

# Field work in ethnography: Being there and writing here<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The writing process of an ethnographic text is still a challenge for educational research. Clifford Geertz, in “Works and lives: the anthropologist as author”, leads us to reflect on the authorship’s processes based on modern anthropology, relating multiple dimensions of fieldwork. This article aims to reflect on dense description and ethnographic interviews as ways of emerging the theories we produce from empirics. We start from the work of Three ethnographic research, at different times, at doctoral level in the Education field. They deal with subjects who are often not heard: young elementary and high school students from public schools and women deprived of their freedom. The questions proposed are: What is ethnographic fieldwork? What reflexivity emerges from ethnographic writing? Is the field the setting for ethnographic writing in Education? In ethnography the researcher uses two means of collecting data: observing and asking. What people’s actions mean to them may be apparent from observation, however, it is necessary to ask, seeking to establish a non-hierarchical relationship that respects the other’s speech. It is important to emphasize that the analyzes are permeated by perspectives’ myriad, voices, and meanings to produce knowledge. We opted for attentive listening to people in situations of exclusion who have been denied the right to speak, as research, public policy, and education cannot be carried out without the subject to whom these actions are directed.

**Keywords:** ethnography; field research; ethnographic interview; education.

## 1 Introduction

There is a basic enigma surrounding anger toward minorities in a globalized world. The enigma is why the relatively small numbers, which give the world’s minority its simplest meaning and generally imply political and military weakness, do not prevent minorities from being objects of fear and anger (Appadurai, 2009, p. 45).

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We can say at the present time, we are experiencing intense changes in the social, cultural, economic and political structure. There is an emergence of new paradigms in the thinking's ways and producing knowledge in its plurality. Would ethnography be an emergency within this context? There are also some borders that are being blurred in their geopolitical, cultural, economic and communicational aspects, generating new possible landscapes (Appadurai, 2003). That said, this article aims to reflect on dense description and ethnographic interviews as ways of emerging the theories we produce from empirics.

It is in the midst of such considerations and based on the idea of a "small number", using the expression of Appadurai (2009), understood as the microsocial that dialogues, intimately, with the idea of ethnographic practice. The point is relatively small numbers give meaning and, sometimes, become significant in the contemporary world. It is understood that fieldwork in ethnography, specifically in the Education field, operates in order to understand educational phenomena, creating a reflexivity that helps us mitigate the socio-educational inequalities present in Brazil, as a small number. Ethnography gains epistemic and political contours in the face of an unequal and exclusionary society. Deprivation of liberty, assessment and youth are addressed in this article from the perspectives from women deprived of liberty; from failed subjects and young public-school students. Three qualitative studies that have a critical ethnographic and socio-interactionist approach as a theoretical-methodological basis.

The study by Sandra Almeida (2013), *Education of Women and Young People Deprived of Liberty: a study with an ethnographic approach*, highlights not only a novelty, but also a relationship between the object of study and social issues. Describing the perspective of women participating in this research on education in spaces of deprivation of liberty and how the socio-educational vulnerabilities they face in these spaces are constructed were the main questions that guided the preparation of the study. The strength of the participants' voices as primary informants of the research stands out and how the interviews reveal violence and denounce extreme situations experienced in spaces of deprivation. There is an amalgam between a sociological theme and the social issue proposed by the author that gives meaning to the narratives of women deprived of liberty. Her contribution is, in this way, about this amalgam that produces knowledge linked to ethnography, so-called classic of the Chicago School, studying the marginalized, and the educational field.

The Suziane Vasconcellos' work (2016), *Multiplicities of School Assessment: an ethnographic study on repetition*, operates through adverse logics about what assessment would be. It starts from the repetition and the invisible voices in a class of repeaters, to think conceptually, that is, it operates in a *bottom-up* logic to reach an understanding of what assessment would be and how to think about it in an inclusion logic. Here lies a double contri-

bution to the field of education, namely, one that operates in the logic of what is experienced in everyday school life and the other as contributing to educational policies of inclusion.

The research by Luis Paulo Borges (2018), *The future of school: an ethnography on the relationship between young people and school knowledge*, has as its object of study the relationship between young high school students and school knowledge. It is based on the ethnographic theoretical-methodological approach, located on the border between anthropology and education. Thus, the field notebook, ethnographic notes, dense description, interviews, photographs, participant observation and textual productions were used as ways of understanding a cross-section of social reality. The voices of students are described, mixing with the researcher's interpretation (re)imagining the school of the future, which only comes into existence through profound changes in its modern architecture, through its reconstruction, under erasure, and insertion in postmodernity.

There are many steps that make up the work of an ethnographic research by Mattos (2001), when carrying out an ethnography the researcher must keep in mind:

I)extensive work for a long period of time in the field in a given location; II) a careful record of the events that occurred at this location: field notes, records of files and documents, image and audio recordings, memos, files, records; III) an inductive analysis of the data, starting from the particular to the general and returning to the particular in an enriched way; IV) a dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity; V) an analytical reflection of these documents collected in the field and recording the meaning in a dense and detailed description, using narrative vignettes, quotes from interviews, descriptions of places and situations observed, general descriptions in the form of graphs, tables and statistical descriptions; VI) an interpretation of data at multiple levels; a concern with the influence of history on the reading and interpretation of data and VII) a constant concern with the researcher's ethical stance (Mattos, 2001, p.13-14)

When considering the phases described by Mattos (2001), it is understood that ethnography in education and inductive data analysis require an exhaustive exercise, in which the researcher must be prepared to carry out, to obtain data that portray the reality investigated with greater reliability.

Based on these methodological-epistemological bases, the focus of this research is on some specific groups – women deprived of liberty; young high school students; failed children and teenagers from public schools. In this scenario, this article divided into three sections, presents aspects related to the ethnographic research approach based mainly on the studies of Mattos (2004, 2006, 2009), Erickson (1988; 1992; 2009), Peirano (1995, 2014) and Geertz (1989, 1999, 2002), as they help us in a process of reflection on ethnographic practice.

## **2 Anthropology and education: ethnography as frontier knowledge**

Thinking about ethnography in its relationship with education also means judging the perceptions of school actors, participants in the researched context that takes place in a social and cultural context. There is also a methodological enigma, that is, forms of knowledge production coined in the dense description of the microsocial universe. We understand that ethnography, in its uses in the educational field, is a frontier knowledge between anthropology and education (Dauster, 2007).

Ethnography is initially defined as the writing of the other, but is it possible for an individual to write about another? In this article, we understand that writing about the other needs to be increasingly written with the other, starting from attentive listening to the point of view of the participants in the investigations. To be a little more faithful to what the participant says about their culture, it is necessary to understand the meanings, symbolic and concrete, manifested in the interactive instances they experience (Jacob, 1987).

The content of the speech expressed in a concrete way does not, however, reveal the whole of the situation experienced, and can be considered the representation of the fact from the speaker's view, however, placed in opposition to the view of other participants from the same fact it can have another interpretation, which denotes interpretative subjectivity for the same fact.

We believe that doing ethnography is learning to listen to participants and see the field, advancing in a current debate, we can say that it is necessary to understand the field, assuming the idea of cosmoperception beyond the senses guided by the Eurocentric and Western perspective (Oyěwùmí, 1997). Ethnographic insights are fundamental for the ethnographer to do research less about and more with, for example, when reporting how pregnant women are transported from prison to hospital by pregnant women. Almeida (2013), in his research, highlights that the same action had varying impacts depending on the situation and vision of each subject.

In general, women who were about to have a child reported the inadequacy and horror they experienced on the way from prison to the hospital, however, the dimensions of this inadequacy and horror varied according to each one of them. In this research, when volunteering to participate in the study on the education of women deprived of their liberty, the participants perceived the opportunity to talk about education, but also to denounce the inhumane treatment they experienced in their daily lives in prison. In other words, the role of research participants is not merely informative, it is, above all, reflective and intentional.

Ethnographic research includes all the resources of qualitative and reflective research (Mattos, 2006; Alves, 2012). Reflexivity based on the assumption that "all human beings are reflexive, that is, they interact with themselves" (Delamont, 1987, p. 37). Social actors act

on their world based on “the way they see it and not based on the way this world appears to the outside observer” (Delamont, 1987, p. 39, *apud* Blumer, 1966). The use of reflexivity as a theoretical basis implies that the researcher seeks to see the world based on what the participants report and how they reflect on their reality and their culture, in an attempt that, when talking about their realities, they reveal their points of view. “Concentration on the subject’s points of view and the meaning they attribute to experiences and events, as well as orientation towards the meaning of objects, activities and events, fuels much of qualitative research” (Flick, 2009, p. 70).

Mattos (2006, p. 47) addresses some equally important aspects when carrying out qualitative ethnographic research that reveals the active role of the participants. According to the author, participants are understood as social actors and direct agents who give meaning to research data. Mattos (2006) also highlights that, throughout the investigation, it is necessary for the researcher to live immersed in the local culture for a prolonged period, in search of typical and atypical events in the ways of acting of the researchers the research subjects. This does not mean that those who research become part of this culture, as if they were appropriating what is not theirs, but it approximates two different subjects in a joint attempt to understand a phenomenon, in the case of this article, the education of women in spaces of deprivation of liberty, school failure and youth.

In research by Almeida (2013), throughout the interviews carried out with women who were deprived of their liberty, it was possible to understand how the experiences lived in prisons are perceived as impediments to the construction of a new life outside of prison. Daiane, 25 years old, imprisoned in a women’s penitentiary in Rio de Janeiro for 4 years, studied until the 2nd year of high school. At the time of the research, she had a 9-year-old son who lived with his aunt and was in the 5th year of elementary school. She took computer and human resources courses during the period she was imprisoned; however, she reveals in her interview that she does not consider these activities to be a guarantee of resocialization. As she states: “(...) when they pull it, it won’t matter, it will weigh me down that I’ve already been arrested. So, they think I will never reintegrate into society again, I think I will be that mistake.” For Daiane, prejudice and lack of resources are factors that do not favor social reintegration outside of prison, which leads to a feeling of instability regarding expectations regarding the opportunities she could obtain with freedom.

The interview is an opportunity for participants and researchers to reflect together on the questions presented in the study, in an action-reflection-action process. Paulo Freire (2005, p. 91) states that it is necessary for those who are “denied the primordial right to speak, regain this right, prohibiting this dehumanizing assault from continuing”. For him, if it is by saying the word that men and women transform the world, dialogue imposes itself as the path through which men and women gain meaning as subjects.

The option for dialogue and attentive listening assumes that women deprived of liberty, failed students and young people in public schools have been continually denied the right to speak and, following this assumption, a principle on which the entire this work: no research, no public policy, no education can be carried out without the subject to whom these actions are directed.

Knowing reality from the point of view informed by the subjects is a complex task, but essentially, it is a listening task. Listening constitutes part of the ethnographic work, which is composed of other specificities. In the case of research that studies subjects who are victims of exclusion processes, listening to them implies expanding the possibilities of thinking about the reality they experience in situations of exclusion.

Mattos and Castro (2010), when analyzing 683 national scientific texts about school failure, indicate that, of the total number of texts researched, only 149 use interviews, and, of the total, only one uses ethnographic interviews. However, the authors state, twenty-six of this totals indicated that structured interviews were carried out. "Therefore, it is inferred that researchers on school failure, in general, do not show interest in listening to students who fail, but, on the contrary, when interviewing they use pre-conceived agendas in which the agenda belongs to the interviewer himself." (Mattos; Castro, 2010, p. 01). It is understood, regarding this study, that research that seeks to listen to the excluded subject is still scarce. These subjects, therefore, remain without the possibility of having their reflections presented in scientific research, which, in some way, invalidates the construction of knowledge about the reality they experience and about inclusion processes.

Faced with the complexities involved in listening to others, we ask: who can do ethnography? Mattos (2006, p. 44) states that any researcher with an ethical commitment and a socially relevant issue can carry out ethnographic work. But then, how do you carry out ethnographic research? According to the author, "only the researcher can answer this question through the field, as each field is unique, each research is unique and each day in the research itself is unique" (Mattos, 2006, p. 44). We agree with Mattos (2006) about the singularity of spaces, time and the understanding of researchers and those researched about the research field. It is believed that, in addition to knowing the instruments for collecting and analyzing data, in ethnography. a cosmoperception of the world is necessary.

It is necessary to understand that the educational field trying to take on "Anthropology points of view try, first of all, to delimit boundaries that mark both areas and that cannot simply be dissolved but rethought in the sense of the articulation that maintains their identities and differences" (Pereira-Tosta, 2011, p. 428). As we observe below from Borges (2018) ethnographic notes:

I arrive at school at 8am, but I don't go into the classroom so as not to disturb the teacher and his class. I stay in the school courtyard waiting for the third period so we can go to the 3rd year. I see primary school children playing, there is primary and secondary education at the school. Two girls scream:

- Teacher, will I kill her? (pointing to the colleague). I say no and they smile. I see some students taking a selfie (this is understood as a photograph, usually digital, that a person takes of themselves, like a self-portrait. I think about the idea: The selfie, interaction and self-image.

I see the phrase in the courtyard: "Days of struggle are my days of glory". Still in the courtyard I see two elementary school students jumping over the school wall, running away. They don't carry backpacks; they just run and jump over the wall. See, review, look... observe. There are so many actions put into ethnographic research. My head overflows with thoughts, ideas... there are many possible displacements to think about the modern school and its contradictions: the space for play is the space for escape (Field report, August 25, 2015).

Ultimately, we can think that the ethnographer "moves in a field of diffuse, or imprecise, disciplinary genres" (Carvalho, 2001, p. 109). Ethnography as a scientific investigation approach brings contributions to the field of research that is interested in the study of social inequalities and exclusions. According to Mattos (2006), ethnography in education is concerned with a holistic analysis of culture, that is, culture is not seen as a mere reflection of structural forces in society, but as a system of meanings and signifiers that mediate between social structures and human action (Borges, 2018). And also, for understanding social subjects with an active and dynamic participation in the process of modifying social structures themselves and not as an object of research guided solely by researchers. These are the ethnographic views that reveal poignant dimensions that need to be guided/problematised throughout the fieldwork.

### **3 The ethnographic view as revealing the exclusion/inclusion realities**

Who knows more about the exclusion/inclusion realities than the subjects themselves who are immersed in their contexts? And what is the role of the researcher, given the unlivable reality? How to produce knowledge that dialogues with different social contexts? These questions are necessary to avoid deepening an understanding that it is up to the researcher to reflect on the other, as a superior being. Or as Carvalho (2001, p. 110) states, "when criticizing the nature of the ethnographic look in which the ethnographer is the civilized subject and the native, looked at by him, the primitive". In other words, it is necessary to understand the processes of (de)colonization of ethnographic research (Carvalho, 2001).

According to Carvalho (2001, p. 110), criticism of the idea of a civilized researcher is a criticism, as he states, “of this knowledge shaped in central countries”. So, we turn, once again, to Oyěwùmí (1997) reaffirming that there is a multiplicity of meanings present in ethnographic work. We want to build an Other-knowledge that is capable of producing reverberations based on ethical, aesthetic, political commitments, etc. The ethnographic notes below were generated by field observation in the research of Borges (2018), a public school in Baixada Fluminense in the state of Rio de Janeiro, a region marked by profound social inequalities and processes of political, cultural and human resistance.

After the train, you need to take a bus to get to the school. On the bus, we met Professor R., of Chemistry and Biology, he always seemed very receptive to research and the presence of Uerj researchers at the school. It encourages student participation in projects and partnerships (with Ufrj and Estácio universities). Still on the bus, Reinaldo says that “young people are immediate, accelerated and anxious”. He points out that there are 18 classes at the school in the morning, afternoon and night shifts. That Dona Maria Joaquina is the director of the school and that it has an assistant director. In the teacher’s speech, he comments on the future of the school’s students and talks about three possibilities: a military career, health as nursing technicians and music because of the large number of evangelical churches in the neighborhood. There is also a great parental relationship at school with students: cousins, brothers, nephews, uncles, etc. Surnames are common, they are repeated. I remember anthropological studies on kinship. Would this be an intriguing object of study? I talk more about research and the relationship between knowledge and culture as something I want to work on. We talked a lot, an unexpected conversation. An ethnographic narrative that crosses the border inside and outside the school. Dialogue on the bus generates empathy, generates the possibility of new dialogues. Research, its nuances and lack of control emerge in the daily research itself (Field report, June 23, 2015).

It is necessary to shift the place of enunciation from the perspective of those who write and ‘say’ in ethnography, to the perspective of those who narrate and ‘say themselves’, to shift modern reason so that we think about ethnographies in “post times”, that is, to discuss the ability of the other to represent themselves. In our case, male and female students; think and propose a theory no longer centered on European modernity, but on the insurgency of so many other peoples and contexts; and, finally, think about hybridisms in the field of language in which the subaltern creates conditions of enunciation, so to speak, counter-discourses. It is necessary to problematize, from ethnography, new forms of knowledge, and that these are critical, in the face of the contemporary world thinking about new alternatives that are not envisioned by the postmodern, Eurocentric and Western project (Oyěwùmí, 1997).

According to Castro (2011), ethnography in education has socio-interactive potential to analyze the different perspectives that involve school subjects in their training processes with the daily lives investigated. Erickson (1989) suggests some questions that can guide or educate the researcher's perspective and that he or she can use to organize the interactions observed in the research field and that can help to focus this perspective on the main events researched. Are they:

How can we know when someone is angry, happy or ironic? How can we know when something new and important is starting to happen at the event? How do people recognize each other and react to disruptions in the social order of interaction? How are positive and negative sanctions applied behaviorally, and what is sanctioned? (Erickson, 1989, p. 7).

It is noteworthy that the questions proposed in ethnographic research are being reformulated based on the analyzes carried out and the results obtained throughout the study, to guarantee not only objectivity, but also to try to preserve the subjectivity of both participants and of each member of the research team, especially the researchers who carried out the ethnographic interviews.

We understand and defend that the ethnographic approach allows the researcher to expand the understanding of the reality investigated based on what the participants have to say about their own realities. Therefore, trying to get to know the participants involves listening to their stories to understand them in their complexity, thus making sense of what you want to research.

Listening to subjects and seeking to understand their point of view is complex work. According to Monteiro (1998), qualitative research is essentially ethical, as it is committed to knowing in depth the life experiences of the participants. Therefore, according to the author, this type of research involves a series of challenges to preserve and protect research participants<sup>2</sup>.

[...] My initial argument is that all interpretation, by virtue of focusing on people's lives, is an ethical act. Using interpretation as an essential element, research necessarily presents ethical challenges that its followers, including researchers of the educational phenomenon, are compelled to face (Monteiro, 1998, p. 17).

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<sup>2</sup> Research must be based on ethical assumptions to guarantee the integrity of those involved (the subjects of the investigation and the researchers) as well as the data. In Brazil, studies involving human beings are regulated by the National Research Ethics Commission, linked to the National Health Council. In universities, they must be approved by the Research Ethics Commission, which aims to guide researchers regarding ethical aspects .

The research needs to have the informed and conscious consent of the participant and the protection of this subject regarding their exposure when deciding to participate in the study. In research with women deprived of liberty, Almeida (2013) states that the risk of exposure of participants can put the physical integrity of these women at risk, as they are often victims of violence within their own prisons, and the moment of the interview can reveal this violence. Preserving women's identities also means preserving their lives. We understand that the ethnographic perspective must be expanded from a perspective of cosmoperception given the complexity of empirical research. In this way, the field affects us greatly, indicating which paths we should follow in the face of the unknown.

#### **4 Being affected by the ethnographic field**

The way in which the researcher and participants are affected by the field is a fundamental point of this article, since ethnography in education reveals stories about education that, often, also reveals vulnerabilities experienced in the locus of investigation. As Brazil is still a country without the social justice guarantee, quality education for all and the basic rights of the population, doing ethnography in education is also dealing with the vulnerabilities of research participants. During work with women deprived of liberty, reports of violence inside and outside prisons were recurrent (Almeida, 2013).

The vulnerability experienced by women and their children ranges from birth in prison, in which they receive precarious prenatal care, to experiences outside the prison institution, living with family, friends and, sometimes, at school. One of the recurring situations in women's reports is about the time of birth. They report that they experienced terror moments, a reality apart, during the trip to the hospital and during the birth of their children. According to the reports of these women, they are subjected, by hospital authorities, transport vehicle drivers, and prison officers who accompany them, to cruel and inhumane conditions. This article highlights a report from a pregnant woman who, upon being arrested, had her baby on the way to the hospital.

Marina was 34 years old at the time of the field research carried out in 2010, a woman deprived of liberty, mother of 7 children, a newborn daughter who lived with her in prison. Marina's husband had already been through the penitentiary system and could not visit his wife and newborn daughter as he was considered a fugitive by the courts. Among the situations reported by Marina, the occasion in which she was being taken to the hospital to give birth to her daughter stands out.

Marina: God forgive me, it was a tragedy, because I was there at X [referring to another women's prison], when it was Friday, the 4th, I wasn't feeling very well, then when it was Saturday I woke up feeling really sick in the morning, on the 5th, then the

girls there asked me to call the — (prisoner transport service) there, who transports us here so they can take me (to the maternity ward). Then, it took a long time, then when I got out to go, the woman handcuffed me, I was feeling very sick, I was already freezing, she handcuffed me, put me behind, didn't take me in front, and instead of taking me straight, It was in another prison nearby, because I don't know it, to pick up a prisoner who was feeling ill. Me saying: man, I can't take it anymore, man, I'm really feeling bad. Then he: oh, wait, wait! (...) then when he entered another prison I started hitting, hitting, hitting, because she (the daughter) was already crowning. Then I was handcuffed, with the handcuffs forward, I took off my shorts and started hitting - "boy, open here, man". Then he opened it and I said: - dude, my daughter is crowning, for the love of God, get me out of here. He took it and said: - no... He knocked and left me locked inside. I had her locked... Researcher: Did you have the child in the car? Marina: yes... inside the car. Locked and handcuffed (Fragment of the interview carried out at the mother and Child Unit with Marina in August 2010).

Scenes involving the moment of the children's birth, as described above, were reported to the team in other interviews. The precariousness of care for women deprived of their liberty during motherhood is revealed by the rigor experienced by women who are imprisoned and are mothers. The reality of violence and vulnerability reported by women deprived of their liberty created the need to create a specific chapter that deals with this reality in the final research report. Talking about education in prisons is also talking about the violence experienced in spaces of deprivation. Being a woman and a student at a prison school means being faced with all the vulnerabilities experienced in the daily life of being deprived of liberty.

Violence found in the field of research on the education of women prisoners (Almeida, 2013) was also experienced in the field of the class of repeaters (Vasconcellos, 2016) where it was observed that the culture of repetition (Earp, 2006; 2021) was an intrinsic part of the evaluation process. Repetition is commonly understood as a pedagogical proposal, and despite being archaic and traditional, the school still believes that it allows students to review issues in their learning that were not achieved within school parameters.

However, what has been observed in the field of research is that, often, the student repeats the entire academic year, and not infrequently, goes through the same curriculum, the same evaluation processes, the same teaching material and, often, repeats the the same teacher who presents the same methodology as the previous year without the reflection used by educators as one of the justifications for failure.

As happened with Lucio, he was 13 years old and multi-repeat student, who repeated the second year of elementary school five times, in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2006 and 2007. The student has great learning difficulties, which led the school to seek help external, such as psychological and physiotherapeutic support, in a Special Education Center.

In an interview with the school director, she states that, although the student has support outside the school, she believes that there is something that the Special Education

Center has not identified, as “he has the support of a psychopedagogue, and a speech therapist, physiotherapist, but I think he has something more serious, because he can’t even write his full name, you know? So this has to be investigated as a more serious thing, right?” (Interviewed, 2016).

Lucio was constantly stigmatized as a problem student (Gomes, 2014) and, even though he was described in the teacher’s evaluation report as a hard-working and interested boy, the issues of learning and discipline overlap. The teacher also reports that the student has learning difficulties and “was agitated and talked a lot during classes and when a classmate provoked him, he acted aggressively.” (Interviewed, 2016). According to the evaluation reports accessed by the researcher (Vasconcellos, 2016) and written by the teacher, the student presented great difficulty in learning. Furthermore, for the school director, Lúcio’s advanced age, 13 years old, for his year of schooling indicates other problems:

[...] he’s already 13 years old, isn’t he, and he didn’t make it to the third year. It’s a... a question of... I think it’s... the mother didn’t bring his report, but he has serious neurological issues, okay? (...) It’s because it is.... I believe, no, I believe that it’s that issue of you not accepting it... it’s your son’s problem, I think it’s... I think it’s the only thing is not believing in your child’s problem (Director, in interview, 2008).

As in the case presented above, it is possible to observe that, often, when the student becomes a problem, the school seeks to justify their “failure”, mainly through medical reports, which prove some type of clinical problem. In this case, however, the director reports that this was not possible, as the school did not have access to the report, although the student was being monitored by a team made up of a psychopedagogue, speech therapist and physiotherapist.

What was observed by Vasconcellos (2016), when the student does not perform as expected by the school, he or she is put aside from the teaching-learning process, being considered a problem that will not be resolved by the school. When discredited, the student ends up abandoned or resources are sought outside the school. For Lúcio, what remained were multiple failures. At the age of 13, he was already on his 5th repetition, being continually subjected to learning checks. The school does not know what to do with Lúcio, the monitoring does not have the expected effect and the student continues to fail and is at risk of dropping out of school.

Experiencing situations of violence throughout the research is common in a study with an ethnographic approach to education, as highlighted in the descriptions above. In research on education, we are confronted daily with themes that cross the field, such as pregnancy in prison, reports and therapeutic monitoring of multi-repeat children, and drug abuse

in adolescence. How, then, can we be or not be affected by the field? Borges (2018) reports how the field approach's themes that were not initially thought of by him in everyday life.

We arrived at school late, the train on the Central-Japeri branch was delayed, therefore, class observation would no longer be possible, as it would not interrupt the teacher's class and the class dynamics. So, I stayed in the teachers' room waiting for the Chemistry teacher so we could go to the 3rd year room for the final period. In the teachers' room the conversation focuses on the issue of current education and the future of young people. Mathematics and Geography teachers talk. According to the Geography teacher, young people who are at school are already privileged for this. They say that life in the neighborhood is related to "banditry". They talk about the use of marijuana by young people, a large number in the region, and the pregnancy of young women, there are also several pregnant students at school (Field report, July 7, 2015).

Starting from the relationship between Anthropology and Education (ethnography as frontier knowledge), the perception that educational research carried out at school can be understood based on the daily life of the school itself stands out. In the words of Geertz (1989, p. 32), "research in the villages and not the villages". Castro (2015, p. 78), then, states that "researching the school at school constitutes a way of portraying the reality researched in the most faithful way possible". Thus, an ethnography at school seeks a dense description not only of the spaces, but of the symbolic interactions existing in the institution, especially in the teacher-student relationship.

There are topics put forward for research that were not previously thought of, for example, drugs, pregnancy, reports, abandonment, the future. These are themes that are progressively emerging in the field. As evidenced in the aforementioned field reports, there is something that, experienced in the field, creates impressions, nuances, marks, in short, affections. Favret-Saada (2005) called this being affected, that is, what "mobilizes or modifies my own stock of images without, however, instructing me about that of my partners" (Favret-Saada, 2005, p. 159). Being affected becomes a hallmark of fieldwork in ethnography, it becomes a unique analytical axis for creating perceptions about what is experienced, both by subjects and researchers.

Letting yourself be affected by fieldwork is recognizing that science is not neutral, it includes the researcher, the schools, the cuts, what was left in and what was not included in the final report. Field research is alive, the field is alive, as Peirano (2014) states, there is no right time to start and finish.

These moments are arbitrary by definition and depend, today that we abandon the great crossings to isolated and exotic islands, on the potential for strangeness, on the unusualness of the experience, on the need to examine why some events, expe-

rienced or observed, surprise us. And this is how we become agents in ethnography, not just as researchers, but natives/ethnographers. This dimension encourages the questioning of ethnography as a method (Peirano, 2014, p. 379).

Just as Peirano (2014) states that allowing ourselves to be affected is recognizing that the researcher and the participants are active agents in carrying out ethnographic research and, in this article, we do not deny the place of the researcher as a subject who acts on his research, but acts ethically, always prioritizing attentive listening and the role of primary research subject to those who are excluded from education.

In ethnographic interviews, reports about education as a place of life change and transformation are common. However, when reflecting on how school can be a place of change, women deprived of their liberty, teenagers who repeat repeatedly and young people from public schools are unable to describe what it would be like this change.

As Maciel, Hernández and Morais (2023, p. 252) state,

it seems that it is in this transition between the everyday meaning of school and the construction of a life project outside of poverty and/or marginalization, that lonely individuals get lost. What we question here is whether it would be the responsibility of these individuals to carry out this transition, or of all of us.

In this sense, ethnographic research can collaborate as another space for listening, listening to others and, in the case of research on exclusion and education, denouncing the violence experienced by the excluded.

## **5 Final considerations**

The complexity of ethnographic fieldwork involves immersing yourself in a specific community, society, or culture to observe and analyze its patterns of behavior, beliefs, values, underlying meanings, and social structures. One of the main features is the possibility of capturing the social dynamics and cultural interactions, so that researchers can observe nuances of human behavior in their natural context.

The core of the ethnographic field is participant observation, in which the researcher needs to immerse himself in the natural environment in a meticulous, approximate and respectful way, to observe where the phenomenon occurs, participating in activities and interacting with participants in an active way. This approach allows us to obtain valuable observations about the practices, norms, values and cultural meanings that structure people's behavior within a specific context. Participant observation also allows us to consider nuances and social dynamics that may not be evident through interviews, questionnaires

or document analysis alone. Thus, avoiding simplistic or distorted interpretations that may arise in controlled environments or through less immersive research methods.

Direct and participant observation in the field provides a rich and insightful context for the data collected. Additionally, by interacting directly with community members, researchers have access to local perspectives and insider viewpoints that would not be accessible otherwise. This enables deeper observation and analysis of participants' experiences and perceptions, contributing to a more complete and accurate study. Ethnography favors the construction of relationships based on trust with community members. These connections are fundamental to the success of the research, as they facilitate access to sensitive information and guarantee the collaboration and participation of participants throughout the process. To achieve this, fieldwork requires flexibility and the ability to adapt on the part of the researcher. Unforeseen situations may arise, requiring adjustments in research strategies and in the way the researcher is and allows himself to be affected by the research field. The ability to deal with these situations sensitively and ethically is essential to successful research, however, the ethnographic field also presents unique challenges. How can the researcher's subjectivity influence, interfere or "contaminate" the interpretation of data? How can prolonged immersion in a community generate ethical dilemmas, especially regarding participants' privacy and consent? How can ethnographic interviews reveal processes of exclusion and inform public policies that are more aligned with the participants' desires?

We believe that ethnographic interviews made it possible in these researches (Borges, 2018; Vasconcellos, 2016; Almeida, 2013) to emerge the vision and perspective of the participants as primary informants in the search for guiding public policies for schools that meet their needs. We also understand that the vocalization of subjects in investigations on exclusion/inclusion is fundamental for informants to be able to present an initial proposal about the school, the institutions, in short, the society that they want and need, considering their learning demands, socialization and life.

We understand that many changes are needed in institutions and public policies so that we can live in a world with more social justice, but research can be a space that truly reflects what those considered subaltern want. Research that, considering methodological rigor, does not hide behind scientific neutrality when it comes to revealing exclusion/inclusion processes denounced in their research by participants.

Ethnography requires great sensitivity from the researcher, since it is necessary to observe, analyze and describe densely about the other, in a reliable way, respecting and considering what the other said about him, in an ethical and reflective process. However, André (1995) clarifies that what is reliable is not the correspondence with the real, as "it is based on the assumption that the reconstruction of the real made by the researcher is not the only possible or correct one, but it is expected that offer sufficient elements (evidence,

clues) so that the reader can judge the credibility of the report and the relevance of the interpretations” (André, 1995, p. 63).

In short, fieldwork in ethnographic research is fundamental to carrying out a deep and contextualized analysis of the cultures and communities studied. Therefore, it allows researchers to delve into the complexity of social and cultural life, capturing the voices and experiences of participants in an authentic and meaningful way, considering participants as active research agents and not as objects that will be investigated.

In this article, we elucidate excerpts from three different fields of research researches (Borges, 2018; Vasconcellos, 2016; Almeida, 2013) that brought the voice of the researched subjects at their core; the complex attentive, thorough and respectful listening to the participants; analysis and reflective-descriptive writing of the results. It can be said that in such research, fieldwork was one of the key pieces of the research work, as the field brought researchers and participants closer to the object of study - education of women deprived of liberty, grade repetition and the relationship between youth and school knowledge. In other words, we were encouraged to take on the challenge of Peirano (2014) by understanding and defending ethnography as a methodology and epistemology of our investigations.

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