

**ICLS 2008 pre-conference workshop:
Using ethnography to further understandings of learning in everyday settings**

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Tuesday 24th of June from 2:00 to 5:30 p.m.

To register, go to: <http://www.isls.org/icls2008/>. Workshop fee payable to ICLS 2008: € 30.

Summary: This workshop will give researchers an opportunity to interact with learning scientists employing ethnographic methods. The workshop presenters will use their own ethnographic research—leveraging thousands of hours of fieldwork—as an exemplar in order to describe this methodological approach, share “tricks of the trade,” and discuss challenges associated with conducting cognitive ethnographic research. Workshop activities include presentations of theory and method, demonstrations, and discussions.

Ethnographic methods are used in the learning sciences in order to understand the unique meanings that people associate with their activities and related knowledge (Emerson, 2001). Within the Learning in Informal and Formal Environments (LIFE) Center, ethnographic research plays an important role in understanding people’s learning processes and pathways and their attendant social and cultural influences. According to Erickson (1986), ethnography and related research methods help us to gain “specific understanding [of a phenomenon] through documentation of concrete details of practice,” as well as elucidating “the local meanings that happenings have for the people involved in them” (p. 121). We believe these grounded understandings of how people learn can generate robust theories that are relevant to participants’ lived experiences, as well as suggesting questions for further research. The focus at the LIFE Center has been on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning (e.g., Bell, Bricker, Lee, Reeve, & Zimmerman, 2006; Mertl, McCarthy, Levias, & Stevens, 2007). At the LIFE Center, we use ethnography to answer such research questions as: How do parental practices shape children’s conceptions and practices around money matters? How do children participate in scientific practices across the settings of their lives? How do children make use of quantitative representations in video games?

In the spirit of fostering research collaborations between learning scientists, three LIFE Center research teams at the University of Washington will present a methodological workshop to share their ethnographic research at ICLS 2008. Ethnographic methods are used in many disciplines, including developmental psychology, sociology, anthropology, science studies, education, learning sciences, and in other research settings such as corporate research and development departments. We focus on cognitive and social ethnography that attempts to understand learning. Data are collected on the ecology of the settings (through observations, interviews, artifact collection, etc.) and analyzed through inductive reasoning to formulate interpretations, possible theories, and further questions (Lareau & Shultz, 1996). The strength of ethnographic research is that it typically generates a comprehensive picture of the situated activity (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996) by using a combination of data collection techniques to

triangulate findings (Wolcott, 1997) and obtain a more pluralistic view of the setting, from the participants' perspectives. Ethnography can also be effectively combined with other methods. For example, ethnographic work can be used to set up experimental studies that reflect real-world tasks (Scribner, 1997), develop design principles used in the development of learning environments (Tzou, Zimmerman, and Bell, 2007), and support or challenge findings from experimental studies (Bricker, Amsterlaw, Lee, & Bell, 2007). Additionally, ethnographic work can be synthesized with other types of data to create a multifaceted view of a learning phenomenon (Ochs, Graesch, Mittman, Bradbury, and Reptti, 2006).

Ethnographic research involves a range of well-specified data collection procedures and conventions (including participant-observation, interviewing, participant self-documentation work, synchronizing human-machine-room interactions, photo elicitation, shadowing, and clinical and real-world tasks). In our workshop, we will discuss these conventions of ethnography, the "tricks of the trade" that capture tacit research knowledge (Becker, 1998), and research procedures specifically associated with the videorecording of human activity (Hall, 2000). By discussing the norms of ethnographic research and the unique advantages and complications associated with it, we will engage in a discussion of how ethnographers establish the validity of their claims, build theories, and judge the quality of ethnographic work.

The workshop will present methodological and theoretical issues associated with conducting ethnographies of how people learn. It will be targeted to researchers of all experience and interest levels. Our workshop incorporates time for presentations, discussion, demonstrations, and question/answer sessions. Using studies from our three research teams as exemplars, we will begin by elucidating the rationale for using ethnography to study learning. Again drawing from our studies, we next will present the range of methodological assumptions, approaches, and techniques inherent in doing ethnography (e.g., Erickson, 1986; Wolcott, 1997). Participants will then rotate between stations to focus on areas of interest to them. Because we will work in small groups during this portion of the workshop, the presenters will customize the material presented in the workshop stations to the participants' needs.

An understanding of ethnographic methods is timely for learning scientists across disciplines because studies of human learning and cognition have taken an ethnographic turn in the last decade (Jessor, Colby & Shweder, 1996). In this 3.5-hour workshop, we will cover practical and conceptual aspects of ethnography for a general audience so that participants can leave the workshop with an overview and a list of resources for further study. We intend to start a discussion around ethnography that will help build a community of people to support each other in their research plans.

Schedule for Tuesday 24th of June from 2:00 to 5:30 p.m.

Ethnography: Overview, rationale, and methodology	30 minutes
Small group rotations on themes	120 minutes
Break (between small group rotations)	30 minutes
Large group Q&A and wrap-up	30 minutes

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