

Persuading Pre-Professionals to be Participant Observers: Reflections on Teaching Anthropology and Education to Professional Teacher Candidates

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Abstract

This paper explains how I design and teach an Anthropology and Education course within a professional teacher education program. After establishing how some teacher candidates might initially imagine that this course is irrelevant to their professional education, I argue that anthropological knowledge and being able to think anthropologically enables teacher candidates to become better teachers. Specifically, I argue that becoming a participant observer of one's own and others' practices provides an easily accessible crossover between an anthropological method and mindset, on the one hand, and teacher actions like instruction, observation, assessment, and reflective practice (Schön 1982), on the other. To support this claim, I describe how I teach teacher candidates concepts and theory from anthropology that are applicable to the study of education, and can be used to inform their work on a video ethnography of a classroom (Hester 2012) that I assign to develop their practice of professional participant observation. I then describe how I prepare teacher candidates to consider the context of that video, especially as it offers an encounter with ideological diversity within the teaching profession and schools. The conclusion explains how I encourage the candidates to continue using the participant observer concept to inform their professional work post-graduation.

Keywords

anthropology, anthropology of education, participant observer, ideology, normativity, scholarship of teaching and learning, school, teacher candidate, teacher education.

Introduction

At the first meeting¹ of an Anthropology and Education course I arrive early in the classroom, greet each student individually, and hand them a paper syllabus. As usual, I wear a blazer and dress slacks, with a white collared shirt and tie. I have a slide presentation that overviews the course ready on screen, I have learned the students' names, and I know exactly what I will do at each moment in this meeting. At one minute before the scheduled start time, I move to the front corner of the room and wait for the clock on the wall to indicate the beginning of the meeting. When that moment arrives, I walk to the front and centre of the room and stand there, facing the class, smiling and silently waiting for them to attend to me. I do not do anything else to signify the meeting's start. I just stand and wait for the students to attend to me quietly. And they do. And when they do, I begin the meeting. Or, more precisely, I *continue* it.

That ritual conveys much information about what these students – who are candidates to be professional teachers – will learn in this course. It demonstrates to them how I will start every meeting, including norms for punctuality and order. It also implies that I value employing a specific first impression to implement those norms. Perhaps more subtly it reinforces the institutional norms for who is authorized to stand at the 'front' of a classroom to convene meetings. The ritual also invokes some element of peer pressure, where students who do see me arrive at the front will inform the others who are looking away, so that they might join the attending group. Within these first moments I have provided students with an experience that we can recursively recall throughout the semester, and that opens a path to consider many topics as we examine how anthropological perspectives strengthen our work as teachers. For example: What is ritual? How do rituals appear in education and schooling? What does this ritual look like to someone who is an outsider to our class? To an insider? Or to those who approve or disapprove of it? And so far as it seems normal here to talk about approving and disapproving of this or any other educational practice, in upcoming meetings we will talk about the distinction

between prescriptive and descriptive statements, and how the former apparently occupies the greater share of attention in teacher education's 'good teaching' discourses.

This quickly expanding list of questions shows that one need not look far to find something of anthropological interest in education and schooling. However, while that ritual offers a conceptually rich approach to beginning this course, it could also appear in any other course's opening meeting. Instructors in other teacher education courses might use it instrumentally to gather students for the study of teaching methods but think nothing more of it; or instructors in an anthropology department might act out that script to teach ritual for its own sake, outside the teacher education context. Thus the question arises as to how I distinctly employ that ritual in this course, and what makes it, and its consequent questions, especially relevant for students in a professional teacher education program? In this paper I answer that question by arguing that anthropological knowledge and being able to think anthropologically helps teacher candidates become better teachers. More specifically, I contend that becoming a participant observer of one's own practices is an important part of that anthropological mindset. That first day ritual is instructive for the teacher candidates in this course beyond its function for regulating our interactions, or as a technique that they may appropriate into their own practice, because it presents them immediately with an opportunity to think about the kinds of choices they have as professionals. Being a participant observer, I contend, is a helpful stance for teachers as they participate in school cultures, both as responsive receivers and contemplative contributors. To this point, Mills and Spencer (2011) "suggest that the ethnographic metaphor of 'participant-observation' is an apt one to describe the lived engagement between students and teachers, reminding us how teaching is also a process of learning" (Mills and Spencer 2011, 1). Within the context of professional teacher education, this concept provides an easily accessible crossover between an anthropological method and mindset, on the one hand, and teacher actions like instruction, observation, assessment, and reflective practice (Schön 1982), on the other. It also has the advantage of portability across several contexts within the profession, a feature that is easily perceptible by noting its independence from specific subject areas, grade ranges, or kinds of schooling. A grade nine science teacher would find it just as useful as a grade twelve art teacher; so would a teacher in a Montessori, religious, or secular school.² The participant observer concept thus very helpfully enables teacher candidates to encounter familiar, conventional institutions with a fresh perspective, appreciate their uniqueness, see for themselves the arbitrary features within them, and hence discover a wider array of choices at their professional disposal (Erickson 1987, 23).

An Anthropology Course in a Teacher Preparation Program

Courses in anthropology, history, philosophy, and sociology of education sit within a field called *educational foundations*, and my university requires teacher candidates to take a one-semester course from this area.³ I was hired to teach the Philosophical Foundations of Education course that meets this requirement, but from 2018-2020 I taught Anthropology and Education instead. One of the main challenges that instructors face when offering foundations courses to pre-professional students is what I term *the relevance question*. Perhaps this question arises from a perception that learning the content in these courses impedes learning the profession's technical knowledge, and that this technical knowledge takes priority over other knowledge, imagined in opposition as 'theoretical'.⁴ If students perceive that the path to becoming a teacher is reducible to knowing 'teachable' subjects, being proficient in 'effective' teaching methods, and having skills with 'classroom management,' then the likelihood is greater that they will relegate to secondary status any course with purposes that do not easily match with this perception. From that perspective, foundations courses are at best perceived as 'academic' obstacles that distract from training one's ability in those areas.

This phenomenon is not necessarily only a matter of students' individual choices, however, because socio-institutional factors also possibly shape them. The students I meet in this course study it as part of a post-degree teacher education program (for secondary school⁵ teacher candidates) that they have been admitted to, in part, based on their expertise in "one or two approved teachable subject areas" (University of Victoria, 2021a). As that entry requirement has recognized their content-area knowledge of *what* to teach, the students I meet could then reasonably expect that teacher education would focus on the technical knowledge of *how* to teach. Moreover, if their exposure to the teaching profession has largely been conditioned by watching teachers at work over at least 17 years of schooling (Kindergarten to grade twelve, plus a 4 year university degree), then their view of the teaching profession, acquired through what sociologist Daniel Lortie calls a prolonged but narrow "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie 1975, 61-67),⁶ has likely constructed their understanding of what teachers do according to that knowledge, methods, and management triad. Those three dimensions of teaching

are important, but taken by themselves overlook how one thinks as a teacher, including the cultural, social, political, moral, epistemological, and psychological dimensions of teaching and schooling. If this phenomenon is real, then any foundations course must receive and reply directly to the relevance question, both at the beginning and throughout the term, in order to encourage the affective response from students that will enable them to appreciate how it strengthens their professional power in that greater sense.

Course Aims

This course does not lead toward a major in anthropology, nor is its goal to make students experts in this area. As it is part of a teacher education program that admits students with a wide variety of academic backgrounds (from fine arts to sciences to languages, and so forth), I have designed it as an introductory course for a university-educated audience. Conceiving of academic and professional rigour in this course thus poses an exciting challenge for me to relate an iteration of anthropology's best content and ways of thinking in a way that enables the candidates to build lasting connections between it and their professional situations. I therefore choose aims that I hope will challenge them without alienating them, and that re-cast relevance more broadly than instrumental training in pedagogical methods or behaviour management. These aims are:

1. Appreciate the value that anthropological thinking has for educators;
2. Comprehend anthropological theory; and
3. Apply anthropological theory to analyses of education and/or schooling.

I deliberately state an affective aim first: I hope that the students will become well-disposed toward the discipline so that they wish to learn more about how it can contribute positively to their professional work. I believe that students who appreciate the discipline's professional value will find it easier to engage with this course, but I also hope that being well-disposed toward studying anthropology will have an enduring effect throughout their careers. The second aim shifts into the cognitive domain, and states that students must be able to learn the theory to a level where they can relate it fluently in conversations among each other. This aim opens a path towards them basing their professional judgments on anthropologically rigorous grounds. The third aim thus descends from that comprehension. Since the course argues that anthropological thinking enables greater professional power, fulfilling that purpose involves connecting its theoretical knowledge with education's and schooling's socio-pedagogical reality. Teacher candidates ultimately need to know that anthropological theory, concepts, and research offer a strong basis for their professional judgments. This paper thus describes how, in the first weeks of this course, I lead students through conceptual knowledge of anthropological theory toward acting as participant observers through a video ethnography of a real classroom.⁷

Assignment Aims

The general, instrumental purpose of the video ethnography is to enable candidates to practice applying an ethnographic method in educational settings, and more specifically, I assign it to accomplish two outcomes. The first of these is for candidates to apply theory and concepts to the analysis of educational phenomena. Meeting this outcome enables them to realize that theory and concepts are helpful ways of describing educational realities. Its scope is descriptive, not normative, so that students might focus on using the data to explain how the teacher's (Hester 2012) classroom works, rather than evaluating his actions. Sustaining this exclusively descriptive scope challenges candidates to encounter and appreciate Hester's teaching practice on its own terms, rather than according to their own preconceptions of what counts as good teaching. As such, it provides an opportunity for candidates to realize the assignment's second outcome, which is practicing cultural relativism as it applies to receiving and responding to ideological differences within the teaching profession. These two outcomes provide a sufficient challenge for a single mid-term assignment; however, prioritizing them admittedly leaves extended normative critiques of theory and concepts for other moments in the course.

Working within that descriptive scope, however, does not require that candidates suspend their critical reception of the theory and concepts that they employ, or the data with which they engage. Even though some concepts like *ritual* or *hidden curriculum* may superficially or initially appear unproblematic in the sense that they are useful for making functional descriptions of 'how things work' in Hester's classroom, I propose to candidates that these concepts work best as first words in a critical conversation to explain classroom or school culture, rather than final, uncritical statements (see Ling 1999, 58). For example, when preparing this assignment we spend time in meetings questioning what counts as ritual or hidden curriculum, or how hidden curriculum (socialization in

schools) is sometimes mistakenly presented as ideological bias in the formal curriculum (the content that schools teach). We also engage with authors' critical discussions. These include Catherine Pelissier's observation that the distinction between formal and informal learning breaks down descriptively when one considers apprenticeships (1991, 88-90), and Paige West's (2016) normative caution to think very carefully whether development projects contribute to ongoing colonization of oppressed peoples. West's point is very instructive because it directly implies reconsidering what *development* means, and reminds us that educational institutions have been major actors in colonization. Our discussion of Ling's admonition to "be wary of considering our observations and interpretations as *the* 'final word' or a complete, perfect explanation for any phenomenon" and warning "not to trivialize or exoticize anyone's life or cultural habits" (Ling 1999, 58, emphasis in original) provides a helpful reminder to attend to the normative dimension embedded within the task of making descriptive explanations.⁸ Throughout this assignment, candidates therefore encounter the critical task of determining the adequacy of certain concepts or theoretical perspectives for explaining the data in the video, and whether certain choices are better suited than others for descriptive purposes.

It is certainly important to teach students to approach theoretical and conceptual frameworks with critical care. Recent scholarship, for example, reveals the problematic consequences of taking a concept like *competence* for granted within teacher education (Biesta 2015) and school curriculum (Ruitenbergh 2019). Gert Biesta (2009) especially admonishes readers to be wary of "cases in which the concepts that are used already appear to express values" (2009, 35). In his view, taking conceptual meanings for granted, and avoiding normative critiques of educational purposes only contributes to sustaining "the interest of those who benefit from the status quo to keep things as they are and not open up a discussion of what education might be" (2009, 37; see also Gunter 2013, 206-7). Helen Gunter (2013) as well indicates how specific conceptualizations of concepts like professionalism, "leader, leading, and leadership" (2013, 204-205) work in the particular ideological interests of those in power, leading to a situation where even the scholarship on leadership, although it appears productive by any measure of its "range and volume of activity," has largely become "disconnected from epistemological roots and debates" (2013, 205). It is important to recover the critical stance that such debates offer, according to Gunter, since "Ideas and action are linked through conceptualising what we do as intellectual work, and in Arendt's (1958) terms we need to think about what we are doing" (Gunter 2013, 209). Similarly, in her study of a Norwegian teacher education program, Ela Sjølie (2017) observes how a problematic acceptance of a theory-practice gap has a cascading effect of prompting teacher educators and candidates to "unreflectively [adopt] a discourse of harmony and coherence" in order to "make different parts 'fit seamlessly' into each other, or to 'close the gap'" (2017, 51). The findings of her study interestingly point to "a need for more critical and explicit dialogue amongst and between teacher educators and student teachers about the concepts of 'theory' and 'practice' and what each means in the field of education (as distinct from their meanings in other fields of study)" (2017, 54). She strongly suggests that it is very important to extend teacher knowledge past its mere reception and into a deeper, conceptual discussion of what the consequences are of certain discourses, including most especially those that are dominant to the point of being taken-for-granted in the field.

Finally, the assignment also enables me to show candidates that its descriptive delimitation strongly contrasts with the normative orientation of much of the discourse at other points in teacher education, thus placing both the ideologically normative framing of teacher education in high relief, and also showing that the normatively critical research that promotes school improvement (see, for example, Francisco et al, 2021), while important, is not the only kind of research that might be considered. This contrast does not imply, however, that a descriptive assessment of school cultures cannot lead to a normative end. One might infer some overlap, for example, between Susanne Francisco et al.'s normatively endorsing "critical praxis in its capacity to question institutionalised habits or educational practices ... in order to create positive change" (2021, 2) and Frederick Erickson's observation, from his conceptual analysis of school culture, that it is advantageous to consider how school cultures develop from "arbitrary choices [among] a range of alternative possibilities" because doing so enables one to develop a broader horizon from which to consider "policy options" (1987, 23). His contention that such engagement provides a basis for "hope in the possibility of educational reform" (1987, 24) shows how a professional need not stop at receiving descriptive observations, and could or even should use them toward promoting helpful normative outcomes, too.

Comprehending Theory: A First Step toward Participant Observation

Just as an anthropologist should not enter the research field without solid theoretical preparation, professional candidates should be similarly prepared to observe their field of practice. This course, I hope, does some of the

work toward broadening their perspectives past their “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie 1975), and into being able to perceive, know, and decide as teachers do – as participant observers. I devote much time to teaching the candidates concepts that will inform the analyses they perform later in the course, and after that within some of the relationships, situations, and institutions they will encounter as professionals. My teaching burden here is thus to enable candidates to appreciate how anthropology is helpful for recognizing, understanding, and responding to those encounters. It is obviously impossible to anticipate every context and teach every concept, and so the content I select is delimited by how well it transposes into informing their work on the video ethnography assignment.

The opening day ritual I describe above continues into a module where I outline for candidates the course’s aims, content, and teaching and assessment methods. When that work is complete, I move directly to teaching them the conceptual features of ritual as “rule governed action” (Parkin 2015, 717). My rationale here is trifold. First, ritual is an important concept for candidates to know because it will enable them to interpret events in schools in a new way, as participant observers, and it will directly inform their analysis of real practices in the video ethnography assignment. Second, I juxtapose its teaching with assigning Horace Miner’s (1971/2012) well-known “Magical Practices Among the Nacirema” for our next meeting. I emphasize to candidates that they need to read for this course with a purpose greater than just acquiring generic familiarity with the material, and that they need to be alert for identifying anthropological concepts and theory in what they encounter. In this case, I ask them to identify Miner’s description of rituals among the Nacirema. Third, while Miner’s paper says nothing specifically about education and schooling, it prompts students to reconsider how they perceive familiar institutions and habits, and in so doing provides both a powerful example and dispositional encouragement toward becoming a stronger participant observer in classrooms and schools. Here I also encourage a related outcome, which is that students learn to consider that the academic works they read do not necessarily have to mention schools, teaching, or academic subjects in order to have value for the profession and their practice of it. Their value may sit in how one perceives social phenomena, for example, that can then be applied to thinking about the contexts in which teachers teach.

In addition to its helpfully teaching candidates about how to perceive ritual, Miner’s paper also presents an example of the insider-outsider distinction. Considering this distinction is critical for how candidates conduct themselves as participant observers. I propose to candidates that they can simultaneously participate in school communities as professional ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ (Dwyer & Buckle 2009)⁹ for the purposes of being able to perceive, acquire, and choose new ways of serving their students. An ‘insider’s’ knowledge of the “codes and cues” (Ling 1999, 54) within a school gives pre-professional and professional teachers alike the advantage of being able to relate more responsively, creatively, and helpfully to everyone they encounter there. At the same time, if they are also able to develop the fresh perspective of an ‘outsider,’ they will also be able to perceive more easily what insiders take for granted. According to Frederick Erickson, acquiring an ‘outsider’s’ view is very helpful for those who have cultivated “over-learned ways of thinking and activity that ... [they hold] outside conscious awareness” (Erickson 1987, 14) to realize their arbitrariness, and hence appreciate that other choices are available that may be more helpful for students. Erickson offers a handy formula for cultivating an ‘outsider’s’ habit within familiar institutions, which is to continually ask, “‘Why is the X way not done in the Y way?’ and ‘What are all the different possible ways of perceiving/believing/doing/evaluating X?’” (1987, 15). I emphasize the practicality of these questions by proposing that some easily perceptible opportunities to pose them will present themselves on the first day they meet a group of students or at their first staff meeting. For example: What rituals govern events like room entry, transitions between activities, and dismissal? Who speaks for how long and in what order at staff meetings (Erickson 1987, 20)? I then propose to my students that being able to pose, and at least tentatively answer, questions like these will help them build a stronger sense of where and with whom they are working, and how they are participating in building and responding to a culture of teaching and learning.

The participant observer concept is not only something we read about (Erickson 1987, 14-15; Ling 1999, 55; McGranahan 2014, 23), but something we also practice with classroom exercises. One of these is the lesson I conduct when we study Catherine Pelissier’s (1991) “The Anthropology of Teaching and Learning”. I begin this lesson with a short module where I distribute an assortment of blocks and spheres to candidates, and encourage them to play freely with these objects. I do not provide any instructions on how to play, and simply leave them for a few minutes to create their own experiences. I do instruct the candidates to participate with the dual consciousness of an observing participant, though, where they are both ‘in the moment’ of the play and also thinking about what they are doing as if they were detached from it. I consistently admire the students’ abilities to create a variety of elaborate games, machines, and structures that I could not have imagined previously. Once

the building is complete, we move to a question-and-answer phase where I ask students to describe both their products and how they were created. Their explanations are equally remarkable, and go a long way to inductively revealing one of the purposes of this lesson, which is to comprehend distinctions between formal and informal learning (Pelissier 1991, 88-90), and formal and hidden curriculum (see Pelissier 1991, 84-85, regarding communication style). Sometimes during these discussions I discover that I have misperceived what one of their creations is, or what it represents. I share these discoveries with my students to illustrate the importance of taking time to acquire sufficient data before arriving at a conclusion, especially when encountering unique experiences.¹⁰ The descriptions of their process reveal how apparently casual play is rich with varying kinds of cooperation, leadership, moral and aesthetic judgments, and applications of their knowledge of the physical properties of matter.¹¹

From here I ask them to consider how they would respond to an imaginary person, perhaps a supervisor like a principal or department chair, who might have entered this classroom during that module and scolded us for wasting time. The point of that question is not to surreptitiously coerce students to affirm this particular pedagogical practice, but rather to persuade them of the merits of looking past superficial appearances, avoiding hasty judgments, and considering practices descriptively as *practices* from which one might make reasonable inferences about the learning and meaning within them (see Pelissier 1991, 81). As a concurrent realization, it is also interesting how that imagined scenario of a disapproving visitor fits so easily within what the contemporary teacher education culture frames as a reasonable question an instructor might ask candidates. What is so extraordinary about this play module that makes the conditions of a supervisor expecting to receive an explanation, and the teacher needing to anticipate delivering it, sufficiently plausible for teacher candidates to engage with this question, and not to dismiss it as a ‘merely theoretical’ exercise? Why might a similar explanation not need to be prepared for a seatwork lesson on spelling or fractions? I do not intend to encourage candidates to over-think every encounter throughout their day, but rather to persuade them to appreciate that even seemingly simple events have multiple meanings that, if they wish, can be explored insofar as they helpfully serve students. Moreover, this question also highlights the presence of a normative dimension concerning what counts as good or even legitimate professional practice.

Ethnography of a Classroom: “The Hester Paper”

The Local Context

The material for this course’s video ethnography assignment is Tyler Hester’s *Classroom Management – Week 1, Day 1* (Hester 2012), which documents the first day of his grade nine¹² English Language Arts course at Leadership Public School (LPS) in Richmond, California.¹³ LPS is a charter school, and its website states: “Our mission is to send 100% of our students to and through college” (LPS 2021). The video displays a mixture of (1) a familiar classroom, with desks, an overhead projector, and a space at the front of the room from where the teacher directs learning; with (2) Hester’s explicitly behaviourist methods and exercises of sovereign power and surveillance that clearly contrast with the paradigms of social constructivism and ‘teacher-as-benevolent-monarch’ in Canadian teacher education. Hester’s explicit mastery of the classroom therefore presents a possible tension to teacher candidates. The expectation that a teacher enacts a program of ‘effective’ classroom management is familiar, but his methods of achieving it present themselves as strange within the context of the progressivist ideologies that the research literature suggests most teacher candidates probably hold (Ryan 2008). Teacher candidates with those commitments are ‘insiders’ in the sense that they are encountering what looks like a familiar classroom; but they are also ‘outsiders’ in the sense that Hester’s methods are squarely outside the methods that follow from ‘progressive’ ideologies.

I assign this video in part because it enables a whole class of undergraduate professional candidates to study the interactions between a teacher and students in a real classroom.¹⁴ I instruct my students to view it at least three times: once to acquire a general knowledge of its features; again to begin listing and organizing themes for analysis, using the concepts they have learned; and finally to solidify and confirm their findings. The video is interesting as a stand-alone artefact, but since it only presents a small vignette of the wider school and community context, I also prepare the candidates for this assignment by sharing with them government census data from California’s Contra Costa county, a tour through the LPS website, and a local news report about the school. That report states that while “nearly 90 percent of its students don’t speak native English ... About 90 percent of students at the school met or nearly met the state standard in English with 27 percent exceeding the standard, both significantly higher than most district schools” (Chen 2017). The candidates can use this

information to work toward meeting Carole McGranahan's standard for a good ethnography for students, which involves combining "ethnographic material," anthropological "texts or lectures," and a recommendation to consider the perspectives of three subject positions,¹⁵ including those "of a member of the society itself"; "an Anthropologist in the field"; and themselves" (McGranahan 2014, 31). I suggest that considering those data and following McGranahan's method will enable candidates to more easily appreciate how this school's context enables – and possibly even encourages – Hester to enact 'classroom management' the way he does.¹⁶ I infer that he is able to enact those strict controls because they are an accepted means to achieving high standardized test scores.

This video has been viewed more than 1.994 million times since August 2012,¹⁷ which means that not all its viewers are teachers in the LPS context. It is probable, given its subject matter, that several of its viewers are teachers or teacher candidates who are looking for generic resources and techniques for how to teach on their first day of school, in the hope of enhancing their ability to manage a classroom.¹⁸ I infer from its popularity that this video is meeting a need shared by many throughout the profession (see Woodcock & Reupert 2017). Hence it is reasonable to suggest that this resource is similar to others that candidates may access after their teacher education is complete, and that they might recommend to colleagues who are struggling with maintaining order. How might they think about this video for themselves, or talk about it with their colleagues, in an in-service context?

This probability and that question presents an opportunity for discussing the importance of context, and encountering and understanding school cultures in their own right. From there it is only a short distance to the next lesson about exercising care when transposing practices from one schooling context into another. Hence, the burden for professional teacher candidates here is to look past this video's superficial appearance, from the particularities of the teacher figure's authoritarian behaviourism to the contextual ground that enables his practices. In this case that burden means extending past their perception that Hester is simply a 'controlling' or 'effective' teacher to explore what enables his methods to work in the LPS context.

Preparing Students to Write

Before the teacher candidates are ready to write their classroom ethnography, I want them to have as good a conceptual and methodological framework as possible for viewing the video. Ethnographies are complex – which is what makes them compelling reading – and so to write them well the candidates need to attend to both these dimensions as well as possible. Composing a good ethnography is a disciplined action, and so I explicitly take pains to direct my students away from making generic, undisciplined observations and toward practising the ethnographic way of knowing McGranahan describes, which is a rigorous method that will inform strong professional judgments. I here connect the academic task of ethnography to the teacher's professional act of observation, and propose to the candidates that this connection has much meaning for them, because the work in this course is to move out of immersion in "apprenticeship of observation" (Lortie 1975) and into purposeful professional observation informed by research. Since one should expect a trained ethnographer to produce work that is of greater qualitative depth and insight than what an untrained layperson would contribute, so should one expect that a professional teacher's observations of teaching and learning environments and interactions would be similarly distinct from those of non-teachers. As what occurs in the culture around them will inform their professional decisions, the better conceptually, methodologically, and epistemically equipped teachers are to encounter that culture, the richer their observations will be, and hence the greater chance that they will make higher quality decisions within and in response to it.

Like McGranahan offers her students dramatized examples, such as riding a bus in Nepal (2014, 23), through which they may enter into ethnographic practices,¹⁹ I craft similar examples of institutional and pedagogical events for my students to practice participant observation in professional settings. One example is where I organize them as a choir to show that the high level of teacher control they will witness in their video ethnography is not always unusual in schools. This exercise begins with them assembling in the hallway. We then practice re-entering the classroom as if 'going on stage': forming into three rows at the front of the room. This practice, I insist, for the purposes of this exercise, requires 'correct,' uniform behaviours like all participants facing the same way, not waving hands about, not talking, and so forth. For the dramatized purposes of this exercise, I promise the candidates that if I witness any of these behaviours I will stop the group, turn it around, and ask it to perform the room entry again until it is done 'correctly'. Many 'successful' school ensembles employ this practice, and although 'going on stage' could be accomplished in other ways, the candidates quickly realize that they, as audience members, have come to expect these behaviours when viewing a performance. I then teach

them to sing “Row, Row, Row Your Boat” in a three-part round, insisting that they follow precisely all my verbal instructions and conducting gestures on when to breathe, begin and end phrases, pronounce the words, and project their sound. The greater their compliance with my instructions, the better they sound! This exercise reveals to students an unfamiliar rupture in familiar territory, as its high control of behaviour, watched and directed by an autocratic conductor, clashes with the progressivist ideology that is dominant in most other areas of teacher education.²⁰

The Normativity Problem

In my experience, it is important to set aside sufficient time to discuss the problem of how challenging it can be to assess Hester’s classroom in strictly descriptive terms. I do not present Hester’s video for the purposes of modelling ‘good’ or ‘bad’ teaching to candidates, but rather to provide them with one opportunity to analyze how classrooms work, including a consideration of the contexts that enable them to work. Nonetheless, I do take time to have this discussion because what I term ‘the normativity question’ (which in this case concerns how one adjudicates Hester’s teaching as praiseworthy or not) reveals features that are both familiar and strange to teacher education programs. In terms of familiarity, it makes sense that a teacher education program would and should present to pre-service teachers models of the best teachers and the practices that make them successful, and also provide opportunities to assess practices critically. A teacher education program should be responsible for enabling its graduates to be the strongest practitioners possible, and to set them up to succeed. Moreover, it would be normal for a teacher education program to advertise its ability to provide its candidates with access to the highest quality instructors and intellectual-professional resources. Remarkably, though, a normative concern with ‘the best methods’ may take at least two directions. One possibility is that it provides teacher candidates with a survey of a wide range of ‘best methods,’ but another is that it may focus on promoting only a few, and so possibly indicate an ideological preference for certain ways of teaching and learning. For example, Kerr et al. observe that: “Faculties of Education across North America are increasingly characterized by unquestioned ideologies, often leaving prospective teachers within the erroneous perception that there is one ‘right way’ to teach (Hare 2007)”. They offer Liston, Whitcomb, and Borko’s argument, in contrast, “that teacher education should offer multiple – not singular – perspectives on teaching and learning (2009, 107)” (Kerr et al 2011, 122). The implication here is that a narrowly normative approach to teaching has suppressed a broader descriptive approach, thus making normativity itself a dominant perspective. From this vantage point, not only would Hester’s practices appear strange in contexts where progressivist ideology is dominant, but also would the suggestion that they can be assessed in strictly descriptive terms, relative to other practices. For anyone with commitments to surveying a wide range of methods, therefore, part of the burden of teacher education involves showing teacher candidates a descriptive breadth of normative views, and relating to them that not all pedagogical differences are differences by degree, and may instead be differences by kind.

McIlwraith (2016) describes a similar disorientation some of his students experience in an introductory anthropology course when they encounter the familiar as strange (2016, 59). While he finds that his students easily appreciate cultural relativity when encountering cultures that are very different from their own (59), they have difficulties applying the concept when experiencing video presentations that “are only partly removed from [their] student realities” (2017, 59). The congruent experience in my course would be teacher candidates holding similarly positive dispositions toward cultural relativism and diversity, but finding themselves struggling not to judge Hester’s methods. Of interest here, then, is how Hester’s video exposes a tension within the culture of teacher education, where a familiar expectation that teacher candidates should be able to maintain good classroom management in a benevolent way encounters his strangely behaviourist application of it within a similar, but still qualitatively distinct context. Like McIlwraith, I find it quite easy to teach about cultural relativism in the abstract, and hypothesize that this is so in part because it reinforces my university’s well-publicized equity statement (University of Victoria 2021b) that speaks about diversity in familiar terms that refer to social groups. I find it relatively much more challenging, however, to propose that one might also adopt cultural relativism when encountering teaching practices ideologically different from one’s own, including especially the practices one prefers or has been taught to prefer. Consequently, I find myself devoting significant amounts of time toward describing the requirement that candidates conduct this video ethnography using a descriptive voice, and avoid engaging normatively with Hester’s work. My experience of presenting Hester’s authoritarian, behaviourist methods and regime, therefore, highlights how teacher education programs apply cultural relativism with ease when considering social groups, but have relatively less success when considering a plurality of educational ideologies and practices (see again Kerr et al 2011, 122).

The challenge for teacher candidates who might normatively disagree with Hester's methods, then, is to confront the problem of how to merge their belief in student-centeredness with their own need, following the practicum's requirement, to demonstrate 'effective' classroom management.²¹ The progressivist solution I believe they seek is a formula for operating a benevolent dictatorship, where their students' exercise of self-discipline according to the teacher's rules has the function of softening the rough edges of externally imposed authority.²² This arrangement thus creates either the illusion of student-centeredness or its limited expression within an externally bounded system where supervisory responsibility remains within a hierarchical structure where the teacher's classroom sovereignty descends from a share of the principal's sovereign power over the whole school. In other words, while this concern that teacher candidates have for classroom control may be considered a part of their rite of passage into the profession, it may be more simply argued that they are more sensitive to this topic because, they, as candidates, currently maintain a greater degree of 'outsiderness' or 'strangeness' to questions like these than do their counterparts who, as full members of the profession, and at later stages in their careers, may have already resolved them for themselves in some fashion.

Course Conclusion

On the final day of this course, I tell my students that I hope they might 'take this course with them' on their professional journey. I revisit some of the content, and relate to them that after having studied the course once, they will appreciate it at a certain level, but the more they think about each topic within it, the greater meaning it will have for them. I do appreciate that new teachers have many immediate obligations that can push the practical aspects of tasks like lesson planning and extra-curricular activities to the front of attention, where the need for immediate action sometimes makes it easy to set aside any considerations about how research and theory inform the profession. So how might I best encourage teacher candidates to carry this course with them, throughout their professional experiences? My solution is to address this question explicitly during that final meeting, as part of my sending the candidates off into their practicum experiences. I encourage them to schedule an automated prompt that will interrupt those immediate concerns so they can devote time to a self-initiated professional development task that encourages them to return to thinking about how they might be participant observers of their own work. I suggest that they might set this reminder to coincide with some meaningful future event, perhaps at the midpoint or conclusion of their practicum, where they can think for ten or fifteen minutes about what this course means to their professional lives. I encourage them to focus on topics that are important to them, like classroom management or staff meetings. I also suggest that they consider adding their thoughts to their teaching dossiers as evidence of their ongoing professional development.

On that final day I also ask the candidates to imagine what it would be like to approach a classroom without the knowledge from this course. Because they have some practice as participant observers, I invite them to consider that they can now recognize more of what is going on in a classroom, school, and community than they could before. This recognition is evidence of the benefit professional education provides these candidates, as it is a knowledge base from which to make choices about how they might use or respond to rituals, the hidden curriculum, and other features of relationships in the school for the benefit of students. I also hope that this course prompts the candidates to think about what 'classroom management' means (including its multiple possible meanings), why it is a concern, who is concerned, and why. In this way, I hope that students appreciate how anthropological theory informs their professional work, and continue practising and amplifying their fluency with it by applying it to their thoughts about the profession.

I hypothesize that the first day of class is among the major phenomena that explicitly presents teacher candidates with an opportunity to consider classroom and school culture, and how they might shape it. At the same time as their ability to shape it is an important consideration, however, so is their ability to receive and respond to cultural features in the school and wider community. Such talk of the first day of class cannot therefore be taken up only in terms of imposing norms upon a class of students, or enacting the dominant ideology learned within a teacher education program. Considering one's service to students in this way is important, and takes work. It is my hope that the experiences in this course enable teacher candidates to respond well to this challenge, perhaps beginning with considering what they hope to do on their first day class.

Notes

¹ In my teaching practice I distinguish between a course of study and the meetings when students gather to study it. This distinction highlights that the course is ongoing throughout the term, and students work outside meetings to prepare for them and to work on assignments. I also meet with individual students outside of full class meetings.

² In Canada most students in grade nine and grade twelve are fourteen and eighteen years of age, respectively.

³ History, philosophy, and sociology of education tend to dominate numerically in this field. For example, while the Canadian Association of Foundations of Education's (2012) constitution recognizes anthropology of education as one of its disciplines, anthropology does not currently have a special interest group within that association, as each of history, philosophy, and sociology do.

⁴ Kerr et al.'s (2011) review of literature on teacher candidates' perceptions of their program's coursework reports American (Howey 1988) and Brazilian (Simoes 1992) candidates ranking historical foundations of education as "less useful than their methods courses" and Canadian candidates (Crocker & Dibbon 2008) finding "historical and philosophical foundations to be the *least* useful among 18 program content areas typically covered in teacher education programs" (Kerr et al. 2011, 122).

⁵ My institution distinguishes between elementary teacher education for kindergarten to grade seven (for students ages five to twelve), and secondary teacher education for grades eight to twelve (for students ages thirteen to eighteen) (University of Victoria 2021d).

⁶ *Apprenticeship* has heuristic value for describing this phenomenon metaphorically, but Lortie clearly emphasizes that it is not a true apprenticeship that builds professional skills: "The students' learning about teaching, gained from a limited vantage point and relying heavily on imagination, is not like that of an apprentice and does not represent acquisition of the occupation's technical knowledge. It is more a matter of imitation, which, being generalized across individuals, becomes tradition" (1975, 63).

⁷ The participant observer concept is an important topic in this course, but still only one portion of it. Its other major topics, that I do not describe here, include social class, gender, and Indigenous perspectives.

⁸ Later in the course candidates also read Bomer et al.'s (2008) critique of Ruby Payne's (1998/2005) claims in her book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*.

⁹ In concert with Dwyer and Buckle (2009), I also lead the teacher candidates through a discussion that troubles binary distinctions between these concepts.

¹⁰ The historical and philosophical root of this lesson is Friedrich Fröbel's use of gifts and occupations in kindergarten. Spheres and blocks are perhaps a taken-for-granted presence in many, if not most modern kindergartens, and so may indicate no further meaning to an untrained observer. In Fröbel's system, however, they are philosophically idealist representations of *all spheres and cubes*, and a child using a sphere thus participates in knowing the earth, moon, and sun (Gutek 2001, 130). It is not necessary to agree with Fröbel in order to appreciate that appearance and reality do not always match, and that the mis-perception of appearances (of which Fröbel complained in his childhood) can obscure or even obstruct a teacher's view of something more important (Fröbel 1889, cit. in Gutek 2001, 132-133).

¹¹ One potential irony of play-based learning's application within formal curriculum is its appropriating a child's innate ability in the service of artificially determined and adult-desired curricular ends. Peterson et al.'s (2016) study observes the dominance of this "play as progress" ideology within contemporary kindergartens (2016, 18).

¹² Grade nine students in California are typically fourteen years of age, based on their starting Kindergarten at age five (California Department of Education 2020)

¹³ The video's high production quality, including its use of editing and multiple cameras and camera angles, suggests that it, or parts of it, could have been staged to illustrate Hester's ideal first day of class, rather than the actual one. I am not certain of this hypothesis, however, but even if it is true the video nonetheless successfully portrays a realistic account of teaching and learning as if the cameras had not been there.

¹⁴ My institution permits the use of internet sources for instructional purposes "if the video is a legally obtained copy," and instructors are permitted to "stream a YouTube video directly from the site" for classroom viewing. [University of Victoria 2021c]. However, this video's presence on YouTube raises an occasion in my classroom to discuss the requirement to receive permissions for recording and publishing images of students – especially for teachers as part of their professional ethics. In the case of this video, that burden sits with its producer.

¹⁵ I modify this from McGranahan's request that students "inhabit one of three subject positions" (2014, 31).

¹⁶ Encouraging this broader view of education and schooling also aligns with Mills and Spencer's (2011) view that "[t]he best ethnographies of education, from *Learning to Labour* (Willis 1979), to *Making the Grade* (Becker et al. 1968) to *Wannabe U* (Tuchman 2009) highlight the range of forces and networks that shape classroom interactions. They remind us of the importance of looking beyond the classroom in order to understand what is going on inside." (Mills and Spencer 2011, 1).

¹⁷ Figure taken from YouTube's reported views of Hester 2012, accessed 4 August 2021.

¹⁸ Hester's work in this video focuses on building the hidden curriculum (socialization) in his classroom, and so for that meeting, at least, teaching the formal curriculum (English Language Arts) is a secondary aim. A remarkable moment in the video illustrates this point. It arrives after Hester has spent much time and energy explaining the procedure students must use to hand their papers to him at the front of the room. Once they successfully complete this task, he takes the papers he has received and unceremoniously 'chucks' them on the floor (from 8m45s to 9m15s) in order to facilitate moving on to the next task. In that series of events, those papers – and the students' work they hold – transition from having very high value to nearly none at all. I discuss this moment with my students, and propose to them that it is likely that we have a shared understanding that some items with relatively lesser value get relegated to 'the floor' (excepting larger items like grandfather clocks), while those with relatively greater value tend to be elevated off it. For example, I make mock demonstrations of serving one of the teacher candidates two

imaginary cups of coffee: one that I place at their feet, and another that I place on their desk, with the implication that the one on the floor is less appetizing. Apparently, therefore, Hester's act of tossing the students' work to the floor indicates that he prioritizes the hidden curriculum lesson on procedures over the academic object that carries it.

¹⁹ My choice of a ritual to begin my course's first meeting stands in parallel with McGranahan's statement that her "first-day-of-class exercise is designed to get students thinking both anthropologically and ethnographically" (2014, 24).

²⁰ Hester's classroom design and teaching practices (Hester 2012) align with the factory model of traditional schooling, including its coordination of architecture, sovereign power, and surveillance. See Ford's (2003, 14-17) argument that power and surveillance do not disappear in progressive contexts, but remain only in a different guise.

²¹ According to Woodcock & Reupert (2017): "Managing a classroom of students is arguably one of the most important skills for teachers to acquire, but one that beginning teachers repeatedly report not being adequately prepared for (Maskan 2007; O'Neill and Stephenson 2013)" (2017, 655).

²² Recall Ford (2003, 14-17), at note 20.

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