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Abstract Fieldnotes and their processes tend to be implicit endeavours in the nursing and midwifery literature. The opportunity, therefore, to build an understanding of the social practice of this part of the research process is lost. This paper explores fieldnote generation in an ethnographic doctoral study examining the building of research capacity. Ethnographers claim that data is generated collaboratively. In this study, data was collected from two fields of ‘peers’. First data set contained 50 h of observation with doctoral research fellows, and the second data set contained 2 years diary recording of a nurse working in a national research funding agency. The paper shows that the levels of collaboration in constructing the ethnographic data can depend on the field itself, the stance of the researcher and the willingness of peer participants.

Key words collaboration; ethnography; fieldnotes; peers

Introduction

Agar (1996; p. 4) in his seminal work on ethnography states that data is ‘actively constructed over time in a collaborative way’. Thus, ethnographic data is studiously generated and not merely passively collected. For Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), the field researcher is the tool of data generation but such a statement oversimplifies a complex, purposive process and fails to acknowledge the input of others. This paper describes just such an aspect from a doctoral study examining the building of research capacity. The data generated for this study was with peers either as fellow doctoral students or work colleagues. This paper is an exploration of how fieldnotes for the study were generated, including a reflective account of constraint on their development and the differences stemming from differing ethnographic roles being adopted in the field.

Allen (2004) has called for systematic reports of fieldwork processes. The writing of fieldnotes is often an invisible part in fieldwork processes (Emerson, et al., 1995;

Montgomery and Bailey, 2007), yet these are the 'raison d'être' of the observer (Lofland, 2004). This paper aims to help address a gap in the nursing and midwifery literature whereby the 'explicit pragmatics' (Montgomery and Bailey, 2007; p. 66) of fieldnotes are explored. There is broad variation of what ethnographers regard as fieldnotes and their practices (Emerson, *et al.*, 2001) although similar qualities are found in the majority of descriptors used (Montgomery and Bailey, 2007). The term spans the single words written as reminders through the interpretative, analytical accounts. This paper reviews fieldnotes as the processes of 'raw' writings that occur in or immediately following the exit from a data gathering 'session'.

Context of skill development

Borbasi, *et al.* (2005) have noted the skills of observation and jotting notes that nurses, such as myself, bring to fieldwork develop from the experience of clinical practice. For nursing, a key competency is the skill of observation. This is usually focused on patients and their families and can include aspects such as body language, clinical condition and mood. Although acknowledging that research observation differs from clinical observation in its construction and organisation (Lawlor, 2003; Mulhall, 2003), experienced nurses, nevertheless, have a legacy of using the visual sense to interpret the world. A second legacy of my clinical practice was that of note taking. In practice, short-written notes were based on the lengthier, verbal 'handover' report of patients from the previous nursing shift. Such jottings consisted of both retrospective actions and planned activities personalised and written in shorthand by each nurse. Contents included key nursing tasks, important numerical data such as blood tests and forthcoming events such as ward admissions. These jottings were added to as the shift progressed and referred to when compiling the end-of-shift report. They formed an informal record by each individual nurse as opposed to the shared, formal documentation of patient care. They have been described and investigated as part of ward culture elsewhere (Hardy, *et al.*, 2000). Such a skill base was fundamental for developing further craft skills in the ethnographic field.

The study

The study explored the building of research capacity. A review of the literature had showed that research capacity is built on many different levels with funding being a key element (Condell and Begley, 2007). An opportunity arose to examine the phenomenon from both an individual and a policy perspective in the emerging academic discipline of nursing and midwifery within an Irish context (Treacy and Hyde, 2003). Degree level undergraduate registration education was only introduced nationally in 2002. Doctoral programmes are very recent additions (NCNM, 2006) and up to 2005 consisted of the traditional PhD with a substantive piece of research followed by a viva voce. In Ireland, employment in the higher educational institute (HEI) schools of nursing and midwifery has a minimum entry criterion of Masters level qualification (Begley, 2001; Condell, 2004) but a PhD is increasingly a requirement for tenure and promotion. A mapping exercise in 2003, conducted shortly before data collection for this study, showed 18 nurses and midwives employed in HEIs with PhDs and a further 36 registered on PhD programmes from a total nursing and midwifery staff of 267 (NCNM, 2006)

Ethical clearance was granted by the Faculty of Health Sciences Ethics Committee in the University of Dublin, Trinity College and the Health Research Board. The study

entailed tracking over a 29-month time frame, funded nurses or midwives, known as Clinical Nursing and Midwifery Fellows (CNMFs) who were carrying out individual PhD studies on a full-time basis, whilst simultaneously recording the work of the Nursing Research Advisor (NRA) in the funding agency, the HRB, Ireland. The latter role I held as a joint appointee with another national nursing agency. Hence, this study had two fields and the fieldnotes discussed in this paper were the 'writings produced in or in close proximity' (Emerson, et al., 2001; p 353) to these two researcher-constructed fields (Atkinson, 1992). I called them the Field of the Fellow and the Field of the Funder.

Fieldnote processes in the field of the fellow

In this field, the 16 fellows meeting the inclusion criteria of being awarded funding for PhD studies were invited to participate in the study. An additional fellow was invited but only on successful completion and award of their PhD as the researcher had acted as a co-supervisor to their work. So as to avoid coercion all fellows were initially presented with an information sheet detailing the role of the NRA. This outlined the lack of any formal relationship between the NRA and a fellow, with the grant being administered by a Grant Manager. The information sheet clearly stated that fellows were under no obligation to participate and that their decision either way had no impact on the terms and conditions of their award. In all, 16 of the 17 signed consent forms agreeing to participate. Following this, interviews and observations were individually negotiated during which ongoing informal consent was obtained. Even though it was a mixed gender group of participants, the researcher stance and strategies in this field were akin to feminist ethnography (Skeggs, 2001): minimising power differentials, giving opportunity to enhance participant control and reciprocating with information. Such a stance seemed 'natural' considering the shared, previous occupational socialisation and simultaneous doctoral student processes that the fellows and I were undergoing. Examples are contained in fieldnotes.

Following a second interview with the CNMFF^a, I was asked "How is your own work going?" I described the amount of data gathering that I had conducted. I also said laughingly "Of course, I've nothing written!" I meant by this the type of formal writing of chapters and sections. I felt safe in saying this as this particular CNMFF had described how writing had only commenced in the second half of the third year of the Fellowship.

Researcher Diary 11/1/05

It is 3 months since I've been in contact with this CNMF1 but that has been quite deliberate. I know that she has a transfer hurdle of MSc to PhD and I consciously was giving her the space for this. Her voice is a little quizzical at first until she knows it is me; then she replies warmly "How's it going?" I lament my perceived inability to recommence my own study after my holiday. (A conversation ensues on CNMF1 progress – content omitted here). We agree a day to meet and she laughingly closes the telephone call with "Now get off those ski slopes and get that brain going again, Sarah".

Researcher Diary 16/3/05

In the observation sessions, the role of the researcher varied on a continuum from complete observer to complete participant (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) depending on the observational situation. For example, I observed a fellow presenting at a national, multidisciplinary meeting which focused on a specific, highly

^a The code shows the stage at which the CNMF is at. F denotes finished, 1 denotes in first year, 2 in second and so on.

specialised area of clinical practice, I observed a meeting between a fellow and their supervisor, I assisted a fellow to set up a focus group and I was a volunteer for a fellow who was collecting scientific data from healthy human subjects. When observing was the main aspect of the ethnographic role, I managed to situate myself to ensure maximum visual range with minimum visibility to the fellow striving for unobtrusiveness and a reduction of any reactive effects to my presence as observer. A secondary issue was the comfort of writing whilst observing. The level of writing during observation varied depending on the situation. Sometimes fieldnotes could be written as I observed a fellow undertaking tasks such as research analysis. My notebook of preliminary fieldnotes show these accounts to be messy with symbols, abbreviated words and partial sentences, which whilst accessible to myself as the writer would not be readily available to other readers. These writings needed subsequent transcription into a full, comprehensive account. At other times such as when I was a full participant, jotting writing occurred immediately after the event and usually reflected the 'headnotes' I made during the participation. Jottings consisted of phrases or snatches of conversation, types of activity or behaviour undertaken, brief descriptions of settings or anything that I thought would act as an 'aide memoire' in writing up the fieldnote and were similar in format to those used in practice contexts. The value of generating jottings and not simply relying on frail headnotes was subsequently shown to me.

How fragile getting data can become. I spent 4.5 hours yesterday with a Fellow in the Fellow's own home... (content omitted) Having sat with my back to the window for most of the afternoon, I had not noticed the forecasted storm had arrived. We both leave the house at the same time as the CNMF is meeting a friend for dinner. I run to my car to write some jottings from the encounter to discover a car with no power! I sit in the dark and cold with the wind and rain raging around me waiting for rescue. By the time this happens with a jump lead start, a drive through long queues of traffic trying to avoid floods and I get home, warmed up and eat something, the intended jottings are gone! I sit and try and recall the 'head notes' of snatched phrases from after the interview that I still remembered on the run to the car but seem to have vanished in the panic of the situation but to no avail... Today as I'm involved in something else, I remember what it is I wanted to record. This time leaving nothing to chance I wrote a note to myself on a post-it.

F2/C/28/10

Fieldnote content included issues such as the environment; the presentation of the fellow with regard to dress, stance, use of title etc.; interactions between the fellow and others and snatches of dialogue. Fieldnotes cannot record all that happens and the ethnographer selects aspects to be recorded. In these sessions, I particularly focused on issues of identity construction, relationships with others, spatiality and temporality and noting anything that I thought unusual. Aware that my observational accounts represented what I saw during the session, my initial response to the fieldnote completion was to label and store the account. However, I found that most of the fellows frequently asked what I had observed. Finding that a verbal report failed to satisfy one fellow, I started to email the observational accounts to the individual fellows before storing with the proviso that this was a record of what I had seen and was, therefore, not for editing beyond changing items for confidentiality purposes. However, I welcomed comments from the fellows. In the main, the fellows expressed surprise at the level of detail recorded and the lack of their own knowledge in relation to some of this detail. For example, one fellow had not noticed that during preliminary state-

ments preceding her presentation at a multidisciplinary conference that she was referred to by the chair by first name only, whereas medical practitioners were afforded their professional titles and surnames throughout. In some cases, additional comments of non-observable issues such as feelings were made by the Fellows. Such comments were kept as italics in the account to differentiate the statements from my own.

There were two ways in which the fellows collaborated in the generation of observational fieldnotes for this field of the study. The first was the identification of sessions to be observed. Although the researcher developed a context analysis grid following Schwartzman's (1993) outline, to identify the potential activities for purposive sampling in the study, in this field, fellows maintained a 'gatekeeping' role to what was observed. Individual fellows differed in their preferred method of data generation with some agreeing to interviews and no observation at all; others were more open to the experience. Requests for observing particular events were refused at times, for example, on the grounds of anticipating nervousness in a particular situation without added pressures. Thus, control of access to data collection was with the fellow and not the researcher, thereby reducing any potential coercion. Nevertheless, more than 50 h of observation in 15 different sessions over 2 years involving seven fellows was achieved in this field. The second way in which fellows assisted in the generation of fieldnotes was in reading them and making additions. This allowed opportunity for different perspectives to be included explicitly and richer detail to be generated. Fellows could also see that issues in the data requiring confidentiality and anonymity were being managed by the researcher. Participation in the study allowed for reciprocal benefits as noted in this extract and added to a sense of collaboration in this field.

I'm attending a conference and go along to listen to a CNMFF present their work. There has been no negotiation of data collection and I'm present solely because I'm interested in how the study findings will be presented. During the presentation, the CNMFF explains the mechanisms which helped develop their thinking as the study progressed. Within this slide is acknowledgement of the interview and observation transcripts that we generated for my study. I inform the CNMFF afterwards that I will be making a note of this for my own work with their consent, which was given.

Researcher Diary 9/11/06

Fieldnote processes in the field of the funder

Although I had formerly worked in hospitals and academic settings, a health research funding agency was a new culture for me, 2 years previously when I took the role of NRA. This was a unique and privileged joint appointment, and my commitment to the HRB was part-time and flexible. Emerson, et al. (1995) suggest that initial impressions of the setting are made to allow the ethnographer 'to get started in a setting that may seem overwhelming' (p. 26), so first, I wrote of my initial experience in the organisation. Although I would not claim this was comprehensive with some initial impressions missing, it did allow a certain contextualising for what was to follow and describing my sensitivities to patterns and dissonance, which could become blunted over time. Details such as the physical environment were recorded. Issues of difference between the nursing culture and the health research culture were recorded, for example, the start time of the working day. After formal organisation ethical clearance and informal consent of management and my colleagues, I was ready to start

recording fieldnotes in the Field of the Funder. The researcher stance and method of recording fieldnotes reflected an 'insider researcher' aspect of this field. Such positioning has been used elsewhere with nurses conducting inquiries in their own work settings. (Cudmore and Sondermeyer, 2007; Simmons, 2007)

In this field, the researcher stance differed from that of the Field of the Fellow. Aware that the field was a temporal one whereby I undertake a dual role of researcher in addition to my role as worker over a set timeframe, and that my relationship with work colleagues had commenced and would continue outside of this temporary frame of data collection, I strove to minimise the disruption of my work relationship with them. I was eager to show that the research did not impact on how I conducted the role of NRA, and I did this by ensuring that my NRA tasks took precedent. I was also sensitive to the comfortableness of my work colleague peers, who whilst somewhat used to transient summer students undertaking research projects, having a researcher exploring an aspect of unit work in their midst was a new experience. In addition, there were two further issues which influenced the researcher stance. I was aware that my colleagues' consent to participate was initially given collectively at a team meeting and was superseded by organisational ethical clearance, thus, having the potential to influence their seeming willingness. Subsequently, as individuals joined the team I informed them of the study and sought verbal consent. This occurred on five separate occasions. In any subsequent conversations, I emphasised the centrality of the NRA role for generating the data in congruence with the overall study objectives. I gave intermittent updates of my progress at team meetings, and my colleagues did make occasional informal enquires as to my progress during tea breaks. Aware of potential coerciveness, on all occasions I offered the opportunity to further discuss the study, address individual anxieties or give greater clarification but this was never sought. In the main, my colleagues displayed ambivalence, if not disinterest as shown in the extract below.

I catch the new staff member in an office on her own. This is only the second day that I've been in the HRB since she started in her job. I tell her about the study and how confidentiality is managed and that I'm available for questions. She is wishing me the best of luck when someone walks into the office and the conversation ends. However, although there were no indicators from her facial expression or body language that indicated anxiety, on reflection, I consider that I've not informed her as fully about the study as my other colleagues and I plan to remedy this in the near future. (9/12/04) I follow-up with my colleague by asking if she needs more information or clarification on my study but she has no questions and doesn't seem particularly interested...

Researcher Diary 2/12/04

The second issue was the meaning of a PhD. Within the organisation, a PhD was a highly contentious eligibility criterion for promotion to management grades. This meant that I was potentially a future competitive threat to colleagues who might seek promotion. Being sensitive to these issues in this particular field, meant that the researcher stance I adopted necessitated discretion regarding when and how I recorded the fieldnotes.

The role of the NRA itself, I felt was perceived as somewhat unknown to my work colleagues. I was the only professional advisor in the organisation and my flexible, part-time joint appointment status was somewhat ambiguous. So whilst I was legitimately an organisational member and so an 'insider', the role of NRA was both formally and informally treated as marginal in the organisation. The role had both strategic and operational elements and so differed to that of my 'peer' colleagues many of

whose positions had operational elements only. An organisational map showed reporting relationships of the NRA being a dotted as opposed to the solid line of others. This positioning of the role of NRA did not allow a 'going native' development to occur rather it gave rise to the impression and feeling of being a 'visitor', although perhaps justifiably so at times. This was further enhanced by colleagues asking of 'news from the world outside' as if the NRA was a bridge with elsewhere. The following field notes show this phenomenon and my reaction to the tensions it produced.

There is a certain sense of being a visitor to the organisation. Comments such as 'what brings you over to visit us?' were regular in the last two years. After approximately 18 months in the organisation and repeated comments on my 'visits', I challenged one particular staff member with the statement 'I work here'. What may have been a personal joke for one person however, underlined a perception that others may also have had. For example, on two of the past three partnership days^b management staff have asked would I be joining the activities and another staff member commented 'oh you're here then' when I joined in a Freedom of Information session. It appears as if no one assumes my engagement with the practices of the organisation.

NRA Diary – First Impressions

I'm at my desk by 8.45 and reading emails. I have quite a list of tasks to achieve today. My new office mate arrives just after 9.00 and approximately 30 min later another colleague steps into the office on her way up the stairs. "We haven't seen you in a while" she remarks when she sees me. "I was here last week" I reply "though it may have been towards the start of the week". "It seems ages ago" is her response.

NRA Diary 3/3/05

Overall, the NRA role gave a feeling of being a border inhabitant rather than a fully embedded indigenous member. My somewhat limited previous exposure to the role meant that a high degree of 'strangeness' to the organisational culture remained at the start of the data collection. The part-time nature of the role in addition to the keeping of a concomitant researcher diary for descriptive and reflexive accounts of the researcher role as opposed to participant fieldnotes assisted in maintaining analytical distance throughout the data collection period.

During the 2 years of recording NRA activities, the process of writing fieldnotes acted as self-consciousness of the researcher stance and, for that timeframe, positioned me in the dual role. However, as previously stated, I privileged the NRA role over the researcher role, and unlike nurse researchers in the practice settings (Borbasi, 1994; Beale and Wilkes, 2001; Colbourne and Sque, 2004; Bailey, 2007) I experienced little blurring of boundaries. My management of the writing of field notes reflected the role I adopted in this field thus preventing reactivity and any change in practices with those I worked with. In this field, writing always commenced with jottings which were recorded on 'post-its' or scrap paper and removed from the setting for writing up into field-notes. These jottings were made covertly and usually in the privacy of my own office. Occasionally, they were made under the guise of writing for another purpose, for example, making notes at a meeting. The implication of optimal participation is that writing may be suspended (Emerson, et al., 1995); therefore, I performed my NRA role and recorded only jottings simultaneously. As before, the jottings were embarrassingly scruffy with untidy writing, idiosyncratic shorthand

^b Partnership day is an annual event where management and staff spend a half day together discussing issues within the organisation. This is then followed in the evening by a social event.

and personal abbreviations which subsequently acted as 'mnemonic devices' (Fetterman, 1998; p. 114).

Again fieldnotes were developed from the jottings and made fairly contemporaneously with the observations. Fieldnotes were rarely written within the work setting itself, but this did occur on a very small number of occasions when the notes were saved to a floppy disc only and not held in the work setting. Routinely, the fieldnotes were usually written in the researcher's own home on return from the day's work in the setting, this being the most practical option (Fetterman, 1998). The interval between jottings and writing fieldnotes varied from 3 h to 3 days, but they were developed as soon as possible so as to capture the sharpness of the observation and not lose the 'rich, nuanced detail' (Emerson, *et al.*, 1995; p 40). Long-interim periods (more than 8 h) between leaving the field and developing the fieldnotes from jottings were rare but due to a variety of reasons such as long and late work hours or maximising participation at conferences or HRB social events. In this study, I made the conscious decision to write when less tired as advised by Emerson, *et al.* (1995). After 12 months and based on the burden of recording, I moved from recording the mundane 'basic routines and daily rhythms' (Emerson, *et al.*, 1995: p40) or the minutiae of the role of the NRA within the HRB to recording events of significance only. I found this change remarkable; especially, the release from feeling that I had to live my working day twice over as I replayed in my head scenes of social interactions from that working day. After 24 months, I stopped recording fieldnotes in this field.

These fieldnotes were a chronological narrative with the content including issues such as the use of space; general communication patterns, my work and self-presentation as NRA; my interactions with work colleagues and others and snatches of dialogue related to nursing and its relationship within health research. Also, there were topics to be followed up and my reactions and feelings about particular events. Thus, the fieldnotes contained process memos, asides and commentary as well as description (Emerson, *et al.*, 1995). For example:

I have planned to publicise the Basic Guide's existence in a professional newsletter that is posted to every nurse and midwife on the Live Register. This will supplement a piece I wrote on writing good grant applications which is due to be published shortly in the same newsletter. Other HRB staff have had an opportunity to make comments and the document has now been finalised incorporating their points. It will be made available on the HRB website as well. This is an example of how a 'new kid on the block' can identify opportunities for enhancing services and challenge the notion of familiarity that members of an organisation can develop. (example; an aside)
NRA Diary (1/09/04)

Advice to a nurse considering application to the HRB. A personal connection is made as the nurse mentioned a previous work colleague of mine with whom she now works and who advised her to talk to me. 'Making connections' is important to the Irish and nurses and midwives are no different. The arena of potential and real researchers in nursing and midwifery is very small which makes the 'making connection' process even easier. It may also act as a potential barrier, however, as ex-colleagues may not feel comfortable in seeking my advice. (example; a commentary)

NRA Diary 2/9/04

The style of fieldnote was somewhat 'distant', however, as if I was observing rather than participating. On reflection this was because of an issue of constraint on fieldnote development. The team was small, consisting of 9–10 people over the 24 months, one of whom was male. To ensure confidentiality, I wrote the fieldnotes from the outset as gender neutral. I did not use individuals' names and tried where possible to avoid using role titles which would act as identifiers. Writing in this way

meant that any of this anonymous data could be presented in the final ethnography. Within this field, the level of collaboration of data generation was low resulting in mainly author privileged fieldnotes that gave primacy to the researcher's own voice.

Discussion

The generation of data as a collaborative ethnographic venture is dependent on a number of issues. These are the field itself, the stance of the researcher and the willingness of participants. In this study and over time, the data was actively constructed as Agar (1996) propounds. However, the two fields and the relationships within them varied enormously and impacted directly on the level of collaboration. In addition, neither field in which the data was generated had a fixed spatial location. The NRA diary described my role outside the physical HRB building but still as a representative of the organisation and observing fellows occurred in multiple locations; thus, the fields were constructed social entities and not simple bounded physical spaces.

In the Field of the Funder, a number of constraints led to author privileged fieldnotes. Collaboration did not develop following a slight sceptic, dismissive tone of voice being used by one influential colleague on two initial occasions when my diary was mentioned thus leading me to assume an unvoiced unease stemming from non-familiarity with my data collection methods. I made a decision that trying to convince my 'positivist' colleagues of the merits and value of collaboration for fieldnote writing on top of their everyday work would have been a battle too far! Although one of my colleagues did show the potential for engagement as outlined in this extract, this occurred some 15 months into data collection, and I deemed it too late into the fieldwork to change processes.

A new staff member has commenced work almost eight weeks ago. My presence in the office has been infrequent because of regional meetings and anytime that I've been in the office I have not managed to see her on her own to explain about my research. I was in the HRB last Friday and went round all the offices to say hello. Another colleague asked me how my research was going in front of the new staff member. I replied honestly but thought afterwards of the fact that I had not informed the new staff member. The next working day I email her with apologies and a short explanation. I asked to meet her in the near future to give her more detail. She replies promptly with enthusiasm to learn more about the project as it sounds "so interesting and so different" from her own scientific background.

Researcher Diary 7/11/05

Regardless of the lack of active collaboration on fieldnote writing, these peers were part and parcel of some of the transactional exchanges that occur in the social field of the Funder and so were passive partners in fieldnote generation. Fieldnotes from this field, though detailed, were constrained by confidentiality issues and lacked a sharpness of presence, though not the essence of the experience. They were a solo perspective of happenings and thus a filtered version of events (Emerson, *et al.*, 2001).

In contrast, for the field of the fellow there was a level of comfortableness for me as researcher in a milieu of peer researchers of the same discipline. Similar experiences between me and the participants were recorded. For example, the following quote of participant observation by a Fellow mirrored my own feelings recorded in my researcher diary.

Em... I felt uncomfortable initially because I felt, you know, I felt like a little bit of a spy really and that there might be concerns about you eh... revealing bad practices and so on and so forth...

CNMFF/I/21/1

A team meeting allows me to scribble jottings in the guise of recording notes of the information we are being told. At times this dual role (of worker and researcher) feels like being a spy in the camp and I feel quite tense about it! I try to hold over in my head certain words that folk say in the discussions and write them down at what seems a 'natural' time or when others are also making notes. I think I am extra sensitive to how others perceive this study of mine and hope that I relax more into the combined role.

Researcher Diary 12/11/04

Similar previous professional socialisation and treading the same path of doctoral studies, albeit at different paces, lent itself to immediate rapport with most participants. Individual negotiation of data collection and varying levels of involvement in fieldnote writing gave rise to a collaborative effort for the generation of rich and detailed fieldnotes, many incorporating dual perspectives.

Conclusion

Fieldnotes are a neglected aspect of the ethnographic nursing literature (Mulhall, 2003) and so warrant more attention such as in this endeavour. This paper has shown that as fields are constructed entities they 'shape and constrain the writing of fieldnotes' (Emerson, *et al.*, 2001; p. 354). This in turn impacts on the level of collaboration achieved between researcher and participant in ethnographic data generation. This paper has shown that fieldnotes are produced from complex, purposive processes with varying levels of collaboration depending on the field itself, the stance of the researcher and the willingness of participants. Ethnographers of nursing or midwifery should consider making such issues explicit so as to aid our understanding of fieldwork processes and aid reflexivity of the social practice of research processes.

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