Serious Fieldwork
On Re-functioning Ethnographic Pedagogies

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Over the last several years, an increasing number of ethnographers have been directing their attention to the teaching and learning of ethnography and its relationship to re-inhabiting new trajectories of ethnographic theory and practice. For example, in a recent article in the journal *Collaborative Anthropologies* (Vol 1), Douglas Holmes and George Marcus argue for a re-functioning of the mythological residue of still-dominant Malinowskian modes of fieldwork from which spring conventions for apprenticing students, in particular, to do and write up fieldwork. These ongoing reproductions of conventional "images and scenarios" of fieldwork training are increasingly at odds, they write, with the contemporary conditions of "the field" in which students now enter. Simply put, "the field" as we know it has changed faster than its pedagogies. It is by now well-known that as fieldwork has expanded into multi-sited domains with wide-ranging purposes and goals, the nature and role of fieldwork collaboration, in particular, has changed even more. Of course, doing and writing ethnography have always depended on collaboration, albeit collaboration has functioned differently across sites and through time. But ethnographers now work within ever-more dynamic and expanding flows of complex collaborations that implicate an ever-widening range of sites, organizations and constituents. And this is why re-imagining and re-articulating our ethnographic pedagogies has become particularly important for so many.

Several recent books, of course, highlight this issue in whole or in part, including Faubion and Marcus's *Fieldwork Is Not What It Used to Be* (2009), Rabinow and Marcus's *Designs for an Anthropology of the Contemporary* (2008), and Fox and Field's *Anthropology Put to Work* (2007). Most of these discussions, however, have (for obvious and good reasons) focused on re-functioning advanced graduate level fieldwork and its relationship to these changing fieldwork contexts. We want to point out that these developments in pedagogy have been happening at other levels as well including, but not limited to, undergraduate ethnographic pedagogies, an area of practice rarely taken up in current discussions about re-imagining and re-functioning ethnography.

"Malinowski-Lite"
The mythological residue others identify in graduate training is, of course, also very much alive and in play in undergraduate pedagogies. When ethnography enters the undergraduate classroom, for example, it is often deployed as a kind of "Malinowski-lite": undergraduate students are often charged to select and make connections with a group, venture off and do fieldwork—by themselves, of course, and off campus. Metaphorically, they venture into far-away and unfamiliar places, "roughing it," at least emotionally, via some version of cross-cultural encounter at a church, fire house or garage; or with a group of bikers, teachers or police officers.

Carrying out such local ethnographic projects can have an enormous effect on undergraduate students, providing hands-on experience with doing and crafting ethnography; so we wouldn't want, in any way, to diminish such experiences. But what if we imagine an educational experience and ethnographic product that could do more, much more, even in students' first local encounters with ethnography? What if we were to engage students at this level in well-peopled, collaborative ethnographic projects and partnerships that reach for local social and perhaps political change? And more: what if undergraduate ethnography were not measured against the staging of Malinowskian-styled fieldwork (where undergraduate field encounters are considered less "authentic" and not "serious"), and instead measured against the depth to which it inspires community involvement, co-citizenships, and even collaborative modes of local and community-based change (which can potentially be very serious fieldwork)?

**Local Community Engagement**
Ethnographic projects that involve community participants, students and faculty in local (and serious) collaborative partnerships—which may often engender local collaborative activisms as well—are neither unusual nor new. Some ready examples come to mind. Mary LaLone's work with undergraduate students at Radford University to research and write ethnographic oral histories of Appalachia (*Appalachian Coal Mining Memories is one*) has led to broader community discussions about, and applied community-based planning for, heritage preservation and education.

**COMMENTS**

Carrying out research and write ethnographic oral histories of Appalachia, one has led to broader community discussions about, and applied community-based planning for, heritage preservation and education. Susan Hyatt's work with students at Temple University, and now Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI), has prompted a wide range of projects, from locally published ethnographic materials to special edition newspapers that have had, in turn, wide ranging effects, including helping to augment dialogues about community development. And our own past work in Muncie, Indiana, in addition to engendering the largely undergraduate-written *Other Side of Middletown* manuscript, also led to several local collaborative activisms, including those connecting students to community-wide efforts to address issues of racial discrimination. There are a great many other examples to cite, to be sure; but the point here is that such partnerships and projects, while heretofore often unseen (or perhaps even ignored) against the backdrop of a dominant Malinowskian research imaginary and its current re-functioning, may have greater relevance when seen as part of a larger project to expand and open up ethnographic pedagogies at all levels that are at once collaborative, public and engaged—ethnographic pedagogies that, when considered collectively, are meant to transform the future potentials of an ethnography that is more appropriately re tooled for the changing conditions of the field.

In a forthcoming *Qualitative Inquiry* article titled "What Will We Have Ethnography Do?" (December 2010), we argue that...
ethnography in the field, they have also caught up the entire academy—not only the specialized work of doctoral students in anthropology. And as sites of collaboration are expanding across the communities in which we work and into the academy, the possibilities for ethnography to be more than just an instrumental component of student training—to achieve collaborative, democratic, civic and even activist goals—are also expanding. This is serious fieldwork, indeed. And these are exciting times to be doing ethnography with students.

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I’ve also worried about a void in training. I propose that the classroom, understood as a combined online and face-to-face interactive social space, is a crucial focus for solving this apparent contradiction and establishing new opportunities for the development of anthropological pedagogies as pivotal to that of other fields. The development of easily accessible and engaging online and digital technologies offers enormous potential for anthropology education. In the Australian context, where there are no compulsory graduate research courses, positions like the one I occupy are good starting points for the production of critical ethnographic training.

Through conversations and qualitative methodology courses with graduate students, I have realized the need to establish an anthropological curriculum that is not confined to disciplinary boundaries and offers hope for the opening of new spaces of anthropological reflection. Given the aforementioned disciplinary developments—particularly shrinking educational and teaching opportunities in anthropology departments—expanding our efforts to educate a broader group of students about ethnography could be an incredible opportunity. However, the traditional role of anthropologists as ethnography experts is open to serious competition. Following Wescz’s 2008 commentary on experts in the production of knowledge, the very concept of “expert authority” is now under the scrutiny of the digital collective, and we should not assume that anthropological interpretations of ethnography will be embraced above others. Instead, we must learn how to effectively convey to scholars in other fields the value of learning about ethnography from an anthropological perspective.

**Silvia Torezani** graduated in anthropology from the National University of Salta, Argentina, and has recently submitted her PhD in anthropology at the University of Western Australia. She is currently working as research training coordinator at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. Her areas of interest are migration, performance and research training.

In many cases, with regard to undergraduate education, departments offering anthropology degrees have by and large failed to live up to this expectation. The AAA Code of Ethics makes no distinction between graduate and undergraduate “students/trainees” in this mandate; however. Thus, through developing and consistently offering an undergraduate-level, four-field anthropology and ethics course, anthropology departments would both provide a service to active and potential undergraduate student researchers throughout their campus community, and also fulfill a largely unmet ethical obligation of their own.

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with some universities “incentivizing” the process through periodic stamps of approval at various stages, an effort that many students felt would pay off “when it came time for job hunting.”

The University of Chicago’s department of anthropology is poised to join the pack of institutions rising to the teaching challenge with a newly developed “Teaching Anthropology” course, finally answering the call of both anxious and enthusiastic graduate students not so unlike those quoted in this piece. We know that this is not a world in which we are in any way guaranteed tenured positions, let alone those forever-pined-for positions with research sabbaticals built-in and few teaching responsibilities, no matter what myths we may have heard about academia’s supposed golden era. The reality is that lecturing, adjudging and taking other positions focused on “face time” with students is how many of us will end up putting our degrees to work in the economically uncertain years ahead. More than that, we want to put our nightmares of rioting students to rest and, as one graduate student put it, “make a difference in how [our students] see the world [even as we] also accept that [we] will only be able to touch some of them and not others.” So, yes, in case there was any confusion, we want to be prepared for teaching and good at teaching. We want to be more than just great anthropologists. We want to be great anthropological educators.

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