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"Goals" and the Teaching of Anthropology

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Teaching anthropology in the UK is undergoing an important change. Anthropology has become an A-Level subject, which means that it will be taught not only at universities but also at secondary schools and colleges of further education. This is a good opportunity to reflect on what it means to teach anthropology to young people before they go to University. How will it be different to teaching anthropology to undergraduates and postgraduates? Might it affect the way we conceive of teaching and learning anthropological fieldwork, given it is sometimes said that anthropology demands a certain level of life experience and wisdom to understand and conduct ethnographic research? How could the experience of teaching anthropology in higher education inform teaching anthropology at schools and vice versa?

One may argue that key anthropological proclivities include openness to different ways of being, knowing and doing as well as a willingness, an interest and a readiness to embrace different worlds in order to understand them. If this is the case, could we then hope that through delving into anthropology from an early age, young people could turn to this A-Level subject to inspire and guide their moral journeys, hopefully towards tolerance and respect in our multicultural society? Or, as some colleagues have begun to wonder, in order to make anthropology appealing to a younger generation, does one have to exoticise the Other so that the journey of the very young students in anthropology is "exciting" and "enticing"? Or, perhaps, this would involve a "refiguring of the exotic" and, with it, the way we think about anthropology - as suggested insightfully by Bruce Kapferer[i]. What would be the consequences for conceptualising difference and diversity then? Do we always need to be alarmed about "exoticising"? Or, could we find there a spark of enthusiasm to nourish an exploratory, curious and reaching-out spirit, discovering alternative ways of being, meaning-making and "ordering" the world? Learning anthropology without doing fieldwork (or will the A-Level include fieldwork practice eventually?) still demands a vivid imagination, wisdom and patience when reading or writing about and discussing unfamiliar worlds. How could teachers best facilitate these first encounters with ethnography? What would be the specific goals for and methods of teaching anthropology as an A-Level? Should we teach anthropology as a philosophy and practice of humanism, where one reaches out to the Other through experiencing, understanding, articulating and respecting what binds (or separates) people? What vision for teaching anthropology in schools can we propose drawing on our experience in higher education?

Education research, with its excessive focus on measuring the outcomes and goals in teaching and learning has produced numerous "models," most of which focus on developing analytical skills (see e.g. Bloom 1956, Anderson and Krathwohl 2001). Such goal taxonomies have only deepened the gap between academic thinking and human meanings and values. While analytical thinking is valuable, it is not in itself a sufficient scholarly and educational goal. The significant learning experiences in anthropology are broader than gaining some cognitive skills (cf. Fink 2003). One learns about oneself as well as about others, and changes in the process. Anthropology offers an opportunity to learn how

we learn. As we discussed in our inaugural conference[ii], it is also about learning unlearning. Anthropology may change not only how students think but also how they feel, what they value and what they are interested in. Moving beyond the "models," some current scholarship in education has opened insightful discussions. These might resonate better with teaching and learning anthropology. For example, Colby and Sullivan (2009) have recently critiqued the neglect of the moral dimensions and identity transformation in learning. They stress that "high-level analytic thinking about morality is insufficient; it must be accompanied by the kind of habitual, embodied, pervasive morality that is the basis for a moral life" (p.3). Similarly to the US liberal education institutions they criticise, in the UK higher education, we can see a misalignment between implicitly striving to encourage certain moral qualities and the explicit agenda to inculcate analytical thinking. Such misalignment results in unintended consequences and a hidden curriculum. What values and moral personas do we carve out from tensions between vision and practice? How do we do this in daily teaching of classes or seminars, in supervision or at conferences? We will discuss some of these themes also during our forthcoming workshop.[iii]

Each article in this issue of *Teaching Anthropology* engages with such questions and with the challenges of navigating between certain visions of anthropology and the anthropology we assemble in our daily teaching and learning practices. Jonathan Newman criticizes the promotion of a particular "reflective" stance in teaching because of the way it aligns individual's professional development with the corporate strategies of educational institutions in the UK. The question arises: should we even attempt to translate our aims into the language of "reflective practice," "goals," "skills," and "outcomes"? What vision for education in anthropology could we offer as an alternative to the models proposed by education developers? If transformative learning (Taylor 2009) is foregrounded, then, as Dimitrina Spencer suggests in her article, teachers and learners of anthropology have to add emotional reflexivity to the wider reflexive project of both research and pedagogy. Sam Pack shows how he works towards a transformative agenda through a specific method of experiential learning – he describes a class activity that challenges ethnic and racial prejudice among his students in a liberal college in the USA. Two of the articles focus on the Oxford tutorial and remove some of the mystique surrounding this pedagogy, pointing to the challenges and potentials for all small-group teaching: Willow Sainsbury argues for engaging actively student personal experience through the pedagogical use of anecdotes; Hubert Bastide reveals the value of ethnographic sensitivity in one's own teaching, especially in navigating dynamics of "power distance" in pedagogical relationships. Finally, in his insightful account of how the A-Level in anthropology came to life in the UK, David Bennett shows the key role of the anthropological community and its institutions in developing and implementing the anthropology curriculum in schools. In these articles, learning anthropology indeed emerges as an individual and collective journey transforming simultaneously "knowing, doing and being" (Coleman and Simpson 2004).

References

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Notes

[i] During his 2011 RAI Huxley Lecture: *How Anthropologists Think: Refiguring the Exotic* (16.12.2011, Stevenson Theatre, Clore Education Centre, the British Museum).

[ii] The inaugural conference of the journal Teaching Anthropology - "Learning Unlearning," 22 September 2011, University of Oxford. See the conference program and report on the journal website.

[iii] *Learning by Example: Building Arguments Ethnographically*, 16 April 2012, Magdalen College, Oxford. See: http://www.therai.org.uk/index.php?view=details&id=59:learning-by-example-building-arguments-ethnographically&option=com_eventlist