"When used as a method, ethnography typically refers to fieldwork (alternatively, participant-observation) conducted by a single investigator who 'lives with and lives like' those who are studied, usually for a year or more." --John Van Maanen, 1996.

"Ethnography literally means 'a portrait of a people.' An ethnography is a written description of a particular culture - the customs, beliefs, and behavior - based on information collected through fieldwork." --Marvin Harris and Orna Johnson, 2000.

"Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture. The description may be of a small tribal group in an exotic land or a classroom in middle-class suburbia." --David M. Fetterman, 1998.

Ethnography is a social science research method. It relies heavily on up-close, personal experience and possible participation, not just observation, by researchers trained in the art of ethnography. These ethnographers often work in multidisciplinary teams. The ethnographic focal point may include intensive language and culture learning, intensive study of a single field or domain, and a blend of historical, observational, and interview methods. Typical ethnographic research employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents. This in turn produces three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents, resulting in one product: narrative description. This narrative often includes charts, diagrams and additional artifacts that help to tell "the story" (Hammersley, 1990). Ethnographic methods can give shape to new constructs or paradigms, and new variables, for further empirical testing in the field or through traditional, quantitative social science methods.

Ethnography has its roots planted in the fields of anthropology and sociology. Present-day practitioners conduct ethnographies in organizations and communities of all kinds. Ethnographers study schooling, public health, rural and urban development, consumers and consumer goods, any human arena. While particularly suited to exploratory research, ethnography draws on a wide range of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, moving from "learning" to "testing" (Agar, 1996) while research problems, perspectives, and theories emerge and shift.
Ethnographic methods are a means of tapping local points of view, households and community "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Greenberg, 1990), a means of identifying significant categories of human experience up close and personal. Ethnography enhances and widens top down views and enriches the inquiry process, taps both bottom-up insights and perspectives of powerful policy-makers "at the top," and generates new analytic insights by engaging in interactive, team exploration of often subtle arenas of human difference and similarity. Through such findings ethnographers may inform others of their findings with an attempt to derive, for example, policy decisions or instructional innovations from such an analysis.

<http://www-rcf.usc.edu/~genzuk/Ethnographic_Research.html>

**VIDEO ETHNOGRAPHY, FACILITATOR TO SUCCESSFUL INNOVATION**

Don't look now, but you may be under observation. Watched intently by social scientists with digital video cameras. What are they looking for? Habits and patterns that mark your school, work or home life. You may not even be aware of them, but the information they capture may provide teachers, researchers, doctors and engineers pathways to innovations that add to your learning, comfort and effectiveness.

We call this visual observational approach to human behavior “video ethnography.” Start by watching people at school, work, or play. Follow with interviews, review of documents, artifacts and personal histories that you can react to. Then continue the process until you’re sure you have something that makes a significant contribution. . . or not. Finally you tell the story, visually, graphically, artistically. When we are young watching the world around us was a natural, enjoyable way to learn and remember. Video is an extremely efficient mode of recording and presenting research, and now that the technology is no longer as bulky and cumbersome as it used to be, it is likely to be taken up by more and more social science researchers.

Why observation? Because it gets us past one of the limits of survey or interview-based research: the fact that most of us have a hard time describing or disclosing our unmet wants, needs, behaviors and opinions.

Educators, Anthropologists, and Sociologists and other social scientists are pioneering a new, more accessible form of ethnography that is rich visually and textually. Other researchers are tackling the communication problem by trying to write compelling narratives. However they miss the whole visual side of the story and they are going to find that playwrights and novelists beat them at that game. Film has impact but by itself it’s way too linear and doesn't afford the scope for a good old fashioned argument in words. Words in a row, as Bruce Sterling says, are a great tool. Multimedia exploits each medium for its own strengths and good multimedia weaves them together seamlessly.
STARTING THE TEAM PROJECT

Team Projects include the following requirements:

- Movies must be between three and four minutes in length.
- Movies must have a credit clip with a picture of your group.
- Movies must have a title screen.
- Movies must include sound in the form of narration or a musical soundtrack.
- Movies must have transitions between clips.

PLANNING

There are several approaches to planning out a successful Video Ethnography Project. The following steps are one framework for planning. This framework is meant to help you plan your video project. The framework is structured enough to guide your process, and flexible enough to adapt to your practices and needs. Following these initial six steps are additional steps to get started on your Desktop Movie/Ethnography.

Because moviemaking is a team project, the team should begin work with clearly identifiable roles for director, cameraperson, and video editor. Playing different roles helps students master the skills of effective communication.

Six Basic Steps

1. Decide on the project

May include: Identifying what content will be incorporated, identifying any constraints, deciding on multimedia component, deciding on scope of project, looking over Video Ethnography components and deciding on major goals of project.

2. Draft time frame

May include: Deciding on length of project, writing down some due dates or checkpoints for project goals to be completed, allow room for flexibility, growth, and changes in project.

3. Plan activities

May include: Browsing the Web and reviewing available literature for appropriate activities, selecting a few, adapting a few, drawing on own activities, borrowing and adapting other teachers' ideas, deciding when in project time frame to use activities.

4. Plan for assessment

May include: reviewing or drafting some assessment goals (answering the question of what to assess), planning out what assessment tools to use, adding assessments to time frame.
5. Begin project with team members

May include: Discussing goals with each other, allowing for flexibility, keeping eyes and ears open for what is working and what is not, remembering to give selves time to get the swing of new practices, adding activities or backtracking to strengthen group skills or management skills, sticking to original time frame or discussing and planning out any revisions to it. Each team member will contribute to some of the initial planning of the project.

6. Finish project and reflect

May include: Presenting finished product in a special forum, discussing or writing about highlights of project, discussing or writing about suggested improvements for next time, taking time to write down personal reflections on project and things to remember for next time.

MAKING OF DESKTOP MOVIES

PREPARE

Two steps before you and your colleagues begin to create your movies. Make sure you have the right hardware and software tools and then put together a plan to ensure moviemaking will have the greatest impact on telling your story, or learning in your classroom.

Choose - Ready to choose the tools you and your partners need to jump into the exciting world of desktop movie making? Here are a few suggestions for hardware and software that’ll get you up and running in a snap.

Plan - The first step in creating effective and engaging video is making a plan. That means thinking about what messages you want to deliver and how it might look on camera.

Try this: write three ideas about what you want to say with your movie. The idea list might look something like this:

My elementary school is an exciting place. There are lots of really great activities going on here. The people in the classrooms are friendly and bright. Parents would be impressed by the creativity of my students.

or

Students at my college help the local community. For example, students participate in mentoring programs for local schools and volunteer at homeless shelters. Students get as much as they give when volunteering.
Try this: Once you and your teammates have made your list, discuss how that list might translate into visual media. How can you show the classroom is a cool place with friendly people? Perhaps recreating a particularly exciting science lesson or recording a lively discussion about a hot topic? Maybe a guided “tour” of the classroom, complete with interviews?

Try this: After the ideas have gelled into a story, draw a storyboard. A storyboard is a series of rectangles drawn on a page in which you sketch out the setting and characters you’ll use to tell your story. Each rectangle represents a scene. Storyboards also help you make sure you get the right shots and that you keep things in the right sequence. If you want to emphasize sequence and organization, consider creating your storyboard with index cards, one scene per card—that makes sorting and moving things around easy.

Time for lights, camera, action! Begin filming! As you do, pay attention to how and where you film and consider these simple guidelines:

**SHOOT**

**Gathering and Selecting Video Clips**

**School** - Clips of teaching, learning, student interactions with teachers, classmates, administrators, support personnel, etc. In the classroom, on the yard, at the cafeteria/lunch benches, on fieldtrips, in the school offices, etc.

**Home/Community** – Clips of student interacting with family, friends, community members, clergy, etc. After school activities, youth sports, at the park, parties, library, etc.

**Interviews** - of target student, classmates, current and past teachers, administrators, paraeducators, support personnel, family, friends, clergy, etc.

*Video material for a short “Video Ethnography” can be edited from longer segments, such as one or more full classroom sessions, individual interviews, field trip to the zoo, etc. The “story” sequence can be created based on documenting the kinds of learning or experience a teacher/ethnographer wishes to communicate to others.*

**LIGHTING**

**Get a lot of light on the subject** - Make sure you have ample light on your subject. Your movies will be sharp and in-focus. If you’re outdoors during the day, the sun generally provides more than enough light. When you’re indoors, turn on all the lights. As a general guideline, if your subject is brighter than the background your recording should turn out fine.
• Try shooting some test video in different kinds of light and in different places to see how it affects the outcome.

• Watch your light—use lamps, overhead lighting and keep the filmed area bright.

• Try and get bright sunlight behind you, filming towards the sun produces less than desirable results—not to mention it’s bad for the camera.

SCENERY

• Keep your background simple—simple backgrounds mean better compression (your movie size will be smaller).

• Watch out for telephone polls and wires, for example because they might appear to extend from your subject’s head/body.

• A lot of movement in the background of your subject might distract the viewer.

CAMERA SETTINGS

• Use the highest quality camera available.

• Keep the camera steady—if your camera has an image stabilization feature, make sure it’s on. Use a tripod (unless you want to go for an “active” film effect).

• Capture video at a high resolution (you can then save at a lower resolution later).

• Capture audio at the best sound quality possible, then save at a lower sound quality later.

WARDROBE

• Wear plain clothing.

• Wear bright colors if you are the center of focus in a shot.

• Avoid clothes with patterns because they tend to “vibrate.”

EDIT

Editing and Post Production

Clips are selected by the team members and are cut/sequenced. Titles screen and overlays are added after the clips are put together, which provide both context and commentary on what is being shown. The team then makes a desktop movie that can vary in length to fit audience needs. (In this case no longer than 3-4 minutes).
Choosing Editing Tools and Making Video

Once you’ve shot your footage it’s time to edit. iMovie 2 or Final Cut Pro (FCP) on the Macintosh platform makes the process quick and easy and you can be as creative as time and patience allow. There are similar programs on the PC platform that are available as well.

Here are some tips for editing video for your project or classroom:

• Refer to your storyboard to remind yourself what’s important and edit out the rest.

• Use special effects only when they make sense. (The transitions are cool, and iMovie and FCP have LOTS of them, but overuse distracts from the message.)

• Consider making a series of short movies instead of one long movie if you wish to view your movie on the Web. Generally, people will wait up to four minutes, but not much more, for things to download.

• Choose how you compress the movie carefully.

Need some basic editing steps? Here they are:

• Crop and trim the movie (edit out scenes/frames you don’t need).

• Choose the settings for saving your movie (compression type determines final quality).

• Process your movies (save to hard drive or removable media).

ENHANCE

Spice up your movies with music, sound effects, cool transitions and more—all with the click of a mouse!

• Audio - Learn how to add music, voice narration, or other sound elements to your movie.

• Titles and Transitions - Learn how to apply titling and transitions to your videos.

• Other Special Effects - Find additional backgrounds, sound effects, and looping music—the web is a treasure chest of resources.
Time to get those fabulous movies archived on video tape or CD/DVD

Save your movie to tape.

Once you have created your movie, you can export the final movie to your digital camcorder or deck. You can burn it on a CD or DVD as well. To record your movie to tape:

1. Connect your DV device to your computer with your FireWire cable. If you haven’t connected your DV device to your computer yet, go to the section on connecting a DV device.

   IMPORTANT: Be sure you have a tape that you can record over in your DV device. Preview the tape in your DV device to be certain that you are not going to record over source footage.

2. Choose Export Movie from the File menu.

3. Choose Camera from the “Export to” pop-up menu.

4. Use the default values in the Add and Wait fields unless you want longer durations.

5. Click the Export button.

Previewing your final output:

When your movie is finished recording to tape, switch from edit to camera mode and use the playback controls in your editing software or on your camcorder to rewind and play your movie.

Time to share your movie! - Presentation and Video Journal

It is important to share these desktop movies with peers, parents, administrators, and members of the community, in order to get feedback. A series of these desktop movies can be combined or edited into a video journal and, when collected over a period of time, show both an inside look at classroom teaching with students, as well as teachers’ presentations of their curriculum projects and evidence of student learning. You can post your movie on your schoolwide intranet (network) or to your web page.

EVALUATE

Once the movie is complete, each team member must complete a self-evaluation. This narrative will describe their individual contribution and evaluate the contributions made by their team members. A great way to have fun at the end of a project — and pick up some valuable lessons on what does and doesn’t work — is to watch each other’s Desktop Movies.