this instance, participant observation via interaction with the author could have helped a group learn more about their subject matter and delve deeper into the meaning behind the books.

This approach to inquiry also gives us a window into better understanding of others. As a child, my parents would often remind me that before passing judgment on others I should, "Walk a mile in their shoes." Ethnographic participant observation gives the opportunity to not only walk in the shoes of others, but it also provides a window into a better understanding of that culture. As a teacher, I learn a great deal about a child when his/her parents make an appearance at parent-teacher conferences. I learn a great deal about a student's world when I meet his/her parents, as it is typically the parents who have had the greatest impact thus

far, on the life of their child. I'm certain teachers could learn ever more by visiting students' homes and learning about the environment in which the children are raised and the norms of the families.

One way in which this approach is very suitable to certain types of learning is in the study of professions, via apprenticeships. Many workers go through one or several internships to learn what it takes to do a specific job. Internships and job shadowing are, in essence, ethnographic participant observations. The pupil is no longer learning about the occupation by learning in the classroom or from a book, but instead the pupil is learning through on-site observation and participation. By immersing oneself in the occupation, one can learn what is required on a day-to-day basis to effectively perform a job.

Mastering academics in high schools and colleges is an essential aspect of the educational process for almost everyone in today's world, yet learning a trade is also a vital part in becoming a professional. Whether an apprentice is learning to become an auto mechanic or the CEO of a fortune five hundred company, learning to observe the culture of an occupation can play a critical role in the success of any new person to the profession. I know I learned the most about my teaching profession, because of my student-teaching experience. Learning about a new culture and immersing myself within the role of teacher, and the community in which I taught, was vital to my professional growth.

Another way the ethnographic participant observation method is suitable for specific ways of learning is in attempting to learn about another culture. The movie, *Whale Rider*, was an opportunity for the filmmaker, Niki Caro, to experience ethnographic participant observation as she learned about a particular culture. It can be very beneficial to learn firsthand about the society being studied. Consequently, teachers often bring in guest speakers to give students personal accounts of the events being studied in the curriculum. In studying cultures and societies the way that Niki Caro does, in regards to her experience with the Maori people, she gained a better understanding of what their culture is really all about.

Although I do not feel this strategy in education is directly accessible to all educators, the work of others in this genre can aid in educating the masses. Social science teachers in high schools and colleges often do not have the time or the means to have an entire class full of students travel to far-off lands to study particular cultures. Yet, the work of Niki Caro and other ethnographers can shed light on societies from which all students can benefit. If a teacher cannot travel with his/her classroom to see the Maori tribe, then he/she could bring the Maori people into the classroom by watching *Whale Rider*. Although the students would not have the opportunity to interact directly with the Maori, the work done by Caro can help to provide a more cost-efficient and time conserving way to learn about this group.

Movies such as *Whale Rider* bring notice to the topic of unit 6, technology in education. Technology is making ethnographic participant observation a reality for more and more students. In previous generations, ethnographic study was often done by assigning students "pen-pals" from across the county, state, nation, and overseas. Students learned about other cultures from their teachers and then would try to explore further by partnering to exchange information with similar-aged peers living in the areas being studied. With pen pals, students could only visualize

the lives of their new friends if pictures were exchanged. They could not hear voices and accents and could not learn about one another from expressions or body language. Now, with present technology such as webcams, Skype, and instant messaging, students can get answers in seconds to the questions they formulate.

For instance, I can communicate with my brother in Kentucky and see his entire apartment and local community by using a feature on my smartphone. Although this may not be participant observation in terms of proximity, it opens doors to studying other cultures and peoples that have never been possible before. Technology is not a substitute for participant observation; it has just made the task much easier. The format of this post-graduate program at Michigan State is living proof concerning the amount of information that can be exchanged thanks to modern technology.

In observation of groups, we gain the greatest understanding. There is an old saying that teachers use, "Students don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." Ethnographic participant observation is proof of how much one cares. By infusing oneself into a culture, the participant shows those being studied that he/she wants to take the time to gain a greater understanding about the culture. Just as a person may learn a great deal about a person he/she is interested in dating, with hopes of gaining his/her affections, an ethnographer does the same trying to gain the trust and appreciation of those he/she is studying.

While the other options for this paper topic are all valid educational methods, I believe that ethnographic participant observation offers the greatest benefits. Education is a people-driven profession and this method is centered on the premise that we can learn the most by interacting with others. Participant observation is based upon one of the greatest human needs: the need to communicate effectively with others and build positive relationships. Ethnographic participant observation gives both the observer and those being observed the opportunity to learn from one another, making this method one of the purest forms of education.