AAA Meetings, Nov. 19-23, 1997, in D.C.

Assessing Assessment: Success, Failure and Ambiguity in Higher Education

Organizer: Daniel E. Moerman (Michigan-Dearborn)

Many anthropology programs, especially in smaller institutions, have recently had to respond to new requirements for “assessment,” often at the behest of regional accreditation agencies, state legislatures or state boards of education. These assessment systems are quite different from traditional program reviews which have usually addressed issues of curriculum, productivity and research. Assessment typically focuses on “student learning outcomes” and attempts to evaluate student achievement of goals which are often defined in program “mission statements.” Assessment programs may include one or another of these elements: standardized tests, exit interviews, student portfolio programs and/or alumni surveys. Such programs are often highly contested with valuable supporters and opponents. This symposium will seek to evaluate the claims (pro and con) for assessment, to describe its historical origins and structural implicatons, and to explicate successful measures of adoption and resistance.

Participants:
Daniel E. Moerman (University of Michigan-Dearborn)

Introduction
Byron Dare (Fort Lewis) The Ideology of Assessment: Reagan’s Revenge
Manuel Luis Carlos (University of California-Santa Barbara) and Michael Gallegos (California State University-Monterey Bay) The Use and Content of Student Electronic Portfolios to Assess Student Learning Outcomes in Anthropology: A Case Study of a Computerized Course on Field Methods in Ethnography
Peter N. Peregrine (Lawrence University) The Double-Edged Sword of Assessment
Kathleen S. Fine-Dare (Fort Lewis) Cultural Contradictions and Assessment
Lawrence Breithorde (Knox) The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Assessment in Small Institutions
Mark Cohen (SUNY Plattsburgh) Discussant

Ranging over topics from role-playing to the construction of model societies on Mars, papers in the FOSAP session at last fall’s AAA meetings presented innovative ways of taking students out of the classroom and into other realities. Four of the papers are reproduced here, and I encourage readers who experiment with these new technologies and techniques (and others) to keep the conversation going in the Newsletter. In this issue there’s also a note from Cate Cameron on research in the intro course, the latest addendum to our on-going discussion on teaching introductory anthropology and perhaps a good topic for a FOSAP session in ’98.

What would you like to see us do at the ’98 AAA meetings? We all agree that small programs in anthropology have unique problems, not the least of which is invisibility in professional organizations. And, as a member of the Council on General Anthropology, FOSAP may face increasing competition for session slots, if the time allotted to CGA gets cut (see Dan Moerman’s letter to CGA, this issue). We need to maintain our toe-hold on the annual meeting agenda to keep the forum open for small departments. So let’s not wait till the ’97 meetings to put proposals in the pipeline. Write to the Newsletter with suggestions, or contact Linda Easley, Program Chair. Linda’s address is on the back page

(Prez’ Corner, continued on Page 2)

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At our business meeting last fall, there was considerable discussion of changing the name of the FOSAP Newsletter to something, shall I say, more grandiose. In fairness to sentiments expressed at the meeting, I agree with the concern that our current moniker does not do justice to the quality of the papers we publish here. On the other hand, we do pretty much what any other professional bulletin does that calls itself a “newsletter”: publish articles and information of immediate interest and usefulness to a specialized, professional constituency that wants the information now, rather than two years hence after a lengthy review process. Contributors who wish to submit their articles to refereed journals are free to do so; in fact our hope is that the Newsletter as a forum will provide useful feedback to authors as they revise. But my opinion is not meant as a coda to the discussion. By all means let me hear from readers with other ideas.

Want some practical strategies for surviving the assessment process at your institution? FOSAP’s invited session for the ’97 meetings on assessment in higher education can give you some tips (see page 1). The assessment session promises provocative discussion of new trends, driven by budget cuts and other pressures, in the evaluation of academic programs. Small programs, which tend to have low profiles in campus communities, as well as lower numbers for total class enrollments and for majors than large programs, are especially vulnerable. This session is an excellent opportunity to learn more about assessment rationales and how to cope with, even benefit from, the assessment process.

Thanks to Angelo Orona of the University of San Diego for his intelligent and gracious editing of the FOSAP Newsletter over the past several years! Membership in our organization has grown over time (we’re at 260) in no small part due to the interest and esprit de corps generated by the Newsletter. All the more reason for readers to keep the Newsletter informed about issues and concerns that crop up in small programs. Our lines are always open! Contact Dan Moerman (dmoerman@umich.edu) or me (hillan@dickinson.edu) with your comments, reviews or announcements. Deadline for the fall ’97 issue of the Newsletter is August 1. Cheers, Ann Maxwell Hill

Desperately Seeking E-Mail Addresses...
And any other changes to addresses of FOSAP members. Contact Dan Moerman, Dept. Of Behavioral Sciences, U. of Michigan-Dearborn 48128, dmoerman@umich.edu.

FOSAP Business Meeting
Friday, November 22, 1996

In attendance: R. Elizabeth Baird, Claire Boulander, E. Liza Cerroni-Long, Elwyn C. Lapoint, Linda Easley, Nancy Eberhardt, Arlene Haber, John Gatewood, Dan Moerman, Pamela Moro

The meeting began at 6:15 P.M. with FOSAP President Dan Moerman at the helm.

1. The first item of business was an announcement concerning a change of editorship for the FOSAP Newsletter. For the next few years, Ann Hill of Dickinson College will be the editor/publisher. This announcement was followed rapidly by a MOTION to thank Angelo Orona for his years of service as editor/publisher. The motion was approved unanimously. “Thank you, Angelo!”

2. A second motion from the floor presaged Dan’s own second item, which was that we consider changing the name of the newsletter. Several felt that calling the newsletter “FOSAP Newsletter” downplayed articles appearing in it, at least in the eyes of Deans. Those present agreed with this sentiment, and several alternative names were suggested: Anthropology Forum, Projecting Anthropology, Anthropology Projections, Anthropological Trends, and Trends. None of these won a clear consensus, however, and several in attendance felt we might come up with a better name if we thought about it more. Thus, the decision was to delay selecting a new name until more input could be received, especially from the new Editor, and the suggestion was made that perhaps Ann Hill could devise a ballot of sorts and include it in the next issue.

3. The papers in this year’s FOSAP-sponsored session, “They Just Don’t Listen to Lectures Anymore” (Linda Easley, organizer), were considered both innovative and interesting by those in attendance. Congratulations to all those who helped make this another successful FOSAP session!

4. The last item of business was to consider possible topics for next year’s FOSAP paper session. Dan Moerman suggested something on the topic of “departmental assessments,” e.g., helpful hints from those who have successfully gone through such ordeals. A second possibility concerning “teaching ethnographic methods to undergraduates” was suggested by Cate Cameron (via a written handout). Although neither suggestion was formally endorsed, both Dan and Cate were encouraged to persevere with their respective organizing efforts.

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 P.M.
Respectfully submitted,

John Gatewood (substituting for Cate Cameron, Secretary)
"They Just Don’t Listen to Lectures Anymore"

Organizer: Linda E. Easley (Siena Heights College)

The following papers are four of the five from the invited session on participatory learning techniques organized by Linda Easley at last fall’s AAA annual meetings. They’re classroom-tested and, as promised, a sure cure for boring lectures.

Anthropology and the Future: Simulating Possibilities

Douglas Raybeck (Hamilton College)

The interest in simulations is both venerable and current. Simulations present a complex yet abstracted portion of reality in which a variety of variables may be seen interacting. Everything from children’s make-believe games to chess, a simulation for war, draw upon elements of simulation. Simulations are employed by the military to explore strategic contingencies, by politicians to anticipate voter responses, by advertising to shape the marketing of products and by educators to develop research and problem solving skills.

A simulation is constructed both to represent a limited number of real-world variables and to allow a simplified manipulation of these. More complex simulations involve feedback loops so that interrelations between the various elements are represented, and interaction between these can be charted. Currently computers have presented increasingly accessible and complex simulations of social, historical, and scientific events and processes.

This paper discusses the uses of a particular simulation, and its educational benefits both specific to anthropology and to more general pedagogy. The simulation involves students with diverse educational backgrounds and interests in participating in the putative construction of a scientifically believable site in Near Space approximately fifty years in the future.

When this simulation was first undertaken, there were two principal anthropological objectives. I had hoped that the participation of undergraduates in the simulation would improve their understanding of social organization and social structure and the roles these play in human affairs. I also anticipated that the simulation should enhance their appreciation of the cybernetic interrelationships that characterize social systems.

While I anticipated that the anthropological benefits would be significant, my major expectations concerned more general pedagogical goals. I thought participation would enhance student social and communication skills since much of their work would be of an interdependent nature. I also had good reason to believe that most students would increase their computer skills since the simulation requires considerable online work, a familiarity with Multi-User-Domains (MUD), and research employing the Web. Most importantly, I expected that students would significantly improve their problem solving skills while learning to appreciate the contributions of others with differing expertise (Herrmann, et al. 1993).

Solsys Simulation: Overview

Begun by Reed Riner at Northern Arizona University, the Solsys Simulation involves students in the construction and maintenance of future sites in Near Space. Students at several Colleges collaborate in establishing a shared definition of the future (normally 50-100 years in the future). Thereafter, students participate in what is usually a credit-bearing course that ranges from the sciences through the arts. Their efforts are supported by a variety of resource personnel interested in this simulation, who volunteer their time and expertise. These are drawn from NASA, the USGS, Planetary Geology Division, the Lowell Observatory, Brookhaven National Laboratories, Los Alamos and elsewhere.

Given the nature of the task, the need for close supervision, and the rather intense interaction between students, class size has been kept small and has ranged from 14 to 16 undergraduates. In constructing a scientifically defensible site in Near Space, students must accomplish a variety of tasks. First, students make their own choice of site. This could range from an orbiting satellite in Low Earth Orbit (LEO) to an outpost on the moon or Mars. This decision has far-reaching consequences for the simulation and the work that students must undertake, so they are encouraged to discuss their options and research their choice carefully. Once the location is selected, students determine nature of site—what its function and rationale are—and they ascertain such matters as the size of the site and the manner in which it is funded.

Next, class members establish a list of responsibilities that must be fulfilled for the effective maintenance and operation of the site. These are drawn from such venerable sources as Parsons (1962), Harris (1979) and Hunter (1976). Responsibilities can range from waste management to psychological screening and counseling. Once the responsibilities, ranging from 25 to 30 in number, have been selected, students elect which ones they will assume. Then, in concert with an undergraduate representative from other
participating campuses, they establish a Timeline concerning future technological, social and political developments. Once students have defined and 'constructed' their site, they participate in a MUD where they join students from other campuses in the full simulation.

**Specifics**

During the first week, students elect officers who will carry additional responsibilities for the simulation. These include the Captain, who runs each class, coordinates the efforts of the various "departments" and has disproportionate decision-making power; the Chief Engineer who is responsible for implementing design elements of the site and for establishing its electronic presence in the MUD; and the Keeper of the Timeline who coordinates Timeline suggestions and then negotiates for Timeline inclusions and exclusions with the Keepers of other sites.

Students are informed that their grades will depend on the amount of work that they undertake for the simulation, on the quality and extensiveness of their research, and on the constructiveness of their interactions with other students. One of their first tasks is to develop a fictional character and relate its personal history to the Timeline. As soon as students have accepted from one to three responsibilities, they must begin research utilizing both electronic sources such as the Web and more traditional proveniences such as the campus library and assorted faculty members. Via an electronic bulletin board, students are required to coordinate their information and activities with their classmates as the site evolves. Finally, employing the same bulletin board, students are required to submit a weekly journal detailing their research efforts and accomplishments, including a portion written "in character" that describes activities in constructing the site from the inside, as it were.

**PacerForum**

The simulation is facilitated by the use of a specialized software program that acts as an electronic bulletin board. PacerForum allows an instructor to establish major headings with appropriate icons, inside of which are nested related topic boards (see Figure 1). There is a topic board for each student responsibility, and each student contribution is identified by the student's name as well as the date and time of the entry. This assists the instructor in monitoring the amount of work each student is producing. Just as important, it enables students to build upon the contributions of their peers. In addition, boards may be established with varying degrees of privilege. Thus, a board maintained by the instructor may be established as a "read only" board so that the contents may not be altered. Similarly, a "write only" board can allow students to submit their assignments to the instructor, knowing that these cannot be read by others. Further, students may be given privileges for a specific board. Thus, a student in charge of waste management would produce information on a proposed system and solicit responses from classmates, especially from those whose responsibilities, like nutrition or plant management, bear directly upon waste management (see Figure 2 [Not reproduced. Ed.]). The student then maintains the board, monitoring suggestions and providing a weekly summary of discussion and contributions, so that the contents of the board do not become unwieldy.

PacerForum is an application that operates on both Macintosh and PC platforms, and it is TCP/IP compatible, meaning that it can be run from a central server that can be accessed by any computer possessing a client program. Thus, students can contribute to the simulation from their rooms or from other locations on campus, and the instructor can monitor PacerForum contributions from home. Students are generally surprised to discover that a simulation that appeared to be "fun" requires a great deal of work. Most participants invest 15-20 hours week which is well in excess of the 12 hours expected of the typical course. During the three hours in the classroom, students are led by their Captain and address problems of coordination that have arisen on PacerForum, as well as larger philosophical issues involving governance and ethical choices.
Online

Approximately halfway through the semester, once the site is completed and responsibilities are well-researched, classes enter the MUD where the Chief Engineer establishes the electronic presence of (constructs) the site. Working in parallel, the graphics specialist creates a three-dimensional rendering of the site utilizing a program entitled Virtus WalkThrough Pro. This program enables students to move through the visual simulation as though they were in the site. This visual aid adds considerable verisimilitude to the simulation (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3](image)

Two views of a portion of the medical facilities of Naria, an M'nar base.

Figure 3

Other participants join the Chief Engineer in the MUD where they are responsible for designing and occupying their working habitat and living quarters. Students may also communicate with other sites via e-mail and a Solsys chat room. The latter involves a slight bending of the rules calling for scientific accuracy as there is no time lag in communications of the sort that would be expected between widely spaced locations in the Solar System. Chat room discussions can range from simple social exchanges to serious discussions of trade and political relations.

Finally, as student work progresses, both the instructor and outside experts can "tweak" the simulation. That is, it is possible to suggest the development of problems and emergencies that fit within the parameters of the established simulation and which seek to take advantage of design weaknesses in the site. Thus, a fictional crew member may be given a heart attack to see how well site personnel can respond to this difficulty. Even more challenging, sections of the site may undergo limited failure, assuming that the problem reflects genuine weaknesses in station design (see Figure 4 [Not reproduced. Ed.]).

Review and Evaluation: General

Students must continually consult and communicate with one another in order to support the on-going simulation. In the process of developing rules for the site and a sociocultural setting they quickly discover that ideal abstractions must be tempered by practical concerns. This realization, as is true of most others, generally emerges from student interactions rather than from the instructor.

As the simulation progresses, students gradually begin to develop an appreciation of the differing forms of expertise represented by their classmates. Initially, those with strong computer and science backgrounds are dominant in discussions and in the formulation of plans. However, as soon as the operational nature of the site emerges as a serious consideration, those with backgrounds in the social sciences and humanities become far more prominent. Anthropology majors discover that they are better qualified than most to develop an integrated overview of the way in which the various elements of the site interact. Most students also become impressed with the cybernetic nature of the interrelationships that characterize both the social and technological aspects of the site. A change initiated by one participant for seemingly sound reasons can have unfortunate effects on other facets of the station. Working these through requires patience, communication and an increasing understanding of the interdependent nature of such constructs.

Students are faced with a range of problems that they must solve if the simulation is to progress. Initially, most of these concern the acquisition of information and the resolution of questions concerning how best to discharge their on-site responsibilities. New problems soon emerge resulting from the increased need for coordination and integration with other students and their responsibilities. Finally, students encounter problems developed by the instructor and by observers designed to test the dependability of the site design, and the efficiency and soundness of the social engineering. It is expected that the weekly journals will reflect both problems encountered and the steps taken to resolve them.

As the simulation proceeds to its conclusion, students are expected to contribute to a final site report. Participants are asked to contribute a chapter for each responsibility that they maintain. The Captain provides an overview and the Keeper of the Timeline acts as the editor for the final product. The result is a reasonably well integrated document of more
than 250 pages that includes a wealth of site detail, both written and graphic.

Weaknesses

There tends to be an unfortunate division between computer/science students ("techie")s and humanities/social science students ("sociies"). The impetus for this intransigence occurs early in the simulation, as most of the initial tasks facing the simulation heavily involve science. There are orbits to be calculated, stresses to be estimated and structures to be designed. There is a natural tendency to view students lacking such expertise as of less utility to the simulation, and, in some extreme cases, as even being less intelligent. This situation is abetted by the humanities/social science students, themselves who are often reluctant to interject their ideas concerning station design and whose degree of computer expertise is often less than that of most of the science students.

As suggested above, the problem dissipates as the importance of social and humanistic concerns becomes more apparent. However, while the hierarchy of importance is reduced, there remains a strong tendency for humanities/social science students to discuss problems more frequently among themselves than with the computer/science students. The latter, in turn, often form their own clique for initial reactions to problems.

A second class of problems concerns the varying degrees to which students commit to the simulation. Some do too much and some relatively little. "Super contributors" often possess expertise of considerable value to the simulation. Couple this with superior interest and motivation, and one finds some students investing more time and effort in the simulation than they should be. More important, pedagogically, such a person may secure the deference of other students and dominate discussion. While this results in an excellent learning experience for the super contributor, other students derive less benefits. I have found that this issue is best addressed in quiet conversations with these over-achievers that stress the educational objectives of the course and that enlist their conscious support of these goals.

The malingerer or minimal participant is actually rare. I have had only one instance in each of the simulations I have guided. Interestingly, those students who might like to be less responsible, receive considerable prodding from their more committed colleagues. Given the interdependent nature of the site, a student who sloughs off his or her responsibilities, disadvantages others, often in ways that are dramatically apparent. The true malingerer is insensitive to the poor grades that such participation warrants, and is also resistant to the blandishments of others. In this circumstance, other students usually appropriate those responsibilities which affect them most directly.

A final class of difficulties emanate from online experiences. One of the most basic problems concerns coordination of online times since several participating institutions are on the West Coast, a difference of three hours. Thus, when Hamilton College students log-in the evening, it is late afternoon or dinner time on the West Coast and communication between sites is hindered. Additionally, servers at the various sites, as well as the major server at Northern Arizona University, sometimes crash at very inopportune moments and interfere with plans for class participation. Finally, participants from other institutions can treat the simulation with varying degrees of seriousness. Some sites are clearly well monitored and make helpful contributions, but there have been instances where site participants treat the simulation more as a game than as a learning experience.

Strengths

Despite the difficulties inherent in the split between computer/science students and those who are majoring in the social sciences and humanities, students do seem to increase their social and communication skills. Further, as the perceived need for increased sharing of information and expertise becomes apparent, the earlier divisions between "techies" and "sociies" is greatly reduced.

Students tend to develop significant ability to socialize their peers. Those who do good work find that others recognize it and comment favorably upon it. While students are less quick to comment upon shoddy work, they will gradually identify a slacker and will increasingly engage in informal sanctions. These can range from critical comments concerning the person's contributions, to jokes at the expense of the malingerer.

The nature of the simulation requires that undergraduates assume responsibility for its success. Students must necessarily take a pro-active stance concerning the design, construction and maintenance of their chosen site. While these expectations initially strike some as somewhat daunting, they do greatly increase active involvement of participants in their own learning situation. Additionally, students usually develop an increased respect for their own abilities and those of their fellow classmates.

The improvement in problem solving skills is probably the greatest strength of the simulation, and its benefits are numerous. Students learn to evaluate actively a situation, to locate appropriate information, to make decisions about courses of action and then to coordinate their efforts with those of their classmates. In a few weeks there is a perceptible increase in the self-reliance of students concerning their responsibilities and the tasks they must accomplish to realize them. The research and analytic skills that are developed are not specific to anthropology, but are of general utility both within and beyond academe.

An Alternative Model

Utilizing the same procedures and materials described above, it is possible to construct a simulation of
particular anthropological relevance. Instead of designing coordinating sites in Near Space, students, working as classes, could “become” a sociocultural type such as swidden agriculturalist, pastoralist, etc. The design and purpose of the simulation would be similar. That is, students would be responsible for choosing the sociocultural type, its environment and associated factors, and then developing a workable social system. Students would select responsibilities for the culture and develop an appropriate social structure with associated kinship terminology, rights and duties, and so forth. Should instructors desire, it would be possible to model sites after anthropological classics such as *We, the Tikopia* (Firth 1936), *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (Malinowski 1961), or *The Nuer* (Evans-Pritchard 1940). One could even select ethnographic examples to investigate particular sociocultural questions. Thus, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Abu-Lughod 1986) could be used for gender relations, *Yanamamo: The Fierce People* (Chagnon 1983) for questions concerning human aggression, and *Mehinaku: The Drama of Daily Life in a Brazilian Indian Village* (Gregor 1977) for issues concerning human sexuality.

I believe it very likely that such a simulation would not only improve students’ knowledge of cultural processes and content, but would also increase their ability to develop a holistic perspective. Further, such a simulation would stimulate an increasingly sophisticated appreciation of cultural dynamics. It would be difficult for students to resolve some of the problems they would encounter without increasing their understanding of the manner in which all elements of a culture are ultimately interrelated.

Interaction between institutions would then involve culture contact, the possibility of trade, imperialism, and modernization. This would introduce students to the myriad problems that attend sociocultural change and to the tensions between improved living standards and traditional patterns of belief and behavior. Since students from differing locations can now access PacerForum via a TCP/IP connection, this software could serve as the major means of intercommunication between cultural sites. Further, there is currently a beta version that will permit simultaneous communication, so that students representing different cultures could “encounter” one another.

**Final Assessment**

This simulation does succeed in developing intrinsic, as opposed to extrinsic, motivation. Students cease being concerned about the content of exams and papers, and develop their own agendas. Rather than being a lecturer and director, the role of instructor is that of facilitator and guide. As a consequence, students quickly adopt an attitude toward the simulation that exhibits considerable involvement in and responsibility for the structure and operation of the course.

This simulation fosters the development of a holistic perspective and improves students’ understanding of a variety of anthropological issues such as social organization, the difference between formal and informal social mechanisms, the manner in which social sanctions function in small groups, and the relevance of social structure to social action. However, it does not directly acquaint students with anthropological theory and method. While this simulation does not substantially advance students’ knowledge of concepts and terms particular to anthropology, it does seem to greatly improve their appreciation of the cybernetic nature of social dynamics, and of the complex interrelationships between the processes that characterize such entities.

In general, the major success of the simulation concerns the development of a variety of skills as described above. Consonant with most arguments for a liberal arts education, it is the development of intellectual and communication skills rather than the simple dissemination of information that lies at the heart of the educational experience. I have found this simulation to be a very apt means of advancing such goals.

**Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my gratitude for the efforts of Dr. Reed Riner in founding the Solsys Simulations, and my appreciation of the contributions made by other participants including, faculty, students and supportive experts.

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**The Ethnodrama: A Role-Playing Simulation for Anthropology Courses**

*Ehlyn C. Lapoint (Eastern Washington)*

When I began my teaching career at Eastern Washington University twenty-five years ago, most of the undergraduates enrolled in my anthropology offerings were traditional students from the immediate region served by the university. Young, overwhelmingly White, of middle- or working-class families, they had passed virtually the entirety of their lives in the Spokane area. There were as yet no international students, no Hispanic Americans, no Black Americans. Excepting the occasional retired serviceman, serviceman’s child, or member of a Plateau tribe whose reservation lay close by, very few had any direct experience of life outside the American mainstream.

A first—and not inconsequential—task then lay in convincing students of the contemporary reality of unfamiliar lifeways, of the current existence of cultures organized along other lines than the modal American, flourishing even as I spoke in distant and not-so-distant parts of the world.

Once this initial task had been accomplished, an even more intractable challenge lay ahead: to help my students discover that the lessons in living mastered by the members of alien societies somehow had relevance for them, at least insofar as these lessons presented alternative solutions to universal human problems or shed light on general features of the human condition.

Whereas the “reality” issue was largely tackled in the introductory survey course, the “relevance” issue remained a challenge even in upper division offerings, and never more so than in my upper division comparative course on witchcraft. Anthropology majors who were fully prepared to accept the essential wisdom of San subsistence adaptations or the structural viability of Australian section systems still failed to see how witch beliefs could be anything but hopelessly irrational. Lecturing about the “logic” of witchcraft notions did not help very much (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Gluckman 1982 [1944], 1956). The students’ implicit reasoning seems to have run as follows: inasmuch as witchcraft is inherently impossible, the so-called “logic” of witchcraft is benighted, the product of a superstitious, prescientific mind set. Clear-thinking empiricists such as they would never subscribe to such beliefs, much less act on them.

Evidently, something beyond lectures and readings was necessary to convince students that individuals no less rational and tough-minded than they might, under appropriate cultural circumstances, reasonably entertain witch beliefs and elect to act on them. What was needed was to invite students to enter imaginatively into what Shweder (1990:3) calls the “intentional world of... witchcraft” and to operate on the basis of that world’s premises. The “ethnodrama”—as I have styled my particular solution to the problem—was invented to address this need.

The ethnodrama is a role-playing simulation. As such, it is a participatory exercise in active learning (Erickson and Rice 1990: 103). Classroom-based simulations of this sort have been used to good effect in a variety of anthropology course settings. At Northern Arizona University, for example, undergraduates learn principles of social organization and social planning in a computer-assisted futuristic simulation incorporated into a course entitled “ANT 390 Cultural Simulation: Mars Settlement” (Riner and Clodius 1995). And the Spindlers (1990) role play ethnographic informants in graduate training seminars to give the participants practice in ethnographic interviewing techniques; they label this role-playing exercise the “simulated inquiry procedure” (1990: 110). As already noted, the ethnodrama simulation was initially introduced in an upper division course on witchcraft where my intent was to convey the relativistic message that, under certain cultural conditions, people might deem it plausible for the explanation of misfortune to be sought in malevolent sorcery. I also hoped with this exercise to reinforce the general principle that human beings will make use of whatever cultural resources are locally available—in this case, witch beliefs—to cope with universal human problems. Since my initial trial experiment with the ethnodrama, I have regularly employed the simulation in my offerings of “ANTH 457 Witchcraft, Sorcery and Shamanism” and have recently incorporated the exercise into the syllabus of an intermediate-level world ethnography course, “ANTH 342 Tribes, Bands and Chiefdoms.” In these courses the ethnodrama has been well received by students and, in both my view and theirs, it has proven a successful learning experience. Indeed, today’s diverse undergraduate clientele seem to derive as much benefit from the exercise as did those traditional students who first experimented with it over twenty years ago. Let me, therefore, take a few minutes to describe the simulation and then explore with you some of the reasons for its apparent success.
Ethnodrama: Format, Performance, Analysis

During one week late in the term my witchcraft class reconstitutes itself as the population of a local community in a small-scale traditional society. Prior to this, students will already have self-selected roles from the cast of characters listed in the ethnodrama format guide which they have received (see Appendix I). Some assume roles as local political leaders (specifically, kin group leaders or their heirs), others as ritual specialists (e.g., witch finder, diviner), and still others as individuals afflicted with some misfortune or embroiled in an interpersonal dispute with another character. While the ethnodrama is not scripted per se, the role specifications do provide some guidance as to conduct as well as to interpersonal dynamics within the community. Beyond this, however, students are at liberty to improvise—i.e., to interpret their respective roles according to their individual judgments of how the character concerned could plausibly be expected to act under conditions prevailing during the ethnodrama's performance.

The format guide also contains relevant details of the local culture. Although the invisibility of the ethnodrama community remains unspecified, vigilant students often detect a marked resemblance between its culture and that of the Lugbara (Middleton 1960), the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1937), the Navaho (Cluckhohn 1967 [1944]), Colonial Salem (Boyer and Nissenbaum 1974), or one of the other societies discussed in class earlier in the quarter. As in these other societies, so, too, in the ethnodrama community witchcraft offers one possible explanation for personal misfortunes. Yet other supernatural explanations (e.g., ancestral spirit affliction), and natural accounts as well, also are available. Thus a diagnosis of witchcraft is not a foregone conclusion in any case of illness, death, or destruction of property. There is room for competing explanations and, for this reason, room also for the services of the diviner or witch finder.

Witchcraft is deemed to operate over short distances only (see Mayer 1982 [1954]). If witchcraft is diagnosed, therefore, the witch must be presumed to be a local resident. Should a consensus of the community members agree on his/her identity, the putative witch is banished, but not killed. (The university administration frowns on executing students, however compelling the pedagogical rationale may be!)

The simulation runs its course over three or four daily class periods or one longer period in a class which meets on a weekly basis. It concludes when the simulated events reach a recognizable denouement: for example, banishment of the witch or witches discovered, clear assignment of local catastrophes to some other cause, reconciliation of disputing individuals or factions, etc.

And just where is the instructor while all this is going on? The format lists my role as that of a "neutral bystander." It is critical that I neither coach nor referee the performance. Generally, I interact with the student performers as little as possible, and then only on questions of "staging" the drama, rather than how to interpret or enact their roles.

I am not simply a fly on the wall, however. Throughout the performance, I take notes on the proceedings. This chronicle of ethnodrama events is used in two ways. Prior to the resumption of the simulation at the outset of any class period, I review the previous day's events to refresh the memory of participants and bring students who were absent up to date. The second way in which my chronicle is used is as an "ethnographic" resource during the subsequent class analysis of the ethnodrama.

This analysis takes place during the class period immediately following the conclusion of the performance. It has two main components: 1. The ethnodrama is first analyzed as an ethnographic "case study," analogous to the case studies of the Lugbara, Colonial Salem, and other witch-ridden societies we have examined earlier in the term. Given that the students have been both participants and firsthand witnesses of the relevant events, their anthropological interpretations of the simulation as a "case study" generally prove quite perceptive. 2. The ethnodrama is then critiqued as a classroom exercise. Students assess what they have learned from the performance and how the exercise might be improved in future. We will review some of their critical suggestions in a moment. Here I should simply note that this analytic phase brings the ethnodrama to a close.

Last year I devised a new simulation exercise and introduced it in an ethnographic survey course that serves both majors and non-majors. The setting for the new ethnodrama is a tribal society characterized by a segmentary lineage system (see, for example, Evans-Pritchard 1940). The dramatic scenario differs from that of the witchcraft ethnodrama in emphasizing intra-tribal politics and the institution of the feud. The new scenario posits that hostilities commonly erupt between rival tribal segments, although a full-scale feud can sometimes be averted through recourse to a neutral mediator (analogous to the Nuer leopard-skin chief, for example [Evans-Pritchard 1940]). The mediator thus joins a cast of characters which in other respects resembles that of the witchcraft ethnodrama. Although the tribal politics simulation has thus far figured in the syllabus of only one course offering, its initial performance met with the same positive reception regularly accorded the witchcraft ethnodrama.

Uses of the Ethnodrama

Students in both the witchcraft and world ethnography courses uniformly respond enthusiastically to the ethnodrama as a classroom exercise. And, speaking as their principal audience, I certainly relish their individual and collective performances. Yet our mutual enjoyment of the simulation is no guarantee of its pedagogical effectiveness. Is there independent evidence of the ethnodrama's value as a learning experience? I think there definitely is. My own
observations and the statements shared by students in the post-simulation analytic discussions as well as in written assessments of the exercise agree on a number of distinct benefits. Allow me to highlight briefly those I consider most important.

1. Students report that enacting their respective roles in the ethnodrama has effectively reduced the imaginative distance between themselves and those they portray. The exercise has served to bring the ethnographic other closer in empathy and understanding. Students indicate that they now have a better appreciation of how their tribal alters would view a distressing problem—an illness, for example, or a personal dispute—and of how they would attempt to solve it. They recognize that, were they to start from different cultural premises (say, an intentional world in which witchcraft was an active force), they would probably address those problems in a similar fashion. It would be reasonable to do so. You will recall that this is precisely the relativistic insight I had originally hoped students would bring away from the simulation experience.

2. Students also indicate that the ethnodrama experience has heightened their awareness of political processes in small-scale societies. Specifically, they cite dispute resolution and decision-making processes in general. I myself have seen evidence of this in the form of post-exercise examination essays. These essays contain more perceptive analyses of political processes, thus suggesting a keener student appreciation of social dynamics in traditional societies. The students have become, in short, sound Turnerian processual analysts (Turner 1957; Swartz, Turner, and Tuden 1966).

3. Moreover, they have developed a greater comprehension of key ritual and political roles in folk communities: the diviner, the lineage head, the witch finder, the shaman. Their increased understanding in this regard likewise manifests itself in subsequent essay exam responses.

As I have already indicated, the undergraduates in my courses are fully aware of the aforementioned benefits derived from participating in the simulation exercise. In addition to these, however, certain other pedagogical payoffs have become apparent to their instructor. Among the additional benefits, let me cite two in particular.

First, following the ethnodrama performance, class discussions improve throughout the remainder of the term. It is not simply a matter of the increased understanding or added knowledge that students bring to the discussions, however. Through the joint effort of cooperatively creating the ethnodrama, the students seem simultaneously to develop an enhanced rapport with one another and become closer as a group. This esprit de corps appears to have the effect of facilitating class discussions.

Secondly, I have discovered that the ethnodrama provides me with useful ways to assess learning outcomes. There is, of course, the relative skill and ethnographic sophistication that a participant brings to her/his performance. This becomes readily apparent during the simulation itself. Thereafter, the individual contributions made to the analytic phase of the exercise offer another opportunity to assess student growth. Finally, subsequent written responses to exam questions and written appraisals of the ethnodrama itself furnish still other means to gauge the learning experience undergone by the student. When I first experimented with the ethnodrama years ago, I did not anticipate the resulting enhancement in educational outcomes assessment that the method affords, but I greatly appreciate it now. The simulation provides an excellent vehicle for determining how successful I have been in communicating course content.

Questions and Concerns

For the ethnodrama to capture the rifts and rhythms of tribal life, however, the actors must first familiarize themselves with the realities of politics in small-scale societies. Prior to the performance, therefore, students review a number of ethnographic case studies which acquaint them with representative ritual and political figures—diviner, lineage head, etc.—and go on to delineate the elements involved in intra-tribal feuds, witchcraft accusations, and other important social processes. Anticipation of the forthcoming simulation motivates students to scrutinize these case studies closely. Yet it may be wondered whether this preliminary review doesn't constitute a kind of set-up. Won't the cast members be programmed to replicate patterns they have previously discovered in the case studies presented in class? I won't insist that this never happens, but it is not as common as one might suppose. Students display a remarkable creativity and resourcefulness in arriving at novel solutions to the simulated problems confronting them in the ethnodrama.

Take, for instance, the diviner-cum-art major whose colorful canvas, painted on the spot while he was blindfolded, served as his divination apparatus. Or another diviner whose simulated trance states allowed her to locate lost items and forecast the future.

The latter case illustrates a particularly interesting phenomenon. During the term in question, the case studies earlier introduced had not mentioned the divinatory applications of the mediumistic vocation. In effect, our simulation diviner had rediscovered an ethnographically and historically attested cultural option. At the very least, she had generalized this method of divination from another cultural context which she had learned about elsewhere. I cannot be certain which it was. Either way, her interpretation of the diviner's role revealed both praiseworthy ingenuity and a willingness to go beyond the models presented in class in crafting her performance.

A second probable example of such a cultural rediscovery is especially striking. In the first—and, to date, only—world ethnography course ethnodrama, a persistent tribal feud came to end only after a marriage had been
arranged between the prospective heirs of the rival lineage heads. Again, none of the case study material previously discussed in class happened to have cited marital alliances as a strategy to avert or terminate feuds, despite the numerous historic and ethnographic precedents for this practice. Consider, for example, the Yanomamo (Chagnon 1983) or, for that matter, the marital careers of various European monarchs. While the students —many of whom were non-majors—may perhaps have been aware of such parallels, their resourcefulness in finding a solution to the political challenges confronting them showed that, minimally, they did not feel compelled to emulate the ethnographic case studies considered earlier in the term.

If restricted role options do not pose a problem for ethnodrama performances, are there then other limitations or drawbacks to the exercise? The one critical limiting factor that comes to mind is class size. One needs a minimum number of performers—about ten or twelve—to conduct the simulation. In the two courses where I have employed the exercise, a simulation performance has never yet been jeopardized by an insufficient number of cast members. Still, this constraint must be acknowledged. As for drawbacks, one might cite the class time spent on the performance and its analysis. This time is, of course, lost to other potential uses. Yet, in my opinion, the benefits accruing to the exercise greatly outweigh whatever disadvantages the time commitment entails.

Prospective Improvements and Further Applications

I regularly ask my student thespians for their recommendations on how to improve the ethnodrama. In their enthusiasm for the exercise, some have suggested scheduling multiple simulations during the term. Given the logistical difficulties, most notably the need for adequate preparation, I am not convinced of the feasibility of this idea. Another student recommendation, however, seems eminently practical and worthwhile, and I do plan to implement it the next time the ethnodrama appears in a course syllabus. Specifically, class members will be invited to select their ethnodrama roles early in the term, weeks before the performance is scheduled to occur. In this way participants will have ample opportunity to research their parts and master the repertoire of cultural skills required. The resulting performances should thereby gain in virtuosity, versatility, and assurance.

Let me conclude with some brief remarks on potential venues for the ethnodrama in an undergraduate anthropology curriculum. As already noted, I have to date profitably employed the simulation in two topical courses only. Yet I see no good reason why the exercise would not also prove successful in offerings that deal with other anthropological specialties. The tribal politics scenario, for example, would seem to lend itself to courses in political anthropology. And an ethnodrama which focused on trade and marketing or on redistribution might figure usefully in an economic anthropology course. Still other possibilities exist. I encourage you to try them out and, if you do, or if you have already adopted a similar active learning strategy in your own courses, please share your experiences with me.

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Trobiand Fields Forever in DEPTH
The Digital Ethnographic Project: the Trobiand Helix

Allan C. Darrah (California State University, Sacramento)

Introduction

For twenty-six years Jay Crain, my colleague, teacher and friend at CSU Sacramento, has been offering a seminar modeled on the Cornell Trobriand Seminar conducted by Arthur Wolf. Wolf's seminar was inspired by the original Trobriand seminar conducted by Malinowski himself. Malinowski's students have reported that any question of fact would lead him to quickly pull out the pertinent field note or text to decisively resolve the issue at hand. Since the first offering of the CSUS seminar, during which Jay, Gilbert Herdt and myself, struggled with re-interpreting Malinowski, the Trobriand literature has grown immensely.

In spite of this increased wealth of materials, current seminar participants also enjoy instant access to Trobriand texts. They are the beneficiaries of DEPTH, an initiative to convert the entire Massim ethnographic literature into digital texts. DEPTH is a research and instructional environment designed to remove much of the tedium inherent in library research. By reducing the time required to access information, students and scholars are given more time to creatively explore the received literature.

To date over 6,000 pages of Trobriand and Massim ethnography have been digitized. This includes most of the primary source works and a modest start at digitizing the vast collection of oral literature collected by Jerry Leach.

Digitizing Process

The creation of the DEPTH database is a simple process. Texts are scanned to create an image file. The image file is then processed by Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software to create a digital text. On our slow, four-year-old, equipment it takes between three and four minutes to scan and digitize a page, that is, if we have a good clear copy. Editing can take as much as 15-20 minutes per page.

Initially the construction of the database was done by Jay and myself. However, now that a critical mass has been achieved, the endeavor has become a collegial one. Students now enjoying the fruits of past efforts are expected to help with digitization, thereby benefiting their peers, present and future. These contributions to the building of a research tradition, combined with participation in the development of a new research instrument, give added significance to the students' work, thereby providing an important motivation for their participation. Reciprocity is not limited to the Trobriand context; our gift of information, like all magic, must be acquired through pokola.

The Uses of DEPTH

DEPTH users employ commercial information retrieval software to find information. The software creates an index which allows the user to search for single or multiple words, or parts of words within a specified range of other words. Search results, called "hits," are displayed within their context, i.e. their source and location within the text. Users can also post notes, track past searches, and print or copy results. In short DEPTH does for ethnographic literature what computerized library catalogues and online journal abstracts do for the collection of citations.

Immersion

DEPTH enables students to conduct digital fieldwork through an immersion in one of the world's great ethnographic literatures. This is an immersion in which texts become informants in a process of rethinking the received knowledge of Malinowski, Mauss and Weiner. Since Malinowski, immersion has been the preferred means of achieving an appreciation of others; yet time constraints limit opportunities in the academy for immersion.

Archeology of a Symbol

One of the ways which DEPTH can be used effectively to teach students to rethink the Trobriand literature is as a kind of data mining akin to the archeology of a symbol. Victor Turner points out that dominant ritual symbols are characterized by multi-vocality and condensation of meanings. An instructive activity is to apply his concepts to ethnographic data collected under, and thus structured by, other insights. For example, given the absence in the current literature of any Turnerian treatment of Trobriand symbols, how does one go about determining the dominant ritual symbols in Trobriand rites of passage and then unfold the symbols' meanings?

By design and as an aid to communication, the symbols and words, within the highly structured context of Trobriand ethnographic texts, are largely univocal. After all, the text is the author's attempt to make a model explicit.
Explicitness is achieved by a narrowing of focus and by concentrating on only part of a word’s semantic and structural potential. This is a process that tends to strip symbols of their polysemic quality. This paring down of meaning can be partially reversed through the use of a concordance like DEPTH. In digital form, texts can be searched for all occurrences of a word, the context of each occurrence examined and the word’s polysemic potential restored for appreciation and exploitation.

To expose students to the restoration of a symbol, they are asked to use DEPTH in an exercise appropriately titled, No Stone Unturned. Members are given a passage from Nancy Munn’s excellent ethnography, The Fame of Gawa. The passage indicates that certain stones in Gawan gardens symbolize the owning data and that each boulder contains the mind of an ancestor. Participants are asked to examine all occurrences of the word “stone,” as well as categories, uses, characteristics, aspects, and transformations of stones. A raw search for stone and types of stone alone produces over three thousand hits. The student finds that stones are used in rituals related to conception, marriage, parturition, and burial. Stones are employed in magical systems which control gardens, prosperity, kula, and drought.

The normative aspects of stones mark boundaries of social space as well as physical space, while the sensory aspects of stones are legend.

The process of restoring the polysemic qualities of stones leads students to explore an old issue using a new path. In Turner'sg stones the student searches for lime (coral that has been burned, slaked and crushed). This turns up a passage by Damon indicating that people from the island of Muyuw joke about the fact that pwakaw, their word for lime, is the same as the Trobriand word for semen. If the Muyuwans see a connection between lime and semen do the Trobrianders share this perception? (Hopefully, prior readings about Trobriand concepts of procreation have sensitized students to the enigmatic role of semen in the Trobriand world view, thereby begging this question.)

The student continues searching for lime and finds Austen’s article on procreation where we learn that betel consumption, a process which employs lime as one of three active ingredients, is a model for intercourse. Here is another indication that lime may be metaphorical semen. Further searches reveal that lime is also an element in conception magic. Those familiar with the Trobriand literature will immediately see here a new way of looking at that great old puzzle, cum sar babi, called the virgin birth controversy. The magic of conception includes the consumption of lime, which we now hypothesize is metaphorical semen. We can think of few more exciting research experiences than finding a new take on an old conundrum.

At this point the structural constraints of texts are gone and one exists in the creative thrill of liminal play. Librarians call this jumping about in texts “grasshoppering.” We find this a fit symbol. In fable, ants abide in structure, while the artist/grasshopper lives—and almost dies—in liminal play. Since the inception of the computer, it has held out the promise of performing the functions of ants so that we can all be free to pursue the grasshopper’s creative path. In the arena of texts, wordprocessors were the first step in obtaining this grail; the next phase will be universal concordances like DEPTH.

The use of concordances to interpret texts in new ways is not itself new. Edmund Leach and others have shown the fruitfulness of this approach in their interpretations of Trobriand symbols. What is new is the use of computer technology to facilitate an otherwise tedious process. Cross-contextual searches lead to a hypothesis which can quickly be subjected to a cursory test and then rejected or modified. Each adjustment to the hypothesis and each new insight requires research which is literally re-searching or re-reading thousands of pages to find a needle. (Isn’t this why we call it research?) With DEPTH all the needles in all of the haystacks are immediately at hand to reveal if the Queen (your hypothesis) has no skirt (doba). We are convinced that, freed of the tedium of building their own concordances, students can be more creative and go deeper and wider into the literature.

Members of the seminar have suggested we warn about the downside of grasshoppering; as is the case with all liminal activities it can be addictive. Like any really good mystery the rapid pursuit of a hypothesis can lead one to stay up for all hours. Some students dislike the absence of structure when using DEPTH as a concordance; others are intoxicated and find it difficult to escape. In either case the required surfacing to write papers serves to re-introduce structure on a regular basis.

Creativity

We do not assume that there is something inherently creative in this juxtaposition of information in new ways. After all, accessing and reading three thousand quotes about stones does not necessarily lead someone to find new patterns which reflect Trobriand or western thinking. However, the Trobriand seminar is demonstrating that this type of instant access can greatly facilitate the search for new pattern, with DEPTH as a tool students now have enough time for this kind of activity. Assignments which ask students to challenge or extend received knowledge become much more doable.

Why Trobriand Ethnography

The Trobriand literature is the perfect first candidate for digitization. Its historical importance in the development of the fieldwork model, its relative great time depth, the ubiquitousness of discussions of Trobriand issues in textbooks, the wealth and excellence of primary source materials, the mass of related Massim materials inviting comparisons, the wealth of re-interpreted puzzles in the secondary literature, the
contrasting theoretical perspectives it illustrates, Weiner's
dramatic discoveries of the world of Trobriand women, and
the interest factor surrounding the topics of this literature, i.e.
fascinating sexual mores, *kula*, an exotic tropical locale,
Oedipus, virgin birth, and Malinowski's clay feet all combine
to make Trobriand studies both important and fun.

Goals of Project
1. Enhance opportunities for immersion.
2. Enhance creativity in student compositions.
3. Facilitate the rethinking of received knowledge.
4. Speed access to materials.
5. Facilitate development of research skills by
streamlining the testing of hypotheses.
6. Create collegiate atmosphere with students
and faculty working together on a project
which the potential for widespread benefits.
7. Demonstrate the viability and usefulness of
the DEPTH approach to research which
will serve as a grassroots model, as opposed
to commercial, for information access.
8. Provide students with meaningful research
opportunities including working with a
large collection of raw primary source data.

Measurement and Evaluation of Results
Our efforts to evaluate DEPTH's effectiveness
involve a comparison of the work submitted by students from
pre- and post-DEPTH seminars. After a period of reading
Malinowski, Weiner and Montague, students write and
present a short paper each week. We notice qualitative
improvements in the work of post-DEPTH participants. We
also note that current students employ a wider range of
sources. In general the quality and originality of the papers
have benefited from the use of DEPTH.

Future of the Project
Our initial experiences with DEPTH has encouraged
us to look to the future; we see DEPTH in its next phase as an
Internet site, providing not only concordances but also chat
and publication opportunities.5

We also see two models for the development of
research environments like DEPTH. One is the commercial
one where students and scholars will have to pay for rapid
access to information. The other is grassroots efforts such as
ours where faculty and students donate their work in order to
maintain a research environment which is free. DEPTH is
dedicated to the notion that just because one must look long
and hard—even with DEPTH—for a free gift in the
Trobriand context, this does not mean that the same must be
true in the academy.

Notes
1. Caroline Gardner has pointed out that the two primary
forms of Trobriand yams, *diocorea esculenta* and
*diocorea alata*, one female the other male, twine up the
yam poles in reverse direction, one left the other right,
creating a form of helix.

2. We have found that top-ranked OCR software
manufacturers are fairly realistic in their claims of accuracy
rates of 99.8%. However, with thousands of characters on
the page and varying quality of copy there will be a number
of errors on each page even in the best of circumstances. At
DEPTH we closely check Kilivilian words because we
assume that the reader will not be able to readily detect any
errors. The English portions of the texts receive less
rigorous post-recognition editing. An imperfect solution;
however, users will always need to compare digital texts
with originals before citing them. To further reduce errors,
we ask users to report any errors they find.

3. We are not suggesting that virtual fieldwork in DEPTH
replace travel to the field or that codified stories replace
living ones. However, in the absence of fieldwork
opportunities and live co-authors, immersion in texts and
querying them through concordances are meaningful
alternatives.

4. A search for *pwakaw* produces zero hits in the Trobriand
context, but according to Lawton *pwaka* is a Kilivilian term
for lime and Senft gives *pwakau* as lime. Malinowski also
notes the use of *pwaka* in the title of the spell employed to
befog flying witches with lime. *Pwaka/pwakaw* is
suggestive of a pun but nothing conclusive.

5. Proper design can resolve the copyright issues which
must be addressed before this can be achieved. Internet
usage of copyrighted materials will be governed by a set of
"Fair Use" guidelines which focus on the purpose of the
copying, the nature of the copied materials, the effect of
copying on the copyright's royalty stream, and the amount
of the original copied. Restricting DEPTH access to
students on a non-profit basis resolves the purpose issue.
Limiting search results to hits (search words or phrases)
within the context of 4 or 5 lines above and below the hit
would address the amount issue. In essence results would
appear as a string of medium-length quotes, an amount
well within the Fair Use standards. Widespread use of
DEPTH would, if anything, increase the value of the
original text. Researchers will need to see larger portions of
the text than available through DEPTH.
Point your browser to → → →

http://www.umd.umich.edu/~dmoerman

for FOSAP's Web Site.

(FOSAP papers, continued)

Doing Ethnographic Research in Mexican Peasant Communities in a Multimedia Computer Lab Environment

Manuel L. Carlos (University of California, Santa Barbara and California State University, Monterey Bay), Juan J. Gutiérrez (Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro, Mexico), and Phillip McCarty (University of California, Santa Barbara)

Introduction

For many years the senior co-author (Carlos) has traveled to Mexico to study peasant communities, state policies, and regional development in the State of Querétaro. Carlos has done so with small groups of undergraduate and graduate students, who participate in field schools and conduct field research in a unique academic partnership with scholars and colleagues from the University of Querétaro (Carlos, Gutiérrez, Knutson 1995; Carlos, Knutson, McCarty 1996). This collaboration includes the participation of Professor Juan José Gutiérrez of the Autonomous University of Querétaro, one of the co-authors of this paper. Although Carlos ideally would like to be able to give increasing numbers of students firsthand experience in the field, he is faced with a dilemma; the cost and logistics involved in organizing travel and summer stays in Querétaro’s peasant communities makes taking large groups of students impossible.

The co-authors of this paper all agree that the ideal way to teach students to do ethnographic research in a non-U.S. setting is to expose them to a carefully designed curriculum (including language training) and then send them to a field site to apply their newly learned research skills under close supervision. We also agree that, although this ideal is unachievable, an alternative is viable. What we will present today is a new way to give an unlimited number of students an ethnographic field research experience through a computer-mediated simulation. The materials we will demonstrate, through the use of computer equipment and peripherals, can serve as a complimentary curriculum for training students to do field research and then actually taking them to the field. Alternatively, the same curriculum and materials can also serve as an electronic field site for simply expanding the manner in which we train students as ethnographers in a class and laboratory setting. They also provide us with an ethnographically authentic and interactive textual, visual, and aural medium in which to train students in the fundamentals of ethnographic research, whether or not the students we train ever engage in field research of their own. We further believe that the electronic field site, which we have constructed, and made available to instructors and students in a computer mediated laboratory environment, provides us with an approximate “real life” ethnographic experience for training large numbers of undergraduates students in the logic of the scientific principles and protocols that underlie ethnographic field research and data collection as a field based activity (Carlos 1996).

The Electronic Field Research Simulator (EFRS) that the senior co-author is presenting today, with the key members of his development team, was designed and developed under his direction with the above goals in mind, with the support of a grant from the National Science Foundation, Division of Undergraduate Education (NSF Grant No. 9455699). The NSF grant was made to Carlos who is the Principal Investigator for the development of the EFRS CD ROM teaching modules and allied curriculum materials.

The EFRS Courseware

EFRS is a software application, or “courseware,” which serves as the central text book and class room curriculum for courses in ethnographic field research methods. It is currently undergoing a final series of class use tests in the instructional computer lab environment at California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) and the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB). It will be available to the public as a commercial product in just a few months in the form of a CD-ROM. The materials you will see today are contained on a CD, which we produced in-house. Additional instructional and curriculum materials, to accompany the commercially produced CD, will be available on a WEB site and related hard copy materials. For the present, interested parties can obtain additional information and stay in touch with developments concerning the availability of EFRS by visiting our WEB site at CSUMB:

http://www.monterey.edu/academic/centers/sbse/310a6

Using EFRS, undergraduate students can “conduct” field work in Mexico, as is being done by students today in two courses at CSUMB and UCSB. In their on-screen field diaries, you will find descriptions of the people they have encountered, the material culture of the different localities they have visited, and the problems they have had to face in order to conduct their work in the time and with the money they have been allotted before their visit to the State of Querétaro in Central Mexico. Interestingly enough, these students have the opportunity to do research and learn field research skills in another culture without leaving the
classroom and computer lab setting. They have been exposed to conditions of actual field experience in an ethnographically accurate virtual environment.

**Conducting Research in Mexican Peasant Communities Using EFRS Courseware**

The electronic materials they are asked to handle have a multimedia dimension and include text, slides, video clips, audio, maps, text, and statistics pertaining to actual villages in Querétaro, Mexico. Students can use the language of the persons in the villages (Spanish) and thus reinforce their use of a second language as a language of research. Or, students can use English to navigate through the exercises and data in the simulators. The simulators are complemented by a hard copy (and electronic) manual of instructional materials that help them understand the exercises and carry them out.

The simulators allow students to explore various hypotheses and theories concerning such themes as the impact of social change and development on Querétaro’s peasant communities, the emigration choices of populations in rural communities, the extent of participation by the populations of peasant communities in Querétaro in the world economy, and the effects of the world economy on cultural practices and values of peasant communities. Students can test hypotheses and learn about the applications of theories while learning the steps they have to take to obtain the empirical ethnographic data necessary for such tasks.

The first EFRS CD instructional module integrates four field exercises and seven assignments designed to teach the students the basis of observation, interviewing and note taking, the basic elements of successful ethnographic field research. A second EFRS CD, currently under production, will have a similar number of exercises and assignments and show the student how to map a community, and conduct census and surveys. It introduces the basic tools for the management of large amounts of qualitative field data. This EFRS introduces students to all 80 families in a peasant community. A third EFRS CD adds new techniques on life history, genealogies and community profile reporting to the original plan of development for these simulators.

In addition to each program to be distributed in a CD-ROM format, the senior author has developed, along with the development team and co-authors, two reference books for the set of three EFRS. The first is the manual or handbook, which provides full technical references for the use of the simulators in the lab. It introduces the concept of a simulated field experience to the reader and provides materials explaining the cultural context and background of the area of Mexico in which the simulated field research experience takes place. The senior author has also designed a Web site for the EFRS.

The instructional objectives include the definition of skills that make up the field methods being taught and the requirements and conditions for applying these methods. This activity is complimented by criteria for grading students on the application of the field research methods. The EFRS CD 1 requires students to use and build upon their note taking abilities for the purpose of the observation of a group’s activities and interactions such as weddings and other life rituals, festivities and political assemblies that punctuate the daily lives of the people and communities studied. In the field these activities can only be recorded with some level of participation on the part of the researcher. Through the simulation students are required to identify, observe, describe, analyze and hypothesize about the diversity of interactions in any single social event or set of interactions. Without the electronic ethnographic field research simulators and the field conditions they re-create, students could not readily obtain an experience which allows them to do research in a different culture, while also learning skills in ethnographic research and the components of the scientific method, including hypotheses formulation and testing and the applications of theories in social and behavioral sciences explanations.

**Learning Processes Using EFRS Courseware**

In addition to practicing their data collection skills in the field research environment re-created by EFRS, students may also practice data collection methods in field sites with local informants or observe public gathering places. Fieldwork involves humans coping with unfamiliar environments. It is full of unpredictable circumstances that lead to loss of time and frustration when one's work plans and objectives cannot be accomplished or are accomplished with less than satisfactory results. Thus the possibility for taking a wrong turn in their navigation of contacts in the field is built into the simulator. In this way, students learn they need to use all of their observational skills to avoid costly missteps (and even so may not be able to do so!).

The advantage of the simulators is that students can correct their mistakes before they are consequential for their research. In the "real world" of ethnographic research, informants frequently give researchers contradictory information. Exposure to multiple and conflicting sources of data obtained from the data files of informants interviewed, and included in the simulator, force the student to sort and rank data based on research objectives and the reliability of the source. For example, not all members of a community remember key events in the community's history with the same accuracy or from the same point of view. Informants often conflict with other informants, or even with their own statements, and require extensive cross verification. These elements are built into EFRS. Students using the same lesson objectives and simulator learn the same methods and must interact with, react to, and interpret the content of the simulator in their own way.
Conclusion

The electronic communications frontier, and its supporting technology, has created new opportunities for instruction and learning in anthropology and the social sciences (Boone and Wood 1992; Boschman 1995; Carlos 1996). EFRS is a product of that frontier. It allows us to re-create authentic and ethnographically accurate simulated field research conditions for teaching students how to do field research and learn the scientific principles that underlie ethnographic research as a field based discipline. In this environment students learn about the scientific method, while acquiring practical knowledge concerning data collection, the use of field data in hypothesis testing, and connections between hypothesis, empirical data, and theory construction. That effective learning is taking place is evident in the assessment we make of students using the simulators and in the self-assessments they are conducting on their own learning processes. While using EFRS it is clear that EFRS adds an additional dimension to the teaching of ethnographic field methods by providing an actual field site for students to try out their research skills. At the same time, students learn about Mexican peasant societies by interacting with an ethnographically authentic field site.

References

Boone, Margret and John J. Wood (editors)

Boschmann, Erwin (editor)

Carlos, Manuel Luis, Juan José Gutiérrez, and Melody Knutson

Carlos, Manuel Luis

Carlos, Manuel Luis, Melody Knutson, Philip McCarty

This paper contains copyrighted materials and references to courseware design.

FOR THE PIPELINE...

Send proposals for FOSAP panels/sessions at 1998 AAA meetings to Linda Easley, FOSAP Program Chair, Human Services Division, Siena Heights College, Adrian MI 49221-1796, lindaeasley@aol.com.

Re-name the Newsletter? Your call.

See business meeting minutes in this issue, page 2, for suggested titles, or propose your own. Contact Ann Hill, Dickinson College, Department of Anthropology, Carlisle PA 17013-2896, or hillan@dickinson.edu.
Reviews


Kathryn M. Anderson-Levitt (University of Michigan-Dearborn)

After yet another discussion with colleagues about student culture, I finally checked out Michael Moffatt's ethnography of undergraduate life at Rutgers—and couldn't put it down. Coming of Age in New Jersey is an important (and fun) read for professors and potentially useful for students, as well.

Moffatt did participant observation on co-ed dormitory floors in 1978 and in 1984, collecting additional information through optional paper assignments in his anthropology courses. His young dorm residents differ in important ways from my working commuter students—they sleep more, for one thing—and Moffatt acknowledges that students change every decade. Yet he also demonstrates surprising continuity over generations of college students (white males, anyhow), convincing you that this study can't be far "out of date." (Still, if you want a closer look at female undergraduates, white and black, read Holland and Eisenhard's Educated in Romance; for a look at Latino students, see Gandara's Over the Ivy Wall.)

The heart of the book is a pair of chapters on "college life" (i.e., sex). Definitely page-turners and probably fairly accurate, they contain some descriptive gems. There is understated evidence of coerced sex, fraternity gang-bangs, and hundreds of unwanted pregnancies, as well as documentation of kids having fun "coming of age." However, Moffatt offers little explicit analysis, and his insistently "heterosexual," "non-feminist" informants offer none at all. If you use these chapters with students, you'll face hard work whacking through the titillating detail to help them discover what they usually take for granted about sexuality and gender.

The chapter on race, too, probably won't shake students out of everyday complacency. Race is "cultural difference," right? Doesn't this chapter demonstrate that students in the Paul Robeson unit at the end of the hall liked different music than students at the ordinary (um, white) end? However, the chapter offers food for thought for anthropology professors. "As the undergraduates understood culture, it only marginally modified their fundamental individualism," Moffatt argues. "Culture was something like individual choice at a collective level" (pp. 151-2). Implicitly, if the people who choose to be different from the majority would just fall in line, we'd have no problem. The simple notions of culture and cultural relativism that students pick up in 101 probably just feed this analysis, so how should we teach culture, race and racism? No answers here, but good questions.

The other must-read chapter for faculty is entitled "The Life of the Mind." As an incidental, Moffatt offers a neat economic analysis of a link between easy grading and enrollment pressure, with data that might prove handy to FOSAP members. More important, he comes to a startling conclusion about students' experiences. Why were students generally satisfied with their intellectual experience at Rutgers, despite dull professors, passive learning, and courses "wasted" outside their major? Because students compared their college experience to "their families, their suburban hometowns, their high schools, and intellect as it was presented to them in American pop culture" (p. 274). For many, college represented far more intellectual stimulation they had known before.

You may sigh, especially when you read the misspelled, often unreflective essays Moffatt quotes verbatim from these nouveaux intellectuels. They are settling for so little, and we're letting them. On the other hand, Moffatt insists that college has never provided more than modest intellectual stimulation for most students, whether "gentlemen scholars" or immigrant "grinds." At least you and I have a shot at stimulating larger and larger proportions of each succeeding generation.

Amusement, Indignation, and Inversion in Readings of Horace Miner's "Body Ritual Among the Nacirema": Laughing at Half a Joke

Lynn Thomas (Pomona College)

Horace Miner's brief American Anthropologist article disguises Americans, in the mid-1950s, by reversing the ordering of letters in American names and by misleading descriptions. The article's descriptions focus on body health and hygiene, body appearance, magic and ritual, and psychological phobias. Miner joins the psychological-cultural syndrome. He associates the concern for body appearance with the ritual-phobic and health-hygiene concerns in mixed ways. Body aesthetics are not so much treated in the essay as matters about health and hygiene. There is a clearly discernible loose pattern of explanation of the health-hygiene-appearance pattern by the ritual-phobic syndrome. There are other, subsidiary, elements in the article's descriptions, such as elements of gender asymmetry, social class or hierarchy,
and mention of a socialization fetish. It is interesting, and perhaps important, that there is no reference to what Americans conceive as "religion proper" in the article. The article mostly conveys its descriptions and explanations by giving glimpses meant to convey the pervasiveness of the body ritual concerns in American life: Body ritual is found in the little details of otherwise disparate aspects of everyday life—in the bathroom, in elements of hospital practice, in hair drying.

Reference to Miner's article is ordinarily in two areas. It is familiar, even prominent, in some varieties of introductory anthropology instruction. It also figures in the professional literature of the discipline, where it has never been prominent. In the professional literature, I am aware of about thirty essays that cite it, from the late 1960s to 1989; most citations just mention it. Some professional essays develop the pedagogical uses of the article, or extensions of those uses as an anthropologist documenting the nursing profession uses it to help people in "making the familiar seem strange." The professional reception of the article is mixed, but it is to patterns in student understandings of it that I wish to draw your attention now.

As near as I can tell, the article in introductory anthropology instruction is always understood to be about ethnocentrism. A few years ago, a student asked me if one of my introductory classes could discuss it. The student had found it, unassigned, in the collection of essays used in the class. I somewhat reluctantly agreed. I had not assigned it, thinking its disguise too transparent and its point "too elementary" to be of much use to the class. I expected, based on a memory of brief discussions of it earlier, that the class wouldn't have much to talk about. After reading it, I figured out several lines of discussion we might have about it, some of them about the subsidiary themes mentioned above. What happened during the discussion didn't have to do with these, however. In short, quite a few students reacted more with confusion, and even some alarm and anger, than they did with amusement in the first encounter. One young man's experience will give you an idea. We had spent the whole of a class period discussing it. It was clear that some more discussion would be necessary the next time to pull the different threads together. I had tried to play it through to the end, not saying or implying even once that Naciremans are Americans. Several students had revealed the Nacireman's identity, one or two explicitly, two or three indirectly. After the hour a young man approached me to ask if he couldn't find out more about these strange people. It wasn't until then that I realized that the proportion of students catching on to the identity of the Nacirema might be lower than I had guessed. I'll give an estimate of the proportion shortly. I thought by this time I should reveal their identity, and did so, thinking the student could then catch up with the discussion for next period's summary. What happened was that the student immediately became agitated. His expression changed from mild interest to something like dismay, annoyance, or anger, and he began stammering denials, which seemed mostly to be personal ones—when he brushed his teeth, it had nothing to do with ritual. It turns out that this student's reaction has been replicated dozens of times since then in subsequent uses of the article in classes. Discussions with a few other teachers suggest that my experiences may not have been unusual; some students' mild amusement, vague confusion, and flat discussions—uninteresting and undeveloped ones, at that—were reported to me in personal conversations.

Dr. Joanne Mack helped me gather written data from students on their reactions to the article so that I might study more carefully the nature of these reactions. I sought her help because I wished the assessment to be independent of my classes and the idiosyncrasies involved in them. The approach she and I agreed on was to have her classes (eventually three of them) at Cal Poly Pomona and Pomona College read the essay in class. After she was sure everyone had read it, she asked the class to write their responses. Five minutes later, she interrupted them again to make the identification of the Nacirema, and then asked them to tell her if that affected their reaction. It is from reading these student reports for expressions of surprise that the estimate below, proportion of students catching on, is derived. We got some unequivocal expressions:

- I feel stupid!
- Ha! Now I'm embarrassed.
- I was totally fooled.

Some others are reasonably clear:

- after discovery...
- now that I know...

Others never let on, and some students did not write any more after being told; yet others left it unclear, based on what they wrote, whether or not they really understood. My conservative estimate is that in three classes, and discounting the two-to-three students per class who had heard of the essay before, about 60% of the students did not guess the identity of the Nacirema from an in-class reading of the article (total n=121). Judging from the professional reactions to it in the literature, and from the reactions of some of the students who did catch on, this seems a high proportion. I suppose that
Horace Miner would have expected people to catch on during a first reading without much trouble.\(^5\)

But this is not the most interesting or important part of the reactions. Recall the idea that the article is widely supposed to be about ethnocentrism. I take it from my readings and from discussions with colleagues, that there is a "canonical reading" of the article, and that it goes, roughly, as follows. One is supposed to make certain mental associations while reading the essay: the repetitive use of the language of ritual, magic, and psychological phobias strongly conveys a sense of irrationality, an association made "natural" by the presumptions built into the article that one is reading about a "primitive" people. Somewhere along the way, however, one is supposed to figure out the "trick" from the spelling of names, or from such broad hints as the article gives in its descriptions. When one figures out the identity, the "category mistakes" generate the "amused" reaction. One is supposed to see that Americans wish to see themselves as exceptionally civilized, rational, scientific, and yet "they," actually "we," are being described in terms opposite to these. Miner is in this way playing with settled mental dichotomies. Ethnocentrism comes into the picture, in this reading, in that one is supposed to "come down off one's high horse." One is supposed to entertain the possibility that people—or "those Americans"—are too heavy-handed in "our" or "their" holding of American culture high above humankind. Among professional anthropologists I've spoken with, "mild amusement" is the emotion that often accompanies these mental calculations.

Few students react in this way. Some do. I estimate that they number one-fifth at most in the late 1980s in Southern California classes. The other four-fifths figure out ways to distance themselves as much as they can from the descriptions.\(^6\)

A couple of "variables" will give an idea of the pattern. The statistical approach is taken because the interpretations of student comments are error-prone and because it is central tendencies and systematic variations that are being sought in the face of both noise and the potential errors in coding the data. Consider, then, the association between two groupings of the responses. The grouping I will call Acceptance has four values that make a rank ordering: The number one is assigned to a student who indicated a reasonably full acceptance that Miner's readings of the Nacirema fit American culture reasonably well. The number two is assigned to expressions of neutrality, doubt, or ambiguous acceptance of the readings. The number three is assigned to students who show some acceptance, but more rejection, and the number four to those who reject Miner's description without showing signs of ambiguity or partial acceptance.

It should be understood that the assignments to the third and fourth categories involved the use of a negative assessment. If a student gave strong criticisms of Miner's descriptions and did not take any opportunity to indicate positively whether part of Miner's descriptions might be acceptable, a three, or more often in this case, a four was assigned. In other words, non-acceptance is taken as rejection when accompanied with criticism. The object, in this way, was to capture the most salient aspect of the response—acceptance had to mean explicitly showing a willingness to actually entertain an element of truth in Miner's descriptions. To show that a student was not caught up negatively in the rhetoric of the language Miner used.

The other grouping is Ethnocentrism, also a rank ordering. The number zero was assigned if a student made no explicit reference to the possibility that one's background could affect one's interpretation in the descriptions. If interpretative background was mentioned, whether by name or in other words, the number one was assigned. The number two was assigned to students who indicated that Miner himself or his description suffered from ethnocentrism. This ranking, then, is one of "no mention," "general mention," and "specific application," of the idea of interpretive bias in a "cross-cultural context."\(^7\) The two groupings, Acceptance and Ethnocentrism, are associated positively.

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The table shows a pattern that is statistically significant well beyond the \(\chi^2\) .01 level of significance. Gamma is 0.7\(^8\). The data allow an interpretation in which of the three narrower readings, the students are overwhelmingly choosing the weaker two. They could have worked out—some do—Miner's descriptions as asking for consideration of the claim that Americans' lives may involve significant elements of magic, ritual, and perhaps even a curious psychology. Note well that this need not have meant going all the way to accepting the literal or a full reading of Miner, only entertaining the spirit of his thought experiment. For in this rendering of Miner's thinking, the boundary between "primitive" and "civilized" could also become problematic, as would its constituent categories of ritual vs. rationality. A majority of students reject this option and choose instead to rest their thinking on more literal readings of the article, despite recognition of the humorous intention. They either "accept" the description as is, or else they reject it entirely. In the first case, the students are more likely than not to have missed the point of the joke and its relevance to even the most superficial notion of ethnocentrism. In the second case, an abstract concept of ethnocentrism is often invoked that involves the distinction
between Generic Us and Generic Other as an abstraction of that between Primitive and Civilized. The meanings We have about our mores are not subject to critical scrutiny (not from such a source as Miner’s essay). Rather than rendering the terms of primitive-civilized and ritual-rational problematic, these terms are carefully protected from critical scrutiny. What this often means is that some readers not only accept the primitive/civilized dichotomy, but also find in Miner’s essay a reinforcement of its terms.

Conclusion

The content of Miner’s descriptions renders everyday American body hygiene and medical treatment in unmitigated ritual and magical terms and in the forms of psychological problems. These are terms which many students can accept, in the abstract, as applied to some Others, primitives, but which cannot possibly be a part of (their own) everyday American life, which is practical and rational. Miner’s joke, for these students, is that he is using the terms opposite to, not just different from, those appropriate to describing Americans. He is thereby exposing anthropology’s—or someone else’s, even his own—ethnocentrism; what he is doing is seen to be “cute” by making Americans, who are “obviously not primitive,” seem so. The categorical opposition of ritual vs. rationality and its association with primitiveness and modernity is thereby preserved. American cultural conceptions are preserved as well. And yet the message that ethnocentrism is bad is also retained.

Including the professional literature (which I discuss in a longer version of this paper) along with the student data, there are three main partial reactions to Miner’s essay. Each centers on one of the major actors: “primitives,” Americans, anthropologists. Senses of association of oneself, the reader, with these actors are pivotal. There is, first, the (exceedingly rare) claim that Miner spoofs primitives (and unfairly so). This reaction depends on the assimilation of Nacirema to “primitive people,” and so, though rare, it helps in understanding some elements in the student data, especially among readers who missed the identification. There are, second, the reactions that hold that Miner is spoofing either Americans or anthropologists; these are both widely attested in the student data and among professionals. The striking patterning here should not escape notice: among those focused on the concern for Americans (or in some students’ cases, for oneself) as against Others (“primitives”) there is the tendency either to take Miner’s observations for granted as valid, seemingly without notice of or attention to the vulnerabilities of the categories used, or to reject them outright, without discussion of their recognizable elements. Often in the latter case, the rejection is coupled with the decisive blow: Horace Miner is held in contempt as ethnocentric, since he didn’t grasp natives’ meanings. The canonical interpretation is difficult to accept for some, because of its conceptual and social ambiguities. I take it, as should be clear, to be a challenge to Americans’ cultural conceits. Indeed in this respect it is apt to be marked as a “spoof” of Americans, but also, problematically, one for Americans. It achieves its goal by the contestable realism of its depictions and a purposely thin disguise.10

I am not suggesting here that reactions to Miner’s article are a simple litmus test of ethnocentrism in which “bad” ethnocentric people respond negatively and “good” culturally relativistic people are amused. There may be something to the characterization, but it is incomplete. For one thing, some amused readers have to know, one supposes all too well, the terms of the categories at issue, in order to be amused. Some who are amused register only the “mistake” of seeing civilized Americans as primitive. The amusement can go along also with another kind of conceit, often a benign one, that of being an insider poking fun at the still unwashed, those not “in the know.” This would be all right, if it were not for the co-existence of the other reaction and for the still unfinished playing out of the conceits themselves. This amused “in the know” reaction can happen directly by being an insider in the simple joke. It also can happen indirectly by taking the vantage point of standing “above” the Americans that Miner describes and “looking down” on them. One does not see one’s own sense of cultural equilibrium challenged so much as that of Other Americans. Some amused responses, then, allow of a complacency which is perhaps not dissimilar to that of the confused or indignant, on the similar register of an elitism that is not fully joined with a clear warrant for an important kind of superiority.

I find these responses curious and interesting. They might have a general implication. The student reactions are clearly mixed—some students, about a fifth—do take something like what I have called the “canonical reading.” There are two clearly distinguishable ways in which most of the other four-fifths of the students actively distance themselves from the implications of that reading; these involve finely tuned, widely shared, and some of them clearly ethnocentric reactions. The emotional tones of the reactions are interestingly mixed as well—note that some who distance themselves from Miner’s descriptions are amused, others a little troubled, some confused, others slightly angered or annoyed. Perhaps then it is a mistake take ethnocentrism to be a homogeneous, universal, invariant phenomenon, one of anthropology’s most tenacious essentialisms?

I am tempted to argue that the current findings can have only occurred in the past two decades or so, that they are quite specifically historically situated. Might instruction in geography in primary and secondary schools have once been better, such that a few more readers would have guessed the identity of the Nacirema sooner? One might wish to speculate about other possible failings of American education also, and there is the problem that Miner’s essay is dated. Literary conventions and tolerances have also been changing. Another line of speculation would involve consideration of the
development of a “resurgent America” that has been happening during the same time period as the students grew up. Have students become ethnocentric as part of their involvement in some recent themes in American life? I don’t have data on these matters and I will resist the temptation to do more than bring them up here now.

Notes


2. It is important for what follows to recognize that Miner intended a general rather than a specifically anthropological readership for the essay, evidenced by his having submitted it first to the New Yorker (telephone conversation, January 3, 1990 with Mrs. Agnes Miner).

3. Given its professional reputation in some quarters, a second pedagogical use, perhaps in “methods” classes, might be negative, as an instance of bad anthropological practice. I know of no such uses though I would not be surprised to find them.

4. The difference in the proportions for the two schools is not statistically significant. Differences between males and females are not significant. Testing for other differences, such as those among ethnic groups, could not be undertaken in the data available.

5. This is confirmed by a telephone conversation, January 3, 1990, with Mrs. Miner. She reports that Professor Miner expected readers to see through the disguise.

6. The distancing begins in the student comments before the instructor has identified the Nacirema. This decreases the likelihood that in distancing students are engaging in cognitive dissonance reduction or discursive vengeance against Miner, i.e. that they reject what caught them off guard as itself having been illicit. The distancing manifests itself in several ways, one of which is the rhetoric of the past. The primitive is “the old,” or “ancient.” Many anthropologists may have given up nineteenth century stage notions of evolution, such notions are nevertheless alive and well in American education. Miner’s article is vulnerable to being put into the past by virtue of its datedness.

7. The ease with which students adopt “eye of the beholder” bias attributions is striking; many instructional materials give the impression that students need to be taught this in numerous ways against their natural inclinations. The current data suggest that they have the idea well under

control early in the semester if not long before.

8. Spearman’s rho is 0.6, Mu2 is 0.83.

9. This may be in some cases an academic suspension of disbelief produced by the condition of writing observations to the instructor.

10. It is noteworthy that Miner was beautifully situated socially to live with, and so to construct these ambiguities: though trained in, and an eminent practitioner of anthropology, he worked in a sociology department, his work on the folk-urban continuum and in African as well as North American contexts may also have helped him to sharpen his sensitivities on these matters.

Attention: Biological Anthropologists

Does your introductory biological anthropology course fulfill your institution’s general education requirement for the sciences? In response to a recent inquiry, FOSAP wants to hear from members about their experiences instituting biological anthropology as a Gen Ed course. Contact the Editor, FOSAP Newsletter, Department of Anthropology, Dickinson College, Carlisle PA 17013-2896, or hillam@dickinson.edu.
Doing Ethnography in the Classroom

Catherine M. Cameron (Cedar Crest College)

For all the years I have taught the introductory cultural anthropology course, I have assigned a research paper on a non-Western culture area. In recent years, I have also begun to ask students to do either an observational or interview assignment to accompany the discussion of field methods in the course. This year I decided to eliminate the secondary source paper and expand the primary research. In part, this change is due to the ongoing discussions about the intro course sponsored by FOSAP, as in the symposium organized by Ann Hill and Paul Grebinger in the 1995 AAA meetings. But, in addition to this, I instituted this exercise because the research methods course as taught in my department by a sociologist focuses almost entirely on quantitative methods using SPSS. I felt that the students needed the practice of “doing ethnography.”

The research assignment, in itself, is not new; many teachers of anthropology have had students do fieldwork in their own culture. I suppose what I am trying to do in this assignment is convey the long-term nature of fieldwork and the build-up of understandings over time. Note that the students do their research over the entire semester. I regard this first time out of the chute as an experiment: I’ll know better by the end of the semester whether it can be termed a success.

Research Portfolio for Sociocultural Anthropology 220

1. Choosing a research site
Pick a site for ongoing research. It can be large or small, public or private. You need to have easy access to it. It can be a portion of your neighborhood; a small town you are quite familiar with; a place of business; a restaurant, coffee shop, or bar; a laundromat; a sports club; ice/roller rink. It could also be a place where public business is conducted; a county or city council chambers; a city authority (for economic development, planning, tourism) or city commission. It must be a place you can go to on a regular basis. You must decide whether or not you will disclose your business there. I would rather you not choose a locale at Cedar Crest College; another campus is fine.

2. Research problem or question
After you have developed some familiarity with your site, you may be able to pose some research questions or general problem you wish to address. This could be general and descriptive, as what repertory of behaviors occur at site X; what cultural meanings or associations do people have about site X; what kind of specialized cultural knowledge do people possess at site X. With subsequent time at your site, you may also be able to formulate a hypothesis you want to test.

Part I.
3. Research methods and follow-up assignment
Map the area you are working in. If your site is large, you may include a large site map and smaller one. Indicate approximate dimensions, fixed features, areas of movement or flow of people. You can include photos, if you wish. For a demographic assessment, describe people at your site in terms of numbers there, approximate ages, sex, and any other social or physical characteristics. Do a series of observations of your site (once a week or more), noting what people are doing, talking about; patterns of communication or interaction. Document behavior that is repeated, as well as unusual.

Assignment #1 (due week 7 or 8)
Hand in your portfolio with a completed report that includes the assignments above. You may also enclose your rough notes, but keep them separate from your draft. This first installment is worth 15% of your grade and can be 5-10 pages.

Part II.
4. Research methods and follow-up assignment
Conduct interviews with people at your site, some unstructured and some semi-structured. As for how many, you should do at least three people or as many as six. You may want to interview well-informed people several times. As for how to construct your questions, this will depend on your site and research problem. You may, for example, want to probe your subjects’ understandings of what goes on at the site; the cultural meanings or associations they have with the site; their knowledge of implicit norms and values pertaining to interaction there. If appropriate, you may want to do biographical interviews with your subjects. Continue your observational work to add to your growing understanding of the site.

Assignment #2 (due week 13)
Once again, hand in your portfolio with a second report that presents your summation of the interview work you did. You can present each interview and follow up with some general points about your informants, as well as the experience and problems you had in doing the interviews. You decide the best format.

In the second section—call this your Ethnographic Summary— weave all the pieces of your research through the semester together. Pretend you’re writing a mini-ethnography of the kind you’ve read in the course. You can include some or all of these ideas: (a) topic/problem of this research, (b) briefly what you did (your problems and successes, too), (c) your major findings—based on your observations and interviews, (d) what you couldn’t find out, what your would do differently. This may be anywhere between 10-20 pages and is worth 20% of your grade.
Dear Colleagues,

I have been distressed by changes the AAA has made in the rules regarding the Annual Meeting for next year. The changes seem to me to add to existing pressures for fissure of constituent groups in the Association, suggesting, for example, that my group, The Federation of Small Anthropology Programs (FOSAP), should leave CGA (Council for General Anthropology), and become a separate section or society within AAA.

CGA now has had its allocation of time for Invited Sessions cut from about 38 hours (there were sixteen Invited Sessions in 1996) to 11.5 hours which will permit four short sessions (or two long ones). The competition for those slots will be fierce. CGA has five constituent committees, plus thousands of other members, who will be seeking that time, putting us at a distinct disadvantage.

Note by contrast the situation of many other small groups in the Association. I count eight units of the Association, each of which has membership less than or comparable to that of FOSAP, each of which is guaranteed 3.75 hours of Invited Session time (two short or one long session) for next year’s meeting. They include the following groups with their respective membership: ALLA 117, ASA 135, CNA 174, MES 174, NASA 197, SACC 182, SANA 268, SHA 262. Note that these groups, with a total membership of 1,509, have nearly as many total hours for Invited Sessions (30) as did CGA in 1996 (ca. 38) with its 2,900 members. Fair enough. But next year, CGA’s time will be cut to 11.5 hours. While FOSAP with its 260 members has to compete for four slots with four other constituent committees and about 2,800 members, ALLA with 117 members has two slots all to itself. The implication is obvious: FOSAP should seek separate status in the Association.

Sincerely, Dan Moerman, Co-Chair, FOSAP, Dec. '96