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# **ETHNOGRAPHIC EXPLORATIONS OF THE ARTS AND EDUCATION: AN INTRODUCTION**

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This special issue brings together detailed ethnographic studies of social practice in a variety of social contexts in which the arts and/or aesthetic concerns are central. It captures a momentum in educational ethnographic research in which an increasing number of researchers have turned their attention to expressive practices and artistic spaces as contexts and tools for learning, identity construction and social mobilization. Admittedly, this interest is not new and educational ethnographic works examining expressive and artistic practices have appeared in this journal since its inception (Dhand 2006; Delamont 2006) and regularly thereafter (e.g. Russell 2007; Berglund 2008; Muth 2011; Atkinson 2013; Craft 2013). In addition, there is a strong tradition examining the arts and creative production as methodological resources for socio-educational inquiry - captured in an *Ethnography and Education* Special Issue (volume 4, issue 3 - Bagley 2009) and a number of books (e.g. Barone and Eisner, 2012; Knowles and Coles 2008; McNiff, 1998; Leavy 2017; Albers, Holbrook and Flint 2014).

This special issue continues this conversation, drawing from the career-long interest in the arts and educational ethnography in one of the guest editors (Thomson) and the more recent engagement of the other co-editors (Poveda and Ferro) with this topic. The call also builds from two recent small conferences *Learning, Education, Identities, and Musical Experiences: Ethnographic Approaches* (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain, 17-18 April 2015) and *Ethnoarts: Ethnographic Explorations of the Arts and Education* (Universidade do Porto, Portugal, 21-23 June 2017) organized by the co-editors of the volume and supported by the Ethnography and Education Organization. However, with this special issue we also hope to extend and contribute to this conversation by showcasing recent research that re-situates ethnographic explorations of art and education in the current historical and intellectual moment.

From our reading of the articles compiled for this special issue the following themes emerge:

(a) The papers report research conducted in a period shaped by the dramatic socio-economic and political reconfigurations precipitated by the economic recession of the last decade. These historical transformations emerge in a number of ways in the contributions, ranging from how 'enterprising' discourses penetrate the educational efforts of creative industries (e.g. Coles and Howard), to how art consumption becomes a space and tool for new forms of social mobilization (e.g. Castro-Varela) or how more action-oriented research confronts entrenched social inequalities (e.g. Wheeler) or global concerns (e.g. Hatton and Nichols).

(b) The articles show how subjectivities, learning and expressive practices intertwine. This intersection emerges as participants engage with and assume the learner identities (Gee 2000; Wortham 2006) made available in each context (e.g. Saltofte) and in how expressive practices allows participants to construct and problematize the relations between linguistic (Walker), national (Novaro) or racial identities (Halldórsdóttir).

(c) This identity work is also present in the research positions and collaborations established in the various research projects reported in the papers. The arts has consistently been a terrain for methodological exploration, allowing for multiple dialogues between academic researchers/ethnographers, professional artists, students (at all levels of education and across formal-informal settings) and other participants. Each of the articles is shaped by different theoretical and methodological

stances ranging from long-term fieldwork engagement with a community (Novaro), to year-long educational ethnographies (Walker, Coles and Howard), to research experiences in which personal involvement and research identities are variously blurred (Castro-Varela or Saltofte) and to much more decidedly participatory and collaborative projects (Wheeler, Hatton and Nichols, Halldórsdóttir).

(d) This diversity in ways of doing educational ethnographic work in connection to the arts and expressive practices also draws productively from a variety of theoretical concepts and analytic traditions. Walker, in her study of a youth radio intervention with transnational youth in the US Rocky Mountain region utilizes ideas from interactional / sociolinguistic ethnography (Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon and Green 2000; Bloome and Carter 2014). Coles and Howard, studying filmmaking education programs in the UK Midlands, build from a variety of key concepts in British youth culture studies (e.g. Willis 1990). Novaro examines Caporales dance among Bolivian migrant communities in the larger Buenos Aires area from a cultural production of education perspective (Levinson, Foley and Holland 1996). Saltofte, for her study of a girls' choir in Denmark, uses a situated learning perspective (Lave and Wenger 1991). Other articles pick different methodological and theoretical discussions in ethnography, such as Castro-Valera who adopts a sensorial ethnographic perspective (Pink 2009) to study film screening in community settings in Barcelona, or Halldórsdóttir, who draws on Critical Race Theory and Hall's rethinking about identity (e.g. Hall and du Gay 1996), to examine adolescents' spoken word poetry in a US Midwest high school. Finally, other papers make connections with concepts and theories not often explored in educational ethnography. Hatton and Nichol's use Heathcote's (1993) Rolling Role pedagogy in their collaborative project on environmental sustainability in a Sydney secondary

school. Wheeler connects to systems theory (Luhmann 2013) to work through the data from her participatory action research project on food poverty in a South England community center.

In short, there is more than one way to think about and conduct research on the intersections between art and ethnography. The articles selected for this special issue showcase this diversity. The papers are also spread out across geographical contexts, with reports from England, mainland Europe, Argentina, Australia and the United States. Furthermore, the articles present work from a variety of educational settings and a broad range of expressive and artistic practices are examined. To conclude, note that this introduction is only one possible entry point to the articles of the special issue. There are other ways to thread the articles together and with alternative research interests and socio-educational concerns. Our framing is simply an invitation to continue reading.

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