

Chapter 3

Asymmetry in Ethnographic Fieldwork

Abstract Traditional ethnographic research methods employed in the case study in this book are well documented. This chapter, therefore, documents the asymmetries in team members' data generation methodologies and practices and their different materialisations. It describes the methods employed in the study, focusing on the differences that emerged organically through practice, and how the study benefited from this divergence. First, it documents further detail about the logistical differences in fieldwork between the team members. Second, it covers how fieldwork notes were written and typed up and how this changed during the study, and how various visual methodologies were used to generate photographs, sketches, maps and digital videos, and quantitative methods used by one team member. The chapter contains visual representations of these methodological practices and their outcomes, which emerged from team members' developing fieldwork sensibilities, shaped by their professional expertise, skill and experience and inflected by gendered ethical issues. This includes photographs, simple annotated sketches, scans, and examples of collected documents to give a sense of how differently each team member conducted fieldwork and what these differences produced. Finally, the chapter introduces visual assemblages as an innovative fieldwork and analytical research methodology.

Keywords Ethnographic research methods • Observation • Shadowing • Photographs • Sketches • Field notes • Video

Traditional ethnographic research methods were employed in the study. There is ample description and theorisation of ethnographic research methods and fieldwork practices in the literature, so in this chapter we focus on the asymmetries in our data generation methodologies and practices and their different materialisations. We deploy multiple visual modalities—tables, excerpts, photographs and sketches—to supplement our descriptions.

Nick and Teena began fieldwork in March 2011, though Nick had previously spent a week on site for orientations and made several formal fieldwork visits before Teena began.

Table 3.1 Summary of asymmetrical fieldwork participation

Aspect	Nick	Teena
Number of visits	60	22
Shared/simultaneous visits	6	6
Overnight visits (11 pm–7 am)	3	2
Average time spent each visit (h)	Varied 4–10	5
Total fieldwork hours	Approx. 400	109
Photographs taken	338	35
Sketches made	4	71
Documents collected	87	31
Quantitative observations	5	–

Our first impressions of the Unit were very different. Nick’s orientation and initial visits spanned all days of the weekly cycle, while Teena’s first visits were all on Thursdays—giving her a limited view of the rhythms of the Unit, but providing a strong sense of the practices later in the week when families are preparing to return home. The atmosphere at this stage is generally more relaxed for families and staff, which afforded Teena opportunities to talk more with both groups of people. The volume, nature and purpose of conversations with staff and families became a key point of difference between Nick and Teena. While Nick interacted freely and often with participants, he tended not to ask for explanations or commentaries (preferring to wait and see if reasons for particular things would become apparent through further observation). On the other hand, Teena (perhaps reflecting the shorter time available in the field) more regularly sought first hand accounts and explanations from staff or families.

We recorded our observations by handwriting and sketching in notebooks, which we later typed up; taking photos; and collecting documents. A series of handover interactions between nurses was audio recorded over a two-week period, and video was used to document work with three families over one week. The latter was less as an additional source of primary data, and more as a means to explore methodological questions regarding particular kinds of representation of partnership (see Hopwood *in press-c*; Hopwood and Lee 2012).

Table 3.1 captures the methodological scope of the study and quantifies differences in our fieldwork participation.

The table shows the number of our site visits, pointing to one key way in which our fieldwork varied. The average time per visit however, is strikingly similar at approximately five hours per visit. This reflected similar but independently made judgements about appropriate visit durations—long enough to capture meaningful cycles and progression in time, but short enough to avoid burdening participants, and to enable writing of field notes.

Overwhelmingly, our visits were independent of one another. Both of us were onsite at either the same time or on the same day on only six of our 82 visits. This flexibility meant we separately organised visits across the

morning, afternoon and night shifts. Decisions on which days and times to visit were made independently of each other, allowing us to follow our own internal fieldwork logics in terms of covering the spread of shifts, following particular families, and shadowing different members of staff. What might be seen as a lack of coordination between us actually enabled us to schedule visits in a way that retained integrity with the different temporal and other conditions of our work.

The flexibility within our team allowed our methodological practices to diverge productively. As the research progressed, each of us was able to take advantage of opportunities as they arose, such as attendance at regular institutional activities, case conferences, doctor's consultations, group sessions, which enabled us to cover the full spectrum. Nick attended all activities more than once, while Teena attended at least one of each.

Observation approaches were relaxed, with Nick instigating deliberate changes on occasion. We engaged in loose observation on Nick's first eighteen visits and Teena's first six visits, after which we began to formally shadow individual staff and several families. Between us we shadowed 27 staff members individually and in groups (Nick = 21, Teena = 6), sometimes shadowing the same staff member at different times. Toward the end of his visits Nick developed, piloted and deployed a highly structured observation protocol. By this time Teena had concluded her fieldwork, but for Nick, who had judged the shadowing approach to have reached saturation, this provided a new way to pay attention and document practices on the Unit (see [Chap. 4](#)).

Our flexible arrangement meant our methodological practices developed independently, informed by our different backgrounds, ethnographic research experiences, personal preferences and fieldwork dispositions. The material effects of these differences determined how we worked and influenced the divergence in our practices, which we elaborate shortly.

Data sets were recorded in two primary modes—written and visual, with limited audio and video recordings as discussed previously. While acknowledging the broader interpretation of 'writing' to include the inscription of lines and sketches and that words are visually reproduced through typography, for clarity in this book, 'writing' and 'written' refers to data in word form.

We both handwrote fieldnotes and drew sketches in small notebooks, yet the generation of visual data is strikingly different in quantitative and qualitative terms. Both of us drew 'mud maps' (literally, simple drawings indicating key landmarks and/or activities). Teena drew more than 70 quick sketches to capture movement and spatial relationships between staff, families and objects, while Nick took nearly 340 photographs. The way in which these visual data were assembled and what was produced through collaborative visual analysis introduces a methodological innovation (see [Chap. 4](#)).

There were differences in our approach to and experience of using video, discussed briefly in [Chap. 4](#), with respect to how collaboration in editing these materials shifted our work together.

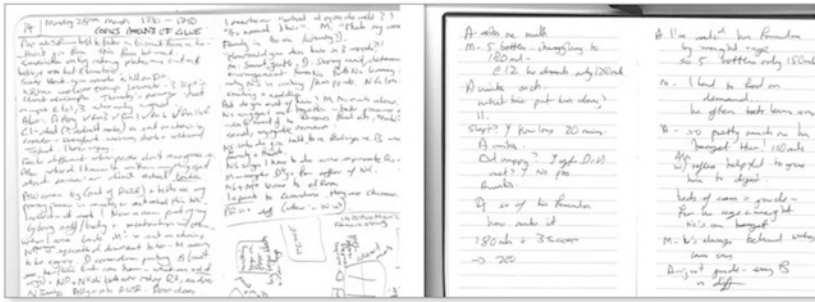


Fig. 3.1 Nick’s handwritten notes on visits 5 and 40

3.1 Generating Written Data

The differences in our handwritten fieldnotes indicate different sensibilities and forms of attention and documentation. We both used small, discreet notebooks that were easy to carry around, could fit in a pocket at short notice and enabled us to be involved in play, hold other objects such as toys, infants’ drinks bottles, infants themselves, clipcharts, and mobile phones to take photos.

3.1.1 Handwritten Fieldwork Notes

Nick used lined notebooks, while Teena’s notebooks were unlined, given her preference for and skill in drawing sketches, diagrams and maps. This reduced the need to erase the notebook lines when they were enlarged and scanned as digital images for publication. Nick’s writing changed over time—the images below (Fig. 3.1, top row) show less writing on each page in the later visit, and the increased use of short hand and symbols to indicate recognisable activities, patterns and conversations. This enabled him to quickly assemble certain things of interest, which he had previously looked at in more detail, in order to focus on other aspects of fieldwork, such as a bigger picture, flow and bodies. The change in Nick’s notes reflects progressive focusing in the (longer) duration of his fieldwork. Initially most of what was observed was new, and felt important to document. Later, Nick became more actively involved or participatory in activities, and was increasingly looking to note and write down unusual events, or particular features of practices—hence he had both less time and less need to write detailed notes. This was reinforced as the shadowing process reached saturation.

Teena’s writing remained consistently legible over time, making it easier to type up her notes, particularly as she waited much longer to do this than Nick. Her use of shorthand did not increase during the study, apart from the system of using room numbers to identify families, which Nick and staff on the Unit also used,



Fig. 3.2 Teena’s handwritten notes on visits 2 and 21

and acronyms for various rooms. Her sketches increased in both frequency and size over the study. By the last visit, the sketches covered whole pages in her notebooks and sometimes extended across double page spreads (Fig. 3.1).

Teena’s approach to fieldwork notes (Fig. 3.2) reflects a different form and pace of progression than Nick’s, less determined by saturation, and more shaped by an increasing emphasis on visual methods to note aspects of embodiment, spatial relationships and materiality.

3.1.2 Typing Up Fieldwork Notes

Ethnographers feel both guilt and anger towards their fieldnotes—guilt because they are always so behind in writing them up, and anger because they must steal so much time from observation to do so... they also know it is necessary. Their obsession with writing up their notes is matched only by the satisfaction they feel when they are momentarily caught up (Erickson and Stull 1998, p. 32).

This quote captures the tension between the activities of fieldwork and typing up notes. It also points to one of the few points of disagreement in our collaboration. Nick always typed up his fieldnotes as soon as possible after fieldwork ended for the day, occasionally doing so in a quiet room while still at the research site or on the train home. This enabled him to expand on what was written and reflect on what he had observed. This explains how, despite the hand-written notes become less dense later in the project, the typed up notes remained at a consistent length as additional details were inserted into the latter from recent memory, and with reference to photographs. Nick regularly made site visits more than once each week, and any delay in typing up his notes would have affected recall and made fieldwork much more difficult to manage.

Teena did not type up her field notes on the same day, partly because she was somewhat overwhelmed by life on the Unit and what she observed, which often triggered complex emotions. She needed space to reflect on what she had observed and used her sketches to prompt her recall of events, interactions, activities and significant events. Typing up her notes several days after fieldwork enabled her to reflect on her observations while typing, which allowed her to simultaneously

analyse the detail in the data and, enhanced by distance, think about the bigger picture. The material practice of translating handwriting to typographic representation enabled her to both make sense of what she observed and to recall the events about which she had written when it came to joint analysis. She saw this delay as allowing space in which to more fluidly weave together the observations recorded in her notebooks and her reflective understandings of what was going on. Typing her notes a day or two after fieldwork gave her what she saw as a fresh view of events and enabled reflection at a distance. Importantly, it allowed her to type in the mornings when she felt more alert rather than late in the day after fieldwork. She saw her practice as offsetting the possible loss of detail the delay may have engendered.

The asymmetry in our practices of typing up notes became a point of disagreement, with Nick working within common ethnographic practice and Teena diverging. This disagreement opened up several discussions about the benefits of typing up as soon as is practicably possible—observation enhanced by a more vivid recall—and the downside—a potential loss of observational detail. On the other hand, typing up some time afterwards offered the possibility of merging observation with reflection enhanced by distance. Creese et al. (2008) support this idea, suggesting it enables the research team to:

...extend, delete, reinstate and clarify points from the scribbled and hurried notes of observations in real time...to avoid memory loss and loss or richness of description but also because we realized that we were relying on one another for different aspects of the research (p. 207).

Although we did not rely on each other as did Creese et al., possibilities for extending, clarifying and reflecting were not closed off for Nick however, as he accomplished reflection at a distance in different venues (see Chap. 4). What is clear however is that tension did in fact arise from the complexity of accommodating personal styles and preferences within our team, and the need to ‘manage’ the ethnographic process on the basis of what the literature suggests are important practices.

The following excerpts from our typed up notes illustrate the differences in our practices in relation to reflection at a distance. Teena’s notes are from her site visits 15 and 18, while Nick’s are from his site visits 36 and 42. All four site visits are near the end of the study.

Key to codes: WB whiteboard; SR staff room; DR dining room; NS nurses’ station; CIR daily family/staff register; B7 (baby in room 7; B7b younger child); M7 (mother in room 7)

TC15

2.40 pm. Loose today, not shadowing anyone, but it feels vague and unfamiliar not to have a structure anymore. Not sure who to follow, what to look out for until welcome group gets underway. H pushing baby (B7b) in a pram (I can retrospectively assign room numbers to identify babies, but at the time, they are just babies or toddlers – later, I identify toddlers by name and have to remember room numbers, but with babies, I identify them until later in the week with the staff member who attends them, then refer to CIR for name/room)...

Baby screaming from C2, O says, is there someone with that baby? Although noone goes (presumably there is someone in the room, although I can't see for now). I think O is a bit theatrical in her comments, partly as her character, and perhaps partly for me, on show...

3.30 pm. O and R are very conscious of me as I write, although other staff don't seem to notice/react. I am writing that I'm not following anyone and so feel a bit scattered, and I tell them that...

4.30 pm. The waiting room is surprisingly light and airy, in contrast to how I usually see it with the blinds closed and noone in there. There are very few views of the outside when in Karitane, attention always seems inward focused, on what is happening in the seemingly hermetically sealed, 'contained' space of the res unit, divorced from 'outside', as P acknowledges later. All senses are at work in the unit, sight, sound, smell, touch, taste even, but most particularly sound...

5.30 pm. I still don't yet read/see the WB as the nurses and mums do, don't check it all the time, now I notice that the list of tasks have been erased, only the massage schedule and staff breaks remain...

7.45 pm. Time becomes quite fluid, meaningless in here for me, although it determines almost all actions for families and nurses...

8.55 pm. A uses chart to report, although V corrects her at times. I think there's some tension between them, when I asked earlier, A had said her families were going well, although when V came back she said (pointedly) to A, that her baby was crying for 25 minutes. A has some handwriting on the top of her hand. She's not very chatty to me, perhaps something to do with her not knowing previously about the research and consent, or I might just be reading something into this? She seems to be losing her voice tonight, noticed by E when she arrives for night shift, although she doesn't say...I suspect there are other issues aside from health for A...I realise that this handover is really about getting information about what mums want to do overnight re waking/feeding/strategies so they can let night shift staff know, that is, what strategies have been put in place, what have mum's and bub's responses been like (action) and reactions (feelings, emotion, mood). Door opens, I can hear loud music from in here as well as the clock ticking over the door inside HO room.

TC18

9.30–10.55 am. Self-awareness group. We start with a cup of tea, staff explaining what will be involved, the room has tables set up in the centre, surrounded by chairs, M12 feeding B12 in one. M13, M7, M6 and I sit around the table. Paints, pens, paper are in the middle of the table. I am faintly wary as I know what is to come, and wonder if I should disclose at all, or whether that would look like I am not participating. Staff said that Nick participated, so I take her lead and do so as well. M12 goes outside as baby might disturb us.

We choose a photo, then write down the thoughts it prompts. I write, surprisingly, about when I travelled overseas alone in the 1980s, prompted by the black and white image, rather than about my babies. We go around the room and explain what the photo meant or prompted, but as is the case with groups more generally, it takes a while to get the ball rolling. We each share, staff first, M13 next, M7 next, then M6, who is clearly emotionally moved by her situation...M7 joins in as well, to support her, as do I. It is very emotional.

When it's my time to share, I shed a tear for M6, although I'm not sure it is entirely for her alone. Makes me realise that we each have our problems negotiating motherhood, and help is there in many different forms. This group, rather than self-awareness, is an extension of FP, the space is there for mums to practice what they've learned from partnership with the nurses and do it with other mums. It's like a flow on effect.

We do a painting each, and it's a relief for me to get paint on paper again, with such abandon, give up the brushes, and just use the paint bottles, pour it all over, takes days to dry. I still have it. It is a relief when the group is over, unexpected and expected experience at the same time. We walk together back to the res unit, B7a has had a lovely time with U, he likes that one on one, says T, refers to his problems with hearing. R6 twins are 'working on something' (doing a poo).

A mixture of observation, reflection and notes to self about the research focus is evident in Teena's typing up. There are also notes about methodology—how to identify babies and families on the day of their arrival when the room numbers or names are unknown. These different aspects are interwoven into a structured narrative which is much more cohesive than the scribbled notes recorded in Teena's notebook.

N36

w says she woke a few times just thinking what's going on, but he didn't wake once! he woke at 5 eventually and she put him back
 a it's good that you're doing that
 w i want to see how HE reacts, what he wants [I THINK THIS IS REMARKABLE - MUM HAS ALREADY INTERNALISED IDEA OF B HAVING OWN OPINION, WANTS, AND TRYING TO READ THESE]
 a yeah, give him that opportunity, let him know
 w i feel like i'm the lucky one here. talking to the other mums, i realise i can be far worse a yes you're not alone
 w when my mum came yesterday she said i can't believe how welcoming it is. i didn't expect it to be this nice, the environment you know, comfortable and friendly . mum herself didn't know what to expect, but perhaps more hospital like.
 [THIS IS IMPORTANT DATA!]
 b chews his finger
 a - ah look maybe he's getting his molars
 w yes he is
 k comes past and leans into say hello mr!
 w describes how she used to be a personal trainer and she is now thinking about starting running again when she gets home - she used to run 1.5 hours a day before him. INTERESTING THAT MUM IS ALREADY POSITIVE THINKING ABOUT HER FUTURE, A LIFE WITH HER AGENDA IN THERE NOT JUST CARING FOR B
 w is promising herself at least on 'me' thing per day

N42

1607 P writes jobs on WB – toys...She tells W i've got you on toys with deb. W does not verbally respond or nod and continues writing. THIS IS THE ONLY INSTANCE OF IGNORING /NOT RESPONDING TO A COLLEAGUE [OR ANYONE FOR THAT MATTER] THAT I HAVE NOTICED ON THE UNIT. TEENA AND I TALKED ON 20/7 ABOUT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN P AND W. P also writes up staff dinner break times. W is 6 pm with deb

interesting how these notes kind of structure the activities for later - but not really - read on!...

1656 W back to NS sits, fills in ch - b3 had slept until 1645 - mum is pleased. relaxation group notice is up on the WB; W talks to T about how going with B7 and last night experiences. took 4 hours! THIS IS UNUSUAL IN THAT THE SETTLING IS ACTUALLY TALKED ABOUT AS DIFFICULT, A CHALLENGE FOR NURSES NOT JUST B AND PARENTS...

W says she'll wait until they are all at tea before tidying all the toys in PR. B12 comes past and high 5 s me! great hand holding i say as he leaves... W goes to SR then DR for water and chat to cook, then back through SR, locking door on inside. They are all at dinner, so we go to PR - it is so quiet and empty here now. we wash the toys by hand - me and T [not assigned this job] and W until she tires and has to sit down. we use buckets with detergent, and wipes. they don't submerge toys bc water gets in and moulds. SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON THE WALL I NEED TO COPY THESE

Nick's notebooks show the development of shorthand that enabled him to focus observation on new areas of interest. The actual shorthand and writing in his notebooks furthermore, seems to be more evident in Nick's typing up. He uses capital letters when reflecting on his observations or making notes to himself for future reference. Both of us use the same shorthand for spaces in the unit, and both of us directly refer to each other in our typed up notes.

The asymmetry in our practice of typing up notes enabled us to develop independent insights that could be expressed in different ways. Articulating the tension it produced, but allowing it to 'sit'—that is, continuing to pursue different practices—worked well in terms of enabling our practices to continue to diverge with little harm. In fact this became a strength of our project, as we discuss in [Chap. 4](#).

3.2 Visual Data Generation and Visual Assemblages

Interest in the visual, visual culture and visual research methodologies and representations in ethnography and anthropology and emergent disciplines such as design has increased significantly in the last decade and is well documented (Clerke 2012; Kenney 2009; Pink 2001, 2012; Reeves 2011; Rose 2001, 2007, 2012; Ruby 2005). In this section, the visual data we individually generated in two modes—digital colour photographs and black and white handdrawn sketches—are described and represented in visual form. We briefly discuss the strengths of what we call visual assemblages of photographs and sketches, drawing on the visual methodologies literature.

While both of us documented interior and exterior spaces in the Unit and staff and family interactions during the week, Nick predominantly took photographs, while Teena sketched. Although this was unplanned, it seemed to suit our different ways of doing fieldwork and exploited different strengths, particularly Teena's skills in drawing. Both methods were quick and discrete, and both captured the scope and specificities of the spaces, individuals and objects represented. We next compare and contrast each method.

Overall, Nick took 338 colour digital photographs on his mobile phone. Teena took several photos at the beginning of the study, but did not record them because she felt Nick had captured most of the site images (the Unit occupies a relatively small, contained physical space). The photos represent external and internal signage; topographical features of the suburban landscape: pathways, ponds, children's play equipment, prams, and so on. They also capture moments of practice, in corridors, nurseries, staff meetings and the playroom.

While her visual methodological skills were seen to be useful for videoing, Teena's fieldwork sketches were entirely unplanned. Guided by Nick's sketches of the physical layout of the Unit, and prompted by an early discussion with a staff member about the efficacy of stick figures over text for printed communication, she consciously sketched more as the research progressed (as reflected in Fig. 3.1). The sketches capture body gestures and spatial relationships between individuals, objects and settings in the Unit, as well as way finding maps.

Sketching during fieldwork can be a quick and effective way to document observations. While sketching is not uncommon in field notes, the drawings are often used to prompt memory when typing up notes. A notable example is Taussig's (2013) reflection on one particular drawing in his anthropological notebooks, which he suggests may surpass the experience from which it gives rise. Thus for Taussig, drawings represent 'a depicting, a hauling, an unravelling, and being impelled toward something or somebody' (p. xii). In other words, drawings invite reflection. On a more pragmatic level, sketching is particularly useful for capturing positions and proximities between people, objects and specific environments and places. It is also a way to supplement other visual records such as photography (less invasive, discrete, quick, and easy) and notes (captures a moment, relational positionings, expressions, gestures, etc. while writing dialogue as text). Sketches bring certain things into sharp focus by decontextualising interactions between individuals and objects from their surroundings. They represent the researcher's 'made meaning' (Rose 2007, p. 2) of what was observed. In other words, sketches are both a form of data and a representation of data analysis.

Sketches can be generated in diagrammatic modes that incorporate written directions, names and other information. It is important to note that explanatory written notes always accompanied Teena's sketches, for example, naming individuals, documenting speech and capturing other information. In this context, written and visual texts are inseparable from one another, and together represent data, its analysis and its representation.

The key difference between photography and sketching is that the latter represents an effective strategy for de-identifying individuals without loss of facial expressions and bodily gestures, while capturing spatial relationships, movement, exchanges and artefacts. We contrast photography and sketches (with notes) in Figs. 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5.

Nick's photo shows one of the two corridors in the Unit. As a physical representation, what can be seen are the doors of two of the family rooms on either side, the fire exit at the end of the corridor (which is always shut), and noticeboards showcasing various promotional and informational flyers. It contains the traces of human activity but does not show how the space engages individual actors. In contrast, Teena's sketch maps the corridor through two simple perspective lines, a rudimentary door shape and the room number (Room 3). It embodies the space with two staff engaging with a parent outside the door. One nurse is holding the clipboard that documents families' progress towards meeting their goals during their stay on the Unit. The sketch de-clutters unnecessary background information to focus on nurses and families in dialogue around the clipboard.

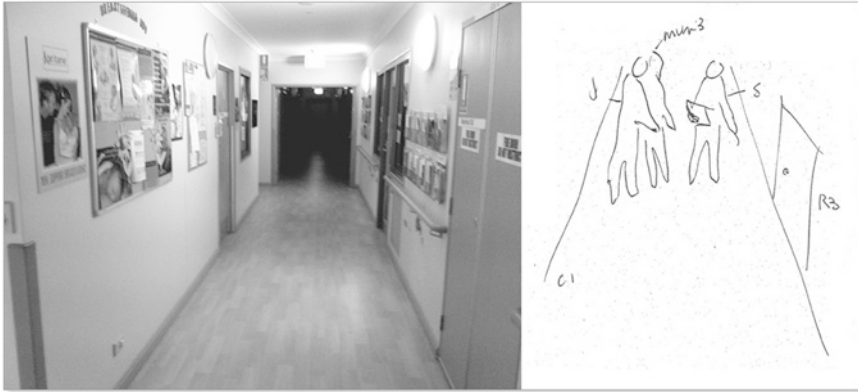


Fig. 3.3 The corridor



Fig. 3.4 The nurses' station



Fig. 3.5 Interactions (left to right): in the corridor; in the playroom; at the nurses' station; in the playroom

The photo and sketch assemblage however, encompasses the benefits of both to describe a partnership space in the Unit in detail and then embody the space through an interactional instance.

Nick's photo shows a nurse engaged in two modes of practice: rocking an infant in a pram while speaking on the phone at the nurses' station. Although the nurse consented to participation, the infant must be de-identified. Teena's sketches show nurses and researchers engaged in dialogue at the nurses' station on two different occasions and from two different angles. The intersection of the perspective lines references the nurses' station corner that delineates staff/family spatial boundaries in the Unit—inside and outside the station. While depicting different kinds of interactions and spatial relationships between individuals, the assemblage of photo and sketches enables more intimate and flexible depictions of the different ways the nurses' station can be seen as a space that orchestrates particular and different kinds of interactions between people.

Nick's photos show three different staff-staff and staff-infant interactions within particular physical spaces in the Unit: the wall in one of the corridors, and a mural and interactive wall toy in the playroom. Again, the nurses consented to participation, while the infants are de-identified. Teena's sketch captures a series of interactions between a staff member and a family, two children and their mother, in the playroom. It shows the physical positions of all participants as well as the spatial relationships between them, while also capturing one child's movement and how the movement prompts the staff member herself to move with the child. It is important to note that the handwritten notes accompanying the sketches are essential for understanding the movement and interactions. The assemblage of photos, sketch and handwritten notes opens up ways of 'seeing' different kinds of spatial interactions between people and physical places in the research setting.

In [Chap. 4](#) we discuss how the asymmetry between photographs taken and sketches drawn in the field provided a crucial stimulus to the use of line drawings traced from photographs in later stages of analysis and representation.

3.3 Other Data

The table at the start of this section shows the range of methods we employed in the study: observation, structured shadowing, photographs and sketches, document collection, self-recorded audio interviews and video observation. Nick alone conducted structured interviews, while the staff self-recorded digital audio files of handovers when we were both offsite. We next briefly discuss the asymmetries in document collection and quantitative data.

3.3.1 Documents

We both collected a wide range of documents during the study. These include personal thank you cards and letters sent by clients to staff; the Unit's organisational procedures documents; handwritten staff information; informational brochures and leaflets; promotional publications, and so on. Within the scope of our

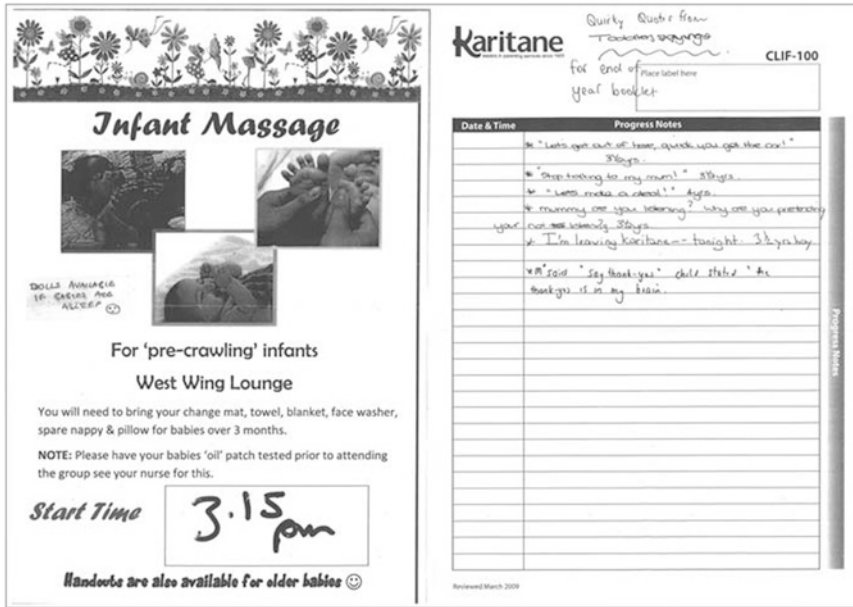


Fig. 3.6 Documents: whiteboard flyer promoting infant massage; staff collection of toddler sayings

ethics clearance, we were also able to photocopy or make notes from some documents relating to work with clients. All documents were scanned into digital form, logged and indexed to the field visit on which they were collected.

The documents vary as to their purpose, audience, location and their function in the Unit. Teena was especially drawn to personal ephemera and promotional material, while Nick examined a wider range of institutional operational documents, including a staff communication book and records of client evaluations of group activities (Fig. 3.6).

It is interesting to reflect briefly on the asymmetries of these processes and their outcomes. Documentary evidence may appear somewhat neutral or self-evident. However the differences in what we noticed and deemed important within the array of material artefacts on the Unit shows that the selection of documents into a dataset is indeed a process of data generation whereby individual backgrounds, interests, and ethnographic sensibilities come into play. Furthermore, as we later reflected, these differences anticipated and produced different understandings of the role material artefacts play on the Unit, reflected in part different theoretical bases for our work—Nick adopting an explicitly sociomaterial approach, particularly following Schatzki's (2002, 2003) site ontology and notions of material arrangements (Hopwood 2013a, b, c, forthcoming-a, forthcoming-b, in press-a, in press-b, in press-c). The document log (discussed in Chap. 4) preserved information as to whom procured each item and when, enabling threads of our asymmetry to be maintained through initial stages of analysis.

3.3.2 Quantitative Client Data

Karitane made several sources of existing quantitative data available to our project, although only Nick was involved in its procurement, entry, and analysis. This reflected Nick's longer and more substantial involvement in the field, and associated aims to generate a holistic dataset covering numerous aspects of institutional culture and practices. Furthermore, with a view to the analyses and publications imagined by Nick, it was important to secure data that could speak in varied ways to the question of evidencing change and impact in the work of the Unit. For this reason, towards the end of the fieldwork period, Nick undertook archival work to create a custom-made dataset focused on key outcome indicators (such as changes in parents' confidence scores from admission to discharge). Data from client evaluation forms (including likert and open-ended responses to questions regarding satisfaction, forms of partnership work etc.) were also collected for the period of study (defined by Nick's longer engagement in the field). As lead researcher, Nick also took on responsibilities to document and analyse information relating to the client intake over the period of study.

The individual rather than joint approach to this aspect of data generation represents some of the starkest asymmetry in our work. Nick undertaking this alone had the advantages of ensuring consistency in data entry. Furthermore, unlike observations, where our differences produced valuable asymmetries in the raw data, these data were defined externally, and so the use of asymmetry did not apply in the same way. Nick's sole analysis of this data enabled Teena to continue focusing on analysing her own qualitative field notes, sketches, and relevant documents. This work contributed directly and crucially to Nick's planned writing and broader analyses, while it may have distracted from the areas of focus in our collaborative analysis, namely forms of staff learning, parental pedagogy, and partnership.

Here, asymmetry took the form of exclusive responsibility for generation and analysis of a significant part of the dataset by one team member. This reflected particular purposes, constraints, and opportunities, and was important in preserving more nuanced forms of asymmetry in the spaces where these were of most value.

3.4 Products of Asymmetrical Fieldwork Practices

Our divergent methodological practices contributed depth to the research project, while our complementary skills contributed to our developing individual research sensibilities and capacities, as in other team ethnographies (Buford May and Pattilo-McCoy 2000; Gerstl-Pepin and Gunzenhauser 2002; Reid et al. 1996). These are: the development of fieldwork instincts, sensibilities and practices, ethics and visual assemblages.

3.4.1 Co-development of Fieldwork Instincts, Sensibilities, Ethics and Practices

Individual fieldwork sensibilities and instincts can be brought into sharp focus through reflection on fieldwork (Buford May and Pattilo-McCoy 2000). Researchers' distinctive backgrounds and experiential knowledge of ethnographic research, the research setting and its location in a professional practice domain, relationships with participants, and respective team roles, inflect fieldwork practices in particular ways.

Teena's notes show her focus on capturing what was said in conversation between individuals and groups, while her sketches captured the spatial relationships, interactions and proximities between objects and the surrounding environment. She only occasionally noticed smells and sounds. Nick on the other hand, often noticed and recorded smells and in particular, sounds, which may be attributed to his unfamiliarity with the rhythms and sounds of infants, toddlers and everyday family life, but also an explicit a priori and theoretically driven interest in embodiment, temporality, and sensory ethnography (Pink 2001). These differences were noticed when reflecting on our experiences in the writing of this book, which represents the only time Teena read any of Nick's fieldnotes.

Teena's field instincts were to ask more questions of staff, while Nick consciously stopped himself doing that, wanting to 'see' the answers. This may be attributed to Teena's neophyte researcher position and her design practice of questioning and checking understanding with clients to generate working briefs. On the one hand, she identified more closely with nursing and administrative staff than Nick, and often enjoyed lunch and meal breaks when conversation flowed freely, sharing parenting insights and experiences. She saw her work as social and relational, focusing on pre-existing professional relationships between staff to track the trajectories of their careers to the Unit. She saw herself as deeply embedded in their social lives at work. On the other hand, Teena instinctively stayed in the background when observing families, to reduce the impact of what she saw as an imposition on their sometimes intensely private and emotionally charged interactions. Teena was less forthright and interactive with families, and particularly children, than Nick, who often actively engaged with children, as Fig. 3.7 shows.

Nick's instincts were informed by previous research experiences and was more engaged with the project on a number of registers: it was 'Nick's' project (he had responsibility for instigating, designing and directing the project and its outcomes), he had developed the research aims and questions, and he had more time on the project than Teena. He engaged in structured shadowing (not represented in this book), developing quantitative tools to capture and represent fine-grained details of their interactions over short, intensive periods of time.

His ethnographic practice had been honed in previous research projects over a number of years, so he was more familiar with the relative timing and duration of the various ethnographic activities. His preference for not asking staff questions (which is not to say he did not interact with them verbally) reflected a security felt

Fig. 3.7 Face painting in the playroom



on the basis of past experience and the increased longevity and intensity of his fieldwork presence compared to Teena's. These different practices produced a valuable asymmetry in terms of the data produced and the understandings of the Unit that we developed. Nick's views, 'confirmed' through extensive observation, could be compared and contrasted with Teena's, which were more routinely enriched and 'confirmed' through direct questioning of participants.

3.4.2 Ethics in Research

The ethics of ethnographic research are complex and nuanced. While we do not provide a full account of these complexities, what follows is a brief reflection on how the process of seeking consent from participants was not experienced in the same way by both of us, nor was it practiced in the same way. The main focus of our ethical discussions was initially broader in terms of dealing with issues relating to the vulnerability of some clients (particularly those who have experienced domestic violence), and also the need to negatively affect the ability of staff to deliver clinical services and support for those parents. Then we focused more on practical implications such as who we might approach to participate in the study, when we might involve them, how we might get them to sign the consent forms, and how we might refer to individuals in our fieldnotes. The solution to the latter was through room numbers, that is, the parent in room 4 was referred to as M4 and the child as B4, or if two children, B4a and B4b. We stored blank consent forms in a locker in the staff room to which we each had a key, and the ones we left for parents or staff to complete when they were available, when signed, were deposited in a drawer in the Nurse Manager's room. Beyond this however, we devised our own screening strategies and approaches for asking families to sign consent forms.

Teena's perception was that Nick was 'better' at asking families to sign consent forms, whereas she was uncomfortable drawing attention to both herself and her role as researcher, and the study itself. Her desire was to melt into the background during fieldwork observations where families were involved. Yet she readily engaged with staff in both formal and informal interactions on the unit, when they were away from families, and often at meal breaks. Czarniawska (2007) uses the

term ‘psychic discomfort’ to refer to feelings of discomfort experienced by researchers in the field that arise from ‘problems caused by the unexpected or discomforts related the strangeness of the Other’ (p. 42). In other words, the researcher’s psychological discomfort of estrangement from those researched is given permission and indeed, encourages emotions in the course of research as a source of insight (p. 56).

We appropriate this term to name the inner discomfort Teena felt when approaching families to ask them to sign consent forms. Without straying too far from the idea of the researcher’s estrangement from those researched, psychic discomfort as felt when approaching families to seek their written consent brings into sharp focus the strangeness of the (research) interaction that brought us together. On the one hand, Teena often waited to approach families when they were alone in the playroom, which was not often on the unit, while on the other, she recalls ‘chasing’ one family all the way to the carpark to get them to sign the consent form, under the (well intentioned) guise of helping them pack the car on their departure. Here, we recognise the tension between the idea of actively pursuing participants because of the ‘good data’ observations of their interactions generated for the study, and the ethical issues of convincing families of the benefits of their participation. This is particularly since the likelihood of them gaining direct benefit was slim. Some families however, were very engaged in what we were doing, and requested copies of our report be sent to them. These families were easy to approach as we felt there was reciprocity in their participation.

Both of us felt uncomfortable however, asking families to participate in the videoing, which required a separate ethics consent form, as well as doing the actual videoing (for a discussion on the ethics of video research methodologies, see Rose 2012).

Gender played an important part in how we interacted with staff and families during fieldwork. Teena’s feminist theoretical perspective sharpened her interpretation of male-female interactions. For example, staff sometimes asked Nick to distance himself from certain families who had experienced domestic violence, sexual assault or war-related post-traumatic stress. Staff questioned Teena on several occasions as to Nick’s interactions with particularly vulnerable families, to ascertain her perspective of certain families’ responses to a male presence on the Unit. During a presentation of preliminary research outcomes to participants jointly facilitated by her and a male academic colleague, Teena noticed the absence of men in the audience even as he remained unaware of this, while staff later commented with some concern as they sensed he had taken the lead in the presentation. Gender remains an aspect of asymmetry that is underexplored with respect to our particular work. Our brief note here is not to dismiss the importance of issues of gender, which constitutes an aspect of ethnographic research teamwork that is less well documented in the literature.

Our different fieldwork instincts and sensibilities however, were never a source of disagreement between us. While we were acutely aware of how differently we approached staff, families and the practice of ethnography itself, we saw these differences as a strength of our joint knowledge production. That is, our asymmetrical collaboration opened space for each of us to expand our individual research knowledge, skills and practices, albeit in distinctly different ways, which also inevitably enriched the research outcomes in very specific ways.

3.4.3 Visual Assemblages

We previously suggested that photographs describe physical settings with relatively low selection (reflecting the aim and zoom of the camera), while sketches and notes detail embodied interactions in context, devoid of distracting visual information. Assemblages of photographs and sketches expand possibilities for generating innovative collaborative data analysis. Thus de-identified and authentic representations of embodied interactions in situ can be produced for publication to more clearly show researchers' 'made meaning' (Rose 2007, p. 2) than written descriptions alone. While unplanned and emerging organically, our independent methodological practices in visual data generation were aligned with our professional practices. What our differences produced was an expanded visual vocabulary and increased flexibility with which to represent spaces, people in interaction and pedagogical partnership. How we utilised this vocabulary and what it enabled will be described in more detail in [Chap. 4](#).

The evolving process of assembling photographs and sketches can be considered an innovative way of what we call 'seeing together'. Visual assemblages show both what sketches capture in fieldwork (de-identified movement and interactions) and what photographs bring to the ethnographic record (historically time-framed and specific contextual detail). Visual assemblages represent what 'seeing together' produces—much more than the sum of individual accounts. While described in this section as a product of our asymmetrical fieldwork practices, our visual assemblages can alternatively be seen as joint analysis because they were produced after the research concluded, during the writing of this book. The 'seeing together' they represent however, directly influenced our ongoing fieldwork (see Teena's reflection in [Chap. 5](#)).

In summary, our different fieldwork instincts and sensibilities enabled us to freely engage in distinct practices of noticing that enriched rather than hindered the research process and its outcomes. The visual assemblages we produced sparked new ways of jointly analysing and representing research, and enhanced the development of our researcher identities and skills repositories. This will be discussed further in the [Chap. 4](#).

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