

# Self-reflective Ethnographies of Practice and their Relevance for Professional Socialisation in Social Work<sup>\*</sup>

Gerhard Riemann

The article tries to explicate and illustrate a type of qualitative practitioner research in the field of professional training and to shed light on its practical uses for the acquisition of analytical skills and the fostering of professional discourse. The discussion is based on the author's work with social work students who are encouraged and supported to become "ethnographers of their own affairs", especially in the context of their practice placements, which are a mandatory part of their social work course. By presenting and discussing students' ethnographic field notes and a sequence of a student's oral narrative (along with their retrospective reflections) he attempts to convey how such a style of researching one's own practice can contribute to student apprentices' personal acquisition of skills for the analysis of individual and collective cases. This type of work could also become significant for collective concerns of the profession, e.g. with regard to generating a research based, self-critical and case specific professional discourse on possible problematic tendencies of professional work and the discovery of alternatives of action, but also with regard to the emergence of a self-confident and innovative type of research which is carried out by professional practitioners themselves.

**Key words:** ethnography, social work, professional self-reflection, professional discourse, professional socialisation

---

\* I would like to thank Karen Broadhurst, Department of Applied Social Science of Lancaster University and a member of the DANASWAC network ("Discourse and Narrative Approaches to Social Work and Counselling"), for her helpful comments on a first version of this paper.