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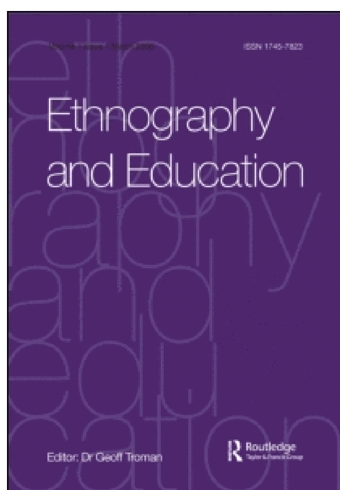

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What does it mean when an ethnographer intervenes?

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This paper explores what it means to engage as an ethical researcher in the conduct of critical ethnography. During the years in which this critical ethnography of new language learners in a midwestern high school, the ethnographer actively participated in the life of the site. This paper poses the question of what such active involvement means for research ethics. Much of the literature on research ethics deals with Internal Review Boards standards, but this paper takes a reflective, ethnographic look at the researcher's own ethical practices in order to articulate and examine the underlying principles entailed in the decisions to intervene or not in the ongoing life of the site.

Keywords: critical ethnography; ethics; research practice; democratic methods

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Being in the field is a daring proposition for ethnographers because they tend to stay for long periods of time, develop relationships with people at the site, impact the scene and change personally while involved in the research. As a result of really being *IN* the field, ethnographers find themselves part of the life of the community they are studying. They go home at the end of the day to ponder how they behaved. The challenges of this lived experience manifest, in part, as ethical dilemmas about whether to intervene in the activities of the community. Because we participate in the life of the community, that participation carries with it the potential to change the community itself. Our literature on research ethics, however, does not speak to this aspect of doing ethnography.

Perhaps, such challenges are particularly salient for researchers like myself who call themselves criticalists because we *expect* to change the community for the better. I am using the designation criticalist to refer broadly to researchers who are concerned with social justice issues and inequities, and who do not enter the field disinterested or uninvested (Carspecken 1996; Korth 2005). Criticalists would specifically invite ethical, transformative engagement with participants – hoping to leave the site better, not undisturbed. According to Kincheloe and McLaren (1998), 'Inquiry that aspires to the name *critical* must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or a sphere within society. Research thus becomes a transformative endeavour unembarrassed by the label "political" and unafraid to consummate a relationship with an emancipatory consciousness' (264) and consequently, criticalists might be especially willing to risk intervening or not intervening for the perceived benefit of the community. For this reason, a critical

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ethnographic project is well-suited to the particular question to which this paper is addressed.

This paper contributes to the literature, in general, by exploring the details of on-the-ground research ethics which are primarily left to intuition; hidden in research accounts. The specific aim of the paper is to demonstrate a process of analysis that results in examining on-the-ground ethical practices, particularly decisions to intervene or not. Drawing on a long-term critical ethnography and reflections amongst ethnographers involved in the research, the analysis revealed: (a) modes of intervening; (b) elements associated with decisions to intervene or not; and (c) ethical principles (complicated and contradictory) through which those decisions were implicitly justified and which resulted in a critique of the ethical practices associated with ethnographers' decisions to intervene or not.

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What does it mean to intervene in qualitative research and why is it a matter of ethics?

Nearly all of the literature on research ethics focuses on the challenges, limitations, and ethics of review board requirements and practices, specifically addressing informed consent, covert research purposes and confidentiality (Driscoll et al. 2008). The most basic principles espoused in the literature align comfortably with Kantian moral philosophy: (1) minimise harm; and (2) do not use participants as means to an end whereby their own experience is disregarded in favour of desired outcomes. Because ethnography has traditionally been described as non-intrusive and naturalistic, it has seemingly posed minimal risk to participants on both these grounds and thus fostered little debate on the topic. Moreover, when these principles are only discussed according to the mode through which they are operationalised by internal review boards (IRBs), the scope of ethical deliberation is further limited in impractical ways. The ethnographer's decision to intervene or not is an ethical one that complicates and nuances Kant's imperatives. I faced decisions to intervene in the life of the school, not fundamentally for the purposes of the research, but because I cared about the goals of the project itself, because I cared about the people with whom we were living out these days, and because I had particular commitments regarding my behaviour in the world – in and out of the field. There is a huge gap in the literature on research ethics at this very juncture – where the naturalistic character of the research means researchers will face complicated dilemmas not dissimilar from those faced in everyday life. This is the gap to which this paper speaks.

As qualitative researchers, we must mean something different by 'intervene' than traditional experimentalists. In fact, 'intervening' is a rare word in the ethnographic literature. A few qualitative research designs (mostly not ethnographic) welcome researcher intervening so long as the efforts are collaboratively developed with participants. Qualitative researchers who work with participants towards transformation, liberation and other changes are explicitly entering into a situation where their participation is an intervention. Participatory action research (Savin-Baden and Wimpenny 2007), appreciative inquiry (Boyd and Bright 2007), photovoice (Jurkowski 2008; Wang and Burris 1997), performative ethnography (Denzin 2003) and some forms of critical ethnography (Korth 2002) are examples of qualitative designs, where the researchers are purposefully involved in altering the lives of people

in the community of study. These qualitative approaches have a few things in common: (1) participants take a lead in these efforts with researchers serving as facilitators in the change process; (2) principles of democracy are foundational to their ethics; and (3) inquirers promote empowerment by increasing opportunities for people to influence or make decisions affecting their own lives. Given these characteristics, intervention is conceptualised as collaboratively engaged change in the lives of participants. It is carried off in an egalitarian, critical, self-reflective manner making sure that participants experience autonomy and empowerment in the decisions affecting their own lives.

By pushing our discussion on ethics towards an analysis of intervening, I am suggesting a broader conception of ethics than we typically allot to ethics in our research conversations or IRB applications. The conception I advocate is not peculiarly methodological, but is primarily about the everyday practice of ethics. The theoretical perspective from which I am conceptualising is derived from Habermas' (1998) communicative ethics. Ethical questions refer to the life trajectory of people who share an ethos and include 'how we understand ourselves as members of our community, how we should orient our lives, what is best for us in the long run and all things considered' and from the perspective of an individual life history 'who am I and who would I like to be or how should I lead my life' (Habermas 1998, 26). According to Habermas (1998), we can examine the practicalities of a successful life 'in the context of a particular, collective form of life or of an individual life history' (27). Our ethics are not simply given, but are considered justifiable – open for discussion. This paper seeks to examine the ethics on such practical grounds, opening up ethnographic decisions for discussion.

'Confessionals' in which researchers revisit decisions they made in the field in terms of their effects on the study are the closest form of scholarship to the current paper. There are not many such publications. One example reported on field decisions related to informed consent. Li (2008) discussed unanticipated challenges regarding informed consent in her ethnography of female gamblers. Initially, she entered the field planning to engage in participatory observation without telling other women gamblers that she was a researcher. This posed ethical problems for her because many of the women gamblers she talked with expressed worries for her – advising her not spend too much time or money gambling. Li decided that she needed to relieve their worries and so she informed them that she was a researcher. This closed off their willingness to talk. Next time, she announced right away that she was a researcher. This alienated the prospective participants. Again, no one talked with her. At last she returned to the covert approach, but in a more aloof way, so that she really did not do much talking with people at all – and certainly did not initiate conversations. This way she did not arouse the worries of women gamblers. She experienced an unanticipated tension between misleading her participants and obtaining high-quality data. Li discussed this ethical dilemma solely in terms of its effects on the research.

How was the study conducted?

A team of graduate students and I worked on a project (IU-Unityville Outreach Project) best described as critical participatory action ethnography. The project had the characteristics of an ethnography (long time in the field – four years, rich data

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collection through multiple means) entwined with some characteristics of participatory action research (PAR) (namely, that the project was initiated by participants who identified their own needs and controlled the project's goals, its boundaries and its activities while collaboratively participating in and leading the project). The research was critical because I drew on critical metatheory and espoused an explicit concern for the undervoiced and disempowered English language learners (ELLs). These students were undervoiced and disempowered because they possessed little cultural capital, because students, in general, are disempowered in schools, and because the students were neither listened to nor understood by school officials. Critical ethics promote the ideals of egalitarianism and freedom from oppressive power relations. As such, critical methods themselves aim to democratise the research process – making it as inclusive as possible, aiming to positively affect the lives of disempowered members of the community, critiquing taken-for-granted assumptions that guide both the researchers and the participants, and facilitating autonomy and opportunities for participants to dialogue with one another.

The IU-Unityville Outreach Project was specifically intended to support and promote educators' efforts to create positive and inclusive educational environments for new ELLs. Change was central to the goals of the project and our ethnographic activities were never distinct from the activities of the on-going project itself. Thus, our research engagement was expected to intervene with the status quo of the school, but in ways that were led by, sensitive to, and informed by insiders. It was a unique opportunity to be part of an ethnographically rooted change effort within the schools.

The story began in the fall 2002 when a small group of teachers and administrators employed by the Unityville School Corporation contacted me for help with newcomer new language learners (ELLs). I was contacted because of my reputation for research and expertise in multi-cultural education. I organised a multi-national, multi-lingual team of graduate students to work with the project. The team began by conducting focus groups in home languages with parents, students, teachers, administrators and community members. We also conducted observations at the three most strongly affected schools (the high school, the middle school and one of the three elementary schools). We developed a lengthy report that formed the basis of what was to become the IU-Unityville Outreach Project. During the life of the project, we conducted weekly classroom observations, interviews, focus groups, teacher inquiry groups, newcomer student socialisation groups using distance videoconferencing, parent interviews, and historical investigations. Additionally, for this paper, I also used transcriptions from audiotapes of our weekly team meetings. Though data from across the schools were analysed, all examples used in the paper are drawn from the high school because this is the school for which we have the most data and because it is more efficient to present readers with examples that reflect one site. Data collection were achieved through teamwork, but the analysis for this paper was conducted solely by me and reflects my own interests in research ethics. I employed a variety of analytic coding strategies, most frequently reconstructive horizon analysis (Carspecken 1996). The analysis involved the following stages: (1) coding instances of intervening; (2) articulating *modes* of intervention; (3) coding instances where interventions were avoided; (4) reconstructing underlying validity claims which produced a set of elements through which the decisions to intervene/non-intervene were rendered; (5) reconstructing the complex

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ethical principles entailed in decisions to intervene or not; and (6) locating a critique by identifying contradictions and complexities in those principles. To validate the data and analysis for this paper, I conducted peer debriefing (with other members of the team), member checks, used multiple recording devices, stayed a long time in the field, worked regularly with the student researchers, and employed both negative case analysis and strip analysis (Carspecken 1996).

We had several categories of research participants at the high school – newcomer students, white students, teachers, administrators and parents of newcomer students. We had a small group of teachers and administrators who served as key informants (all the teachers and administrators were Caucasian). When we began working in Unityville high school, there were ELLs who spoke Spanish, Japanese and Mandarin. Soon there were also Arabic speakers. From 2000 to 2002 the Euro-American students' population rate decreased from 95 to 90% in inverse relation to a rise in newcomer students. Specifically, Asian student enrolment increased from 0.5 to 1% and Hispanic student enrolment increased from 1.4 to 3.7%. There was a steady African-American population during these years of less than 1%. Newcomer student enrolment continued to double each year to the present. For this paper, the primary participants include the team of ethnographers actively engaged in the project since it is their decision making and actions in the field that are the focus of the paper. Those ethnographer participants include myself (the only real name used in the paper) and several graduate students. In this paper, I refer to only five of those students. William was a Caucasian male with expertise in cross-cultural education and Spanish. Juan was a mixed race Puerto Rican, African-American male with expertise in policy studies and Spanish. Hanako was a Japanese international graduate student with expertise in school psychology and Japanese culture/language. Aiko was also a Japanese international graduate student, but with expertise in language education, Japanese culture/language and Spanish. Yi-Ping was a Taiwanese international graduate student with expertise in counselling and Taiwanese culture/language. All of them were fluent in English, exposed to US schools, and were students of qualitative research.

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Findings: what does it mean when an ethnographer intervenes?

The results in total reflect a series of different findings. First of all, analysis revealed four specific modes of intervening and identified elements that were involved in the decisions to intervene or not. Further analysis of these descriptive findings made it possible to infer the underlying ethical principles used to assess whether or not an intervention was the right or wrong thing to do from the perspective of the ethnographers. This final step produced a critique of our practices. One contribution this paper makes to the literature is to illustrate the results of this analytic process.

Identifying modes of intervention

Coding instances of interventions revealed four primary modes of intervening: interpersonal, administrative, enactment and modelling. These four modes begin to also reveal the complications of the decision-making process regarding the ethics of intervening. Those complications show up later as elements involved in the decision to intervene or not.

Interpersonal interventions

This mode of intervening was accomplished through interpersonal relationships between ethnographers and other participants. The interventions were impacted by trust, longevity in the field, credibility and interpretive confidence (which I am using to refer to the sense in which interactants might anticipate being either understood or misunderstood in an interaction). Through this interpersonal mode, there were two really distinct types. One type of intervening was inclusive and the other was unilateral or exclusive. I will provide examples of both.

In this first example, I was intervening with respect to a common way teachers talked about Latino[1] youth. In January 2003, I was talking with a male world history teacher before school in the morning. He mentioned to me that he disliked having Hispanic students in his classes. He followed that by explaining, '*Well, they are in our town and we don't want them here. I wish they would leave. Reminds me of when the Blacks moved in*'. We heard the phrase 'Hispanics are [like] the new blacks' so often during that first year that it became a source of consternation for us. Each time we heard some iteration of that sentence, those of us on the ethnographic team felt challenged and yet rarely did we ever react as if the utterance was anything out of the ordinary (non-intervention). Then, in May 2003, I did intervene.

I was sitting with a focus group of four female teachers. The teachers were talking about how difficult it was to work with students who do not speak English, but they were only mentioning Latino students (rather than Japanese, Mandarin, or Arabic-speaking students):

Teacher 1: *Well they've* [referring to Latino students] *got to learn how to fit in.*
Teacher 2: *They are not really trying to fit in.*
Teacher 1: *I don't really know what to do.*
Teacher 2: *They could be like the Blacks if they would just try to learn English.*
Barbara: *How would they be like Black students if they spoke English? I have heard Latinos compared to Blacks in this way repeatedly and I feel uncomfortable with it because on the one hand, it seems race is used as a way of thinking about students and, on the other hand, it is as if race is erased. Also, comparing non-white groups to each other seems incomplete to me.*
Teacher 2: *Well, we're not racist, if that's what you mean.* [Other teachers started moving their heads from side to side to indicate they are not racists.] *The Hispanics are separating themselves and all I'm saying is that if they stop doing that they will be accepted just like the Blacks are accepted.*
Barbara: *I didn't think you had bad intentions. I am just trying to say how I feel when I hear that sort of thing. Can you say more about how Blacks are accepted?*
Teacher 2: *We don't even notice colour here.*
Barbara: *In my experience, being colourblind usually means expecting people of colour to act like white people. But it seems odd to me to say colour isn't noticed here when lots of people have said that 'Hispanics' are the new 'Blacks'. Doesn't that whole point require noticing colour? Would it seem weird to say, 'Hispanics are the new whites'?*
Teacher 2: *Well, yeah. Hehehe.* [Nervous laugher?]
Barbara: *What happens for me when I hear someone say 'Hispanics are the new Blacks' is that I feel racial tension. It does sound like racism to me, not necessarily that we mean it that way, but do you see how it could be experienced that way? For example, we cannot easily substitute other groups in the phrase. I have never heard anyone say 'Japanese are like the new Blacks' even though most of the Japanese students encounter the same difficulties you have been talking about with respect to Latino youth. Nor can we imagine anyone saying, 'Hispanics are the new whites'. I think there are unexplored racial beliefs in this commonly*

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heard phrase. And, I think we are better off without such beliefs.
Teacher 1: *Well, it doesn't mean we have anything against those kids.*
Barbara: *Then perhaps the phrase does not best fit your intentions.*
Teacher 3: *How did we get off on that tangent*?

I intervened by calling into the question the 'rightness' of the statement and by indicating an interpretation that was unexpected coupled with follow-up opportunities to explore white privilege. This intervened in the trajectory of anticipated responses to the interactions.

That was an example of intervening through the interpersonal mode in an inclusive way because everyone had access to the discussion in a manner consistent across participants. Here is an example that was not so inclusive. Our graduate student researchers were often asked to intervene by translating conversations between school personnel and parents/students. The following example reflects what was typical of the many such instances. One time Hanako, one our Japanese graduate students, was translating at a parent/teacher conference and the teacher asked her to pass along comments to the parents that Hanako's thought were rude. She did not want to do it. She intervened covertly because she did not pass along the comments as they had been expressed by the teacher, but she pretended to do so. She tried to make the point the teacher was making, but in a much more polite, positive, and from Hanako's perspective, acceptable way. This failed to deliver the teacher's irritation and sternness to the parents. This type of interpersonal intervention was not inclusive and therefore represented an ethical risk. Those risks will be discussed further below.

There is another interesting example of intervening through the interpersonal mode that involved Aiko, who was working at the high school as an aide in the English as a New Language (ENL) programme. One day Aiko was confronted by the Assistant Principal who had two Latinas in tow. The Assistant Principal asked Aiko, '*Were these girls just with you*?' They had not been with Aiko, but had apparently said that they were when they were caught wandering the hallways. Aiko was in the process of building trust with the girls. She suspected that the girls had a good reason for missing class which the Assistant Principal might not understand. She also suspected that it would be unduly harmful to the girls to be punished by the administrator for missing class. Aiko lied to the Assistant Principal, with whom she had developed a fairly high level of trust. The Assistant Principal then reminded Aiko to be sure to send a pass with the students next time. After the administrator left, Aiko turned to the two girls and, in Spanish, said that she would not lie for them again and requested that, in the future, they seek her aide prior to missing class. Aiko was troubled by the lie. Then next time she was faced with a similar possibility to intervene, she did not.

Administrative interventions

There were a few times when we, as ethnographers, but most specifically me because of my position in the university, intervened in the life of the Unityville schools through the use of administrative power. The following example describes one such intervention and what led to it.

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One of the high school history teachers, Mr Strong (close to retirement, a man who grew up in Unityville and raised his own children there), was particularly and openly disgruntled by the presence of (non-white) newcomers in his town and in his school. He voiced this without reservation. Several of our students had been assigned to his class. His style of teaching was a bit abrasive by typical US standards – calling on students when he thought they might not know the answer and then publicly humiliating them in front of the class. He gave automatic quizzes when he thought that people had not properly prepared. He interrogated students who did not seem to understand what answers he was expecting. These methods proved very difficult for ELLs as they did not have the linguistic or cultural capital to respond properly even when they did understand the question or the material. One of the ELL students struggled mightily – Ming-Chu. Let me share some more of the context before introducing the specific intervention. Right after class, one day Mr Strong asked Ming-Chu if she planned to get married. She said, 'No' thinking he was asking if she had specific plans to marry already in place. Then Mr Strong began to tease her about staying single and never marrying. She did not understand what he meant, but she did understand that he was teasing her. She was embarrassed and felt belittled. He kept this particular teasing up for weeks and would make comments like 'Miss Hsu, Miss Hsu, Always a miss, never to be married' in the cafeteria or the hallways in front of other students and ethnographers. A little later in the semester, Mr Strong was covering China in his World History class. Ming-Chu, being Taiwanese, was excited because she thought she would probably understand this section better than some of the earlier units. One day in class:

Mr Strong: *Miss Hsu, are you a Buddhist?*
Ming-Chu: *No.* (Looks down at her book, away from Mr Strong.)
Mr Strong: *No*? Are you a Christian?
Ming-Chu: *No*. (Looks down at her book, away from Mr Strong.)
Mr Strong: *Oh, so you are an aetheist!*
Class gasps. Ming-Chu looks at book. Tears form in her eyes.

Later Ming-Chu told Yi-Ping that she had no idea what he had called her (we had to look at the transcript to confirm the word 'aetheist'), but she knew it was bad and she was sure that it made her look like a very bad person in front of the class. We did have an observer in the room when this transaction occurred. That observer also felt ethically challenged – unable to speak up, but alarmed by the teacher's behaviour.

Ming-Chu felt sick to her stomach whenever she went to Mr Strong's class. The ENL teacher was working especially hard with her on the assignments for this class, coming to school an hour early and leaving two hours late. Ming-Chu reported being called upon often while always failing to answer, many times not even sure what the question was. With her ENL teacher, she decided to write a note to Mr Strong asking him to only call on her when she raised her hand and also asking him to consider providing her with some of the questions he might ask ahead of time so that she might better prepare. The ENL teacher read the note and made sure that it was appropriately respectful. So did I. Mr Strong responded to the note by taking Ming-Chu out in the hall and yelling (according to Ming-Chu's report) something like, 'I will call on you 500 times if I want to and I refuse to make any special arrangements for you to pass my class'. Ming-Chu had been regularly talking with Yi-Ping about the situation. The ENL teacher had been regularly emailing with me about the

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situation. Yi-Ping and I were supportive of their efforts to work through the difficulties with Mr Strong. Meanwhile, another one of our graduate students had been meeting with Mr Strong. He was quite clear about his displeasure with having ELLs in his class, his school and his town.

After Ming-Chu's attempts (supported by her ENL teacher and the rest of us) to resolve the problem, and given the history involved and Mr Strong's determinedly negative attitude towards newcomer students, I intervened. I called the Assistant Principal and reported what had been going on. I said something needed to be done. Could the teacher be reprimanded? Could we remove Ming-Chu from his class? We were able to get Ming-Chu moved to a different class. The Assistant Principal concluded that it was better not to put ELLs in Mr Strong's class, but she said it would not be possible to reprimand him or treat him as if did anything wrong.[2] Her reason: He had too much clout in the town and with the members of the school board. So ELL students were pulled from his class and no ELL students were subsequently assigned to him. He was pleased because he did not want to teach the newcomer students anyway. I spoke with the Assistant Principal at length about the reasons why this outcome was only partially satisfactory and in some very obvious ways countered the goals of the project. She agreed, but left her decision intact.

Intervening through an administrative mode was ethically risky. Those risks are explored later in the paper. At the time, I felt a lot of conflict – mostly I found myself wishing Ming-Chu's note had worked!

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Enactment interventions

Analysis revealed that some of our interventions worked by just putting into action various changes that were voiced, but left un-enacted by participants. Sometimes these enactments were direct breaches of policy and other times they were changes that people at the site felt uncomfortable making in the absence of a critical mass of others acting similarly. One example involved intervening with a corporation-wide English-only policy with respect to students' language use, applied to newcomer students only – obviously disincluding foreign language instruction for 'traditional' students. Explanations used to explain the validity of this policy were:

- 'How will I know what they are saying if they speak Spanish?'
- 'What if they are cheating?'
- 'They might be talking about me and I wouldn't know what they are saying'.
- 'They will learn English faster if they are forced to sink and swim'.
- 'They have a bad attitude. If they are going to come here they should speak English or they should just go home'.

There were some people in the schools, however, who thought it would be great if they could use some of the Spanish they had taken in college or if foreign language students could be paired with native language students as conversation partners. Still, nothing was specifically enacted. As an ethnographic team, we intervened in two significant ways. One consistent way was that we held weekly distance education chat sessions (at the school corporation's expense) which were conducted in the home languages of the students. These chats were not visible to the larger school community, but did serve to legitimise the efficacy of using the home language with

students. Another way we intervened was to speak Spanish, Japanese and Mandarin in the hallways with students. We identified teachers who could speak these languages, even if all they could do was say 'hello'. We began engaging in short conversations and greetings in public spaces that included teachers and students. We also used home languages to do interviews and run focus and support groups on the school campuses. We created 'Welcome Booklets' in home languages as well – using school personnel to do this. We led a teacher professional development workshop providing instruction on greetings and basic phrases in Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin and Arabic. The policy became nuanced and the practices shifted a little. The practice now is that a student must refrain from speaking a language other than English when asked by a school official to do so and within classes when it could be a distraction. These examples of intervening enacted practices which others in the school were prepared and inclined to do, but didn't because they were timid and because they did not understand the malleability of the policy. Enactments that breached policy posed some ethical complications that will be addressed below. The policy promoted limitations that participants did not especially agree with, but could not see their way around. Our intervening enactments provided opportunities to put into practice participants' own ideas and beliefs.

Modelling interventions

Intervening by modelling also involved enacting changes, but differed from the above mode because it involved experimenting and engaging in changes that the ethnographic participants themselves did not yet envision. Research on bullying indicates that one of the components of successful bullying is the complacency of witnesses, particularly teachers. Bullying was one of the main ways through which oppression and fear were experienced by newcomers. Many teachers did not envision themselves as having anything to do with the bullying. This was expressed not only in the non-action, but also through things they said:

- 'They [ELLs] bring this on themselves'.
- 'Why can't they defend themselves?'.
- 'Kids will be kids'.

Here is an example of William intervening through the mode of modelling.

Two Latinas were walking down the hall from one class to the next. The hallways were crowded. A white boy was walking towards the girls then this:

> White boy: To Latinas. *Go home, beanos.*
> Latinas just keep walking, but lower their heads and stop talking.
> Teacher looks up, then looks away.
> William (white student ethnographer): To Latinas. *'Hola. Qué pasa?'* To white boy: *Hey, they aren't hurting you. Why can't you just leave them alone?*
> Teacher looks up again and then looks away.
> William: To teacher. *I don't know if I should have said anything, but I just can't watch kids mistreat each other.*
> Teacher: To William. *Well it just means he will work harder not to get caught.*
> William: *Well that would be a start anyway.*

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William was not sure whether it was good to intervene in this way, namely acting over the tendency for adults at the site to respond with non-action to bullying. Clearly, the teacher had doubts about whether or not William's response would affect the bully. This alone suggests that it might also not be effective in terms of teachers' complacency. Nevertheless, we had reason to believe it might have impacted other white students and certainly it could have resulted in the newcomer students feeling supported.

Articulating elements associated with the decision to intervene or not

Looking across the modes of intervention, it was possible to see consistent elements involved in our decision making and reflective practices. The elements were implicit in each of the examples above. Remember that these elements emerged from the analysis and so they reflect existing contradictions and disjunctures that must, in the end, be critiqued.

As indicated above, our decisions to intervene (or not) were comprised of more or less subtle arrangements of elements that were conceptualised according to three broad categories: research values (which seemed to precede and be complicated by the other categories), structural elements (which were treated as 'givens' in our decision making), and hermeneutic elements (which were conceived as interactive components of the interventions and were treated as something we had agency through). The elements are visible through all of the above examples, but I will specifically discuss them with respect to the example I used to illustrate administrative interventions (the story about Ming-Chu and Mr Strong).

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Researchers' values

It isn't that we, as a team of ethnographers, had exactly the same values, but there was a core set of values we shared that we assumed we had in common. We thought that these values would remain consistent, but our field work complicated our understanding of and engagement with the values. By the end, we were aware of contradictions and prioritisations in our values that had not been clear to us at the outset. Moreover, the values that were reconstructed through analysis of our interventions were not identical to the values we would necessarily have espoused. The core values that emerged through analysis include: placing highest importance on the needs and wants of the ELLs; putting the priorities of the 'Project' over those associated with the research; egalitarianism; and respect for diversity. From the administrative example, you might recall that Ming-Chu was struggling with one teacher and his class. Our concern for her occupied our attentions and carried more importance for us (Yi-Ping and I) than did our concern for others involved in the situation. Moreover, this concern, which dovetailed with stated goals of the project itself was more salient to me than research agreements. I put those agreements at risk when I approached the Assistant Principal with a request to have Mr Strong reprimanded. Mr Strong was one of our research participants and we were gathering data in his class. The value of egalitarianism was complicated. On one hand, other teachers were expected to modify their teaching to meet the needs of ELLs and Mr Strong refused to do that (and I was critical of this). Simultaneously, Ming-Chu was not being treated with egalitarian respect in his

classroom primarily because she was not provided opportunities to succeed and all other students were. She felt singled out and belittled. Other students did not because their linguistic expertise made the class a more viable space for learning. More importantly, I criticised Mr Strong's approach precisely because he did not approach Ming-Chu's education with an egalitarian attitude – he cared less about her learning than he did about the learning of his traditional students. This was a strong element of my decision to intervene. It is directly related to the 'respect for diversity' value. Mr Strong was quite outgoing about his negative attitude towards ELLs and his desire to retain what he considered to be a 'homogeneous' community. The difference in our values on this point was at the heart of what resulted in our agreement to disagree. Nonetheless, I did not at any point treat Mr Strong's interests and concerns with equal attention and fevour as Ming-Chu's. Consequently, my own values were not so straightforwardly enacted.

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Structural elements

The structural elements of our decisions were 'structural' precisely because we treated them as if they were stable influences on our ability to be agents, our ability to intervene, and thus, they operated in a structural manner through our hermeneutic or interactive capacities. The structural elements included: institutional power relations among participants; explicit goals of the project; measurable outcomes for ELLs; and longevity in the field. You can see these structural elements referred to precisely as structures that must be accounted for when engaging in interventions in the field. With respect to the example of Ming-Chu and Mr Strong, these structural elements were palpable. The 'institutional power relations among participants' superseded all other structural elements in my decision about *how* to intervene. I used these power relations at last. Doing so put both the hermeneutic elements and my value for egalitarianism at risk. I also ran into existing power relations between Mr Strong and the Assistant Principal, which I experienced as totally outside my control to rearrange (in other words, I could use these relations strategically, but I did not possess agency in their construction). 'Explicit goals of the project' were tempered in this scene. The goals included expecting teachers to modify their instruction to meet the needs of ELLs, but in this case Ming-Chu was placed with a teacher who would do that and Mr Strong was released from the requirement. The larger goal of meeting the educational needs of ELLs was met, but this smaller goal was not. The structure of 'measureable outcomes of ELLs' shows up in both my strategic decision to use existing power relations and the resulting agreement to be 'satisfied' with moving ELLs out of Mr Strong's class. 'Measureable Outcomes of ELLs' often dovetailed with my values prioritising the needs of ELLs, but always involved particular means-end logic with objectively verifiable outcomes.

Hermeneutic elements

The hermeneutic elements of our decisions to intervene involved two categories 'Dialogic Characteristics' and 'Shared Interactive Milieu'. Hermeneutic elements were those aspects of decision making that related to interactive pragmatics and understanding. Ethnographic fieldwork in schools is largely carried out through interactions and so it was no surprise that these elements were consistently

reconstructed in an analysis of our decisions to intervene or not. They were conceptualised as hermeneutic because we treated them as aspects of interactions for which we had some sense of agency and responsibility and for which interpretative dialogue was required.

'Dialogic Characteristics' refers to specific elements directly associated with how participants dialogued: Was there trust? Were participants able to interact in an egalitarian manner? Was the dialogue inclusive of participants? When faced with opportunities to intervene, we implicitly used these characteristics of the dialogue (trust/responsibility, egalitarianism and inclusivity) to gauge whether or not intervening would be a good thing. This element was weak in the example with Ming-Chu. Actually, my reversion to the strategic use of on-site power relations was an effect of the limitations on these particular dialogic characteristics in this set of instances.

'Shared Interactive Milieu' refers to hermeneutic elements particularly salient to whether or not we expected our interventions to be understood by others including the confidence with which we thought we grasped participants' intentions/meanings, and the extent to which there was a match in intentions/understanding across participants. In the Ming-Chu/Mr Strong situation, we initially thought that Ming-Chu and Mr Strong could reach understanding (writing a note to him and their mutual self-expressions were indicators of this). Once it became clear that understanding was not to be reached and given that we possessed confidence in our interpretations of intentionality, we then acknowledged the mismatch of intentions between Mr Strong and the rest of us involved (the ENL teacher, the Assistant Principal, Ming-Chu, Yi-Ping and me). This did not suffice for providing a communicative resolution. My decision to intervene administratively assumed this grasp of intentions and accuracy with respect to calling them mismatched and also assumed that the level of dialogue was not sufficient for intervening interactively with Mr Strong himself. This was a difficult decision for me and its complexities, as revealed in the analysis, illustrate one reason why. My values were aligned with the elements of 'Dialogic Characteristics', but my intervention fell outside of those elements.

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Articulating underlying ethical principles and critiquing practices

The next layer of analysis resulted in articulating implicit ethical principles invoked through our decisions to intervene or not. As a set, these ethical principles were contradictory and complex. The contradictions and complexities serve as a starting point for critically reflecting on our ethical practices on the whole and my ethical practices in particular. Ethics produce guidelines for behaviour and are certainly influenced by values, but are not synonymous with values. In this section, I will begin by articulating the ethical principles as they were reconstructed through analysis and then I will follow that up with a critical reflection on the ethical practices of our intervening in general.

Underlying ethical principles

Ethics became visible in analysis as claims about what is right and wrong in a general sense of how one ought to behave in relation to others. Ethical principles are

inherently practical in that they are not divorced from the practices through which they are instantiated. The complications and contradictions are then revealed both with respect to single interventions and across interventions. I present them here in their contradictory and complicated relation to one another:

- All people's voices should be included in decision making THUS those who oppose egalitarianism should not be allowed to make decisions that limit the inclusion of others' voices.
- Our interactions should be open as well as inclusive BUT if our intentions are good with regards to ELLs and specific interactants would not understand those intentions (particularly if others at the site would both understand and agree with our intentions), then we act covertly and limit the extent to which those conflicting interactants are included.
- Egalitarian interactions should be achieved BUT interactions should privilege the needs and voices of ELLs.
- Communicative means should be utilised for intervening BUT when communicative efforts to effect benefits fail, one should use power to bring about good effects (ends justify the means).
- One's intentions should be taken into account BUT when one's intentions are deemed negative towards ELLs, those intentions should be acted against.
- We should act trustworthily and responsibly with everyone BUT most importantly with respect to ELLs and other ethnographic team members.

The ethical principles persistently showed up with this 'BUT' formula to complicate the broader principle. In practice, these BUTs became ways to justify interventions that did not coincide neatly with the first principle of the formulation. Whenever the ethics required drawing on the BUT aspect of the principle, there was ethical uncertainty, discomfort and confusion.

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Critical analysis

Locating the contradictions in one's ethical claims serves as a foundation for critiquing the practices associated with those claims. Each of the BUTs stated above voice contradictions and limits in the ethical practices of intervening (for this particular project). The contradictions suggest that limits on our communicative capacities (at the hermeneutic level) were linked to a willingness to use power and privilege as a justification for intervening. Power and privilege were the two most prominent features in our distortions of the original ethical principle (the first part of the formulation above). Both of those features show up as structural elements.

There is one ethical principle above that worked differently: all people's voices should be included in decision making THUS those who oppose egalitarianism should not be allowed to make decisions that limit the inclusion of others' voices. In this case, there is no way to achieve egalitarian inclusivity with people who would limit the egalitarian and inclusive treatment of others. Thus, the two aspects of this ethical principle do not contradict each other and do not need to be criticised on these grounds. Rather the second part acknowledges not a complexity in the ethical principle itself, but rather a nuance in the conditions necessary for enacting that principle.

My critical analysis also located disjunctures between our stated values and our ethical practices. At the outset of the paper, I called myself a criticalist and in so doing I identified a set of values I carried with me into the research. These values were more elaboratively and specifically articulated in the methodology section of the paper. Most insightful for me was the extent to which my entering the field with commitments privileging the ELL operated as a justification for me to behave in ways I would not have, in general, promoted as being ethical. This justification surfaced to explain the 'appropriateness' of strategically drawing on structures even when those structures limited the hermeneutic strength of the intervening. The example with Ming-Chu really bears this out. If I were to decide that my intervening in this situation was an ethically good decision, I would have to do so by invoking my a priori value commitments and at the same time I would be contradicting those commitments through the strategic use of administrative power. It is at the disjuncture between strongly held a priori commitments and values/hermeneutic possibilities that I still feel muddled in assessing the ethics of my intervening. As a criticalist, I welcome opportunities to critique my own ethical practices in just such ways.

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Conclusion

This paper makes its contribution to the methodological literature on three levels: (1) generally by broadening what it means to talk about research ethics; (2) methodologically by illustrating a process by which ethnographers might examine their ethical practices; and (3) specifically by scrutinising the ethical practice of ethnographic intervening. The paper exceeds the typical conversation on research ethics because it does not focus on IRB issues and because it lays bare an aspect of ethnographic field work that has been gone under acknowledged. Though we talk about ethnographers gaining the ability to experience life as participants might, we seldom talk directly about what that means for taking positions in the field – specifically for intervening. The findings open the door for further conversations on this and other ethical complications of doing ethnography. Moreover, it provides one example of a process that might be engaged in the call to reflect on our ethnographic impact on a community. In alignment with Habermas (1998), ethics are amenable to discussion and thus 'can undergo reasoned change through reflection on what has intrinsic value *for us* within the horizon of our shared social world' (27). 'In this context the critique of self-deceptions [e.g., the disjunctures between one's stated values and one's ethical practices] and of symptoms of a compulsive or alienated mode of life [contradictory or complicated ethical principles] takes its yardstick from the idea of a conscious and coherent mode of life' where one can be honest and authentic in the face of and in relation to social others (27).

Notes

1. I will use the term Latino when speaking in my own voice because most of the youth at the school designated as 'Hispanic' preferred this label if there was to be a broad label used (many preferred just the national label, but teachers often thought all of the Latino kids were from Mexico). Teachers and Administrators tended to use the word Hispanic to refer to this same group. The mix-match of labels in this paper reflects their varied use at the site. The same kind of complexity was associated with students who were variously called

'white', 'Caucasion', 'traditional', 'local' and 'our'. This complexity is retained in the language of the paper.
2. I was so angry at her response, and yet I appreciated the outcome and I understood how vulnerable she felt to the politics of the town.

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