



A • M • E • R • I • C • A • N
A N T H R O P O L O G I C A L
A S S O C I A T I O N

Anthropology and the Teaching of Human Values

Author(s): Richard H. Robbins and Philip De Vita

Source: *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4, Teaching Anthropology (Winter, 1985), pp. 251-256

Published by: Blackwell Publishing on behalf of the American Anthropological Association

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3216293>

Accessed: 04/03/2009 09:38

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=black>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Blackwell Publishing and American Anthropological Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Anthropology and the Teaching of Human Values

RICHARD H. ROBBINS
*Associate Professor of
Anthropology; Associate
Vice President for
Academic Affairs*

PHILIP DE VITA
*Associate Professor of
Anthropology*

*SUNY at Plattsburgh
Plattsburgh, NY 12901*

The authors suggest an approach to the introductory anthropology course that relates an issues-and-values orientation to anthropological concepts (culture, beliefs, and values) and topics (means of production, relationships, language, and warfare). INTRODUCTORY ANTHROPOLOGY; TEACHING ANTHROPOLOGY; VALUES.

Do not try to satisfy your vanity by teaching a great many things. Awaken their curiosity. It is enough to open their minds; do not overload them. Put there just a spark. If there is some good flammable stuff, it will catch fire.

Anatole France

Based on course descriptions, discussions with colleagues and students, and review of the pertinent literature, we suggest that there are three types of introductory anthropology courses taught in American colleges and universities today: (1) the “training process” course, the introductory first step that leads to a BA in anthropology and a graduate program; (2) the “preparation for advanced study” course, a course on which to build anthropological expertise; and (3) the “what is anthropology?” course, intended to teach students what anthropology is by providing an overview of the field or by introducing the anthropological world view. We question whether these traditional and prevalent approaches are either adequate or meaningful for today’s students.

In the first half of the twentieth century, because of the immaturity of anthropology as a discipline, it probably was necessary to use the introductory course as a first step toward training professionals. But times have changed, and declared majors today know what the discipline is all about. Marion Dobbert (1972:16) states the obvious by suggesting: “Most of our introductory students . . . will never become anthropologists and the needs of a professional anthropologist are often irrelevant. . . . But we continue teaching introductory courses as if we were trying to create miniature professionals.”

Should the goals of the introductory course be to prepare students for upper level courses? We think not. Most students take an introductory course in anthropology to satisfy general education requirements and never take additional courses in the field.

What remains is using the introductory course to acquaint students with the discipline through the "what is anthropology?" approach. However, there are several problems inherent in the "what is anthropology?" approach. First, it is teacher-centered, rather than student-centered, with instructors publicly dealing with their personal identity, spending valuable class time explaining who or what they are. The teacher-centered approach often leads to an attempt to dazzle the student, with the instructor trying to teach the entire discipline in fifteen weeks; by the end of the course the student may be more bewildered than impressed.

But the most serious problem with the "what is anthropology?" approach is that it gives the impression that anthropology is somehow a neat slice of the academic loaf, with its own discrete subject matter, theory, and methodology. As a result, we may vastly overstate the accomplishments of the discipline, and the arrangement, orchestration, and performance of the introductory course becomes more a theological exercise than an intellectually exciting encounter with human problems.

So where does this leave us? How and within what framework should the introductory course be taught? Woodrow Clark suggests that "anthropology should be taught so that it helps students build a personal philosophy of life. It should help the student think through his self-identity and his aims and goals in relation to his own society and his position in it" (quoted in Dobbert 1972:15). In an earlier paper (DeVita and Robbins 1976), we suggested that the introductory course should encourage students to begin to question their own values and to re-examine unquestioned convictions in light of what we know about the life-styles and values of other cultures. We believe that the subject of values is really what the field of anthropology is all about.

A Values Approach to Introductory Anthropology Courses

There appear to us to be strong intellectual and methodological reasons for adopting a values approach for both student and instructor. A values approach is based on the premise that values develop as students are faced with questions for which there are no certain answers. William Perry (1970) contends that students enter college with a relatively low tolerance for intellectual uncertainty; things are either true or false, right or wrong. Truth is absolute. Soon, however, they confront the fact that there is disagreement or uncertainty about central values and beliefs. They respond intellectually by assuming that someone knows the answer, even if their teachers do not. When they find problems with no definite answers, students assume that "although we don't know the answer now, we soon will." Finally, most students come to the realization that there are issues that have no definite answers. They accept the fact that they must devise a judgmental system to choose between alternative views, and that this judgmental system requires a commitment to one view over another.

The values approach to anthropology can model this developmental process for students and assist them in developing a judgmental system to make choices among conflicting alternatives. The issues may be as broad as the controversy over whether human behavior is biologically or culturally determined, whether beliefs or truths are culturally relative, or whether there are behaviors or beliefs universally held to be good or true. Or the questions may be as narrow as whether alcohol should be prohibited to those under twenty-one years of age, or whether nose piercing is different from ear piercing. These issues then can be examined through the anthropological eye, always stressing the fact that there may not be definitive answers to the questions and that there are alternative points of view that can be supported by logical and empirical evidence.

The values approach will expose students to the process of intellectual inquiry, while helping them avoid a false sense of relativity, where “it’s all a matter of opinion.” Instead, the approach will allow students to develop respect for the rigor necessary to reach an informed judgment. Students will begin to realize that the world is a series of dilemmas for which there are no absolute solutions, and that points of view often are contradictory.

A values approach will help students develop reasoning skills necessary for successful careers and necessary for sustaining intellectual growth long after they have left the university. They will be better prepared to confront difficult choices about such things as energy policy, population policy, the nature of government and authority, the distribution of world wealth and resources, and the biological control of life.

Finally, the values approach allows the teacher to step out of the “expert” role and to reveal himself or herself as an active learner, constantly wrestling with questions for which there are different points of view. Not only does the teacher-learner role build a sense of common purpose between teacher and student, it models roles that students must adopt during a lifetime as learners and decision-makers rather than teachers.

Implementing the Course

The values approach is suitable for both large and small classes, though teaching methods—lectures, debates, and discussions—will vary with class size. At times, lectures may seem appropriate; at other times, debates and discussions. The debate format is useful for getting students involved, but it must not overshadow the fact that different sides of an issue need to be resolved, not simply won or lost. In a large class, each student may be involved actively in the preparation and debate of only one issue, but the entire class must be prepared to discuss the implications of the issues debated. There is no suitable text, but we will be happy to provide our lists of readings on the topics discussed below.

What follows is an outline of topics we have found to be successful in our values approach. We suspect the ideas are neither unique nor original; nor are they by any means the only ways to treat the question of values. But they have proved effective for us, and might serve as a starting point for others.

The Concept of Culture

The goal is to introduce students to the issues of cultural determinism, relativity, and ethnocentrism. A central question is: What is it that culture determines? Ask students what might determine the beliefs and behavior of Americans, and, by extension, all humans. Wittgenstein's (1953) notion of language games might be useful as a way of introducing the idea of a culture, with a shift to games in general, concluding with an analysis of selected aspects of American culture. What is looked at is secondary to having students grasp the idea that culture is a real issue to them.

Beliefs and Values

The goal is to examine what determines the specific ways cultures have of looking at the world. Ask students if there are values and truths that are (or should be) universal, or are all our beliefs and values relative to our cultural or social setting? One question for discussion is to try to define a "good" person. Are the qualities that we admire also valued in other cultures? Or, one might begin with an examination of a specific set of beliefs, such as theories of illness and cure. How do our medical practices compare to those in other societies? Are we more advanced in our beliefs about illness? Are there really such things as "advanced beliefs"?

Modes of Production

The goal is to examine whether or not the economic means of production we call industrial is the result of cultural progress or a necessary consequence of other things such as population growth. We begin by looking at the !Kung Bushmen with special reference to Richard Lee's work. If we examine the !Kung in terms of our categories of the "good life," (e.g., availability of food, leisure, health, life span, and general quality of life), how do they fare? Why change from hunting and gathering to agriculture (horticulture), and why from agriculture to industrial capitalism? What is gained? What is lost?

Relationships

The goal is to examine the factors that determine how people relate to each other, focusing cross-culturally on relationships such as parent

to child, husband to wife, friend to friend. We compare relationships between parents and children in America with those in Ireland and China and ask why children show so much deference to parents in China and so little in America. We ask why there are cross-cultural differences in husband-wife relationships or friendship relationships.

Language, Speech, and Linguistics

The goal is to examine language as a key to understanding different cultures by looking at language use, assessment, and perception. We begin by having students reflect on verbal and nonverbal communication as described by Lee (1984) on the !Kung. Turning to American culture, students can be probed for judgments about speakers of American English who sound "different." A discussion of Shaw's *Pygmalion* and the musical *My Fair Lady*, with explicit description of the characters and methods employed by Professor Higgins in transforming Eliza Doolittle from a Soho market flower-seller into a lady, introduces a set of value questions about language and speech. How do we judge others in relation to speech styles? When we judge the speech of others, are we making judgments about other aspects of their behavior? If we make judgments that people from the South "talk funny," what might they say about us if we went to live among them? What relationship is there between judgments about speech and ethnocentrism?

Warfare and Conflict Resolution

The goals are to examine warfare and conflict within a cultural context and compare warfare cross-culturally. We begin by showing *Dead Birds*, a film about warfare among the Dani of New Guinea, followed by a discussion prompted by value questions. Next we play a recording of Andy Griffith's "What It Was, Was Football." The result is an analogy that compares Dani warfare with American football, the American corporate structure, and even the competitive aspects of our own colleges.

Summary

We feel that a values approach is consistent with the nature of anthropology's role in both the social sciences and the humanities. Most of the decisions we make in life are between alternatives for which there are no hard and fast guidelines; the ultimate decisions we make are determined by the values we hold, and it can be the role of anthropology to help us make these values explicit.

References Cited

- DeVita, Philip, and Richard H. Robbins
1976 The Undergraduate Introduction to Anthropology: An Unmarked Category for Student, Instructor, and Employer. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Southern Anthropological Society, Atlanta.
- Dobbert, Marion
1972 Teaching Undergraduate Anthropology: Problems, Solutions, and Experiments. [Council on] Anthropology and Education Newsletter 3(1): 14-17.
- Lee, Richard
1984 *The !Kung: Foragers in a Changing World*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Perry, William
1970 *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig
1953 *Philosophical Investigations*. New York: Macmillan.

Introducing Contemporary Anthropology: A Team-Taught Course for Large Classes

LEONARD PLOTNICOV
Professor of Anthropology
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

The author describes a method of teaching large sections of introductory anthropology by members of the anthropology faculty giving their best lectures. Initiating, operating, and evaluating the course is discussed. INTRODUCTORY ANTHROPOLOGY; LARGE CLASSES; TEACHING ANTHROPOLOGY; TEAM-TEACHING.

By 1975, anthropology's decline in popularity among undergraduate students was certain. Through special reports in the *American Anthropologist* and the *Anthropology Newsletter*, we at the University of Pittsburgh learned that our experience was shared widely within the discipline. But not until our university administration adopted a policy of cost-effectiveness, measured by classroom body counts, did the anthropology faculty's concern turn from mild to acute. The administration's sanctions for low class enrollments and few majors were perceived as threatening both the department's viability and the comfortable working conditions to which individuals had become accustomed. This galvanized and united the faculty like nothing previously. We knew we had to attract more students to our courses and that this could be done only by drawing from class enrollments in other departments. But how?

These subdisciplines variously exploit methods from the sciences and the humanities. Cultural anthropology has become a family of approaches oriented by the culture concept. The central tendencies and. The Boasian resistance to the sweeping and confining generalizations of classic evolutionism had two consequences: an emphasis on culture change at a specific level of analysis and a priority on studying the patterns or configurations of local cultural beliefs and values. Pattern and configuration became key concepts for explaining the relation of culture traits to each other and the study of local patterning of cultural traits and changes over time. cultural contexts. medical anthropology A specialization in anthropology that combines theoretical and applied approaches from cultural and biological anthropology with the study of human health and disease. molecular anthropology A branch of biological anthropology that uses genetic and biochemical techniques to test hypotheses about human evolution, adaptation, and variation. paleoanthropology The study of the origins and predecessors of the present human species; the upright on its two hind legs characteristic of humans and the ancestors; also called bipedality. diastema A space... Anthropology can be defined as the comparative study of humans, their societies and their cultural worlds. It simultaneously explores human diversity and what it is that all human beings have in common. Anthropology does not entail judgement of other people's values, nor do its practitioners rank societies on a scale from "underdeveloped" to "developed". This does not mean that anthropologists suspend all judgements about what people do; for example, few would condone violence or inequality, although it may well be perpetrated in the name of "culture". Anthropology can teach important lessons about the world and the global whirl of cultural mixing, contact and contestation but it can also teach us about ourselves. This paper demonstrates the value of an "anthropological approach" to enhance genetics education in biology, anthropology, and other related disciplines, when teaching about human differences such as race/ethnicity, sex/gender, and disability. As part of this approach, we challenge educators across social and natural sciences to critically examine and dismantle the tacit cultural assumptions that shape our understanding of genetics and inform the way we perceive (and teach about) human differences. Anthropology [anth-row-pahl-O-gee] is the study of human beings in the past and present. The word anthropology has two roots: [anthrop-] and [-ology]. Anthrop- means "about human beings," and -ology means "a type of science." Anthropology is a type of science about human beings. A person who studies anthropology is called an anthropologist. The main goal of anthropology is to answer the questions: What makes us human and why?