

# Pathways to Anthropology

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## Academic Islands and Beyond

At the time of preparing this special double-issue of *Anthropology in Action*, British anthropologists are debating the implications of current British government policy aimed at evaluating the influence of academic disciplines. One of the key functions of the Research Evaluation Framework (REF) is to measure the 'impact' of a subject-area's activity, the extent to which it can be shown to have economic and social effects beyond the quoting circles of colleagues in print or at conferences. The merits or otherwise of the REF can be debated. Arguably, however, it misses one of the key areas where a subject such as anthropology can have a significant effect on the world: the *teaching* of its basic concepts, both in universities and in other contexts where cultural 'relativism' and the recognition of other legitimate ways of being in the world can gain purchase.

In this issue, then, we examine the teaching of anthropology, but from a particular perspective. We are primarily interested in an area that remains relatively unexamined: how do people come to know about anthropology in the first place, and then choose to study it for three or more years at university? We originally used the metaphor of a 'pathway' to anthropology in a conference we organized at the University of Sussex in the autumn of 2007, sponsored by C-SAP (the Higher Education Academy Subject Network for Sociology, Anthropology, Politics). At that forum, we attempted to

bring together people from some very different contexts where the teaching of anthropology might be found: not only universities, but also primary and secondary schools, museum programmes, summer outreach courses for gifted and talented children, and so on. We found, as Bob Simpson notes in his Afterword to the issue, that there is no single pathway to the discipline, that students' initial encounters with it may be as serendipitous as those we experience in the field (see David Bennett, this issue). However, it is striking how little we know about the pathways in – or out – of anthropology that are taken by the people who, after all, fund much of our work through the teaching income that comes to universities. At the same time, it appears that we are allowing the public perception of what we do to be defined by others, who are all too likely to consign our work to the exotic and ornamental section of the academic range of disciplines. As Colleen Popson and Guven Witteveen put it in their contribution, referring to the U.S. but in a way that is surely also relevant to the U.K.: 'Anthropology as a subject has a public relations problem'.

If anthropology is something of an invisible or perhaps 'obscured' (see Callan and Street, this issue) discipline in this country and the U.S. – in a sense a 'muted' discipline (cf. Ardener 1975) – then one of the ironies is that we have contributed to such invisibility/obscure by our relative lack of engagement with publics and institutions beyond either

academic or conventionally 'applied' work. In this volume, Bennett refers to Edmund Leach's opposition in the 1970s to the idea of including anthropology in a pre-university curriculum, on the grounds that it would be confusing to encounter the moral values of others before one could be sure of one's own. Marzia Balzani refers to Rosemary Firth's scepticism over the possibility of teaching anthropology outside of the Academy. Popson and Witteveen note that, for most of the discipline's history in America, anthropologists have resisted 'popularization', which they seem to have thought threatened the field's reputation for rigorous scholarship. (In response we might argue that Stephen Hawkins's reputation as a physicist does not seem to have suffered too much from his forays into popular writing.) On a more structural level, Hilary Callan and Brian Street discuss the relatively centralized control of curricula in the U.K., which has made it difficult to have 'minority' academic voices heard.

On the other hand, the evidence that we have indicates that anthropology is popular with younger people when they are in fact exposed to it. A paper given at the 2007 conference by Robin Wilson, but not included here, discussed the role of The National Academy of Gifted and Talented Youth Summer Schools in presenting the subject: many students who had never heard of anthropology at the beginning of their programme 'converted' to it once they actually knew what it was. Similarly, Popson and Witteveen note that, to anyone who has ever taught the subject to middle and high school students in the United States, its value and potential for popularity are clear. Referring to the International Baccalaureate diploma, Balzani observes that when a school offers social and cultural anthropology as an option it quickly becomes a desired choice.

Summing up the debates over anthropology's (potential) public role, Bob Simpson draws on some earlier work of David Mills (1999) in referring to the general opposition between 'missionary' and 'mandarin' standpoints: is the

subject to be spread to as many people as possible, or should it retain an inner purity, retaining sharp institutional and intellectual boundaries? In practice, the answer is likely to lie somewhere in between the two, but at the moment it is still tempting to think of anthropology in terms of the island metaphors that we love so much within the discipline. If modern ethnography is, in some sense, founded on the words 'Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach' (Malinowski 1922:4), we might respond by adapting the words of the seventeenth-century poet, John Donne, in asserting that 'no discipline is an island, entire of itself'. Malinowski exaggerated the picture of his isolation in the field but he also wrote with a popular audience half in mind, albeit in an academic climate very different from the audit-driven contexts of today. However, we can certainly argue that it is more important than ever to examine the pathways to our discipline at the current time, not least before they are shifted or blocked altogether. In any case, whether we like it or not, anthropology is 'opening up' in the United Kingdom and beyond, both institutionally and intellectually, and we need to be able to respond to what is happening.

Firstly, as has been realized for decades now, the gaze of the discipline itself is changing, as older boundaries between field and home are challenged. The location of fieldwork is more flexible than it was before, and the epistemological, ethical and theoretical transformations that have been the causes and effects of such relocations need to be complemented by pedagogical ones, as we reconsider our discussions with students about where and how to think, and observe, 'anthropologically'. From the point of view of a student, the point is that they can find a field, a place to apply their skills, in the world they find immediately around them, and not merely in places that might still seem hard to reach. Such a circumstance can be turned to our advantage. As Balzani puts it: 'It is precisely because the world is complex and

because of the rapid rise of global technologies and media that young people need to be introduced to the approaches and knowledge base that anthropologists have gathered over more than a century.' Similarly, Popson and Witteveen argue that forms of global awareness are likely to be seen as increasingly significant with the U.S. education system.

Secondly, the Higher Educational field in the U.K. is itself being transformed, as participation is 'broadened', as universities become subject to ideals of mass participation (and increasingly look to international markets). With such developments, not only are more – and more demographically heterogeneous – people taking advantage of such education, but the subjects that a university should teach are coming under scrutiny: what is the value of anthropology in comparison with, say, tourism studies as a form of cosmopolitan knowledge? And, to return briefly to the island metaphor, what might happen to the autonomy of the discipline as it is mixed and 'modularized' with other subjects, such as languages but also management or business studies? We need to ensure that such developments do not cause us simply to block the pathways to our discipline.

There are also some more immediate concerns in considering the institutional location of anthropology. In this issue, Hilary Callan and Brian Street outline the complex and ultimately successful process of gaining recognition for an anthropology A-level programme in the U.K. Currently, it is difficult to assess the long-term 'impact' of such a hard-fought achievement. How many schools will be willing – or able – to take up the new programme, and should we assume that taking an A-Level in the subject will influence students' future career choices in our favour? The evidence of archaeology, with a long-established A-Level but one that is still a relative rarity in schools, might suggest a respectable but limited addition to the numbers of people with sufficient interest in the subject to take it further. And yet

we should not minimize the potential influence that an A-Level might have. The existence of the A-Level means that new teaching materials have to be developed; that a new area of potential work is opened up for graduates; that students but also parents and employers are likely to become more aware of what is involved in a discipline that is too easily – and ironically – dismissed as marginal to the concerns of everyday life. Of course, the International Baccalaureate has a longer history of incorporating anthropology into its syllabus, as Balzani's paper discusses, but it remains a small if fascinating forum for the exploration and promulgation of anthropological ideas, at least in the U.K. Access courses can certainly lead students towards the discipline, as for instance the experience of the Stockton Human Sciences degree demonstrates, but again this remains just one pathway among many potential ones either in existence or needing to be developed, and it has not led significant numbers of mature students into the discipline.

If the context of practising field-based anthropology is changing, along with the educational environment in which the subject can be taught, the institutional base of the discipline in U.K. universities is still rather narrow. The places where anthropology degrees can be obtained include a large number of older and more elite universities, with knock-on effects on who can – or who might wish to – apply. One might think that a discipline concerned with examining and valorizing different ways of life would be highly suitable for a heterogeneous student base. And yet, if this is an opportunity presented to us, we have hardly taken it with open arms. One significant factor has been the lack of a presence in schools. However, there is surely a larger and darker reason behind the relative obscurity of the subject: that of class.

In fact, this issue emerges in a number of the papers. Hawkins and Mills focus on it very explicitly, as they compare the experiences of students entering two very different

university contexts, one long-established and one 'non-traditional' (though they do not look at the study of anthropology *per se*). Interestingly, Bennett also constructs his paper out of a comparison between an elite institution and one created by the 'Robbins' expansion of British universities of the 1960s, and his statistic that few of the anthropology students whom he surveyed felt the immediate need to take a vocational subject seems telling. A similar issue emerges in Popson and Witteveen's overview of the pre-university situation in the U.S., where they suggest that most of the schools where anthropology has existed as a named course subject have been private, independent or located in wealthy school districts. Balzani's conclusions, again, express precisely the worry that the study of anthropology should not be limited to students in private and international schools.

Arguably, the issue of class is implicitly present in Basu and Coleman's overview of the use of museums as tools through which to introduce anthropological ideas to A-Level students who are studying other subjects. After all, the museum itself is a specific means through which to inculcate certain forms of cultural capital, as indicated not only in the work of Bourdieu (much discussed by Bennett in his article) but also in the emergence of the public museum in Britain as a means supposedly to 'educate' the working classes into 'improving' values and forms of knowledge (Clarke and Critcher 1985). We might therefore come back to Balzani's reference to the suitability of anthropology's 'knowledge-base' to deal with a globalizing world. Such knowledge is never 'innocent', and it may contain certain assumptions concerning the values of mobility and cosmopolitanism that may sit rather uncomfortably with the life experiences of some students. These are not likely to be part of the 44 percent of students, according to Bennett's survey, who regarded an experience of overseas travel or living abroad as a very important factor in their decision to study anthropology.

And yet, as ever, the issues are more complex than they first seem. For instance, one problem with the metaphor of 'Pathways to Anthropology' is that it implies that the discipline is something of a static entity, akin to a sacred shrine reached by hopeful pilgrims on their intellectual journey to (cross-cultural) enlightenment. We have indicated some of the ways in which anthropology's fields and institutional bases have been transformed in recent decades, but we should also take account of the likelihood that, if more pathways to the subject are constructed, the discipline will itself be transformed. Pathways 'to' also become pathways 'through', exploring and developing new routes, as the mutually constitutive relationship between subject and student develops. Even museums – even shrines – change over time.

In the following, we suggest briefly some further ways in which to weave what we consider to be significant thematic threads through the papers presented in this special issue. Of course many other journeys through these pieces could have been traced, but we suggest that one useful, if crude, division, might be between articles focusing primarily on the *context* of teaching anthropology, and those concentrating more on pedagogical *practice* (pretending, for the time being, that the two can be separated). In other words, some articles look largely at teaching as it is currently constituted, albeit with a view to potential for changes in the future; others try to show in practical terms how to present anthropology to pre-university constituencies.

## Contexts

We begin by discussing the article by Paul Hawkins and David Mills, which is less about the study of anthropology than about the kind of institution in which it has traditionally been based: the university. Whereas for faculty members a university can form a kind of sec-

ond home, or at least a familiar place in which to practise their profession (defined against the 'field'), it may seem a deeply alienating place to some students, especially those whose families do not have a history of study in Higher Education. Thus, widening participation, including the attempt to appeal to more mature students, may bring people in to local universities, but the physical proximity of the place of education may co-exist, ironically, with the wide cultural gulf that it represents for the 'non-traditional' student. In a sense, anthropology can become a doubly-discomfiting subject, both located in a potentially alienating environment and focusing precisely on a process of intellectual and cultural displacement. The liberating potential of such a 'liberal subject' can, instead, produce a form of uneasy subjectivity, especially when the 'non-traditional' student must negotiate not only the expectations of tutors but also the sceptical attitudes of family and friends at 'home'. Yet, we should not give in to a merely nihilistic view of the effects – the 'impact' – of the discipline. As Hawkins and Mills point out, the ambivalence of belonging is both a challenge for universities and a potential gift to the anthropological imagination.

Hawkins and Mills indicate some of the dilemmas faced by students in the university context in general. Bennett's specific focus on why students opt to study anthropology at university indicates further the politicized nature of pedagogy. His piece forms part of a wider study that is salient to the theme of this volume, given that he is interested in how people become socialized into the discipline (anthropology is after all a form of culture, as well as a discipline that specializes in studying it). Some of Bennett's findings teach us a salutary lesson in making assumptions about our students: he notes, for instance, that some informants may have been more interested in entering an elite university than worrying about degree subjects as such. At the same time, Bennett uncovers a fascinating seeming paradox in relation to choice: many students think of their

choice of degree subjects as highly individualized, and yet largely unrecognized structures are likely to have an influence, such as familial habitus, ethnicity and school. Two ironies are evident here: the valorization of individual choice among students who study a subject precisely concerned with the importance of social, economic and cultural context; and the extent to which the class and ethnic expectations of the institutions where anthropology is taught actually work against minority representation in the discipline.

Colleen Popson and Guven Witteveen's study of pre-university anthropology education in the U.S. sheds light on the teaching of the subject in a context that is indeed a little different from that of the U.K. Admittedly, it has a low profile outside of the Academy in both countries. However, in America public education is more decentralized, and thus locally administered and funded. A little under half of the 50 U.S. schools of education appear to offer a required course in anthropology for teachers in training, which is at least an advance on the British situation. There are also some intriguing attempts to put socio-cultural anthropology on the map: the AnthroNotes newsletter provides information for teachers in the U.S. and abroad, while Popson's recent attempt to develop AnthroQuest, a multimedia web experience, continues the metaphor of a journey to the discipline, this time through electronic means. (We might compare such initiatives with the RAI *Discover Anthropology* website, as well as the *Anthropologist About Town* blogspot, which explicitly points to anthropological events in the public, urban sphere.) At the same time, the classification of anthropology as a multi-field subject in the U.S. locates the discipline a little differently to the U.K., given that archaeology education can gain a higher profile, acquiring some leverage through increasing public awareness of issues surrounding the repatriation of human remains.

These three articles indicate the importance of context at a number of levels: national,

institutional, familial, and so on. Overall, the message seems to be that self-consciousness over the inevitably politicized nature of what we do when we enter a classroom should not prevent us from presenting the discipline in public spheres beyond the comfort zone of the Academy. One of the most important lessons that these articles teach us is that anthropology could benefit from becoming part of 'everyday culture', and not just commenting on it.

### Practices

How, then, can we relocate anthropology within pedagogical contexts away from the university? Articles in this issue explore this question from different institutional standpoints. Stephanie Bunn has inhabited a number of worlds throughout her career as an artist, anthropologist and leader of arts projects, and she describes how she brings such life-experiences into interdisciplinary work with children and young people. There is a clear resonance between anthropology and a pedagogical approach that works through multifaceted places and locations, *doing* as part of learning, and in this respect Bunn notes striking parallels between what can be achieved with primary school children and some of the more imaginative approaches to teaching that can be carried out at undergraduate level. Making the class a 'field' (sometimes literally) also allows for serendipity, unexpected encounters, such as when a session on human-animal relationships turns into one on the senses in Central Asian homes, once a child expresses their joy in touching a wall made of felt. We are back to exploring the relativity of homes, to forms of cultural displacement, but these children do not display the forms of alienation described by Hawkins and Mills or the moral anomie predicted by Leach. Part of the point here is that anthropological ideas are blended into the everyday lives of children, allowing them to discover the links between their lives and the lives of others.

Such young people are learning the toolkit, the craft, of anthropology without it being turned into a set of disembodied principles.

Marzia Balzani explores pre-university education for older students, those in the last years of their school education, in her discussion of the history, practice and challenges facing the teaching of anthropology within the International Baccalaureate (IB). She shows how the guiding ideas behind the IB emerged from an earlier form of internationalism – that following the trauma of the twentieth-century world wars – resulting in a curriculum that resonates with the cultural awareness promoted by anthropology. While some of the anthropological training is age-specific, such as the focus more on ethnographic description and observation than on analytical sophistication, again the aims, objectives and some of the teaching are close to current undergraduate programmes in the U.K. One of her conclusions reinforces a point made in this special issue as a whole: the need for anthropologists themselves to create networks through which schools, parents and others know of the discipline, and that it is available at pre-university level. In this sense, the 'education' associated with anthropology is not just about teaching those who reach the classroom. It is also about extending beyond conventional pedagogical contexts and raising awareness at a more general level.

In their article on the anthropology A-Level, but also on how to reach wider publics, Hilary Callan and Brian Street argue for the importance of discipline-based professional associations such as the Royal Anthropological Institute in helping facilitate such developments, including the bringing together of academics and those inhabiting other institutional spheres. (Popson and Witteveen include some reflections on the role of the American Anthropological Association in their piece.) Discussions over the A-Level itself have involved some intriguing issues of judgement: not only the relationship between biological and social anthropology, for instance, but also the extent

to which the programme must exist as an entity in itself, and not merely as a pathway towards an undergraduate degree in the subject. The content of the curriculum displays some juxtapositions now familiar to us, such as the exploration of locality and belonging alongside explorations of what is meant by the global.

Finally, Basu and Coleman's contribution describes another project, parallel with but also complementary to that of developing the anthropology A-Level. Their focus is on identifying the anthropological content in already existing A-Levels, and thus showing how the discipline permeates and can enhance work done within other disciplines. This is a technique that we have come to refer to as the 'Trojan Horse' approach, and it clearly provides a further tool in our attempts to heighten the discipline's profile. It also suggests parallels with Bunn's work in that it uses material objects and associated concepts as 'bridges' not only into the worlds of others, but also into reflections on the specificities of assumptions made by school students about their own cultures. Members of a school party find a pathway towards the discipline not only through a recognition of its relevance to their self-understandings, but also potentially by embarking on a literal journey through a museum space, making discoveries – we hope – for themselves.

## Concluding Remarks

One of the messages of this introduction and the issue as a whole is that creating a pathway to anthropology is not simply – or necessarily at all – about smoothing the route to studying the subject at university. If teaching the subject has been associated so far with a single educational context, this is a danger and a limitation – a placing of the discipline's intellectual eggs in a single institutional basket – and one whose make-up and strengths are changing all the time. Thus our aim is not only to bolster anthropology's connection with universities,

but also to displace it in strategic ways, to create more of a 'mixed economy' of anthropological expertise. So a perfectly good pathway to the discipline might be to study it at A-Level, as part of an IB diploma, or even at primary school level and then to stop. The important dimension of such encounters should be the ability to observe, to compare, to reflect, in an anthropological way, so that the discipline can be reinvoked even as we reach out to touch the felt wall of a tent, look at an exhibit in a museum, or experience any of the myriad ways we might think about culture in the course of our 'everyday' lives.

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