



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

CUL Conference - Mötesplats
University of Gothenburg
October 26, 2011

Åsa Möller, Ph. D. student in pedagogical work
Dept. of Education, Communication and Learning



Methodological queries about `Hidden Ethnography`

- What is not included in the writing-up process of empirical data and publishing of research results?
- What type of findings or data are omitted?
- On what basis are they not published or disclosed?
- Whose interests control the writing-up and publishing of research findings?



Empirical data excerpt

Two boys and two girls opened the refrigerator and took some of the soft drinks there. “That’s a no-no,” I say half-seriously. Alexis puts her index finger to her lips and signals me to be quiet. “You are not allowed to do that,” I say.

Jamal takes chocolate from a cabinet and puts it into his folder with the help of another boy who is holding the folder open for Jamal while he reaches into the pantry cabinet with dried goods and takes out a bar of chocolate that weighs 250 grams. Jamal puts his folder on the table in the front of the room. I am seated by the window and can see the students from the front of the classroom, each working station with sink, workbench and a cooking range. I can see the board, the refrigerators and the pantry. Jamal and comrade are in full view. I go to the table where Jamal has put his folder which is open and look inside. I see the bar of chocolate in the center pocket of the folder. Jamal approaches me at the table where his folder is lying open.



- Jamal – Are these your things? Is this yours?
- ÅM – That is theft.
- Jamal – Are these things yours? Does this belong to you?
- ÅM – That is stealing.
- Jamal – You can't go in my things!
- ÅM – That is theft.
- Ellinor comes forward. Jamal takes his folder and goes away. I say to Ellinor in English, "He took a piece of chocolate from the cupboard and put it into his folder."
- Ellinor – It has a lot to do with pride.
- ÅM – This is an ethical dilemma.

I go back to my chair and sit down with my adrenalin pumping. The class froze and watched the interaction with me, Jamal and Ellinor. My adrenalin is on red-alert and I feel fearful. Jamal casts menacing looks in my direction from time to time. I try to avoid eye contact and appear disinterested in him. I am sitting on the same chair away from the students while they continue to prepare pizzas.



- At 10:45 all of the students are at work.
- After a while Jamal approaches me, he has a ball of dough in his hands and is slapping it back and forth.
- Jamal – It is the same as if I go...
- Instinctively I reach an arm out across my bag and look up at Jamal and say, “What are you going to do?”
- Jamal – What right do you have to go into my stuff?
- ÅM – If you take chocolate from the cabinet that is theft. I have to report it to the teacher.
- Jamal – (Raises his voice.) What *right* do you have to go into my stuff?
- ÅM – If you do something wrong in front of me then I have to report it.
- Jamal – I haven’t done anything wrong.
- The class is now rolling out the dough and spreading out the tomato sauce.
- Jamal – How long are you going to be here?
- Å M– Today, or the year?
- Jamal – You won’t last that long.



Analysis

- ‘Hidden ethnography’ refers to empirical data that is not published because it may be perceived as:
 - Too controversial,
 - Undermining or discrediting for the research
 - Or be regarded as epistemologically irrelevant



Conclusions

- There is a need to create space for discussing un-reported data, i.e.:
- `methodological mishaps`
- Conflicts between research strategies and ethical considerations
- Building a good rapport and emotional relations to research participants
- Risk-taking and unpredictability of ethnography