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ABSTRACT
                The power relations between ethnographers, teachers
and students present more than a few difficulties. When one graduate
student sat in on--in fact, became a student in--another graduate
student's elementary composition class, "The American Experience
through Literature," several problems arose concerning the status of
the enthographer--was she a student, an ally, a mediator?--and
concerning the ownership of the ethnographer's material and who she
could show it to and whether or not she needed the instructor's
permission. Here are some questions which the participants wish they
had spoken more explicitly about prior to the project: (1) If the
instructor finds the ethnographer's presence negative, are there
other benefits for the teacher and the students? At what point should
the ethnographer volunteer to leave? (2) Who will own the data? Is
the ethnographer obligated to get permission from the instructor to
use graded papers in public situations? (3) How will issues of
representation be negotiated? Will interpretations be cycled through
the participants? In this particular case, the students dispersed
after the term was over and did not seem interested in reading
subsequent texts. Is the ethnographer obligated, though, to show the
instructor what she has written about the class? Given these issues,
ethnographers and instructors might consider writing out a contract,
outlining their expectations. (TB)

Amy Goodburn and Beth Ina
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CCCC's Presentation

Who's Watching Who?:
Shifting Power Relations of Teachers, Researchers, and Students

Introduction (Amy)

In talking about power relations between ethnographers, teachers, and students, it seems appropriate to begin with a story. Last year I was "fishsitting" for a friend when my four-year-old niece, Kaitlyn, came to spend the night. When she arrived, she went over to the aquarium and asked me when I had bought the fish. I said, "Well, Kaitlyn, the fish isn't mine. I'm just watching it for a friend." Kaitlyn paused, peered through the aquarium again, and said "Aunt Amy, How do you know that it isn't the _fish_ who's watching _you_?" Hmm. All I could say at the time was, "Kaitlyn, that's a good question." And it became a moot point three days later when the fish died. But the question "who's watching who?" surfaced again when I became an ethnographer in the fishbowl of Beth's writing classroom. The question "who is watching who?" became central to both of us as we were forced to confront how Beth's students' expectations and our institutional, professional, and political commitments shaped the roles we could adopt and the ways we could work together in this ethnographic study.

As poststructuralist theories of language shape how we think about issues of subjectivity, representation, and positionality, a new school--critical ethnography--has arisen. Those who call themselves "critical ethnographers" (scholars like Michael Kleine, Carl Herndl, Linda Brodkey, and Peter McLaren) argue that ethnographers need to turn foreground how the stories they write are always partial, situated, and positioned by their own discourses and interests. Peter McLaren says "ethnographic research must take into consideration its form of analysis as a narrative practice that is institutionally bound, discursively situated, and geo-politically located" (90). While critical ethnographers have focused on issues of positionality involved in _writing_ ethnographic narratives, little has been written about issues of positionality when ethnographers are actually conducting their projects. Most literature on ethnography

suggests there is a linear continuum for ethnographers as they enter communities, usually moving from outsider to insider, as they increasingly become part of the community being studied. But this model assumes that ethnographers have the agency to choose the roles they adopt. It does not consider how ethnographers' roles are produced in relation to social, institutional, and personal expectations of the participants as well. Our experiences in participating in an ethnographic study suggested there was a continuum but it was not linear. At any moment in time there were different positions we adopted or were positioned into-- oftentimes out of our control--which shaped who we could be in the classroom and how we could work together. In this paper we will first chart various classroom moments which made these multiple and competing roles visible and then raise questions about the implications of "who is watching who" for those who participate in ethnographic research within their own professional communities.

Background (Amy)

Last year, as part of my dissertation, I conducted an ethnographic study of Beth's expository writing course "The American Experience through Literature." Specifically, I was interested in studying issues of authority between and among students and teachers in a multicultural writing course. Initially I aimed to be a participant observer-- to get a student's perspective on what the class was like--by adopting a student role in small groups, class discussions, activities, etc. What I didn't plan for were the ways that my authority would be constructed in relation to Beth's assumptions and beliefs as well as her students' expectations, or for the ways in which Beth would perceive my presence in her classroom.

Coffee Talk: Deciding Who We Wanted to Be (Beth)

Although Amy and I had met before the quarter began to discuss her project and her goals, this information could not have prepared us for our reactions to her presence in my classroom. I felt unable to look at Amy (or at any of the students sitting near her) during the first two weeks of class, having hopefully reasoned that not looking at her would make her go away. Feeling unable to conceive of a role for her in my classroom or for myself in relation to

her led me to attempt to deny her presence altogether. Amy felt uncomfortable too, and struggled to find a way to make sense of my discomfort and to make her presence in the classroom seem positive and productive. My difficulty in defining a role for myself in relation to Amy may have stemmed from the fact that my previous experience with her as a classroom visitor had been in an evaluative, institutional context. As a member of OSU's Writing Staff, she had observed my English 110 class during my first year of teaching. Although she did not remember this event, I had, and I believe that it caused me to view her more as a judge and institutional presence than as an ethnographer. Fortunately, we had an early meeting during the quarter which allowed both of us to begin to revise and reframe our relationship.

During this meeting, we were able to start envisioning some of the positions we might occupy in our working relationship and to reduce some of the discomfort which I was experiencing. After I expressed my uneasiness, Amy discussed some of the difficulties that she'd been having in her own class and offered some observations about what might have been going on with my students. She had noticed that my students looked at the computers rather than each other at the beginning of each class and suggested some small group work as a way of encouraging them to interact. As a result of this exchange, I began to realize that Amy was more interested in being an ally and a colleague rather than an evaluator and to see that her research could produce positive results for me as well. Moreover, I was reminded that Amy was a teacher who worried about her own class and students as well as being an ethnographer. This enabled me to "humanize" her and to begin to mentally "allow" her in the classroom again.

The Snow Day: Redefining Roles (Amy)

As Beth said, our early meeting helped clarify the roles we wanted to play in the classroom, namely ally and colleague. In discussing these options, though, we did not take into account how Beth's students' expectations would shape who we could be in the classroom. That the students' interests and expectations positioned us differently was brought home to me during the day I call "The Snow Day." On this snowy and cold day, very few students made it to class, which Beth had designated as a day for working on collaborative

papers. The group of students I sat with, four men, decided that they couldn't do any work on their paper because one member was missing. Instead, they spent the two hours talking about a variety of topics: sports, family, religion, politics, their classes, etc. Even though I was taping this conversation, they seemed very comfortable, asking me questions about my project and my life. In terms of collecting data, this was a great moment. Students were treating me as a confidante, telling me more about their lives than I could have gotten from interviews or observations and their stories were truly entertaining. At the same time, however, I felt guilty because I knew that they weren't working on their paper. Beth was reading papers at the front of the room and occasionally I would glance her way, trying to gauge how she felt about the situation. Clearly the students were not treating me as an ally or colleague of Beth's. They were treating me like a student, almost as a co-conspirator in actively rejecting Beth's goals. At the end of class, I went up to Beth, and she commented on the way that I was "hanging out with the guys." She said she was interested in what we were talking about and had wanted to join in but felt that the dynamic of the discussion would have changed. I told her I wasn't sure if it would have changed or not because the students clearly were not trying to keep up the appearance of working. But this moment brought home to me the complexity of the relationship between Beth and I. Even though we had decided at our meeting that we would be allies, the students' views of who I could be in the classroom shaped how I could act. On this class day, they viewed me as a confidante, not a teacher figure, and their behavior shaped the ways I could behave as well. But this classroom moment also opened up another possible role, that of interpreter. Because I was privy to some of the students' motivations, I could work with Beth in interpreting their behavior in relation to her expectations and goals.

Homophobia Text: Subverting Roles (Amy)

As the term progressed, Beth and I began to resist the roles that we had been cast into. I was becoming uncomfortable with questions students asked me about Beth. The students expected me to be an interpreter of her behavior: Is she depressed today? Why did she grade so hard on the last papers? Does she have a boyfriend? I always said, "I don't know. You'd

have to ask her." But the shift in roles from student confidante to interpreter was difficult because, at the same time, I was trying to be an ally for Beth. One event which seemed to enable Beth and I to "subvert" these roles that the students had cast for me involved a paper called "Homophobia in Society." This collaboratively-written paper argued that people should respect homophobia as well as homosexuality. It presented five different narratives, loosely connected, which described various contexts in which the writers had encountered what they termed gay lifestyles. Before Beth returned the paper for a grade of "B," she asked me to read it and her comments to see if I felt that they were too harsh. She felt particularly vulnerable that if she gave the paper a low grade, students would complain that she was biased because of her political views. She also asked me if I had watched the group and could I share any information with her about how they wrote the paper. In other words, she wanted me to be an interpreter of the students. While I hadn't been present during their out of class meetings, within class they had had major disagreements about the paper and, in fact, wrote parts of it in class on the day it was due. In giving this information to Beth, I felt that I was being a spy in a way. While the students had cast me into confidante position--one which I resented--I could use that information to help Beth assess their work. I agreed with Beth that the grade was fair given her expectations for the assignment and the responses she had given them on prior drafts. Following the paper's return, two of the male students felt that the grade was unfair. One student, Pat, wrote a letter to Beth in which he argued that the paper was written as well as it could have been given the assignment guidelines. When I sat with two of the female group members the next class, they told me that Pat was going to the university Ombud to challenge the grade and that they were angry because they felt the grade was accurate. At this point, I became even more an ally of Beth's since I too had given approval for the grade. I felt responsible for the consequences. At this point my alliance was with Beth, not the students, even though I had initially entered the project trying to get a "student's perspective." This alliance was further strengthened when Beth and I decided to collaboratively coauthor an article about her class.

Making Sense of Classroom as Spies, Allies, and Collaborators (Beth)

In writing our article together, Amy and I shared a sense of reciprocity and mutual commitment to studying my classroom. As we became collaborators in researching and teaching the course, the teacher/researcher distinction became increasingly blurred. After having had Amy's support in grading the homophobia text, I felt very comfortable in asking her for feedback on my teaching and about class sessions. She and I compared interpretations about various class sessions and developed a common interest in interpreting student texts and behavior. Our collaborative writing process provided a way for us to begin to make sense of what we perceived to be students' ongoing resistance to the goals of the course and to our political beliefs. Amy and I were able to provide support to one another and develop an alternate interpretation of the classroom—one which challenged students' reading of the class and of us. At this time collaboration was a survival strategy which enabled us to reclaim confidence and authority. After the term ended and the pressure caused by disputes with students was over, we were able, through collaborating, to reevaluate how they may have viewed the situation and why they may have positioned themselves as they did.

In participating in the interpretation and the production of the data Amy was collecting, I felt that my interests were being considered and integrated into her project. I believed that I had certain information and knowledge about the class that would be crucial to Amy's interpretation and I liked having the opportunity to influence and contribute to the way my classroom was being portrayed. For the first time in the quarter, I felt completely comfortable with her project and her goals because for the first time, I shared them. This new comfort level was reflected in the ways I talked about Amy to others. I jokingly referred to Amy as "my ethnographer" with my office mates.

Although working with Amy provided a multitude of benefits, I did feel it necessary to remember certain boundaries that I felt that, as a teacher, I should not cross. Although I was dying to ask Amy what my students were saying to each other every day in class, I tried to restrict the amount of information I garnered from her. And there was certain information she

shared—like the fact that none of them were doing the readings—that I would much rather not have had! I felt that I had to step very carefully so that I did not violate the students' privacy or ask Amy to discard her own research ethics. It was a very difficult process.

For the most part, though, collaborating with Amy in interpreting my classroom was a valuable and important turning point in our relationship. It allowed me to feel an interest in her project and alleviated many of the doubts I had about her presence in my classroom. We both benefitted from this phase of our relationship: I received support for my grading decisions and feedback about the class, and Amy received help in discussing and interpreting the classroom. Moreover, our professional interests were served as the article was accepted for publication.

After the Study: Reciprocity, Representation, and Ownership (Beth)

After the quarter ended and we finished writing our article, Amy and I did not communicate very much. I was busy studying for and taking my General Exams, and Amy began writing her dissertation and preparing for the job market. These institutional "duties" significantly changed the way that we both looked at the data Amy had collected. In composing a necessarily single-authored dissertation, Amy assumed primary ownership over and responsibility for interpreting and circulating the information she had collected during the quarter. The shift from being integral in formulating interpretations of the class to feeling alienated from the process was difficult for me because I did feel a sense of ownership for the data Amy had collected and believed that the class "belonged" much more to me and the students than to Amy.

As Amy's project became more public within the department, I felt very vulnerable. With my permission, Amy agreed to talk a little bit about her dissertation project at a training workshop required for all course instructors. Amy gave a transcript of a discussion as well as some response papers I had graded, to the course director of the class, who decided to place these documents in a packet for all the instructors at the workshop. All names were changed in these documents, but when Amy came to discuss her dissertation project and the transcript, I felt extremely uneasy and decided to let everyone at the workshop know that I was the teacher

involved in order to prevent my colleagues from openly criticizing the way I had conducted the class. I knew that Amy's focus was on the students and not on me—during her talk, she actually complimented the way I had acted in the discussion. However, the fact that multiple copies of a discussion I felt uncomfortable about and some response papers I had graded extremely quickly at the end of the quarter were released during a training workshop made me feel uneasy at best. My position as a graduate student—one still required to attend this workshop as someone in need of training—rendered me particularly vulnerable when such "extra" information about my teaching was released. This workshop was uncomfortable for Amy as well, who felt that her work had been falsely positioned as a "teaching" text.

When this same transcript became the primary "text" for discussion at a Multicultural Teaching Reading Group, I was angry at Amy for not having asked my permission to do so, although I did not communicate this to her or ask the group to discuss something else. Again, while I knew that this group served no malevolent purpose, I felt extremely uneasy about having "raw" data which I had allowed Amy to collect released without her mediation to the interpretive gazes of others. I did not attend this meeting. I experienced similar anxiety, although to a lesser degree, as I learned that Amy's writing sample for the job market focused on my classroom, etc.

Although Amy's dissertation is 95% about students, I still felt exposed by her work. I believe that my intense need to protect this data and to restrict who could interpret it stems from a sense of vulnerability as a graduate student and insecurity as a teacher. Ethnographers who work with colleagues must be prepared to account for intense feelings of longing or interest in the project from the people they study.

Conclusion: Issues to Consider (Amy)

As Beth just suggested, relationships between ethnographers and teachers within the same professional community pose special issues which need to be taken into consideration both during and following such studies. First, teachers and ethnographers need a heightened awareness of the possible roles that they can claim as well as those which they may be forced

to adopt. It is important to recognize that these roles are not clearly defined or stable but are constantly produced and altered by classroom dynamics and institutional contexts. While teachers and ethnographers cannot wholly control such roles, the ability to name and claim them can promote more understanding and foster better working relationships.

(Beth)

Although the roles that we adopted and negotiated were contextually-defined within the boundaries of her specific classroom, we feel that our experiences have implications for those interested in doing ethnographic work within their own communities. Here are some questions which we wish we would have spoken more explicitly about prior to the study and which might prove useful as you conduct your own projects:

1. Will there be reciprocity for participants in the research process? Many teachers who initially give permission for ethnographers to enter their classrooms feel differently once the ethnographer does so. If they find the ethnographer's presence negative, are there are other benefits for the teacher and the students? At what point should the ethnographer volunteer to leave?

(Amy)

2. Who will own the data? While I had gotten permission slips from students to copy their writing, I hadn't asked Beth for permission to copy "graded" or "commented upon" papers. I assumed students had ownership of their papers but Beth's comments, written within the context of that classroom, could be read differently by audiences other than students. As Beth already mentioned, data can be used in many contexts, many of which cannot be foreseen at the beginning of such studies.

3. How will issues of representation be negotiated? Will interpretations be cycled through the participants? In this particular case, the students dispersed after the term was over and did not seem interested in reading subsequent texts, but Beth was interested in how she was going to be represented. Was it my responsibility to show her all that I had written? What if she disagreed with the ways I read her classroom?

<u>(Beth)</u>

Many of these issues are especially pertinent when the ethnographer and the teacher are members of the same professional community. If we were to conduct such research again, we might work out an "in-process" contract, outlining our expectations, less to serve as a legal document than to delineate boundaries and raise issues of concern to both of us. Preparing this presentation helped us to chart how we had watched each other during the study and has enabled us to make sense of previously disorienting and painful moments. Hopefully our narrative account will enable you to consider the complexity of the question "who's watching who" in your own ethnographic studies.