

PREFACE

Ethnography has become one of the major methods of researching educational settings. Its key strength is its emphasis on understanding the perceptions and cultures of the people and organizations studied. Through prolonged involvement with those who are being studied, the ethnographic researcher is able gradually to enter their world and gain an understanding of their lives.

Each volume of *Studies in Educational Ethnography* focuses on a particular theme relating to the ethnographic investigation of education. The volumes are closely linked to an annual two-day residential conference which explores various elements of ethnography and its application to education and schooling. The series of Ethnography and Education conferences began in the late 1970s, and was originally held at St. Hilda's College, Oxford University. The series later moved to Warwick University and back to the Department of Educational Studies, University of Oxford in 1996. Each year a broad theme for the conference is chosen and participants are invited to contribute papers. The conference meeting itself is a period of shared work: papers are pre-circulated to participants and critically yet supportively discussed. In their revisions for possible publication, participants are thus able to take account of the detailed critique offered by their colleagues.

The contributions presented in each volume of *Studies in Educational Ethnography* are of two types. Most are revised versions of papers presented at the annual Ethnography and Education conference, but each volume also includes some further specially commissioned pieces. They are selected on the basis of their high quality, their coherence as a group and their contribution to both ethnographic methodology and substantive knowledge.

The series recognizes that the nature of ethnography is contested, and this is taken to be a sign of its strength and vitality. While the idea that the term can be taken to be almost synonymous with qualitative research is rejected, chapters are included that draw upon a broad range of methodologies that are embedded within a long and detailed engagement with those people and organizations studied.

Further details of the Education and Ethnography conference or the *Studies in Educational Ethnography* series of volumes are available from the Series Editor.

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