

ANTHROPOLOGY IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS: WHY SHOULD WE CARE?

Imagine the year 2010. On the campus of one large state university, the president is addressing the student body. She explains that in a recent university poll almost half the students identify themselves as belonging to a minority; less than 20% say they are not, to some degree, "ethnic." The president reveals that similar demographics are quietly transforming public schools across the nation, making it imperative that teachers be trained to deal with multi-ethnic student populations.

At the same time, the world's increasingly global society necessitates more teaching of cultural studies in the schools. To meet these changing needs, the state legislature has passed legislation designed to strengthen elementary and secondary education.

The imagined new law (1) establishes a five-year integrated education program whereby all education undergraduate majors must simultaneously earn a bachelor's degree in the liberal arts before obtaining teaching certification; (2) establishes new teaching certification requirements for all teachers that include at least six hours of coursework in subjects relating to cultural diversity, including a mandated course in anthropology; and (3) states that anyone applying for certification to teach high school social studies must have a minimum of six hours of anthropology.

Finally, imagine the president announcing that the anthropology department will be given three new faculty positions in anticipation of the increased need for anthropology teaching.

Is the above fantasy pure wish fulfillment? Perhaps so, but in 1988 the state of Illinois passed a law mandating coursework focused on cultural diversity for all newly certified teachers. Anthropology is cited as one possible course to fulfill this requirement. Furthermore, 25 states now require teachers to obtain bachelor's degrees

outside of education before they get their teaching certificates.

Several years ago AAA President Roy Rappaport called for ways to increase public awareness of anthropology and its influence on public affairs. If anthropology were an important part of teacher training and the high school curriculum--as psychology has been for decades--students would automatically go to college knowing about the subject. As a matter of course, public understanding of anthropology would increase, as well as awareness of anthropology's potential role in the world today and, more important, in the world of tomorrow.

The 1990s presents some unique opportunities for disseminating anthropology into the American educational system. These opportunities grow from new directions within education and within society, as well as from changes within anthropology itself. Within education, national studies, increased anthropology-related subject matter in the curriculum, and the growing ethnic diversity in American classrooms provide a strong context for precollege anthropology. Within anthropology, a growing acceptance of applied anthropology and a willingness to work within mainstream cultures afford opportunities for anthropologists to become involved with precollege anthropology. Most important is the growing awareness of the potential impact such efforts might have on the overall health and future of the discipline.

Changes within Education

National Studies, such as the 1983 Nation at Risk and the 1985 Holmes Report on Teacher Education that called for abolishing the undergraduate education major, propose more science and social science teaching as well as the strengthening of teachers' academic credentials. Some data indicate that the anthropology background of teachers has increased slowly but steadily over the past two decades. It is possible, though difficult to document, that the increased teaching of anthropology in our nation's colleges and universities in the 1960s and early 1970s has resulted in more teachers with anthropology backgrounds.

What is documented clearly is that at least 1500 teachers have participated in in-service anthropology teacher-training institutes over the past decade, the majority in National Science Foundation (NSF)- and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)-funded university-based teacher development programs.

Not only have new pressures for change emerged within the education establishment and not only are more teachers aware of anthropology, but additional pressures within school curricula also argue for more formal anthropology in teacher training. The social and intellectual ferment of the 1960s and 1970s left a legacy that had great impact on the schools of the 1980s, particularly in the curriculum and some of the textbooks. In social studies and history classes, the traditional text, once a chronology of political and economic events and elites, now includes at least a minimum treatment of the everyday lives of ordinary people, women's experiences, contributions of ethnic and minority groups, and descriptions of cultures previously ignored, such as Pre-Columbian Native American cultures or West African cultures ravaged by the slave trade. Much of the data and the concepts behind these new materials and approaches arise, of course, from anthropology. Teachers with anthropology degrees would certainly be better prepared to teach today's and tomorrow's curricula.

Changes within Society

Not only are more teachers today asked to teach anthropology-related materials in their classes, but more teachers are living daily with cultural diversity in their classrooms. The demographic shift is all around us: from California, where children from non-European ethnic backgrounds currently constitute 42% of the school-age population, to the Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC, where Asian-Americans comprise a majority in more than a few elementary public school classrooms. This growing diversity in the student population offers anthropologists an important opportunity to form partnerships with those responsible for teacher education and the formation of school curricula. One model exists in California, where

anthropologist Carol Mukhopadhyay worked with education faculty at the state university to develop anthropology-based multicultural teacher education programs for education majors.

Changes within Anthropology

In addition to changes within the educational establishment, the school curricula, and society at large can be added the shifts marking anthropology as a discipline today. As anthropologist Sidney Mintz (Johns Hopkins University) has pointed out, "many of anthropology's most distinguished contemporary practitioners have turned their attention to so-called modern or Western societies," despite the fact that "anthropology has built its reputation as a discipline upon the study of non-Western peoples" (Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 1986). Moreover, anthropologists now are working in applied settings, both in the U.S. and abroad. As more anthropologists work in American society, perhaps more will turn their attention to school settings. Directing a teacher-training program, after all, is a type of applied anthropology, with the goal of infusing an anthropological component into precollege teachers' thinking and teaching.

For many reasons, anthropologists are particularly well suited to working in American schools. Because they have been trained to build bridges and to work as sensitive outsiders participating in other cultures, anthropologists possess essential skills for working in and promoting innovations within the subculture of schools. As anthropologists, they share with teachers the role of interpreter, for just as anthropologists try to understand and then interpret their subject matter to the outside world, so teachers interpret their subject matter to their students. In addition, anthropology often entails a strong personal commitment with which teachers can identify.

Though some anthropologists may argue otherwise, many would probably agree that anthropology belongs in our nation's schools, integrated into both the curriculum

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and teacher education. Because anthropology provides a broad cross-cultural perspective, and a framework within which to teach many other precollege science and social science subjects, some would even argue that it should be the basic building block for elementary education and a required subject for secondary school natural and social science teachers. By teaching anthropology to teachers, a perspective and framework are offered within which teachers may better understand the many seemingly diverse fragments of their curricula, enabling them to approach their subjects--geography, social studies, world cultures, history, biology, earth science, language, literature and the arts--in a more coherent and less ethnocentric fashion. As anthropologist Larry Breitborde (Beloit College) has argued, if more anthropologists were to conceive of precollege education as one special form of applied anthropology, perhaps more would be willing to become involved in this important arena critical to the public understanding of the discipline.

If anthropologists are serious about wanting greater public understanding of anthropology, then we would do well to become involved with precollegiate anthropology, through working with teachers, schools and students. If anthropology belongs in our nation's schools, if teachers function better when trained in our discipline, then anthropologists must bear a major responsibility for encouraging anthropology in schools, by working with school administrators, teacher-training establishments and textbook publishers. Fortunately, such work is not only important, but has been demonstrated to be personally satisfying, intellectually stimulating, and professionally productive.

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(Originally published as the "Commentary" in the Anthropology Newsletter, February 1989.)