

Teaching and Learning Ethnography for Social Justice

Historically, graduate programs of the department of teacher education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst have stressed anthropological approaches to education research. Several generations of faculty with backgrounds in anthropology and education have developed core courses to mentor doctoral students in ethnographic inquiry. The experience of teaching ethnography in the context of our department has raised several methodological and epistemological questions among faculty instructors and students. These questions range from the logistics concerning the demands and rewards of teaching a year-long seminar in ethnography, to issues of trust in the use of peer-collaboration as a mentoring tool, to apprenticing students in the ethics and commitments that come with being part of a scholarly community that engages with ethnographic inquiry that is critical and responsive to social justice issues. Additionally, graduate students have brought up many critical questions that have significantly enriched the instructors' thinking and teaching, including the ethics of access to sites and participants, issues of power differentials between researcher and participants and how these power relations shape data collection and analysis, and ethnographic representation as well as issues of validity and reliability. This panel brings together instructors and graduate students of the University's College of Education who will discuss the nuances and tensions in the experience of teaching and learning ethnography. We will discuss how we have come to understand and make meaning of the place of ethnography of education in the context of our department. We will bring this discussion in relation to the broader disciplinary context, which at times has dismissed the contribution of qualitative and anthropological research in education. Moreover, we hope our panel contributes to discussions concerning the importance of anthropological and particularly ethnographic work as central to the preparation of educators and researchers who are committed to education for social justice.

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