

One Day Seminar

MODERN TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

26-02-2014

PROCEEDINGS

NSS TRAINING COLLEGE OTTAPALAM

www.nssce.org

2014

Preface

NSS Training College, Ottapalam has organized a one day seminar on 2nd February 2012 on “Modern Trends in Educational Research”. The seminar was conducted by the M.Ed. Department of the college with a view to make students familiar with the various types of Research and to contribute supports in conducting their own research.

The seminar was inaugurated by Dr.M.A.Sudhir Professor Department of Applied Research Faculty-in-charge, Faculty of Rural Development Gandhigram Rural Institute- Deemed University in the presence of our principal Dr. K S Girija. and other respected dignitaries. Methods of Research discussed in the first session by our chief guest extended great support and guidance to the novel researchers in the field of education.

The research scholars and M.Ed. students gathered from outside the campus appreciated the efforts and endeavours taken by the college in promoting Research. The second session of the seminar was an attempt to bring forth the skill of paper presentation. Dr.M.A.Sudhir chaired the session. M.Ed. students from different colleges participated in the competition.

The seminar was a great success. It was really a great venture through the cooperative efforts taken by the Principal, Members of Teaching Faculty and M.Ed students of this college. The seminar culminated with these proceedings. The seminar papers presented by the participants are being published here appreciating the efforts taken by them and for motivating the newcomers in the field. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. K S Girija, the Principal of our college, all my colleagues', and my students for making this seminar a success.

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**NSS TRAINING COLLEGE OTTAPALAM, PALAKKAD,
KERALA, INDIA-679101**

ISBN:978-81-924412-4-5

Chief Editor: Dr K S Sajan

Associate Editor: Dr Seema Menon KP

Publishing Place : Ottapalam

Publishing Month and Year: May 2014

EFFICACY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Ethnographic research is an emerging research technique in the field of education. Ethnographic research was a procedure usually used in anthropology but now it is getting popular in educational field. This kind of research relies on qualitative data, its perspective is holistic and its procedures of data analysis involve contextualization. Data is collected using observations, interviews, audio- recorders, video cameras, etc. Observations can be participant or non-participant and overt or covert. Most of the ethnographic programmes in education are conducted abroad but for the past few year, such researches are becoming popular in India. Ethnography presents educators with realistic pictures of group behaviour. So they consider this research better than traditional research. A problem with ethnographic studies is that it is only concerned with the group being studied and is not applicable to other groups and settings. Yet this different kind of research is getting popular and is applied in those areas of education where other traditional research programmes are ineffective.

Key terms: Ethnography, anthropology, qualitative data, narrative description, Contextualization, cross-cultural comparison, multilingual, virtual ethnography.

Ethnographic research is a popular qualitative research technique. It is a research process used in the scientific study of human interactions in social settings. “*ethno* refers to human cultures; *graphy* means description of”. The research method uses participant observation, in which researchers immerse themselves in the settings they study. Ethnography is the study of living cultures and ethnographic research is the methodology and results of studying ethnography. It used to be a predominant research procedure in anthropology, but in recent years ethnography has become increasingly popular in educational research, where it is used to illuminate in detail the conditions and interactions of individuals and groups as they function within the schools and larger society.

Educational researchers can use ethnographic research data to understand the challenges faced by teachers and assist in designing programs to meet professional development needs.

Ethnography is placed in a category of its own because,

- It is unique in focusing on social behaviour within natural settings
- It relies on qualitative data, usually in the form of narrative descriptions made by an observer of, or participant in, the group being studied.
- Its perspective is holistic-observations and interpretations are made within the context of the totality of human interactions.
- Hypotheses and research questions may emerge after data collection is well underway, rather than being stated at the beginning of the investigation.

- Its procedures of data analysis involve contextualization where research findings are interpreted with reference to the particular group, setting, or event being observed.

Observing as a Participant or Nonparticipant

One decision you will have to make early is to whether to conduct your observations using participant observation, in which you act as a functioning member of the group or using nonparticipant observation, in which you observe as a non-member. In addition, you will have to decide whether to conduct your observations overtly or covertly.

Making Observations and Recording Data

Data collection in this kind of research is done by observations and interviews. The essence of ethnography is to keep a careful record of what transpires within the group being observed. Always carry a notepad for brief jottings. Sometimes there is no alternative but to wait and record observation after you leave the setting. You should record the observations as soon as possible to minimise recall problems. You may also rely on equipment such as audio-recorders, video cameras, etc. If a purely qualitative approach is taken, data do not take the form of numbers but rather the form of narrative field notes from which themes and ideas are to be extracted. The first step in analyzing data is to do an initial reading of your field notes to identify any themes and hypotheses overlooked (Berg, 1998). The second step in analysing data is to code any systematic patterns in your notes and consider doing an in-depth content analysis.

Some Ethnographic studies in Education

A study was conducted on “Understanding Behaviour disorders-their perception, acceptance and treatment – A cross cultural comparison between India and the United States (Chakraborti-Ghosh, Sumita, 2008)”. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions, identification and treatment of students with behaviour problems or disorders in India and the United States. These were conducted in classrooms both in India and the United States with teachers, students and their parents/guardians. Findings indicated that there were several factors, that is, family backgrounds, socio-economic environments, peer influence, cultural practices, societal expectations and cultural gaps between home and school which influenced teacher’s perception and understanding of behaviour problems and disorder in the United States and India.

The Policy brief “Ethnographic Knowledge for Early Childhood” (Adair, Jennifer Keys, 2010) details the contributions of current ethnographic research in the area of early childhood education. The brief’s main purpose is to demonstrate how ethnography (as a methodology) helps us better understand the context of Early Childhood Programmes, the types of settings and resources those programs and the families have and the meaning, goals and intentions of teachers, parents, children and stakeholders.

The article, Girl’s Education and Discursive spaces for Empowerment: Perspectives from Rural India (Shah, Payal P, 2011) examines a National girl’s education program and its role in addressing gender inequality in the Indian state of Gujarat. Employing an ethnographic and institutional approach, this article

empirically investigates the education empowerment link by examining how institutional form impacts the social process that both define and characterize empowerment. In other words, it investigates how empowerment is manifested in one Kasthurba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya. It presents an ethnographic study of a KGBV in Gujarat, and identifies findings related to the KGBV program's ability to create a unique "space" that fosters empowerment.

Preparing children with Developmental disabilities for life in the Community – A Tanzanian Perspective (Stone-MacDonald, Aryi, 2012) was a study conducted in The Irete Rainbow School (IRS) in Lushoto. Special Education is relatively new in Tanzania. IRS is the first school for developmental disabilities in the area. The purpose of the study was to explore how local context and beliefs about disabilities influenced, how participants understood their roles at the school and they implemented curriculum.

India is home to 1652 languages, but only 22 are officially recognised. While the Constitution requires local authorities to provide mother tongue instruction in schools (Article 350A, Constitution of India), a mere 43 languages are used nationally as instructional medium. A study, "Mediating Inequalities: Exploring English Medium Instruction in a suburban Indian Village School" (Bhattacharya, Usree, 2013), sub part of a broader project drawing on four years of ethnographic work, focuses on five young multilingual children living at an orphanage in suburban New Delhi and studying in an English Medium village school. Careful analyses of the teaching context, pedagogical and textbook approaches and learning practices reveal how "English medium" instruction in a typical small Indian school catering to poor

children leads to restricted acquisition of English, in ways that also constrain student's ability to access educational content across subject areas.

“Investigating the lives of New teachers through Ethnographic Blogs” (Kidd, Warren, 2013) is an article that addresses key issues embedded within what some commentators are describing as “virtual” or “digital” ethnography. Namely, that through the adoption of new (virtual) spaces for ethnographic inquiry it is possible to trouble previous notions of site, place, space and meaning when collaborating in online fields. This inquiry positions both the researcher and participants as co-constructors of both the site of virtual interaction and to a certain extent, as collective decision-makers as what contributes as field and field notes. The article will explore the emerging methodological practices behind this virtual ethnography, exploring the potential use of blogs as an ethnographic tool.

Much of the popularity of ethnographic research in Education stems from its holistic nature. Educational practitioners have long expressed dissatisfaction with research findings obtained from investigations that focus on minute aspects of education or personal behaviour – findings that appear isolated and unrealistic outside their normal context. Ethnography helps satisfy this concern by presenting what educators consider to be realistic pictures of group behaviour. Educators often feel they can derive better insights from those realistic portrayals than from traditional research, with the result that they become able to work more profitably with students under their guidance.

But concerns also exist about ethnography, principally about the reliability of data and hence, the validity of research conclusions. A major problem is that frequently only a single observer records the descriptions that comprise the data, leaving the research open to questions concerning expertise, consistency and bias. The additional problem of ethnographic research is that even though they illuminate the group being studied, it does not seem to be applicable to other groups and settings. A number of books are available to expand our understanding of ethnographic educational research.

Harry Wolcott (1992, 1994, 1995, 2008) has authored several books on ethnography, that, taken as a series, introduce us to all facets of understanding and conducting ethnographic research. His 2008 book is perhaps the best overview of ethnographic practices and ideas available today. Wolcott's books: Wolcott .H.F (1992) Writing up qualitative research, Newbury Park, CA: Sage. Wolcott .H.F (1994) Transforming qualitative data: Description, analysis and interpretation. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Wolcott. H.F (1995) The Art of fieldwork. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira. Wolcott .H.F (2008) Ethnography: A way of seeing (second edition) Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira.

Conclusion

Ethnographic research represents a distinct break from the more traditional forms of research, as it goes deep into human life. Its methodology can be manipulated to suit their particular needs. Educational research has a systematic approach whereby the researcher is not fully involved in the process, but while referring through the studies based on ethnographical approach in education, it was noticed that it covers

wider and deeper aspects which other kinds of research cannot cover. In this kind of research, the researcher has more freedom to interact with the groups or people under study, so it would be apt for teachers or educators to interact with students in classroom conditions as well as outside the class and arrive at conclusions, taking their own time without the students knowing that they are under study. So ethnographic research can be conducted to study daily life in class room, introducing aesthetic approaches to learning especially to avoid the dryness of subjects and to study teacher and pupil interactions. Similarly this type of research can be applied to study behaviour, language, difficulties, opportunities, etc...in the field of education.

The 35th **ANNUAL ETHNOGRAPHY IN EDUCATION RESEARCH FORUM** is being conducted from February 28th to March 1st of this year, the theme is, “ The Ethnographic imagination – arts, multimodality and pedagogies of the possible” in Philadelphia. This shows the relevance, importance and acceptance of ethnography as a technique in educational research in the present era.

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