

ON THE TEACHING OF ANTHROPOLOGY

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Mike Holmes

The topic, "On the Teaching of Anthropology" is one which lends itself to a number of approaches. Teaching is the primary role of the anthropologist in American society. Although it is the means by which most anthropologists earn their money, or at any rate, it is the activity for which they are paid, the particular relationship between the anthropologist and his livelihood is generally ignored in the professional publications. Generally, anthropologists are given no formal training in educational methods and theory, and when the anthropologist confronts a classroom full of students, he is given no systematic prescription concerning just exactly what his role should be in the classroom, except for the fact that he knows that he is expected to somehow teach anthropology. The general classroom environment, although it is a common habitat of the anthropologist--the culture area in which the concepts of the discipline are transmitted and expanded from generation to generation--has seemingly been avoided as an area of anthropological research. The classroom is the social environment in which anthropologists are trained, and constitutes a microcosm of the larger cultural framework with which it is associated. Anthropologists, perhaps more than any others, are most acutely aware of the importance of learning. The culture model, the major conceptual framework of the anthropologist, is actually a model of the learning process, a model which demonstrates that human behavior can be analyzed most accurately as the result of specific and

measureable environmental factors. The literature on this subject indicates that while anthropologists are very knowledgeable concerning the factors of enculturation in non-western societies, there have been few systematic attempts to apply this knowledge or to expand it at home.

Perhaps the reason that theory and methods in education have been largely ignored by anthropologists lies in the fact that the relevance of such studies has never been firmly established. The key issue of the symposium for which this topic has been proposed is relevance, and it is my task to determine whether or not the topic of teaching is a relevant area within the discipline. The question of whether or not something is relevant is essentially the question, "How does it help us?", "What is its significance as a tool?" The general tone of this symposium has been one of extensive investigation and personal commitment concerning the relevance of anthropology in our contemporary world, with considerable attention being focused on a continuing discussion of the question, "What can we do, as anthropologists and students, to promote understanding between conflicting groups?" There is little doubt that in many American universities, students, teachers, administrators, and the general public constitute more or less conflicting groups. We have become increasingly aware of the magnitude of such a task, and we generally have found that anthropology in its present form is not equal to the expectations we associate with the study of these conflicts. We would like to believe that the anthropologist is qualified to be a "superman", a universal culture hero

who, with his superior insight into human behavior, is capable of being a voice of reason in a world of crisis. It would definitely require, by present conceptions, superhuman effort by all anthropologists to alleviate present cultural crises of the contemporary world, and most anthropologists would probably admit that our discipline presently has no systematic prescription for anthropologists of this generation to follow in the area of human relations. In a shrinking world which escalates and intensifies cultural contact and conflict, it is not feasible to assume that the present generation of anthropologists, despite the presence of some truly gifted individuals, can save the world, if, indeed, it requires saving. It is in view of this perspective that the topic of education becomes powerfully relevant to anthropology. If we are not supermen, perhaps we can educate others to transcend our own inadequacies. This is an alternative which is no longer possible to ignore, and still claim relevance for our discipline. If Western culture is to become world culture, and there are implications that it may, it is crucial that anthropologists begin extensive investigation into their own cultures. The American classroom seems, to me, most in need of critical scrutiny. If we desire relevance in anthropology, a place to start would be our own classrooms.

In order for anthropologists to make their educational methods more relevant to their students, it is of primary importance that the teacher be aware of the general cultural make-up of those students. This necessity has been emphasized

in most anthropological publications on education, which generally sound a call for more extensive investigation in the learning environment in which anthropologists generally operate. In order to meet the needs for relevance in the discipline, it is necessary to take advantage of the classroom, the university, and the academic community as a legitimate area of field inquiry. To take advantage of this potential for using the classroom as a field, it is necessary to encourage dialogue and discourage monologue--the teacher must assume that something of value can be learned from the student. If anthropologists are willing to impart the right of self-determinism in effecting social change in non-western cultures as Sol Tax suggests, it seems inconsistent that we should deny this right to the students in our classrooms whose cultural make-up may be radically different from our own in many respects. Every educational technique which promotes coercion and deference between teacher and student is, in my opinion, one which is contrary to the aims of what education should be. It is my belief that monologue (as maintained by the lecture system) and comparison of student performances (which ignores the importance of individual and sub-cultural differences) are practices which need to be re-examined in terms of their educational and ethical implications. Anthropology, illustrating the immensely varied forms that human behavior manifests, can play a key role in revitalizing American education, and make possible the development of the kind of supermen we most need, men who are aware of their own conformities and differences, and who are capable of communicating this awareness to others.