

‘Anthropology in and of Education’ Teaching Anthropology 2012

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This paper sets out some of the context of the RAI Education Committee’s development of an A Level, as the background against which some of the other papers in this issue of TA will pursue the place of Anthropology in pre-university curricula. In considering the position of anthropology in these new educational contexts, I take account of **anthropology in education** and the **anthropological study of education**. The work done by the RAI’s Education Committee to design and introduce a new GCE A-level in anthropology, culminating in its successful accreditation by the national regulator, and its current place in a number of UK schools, is described as a case study of both anthropology in and of education. The implications of the experience so far for future directions will be briefly indicated.

Green and Bloome (1997), writing mainly about anthropology and education in the U.S., have distinguished between the anthropology *of* education and anthropology *in* education, with particular reference to the uses of ethnographic approaches. In applying these ideas to the activities in the UK, I take into account not only the process of locating an Anthropology A Level within the UK education system but also the scope for anthropology to reflect upon education policy and curricula and their engagement with wider public issues. The reflexivity to which Foley (2002) refers as anthropologists engage in describing different cultural contexts applies here in the sense of us, as anthropologists responsible for developing the A level, also applying our anthropological frames and concepts to this system and our own roles in it. I also take into account Wolcott’s (1982) distinction between Description, Analysis and Interpretation, as a way of reflecting on our experience and moving carefully from descriptive accounts of ‘what went on’, through use of some analytic terms, to stepping back a bit and offering some interpretation of the process and its potential for future developments. Wolcott suggests that ethnographic accounts begin with *Description*, which he takes to be ‘mainly accounts of data, events, ‘what’s going on?’. He links this closely with *Analysis*, which in his terms means doing systematic trawls through Description in relation to analytic terms eg literacy events/ practices eg habitus/ field, to check whether you can validate/ support your insights. Only then, he suggests, might we be ready to offer some *Interpretation*, mainly insights, knowledge the researcher brings to bear from elsewhere, theoretical perspectives, explanations for ‘why’ things are as they are, in this case the comments I and fellow authors in this volume make on the significance of the role of anthropology both *in* and *of* education.

As Barry Dufour describes in some detail in the present volume, during the 1970s the RAI was involved in developing materials for schools eg Land and Peoples and also supporting those schools developing GCE Mode 3 syllabus in the discipline (eg Gosford Hill; Oxfordshire Curriculum Development project etc.). During the 1980s this activity extended to more political engagement with issues associated with Multicultural/ antiracist education and in particular with responses to the Swann Report (1982). Anthropologists also contributed to attempts by ILEA and by ATSS to bring a more ethnographic, culturally-sensitive perspective to classroom practices and curriculum data (cf Callan and Street, 2010). However, colleagues in the discipline

were concerned at this 'political' move and, amidst fears of 'fracture' in the discipline pulled the Education Committee back from such active engagement. Some anthropologists, notably Leach but many others, also believed that anthropology was 'not appropriate for pre-university' study and that attempts to introduce it earlier in the education system might simply reinforce prejudice and stereotyping.

More recently, however, there has been a shift in the perspective, perhaps with growing awareness of the impact of 'globalisation' meaning that children at all levels and ages were being exposed to cultural and ethnic variations and that maybe it was appropriate for anthropology to enter these fields and perhaps counter some of the over simplification evident in many public accounts. In 2004 the RAI strategic review identified the role of anthropology in 'broadening the range and scope of education' pre university and revived the Education Committee, whose role was to 'initiate, promote and develop strategies to disseminate knowledge and awareness of anthropology pre-university ...'. In a different climate than the 70s and 80s there was now strong support from heads of university departments and the RAI Council. The Education Committee was helped in applying for outside funding, from HEFCE 'Aim Higher' and from the ESRC to support the employment of an Education Officer. With the support of Gemma Jones and later of Nafisa Fera, in this role, the Education Committee between 2004-2009 worked on the development of a draft curriculum to be submitted to the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA – now QCDA) for what would become an A Level in Anthropology.

Key issues in this process included the recognition that the discipline included both Bio and Socio, as in the RAI's founding Charter; and the recognition that an A Level was not simply a watered down 'first year university' course but rather an independent study calling upon anthropological principles. It was recognised, for instance, that many students would not go on to do anthropology at university, at least straight away, and that the course should offer them an independent way of engaging in the issues addressed by the discipline, as they entered other disciplines in HE or went on to jobs and professional activity in a range of contexts. Topics relevant to such an endeavour included helping students reflect analytically upon the 'global' and 'local' worlds they were encountering, contextualizing 'diversity' and engaging themselves in applied projects from an ethnographic perspective. The latter turned out to be a particular fraught aim, since it appeared in conflict with government policy regarding 'projects', which believed that they were inappropriate for this age group – parents, they believed, were more likely to do some of the work for their children and in this media age the pupils were likely to simply download material straight from the internet. However, for the Education Committee the engagement with practical work in the field was a key component of learning anthropological principles through their application, and so they held out. Some negotiation and accommodation was necessary, however, and in the end the Committee agreed that such independent work would not be separately examined but be included in the final question paper; that it would not be called a 'project' but 'independent study'; and that it would not be a separate curriculum item but embedded in what became Unit 4 of the curriculum, 'Practising Anthropology: methods and investigations' (see Appendix for brief summary of Curriculum, also available more fully on website). On this basis, the approach was accepted and the A Level was agreed by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) in October 2009, for first teaching in autumn 2010. The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) became officially

responsible for curriculum and examination of the Anthropology A Level and the RAI Education Committee has continued to liaise with colleagues there, with examiners appointed by AQA and with teachers in schools, calling upon colleagues in anthropology departments as the subject has spread in different parts of the country. The Committee has also been responsible for producing **resource materials** to support teachers – a **Text Book** edited by Hendry and Underdown and a **Resource Book** produced by Callan, Street and Underdown, including excerpts from many classic anthropological texts to give students access to the writings of the discipline. The Education Officer, Nafisa Fera, has also developed a **web resource** ‘Discover Anthropology’ (www.discoveranthropology.org.uk).

So much for the Description of what has gone on, how now might we make sense of this and look to future developments? We might firstly note some of the Analytic concepts that have been woven into this Description. In deciding to develop an independent curriculum, not just a watered down University course and in attempting to address the kinds of issues that students of this age are likely to encounter, the Committee built on anthropological work in the field of bio and socio approaches to ‘Being Human’, notably the concepts of Unity and Diversity, which headed up Unit 1. Allied to this and still combining bio and socio, were the concepts agreed for Unit 2: ‘Becoming a Person: Identity and Belonging’. Many other anthropological fields and concepts might have been developed for this and there was indeed complex discussion amongst members of the Committee, but these headings were generally agreed and were seen in particular to be relevant to the local/ global interface that students themselves were encountering. The A level consists of two potential qualifications, Units 1 and 2 making up the AS, which students could take and then move on to other A levels; or they could continue to Units 3 and 4 for the full A2. The last two units build upon the AS and firstly make explicit, in Unit 3, the theme of ‘Global and Local’, developing the themes of ‘environments and globalisation’. And then, in Unit 4, as noted above, the theme of ‘Practising Anthropology: methods and investigations’ was agreed, allowing students to go out into their own environment and conduct some original inquiry that could help them reflect more deeply on the concepts they had been exposed to.

The Description and Analysis thus developed can classically be seen as examples of anthropology *in* education. But at the same time, the Committee in its participations in the work of developing the curriculum over such a long period, and in particular the political engagements with government agencies, was also very aware of the reflective issues associated with their addressing the anthropology *of* education. And, importantly, this perspective is also seen as affecting how the students themselves view the subject. I conclude, then, with a tentative Interpretation of the whole process that builds upon this perspective involving an anthropology *of* education. In an earlier paper on this process, Callan and Street (2010) concluded:

... the relationship anthropology wants to have to the wider public, including how to overcome its ‘impaired visibility’ or the stereotypes it would wish to challenge, will also raise questions of an educational kind. The questions asked by Eriksen (2006) regarding how anthropologists might ‘engage’ with the wider public will demand a more focused discussion on how the ‘public’ have ‘learned’ about anthropological issues, and how a more professional input might help to challenge dominant and distorted perceptions. An

anthropology *of* education will have a significant role to play here, and this role will in fact have to be closely linked with the work of anthropology *in* education that has been the main subject of this article.

As the present Government moves to narrowing the A level field, emphasising what it believes to be subjects more closely associated with commercial and ‘job’ needs, such as Science subjects or languages, and as parents encourage their children to make such ‘practical’ choices with direct economic benefits, then subjects such as anthropology may have to fight harder to justify their place. But in a world increasingly diversifying, where local engages with global at every turn and where the narrow, ethnocentric assumptions of those with ‘economic and cultural capital’ are even more likely to prevail, then it becomes even more important that a subject such as Anthropology, which can offer a broader, reflexive perspective on our lives, takes its place and makes its contributions to the complex world students are entering. The anthropology *of* education – and indeed of society more generally, within which such education defines its role – tells us how important it is to develop and maintain anthropology *in* education.

Appendix:

Brief Summary of Anthropology A level Curriculum (for more detail see website http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/humanities/anthropology_overview.php)

- Unit 1: Being Human; Unity and Diversity
- Unit 2: Becoming a Person: Identity and Belonging
- Unit 3: Global and Local; environments and globalisation
- Unit 4: Practising Anthropology: methods and investigations

References

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