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# A Book Review Journey through Doing Ethnography

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## A Book Review Journey through Doing Ethnography

### **Abstract**

Giampietro Gobo and Andrea Molle describe their book, *Doing Ethnography*, as a recipe for cooking ethnography. In this book review, I will take you on a journey through this culinary delight. I provide an overview of the points of interest, a short description of what can be found at each location, and the benefits of the various stops on the tours. Overall, this book is an appropriate choice for novice researchers or anyone who is interested in the practice of ethnography.

### **Keywords**

Ethnography, Methodology, Novice Researcher

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## A Book Review Journey through *Doing Ethnography*

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*Giampietro Gobo and Andrea Molle describe their book, *Doing Ethnography*, as a recipe for cooking ethnography. In this book review, I will take you on a journey through this culinary delight. I provide an overview of the points of interest, a short description of what can be found at each location, and the benefits of the various stops on the tours. Overall, this book is an appropriate choice for novice researchers or anyone who is interested in the practice of ethnography. Keywords: Ethnography, Methodology, Novice Researcher*

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The authors of *Doing Ethnography*, Giampietro Gobo and Andrea Molle, call the book a recipe for cooking ethnography. As I read, I felt it was more of a journey through the process of ethnography. This book consists of four distinct parts, which include a voyage through (1) the basics of doing ethnography, (2) working in the field, (3) analyzing data and building theory, and (4) presenting the information learned throughout the process. At the various stops throughout the trip, we encounter things to do at each point of interest such as examples of ethnographic studies, key terms, recommended additional readings, practice exercises, and self-evaluation tests. Figure 1 is a map outlining the main points of the book.

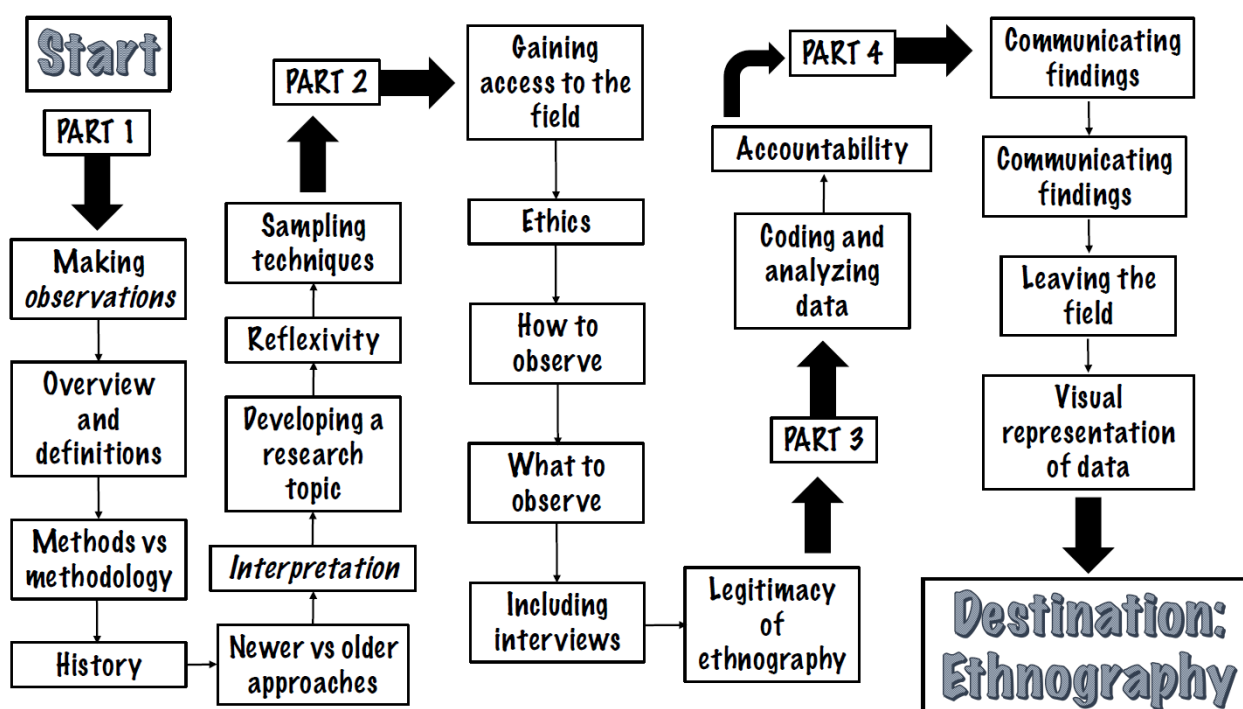


Figure 1. Outlining the main points of the book.

Figure 1 maps out the journey of ethnography, including the main points described in the book along the way.

Part one of *Doing Ethnography* begins with an excursion through the basics and methodology of ethnography. Points of interest in this excursion include the history and overview of ethnography, methods and methodology, approaches to ethnography, research design, and sampling techniques.

This first stop is at chapter one with an overview and definition of ethnography, including the importance of observation. This destination would be especially interesting to anyone who is not familiar with the process of ethnography.

Chapter two continues with a visit to methods versus methodology and what it really means to be “doing ethnography.” This chapter includes several tables outlining different ethnographic methodologies and what types of data collection and analysis techniques can be used with them. I would recommend this chapter to anyone who needs or wants to understand all of the possibilities of an ethnographic methodology.

Chapter three is a foray into the history of ethnography. Older approaches such as the Chicago School, symbolic interactionism, grounded theory, structuralism, ethnomethodology, and realist ethnography are all included. This could be useful to anyone who wishes to understand more about the background of this type of research.

In chapter four, highlights include newer approaches such as cultural studies, media ethnography, feminist and gender studies, and postmodernism. This would be helpful to anyone who wishes to understand how ethnography has changed over time and to learn more about the newer approaches.

In chapter five, research design is discussed, including how to develop your research topic and the role of reflexivity. One quote I found salient refers to interpreting actions, “classifications are always the constructions of those who produce them; they are inventions” (Gobo & Molle, 2017, p. 75). I think this is important to remember as qualitative researchers, when we interpret, our own thoughts and feelings impact our interpretations. I viewed this as an entry-level chapter, well suited for the novice researcher.

Chapter six explores sampling techniques and how to choose participants, settings, and what type of observations to do: covert, overt, or semi-covert. Again, this would be a point of interest for novice researchers, or those unfamiliar with qualitative research.

During the second part of the book, the journey continues through information related to working in the field. Stops on this tour include gaining access to the field, ethics, observations and interviews, and the legitimacy of ethnography.

Chapter seven is an exploration of how to gain access to and enter the field. Gobo and Molle outline the four key players who may help this process along: the intermediary, the guarantor, the gatekeeper, and the informant. The researcher’s roles and influences are also addressed in this chapter. I found this outing to be helpful as it introduced some key terms within the context of ethnography.

Chapter eight is a necessary stop on the journey that ventures into ethics from both a practical point of view and from the point of view of laws and regulations related to the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Anyone who needs to do research under an IRB would benefit from this stop on the tour.

Chapter nine is the beginning of an expedition into the art of observation in the field. I found the best piece of advice in this chapter to be, “narrow down the observational field from the very beginning” (Gobo & Molle, 2017, p. 151). Knowing exactly what I am looking for and having a plan, makes observations far less overwhelming. This is something I did not know when I first began my own research journey, so this would be a helpful stop to any beginning researcher. Chapter ten continues this expedition with what to observe in the field, such as social structures, discourse, and even the use of artifacts.

Chapter eleven ventures into using interviews as part of ethnographic research to help clarify events witnessed in the field. The authors include some tips on how to conduct interviews for those who are unfamiliar with this method of data collection.

Chapter twelve is an excursion for anyone wishing to learn more about ethnography as a craft and how ethnography can be seen as more legitimate to other researchers. “Ethnography’s main weaknesses are that its empirical foundations are difficult to verify, let

alone replicate, and that the information it collects can be easily manipulated” (Gobo & Molle, 2017, p. 190). According to the authors, using more rigorous and systematic techniques, such as preserving linguistic variability or taking careful field notes, can address some of these shortcomings.

The third part of the book is focused on analyzing data and building theory from the results of ethnographic research. Landmarks on this tour include analyzing data and accountability in qualitative research.

Chapter 13 delves into the often-confusing maze of coding and analyzing data, especially the use of grounded theory in analyzing data. This chapter also addresses the use of CAQDAS to help in analyzing data. This stop would be useful to anyone who wants to learn about or requires a refresher course in grounded theory and what it entails.

Chapter 14 stops at accountability and the legitimation of qualitative research. This chapter covers reliability, accuracy, validity, and generalizability. I think this stop on the journey could help any qualitative researcher better understand how to situate their research to be seen as a legitimate contribution to the field.

Finally, section four on the journey through *Doing Ethnography* focuses on audiences and how to reach them. In this section, points of interest include writing, when and how to leave the field, and visually representing data.

In chapter 15 the focus is on communicating findings and writing up ethnographical work. It covers topics such as how and when to write up findings and ideas. I personally found the advice to write at all stages of research to be most in line with my own ideas about research and writing. I like to look at writing as a form of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) and I think it helps immensely to write throughout the research process, not just at the end.

Chapter 16 offers advice on when and how to leave the field gracefully. Gobo and Molle offer several exit strategies to help ease the transition and make it possible to return to the field someday. Anyone who wishes to immerse themselves in ethnographic research could benefit from this excursion.

Finally, chapter 17 is focused on visual representation of data, including a section on analyzing visual data. I appreciated the inclusion of a discussion on images and I think this chapter would be good for those who want to include some sort of visual analysis into their research.

In conclusion, I feel this book is appropriate for all levels of novice researchers. As a graduate student in science education, I will use this book as a reference as I continue on my own journey of educational research. However, this book would also be helpful to undergraduate researchers interested in embarking on their own investigations. Each chapter includes additional readings for both undergraduate and graduate/advanced researchers, so there is something for everyone at every stop along the way. In addition, the book thoroughly explains numerous facets of ethnography so it is a good starter book for researchers wishing to embark on this journey.

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### Author's Note

I am currently a PhD student in the Science Education program at the University of South Florida. My research interests include science teacher action research, student voice, and

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