

IE NEWSLETTER

Institutional Ethnography Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems

Winter 2010

Vol. 7, No. 1



Kamini Maraj Grahame
Division Chair
Department of Social Sciences
Pennsylvania State University
Harrisburg, PA

Send correspondence to:

Roz Stooke

Correspondence and Copy Editor

rstooke@uwo.ca

Send photos and other images to:

Cheryl Zurawski

Production and Picture Editor

cdz@arialassociates.com

Proofreader:

Linda Shorting

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FROM THE DIVISION CHAIR

Kamini Maraj Grahame

Greetings from the snowy northeastern U.S. When I began this greeting, I was actually in Vermont, having driven there after the snowstorm during the first weekend in February. It was a somewhat disconcerting experience to leave southcentral Pennsylvania and drive north only to encounter less snow the further north I got. The southeastern part of the U.S. seems to be having an unusually cold and snowy winter. Let's hope August in Atlanta isn't too hot!

The deadline for paper submissions has passed and organizers are sifting through submissions for their sessions. You should be hearing about your paper soon, if you have not heard back already.

My sabbatical research project has taken me to Trinidad where I was when the earthquake occurred in Haiti. The scale of the destruction and the ensuing challenges of getting aid to people reminded me of Henry Parada's presentation on his work in the Dominican Republic. Some of you may recall that Henry raised the issue of the lack of good coordination – textual and otherwise. I am looking forward to more conversation on the issues generated by Henry's research.

I hope you take a look at the two books identified on pages 2 and 3. They both take up the issue of neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state and the consequences of the reforms for poor people – one focused on the U.S. context, the other in Canada. Perhaps in a future issue of the newsletter, we could have extended reviews of these books. They are especially timely in light of the ongoing economic crisis and the related health care crisis.

In a few weeks, those of you who attend the Eastern Sociological Society meetings in Boston can seize the opportunity to participate in what the Society is billing as a conversation with Dorothy Smith,

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(Division Chair's message continued)

Alison Griffith, Nancy Naples and Marjorie DeVault on "Dorothy Smith's Sociology for Women/People and the Institutional Ethnography Approach". There'll be further opportunity for IE exploration at the CSSE conference in Montreal in May (please also see pages 4 to 6).

I'd like to remind students to submit papers for the student paper award competition. The deadline for the Dorothy Smith Scholar-Activist Award is also approaching. Please send in nominations. Details for both awards are provided on page 7. Please also remember to vote for your next IE Division Chair (deadline March 16).

As spring approaches, I am looking forward to the snow melting, crocuses appearing, and conversing with institutional ethnographers in Boston. I am certain these things will arrive before a health care bill for all here in the U.S.

Recent publications

Article:

Peter R. Grahame and Kamini Maraj Grahame. (2009). "Points of Departure: Insiders, Outsiders, and Social Relations in Caribbean Field Research," *Human Studies* 32 (3), pp. 291-312.

In this paper we critically examine the significance of insider and outsider positions in developing IE problematics. In doing so, we also explore differences between IE-oriented projects and traditional ethnographic studies.

Books:

Sandra Morgen, Joan Acker and Jill Weigt. (2010). *Stretched Thin: Poor Families, Welfare Work, and Welfare Reform*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Poor families, welfare workers, and welfare funds are still stretched thin as the result of the 1996 federal legislation, inspired by neoliberal beliefs in the efficacy of markets and the efforts of individuals to solve the problem of poverty. This book analyzes the process and consequences of the "reform," as poor families' right to assistance was eliminated and replaced by mandatory work, no matter how low the wage. This large study of former welfare clients, welfare agency workers, and agency administrators in the State of Oregon also reveals how different groups of participants in welfare restructuring experienced the process and dealt with its contradictions in different ways. In the present economic crisis in the U.S., there is almost no public discussion of the tragic inadequacy of our last ditch safety net and what we can do to build a better one. This book takes the experience of "welfare reform" as a basis of suggesting a broad set of programs that would restore the right to subsistence to the American people.

The following excerpts from reviews of *Stretched Thin* were taken from the website of Cornell University Press. http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/cup_detail.taf?ti_id=5581

"This is a wonderfully thoughtful and illuminating book. For more than a decade, Sandra Morgen, Joan Acker, and Jill Weigt peered into the workings of the Oregon welfare system after the implementation of the draconian reform of 1996. The result is a closely observant picture of just what went on. We learn about

(continued)

(Recent publications continued)

the real human costs to mothers and children of the much-heralded shift to 'work first' and 'personal responsibility.' We also learn about the pressures on the staff of the local agencies as they tried to adapt a neoliberal policy designed in Washington to the exigencies of the lives of the poor and troubled people they were mandated to help."

–**Frances Fox Piven, Graduate Center of the City University of New York, coauthor (with Richard Cloward) of *Regulating the Poor and Poor People's Movements***

"*Stretched Thin* is a tour de force. It proves that the best scholarship makes for good politics. The story is sobering, but presented in highly accessible prose and based on stunning empirical research. It tells us all we need to know about neoliberal social welfare policy today: it fails to deliver for the poor. Here is engaged scholarship at its best. Read it and weep!"

–**Sanford Schram, author of *Welfare Discipline: Discourse, Governance, and Globalization***

"A stunning dialogue between ethnography and poverty policy, *Stretched Thin* takes risks to chronicle the messy moral incongruities that lay at the basis of welfare reform. Sandra Morgen, Joan Acker, and Jill Weigt urge us to face the myths we so readily accept about work, family, and poverty. They have written a classic that will stand the test of time."

–**Carol Stack, author of *All Our Kin and Call To Home***

Julie Vaillancourt. (2010). *Ontario Works – Works for Whom? An Investigation of Workfare in Ontario. Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Press.*

This book is an institutional ethnographic investigation of the Ontario Works program and the problems that it creates in the lives of people on social assistance. Ontario Works is a work-for-welfare program that was implemented in Ontario in 1996 as part of the neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state. The book shows that Ontario Works has not, in reality, been used to help people on assistance and rather has been used as another means of facilitating an attack on them, while providing subsidized and cheap labour for companies and social agencies.

Julie Vaillancourt is a recent graduate of the Masters in Applied Social Research program at Laurentian University. Prior to pursuing graduate studies she earned degrees in criminology and sociology from the University of Ottawa and Laurentian University. She has worked in various research capacities, having been employed in the public and not-for-profit sectors for over eight years. Previously she has worked for the federal government, the municipal government, and in a youth detention facility. For the last four years she has worked in the area of public health, and recently accepted a position as an economic and policy analyst with the federal government.

Upcoming conferences and presentations

March

Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting

Economic Crisis and New Social Realities

March 18 to 21, 2010

Boston, MA

<http://www.essnet.org/default.aspx>

On Friday, March 19 from 12:30 to 1:30 pm, this annual meeting features a "Conversation with" Dorothy Smith, Alison Griffith, Nancy Naples and Marjorie DeVault on Dorothy Smith's *Sociology for Women/People and the Institutional Ethnography Approach*.

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(Upcoming conferences and presentations continued)

May to June

Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences

May 28 to June 4, 2010

Concordia University, Montreal, PQ

<http://www.congress2010.ca/>

Notices of a number of meetings and paper presentations as part of Congress appear below.

Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada

(May 28, 2010)

The Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada (LLRC) are holding their annual Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) preconference on May 28, 2010. This year's theme is *Language and Literacy Research for Social Action*.

The plenary will be given by Mary Hamilton. Mary Hamilton is Professor of Adult Learning and Literacy in the Department of Educational Research at the University of Lancaster in the UK. Her recent research illuminates how "the global is instantiated in the local" (Hamilton, 2009) as learner and educator identities become aligned to the standardizing apparatus of high stakes testing and mandated performance indicators. Her research offers tools to explore how the textually-mediated work of literacy research and practice may unintentionally contribute to the very inequalities it seeks to address.

Following the plenary address, delegates will participate in conversation groups to share and discuss one another's research in light of the following questions.

Canadian Society for the Study of Education Symposium with Dorothy Smith

(tentative date May 29, 2010)

A symposium entitled *Mapping Local Literacy Work to Global Policy Discourses: Institutional*

--How does current literacy and language research support social action, including social critique and policy decision-making?

--How might researchers work with practitioners and activists to address intransigent problems that are "latent" in the actualities of the experienced world" (Smith, 1987, p. 91).

--How might the processes and products of language and literacy research engage communities, and provoke new ways of looking at and acting on issues of equity?

--What are the roles of texts and institutions, including research texts, in "projects of social ordering" (Hamilton, 2009) as well as social action and equity?

References:

Hamilton, M. (2009). Putting words in their mouths: the alignment of identities with system goals through the use of Individual Learning Plans. *British Educational Research Journal*, 35, 2, 221-242.

Smith, D. E. (1987). *The everyday world as problematic: A feminist sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

The deadline for submitting a proposal is past, but spaces are available for anyone who would like to hear Mary Hamilton's plenary address. (Cost \$10 CDN). For further information, please contact Suzanne Smythe at sksmythe@sfu.ca

Ethnography, New Literacy Studies and Tools for Social Action will take place at the annual Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) conference (part of the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences).

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(Upcoming conferences and presentations continued)

The symposium brings together leaders in the fields of new literacies and critical sociology including Mary Hamilton of Lancaster University, UK, Richard Darville of Carleton University, Dorothy Smith of the University of Victoria and of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), and Victoria Purcell-Gates, of the University of British Columbia.

From diverse perspectives these researchers share a common interest in mapping the dynamic relationship between local literacy work and its “ruling relations” (Smith, 2005), with a view to forging literacy and social policy that takes up, rather than erases, “intractable problems of

inequality, social exclusion and social injustice” (Hamilton & Hillier, 2007, p. 592). The goals of the symposium are to share insights across diverse fields of research and practice, to foster the development of powerful tools of literacy policy analysis, and to explore opportunities for social action, especially in settings outside formal schooling.

Symposium organizers, Roz Stooke of the University of Western Ontario, and Suzanne Smythe, of Simon Fraser University, hope that this will be the beginning of many conversations about the ways in which a social practices perspective on literacy might engage with IE’s analytic strategy.

Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW)

May 29 to 31, 2010

Suzanne Miller will present a paper entitled “*Doctoral Students’ Reading-Writing Activity as Text Production*”. The abstract is below.

My work explores transformations in graduate school program practices in the social sciences as they pertain to and shape the reading and writing activities of doctoral students. The multiple, mediated and ongoing determinations of doctoral students’ “reading-writing activity”, which constitutes the substance of the dissertation knowledge-work, presents itself as a *peculiar* phenomenon. This phenomenon and research that aim at accounting for it is at the centre of several emerging schools of study (Bazerman; Prior; Kamler & Thomson; Paré et al).

My own contribution to this emerging field of study – research on text production in graduate school – is

Canadian Sociological Association (CSA)

(May 31 to June 4, 2010)

Suzanne Miller will also present a paper in Dorothy Smith’s IE session at the CSA conference. The

in my use of institutional ethnography as a method and school of sociological inquiry. The standpoint of graduate students that I employ shifts the starting point of inquiry onto the exploration and conceptualization of graduate students’ products, namely academic papers. Reading-writing activity originates and culminates (is brought to a temporary closure) in academic papers. Beginning with the processes of academic paper production provides the means for the exploration of expanding interdisciplinary practices, including the deployment of digital technologies, advances in library services and conference organization for journal and book publishing. As well, this starting point sets a new research direction that problematizes naive perspectives that view reading and writing as what self-contained individuals (doctoral students) do, and builds on the recognition that doctoral reading and writing processes are organized beyond any individual’s control.

paper is entitled: “*An Account of PhD Thesis Production in the Social Sciences, Using Institutional Ethnography as a Method of Inquiry*”. An abstract follows. *(continued)*

(Upcoming conferences and presentations continued)

How do graduate students tackle the task of “writing the problematic” they are researching and developing? This question is often asked without any sociological perspective on the dynamics of graduate program practices and their expansion into larger academic arenas. The question takes the form of: What can the individual graduate student do to write her/his thesis? Or, what can be done at the program level to facilitate her/his writing of the thesis? What is missing in these approaches is a clear account of what a thesis is and what it is becoming. IE provides a research approach to work towards an adequate account of what a thesis is. IE sees it as (1) a prolonged multiple texts production process that (2) involves specific forms of social relations and (3) substantive work of both PhD students and others such as the supervisor, thesis committee members, peers, mentors, and conference session and workshop organizers. As

well, (4) the texts that eventually comprise the thesis are given forms that are socially recognizable and accountable. I will map out the landscapes and event-scopes within which graduate students articulate, research and write about the problematics on which they are working. I will focus on the identifiable and accountable process in which graduate students make themselves answerable to the requirements and expectations of their graduate programs and larger academic communities.

[Editor’s note]: Individual societies are at various stages the process of reviewing proposals and sending out acceptances for the various society conferences that make up the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences. Roz would still like to hear about IE related sessions at Congress. Please send the title of the paper, the name of the society and a short blurb to rstooke@uwo.ca.

August
IE Division and SSSP Annual Meeting
Social Justice Work
August 13 to 15, 2010
Sheraton Atlanta Hotel, Atlanta, GA
<http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/m/23>

Research in progress

Research Ethics Boards and School District Research Review Procedures: Exploring the Ethics Review of School-Based Research

Susan Tilley of Brock University is the principal investigator for a SSHRC funded study into the ethical review process. Dr. Tilley is currently exploring the role played by Ontario Faculties of Education in the ethical review process for school-based research and connections between the work of Research Ethics Boards (REBs) and school district Research Review Committees (RRCs). Through a series of qualitative interviews with faculty-based researchers and graduate students, she is also examining the relation between formal ethics review procedures and the ethical challenges researchers face when conducting school-based research. An additional goal of the study is to develop a network of school-based researchers (university, practicing teachers and others) to share knowledge and experience that advances understandings related to the application of ethical principles during the conduct of research. What does being ethical look like as research unfolds and issues arise?

George W. Smith graduate student paper competition

Deadline: May 1, 2010

The Institutional Ethnography Division solicits papers for its 2010 George W. Smith Graduate Student Paper Competition. Papers should advance institutional ethnography scholarship either methodologically or through a substantive contribution. Authors must be currently enrolled graduate students or have completed their degree since September 2009. Prizes include a \$100 cash award, registration fees and an opportunity to present the paper at the 2010 SSSP meetings, and a ticket to the SSSP awards banquet. Students who submit papers should be prepared to attend the conference. Send one copy each to Liza McCoy mccoy@ucalgary.ca and Ali Gabriel aligabriel@asu.edu. For an overview of institutional ethnography and the purposes of the IE Division, see <http://www.sssp1.org/index.cfm/pageid/1236>.

Dorothy E. Smith award for scholar-activism

Deadline: May 1, 2010

The Institutional Ethnography Division is pleased to solicit nominations for the 2010 Dorothy E. Smith Award for Scholar-Activism. This award recognizes the activities of an individual or group who has made substantial contributions to institutional ethnographic scholar-activism in either a single project or some longer trajectory of work. The contributions may involve IE research conducted and used for activist ends, or it may involve activist efforts which have drawn upon or contributed to IE scholarship. The award committee invites members of the division to send a one-page statement describing the contributions of the nominee to Tim Diamond tdiamond9@gmail.com.

The honoree will be recognized with a certificate at the Institutional Ethnography Division's business meeting during the SSSP Annual Meeting in Atlanta.

New members

Welcome to the following new members who joined the IE Division since the last edition of the newsletter.

Bernadette Barton
Craig Dale
Judson Everitt
Sarah Flogen
Jonathan Fox
David Frank

Barbara Gurr
Lauren Joseph
Stephanie Mazerolle
Ryan McNeil
Debra Osnowitz
Christine Patterson

Gwendolyn Purifoye
Daisy Reyes
Rebecca Rivera Maestre
Paula Ross