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Book Review: Research Practice for Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Methods and Lived Cultures

Liam French

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BOOK REVIEWS

Research Practice for Cultural Studies: Ethnographic Methods and Lived Cultures by Ann Gray. London: SAGE, 2003. ISBN 0–7619–5175–X. 208 pp. £11.99.

This is an excellent textbook and a valuable addition to the growing field of ‘how to’ books providing advice and guidance for practitioners and students wishing to undertake fieldwork of an ethnographic nature. Gray’s familiarity with the methodological terrain is clearly apparent and her experiences as both researcher and tutor enable her to address the sort of problems that students and researchers are likely to encounter in setting up their own fieldwork projects for either undergraduate or postgraduate research. This book can also serve as an effective resource for lecturers delivering courses or modules concerned with research methods across a range of disciplines. Media, sociology and cultural studies practitioners, in particular, will find this book invaluable.

The book is divided into two sections; Part One (Ethnographic Methods) consists of four chapters which provide a coherent and succinct overview of ethnography and its place within cultural studies as a research method. Core issues and debates are neatly addressed along with a critique of ethnographic methods. Key texts and some classic studies are signposted throughout and recommended for further reading.

Issues concerning methodology, reflexivity, epistemology, validity, ethics and the politics of research – all vital to an understanding of ethnography and empirical research more generally – are addressed in an easily digestible and refreshingly jargon-free manner. Part Two (The Research Process) contains six chapters that build on the themes and concerns of the first section but provide in-depth and practical advice on how to actually undertake research and the various stages of the research process from design and implementation through to writing up.

Engaging and easily readable throughout, this book works on a number of levels in the sense that both lecturers and students will find material of value in it. Whether you are a student or researcher planning to undertake fieldwork in the near future, or a lecturer involved in delivering courses or modules on research methods and methodology, this book deserves to be high on your reading list.

LIAM FRENCH

The College of Saint Mark and Saint John, Plymouth