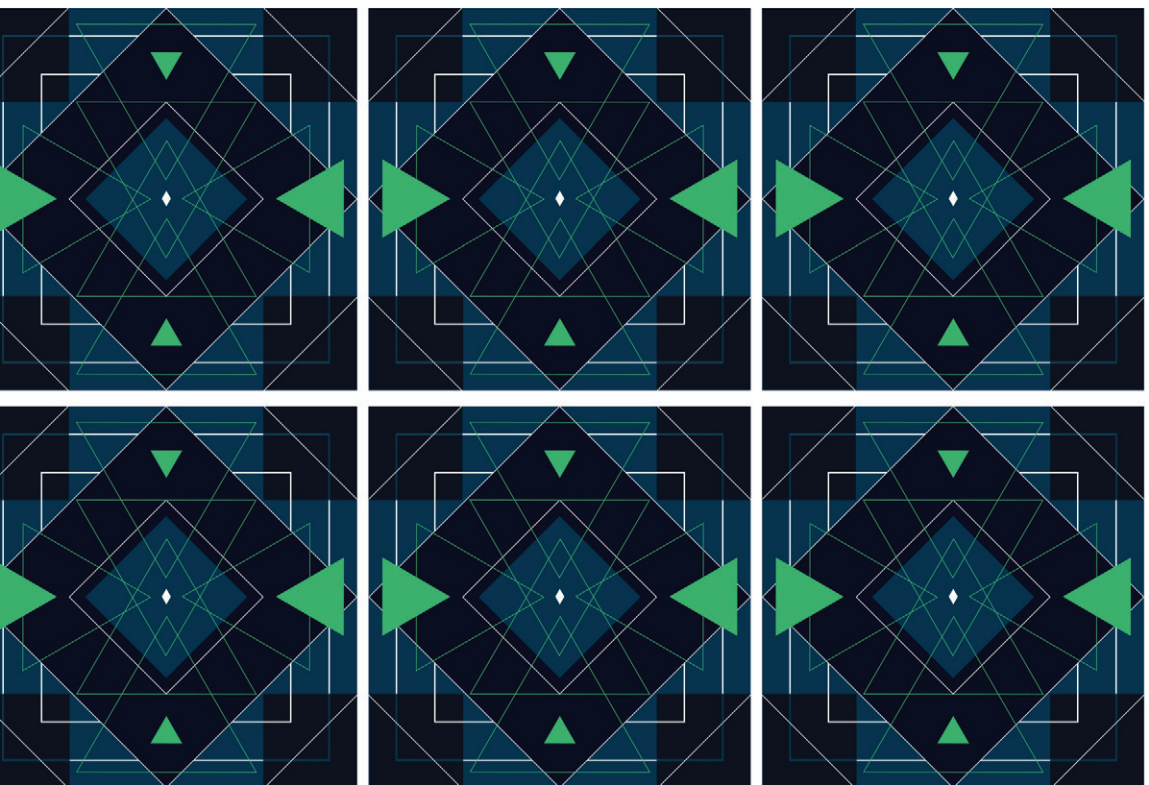


STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

# Theories Bridging Ethnography and Evaluation

Making Transformative, Intersectional,  
and Comparative Connections



EDITED BY

Melissa Rae Goodnight  
and Rodney Hopson

# **Theories Bridging Ethnography and Evaluation**

The fusion of ethnography and evaluation addresses a long-standing need to integrate issues of culture in a systematic way into evaluation theory and practice. This fusion strengthens evaluators' potential to contribute to the transformation of education programs, systems, and policies toward increased justice and cultural responsiveness. The focus on intersectionality, international, and national understandings of ethnography's contribution to a more culturally responsive approach to evaluation provides the reader with an expansive opportunity to uncover oppressive cultural beliefs and norms, challenge asymmetric power structures, and address issues of discrimination and injustice in pursuit of positive changes in schools. The contributing authors share their personal and professional experiences in ways that make the cost of failure to transform educational systems more tangible and heartrending.

—*Donna M Mertens, Professor Emeritus,*  
**Gallaudet University**

This collection of empirical and methodological challenges to ethnography and evaluation will push researchers and systems of evaluation to rethink harmful, generalized, and overly static modes of evaluation. This volume shows the importance of centering community knowledge, local expertise, and more nuanced approaches to evaluation and ethnography. This is a must-read for critical ethnographers and those committed to community-rooted, sustainable, and critical evaluation practices in education.

—*Professor Jennifer Keys Adair,*  
**The University of Texas at Austin, USA**

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# Theories Bridging Ethnography and Evaluation: Making Transformative, Intersectional, and Comparative Connections

EDITED BY

**MELISSA RAE GOODNIGHT**

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AND

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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## About the Editors

**Melissa Rae Goodnight**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in Educational Psychology at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign with appointments in Global Studies and the Department of Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership. Additionally, Goodnight is a faculty affiliate of the Center for Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA). Her transnational scholarship and teaching explore the synthesis of three areas: (1) research, monitoring, and evaluation, (2) education for communities who are stigmatized, underserved, or historically marginalized, and (3) social justice theorizing that draws on feminist, culturally responsive, anti-racist, and postcolonial concepts. Goodnight is particularly interested in qualitative methodologies and issues of equity, validity, and representation social inquiry. Her publications include a 2023 article in the *American Journal of Evaluation* on researching the influence of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in India's education system; a 2022 article in the *International Journal of Educational Development* on the origins, goals, and political implications of India's Annual Status of Education Report, a groundbreaking citizen-engaged M&E effort; and, a 2017 article on the translation of critical race theory for analyzing inequity and discrimination in the Indian school system. Goodnight currently serves as Associate Editor for the *American Journal of Evaluation*. In 2014, she conducted dissertation fieldwork in India as a Fulbright-Nehru student researcher funded by the governments of India and the United States. Previously, Goodnight served as a United States Peace Corps Volunteer in Kingston, Jamaica where she was an HIV/AIDS and sexual health educator and counselor. She received a Master's in Social and Cultural Foundations of Education from DePaul University and a doctorate in education from the University of California Los Angeles with concentrations in comparative education and evaluation.

**Rodney Hopson**, PhD, is an accomplished scholar, academic leader and thought partner who serves as a Senior Associate Dean and Professor, School of Education. Prior to his dean roles at American University, Hopson served as a Professor of Evaluation in the Department of Educational Psychology, College of Education, with appointments in the Department of Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership and the Center of African Studies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Hopson received his doctorate from the Curry School of Education, University of Virginia, with major concentrations in educational evaluation, anthropology, and policy, and sociolinguistics. He was

awarded a National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIH) postdoctoral fellowship at the Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University. Hopson is an American Educational Research Association (AERA) Fellow and has been affiliated previously in the Faculty of Education, University of Namibia as a JW Fulbright Scholar and the Centre of African Studies, Cambridge University (UK). Currently, he is affiliated with the School of Health, Victoria University-Wellington (Aotearoa New Zealand), is the Editor of the *Studies in Educational Ethnography* Book Series, Emerald Publishers, and Co-Editor of *Educational Policy as/in Practice: Critical Cultural Studies*, Information Age Book Series. Additionally, he serves as the co-Editor of *American Journal of Evaluation*. Central to Hopson's research agenda over the last 25 years are questions that (1) analyze and address the differential impact of education and schooling on marginalized and underrepresented groups in diverse global nation states and (2) seek solutions to social and educational conditions in the form of alternative paradigms, epistemologies, and methods for the way the oppressed and marginalized succeed and thrive despite circumstances and opportunities that suggest otherwise. He has coauthored and coedited 10 books, including *Culturally Responsive Inquiry in Education: Improving Research, Evaluation, and Assessment* (Harvard Education Press, 2022), *Tackling Wicked Problems in Complex Ecologies: The Role of Evaluation* (Stanford University Press, 2018), *New Directions in Educational Ethnography: Shifts, Problems, Reconstruction* (Emerald, 2016), *Power, Voice, and the Public Good: Schooling and Education in Global Societies* (Elsevier, 2008), and others.

## About the Contributors

**Sharon Brisolara**, PhD, is an evaluator, educator, writer, organizational coach, and Chief Executive of Inquiry That Matters. She has engaged as program evaluator with primarily rural-serving community-based organizations in the United States, Latin America, and Africa, building organizational capacity to gather and use data for improvement and in service of equitable outcomes and to design for inclusion, belonging, and equity. She has, with others, developed Feminist Evaluation as an evaluation model (*Feminist Evaluation and Research Theory and Practice*, 2014) and written on participatory and collaborative forms of inquiry. She earned her doctorate from Cornell University in Program Evaluation and Planning with concentrations in Rural Sociology and City and Regional Planning. She currently lives in Far Northern California.

**Cory A. Buckband**, PhD, is a 2024 graduate of the Educational Policy and Evaluation program in the Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College at Arizona State University. His research interests bring together critical interdisciplinary perspectives on language, race, class, identity, and education, applied to study multilingual education and multilingualism, educational language policy, and parent/family engagement. Cory is also multilingual, and his political stance toward heritage language education has led him to relearn Yiddish, his family's minoritized heritage language. For his dissertation, Cory conducted a critical ethnographic study in collaboration with a suburban charter elementary school in Arizona that uses a trilingual immersion model with Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, and English as languages of instruction. Findings from this yearlong study meaningfully and vividly illuminate the impacts of education and language policies on the school's creation and implementation, as well as the multilingual identity development of students and teachers from racially and linguistically minoritized backgrounds. Cory frequently writes about critical ethnography and ethnographic research methodologies from anthropological and critical educational standpoints, and he has published research on the application of critical ethnography in virtual schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. At Arizona State University, Cory taught undergraduate and graduate-level courses on family/community engagement and educational language policy to preservice and in-service bilingual elementary teachers and school administrators. Raised in Van Nuys, Los Angeles, California by a single mother, Cory firmly grounds his anti-racist and anti-colonial orientation to research and evaluation within the Jewish principles of Tzedek (Justice) and Tikkun Olam (Healing the world).

**Tatiana E. Bustos**, PhD, MA, MS, is a community psychologist, researcher, and evaluator in the Transformative Research Unit for Equity (TRUE) at RTI International. Dr. Bustos applies participatory and equitable research and evaluation methodologies to design and implement projects that promote the inherent strengths, capacities, and opportunities of communities for social change. In TRUE, she is also an instructor for professional development trainings in RTI's Equity Centered Methodology Framework, Participatory Methods, and Establishing Authentic Community Partnerships. In her capacity as a researcher, her work aims to bridge science with practice for the benefit of enhancing the engagement of communities throughout research and evaluation projects, programs, and initiatives. She has authored several blogs and peer reviewed publications on community partnerships, new directions for partnership engagement in evaluation, and practical ways to conduct equity-centered evaluations in service of racial equity. These publications include: "Evaluation Engagement: Historical Perspectives and New Directions with Community-Based Participatory Research Principles," "Good Solid Relationships Make Programs Work': A Mixed Methods Assessment of Determinants to Community Academic Partnerships in Flint, MI," and "'We Bounce Back From the Worst of the Worst': Assets of Flint-Area Women Identified in the Flint Women's Study." She was a University Enrichment Fellow at Michigan State University, and her research has been awarded through the Society for Community Research and Action. Most recently, she was selected for the National Network of Public Health Institute's Next Generation Rising Leader Award for her commitment to advancing equity.

**Paula Caffer**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Dreeben School of Education at the University of the Incarnate Word, Texas. Her research focuses on career and leadership development, the impact of biases on decisions, and culturally responsive collaborative processes and communication strategies. A Brazilian native, Paula worked extensively as a multilingual/multicultural global business partner at Brown-Forman Corp. leading the design, implementation, and evaluation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion strategies and initiatives in Latin America, Africa, APAC Region, Ukraine, and the United States. These initiatives aimed to support underrepresented talent advocacy and develop leadership programs for young professionals, emergent female leaders, and historically marginalized individuals. During her tenure at B-F Global Division, Paula received the "Spirited People of the Present" International Award. Paula has considerable experience collaborating with women's grassroots organizations in the Global South, where she worked tirelessly to forge alliances with national and international organizations to establish capacity-building programs to enhance small-business startups, computer literacy, and leadership development for girls. Paula holds a Bachelor's degree in Social Sciences and a Master's in Political Sociology from the Federal University of Sao Carlos (*Universidade Federal de Sao Carlos, UFSCar*) in Sao Paulo. Paula subsequently earned a Juris Doctor, a Specialization in Consumer Law and Class Action from the Escola Superior de Advocacia Nacional, Brazilian Bar Association, and a doctorate in International Education and Entrepreneurship from the University of the Incarnate Word,

Texas, having conducted research and practiced in social sciences, law, and international education with a strong focus on social justice. Her experience as a Leader in Equitable Evaluation and Diversity (LEEAD) Scholar (2021–2022) has deepened her expertise and utilization of culturally responsive and equitable evaluation approaches. Paula lives in Austin, Texas with her family.

**Amaarah DeCuir**, EdD, is an educator, researcher, inclusive Pedagogy Fellow, a faculty member at American University in the School of Education, and an affiliate faculty member of its Antiracist Research and Policy Center, and an Executive Board member at the Center for Islam in the Contemporary World at Shenandoah University. Her scholarship spans the areas of antiracist pedagogy, Muslim student experiences, Prophetic pedagogy, faith erasure, equity, antiracism and social justice, education leadership, teacher education, and faculty development. Dr. DeCuir has been selected as a member for the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Division A Leadership for Social Justice Action Committee. She has published peer-reviewed articles and chapters; coedited a book in the Routledge series, *Educational Leadership for an Equitable, Resilient and Sustainable Future*; and had her public scholarship appear in news and media outlets. A highly regarded educator and facilitator, Dr. DeCuir teaches Education Studies and Social Justice, Education Leadership, and an Antiracist Research Methods course that she codesigned. She brings over 25 years of teaching and leadership experiences from public and private K-12 schools to inform her current work in higher education. Dr. DeCuir holds a BA in History and a minor in African American studies from the University of California, Berkeley; an MEd in Curriculum and Instruction from Howard University; and an EdD in Education Leadership, Administration, and Policy Studies from the George Washington University.

**Ariana Guillermo Dimagiba**, MA, is a PhD candidate in the Higher Education and Organizational Change division in the School of Education and Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles. She earned her BA in Political Science and MA in Higher Education and Organizational Change from University of California, Los Angeles. Her broad research interests focus on first-generation college students of color access and transitions to college. As a graduate student researcher, she is a research partner for a research-practice partnership (RPP) with the UCLA Center for Community Schooling and the UCLA Community School. Her work with the RPP centers on research on the UCLA Community School's college-going culture and the postsecondary pathways of their alumni. Her current project aims to design and implement a culturally relevant and sustaining college knowledge curriculum to support first-generation college students of color in the transition from high school to college. She also developed a community-engaged research internship for undergraduates to codevelop and teach the college knowledge curriculum to current high school senior students, who will be the first in their families to attend college in the United States. Her positionality as a daughter of middle-class Filipino immigrants, a first-generation college student, and a college advising practitioner informs and inspires her research. Prior to attending graduate school,

she worked as a college advising practitioner for 11th and 12th grade students and their families in Chula Vista and San Diego, California. Ariana is committed to college-going research and practice that can better support marginalized students to and through college.

**Rose Ann E. Gutierrez**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Equity and Diversity in Education in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Nevada, Reno. She obtained her PhD from the University of California, Los Angeles, in Social Sciences and Comparative Education with a specialization in Race and Ethnic Studies. Her educational background consists of obtaining a Master's from Seattle University in Student Development Administration and a Bachelor's from the University of Richmond with a major in sociology. Her research is informed by a Pinay epistemology and positionality as a 1.5-generation immigrant from the Philippines, first-generation college student, and only daughter of working-class Pilipino immigrants. Her lens as a race scholar in education undergirds her resolve to improve the conditions and opportunities of historically oppressed communities across the lifespan through educational research and practice. Her broader research agenda examines the relationship between knowledge, race, and social transformation in higher education contexts and is anchored by critical theories and critical qualitative methodologies. She seeks to understand how racial inequities in education are preserved at the intersection of and in relationship with other systems of oppression, how students navigate these systems using embodied epistemologies, and what role higher education institutions play in shaping student pathways and outcomes across P-20. She focuses on low-income, immigrant, immigrant-origin, undocumented, and first-generation Students of Color, and more specifically, Asian American and Pacific Islander students. She has published in *Educational Researcher*, *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, and *Community College Review*. She has also worked as a middle school teacher and student affairs professional. She has been involved with community organizations such as the Filipino American National Historical Society-Hampton Roads; Pilipino American Unity for Progress, Inc.; and the Southern California Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Educators.

**Arthur E. Hernández**, PhD, is a Professor at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio Texas with graduate and professional training in Clinical and Educational Psychology, Measurement and Evaluation, and Curriculum and Instruction. His scholarship is wide-ranging but recently, focused on Program Evaluation; Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation; Community Based and Participatory Research; and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Dr. Hernandez is an active contributor to scholarly and professional communities as well as to community-based organizations through research, evaluation, consultation, professional and pre-professional development, and community service. Some examples of this from his recent work include contributing to and coediting a special issue of the *Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation* (Volume 19, Issue 43), contributing to and coediting *Qualitative Research With Diverse and Underserved Communities* (Information Age Publishing), multiple presentations at scholarly

meetings, presenting at a webinar entitled “DEI Conversations: Applying Equity-Minded Practices in Analyzing Data” (American Association for Learning in Higher Education), and working in support of an effort funded by Robert Wood Johnson Foundation focusing on and exploring the dynamics of community power and domestic and international community power groups seeking to address health access and outcomes disparities, among other work. Throughout his career, Dr. Hernandez has been committed to learning from the perspective of the traditional triad of higher education: teaching, research, and service. Although he has contributed to other areas, he has focused his work primarily on developing and advancing conceptual knowledge and professional and informed practice in the fields of evaluation, education, public health, and psychology, in all his efforts seeking diligently to foster and advance a culture of collaboration and inclusiveness based on social justice.

**Anna Jefferson**, PhD, has spent her career in policy research creatively and rigorously applying ethnographic, participatory, and community-based methods to make policy research more person-centered. She is a subject matter expert in guaranteed income, inequality, consumer finance, and US housing policy, and a fluent Spanish speaker. She currently coleads a portfolio of guaranteed income evaluations and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD’s) first participatory research with participants in housing assistance programs. In addition, she has worked extensively with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, New York City Mayor’s Office of Economic Opportunity, and a range of philanthropic clients, some of whom she has had the privilege to partner with on their first community-based participatory research projects. She provides professional development coaching on qualitative methods and community-engaged and participatory research internally at Abt Global, where she is a Principal Associate, and through external conferences and writing. She holds a PhD in Anthropology from Michigan State University and Bachelor’s degrees in Anthropology and Latin American Studies from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She lives in North Carolina with her family.

**Christine Abagat Liboon**, MA, is a PhD candidate in Social Research Methodology at UCLA’s School of Education and Information Studies. Her research interests are focused broadly on program evaluation, culturally responsive evaluation (CRE), and continuous improvement in education related to newcomers, immigrants, refugees, and other historically minoritized populations. Christine studied the integration of the Immigrant Family Legal Clinic, the development of i-MTSS (Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Supports) at UCLA Community School at RFK, and continues to support research and improvement efforts at the UCLA Lab School. Christine’s work is shaped by her identity as a second-generation child of Pilipino working-class immigrants, first-generation graduate student, her experiences teaching and working abroad, and in non-formal educational programs in refugee resettlement in San Diego, California. Currently, Christine’s dissertation research is dedicated to further understanding the concept of reciprocity in evaluation and research practice to heal systems where injustice and inequity exist. She is currently a Program Co-Chair for the Graduate Student and New Evaluators

Topical Interest Group (TIG) and a Member-at-Large for the Research on Evaluation TIG at the American Evaluation Association. She sustains her spirit as a volunteer for the Education and Cultural Center and Museum at the Kuruvungna Village Springs in West Los Angeles and the Filipino American National Historical Society-Orange County/Inland Empire. She has presented at conferences such as the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Culturally Responsive Evaluation and Assessment (CREA), the World Congress on Comparative Education Societies (WCCES), and the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA). She holds a BA in Ethnic Studies from UCR and an MA in Social Research Methodology from UCLA. She has published in *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies* and in collaboration with other scholars for *The Journal of Educational Change* and *AERA Open*.

**William N. Thomas IV**, EdD, has been an educational leader for the past 20 years in urban public and public charter schools located in Washington, DC, Philadelphia, PA, and Camden, NJ. Dr. Thomas is currently on the faculty at American University's School of Education (SOE) as a Professorial Lecturer and Director of their Policy and Leadership Doctoral (EdD) program where he teaches courses centered on antiracism in education, humanizing methodologies for practitioner action research, and the influence of popular culture on educators. Dr. Thomas was named an American University Experience (AUx) Faculty Fellow in 2022 where he performed monthly antiracist professional development for the program's instructional team while conducting action research related to antiracist pedagogy and mindsets. In addition, he was named to the American University's President's Council of Diversity and Inclusion (PCDI) as a result of his equity initiatives in the SOE and the AUx program. His research interests focus on the application of self-determination theory (SDT) through an African epistemological lens to better understand how marginalized stakeholders can gain equitable access, logical opportunities, and authentic empowerment in public schools and university settings. In addition, Dr. Thomas is a former middle school science teacher, elementary school principal, central office director of science, and high school director for an international studies program. He holds a BA in English from Morehouse College, a Master's of Professional Studies from George Washington University in Middle Grade Science, and a doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Pennsylvania.

**Yamanda Wright**, PhD, is a developmental psychologist and researcher, formerly in the Transformative Research Unit for Equity (TRUE) at RTI International. She examines root social, economic, and environmental causes of racial disparities in criminal legal and public health systems. Specifically, she has studied topics such as school district policies that push Black youth toward juvenile incarceration as well as how policymakers and system professionals are beginning to share decision-making power with historically marginalized communities. She also enjoys writing and non-academic discourse about children's effortless understanding of race and gender as social constructs. In her current role as Director of Equitable Learning and Measurement for a community foundation, she is exploring ethnographic approaches to evaluation for the philanthropy

sector toward more equitable, holistic support for community-based organizations. Her works have been published in peer-reviewed journals, technical reports, and books, including *Child Development Perspectives*, *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, and *Racial Stereotyping and Child Development*.

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## Preface

The edited book by Melissa Goodnight and Rodney Hopson, *Theories Bridging Ethnography and Evaluation: Making Transformative, Intersectional and Comparative Connections*, is Volume 20 in the *Studies in Educational Ethnography's* book series. It promises to be an important contribution for scholars and students of ethnography and evaluation, and who seek to interrupt, transform, and facilitate educational and social change. As the first of two volumes integrating and bridging concepts and cases in ethnography and evaluation, this volume builds on the theoretical ties of these two transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary historical and current connections to weave evaluation practice with conceptual roots in ethnographic methods.

By initially weaving a timeline of selected ethnography and evaluation publications over four decades of scholarship and practice, this volume represents the current generation of those of us bridging theories in and between ethnography and evaluation, comparatively, intersectionally, and transformatively. The contributions of the authors, who highlight their own experiential learning in doing transformative scholarship in the US, Palestine-Israel, and India, reveal important philosophical, relational, and ethical dimensions of the interconnected practice of ethnography and evaluation related to notions of positionality, criticality, authenticity, and reciprocity.

The Goodnight and Hopson volume begins the relocation of the book series to the mid-Atlantic/eastern coast of the United States to the School of Education at American University in Washington, DC from the College of Education at University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where it has been from 2018–2023. Founded in the mid-2000s by Prof. Geoffrey Walford (Oxford University), the volume has been a catalyst for ethnographic research, perspectives and methodologies featured that would extend our understandings of sociocultural educational phenomena and their global and local meanings. In our new home, the series continues to welcome the opportunity to engage colleagues who have ideas that may contribute to our series!

The primary objective of *Studies in Educational Ethnography* is to present original research monographs or edited volumes based on ethnographic perspectives, theories, and methodologies. Such research will advance the development of theory, practice, policy, and praxis for improving schooling and education in neighborhood, community, and global contexts. In complex neighborhood, community, and global contexts, educational ethnographies should situate themselves beyond isolated classrooms or single sites and concern

themselves with more than narrow methodological pursuits. Studying classrooms and educational communities without concomitant understanding of the dynamics of broader structural forces renders ethnographic analyses potentially incomplete.

Rodney Hopson  
*Series Editor*

# Acknowledgments

Books are large projects that require many minds, hearts, and hands. Our first thanks as editors go to the contributing authors of this book who trusted us with their scholarship. We also acknowledge their community and educational collaborators who shared their knowledge and experiences with us. May the book that follows be of benefit.

Melissa would like to acknowledge several colleagues and collaborators who contributed ideas, advice, and labor to this work recently and in the past: Cecilia Vaughn-Guy, Hui Xie, Rebecca Taylor, Cherie Avent, Osly Flores, Ananya Tiwari, Ramya Kumaran, Mariana Barragan Torres, Taiko Yusa, Karen Kirkhart, Nick Smith, Jennifer Greene, Stafford Hood, Melvin Hall, Jose-Felipe Martinez, Akhil Gupta, Katie Anderson-Levitt, Mike Rose, Karen Monkman, Edith Mukudi Omwami, and Tina Christie. Also, the book was possible only because of the friendship and generosity of Nandita Banerjee and family, Karthika Anthony and family, Surbhi Batra and family, Ashok Mutum and family, Ketan Verma, and Savitri Bobde. Special thanks to Suman Bhattacharjea, Wilima Wadhwa, Rukmini Banerji, Madhav Chavan, Gunjan Sharma, Venita Kaul, and Ajit George. Also, much appreciation goes to ASER Centre and Pratham staff, partners, and volunteers who shared so much of their work, wisdom, and themselves during the fieldwork contributing to this book. The staff of the United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF) and the Fulbright-Nehru program facilitated fieldwork via funding, housing, logistical support, professional development, and guidance. Finally, Melissa's family – Amol Naik, Ashok Naik, Elaine Goodnight, Michael Goodnight, Minal Naik, Bharat Naik, Philip Goodnight, Nancy Goodnight, Savannah Goodnight, Joshua Goodnight, Haley Naik, Aneesh Raman, Isha Raman, Maha Raman, Ami Naik, Sushil Jacob, Sathyan Jacob, Suhani Jacob, Chris Burroughs, Christine Burroughs, and Jessie Thompson – have been consistent champions of her work and sources of support, humor, and love through its challenges and milestones.

Rodney invokes the first stanza of the poem, *The Invitation*, by Oriah Mountain Dreamer, as an expression of the fulfillment of this book volume on the journey that this first volume represents:

It doesn't interest me what you do for a living.

I want to know what you ache for and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.

As described in Chapter 7 (Sankofa Reflections on Bridging Ethnography and Evaluation), much of what he thought he was doing over 25 years ago was finding ways to bridge theories and practice in his emerging academic career, between finishing doctoral work, postdoctoral training, and new faculty member in the late 1990s. In many ways, this is a dream imagined and fulfilled.

Thank you, Melissa (Goodnight), for co-partnering and realizing a dream deferred, for your grace and compassion in lifting up ideas to explode! To Kirsty (Woods) and the incredible Emerald Team for the encouragement, direction for seeing how to make our dreams real, and the belief in what we imagined could occur in print.

Rodney dedicates this book to the late greats: Dell H. Hymes (1927–2009), Michael H. Agar (1945–2017), and Stafford L. Hood (1952–2023), all who nurtured and modeled the passion and commitment to the bridging life work he aspires.

## Chapter 1

# Ethnography and Evaluation Possibilities: Fostering Transformative, Intersectional, and Comparative Work

*Melissa Rae Goodnight*

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### Abstract

This chapter describes the possibilities for fusing ethnography and evaluation to transform educational inquiry and educational entities (programs, systems, and policies). The central question explored is, *how do we best pursue work connecting evaluation and ethnography to fulfill our commitments to diversity, justice, and cultural responsiveness in educational spaces, to make tangible transformative change?* With 40 years of literature on ethnography-evaluation connections as a foundation, this chapter describes three coalescing themes: transformative, intersectional, and comparative. These themes are proposed as valuable for guiding contemporary educational inquiry that serves social justice. The transformative theme denotes educational inquiry in which the researcher or evaluator ethically collects data, makes defensible interpretations, *and* facilitates social change in collaboration with others. Doing transformative work that meaningfully fuses ethnography and evaluation rests on essential factors like time, values engagement, collaboration, and self-work. The intersectional theme describes intersectionality as an evolving analytical framework that promotes social problem-solving and learning via investigating the significance of intersecting social identities in (a) how people's lives are shaped, (b) their access to power across circumstances, and (c) their everyday experiences of subordination and discrimination. Finally, the comparative theme refers to sensibilities and practices gleaned from the interdisciplinary and transnational field of comparative education, including developing comparative cultural understanding and analyzing complex systems in one's inquiry projects. Across themes, this chapter emphasizes positionality, responsibility,

and theory-bridging to make sense of the uses of ethnographic concepts and practices in transformative evaluation work in educational spaces.

*Keywords:* Transformative; intersectionality; comparative education; social justice theories; systems analysis; culturally responsive evaluation; values-engagement; collaboration

## **An Overview of Volumes 1 and 2: Connecting Evaluation and Ethnography**

This introductory chapter aims to orient readers to the first of two edited volumes on the possibilities between ethnography and evaluation. In both volumes, contributing authors explore ethnography-evaluation connections in their work as they pursue transformation of educational inquiry and entities (programs, systems, and policies). The volumes' authors contemplate the boundaries of ethnography and evaluation to make compelling arguments about how each can be conceptualized and practiced within particular contexts and with specific communities. The question that guides these compilations is, *how do we best pursue work connecting evaluation and ethnography to fulfill our commitments to diversity, justice, and cultural responsiveness in educational spaces, to make tangible transformative change?* While investigating multiple connections between ethnography and evaluation, authors in Volumes 1 and 2 address the moment – wrestling with pressing justice and equity issues within educational programs, systems, and policies in today's societies across the world.

Volume 1, entitled *Theories Bridging Ethnography and Evaluation*, examines the theoretical ties between ethnography and evaluation in educational spaces. The five chapters of this book principally explore concepts (e.g., positionality, transparency, authenticity, and reciprocity) that facilitate opportunities for evaluators' and researchers' connected practice of ethnography and evaluation. Whether the concepts are substantiated theoretically or empirically, these chapter authors analyze various dimensions of ethnography and evaluation – philosophical, methodological, relational, and ethical – respectively and connectedly. Authors also highlight their experiential learning – how these concepts are forged not only from literature but also from the lived experience of doing this connected, volume, transformative scholarship.

Volume 2, entitled *Cases Integrating Ethnography and Evaluation*, forthcoming in 2025, presents seven chapters that use ethnographic methods to conduct evaluations or to research aspects of evaluation across different contexts. Several authors describe evaluations that emphasize the use of fieldwork and participant observation as a means of learning about the cultural and contextual specificity of educational entities. Such evaluations simultaneously pursue greater democracy, equity, and justice in educational policy, programs, and systems through forging trusting and reciprocal relationships with individuals and groups (e.g., communities). These relationships are the crucial foundation for generating information, interpreting its meaning, and acting on it collectively. Drawing upon the

conceptual rooting of ethnographic-evaluation connections in Volume 1, Volume 2's chapters reflect application: the conduct of contextually and culturally responsive work (e.g., Hood et al., 2015) tackling the localization, enculturation, and refinement of ethnographic methods and evaluation practice.

Previous publications provide a historical and intellectual foundation for these volumes (see Appendix, Table A1). The publications are multidisciplinary, representing writing from academic fields like anthropology, education, and public health. They offer unique understandings of how culture, politics, and social issues operate in educational or social entities (e.g., programs) and can be studied. These writings also illuminate how a holistic, naturalistic, and phenomenological orientation paired with the employment of ethnographic methods in evaluations greatly influences evaluations' validity, usefulness, and ethics.<sup>1</sup> The ethnographic methods referenced across these sources include researcher reflexivity, fieldwork and participant observation, immersion, cultural interpretation, and prolonged relationship-building. Scholarship from the 1980s to the early 2000s is indispensable in establishing the present volumes' purpose and subsequent chapters. The progress made over roughly 40 years in envisioning ethnographic-evaluation connections (from Fetterman, 1980, to Butler, 2016, to today) should have a venue for extended discussion. These volumes are created in acknowledgment that such discussion of ethnography-evaluation possibilities is fruitful and ongoing. The discussion's objectives are twofold: one, to make these ethnographic-evaluation connections visible in the context of doing transformative work in education, and two, to hold this dialogue across different scholar-practitioners whose work incorporates various critical and liberatory ideas (e.g., intersectionality, antiracism, and criticality). In both volumes, the concept of education is engaged as it is intrinsically embedded in authors' ethnographic and evaluation work in formal or nonformal educational contexts.

A goal of Volume 1 is to provide readers from different disciplines and practice areas (e.g., evaluation, sociology, anthropology, comparative education, and social work) with a background on the practice of evaluation and the conceptual rooting of ethnographic methodology.<sup>2</sup> Regarding evaluation, chapter authors provide orientations to evaluation's varying features: from its differing purposes to its diverse methodological and interpersonal strategies to its multifaceted

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<sup>1</sup>LeCompte and Goetz (1982) describe the ethnographic orientation in evaluation in the following way: *phenomenological*, as in representing "the world view of the participants being investigated"; *empirical* and *naturalistic*, as in acquiring "first-hand sensory accounts of phenomena as they occur in real world settings"; and *holistic*, as in seeking "to construct descriptions of total phenomena within their various contexts and to generate from these descriptions major variables affecting human behavior and belief toward the phenomena" (p. 388).

<sup>2</sup>Readers interested in a longer orientation to evaluation (especially from the anthropology perspective) or to anthropology (especially from the evaluator perspective) would be well served by reading Butler's (2016) book that presents each in separate accessible chapters. Butler offers a *cultural systems approach* to evaluation – i.e., *evaluation anthropology* – drawing on anthropology's cultural interpretation and methodology (e.g., ethnography) to conduct evaluation.

consequences. Regarding ethnography, the traditions and philosophy of ethnography are interwoven throughout the book's chapters. For example, Buckband (Chapter 3) explains critical ethnography's interconnected pursuit of an emic perspective and a pathway of action – thus seeking knowledge rooted in participants' lived experiences while actively disrupting systems or practices that marginalize people.

Before moving on, it is important to highlight that, generally, these chapters differentiate educational evaluation from educational research. Evaluation is a process primarily focused on collaboratively and systematically generating information for people's decision-making about educational entities (programs, systems, or policies). The generated information is supposed to be practical, facilitate action, and emerge from the questions of people who are connected to the educational entity. In other words, the evaluation pursues information wanted by people who have "a stake" in the evaluated program, system, or policy. Thus, unlike research, evaluation is *not* principally driven by researcher interests or the creation of broader knowledge (e.g., generalizable) for a disciplinary or professional audience. Because of its relationship to making judgements about the merit, worth, and continuation of vital educational entities, evaluation is a form of inquiry and a profession that carries immense power and privilege (e.g., Hall, 2020). The field of evaluation, which is referenced throughout the two volumes, is concerned with the *theory, methods, practices, and profession* comprising evaluation work (see Smith & Brandon, 2008). With all that said, the boundaries between evaluation and research are not crisp or seen the same way across evaluation scholars and practitioners (Wanzer, 2020). The connection between evaluation and ethnography can be understood in part through evaluation's reliance on social research methodologies like ethnography and data collection methods like participant observation to produce information about the evaluated entity (i.e., the *evaluated*). Such methodology decision-making is not neutral but rather "represents the myriad of political, social, and cultural implications behind methodological selection and choice of methods" (Chouinard, 2014, p. 337), which are dilemmas discussed in the chapters of these two volumes.

The remainder of this introduction is organized in the following sections: the next section describes both volumes' vision and themes; the third section describes the key priorities unifying chapters; the fourth section relays the story of how these two volumes came into being; and finally, the last section summarizes each of the authors' five chapters for Volume 1, *Theories Bridging Ethnography and Evaluation*.

## **The Vision and Coalescing Themes of Volumes 1 and 2**

The subtitle for Volumes 1 and 2, *Making Transformative, Intersectional, and Comparative Connections*, highlights three coalescing themes of the books, which illuminate opportunities to connect ethnography and evaluation work. These interweaving themes – transformative, intersectional, and comparative – largely substantiate the vision for the two volumes. In situating their importance, Rodney

Hopson's previous (2002, 2005) scholarship provides insight, particularly in its moral clarity on the responsibilities of the *ethnoevaluator* to be critical, self-reflexive, and aware of power and important histories (Hopson, 2002, 2005). Each of the responsibilities Hopson emphasizes is described within the themes' sections that follow. Hopson's ethnography-evaluation ideas – infused with a postmodern perspective – strongly foreshadow the volumes' blending of constructivist sensibilities with critical and liberatory theories. The following snippets illustrate his wisdom on the fusion of these ideas, beginning with an analysis of the constructivist worldview's significance:

I too suggest that too little attention has been paid to the role of the ethnographer in evaluation and to the connections between evaluation and ethnography. Using Fetterman's conceptual underpinnings of ethnographic evaluation (1984, 1989) and Stake's (1991) appeal to fourth-generation evaluation, I suggest that the historical development of ethnography and evaluation contribute to timely conceptual, methodological, and epistemological interdisciplinary possibilities for ethnoevaluation.<sup>3</sup> The social constructivist perspective of evaluation from which the ethnoevaluator operates promotes a blending of traditions that values the cultural interpretation of ethnography with the judgment-framing and description-forming of evaluation. Merging multiple roles, the ethnoevaluator helps uncover complex social realities and contexts of programs and policies through formative or process evaluative decisions and by promoting holism and cultural interpretation of events and activities by program beneficiaries and other stakeholders. (Hopson, 2005, p. 209)

Ethnographic-evaluation connections have constructivist underpinnings and rely on the strengths of a constructivist orientation that emerged in evaluation work (e.g., fourth-generation evaluation). These strengths can be observed particularly in the quality of evaluators' cultural interpretations and the insightfulness of their reflection on the socially constructed nature of reality – for example, when establishing criteria for evaluating an educational entity's merit or worth. Yet, postmodernism compels something more: an ongoing attentiveness to issues of power, oppression, and justice that constructivism does not.

The very nature of postmodernism implies a changing state of knowledge and reaction to claims about truth, ideology, representation, authority, power, and identity. The postmodern

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<sup>3</sup>See Guba and Lincoln (1989) for their description of the constructivist paradigm in evaluation theorizing and practice, which they characterize as *fourth-generation evaluation*. See Hopson (2002) for his more detailed interpretation of Stake's reconsideration of the ethnoevaluator's role in evaluation, particularly to cultivate "anthropological sensitivity to culture, kinship, and ritual" (p. 48).

condition revisits and rethinks cultural phenomena and assumptions typical of Western European universalisms and rationalism, with an eye toward new cultural and political orientations. . . . The “progress” of the West is also rooted in a history of subjugation, exploitation, and enslavement. . . . The emphasis on critique, questioning, multiplicity . . . are important characteristics of the postmodern condition, all applicable and timely notions in current and future discussions in evaluation. Postmodern evaluation deliberates on these same notions of shifting power, ideology, truth, identity, and presentation. (Hopson, 2005, p. 291)

Postmodernism promotes deconstruction – analyses of politicized knowledge systems and the human realities they form. Hopson (2002, 2005) outlines a liberatory, socially just evaluation practice utilizing ethnography that is no less valuable today than it was 20 years ago. It is a practice aware of how ideology, representations, and claims about truth relate to tangible uses of power right now and throughout the related histories of the communities affected by the evaluation. He envisions ethnographic-evaluation possibilities that experiment with participation and methodology to “study up” into the societal layers of power (referencing Nader, 1999) and that engage down to the ground – working with people deeply in healing, learning, and “reinventing” how evaluation and social inquiry are done (Hopson, 2005, p. 293). With these ideas as jumping off points for the two volumes’ explorations, the three coalescing themes – transformative, intersectional, and comparative – draw on substantial bodies of literature and social theory. The themes are presented in succinct summaries in the following sections to initiate conversations that are sustained in the chapters throughout these two volumes. May the themes’ limited presentation below be of benefit in situating for readers the textual dialogues between authors that are to come.

### ***Transformative Work***

The transformative theme denotes educational inquiry in which the researcher or evaluator ethically collects data, makes defensible interpretations, *and* facilitates social change in collaboration with others (e.g., students, teachers, community members, and civil society workers). As a primary goal for inquiry, this social change is supposed to affect the quality and justice of education for all people it is meant to serve. In the case of evaluation, inquiry is often viewed as a professional and “market-based activity” with economic and feasibility concerns dominating evaluators’ decision-making, yet evaluators who seek to do transformative work may decline lucrative contracts for otherwise feasible projects because those evaluations would not accommodate goals for “societal improvement” or “the public good” (see Smith, 1998, pp. 177, 184). In other words, in all situations, the would-be evaluator may not be able to negotiate what is needed for transformative work: the resources, evaluation questions, evaluation methodology, participatory approach, or inclusion of all individuals and communities needed to

evaluate responsibly, i.e., to “do something that moves the needle forward on the social justice scale” (Hood, 2019). At the same time, some culturally responsive evaluators opt to take on feasible evaluations that funders want, while also conducting a second evaluation that *comes out of your hide* – an additional evaluation that is the evaluator’s free labor, a manifestation of the evaluator’s social justice commitments to produce information that benefits communities of people who are least well served, excluded, or marginalized (Hood, n.d., in Frazier-Anderson et al., 2023).

Importantly, transformative refers not only to the social justice goals of a research or evaluation project but also to the researcher’s or evaluator’s *worldview* (Creswell, 2014). The transformative worldview or *paradigm* describes an orientation to being in the world that comprises understanding reality (*ontology*), constructing knowledge (*epistemology*), making ethical choices (*axiology*), and pursuing information (*methodology*) in ways that directly advocate equity and human rights (Mertens, 2009). The inquiry projects of researchers and evaluators who operate from a transformative worldview are usually guided explicitly by critical and liberatory theories – such as anti-racist and critical race, feminist, queer, Indigenous, and postcolonial – some of which have roots in contemporary interpretations of Marxist philosophy and standpoint social theories (Hall, 2020; Mertens & Wilson, 2019). As one example, a key aspect of employing decolonizing theory frameworks is *deconstruction*, which “involves taking stories apart, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to experiences and realities often glossed over in traditional scholarship” (Hopson, 2009, p. 436). Drawing insights from critical and liberatory theories, transformative inquiry projects analyze “asymmetric power relationships,” and they center the “lives and experiences of communities pushed to society’s margins” (Mertens, 2009, p. 48). In doing so, transformative researchers and evaluators may not stop at seeking to change the educational entities that they study; rather, they can seek to change the norms, criteria, and practices of inquiry itself in collaboration with other people, especially those from historically marginalized groups and excluded social positions (see Bustos & Wright, Chapter 2, and Liboon et al., Chapter 5). As one example, a key criterion of inquiry requiring ongoing scrutiny is validity – how validity is conceptualized and pursued. Specifically, the goodness of an evaluation, as seen through a transformative worldview, is influenced by the extent validity’s conceptualization centers cultural context, respectful relationship-building, and social justice in guiding an evaluation’s design, implementation, and consequences (see Kirkhart, 1995).

Doing transformative work that meaningfully fuses ethnography and evaluation rests on essential factors like time, values engagement, collaboration, and self-work.

- *Time*: Regarding the first factor, earlier writing about using ethnography in evaluations underscored the issue of time, influencing the quality or feasibility of ethnographic work and its support from evaluation funders (Fetterman, 1987; Hess, 1991; Hopson, 2002). Commonly, evaluations are expected to be efficient with quality data produced and interpreted in a short time across many sites and people to facilitate the funders’ sound decision-making (Hess, 1991). The value of

time efficiency can be pursued at the cost of the relationship-building, mutual learning, and collaborative work central to critical ethnography as well as participatory and culturally responsive evaluation approaches (Chouinard, 2013; Hood et al., 2015). As Caffer et al. (Chapter 6) describe:

creating the conditions for trust requires the investment of time necessary for deep learning about culture – the social, political, economic, and historical context, along with community experiences, including achievements and traumas, norms, and values. This includes the time necessary to build relationships with community members and gatekeepers. (p. 151)

While all evaluations require considerations of resources in their design (operating within certain constraints), time and other resource investments reflect not only funders', organizations', and evaluators' constraints but also their values. Just as certain equity commitments are “non-negotiables” (i.e., a focus on social justice) in the pursuit of doing transformative work (Hood, 2018, p. 70), so must be the commitment of adequate time. The amount of time required necessarily depends on the evaluator's prior knowledge of the context, the evaluation's beneficiaries or communities, and the complexity of the entity being evaluated.

- *Values engagement*: The second factor in transformative work unifying evaluation and ethnography is the transparent engagement of values, including negotiating the complexity of conflicting values (Hess, 1991). *Values engagement* requires explicit, frequent dialogue between different people connected to the evaluation (e.g., funders, educators, beneficiaries, government officials, and evaluators) about the values that they hold, and how these values inform their goals for the educational entity and their priorities for evaluation (Greene, 1997; Greene et al., 2004). “Values are present in virtually all aspects of evaluation” – detectable in the evaluation questions asked, the purposes and audiences served, the criteria used for judging quality, and the conception of the evaluator's role, responsibilities, and ethics (Greene, 2012, p. 195). To be equitable, evaluations must not operate under the guise of value-neutrality but rather create opportunities for values' negotiation. In transformative evaluations – including culturally responsive and democratic approaches, the values advanced by evaluators include equity, diversity, and inclusion (e.g., *democratic pluralism*) and deliberation (Goodnight & Avent, 2023; Hall et al., 2012).
- *Collaboration*: Time investment and values engagement directly influence collaboration, the third factor. Collaboration in transformative evaluation and research draws on participatory models of inquiry, which value contextualized, democratic, relational, and learning-oriented strategies over standardized, technocratic, and instrumental- and accountability-driven approaches (Chouinard, 2013, 2014). Within the transformative paradigm, collaboration entails not only high levels of participation by a representative group of various people who have a stake in the educational entity but also power-sharing in deciding what information is important, how inquiry is pursued, how data will