Doing Fieldwork

Ethnographic Methods for Research in Developing Countries and Beyond

WAYNE FIFE

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Wayne Fife

In Memoriam

This book is dedicated to the memory of my niece, Alana Fife (1981–2003). Lanny wanted to be a teacher and died in an accident while working as a volunteer in the country of Indonesia with orphans and street children on basic literacy and other life issues. She had strong convictions and she acted on them. Her courage challenges us to find our own convictions and apply them to our everyday lives.

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Contents

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List of Tables

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Believe me, I'm quite capable of making my own mistakes—none of these people had anything to do with any errors or omissions in my book.

one particularly gifted student was told over and over again by his teacher that his math answers were "wrong," because the student had worked out his own method for arriving at the correct final answer for the math problems and had not strictly followed the methods set out by the teacher on the board. The teacher often embarrassed this boy by referring to him as a "bighead" and quite forcibly erasing the answers from his sheet of paper and telling him to "do it again correctly."

It should be clear, then, that observations made in the school itself, such as those I made above regarding the militaristic nature of morning assembly, can be combined with observations inside of the classroom to form a more comprehensive analysis (in this case, one about the importance of the hidden curriculum of bodily and hence intellectual "discipline"). In a similar manner, the researcher also needs to move outside of the school to take broader educational contexts into account.

Outside of the School

Parent–Teacher and Other Extracurricular Venues

It is common to have meetings between teachers and parents, between teachers and teachers (e.g., from different schools), between Head Teachers (also known as Head Masters or Principals in some places) from different schools, between teachers and/or parents and school board members, and between all of the above and representatives of the provincial (state) or federal Ministry of Education and other similar offices. It is important to conduct participant-observation at as many of these venues as possible. Meetings may be about obvious educational issues, such as the annual parent–teacher assembly, or they may involve less formal events such as an Intra-School Sports Day or a day of Cultural Celebration. Wherever educators meet with other members of society, the researcher can learn something of value about educational issues and relate this new knowledge to what he or she has been learning about the more direct aspects of education as it occurs inside of classrooms and schools. Of course, similar relationships and meetings are equally relevant to a project when studying a hospital setting, a local small-business voluntary association, or an indigenous activist group. In this period of general observations, the focus is upon the kinds of relationships that exist between those involved at the most basic level of the local group (e.g., teachers and pupils or the members of a local naturalists club) and others who, though not involved with the group on a daily basis, remain critical to it.

As usual, a specific example will best illustrate the value of participant-observation involving nonschool educational activities (or other similar situations). This example comes from my attendance at the annual board of management (what might be called a school board in other countries) meeting between board members, teachers, and parents of the children attending Kimbe community school. The meeting took place on a Friday afternoon and involved between eighty and one hundred people—occurring in the open air of the schoolyard itself (in which parents and teachers sat on the ground, while the board members sat on chairs at a small table while the chairman used a microphone especially set up for the occasion). Among many other issues was a consideration of whether or not to

raise school fees (fees paid by parents for each child attending the community school) for the next year. One parent, dressed only in a ragged pair of shorts and no shirt, which was in sharp contrast to the "Sunday best" clothes worn by most of the other parents, stood up to speak on the issue.

> He tried to explain to the school board, using only Tok Pisin, that he had a number of children in school and lived in a village just outside of Kimbe. He did not have a job in the cash economy and it was hard for him to pay for school fees. Some parents objected to his use of Tok Pisin, and shouted out "use English, use English." He asked that the board consider cutting all school fees because parents like him, who had no job, couldn't afford to pay them. This was greeted with a lot of angry shouting by other parents: "Go back to the village!" "Bush Kanaka!" "How can we have a good school then?" He sat down quickly and looked quite shamed. The chairman who was running the meeting quickly passed onto voting whether or not to keep the fees as they were, or to raise them, ignoring the villager's suggestion to abolish them. The majority voted to keep them as they are for another year. (Board of Management Annual Meeting, Kimbe C.S.)

This and many other examples of hostility being expressed toward what are thought of as "village" values as opposed to "modern urban values" as they are displayed at public meetings can be compared quite easily to similar attitudes presented daily by school teachers inside of the classrooms of West New Britain concerning the supposed "backwardness" of rural peoples versus the "modern" outlook of urban groups. Often specific cultural groups, such as the Nakanai of West New Britain or the Simbu of the Highland areas of the country, are implied to be exemplars of "primitive, rural thinking." A few examples of how these dichotomies unfold in the classroom are as follows.

> The teachers sometimes begin class in the morning by asking the students if they've heard any interesting news items in the last few days. This morning a girl got up and gave the news that a Simbu had attacked and killed a boy with an axe at Mosa [an oil palm project area in the province]. The teacher responds by saying: "Yes, this is stupid! Only stupid primitive people do such things, hurt others. Is that good?" The class responds by shouting a very loud "No!" (News, Grade 4, Ewasse C.S.)

In another school, community life classes make use of kits that contain a series of pictures and category headings. Students are divided up into "ability groups," given a kit, and attempt to match pictures to category headings (e.g., Town Area, Coastal Area, Swampy Area, Mountain Area, etc.).

> The kids in all of the groups match the picture of a Simbu male to "Mountain Area," even though many Simbu live in Highland towns [i.e., Town Area] and in the flat coastal oil palm areas of West New Britain. They match a picture of a car, as well as a picture of a newer style house, to "Town Area." Even though some villagers who live along the rural north coast Kimbe to Bialla road area also have cars. The teacher and a group of students argue about where to put a picture of a large ship. Students say the "Coastal Area," but the teacher demands that it be placed under "Town Area." Town Area also has all of the factories, large stores, and banks put under it. (Community Life, Grade 4, Bialla C.S.)

Notice how what most Papua New Guineans view as the "good things" of "modern life" are generally associated with urban areas above, as well as how the Simbu (notoriously thought of by non-Simbu as a "primitive group") are resolutely associated with the rural mountain areas. Researchers who have done their homework should not be surprised in finding a strong split between the portrayal of "urban" versus "rural" life, as such a dichotomy would have been prefigured in a reading of the historical literature about the creation of Papua New Guinea as a nation and the emerging distinctions between what is increasingly assumed to be the good life of "modern, urban Papua New Guinea" versus the backward life of what is increasingly thought of as "traditional, primitive, rural Papua New Guinea." Given the vast majority of urban parents' attitudes, as they are displayed at such venues as board of management meetings and teacher/parent meetings, it is not surprising to see similar attitudes displayed by teachers inside of the classrooms. Both of these trends are, as noted above, linked with much larger historical patterns in Papua New Guinea. The importance of the urban versus rural (often couched as modern versus traditional) issue will be underlined as it reappears later in this book. Suffice to say here that it appeared constantly in both school and nonschool settings in West New Britain (see Fife 1992). One of the more extreme examples of it, and behavior that suggests how serious an issue this is in contemporary Papua New Guinea, came in the school fights between rival high school groups that often occurred after school dances. At one fight that I witnessed from a distance, a small group of local boys (who were actually from several different cultural groups who lived in and around the Kimbe area of the province) rushed another group of boys as the first group's leader shouted "Fucking Tolai, think they're so smart!" As the group of visiting high school students (who were also actually from a variety of cultural groups) from the neighboring province of East New Britain counterattacked the local group, one of their members shouted "Fucking Nakanai, know they're so stupid!" As a small number of teachers were nearby, this fight was quickly broken up—though many other similar fights have had much more destructive consequences. The Tolai people come from a historically missionized area of East New Britain and are associated by many Papua New Guineans with very successfully adapting to "modern urban ways" and to the cash economy. The Nakanai are in some ways seen as the local West New Britain equivalent of the notorious Highland Simbus (also known as Chimbus) and both groups are associated by many Papua New Guineas with being "backward, primitive, violent, lazy, traditional villagers." These are of course stereotypes, but they remain powerful symbols of contemporary life in the country and, as we saw above in the extra-school situation of a dance, become played out in the educational experience of West New Britain children.

Focused Methods of Observation

After researchers have completed the initial period of evidence collection and analysis, they will want to move into a more advanced period of focused participant-observation. This is most important in terms of the classroom observations,

though focused observation may also be used both in the school as a whole and in the content of other educational events as well. In this section of the chapter, I concentrate upon showing researchers ways to do focused note-taking for the classroom, as well as how to deal with the reliability issue in qualitative research through the use of counting schedules. These methods can be adapted by the researcher for focused note-taking on other occasions such as meetings (whether a parent–teacher event or a local political rally) as well.

Focused Note-Taking

Once a researcher has isolated what seems to be a widespread pattern of behavior he or she will wish to confirm the importance of this pattern through classroom observations that focus upon only one or two specific types of interaction at a time. This form of observation is done in order to obtain a much greater number of examples of similar forms of behavior so that the researcher may: (1) saturate this category of behavior by recording samples that show the widest possible variety of interactions that occur within that single category or pattern of action, (2) record behavior that originally appears to be similar but upon later analysis may turn out to be different from the "type" pattern itself, and (3) determine how frequent and widespread the behaviors are and in which contexts these patterns tend to appear in the classroom. The importance of this list of reasons becomes clearer when the reader reaches part C of the book, which deals with ethnographic analysis and writing. All the researcher needs to consider at this point of the book is the importance that focused observations have for the question of ethnographic reliability. The earlier form of participant-observation that I taught the reader contains no means by which to judge the relative importance of the specific patterns of interaction that s/he has isolated in the initial coding of her general ethnographic observations from the classroom. In order to provide yourself with such material, the researcher needs to begin by selecting a specific pattern of behavior that s/he wishes to investigate, decide upon a specific time period (e.g., two hours per classroom) for focused observations, and do these observations in every school within the study. I would also suggest that each pattern is checked for a variety of grades (e.g., grades two, four, and six) at each school and for a variety of subjects (e.g., Language Arts, Math, Community Studies). In my experience, patterns often vary between grade levels and between different subjects.

A specific example of focused observation will help explain this method in more detail and illustrate the advantages of it. Because it takes a considerable amount of time to do focused observations (so many hours in each classroom, of each selected grade, in every school) I often chose to focus upon two patterns or categories of classroom interactions at the same time, especially if I thought that these two patterns were closely related to each other. I, therefore, use this method of dual focusing as my example—although the individual researcher may choose to focus upon one pattern at a time in her own work.

In my initial coding of my general classroom observations, I created a category that I referred to as "hierarchy" and another category that I referred to as "authority."

Hierarchy, I defined as the overall effect of organizing education along a system of ranking that extended from the federal Minister of Education to the provincial and local authorities responsible for individual schools, to teachers, and finally to the students themselves. Schools in West New Britain, for example, are each divided into a hierarchy that includes the head teacher, senior teachers, junior teachers, and students. Students are themselves commonly further organized into "ability groups" within the classroom, each group having its own student leader.

Authority, in turn, refers to the assumed naturalness of this arrangement. In a particular situation, an individual will be given (or will take) the "authority" that is "due to" him or her because of the position s/he plays in the organization of schooling rather that because of any specific personal ability. In a sense, this is what Pierre Bourdieu and J.C. Passeron (1977) refer to as "pedagogic authority"— the unquestioned place or social role that receives respect due to its placement in the educational system.

How, then, did my two sample categories become manifested in the classroom? After I became aware of the categories through my initial analytical coding, I initiated a period of time at each of the schools in which I specifically looked for examples of "hierarchy" and "authority" in the classroom. Let's begin with an example from the category of hierarchy. Many classrooms in West New Britain community schools are decorated with magazine cutouts depicting scenes or items from the "modern world," such as automobiles, airplanes, professional soccer or rugby teams at play, and so forth. Along with these, it is also common to see visual representations of social organizations such as the educational system and the various levels of the government upon on the walls of the classrooms. For example:

> Classroom description. On the front wall there is a large blackboard, with ruled-off sections for "Teacher's Corner," "Notices" and "Policies." There is also a "Duty Roster" printed on cardboard paper taped up on the wall [for student duties]. A similar poster shows the "supervising Structure" of Kimbe Community School (from headmaster down to junior teacher). Class rules and rules for marking are on paper above the blackboard. [O]n the left hand side of the front wall there are the Provincial Governments and the Premier of each Province. Beside that, the teacher has put the members of the West New Britain Provincial Government, with cabinet ministers clearly indicated. Beside that, on the left wall, is another chart that outlines the structure of the WNB [West New Britain] government. (Grade 4 classroom, Kimbe C.S.)

These are common "decorations" in classrooms in West New Britain (for example, I recorded intricately detailed handmade charts of every level of the educational system in several classrooms during my focused observations—information that I overlooked before I began specifically searching for it). Other classrooms had posted all of the levels of government, from national to local levels, and the relative rank of office holders in each system. The overall collective message embedded in these practices seems to be quite simple: contemporary Papua New Guineans live in a county and in a social world that contains an intricate series of hierarchies and they therefore "need" to know how to recognize and deal with them.

These are not empty forms, put there solely to appease school inspectors or local government officials. My focused notes also include numerous examples of

students memorizing these lessons as a normal part of Community Studies. A surprising number of students were amazingly adept at reeling off the intricate authority structure of the local government, for example, often including the names of each office holder and his[2] place of origin on the island of New Britain.

The lesson of hierarchy, however, is most forcefully brought home to the students in the form of the everyday authority lessons taught in the hidden curriculum of classroom instruction. It is at this level that they most strongly experience the lessons of going along with, or fighting against, pedagogic authority. The most important lesson of course concerns the assumed relationship that is supposed to exist between the teacher and the students in the classroom. The fact that the teacher has a "right" to constantly correct both the pupil's work and the pupil's behaviour, while the student has no similar right in relation to the teacher, repeatedly reinforces the idea that an order-giving/order-taking hierarchy is part of the "natural order of things," as in the following two examples.

> The students are working in what is called the "Pre-Writing Activity Book," put out by the Department of Education. [T]he book begins by having the students trace pictures, then colour them in. Eventually, more abstract patterns are traced, moving left to right. And then eventually they move on to tracing out the alphabet. Today, the students are working on a pig. In response to several students, who finish early and ask: "Can we do more," the teacher says: "No, trace the pig, that's all." As the children are colouring the pigs in, the teacher stops and stands up from looking at a pupil's work and says in a loud voice to the entire class: "Eh, have you ever seen a red pig!" Students laugh, and several call out a loud "NO!" (Pre-Writing, Grade 1, Kimbe C. S.)

> She [the teacher] is teaching the class how to pronounce certain sounds: fun, run, sun, etc. She will say a word out loud, such as "run," and then ask "What sounds the same?" Individual children often call out a correct answer, but she persists in waiting for the person she herself chooses to answer "correctly." (English, Grade 2, Bialla C.S.)

My notes are full of examples of teachers refusing to accept any initiative for learning if it came from the pupils themselves. During one particularly memorable Math lesson at Kimbe community school, the children were learning how to do basic arithmetic by arranging sticks and stones according to a pattern laid out by the teacher on the floor. Each pattern represented a counting problem that the students had to solve. While walking around the room to check how her students were doing, the teacher came across a boy who was making up "extra" problems for himself with the sticks and stones. "Eh, what are you doing. These aren't the problems." The boy explained that he was finished and showed the teacher the neatly arranged sticks and stones that he had compiled for the assigned problems. "I'm finished," was all he said. "No, you're not," replied the teacher, while erasing the assigned problems by scattering them with his foot. "Now you have to do them again, bighead."

By this point, the potential researcher might be wondering "but, how does one know when to record information during focused observation?" That is, how can we possibly know ahead of time that a behavior is going to be an example of a specific category? The answer of course is that he or she could not possibly know the

significance of a set of behaviors ahead of time. Recording occurs in two ways. The first and most common method is to record the information immediately after observing the pattern of behavior—when it becomes obvious that this may well be an example of category X type of interaction. This is not as difficult as it sounds. With practice, most people can become quite adept at recording detailed descriptions, including direct quotations, only minutes after something occurs. Because the researcher is no longer recording almost everything that she notices in the classroom, as was done during the general observation period of the research, s/he is free to observe classroom behavior in a much more concentrated fashion. Details that went unrecorded because of the original emphasis upon writing while observing now come into a more complete relief through focused observation. The result is normally a more detailed set of evidence for eventual analytical use.

The second method for recording involves what we might think of as researcher's intuition. I found that after I began my focused observation on a specific pattern (or pair of patterns) for a while, I often intuitively knew as a pattern of interaction began to unfold that it might turn out to be something that I wished to record. In order to make use of a more focused method of recording, researchers need to learn to trust their own abilities to "recognize" significant evidence as it unfolds before them. A scholar who is uncomfortable with the idea that research intuition will often tell one when to begin writing notes during focused classroom observations need not use this method of recording and is of course free to remain solely with the first method of note-taking (what we might identify as the slightly-after-the-fact method). Was I always correct in my suppositions about what might prove to be "significant" information as it began to occur before me? No, of course not. But, I was correct the vast majority of the time—certainly often enough to come to trust my own judgment about when to begin recording during interactions as opposed to waiting for them to completely end before my note-taking began. The worst that can happen is that you spend some time recording material that is not strictly necessary. A few extra notes will not hurt you and you never know what interesting patterns you might reveal at a later period in these "useless" notes as you reread them.

Rather than offer more analysis here of the importance of the focused observation of such categories of behavior as "hierarchy" or "authority," I prefer at this point to move on to a consideration of counting schedules and the role that they can play in ensuring the reliable collection of ethnographic data. Much more is said about the analysis of focused information in chapter 8.

Counting Schedules (the Question of Reliability)

Focused note-taking is itself one way of checking how reliable one's initial analysis of educational patterns are during the opening stages of general participant-observation. It will soon become obvious when the researcher returns to each school to conduct focused note-taking about a specific pattern whether or not that behavior is as significant as s/he first thought. If the category of behavior only appears once or twice more then it is likely of no great significance; if it shows up

regularly over a wide variety of contexts then it is likely a pattern of major impor-tance. The art of analysis comes into play when patterns show up sometimes (but not other times), in some places (but not other places). When in doubt, keep recording and leave the analysis for later.

Even with focused note-taking I was not always satisfied that I was able to answer the question of whether a specific type or pattern of behavior was of true significance. This is a standard problem among qualitative researchers—it might be thought of as the reliability issue. How do we know when behavior forms a sig-nificant social or cultural pattern? We cannot fall back upon the same tools used by quantitative researchers (i.e., the use of statistical tests to tell us whether or not a pattern is statistically "significant"). However, we can follow the advice that the well known Canadian anthropologist Richard Salisbury often suggested to his listeners: "When in doubt, count." Counting does not of course provide us with the same kind of statistical assurance that some quantitative researchers obtain from their use of true statistical testing (counting, for example, does not imply random sampling), but it does provide the qualitative researcher with yet another check on their ethnographic reasoning and is therefore a useful (and easy to use) technique for qualitative research. As before, I of course illustrate the use of this technique with specific examples from my own work.

In order to try to confirm my suspicions about what I considered to be impor-tant patterns of ethnographic evidence that I had gathered during both general-ized and focused note-taking in Papua New Guinea, I created a technique that I refer to as "counting schedules." This method is quite time consuming and should only be used to answer important ethnographic questions. For example, I had three questions that I wanted to try and answer through the use of counting schedules. The first one involved the issue of whether there was a substantial dif-ference between the use of Tok Pisin by teachers in rural versus urban schools, and whether that difference changed from the lower to the higher grades. My confusion in this case stemmed from having witnessed very few instances of the use of Tok Pisin during my generalized period of note-taking. Focused note-taking did not turn up many more examples of teachers using the *lingua franca* Tok Pisin (as opposed to the official language of education in Papua New Guinea, English), which was officially forbidden for use inside of classrooms. I became puzzled by this, because my notes did not coincide with the information that I had previously been given by several very experienced field researchers (who had worked in both West New Britain and/or in other parts of the country). They assured me that Tok Pisin was used widely for instruction in rural classrooms. In order to try to answer the question of the rural versus urban use of Tok Pisin inside of classrooms, I selected one of the two urban schools (Kimbe) to compare to a sin-gle rural school (Ewasse—a collector school which serviced a cluster of several vil-lages located within a few hours walk of the town of Bialla). My plan was to sit for several hours in at least three grade levels for each of these two schools and sim-ply record (i.e., count) every use of Tok Pisin by either the teacher or the pupils. I soon abandoned this work, as it very quickly became apparent that Tok Pisin was seldom used by teachers or students at any grade level in either school. I decided to quit this work after spending two full days on it at each school, as it was

obvious that there was no need for further confirmation—a near zero count after approximately 12 hours of observation at each school in different grades was more than sufficient. Either my colleagues were mistaken in their observations at their own field sites (none had specifically conducted educational research at their locations), or my rural school was not sufficiently "rural" enough to register this language pattern. Negative confirmations are of course just as important as positive ones, and by sitting down and counting Tok Pisin language usage in these classrooms I was able to put to rest (at least as far as my own research area was concerned) an issue that was taken to be "common sense" by most noneducational ethnographic researchers who worked in that region.

Two other ethnographic questions for which I used counting schedules resulted in very positive results. One question involved the issue of student "discipline." I had recorded quite a few examples of disciplinary behavior in both my generalized and focused observation periods and was eager to answer the following two questions: (1) did students internalize these disciplinary actions in such a way that they did not "need" to be disciplined as frequently in the higher grades as in the lower grades in the community schools? and (2) were there any substantial differences between teachers in their preference for disciplining individual students versus the class as a whole? Both of these questions came from a careful reading and preliminary analysis of the results of the generalized and focused periods of participant observation. The third major issue that I wished to investigate involved questions about gender inequality in the classrooms. In particular, I wanted to know the following: (1) were there any differences between the ways male and female teachers interacted with their male and female students? (2) were there any differences in the ways boys and girls were treated during instruction in specific subject areas (e.g., Math versus English classes), and (3) was there a general pattern of favoring boys over girls in the classroom? Each of these issues turned up interesting patterns. The gender issue, however, involved somewhat complicated numerical "corrections" due to the different enrolment rates of boys and girls at each grade level and I would like to offer the reader a more straightforward example of how to construct a counting schedule here. I have, therefore, chosen to focus in this section on the example of constructing a counting schedule for the issue of disciplinary actions inside of classrooms (for the gender issue, see Fife 1992).

In order to answer the questions about discipline in the classroom that I asked above, I first had to define what "discipline" meant behaviorally so that I could count occurrences of it being applied. Because I had no video equipment with me, I decided to exclude the nuances of bodily corrections (e.g., a teacher subtly leaning into the back of a boy to signal him to stop talking) and instead concentrated on the much easier to record examples of verbal corrections. For my purposes, I defined what I came to call "disciplinary action" as any verbal command, instruction, or response by the teacher that indicated a negative evaluation of a student's or students' behaviors, which also in turn led to a relatively immediate response by the student or students (i.e., a response that indicated that an effective communication had taken place).

Given the nature of classes in community schools it was not possible to hold observation times perfectly even across schools or even across different grades in the same school. As you see in the tables below, I therefore chose to ensure that each grade in every school was observed for between seven and eight hours. This requires strictly recording the periods of observation within research notes. What keeping time does is allow the researcher to even out the differences in classroom observation times by dividing the disciplinary actions by the actual observation time in order to arrive at a figure that yields actions per hour for each classroom (see the tables 5.1 and 5.2). This makes these actions more comparable with each other, both inside of a school and across schools.

In order to actually do the counting, I simply sat in the back of each classroom with two sheets of paper. One sheet had the heading "Disciplinary Actions—Class," and the other the heading "Disciplinary actions—Pupil." I made single strokes for each action observed, arranging the strokes in groups of five for easy addition. As in the following example of twenty-three disciplinary actions involving individual students.

<div align="center">

Disciplinary Actions—Pupil

Time Observation Began: 1:15 p.m.   Time Observation Ended: 2:18 p.m.

Disciplinary Actions: IIIII   IIIII   IIIII   IIIII   III

</div>

In the table that lists results below, "class" refers to the number of times the class as a whole is disciplined (e.g., "There is too much noise in here!"); while

Table 5.1 Disciplinary Action in the Classroom

	Grade Two		Grade Four		Grade Six	
	Class	Pupil	Class	Pupil	Class	Pupil
Kimbe Community School						
English	39	31	11	10	10	12
Math	12	10	0	9	1	0
General	23	22	5	3	2	5
Total	74	63	16	22	13	17
Bialla Community School						
English	25	80	20	24	3	1
Math	11	28	3	4	0	2
General	7	32	4	8	1	1
Total	44	140	27	36	4	4
Ewasse Community School						
English	45	68	9	8	7	5
Math	6	13	0	4	2	3
General	7	8	2	1	1	1
Total	58	89	11	13	10	9

Table 5.2   Disciplinary Actions per Teaching Hour

	Total/Grade	Observation Hours	Actions/Hour
Kimbe C. S.			
Grade Two	137	7.6	18.0
Grade Four	38	7.8	4.9
Grade Six	30	7.9	3.8
Bialla C. S.			
Grade Two	184	7.8	23.6
Grade Four	63	7.3	8.6
Grade Six	8	7.3	1.1
Ewasse C. S.			
Grade Two	147	7.9	18.6
Grade Four	24	7.8	3.1
Grade Six	19	7.9	2.4

"pupil" refers to the number of times individual students are disciplined (e.g., "John, stop that right now!"). "English" refers to English Language Studies; "Math" to Mathematics; and "General" refers to General Studies (a mixture of community studies, history, and other forms of "social" studies at the various grades). "Total" of course refers to the total of all of the subjects together for that grade.

This table of results allows me to answer the second question that I asked myself earlier: Were there any substantial differences between teachers in their preference for disciplining individual students versus the class as a whole? The answer to this question is "yes," there were substantial differences between individual teachers in this regard. For example, the table shows that the grade two teacher at Bialla Community School strongly favored disciplining individual students rather than the class as a whole, the grade two teacher at Ewasse Communty School moderately favored disciplining individuals over the class, while the grade two teacher at Kimbe Community school actually slightly preferred to discipline the class as a whole over disciplining individuals. In this way, the researcher can make qualitative comparisons (remember, these are not "statistically valid" numbers, but rather further confirmation of the patterns of behavior found through ethnographic research) between the same teacher for different subjects, between teachers in different class grades within the same school, between teachers in the same grades in different schools, and so forth. What we are doing in this kind of analysis is looking for the ways that smaller patterns combine to form larger patterns. For example, how the category of "disciplinary actions" can be expanded beyond an individual teacher or student's configuration to form more collective configurations. Again, substantially more is said about building analytical levels in this fashion in chapter 8.

The next table combines information from table 5.1 in a new way in order to answer the first question about disciplinary actions asked earlier in this chapter: Do students internalize these disciplinary actions in such as way that they do not "need" to be disciplined as frequently in the higher grades as in the lower grades in the community schools? In table 5.2 "total/grade" equals the total number of

disciplinary actions by a teacher regardless of the subject these occurred in or whether or not they were directed at the class as a whole or to individual students; "observation hours" refers to the total number of hours for which I observed this particular teacher (grade); and "actions/hour" equals the total number of disciplinary actions divided by the observation hours in order to give the average number of actions per hour. Note that I decided not to divide "observation hours" up into both hours and minutes, but instead converted minutes into a percentage of an hour. For example, 7 hours and 54 minutes of observation would become 7.9 hrs. of observation time. Minutes are rounded to the nearest tenth (e.g. both 54 minutes and 55 minutes would come out as 9/10 of an hour when rounded). This is desirable to keep the figures relatively simple and permissible because absolute numbers have no special meaning in a counting schedule (remember, this is a qualitative check on ethnographic evidence, not a statistical test). What we are after here are relative numbers (i.e., numbers that can be compared to each other in a relative manner). Given the difficulty of gaining completely accurate figures for observation times (the most conscientious researcher is likely to be off a minute or two in recording his or her observation times) rounding numbers off likely gives just as accurate a picture of the situation as dividing hours into smaller fractions. For the same reasons, "actions/hour" are also rounded to the nearest tenth.

We can see from table 5.2 that the answer to the question posed above is "yes." Students as a whole do receive much less overt verbal "discipline" by their teachers as they move upward in the grades. This consistent and dramatic reduction in disciplinary actions would seem to indicate that students in some sense internalize this "discipline" in such a way that makes it less necessary for teachers to verbally discipline them in the higher grades. It can be suggested that it might not mean this at all, but could simply be an indicator that teachers (for whatever reason) lose interest in disciplining students in the higher grades. As will become clear in chapter 6, which deals with interviewing, teacher interviews indicate quite clearly that this is not the case and that grade six teachers are just as likely as the earlier grade teachers to feel that discipline is a primary consideration when evaluating student performances. In fact, teachers are often rewarded with assignments to teach grade six classes because of their reputations as disciplinarians. As usual, it is important to remember that it is this wider context of ethnographic knowledge that allows the researcher to carefully interpret results gained from such techniques as the use of a counting schedule, rather than something "inherent" in the data itself. This is equally true of information gathered through interviewing techniques.

Again I would like to remind the reader that, with a little imagination, the technique of counting schedules could be used to check ethnographic results in a wide variety of situations. In a study that involves tourists who visit national parks, for example, the researcher might find that his/her general fieldnotes seem to indicate that there are decided gender preferences in relation to specific hiking trails in the park. In order to check this observation it would be a relatively straightforward matter to set oneself up in a specific location along a trail and count the number of male and female (and perhaps adults versus children) who make us of a particular trail over a specific time period. These figures could then be compared for several

trails that the researcher has identified as being "different" from each other (e.g., relatively level versus climbing trails; forested versus coastal trails; scenically diverse versus homogeneous trails that have one spectacular sight at the end; and so forth). The results of these counting schedules would, in turn, give new insight into the gendered use of park trails and suggest specific questions that could be explored further with individual tourists during formal and informal interview situations—which leads us to the next chapter of this book.

6

Interviewing

The Basics of Interviewing

Along with an eye for observation, it is necessary for an ethnographic researcher to develop an ear for interviewing. It is probably easiest to divide interviews up into three main types: structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews, also commonly known as formal interviews, most often involve sitting down with an individual in order to elicit answers in such a manner as to render them translatable into numbers for the purpose of quantitative comparison (for good examples on how to do this see Weller 1998). As Fetterman (1989: 48) suggests, such interviews are "verbal approximations of a questionnaire with specific research goals." As such, fully structured interviews are not of any real interest to us here, as this book is concerned with the use of non-positivistic ethnographic research methods. I (along with most other ethnographers) do not agree with the falsely scientific agenda of forcing those with whom we do research to "answer" questions in such a way as to suggest that complex lives can be understood through a multiple choice questionnaire format (or its analog). Another way to think about this issue is to understand that the questions used during interviews are also sometimes divided between what are called closed-ended questions and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions give the person being interviewed only a very limited number of choices. An example of a closed-ended question might look like this: Which of the following best describes your reaction when a teacher openly corrects you in the classroom: (1) you become very uncomfortable, (2) you become somewhat uncomfortable, (3) it does not bother you at all. As you might expect, closed-ended questions are the kind of format that is normally employed in structured interview situations. As I suggested above, ethnographic researchers are seldom interested in limiting the responses of the people we do research with in this manner. Ours is the art of the open-ended interview, or of asking questions in such a fashion that the person being interviewed has the "right" to interpret the question and take it any place he or she pleases. It might even be suggested that if the researcher comes from a developed country such as Canada, the United States, or France, then the extensive use of

closed-ended, structured interviewing methods in a developing country is in some ways a replication of the colonial or oppressor/oppressed relationships of the past (for a parallel argument regarding the methods of school instruction, see Freire 1983). Setting oneself up as an "authority" and suggesting that all research needs to consist of is a few weeks of structured interviewing in which a captive set of interviewees (such as school teachers or students) merely need to say that "Yes, a, or b, or c, or d, or e response captures my feelings, thoughts, and experiences exactly," is surely little different than former colonial administrators saying: "Yes, we know what is best for the indigenous population—all they have to do is agree to abide by our rules." It hardly seems worth doing the study if we are already assuming that we know so much about the research situation before the actual fieldwork that we can reduce the potential results to a handful of possibilities in preformulated interview questions. In other words, if we are already so knowledgeable that we can reduce answers to virtually yes or no formats, then why are we spending all of this money and our precious time in research? There are exceptions to this situation, such as when the researcher wishes to gather a basic demographic profile of a village or community, or when s/he wishes to conduct a household survey (e.g., recording the basic membership of each household). In cases such as those, a closed-ended structured interview can be a useful research tool.

Generally though, ethnographic researchers will prefer to make use of open-ended semi-structured or unstructured interview methods. Taking each of these in turn, we can begin to explore how they can be used in qualitative research. Before we do so, however, I want to remind the reader that these research methods are to be taken as examples and suggestions, rather than as a set of objective rules that, if followed, automatically result in "good research." Robert Levy and Douglas Hollan suggest that we should think of both observation and interviewing as akin to engaging in the performing arts. The relationship between a researcher and a book of research methods is, according to them, rather like that between a musician and a musical score. "This means that none of what follows is to be followed mechanically. It is rather to be taken as a series of examples . . . [T]hese methodological prescriptions are no more mechanical and positivistic than is a musical score for skilled performers" (Levy and Hollan 1998: 335). This chapter (and this book) is an attempt at helping the researcher become a skilled performer. Much like a musician, this will require hours, weeks, months and even years of practice. Methods are simply a place to begin that practice.

Semi-Structured Interviewing

In a sense, semi-structured interviews are an attempt to capture something of the "control" of structured interviews without the need to use closed-ended questions or force people into the role of a "respondent" rather than that of an "initiator" of information. Typically, such interviews involve a mildly formal setting (in the sense that the interviewer and interviewee sit down together in a quiet place and attempt to work their way through a specific list of questions brought by the