Institutional Ethnography

Newsletter of the International Sociological Association Thematic Group 06

From the President …

Welcome to our August Newsletter. It's summer here in Toronto and winter for our colleagues in the Southern part of the planet. Last year at this time, we were planning for the meeting in Buenos Aires. This year, we're looking forward to Yokohama 2014. While Yokohama seems a long way away, it's coming up fast. Please read the Call for Papers that Paul Luken has included in this newsletter. Then tell all your friends to send in an abstract. Our sessions look exciting and Yokohama promises to be a wonderful experience on many levels. The conference website http://www.isa-sociology.org/congress2014/ has practical information about the conference site and some practical information about costs. I expect they will post more links for travellers as we move closer to the date.

On May 28, the Center for Women's Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education held a Symposium in honour of Roxana Ng who died in January 2013. Renita Wong, Tania das Gupta, Himani Bannerji and I spoke to the importance of Roxana's scholarly work in the areas of immigrant women, anti-racist education, body-mind pedagogy, and institutional ethnography. Roxana was an activist for all of her life, had served on the Boards of several community organizations, and had been involved in NGO's such as the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW), and InterPares. As I listened to the other speakers, and indeed as I reviewed her published work for my short remarks, I was struck by the strength of the links Roxana had crafted between IE and the discourse on immigrant women. I asked her students to put together a bibliography of her work, which is scattered among journals, edited chapters, and community reports. Once that is done, we will let you know where you can find it.

Finally, Marie Campbell, Cheryl Zurawski, and I are putting together a project that may be of interest. "Organizational Change from Below" is a web-based project to learn how to extend our findings from IE (scholarship) into what Dorothy Smith has claimed for it: knowledge that people can use to help them make change in their lives. The focus of this project is to help practitioners in service-oriented organizations think (analytically) about problems they face in doing their work – in order to better understand what they know goes wrong in routine organizational ways. These are the issues that institutional ethnographers learn about in their scholarly studies and that they ordinarily publish in academic media. The goal is to popularize and mobilize these research findings for those who could actually make use of them. The idea of "change from below" comes from researching "good organizational practices" that have effects that are not so good, or not good for everybody involved. People located on the front line doing the routine work of organizations see things differently from those in executive or top managerial positions and the project aims to make use of their practical expertise to help practitioners make a difference in their own organizations. Using an interactive website (located at York University), the project builds a community of researchers who will act as consultants to practitioners who are attracted to the website and invited to "tell their stories" of what is going wrong. Based on these stories, practitioners will be matched up with a researcher who will then work with them in aid of finding solutions. Appropriate levels of public and private communication are being built into the site as options for the collaboration between participants and researchers. Once the website is up and running, we will send out an announcement.

Have a good summer, or winter. *Alison*

Call for Abstracts for the ISA World Congress

Eight open sessions for presentations will be organized by members of the Thematic Group Institutional Ethnography for the XXVIII World Congress of Sociology to be held in Yokohama, Japan, July 13-19, 2014. Abstracts may be submitted until September 30, 2013 at 2400 GMT online at https://isaconf.confex.com/isaconf/wc2014/cfp.cgi. Click on the link for Thematic Groups and then TG06 Institutional Ethnography. To decide which session is best for your abstract, review the session descriptions below before going to the web pages. Your abstract cannot be more than 300 words and it must be submitted in English, French or Spanish. Contact the appropriate session organizer if you have questions about a session.

Confronting Inequality by Explicating the Ruling Relations of Management
Session Organizer:
Cheryl Zurawski, University of Regina, Canada, cdz@arialassociates.com

Session in English

This session invites submissions from institutional ethnographers whose research explores how conditions of inequality come to be for people whose everyday lives are shaped and determined by the ruling relations of management. People who hold jobs as managers, people whose on-the-job activities are managed and people who are to be the beneficiaries of the work that managers and the managed do are all implicated as participants in these relations of ruling.

As the relations of ruling of management are continually revised and extended in contemporary society, the potential for conditions of inequality to be perpetuated is great. This is where critical, politically-oriented and social justice-minded scholars who use institutional ethnography make an important contribution by producing knowledge as a resource for people to confront and work to eliminate conditions of inequality in their everyday lives. Institutional ethnographers whose studies map or trace the way in which the relations of ruling of management are becoming more comprehensive and complex so as to perpetuate the conditions of

equality in the everyday lives of the people are among those likely to be attracted to this session.

Educational Accountability Practices in Systems, Educational Institutions and Homes
Session Organizer:
Barbara Comber, Queensland University of Technology, Australia, Barbara.Comber@qut.edu.au

Session in English

Educational work in systems, educational institutions and homes is changing with the continuing onslaught of new requirements to account for performance. Across the many sites where educational work is done the impacts are being experienced by educational professionals (including policy-makers, teacher educators, academics, educational researchers, educational consultants, school and systems leaders, teachers and tutors). Such practices are being transferred into the very ways in which students experiences their learning lives (in and out of educational institutions) and also into the ways in which family members are expected to offer support and supervision. Accountability regimes redefine what constitutes educational 'success' at every level. This session invites papers which report on studies of the actual practices which are regulated, coordinated and organised in the context of educational reform agendas concerned with standardisation and accountability.

Interdisciplinary Applications of Institutional Ethnography
Session Organizer:
Lois Andre-Bechely, California State University, USA, loisab@calstatela.edu

Session in English

This session seeks papers related to Institutional Ethnographic research that emanates from a variety of disciplines. Specifically, papers selected for this session will be based on research that reveals the workings of ruling relations in contemporary society. The session is designed to bridge

disciplines related to institutional ethnography by bringing together work that illustrates the ways in which differing disciplines approach the core question, "how does it happen?", that institutional ethnographers bring to their research.

Issues and Developments in Institutional Ethnography
Session Organizer:
Alison Griffith, York University, Canada,
agriffith@edu.yorku.ca

Session in English

Institutional Ethnography is the focus of this session. IE claims an ontological ground that appears to have strong similarities with other sociologies (for example, public sociology, social constructionism, ANT, extended case studies, grounded theory, narrative analysis). Papers are invited that examine the social ontology of IE in relation to other sociologies in terms of theoretical development, practical application, and other issues such as research strategies or knowledge dissemination. Papers should take a didactic approach to draw out the ways that IE shares its ontological ground with other explorations of the social world, as well as identifying the points of separation that distinguish IE from similar sociological frames. Papers that use research data to illustrate conceptual similarities and differences as well as those that take a more philosophical approach are welcome.

Locating Institutional Sites of Change: Social Intervention in Times of Crisis and Welfare Restructuring
Session Organizers:
Naomi Nichols, York University, Canada,
Naomi_Nichols@edu.yorku.ca
Isabella Paoletti, New University of Lisboa,
Portugal, isap@fcsh.unl.pt

Session in English

Availability and access to social care is a relevant aspect in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. In Western Countries welfare systems have been progressively restructured, moving increasingly towards a market economy in the provision of social care. The present economic crisis has implied significant cuts in public provision of social care in many countries, aggravating considerably the material condition of vulnerable people.

Institutional Ethnography can effectively inform community development and social change work, showing the specific institutional practices, which systemically disadvantage particular groups of people and what kinds of institutional changes will be effective and how to arrive at them. An investigation that begins with participants' experiential knowledge lends itself to an emergent, community-driven, social-justice oriented research agenda.

This session invites papers that explore IE's potential for locating institutional sites of change, as well as the strategic use of IE in community or public service settings. This panel aims to discuss theoretical perspectives on social intervention at the policy level and empirical studies that document and critically discuss social intervention practices.

The Institutional Challenges of the Legal Frameworks in the Contemporary World
Session Organizer:
Laura Ferreño, Universidad Nacional de
Avellaneda, Argentina, lferreno@undav.edu.ar

Session in English

The minorities were historically exiled from the democratic system. The institutions reifies the social gap because it reproduces the socio-economic differences in the territory were located. The daily struggle of the vulnerable groups for survival makes invisible the inequity of opportunities to access education and jobs. This problem becomes an obstruction for the possibility of social improvement, reinforcing and reproducing the social discrimination conditions. In some countries in the 20th century this problem has been reversed with specific policies for these groups.

We invite institutional ethnography papers that examine practices that exclude or severely limit people from participation in specific areas of social life. While we are especially interested in institutional ethnography studies of obstacles to higher education, studies dealing with a variety of

other issues will be welcome in this session: lack of access to education, limitations in health care provision, obstacles to adequate employment and wages, boundaries in the admission to public jobs, restrictions on expressions of sexuality, insufficient access to food and shelter, among others. The focus should be on the ruling relations (how it is that people are regulated, subordinated, and deprived) and the consequences for people in the everyday world (their daily struggles and suffering).

The Language of Research as Problematic: Réaliser une ethnographie institutionnelle en contexte coordonné par la culture anglo-saxonne / Doing Institutional Ethnography beyond the Ruling of the English-speaking Culture
Session Organizer:
Sophie Pomerleau, Université McGill, Canada, sophie.pomerleau@mail.mcgill.ca

Session in English/French

Le but de cette session bilingue est d'explorer les différents défis (tensions) relatifs à la réalisation d'ethnographies institutionnelles (EI) dans des contextes (langues et cultures) autres que ceux de la culture anglo-saxonne dominante en recherche. Cette session vise à inclure toute présentation qui offre une réflexion portant sur les défis rencontrés par : 1) les personnes d'expression autre qu'anglaise lors de la conduite d'EI; et 2) les personnes d'expression anglaise lors de la réalisation d'EI dans des cultures autres qu'anglo-saxonnes. De plus, les réflexions relatives à la portée universelle de l'EI sont aussi bienvenues.

The aim of this bilingual session is to explore tensions associated with the conduct of Institutional Ethnographies (IE) in contexts (language and culture) other than the dominant occidental English-speaking research culture. This session seeks papers that offer insights into tensions encountered by: 1) people speaking other languages than English while conducting IE; and 2) people of English language while conducting IE in non-English contexts. Also, reflections regarding the universal application of IE are welcomed.

The Social Organization of Gendered Violence: Contemporary Perspectives, Global Responses

Session Organizer:
Alison Fisher, York University, Canada, alison_fisher@edu.yorku.ca

Session in English

This session invites participants to explore ideological and institutional responses to gendered violence. Papers will examine how institutional policies and procedures organize and coordinate responses to violent incidents that are sexist, homophobic and/or trans-phobic. Papers should engage with ideas developed in Dorothy Smith's (1987; 1990; 2005) work including her exploration of relations and apparatuses of ruling which use particular ideological practices, manifested through textually mediated discourses, to construct objectified knowledges.

Papers may also focus on how social actors within institutional settings re-construct, organize and coordinate textually mediated discourses of gender-based violence. Using Smith's notion of 'standpoint' (1987; 2001) as a reference, participants may also wish to investigate how such discourses transform and/or (re)construct subjective experience 'on the ground'.

Papers could explore a range of institutional settings, including but not limited to, schools, health care institutions, non-profit organizations, governments, unions, military and or policing agencies. This session encourages papers that engage institutional responses to gendered violence from a variety of cultural contexts.

When Western IE Meets Eastern Culture of Care
Session Organizer:
Frank T.Y. Wang, National Chengchi University, Taiwan, tywangster@gmail.com

Session in English

Not open for submission of abstracts.

Institutional Ethnography, a unique sociological method of inquiry which aims to explore social relations from the experiences of everyday lives, provides an approach to link the micro experiences with the macro institutional arrangements. The inclusion of daily experiences and the linkage of everyday experience and institutional analysis in IE

have been a source of inspiration for critical scholars in Taiwan.

In this panel, we focus on the social organization of care. Five IE researchers will present their critical analysis to illustrate how care in different domains, such as child care for indigenous peoples, care for disabled students, care for victims of domestic violence, home care by live-in migrant workers, and institutional care, is organized in a way to reinforce relations of inequality. Senior IE researcher, Marjorie DeVault, will be the discussant for the session.

Practicing Institutional Ethnography in Australia
The Views of Barbara Comber

Barbara Comber is a Research Professor in the Faculty of Education at Queensland University of Technology. Her interests include literacy education and social justice, teachers' work and identities, place and space, and practitioner inquiry. She has recently co-edited the International Handbook of Research in Children's Literacy, Learning and Culture (Hall, Cremin, Comber & Moll, 2013) and Literacies in Place: Teaching Environmental Communication (Comber, Nixon & Reid, 2007). She is currently conducting three Australian Research Council funded Linkage projects – Ethical leadership: How educators address learning, equity and accountability, Educational leadership and turnaround literacy pedagogy and New literacy demands in the middle years: learning from design experiments. She recently completed a study on mandated literacy assessment and the reorganisation of teachers' work. My thanks to Barbara for taking the time for this interview about her work and IE in Australia. – Paul Luken

PL: Sometimes I'm surprised when people who are so far from North America know about Institutional Ethnography and Dorothy Smith's work. Could you talk about how you first found out about it? How you got involved with it?

BC: I first found out about Dorothy's work when I was doing my doctorate with Allan Luke. And Alan, as you may know, is a sociologist and literacy scholar who has worked in the US and Canada before coming to Australia. The focus of my doctoral work was looking at… well the title was, "The Discursive Construction of Literacy in a Disadvantaged School." I was interested in was the ways in which competing discourses were impacting the work of teachers in high poverty schools. I was interested in the whole notion of how we were locked into deficit discourse even as we try to work our way through that. This was a longitudinal study, it was over about two years, and it was an ethnographic study. Originally, it wasn't framed as IE. It was framed as a regular ethnography. And as I began to talk to the teachers and observe in their classrooms and I sat in on staff meetings and so on, I was really grappling with the problem of representation, the problem of the difficulties I was coming across as the teachers tried to talk about the material effects of poverty without talking deficit. And as I was going about the data

analysis, which was largely informed by Foucauldian critical discourse analysis, I was really worried about the ways in which it was very easy to do that critical discourse analysis about what the teachers had said, how they constituted these kids. But what that did was entirely bracket out the teachers' lived experience of doing this work, which was different work than the work other teachers were doing in other schools. So Allan suggested that I look at a range of feminist theory, which I did, and he also recommended that I might find Dorothy Smith's work around standpoint helpful for thinking about how I could write about these women educators working in these poor schools, how I could write about their work without losing my critical analysis, but at the same time not bracket out their lived experience and their everyday work and try to understand their work as not just about them as individuals. A lot of the work that's been done around teachers' work is based on labor process theory or narrative analysis and some of it positions teachers as heroes, and so on. I wanted to do something that looked at the ways in which teachers were part of an educational system. And, particularly, the ways that teachers who were working in this high poverty context, what their work was like, how they understood it, and what they thought they could do as teachers.

My particular focus was literacy education. That's always where I've been placed. So, Dorothy's work was helpful on many, many levels. And once I started reading it, I guess you could say I became an addict, and I read everything I could read. I went back and read her earlier work. I read the work she was doing with Alison Griffith, and I read as many other institutional ethnographies as I could get my hands on. I was so excited by Dorothy's work that several times I found the money to bring Dorothy to Australia because I really thought that her work was so important that myself and my colleagues really needed to understand it more deeply. As you would know, Dorothy is incredibly generous. She made the trip to Australia to work with us at least three times, maybe more. She would basically explain to us the key parameters of Institutional Ethnography as practice. We also understood that it was organic and dynamic and changing. Others were still working on it. It was a continuing work in progress. What happened then is rather than it just being around my work, colleagues also became very interested in

Dorothy's work. At that time in Australia, there was a lot of excitement, and there still is, around the potential of critical discourse analysis, so there were some very productive conversations between some of the people who were doing that work and people like us, and also people like Dorothy who were doing Institutional Ethnography. So there was a lot of really interesting discussion and conversation around texts and discourse and so on.

So to go back to your original question then, I first came across Dorothy's work when I was doing my Ph.D. While, as I said, it wasn't framed as an institutional ethnography, I think what reading Dorothy did was to change the way in which I went about understanding what I was learning from being in the school, and changed the way in which I looked at teachers' practice and what they were able to say about the kids they were working with. So it was very powerful in all kinds of ways. The concept of ruling relations, the concept of text mediated actions, the concept of institutional capture, the way in which she understood power, really connected with the work I was reading around Foucault, so I worked with both Foucault and Dorothy's work the best I could in that project.

PL: Okay, what time period are we talking about here?

BC: Okay, I was undertaking my thesis in the early 1990s, and I submitted it in 1996. It was after that that I started bringing Dorothy to Australia. I have to check my records to find out the first visit that Dorothy made, but it was certainly after I had completed my doctoral work. Probably late 90s.

PL: Where were you when you started bringing her to Australia?

BC: I was at the University of South Australia. I had been a teacher myself, a classroom teacher. In looking to understand the lived experience of teachers, and I had also grown up in a high poverty area myself, and I had gone to so called disadvantaged schools myself, so I started speaking with teachers and the school principal in this particular community. It came out of that biography and history. It wasn't just an interesting topic. I really wanted not to repeat what I had seen other critical ethnographies do to teachers – that is to make them the problem.

PL: What was it like, for not just Dorothy, but for yourself, when you tried to present institutional ethnographic work to people at meetings and the like? Was it well-received? Were people confused by it and wondering what you're doing? How did it go? Was it smooth or kind of bumpy?

BC: That's a really good question and not one I guess I've thought about for some time. I did a lot of public speaking to teacher audiences and I was invited a lot to speak at conferences that were organized by the unions, for example, and conferences that were organized by the professional organizations. I think teachers were very responsive, school principals and so on. I think in terms of—it's hard to do this retrospectively—but in terms of the academy, I think it took some time for people to understand what was so different about institutional ethnography than critical ethnography. What was I on about? Looking back now, I possibly should have made more of an effort to publish around the methodological framing. But as I said, I came to it in the process of the thesis, not before I designed it.

But it was interesting because in some of the work I did out of my thesis, there were people in Australia and overseas who found it quite compelling. One of those people was a terrific educator from Nottingham, a woman called Christine Hall. She invited me, on the basis of the talk that I'd given, which was very much framed by Dorothy's work, to look back on my work using Dorothy's work to reframe it. In a way, in that paper, I try to do a little of what you're asking me to do now. I tried to summarize what I'd worked with and how I'd tried to work with it. Possibly, because I didn't see myself as an institutional ethnographer at the time, when I gave presentations and so on, I wasn't aware that I wasn't always framing it in that way. So it took me quite a while. Lots of visits from Dorothy and lots of encouragement. I think I used to say I've got my institutional ethnography trainer wheels on, and that was genuine because I felt like I was learning at a distance and I was learning by doing. And we were very, very committed to it, and we started to have a number of students who were interested.

PL: When you say "we" who are you referring to?

BC: My colleagues at Uni SA (University of South Australia). Sue Shore was in adult education and adult literacy was very inspired by Dorothy's work. Phil Cormack, who was in literacy education with me, was also really inspired by Dorothy. And you need to remember that they had heard her speak. After Dorothy had visited for just the first time, people started to see the potential because, in the center that I directed for nine years which was looking at literacy policy and learning cultures, we had a commitment to working collaboratively with the education department and directly with schools. A lot of our work was looking at the whole area of literacy and educational disadvantage. Dorothy's work was incredibly important for us because we could see ways of continuing to work collaboratively with the education department or the Catholic education sector in a critical way, but in a way that didn't ignore the complexities of what it was that people were grappling with in terms of policy demands and funding changes, and so on.

So, it was a long term project. I worked at Uni SA for 30 years and pretty much all my work in one way or another was looking at the connections between educational disadvantage, poverty, and teachers' work. It wasn't fast. It wasn't quick. We invited Dorothy and worked with her ideas, and it wasn't until the early 2000s that we actually won a funded project with institutional ethnography firmly there in place. That project actually included Alison and Dorothy as partner investigators on the team. We took to that point to feel like we had the wherewithal to design and carry out a project. That project included Alex Kostogriz, who was at Monash Univerity at the time, and Brenton Doecke, who was at Monash at the time, basically who you'd say were Marxist scholars in various ways. They had also Terri Seddon at Monash and Jill Blackmore at Deakin, who had invited Dorothy and Alison to Australia for a couple of whole or two day seminars with Dorothy. So it wasn't only the work we were doing. There was this interest from Terri and Jill Blackmore. So by then you've got a little bit of a groundswell of people in Victoria and people in South Australia doing that kind of work.

PL: Oh, so there's quite a collective of you, it sounds like.

BC: There is, but we're not together. We did that project, and we're still publishing out of that

project, but a lot of the work now is happening with an ongoing bunch of doctoral students. Sue Shore, who is now at Charles Darwin University, had a number of doctoral students. I had a number of doctoral students work with Dorothy's work as well. There's a piece of the puzzle missing because during all of that time, I had a very good colleague and friend, Andy Manning, who's based at Mt. St. Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. And Andy used to run, I think he still does, these phenomenal summer schools. He had a friend, Ann Vibert, who had been inspired by Dorothy's work and Alison's work. There was at least one occasion when Andy invited Dorothy to one of his summer schools. So there was a Canadian cohort using IE in various ways in various degrees. Recently one doctoral student, Carolyn Clarke from Newfoundland, studied the impact of homework on family life using elements of institutional ethnography. Another student, Sandra Hewson from South Australia, is using institutional ethnography to look at the ways in which new technologies are reorganizing the work of teachers in terms of curriculum and assessment design. We've got others on the go. There's still people doing this work. Since I've moved up here to Queensland, there are students now at UQ who are using institutional ethnography. Just the other day I met a student wanting to use it. It's quite organic. We need Dorothy and Allison back again, but I'm really conscious of just how hard the trip is for them to make.

PL: Maybe we could get a lot of those people to come to Yokohama next summer.

BC: I'm working on that. I just sent that out and said consider this. It would be great. It's not so far for us to travel. I'm hoping to get some of these doctoral students, one from Canada and one who's just finishing up, to come present. So you will be seeing their names probably.

PL: It seems that through Dorothy's and Alison's visits and some of these Canadian scholars who have immigrated to Australia, that there's quite a contingent there.

BC: Yeah. And I think it's got a lot of potential to grow. So to these doctoral students, I'm saying, "You should join the thematic group. That's the best

way of getting hooked in." I know one of the doctoral students who is working with Bob Lingard at University of Queensland, he is going to Dorothy's next summer school, or winter school, whenever she runs her Toronto or Vancouver sessions. He's so committed that he's going to spend the time and go over. There's a new group of people. Because I moved to a new university I'm sort of starting again with people here. I'm trying to build the knowledge among colleagues again. Can't take anything for granted, like that people know the work.

PL: The people that you're talking about, are they mostly in the area of education?

BC: The ones that I've worked with are in the area of education. I think there are other folks around Australia who have possibly worked more broadly with IE, but I'm not hooked in with them, not for any reason except for busyness. Jill Blackmore, who I mentioned earlier, is also an educator, and so is Terri Seddon. So they're both very strong feminist educators, and that's how they've come to Dorothy's work I would think. All of these studies that I've been involved with are all education studies, at the moment anyway. Interestingly, they go right through from early childhood into higher education, so it's all education, but not only school based. It's covering the whole gamut of education.

PL: The impression that I have, because institutional ethnography has gotten such a warm reception from educators, is that they see a practicality to it. They can readily connect with the applied side of institutional ethnography. Is that a safe assumption? Is that a good inference to make?

BC: Yeah, I think it resonates. It's an alternative to critical educational research which always lines them up as the bad guys. Right? It allows for different kinds of explanations of educators' work, whether they're policy makers, or school leaders, or teachers, or early childhood educators. It allows for a much more comprehensive explanation for what it is they know. I think so. I think it varies among various projects and students, but there's not a lack of interest in the theoretical nature of the work either. People may start with Dorothy's 2006 or 2005, her edited collection and single-authored books, but they inevitably go back. They have to go

back. You can't work, well I don't think you can work, without going back. For me, you need to understand the whole theorization of power and how it works. The other book that was very helpful for people here was the little book that Dorothy did with Alison on "Mothering for schooling". That was a really useful example for people. They could begin to see how this would work. So that connects with your question about application. I think they could really understand. It was a different way of understanding what was going on without a lot of normative discourse about parental involvement.

PL: It may be too early to tell, but has it had any influence on educational practices of yet?

BC: Good question. We have a very conservative press here, Rupert Murdoch, who owns *The Australian* and many, many other major daily newspapers around Australia. And for many years, I've been trying to get an article in *The Australian* to present alternative views on the incredibly conservative politics that his newspapers report. Just over the weekend, an educator in a school in Melbourne quoted the study that we did. The study was "Mandated Literacy Assessment and the Reorganization of Teachers' Work: An Institutional Ethnography." So I'd say that that was the first time that it's gotten media attention here. We're in a very, very conservative phase of government at the moment where the so-called liberal, the neo-conservative liberal opposition, and the in-government labor party are both really not that different in terms of where they stand on some aspects of educational policy. Those aspects are very much associated with teachers' standards, high-stakes testing, test scores, and so on. Even to get a mention in *The Australian* over the weekend was quite surprising. Whether there's any follow-up now, I don't know. We are in an era where everything that has happened in the US and the UK, the US and the UK educators abhor. We seem to be determined to follow suit in Australia. We're just going along that route religiously.

PL: We are going down the same dangerous trails.

BC: Yeah, it's the same in higher education, too. Everything is counted and measured and compared. I'd still like to think that there can maybe be an impact on policy, but my feeling is the more

significant impact, I'd say the work has had, is that I, myself, my colleagues and my students have continued to do collaborative research with teachers in schools and with principals in schools. In these tough schools. I've got a new project now, one in particular where Dorothy's work is never far from my mind, because these schools are hard and they are being judged and the teachers are being judged and the kids are being assessed relentlessly. And what I'm finding is because they know that we are there to understand the complexities of their work, I think that it allows us to do different kinds of research. So whether that change in practice has some, to use Patti Lather's phrase, "catalytic validity" that it's part of rethinking peoples' everyday languages, everyday practices, so I'd like to hope so in my optimistic moments. At a broader level, I'd probably be lying to say that. You can just see what's happening here. It's not any different, unfortunately, at this point.

PL: It does seem like others have to buy into it. You can't produce the change yourself. It's part of the institutional analysis approach that people developed. You have to get the people who are capable of making change to become part of the research process as well. If they're not interested, or you don't have the buy in, it's going to be a struggle. In the meantime, it seems like you are creating a cadre of institutional ethnographers so that if the time ever does come, you're ready to go.

BC: I think these younger scholars who are taking it up are quite passionate about it. The one thesis that should go to examination quite soon, I'm hoping that she becomes an academic. She's still working as an educational leader in a school. There are a few people who, should they want to go into the academy, they could do a really good job in terms of continuing to lead that work when I and others like myself retire. I'm encouraged by people coming to me, often they're not my students even, and they say, "I've heard you've done work with institutional ethnography. Will you help?" They're at UQ or other institutions, and I always say yes to that and try to hook them up with others. There is a real interest. The impacts are no accident, right? Given the kinds of times we're living in, people are finding the usual sociological or ethnographic or anthropological approaches are not giving them the kind of explanations they need. Even with critical

discourse analysis, that's fine, but that's not looking at people's everyday lived experiences or the ways in which texts do mediate their work. I know a lot of people in Australia have become interested in Stephen Ball's later work. He's talking more now, and he's a Foucauldian policy analyst who is a world leader in education policy research, and he's talking more now about "policy enactments," and there may be an influence there from Dorothy's work. He's now talking about how these things work and how they're hooked up and connected.

PL: Where is Ball located?

BC: Ball is in the UK at the Institute of Education in London.

PL: You've answered most of my questions already, which is wonderful. Before we bring it to an end, I want to know if you think there's anything in particular that you think we should be bringing up, or anything that we should be talking about that hasn't come up. Basically, things that the readership of our newsletter might like to see or to know more about what's happening in Australia and with yourself. Anything else?

BC: Yeah, I think one thing as a supervisor of doctoral students, whether they're my students or other people's, and maybe this is our process or the way we go about things in Australia, but writing up a proposal as an institutional ethnography is hard. They find it hard to get ethics clearance for interviews which are a different kind of beast. Just yesterday, I was working with a student who is just designing her study now. She had this set of questions, and then she had what she was really interested in, and it was like trying to work out how you write stuff for the demands of the university that still allows for institutional ethnography's insistence on discovery. That's a challenge. So I'm hoping that Dorothy and Alison are going to write more about that.

PL: Do you think it's harder for institutional ethnographers than for traditional ethnographers? There is a certain amount of discovery in their research as well.

BC: I think the thing is the problematization and the standpoint. One of the difficulties with ethics

protocols and getting through ethics committees is there are always questions about power and power differentials and so on, and people sit on these ethics committees who don't necessarily know anything about institutional ethnography or even ethnography. They want things that are tight, neat, tied down, where the parameters of the study are already pre-theorized to some degree. I'm exaggerating a little bit to make the point here, but what I'm getting at is that students who are grappling with the complexities of Dorothy's work and trying to write their conceptual framework and their design for what's expected for an Australian thesis, I do think it's harder. I do think that institutional ethnography by its very nature is messy. It's quite messy work. I think that committees are looking for things to be risk-free. Everything that institutional ethnography opens up is what committees want to control and shut down. So for students who are grappling with these ideas at once, I do think it just adds a layer, because it's not apolitical. There is a problematization. It's not like, I'm going to go find out, in a completely open sense. You are there because you have something driving it. You are there because you have already, to some degree, made it your problem. You've made it the object of your study. The fact that you don't know how it works and how it actually unfolds, that's okay. But to a certain extent, I think the politics of it is something that students grapple with all the way through. Have you found that in your work?

PL: I haven't worked with too many students, so I can't say I have a lot of experience, but I think I feel rather fortunate because the IRB people have dealt with anthropologists, so they see the word "ethnography" and they understand that everything is not all laid out. I guess I also feel that really all they're looking for is peoples' safety. They're not really assessing the whole proposal and trying to understand. They just have one question: are the subjects going to be protected? And if they feel that, well let's face it, the research we do is not risky.

BC: I wouldn't have thought so.

PL: I think they see that also. It's taken a while for that to happen. I haven't had too many problems with that kind of thing.

BC: In the ethics protocols that students and us or anyone doing research have to fill out now in Australia are unbelievably technical. They're actually concerned by risks where there are none. It's like, you can't get away from answering these questions. I think what that does is that then has an effect on the people on the committee. They look at these forms in a particular way. This is exactly Dorothy's analysis at work here about how these things are organized. My students haven't shied away from it, but so much has to be done here before they can get full candidature here, they have to have written an introduction, a conceptual and theoretical chapter, a design for their project and they can't start doing anything with any human being until they've had full ethical clearance and so on. It's part of the culture.

PL: That is a serious problem because generally the problematic arises through interaction with people in the everyday world. Basically, one's doing research before the formal research process begins, but it has to work that way. It's sort of mucking around for a while first.

BC: Exactly, which I think is dangerous. It pins people down and stops them from doing some of the thinking they need to do and the trialing that they need to do just to get the clarity on what it is they want to look at. I think it would be terrific if we could have the thematic group come to Australia, but I haven't looked ahead to see whether there are any ISA Forums heading our way. I know we have the Australian Sociological Association, but I'm not sure when the next international conference is here.

PL: It would be interesting because the ISA groups are supposed to meet at some point between the World Congresses, but they don't necessarily have to be at the Forums.

BC: We could meet in Australia.

PL: It can be anywhere. The group creates its own meetings, so it could happen.

BC: Well, I think that would be good. Then maybe we could generate an event around that. That would be fantastic to think about doing something like that. I'm not really active in the International

Sociological Association. My connection with the IE group is really it.

PL: I haven't been too involved either for long, but it was at the World Congress in Durban in 2006 where people from all over the world were talking about doing IE, and I thought, "That's interesting. How do they know about IE?" So that's what sparked the idea of creating the thematic group, to try to create a place to bring people together. Yeah, we are free to create our own meetings, and actually, I think, we are encouraged to do so.

BC: Maybe we need to think about that.

PL: We can have some discussion in Yokohama about that.

BC: Yeah, I am planning to go, and I'm certainly encouraging colleagues and friends to put something up. David Peacock, who is using IE to look at higher education, who is Bob Lingard's student at UQ, he's probably going to put one up. These people are the new, young ones doing it; they are really keen to get connected. So that's exciting.

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Recent Publications and Ongoing Projects

Barbara Comber has edited the most recent issue of the *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* (Volume 36, Number, 2013). She notes that many of the articles are influenced by Institutional Ethnography. The table of contents follows

Literacy Education in a Changing Policy Environment: Introduction. *Barbara Comber and Peter Freebody*. Pp. 65-66

Testing that counts: Contesting national literacy assessment policy in complex schooling settings. *Ian Hardy.* Pp. 67-77

High-stakes literacy tests and local effects in a rural school. *Phillip Cormack and Barbara Comber.* Pp. 78-89

The ethical practice of teaching literacy: Accountability or responsibility? *Alex Kostogriz and Brenton Doecke.* Pp. 90-98

National Standards for student achievement: Is New Zealand's idiosyncratic approach any better? *Martin Thrupp.* Pp. 99-110

Everyday practices of teachers of English: A survey at the outset of national curriculum implementation. *James Albright, Lisa Knezevic and Lesley Farrell.* Pp. 111-120.

Marj DeVault has an interesting story regarding one of her recent publications (Marjorie DeVault. 2013. "Institutional Ethnography: A Feminist Sociology of Institutional Power." *Contemporary Sociology* 42, #3: 332-340).

"This article is a "critical retrospective essay," and there's a story behind that format, told by the journal editor Alan Sica, in "Behind the Scenes: Legitimating CS Labors" (*Contemporary Sociology* 2012, 41: 137-138), which may be of particular interest to institutional ethnographers. Sica reflects there on the increasing difficulty of recruiting authors to write academic book reviews and speculates that the problem has arisen in part from the increasing significance and administrative use of journal "impact factors." *Contemporary Sociology* is a journal of reviews (an extremely useful sort of publication, in my opinion), and since single-book reviews are rarely cited, its "impact factor" has been low. So – as I've seen in several other editorial contexts, the journal has been strategizing about how to position itself in a way that might improve its score – and the new series of essays is one such initiative.

I was happy to have this opportunity to write about some of my favorite book-length institutional ethnographic studies. And I also learned a bit more about the textualized apparatus of contemporary academic research."

Laura Ferreño has numerous publications and projects of interest.

Publications

Ferreño, Laura (editor). 2012. *Identidad Nacional: Hacia "La Argentina del Bicentenario". Reflexiones sobre el concepto de ciudadanía*. Buenos Aires, Imprenta del Congreso de la Nación. ISBN: 978-950-9660-63-2

Ferreño, Laura (editor). 2012. *Estado e Identidad Nacional*. Buenos Aires, Imprenta del Congreso de la Nación. ISBN**:** 978-950-9660-62-5

Ferreño, Laura. 2012. "'Yo soy de la casa'. El H. Senado de la Nación Argentina: Prácticas y discursos en una 'casa política'". *Idéas – Revista do Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas. Universidade Estadual de Campinas – UNICAMP*, Campinas (São Paulo**,** Brasil), Vol. 1 N° 5 "nova série", 2012. ISSN (on-line): 2179-5525. ISSN (Impresso): 0104-7876

Ferreño, Laura. 2012. "Culturas sospechadas". Aproximaciones al estudio de los catastros culturales. Actas del *III Congreso Latinoamericano de Antropología. Antropologías en Movimiento. Ideas desde un sur*

contemporáneo, Santiago de Chile, Asociación Latinoamericana de Antropología (ALA). ISBN: 978-956-19-0779-9.

The following are in press:
Ferreño, Laura. 2013. El Estado y la construcción de la paraguayidad en Argentina. En *La colectividad paraguaya en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Secretaría de Cultura de la Nación.
Ferreño, Laura y Olmos Álvarez, Ana, 2013. *Cultura y territorio: La cartografía cultural como herramienta estratégica para la gestión*. Avellaneda, UNDAV Ediciones.

Research projects:
Project Coordinator: "Gathering of Paraguayan population in the AMBA", April 2012 – March 2013. Universidad Nacional de Avellaneda / Secretaria of Culture of the Nation

Project Coordinator: "Culture and territory: Cultural Cartography as tool for the gestion", October 2011 – November 2012. Project: PROAPI-2011.

Project: "The road for the belonging at 'politic house'". Buenos Aires, April 2010 – March 2013. Rio de Janeiro, April 2013 – ongoing.

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