

Ethnographic Eyes: A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Observation. Carolyn Frank.
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Teachers and ethnographers share a common responsibility to see the familiar with new eyes. Personal assumptions about the nature of the world must give way to consideration of how students and other participants in a social setting see the world. Yet, as Judith Green and Carol Dixon write in their foreword to Carolyn Frank's *Ethnographic Eyes: A Teacher's Guide to Classroom Observation*, the process of observing is so ordinary as to be virtually invisible. We seldom think about what shapes our observations or "the ways in which our individual lenses influence what we see, what we interpret, and what we come to understand, and how our observations may differ from those of others" (p. ix).

Frank's work addresses the preparation of beginning teachers for observing interactions in their own classrooms. *Ethnographic Eyes* combines the practicality of a methods textbook with a theoretical discussion of the gains in learning for everyone who develops "ethnographic eyes." Supervisors of student teachers and classroom teachers at all levels will find the book both provocative and useful. Teachers of educational research methodology will also appreciate the way Frank integrates ethnography with teaching and learning.

In eight chapters, the author documents the benefits of using an ethnographic approach with student teachers. Drawing on her own work with the Santa Barbara Classroom Discourse Group, which uses an ethnographic approach and a sociolinguistic frame to study classroom cultures, Frank shows how novice teachers can learn to withhold judgment until they are able to understand the perspectives of their students. If they could hold off premature judgment, she notes, "they would be creating a base for informed action; they would be able to take action, not based on their personal views of teaching and learning, but instead based on their observations of classrooms" (p. 1–2). Her students not only learned how to complicate their own thinking with regard to everyday classroom events, but they learned how to see expanded meanings for "culture."

Frank, an assistant professor at California State University at Los Angeles and a research fellow of the South Coast Writing Project, describes her own development as a teacher and researcher. Ethnography provided her the language for describing the unique character of events in her classroom and helped her to realize that all classrooms "are 'particular' social settings, mini-cultures in themselves, that are *not* universal" (p. 7).



During the fieldwork for her doctoral research, she discovered that her own habits of language and thought prevented her from seeing and understanding the complexity of even the most ordinary events. She literally had to develop "ethnographic eyes" in order to see the differences between description and interpretation.

The value of this book lies in its integration of research and practice. While showing her student teachers how to use ethnographic research methods, Frank also taught them how to become more effective teachers. By learning the difference between descriptive *note taking* and interpretive *note making*, by making a "neighborhood map" to construct understandings of their students' lives outside of school, by interviewing their cooperating teachers *and* their students, and by developing case studies of individual students, Frank's student teachers gradually learned the importance of using actual evidence for their classroom decisions. Rather than relying on biased or premature judgments based on past experience or a belief in universal principles of learning, they began to "see" actual, complex life in classrooms as the basis for their professional decision making.

Student teachers commonly enter the classroom with the belief that they are ready to teach by virtue of their prior learning and experiences. This way of thinking can literally blind them to the meaning of situations that fail to conform to their expectations. Locked into their own conventional interpretations, they fail to see the patterns and details in language and behavior by which their students express diverse needs, preferences, identities, and responses. Frank's nine student teachers learned to ask Mehan's (*Learning Lessons: Social Organization in the Classroom*, Harvard University Press, 1979) ethnographic questions, "Who can do what, when, with whom, for what purposes, under what conditions, with what outcomes?" in their own classrooms. They learned to observe, inquire, and reflect. They learned, as Frank herself learned, "how our classrooms are created by *the way we speak with our students*" (p. 94).

Ethnographic Eyes addresses specific research questions concerning the ways student teachers learn to expand their cultural perspectives and to critically reflect on their own practice. Moreover, it reminds that an ethnographic perspective also helps supervisors withhold judgment of student teachers based on brief visits to the classroom. With chapters offering specific examples of instructional methodology and with periodic discussion questions and exploratory activities that promote active fieldwork, the volume invites a reflective, hands-on approach. The annotated bibliography at the end of each chapter adds further documentation for the theoretical positions that inform the ethnographic perspective.

Ethnographic Eyes offers abundant rewards for a wide audience of teachers and researchers. The inquiry assumes that ethnographic investigation is equally valuable to the researcher doing a formal study, the teacher making day-to-day instructional decisions, and the supervisor or administrator who evaluates classroom practice. Just as important, the data-gathering activities that Frank presents are clearly conducive to



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classroom learning at all age levels.

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