What is visual ethnography?

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Ethnography

1. “treats people as knowledgeable, situated agents from whom researchers can learn a great deal about how the world is seen, lived and works”

2. “it is an extended, detailed, ‘immersive’, inductive methodology”

3. “it can involve a ‘shamelessly eclectic’ and ‘methodologically opportunist’ combination of research methods but, at its core, there must be an extended period of ‘participant observation’ research (Jackson, 1985: 169).”

4. “participant observation uniquely involves studying both what people say they do and why, and what they are seen to do and say to others about this.”

5. it “inevitably involves tricky negotiations between researchers’ words and deeds”

6. “its main research tool is the researcher and the ways in which he or she is used to acting in more familiar circumstances and learns to act in the often strange and strained circumstances of his or her research settings.”

**Ethnographic monitoring**

*Goals and contexts of ethnographic research*

- **Ask**: Consulting social actors to identify what issues concern them most
- **Observe**: Observing behavior relevant to that issue in a series of context
- **Change**: Initiatives, recommendations and dissemination
- **Share back**: Sharing back findings with central social actors

"Tell me how I can get to know you"
Researcher–participant cooperation

"As part of a larger Nordic study, I got to study six pupils who had moved to Norway in their late teens: the students whom I call Ahmed, Bahar and Nargis, Mohammed, and Helen and Mikeline respectively from Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Eritrea allowed me into their life worlds. In addition to a linguistic ethnographic approach where I observed and audio recorded them in and outside of school, I wished to actively involve the young people in the way I studied them. In response to my prompt “Tell me how I can get to know you”, Mohammed, for example, suggested that he should write short texts at the end of our interviews, resembling those he wrote at home, and Bahar suggested that I become her Facebook friend.”

Finding own words (2014–2016)

Since 2010, numerous top-down regulatory processes have been implemented in Hungarian education policies due to a restorative turn from the formerly (1985–2010) decentralizing and liberalizing tendencies.

This turn in Hungary consists of large scale centralization and homogenization which are exceptional in European comparison (cf. Monitor 2015; Szabó 2015).

The project investigated the agency of school community members against the background of the increased control of state administration over schools.

4 schools participated (different institutional and pedagogical background).

All participating schools were invited to suggest a research focus to the visit which would be interesting for self-reflective study for the whole school community.

It was only Hill School that chose a focal topic (“connections between conceptual and visual learning”) for self-study.

Hill School teachers invited me to teach a class about my life experiences in Finland, and they also invited me to a staff meeting and a parent–teacher discussion circle.

Beyond self-reflective learning, their co-operation with me has made it possible to elaborate on their educational principles and practices in the frame of academic research.
Data

- Visual materials are part of heterogeneous data sets
- Visuals enhance interaction with participants
- Visuals become part of the research narrative

Tourist guide technique

A description of this method:

Forthcoming publication on the theories and methods of inclusive visual ethnography:

An example from the fieldwork:
- Guide: a mother of three students from Hill School
- Cameraman: her husband
- Editing of the video: ’edge detection’ effect, pitch changed, noise added for masking
Data representation and analysis

• Analysis makes it possible that we can share back findings.
• Different data types can be analyzed separately or in combination.

• Examples for separate (layer-by-layer) analysis:
  • finding the recurring motif of ‘child-centeredness’ in the transcript of a spoken narrative;
  • the analysis of children’s objects in the classroom (from the point of view of actions and action potentials) as captured on a photograph

• Combined analysis:
  • analyzing embodiment, the handling of devices and verbal interaction between participant and researcher based on (1) video captures, (2) photographs, (3) researcher’s annotation of action recorded in the video and (4) quotes from the transcript
Towards change

- **Involving school community members** into the analysis of the data, encouraging them to be self-reflective and suggest modifications in their practices if needed.

- **Transforming fieldwork-based methods** to educational / interactional practices of school communities:
  - School projects on the design of community spaces involving photography, videography, drawing, text writing, situational game (e.g. students guiding their teachers or each other)
  - Self-reflective development days for staff with similar methods.

- School communities can conduct **self-ethnographies** with visual tools.
What is ‘visual’ in this setting?

- **The observed environment**: the visuality of drawings, written texts, various objects used in education (e.g. desks, chairs, bean bags, mugs, flute cases, etc.), the clothes of the people involved in interaction, embodiment, gestures, etc.

- **The research materials** (video and photography) generated in interaction between the researcher, the participants and the voluntary cameraman

- **The visual representation of the research narrative**: e.g. video excerpts, video captions, still photos, charts, highlighted text, etc.
More about this topic

Panel: Co-exploring visual practices in educational settings
30.5.2017, 17.10–18.30 Auditorium 3

Chair: Tamás Péter Szabó (tamas.p.szabo@jyu.fi)
Presenters: Kati Kajander
Petteri Laihonen
Raija Kattilakoski
Tamás Péter Szabó

“ [...] we discuss how the generation of visual data (e.g. fieldwork, classroom observation, collecting artwork from students, etc.) as well as the joint interpretation of the data (e.g. researcher-led hands-on workshops with school community members) influence schools’ visual practices.”