Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University

Scholarship @ Hofstra Law

Hofstra Law Faculty Scholarship

1978

On Anthropology and Education: Retrospect and Prospect

Lambros Comitas

Janet L. Dolgin
Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University

Recommended Citation

Lambros Comitas and Janet L. Dolgin, *On Anthropology and Education: Retrospect and Prospect*, 9 Anthropology & Education Quarterly 165 (1978)
Available at: https://scholarlycommons.law.hofstra.edu/faculty_scholarship/217

On Anthropology and Education: Retrospect and Prospect[1]

Lambros Comitas and Janet Dolgin*

This essay deals with aspects of the historic and contemporary linkages between the discipline of anthropology and the domain of education. An historic contextualization of the development of educational anthropology provides the frame from within which extant theoretical and methodological issues are critically delimited. Possibilities for future areas of activity and concern are explored, and specific recommendations for future directions are presented. DISCIPLINE OF ANTHROPOLOGY, DOMAIN OF EDUCATION METHODOLOGY, RECOMMENDATIONS, THEORY.

I

Educational anthropology, often referred to as anthropology and education, forms a domain of inquiry and a frame for delimiting informal action and policy thereby joining academic interest with topics of general concern. The present essay, prompted by a need to define this domain of inquiry within an historic context, is additionally concerned with the analysis of weaknesses in the links between anthropology and education and with some necessary steps for increasing the effectiveness and perspicacity of anthropological analyses of education and of educational matters.

As a field of inquiry, educational anthropology is variously set within departments of anthropology or schools of education. Similarly, in the training of graduate students in this specialty, one aspect or the other—anthropology or education—may receive primary stress. Consequently, it is necessary that we begin with an obvious and fundamental distinction between the two: anthropology is a science, a specific body or bodies of ordered knowledge. Education, a domain of purposeful acts and processes, is not. This distinction, though seemingly apparent, is sometimes obscured in research, thereby compounding inherent difficulties in understanding. Anthropologists have claimed their discipline capable of investigating almost any and every facet of human existence. This creative pretension notwithstanding, it is simpler to identify the specific products of anthropology than it is to detail the products of education which, of course, include anthropology itself as well as schools, students, relationships between students, relationships between teachers, between the two together, knowledge, and perceptions about and transformations of reality.

Anthropology is a set of methods and theories for studying people, their products, their interactions, and their comprehensions and creations of reality. Education is an extremely complex set of multifaceted institutions, goals, theories, and social actors found in the home, at work, and in school settings.

* Department of Philosophy and the Social Sciences
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, New York 10027

In its formal guise, education is embodied in regulative and operative institutions which explicitly aim to teach people, most often the young, specific sets of facts and abilities and which provide the context for teaching other less patent lessons, morals and ideas. Education entails learning skills; equally it entails learning to internalize various stances, that is, "proper" stances, toward oneself and toward one's larger world. Educational institutions both fulfill their specific purpose, more or less adequately, and vitally effect and influence many other core institutions of society. This unusual blend of operative and regulative aspects grants education undisputed power in society. It has been suggested that in the West, schools have replaced the Church in uniquely distilling, propagating, and reproducing basic ideological forms and comprehensions of society. "The School-Family couple," states Louis Althusser, "has replaced the Church-Family couple" as the dominant apparatus for control and dissemination of ideology (1971:154).

The task of describing the interrelation between anthropology and education can take several paths. Certainly, it does not entail the specification of a relationship between two homologous structures or processes. We take the issue to be an exploration of the relations between the theory or theories of anthropology and a set of activities and beliefs which comprise the specifically American institutions of education. In a sense, we intend an anthropological analysis of anthropology, itself created by particular people within particular historic contexts, of education, and of the relation between the two.

In these pages we can only suggest the beginnings of the task. It is, however, a crucial, albeit difficult, one, for the assumptions through which the Western anthropologist works, the natural and taken-for-granted, and thus unanalyzed, aspects of his or her universe may well be similar or identical to the assumptions underlying systems of Western education. Correlatively, we take the anthropological study of education to be an integral part of the study of the American polity and its socioeconomic forms. We strongly suggest that anthropological studies of education which do not take the driving forces and incorporative patterns of the larger society into account, or which accept these as common sense givens rather than as objects of study will, at best, provide dreary, even if eloquently phrased, descriptions of the status quo.

Both anthropology and education have been described as in a state of crisis. The crisis, or crises, of education have demanded and rightly received more attention, for they are by far the more socially consequential. "Symptoms" of educational failure have been identified, and various "cures" have been proposed and implemented, mostly with little or no success. Unfortunately, the "symptoms" rarely reveal the depths and complexities of the crises. Within American schools and universities, educational malaise was stridently demonstrated against and vociferously reported in the 1960s. These eruptions may seem to have waned in the 1970s, but we suggest that it is only the protest which has subsided. The crisis of anthropology is less obvious, less energetically deflected or "resolved"; it is a tired crisis, of growing trivialities and fatigued repetitions. For some, anthropology seems devoid of theory and theoretical object; for others, it is beset with so many theories it emerges a tinker-box of straw

toys. As put by one anthropologist, "unlike the genuine creation of an object for a genuinely new scientific exploration (say, . . . the unconscious in Freudian psychiatry) where that new object is central and well-integrated in a complex array of theoretical constructions, the [anthropological] idea of 'other societies' (or more generally and vacuously 'man') is a spurious object" (Barnett 1977:272). Yet, anthropology, whose problems may be less worrisome though perhaps equally suggestive as those in education, can still provide renewed inspiration for reexamining and creating theory not foundering in the ahistoric reproduction of that which is. The anthropological investigation of American education is a particularly fitting place for such an endeavor to begin. Understanding may not lead to rectification or salvation, as Freudian theory itself so well suggests. But action stemming from careful critique will at least be informed action; part of that information will be the realization that social actors are not condemned to reproduce the historically created society, including school, educator, and anthropology, with which we have been endowed.

To contextualize the fields of anthropology and education within the broader frame of each, we present a schematic outline of the developing relations between the two including areas of explicit convergence and theoretical intersection. Educational anthropology is not a new concern although in recent years it has gained momentum and increased in numbers of practitioners. Since its inception in 1968, for example, the Council on Anthropology and Education has maintained a membership of well over a thousand including a significantly large proportion of the discipline of anthropology. Symposia and sessions devoted to anthropology and education have become standard fare at meetings of the American Anthropological Association, the Society for Applied Anthropology and other regional societies. Over one hundred anthropologists list anthropology and education as one of their specialties in the *Guide to Departments of Anthropology*; many others subsume this interest under labels such as applied anthropology, psychological anthropology, and sociocultural change.

Despite the fact that a formal organization on anthropology and education has been in existence for only a decade, consideration of educational matters was evidenced within scientific American anthropology almost from its beginnings in the late nineteenth century. In 1892, the very year the first American doctorate in anthropology was awarded at Clark University, one of the most popular lecture series given at the Anthropological Society of Washington, the only anthropological association in the United States at the time, was entitled "Is Simplified Spelling Feasible?" By the early twentieth century, anthropology departments had been established at a number of American universities; unilinear evolutionary theory began to be replaced by historical particularism as developed by Franz Boas at Columbia University; and anthropologists, such as Boas, began to stress the importance of learning and experience, a stress that contrasted sharply with that placed on heredity, the central concept in educational thought outside anthropology during the early decades of this century.

During the 1930s, anthropological work by both British and American dis-
ciplinarians was of importance for educational studies. In that decade, Meyer
Fortes and Raymond Firth, both working within the framework of a social an-
thropology generated in the universities of the United Kingdom, presented
their respective analyses of educational forms among the Tallensi of Africa
and the Tikopia in the South Pacific. On the whole, however, British
social anthropology, with its emphasis on the structure and function of social
institutions, remained relatively unknownto the American audience for
another twenty years. In the United States during the 1930s, Ruth Benedict,
Abram Kardner, Ralph Linton, and Margaret Mead, among others, began to
blend an anthropological stance with psychological insights, thereby creating
the study of "culture and personality," an approach which held great promise
for understanding the processes of socialization and forms of learning within
different societal and cultural contexts. Within anthropology, psychological
studies had promise for only a few decades, fading from concern and poularity
partly as a consequence of somewhat overzealous applications of isolated dic-
ta from Freudian and other theories of infancy and early childhood training to
analyses of national character. Whatever their shortcomings, psychological
studies carried out by anthropologists during the thirties forcefully indicated
the pervasive quality of "education" and thereby encouraged analyses of
education which avoided the exclusive study of or within the formal institu-
tions of education. In much the same period of time, American cultural anthro-
pologists, concerned with cultures in contact, foreshadowed later work in an-
thropology and education and in applied anthropology.

World War II marks a critical turning point for American anthropology.
With the termination of hostilities, the discipline broadened both its
geographical and theoretical interests. Not only were many American anthro-
pologists beginning to work on several continents but on scientific problems no
longer completely focused on preliterate, tribal populations — even complex,
urban situations were taken up as fitting contexts for anthropological study.
British structural-functionalism and French structuralism, especially the theo-
retical thrusts of Claude Levi-Strauss, were warmly received and vigorously de-
bated by anthropologists in the United States. The British influence en-
couraged analyses of the structural properties of social institutions often under
premise that social systems tend to develop functional capacities which
enable them to endure. The influence of French structuralism, modeled after
the linguistic analyses of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson,
stimulated the study of communication patterns and systems of cultural ex-
change, including the exchange of words, goods, and people.

Theoretical options, research sites, and professional employment in-
creased enormously through the decade of the 1960s. The formal acceptance
of anthropology and education as a specific and legitimate subfield within
anthropology immediately predates this period of activity and expansion,
signaled perhaps in 1954 with the convening of a major conference on Educa-
tion and Anthropology by George Spindler at Stanford University. This con-

ference explicitly recommended and fostered regular communication among anthropologists and scholars working in the professional schools of education.

In contrast to the sixties, the decade of the 1970s has been characterized by economic constriction and growing constraints for field research in many world areas. Declining opportunities for traditional anthropological employment in the universities have been joined by strident demands for "relevance" in research. Earlier theoretical innovations and encouragements have become "paradigms" to their adherents, who seem, to others, to be mechanically plugging "new" data into old models. At present, anthropology as a discipline, is not dominated by any one overarching, theoretical position. In fact, a set of discrete, sometimes loosely articulated, approaches to anthropological study can be identified. Of equal significance, the present decade has witnessed the beginnings of serious, sustained anthropological research within and about American culture and society — for some nonanthropologists, the belated return of the prodigal academic.

Although the present situation neither abets the optimist nor cheers the pessimist, a growing focus on American society, generated as a result of restrictions rather than expansions, provides a singular opportunity and an important challenge: anthropologists are, perhaps uniquely, trained to begin the critical investigation of the sociocultural underpinnings of our own everyday existence. The significance to education of such an effort and of this investigation to education is enormous.

Approaches to anthropological inquiry with current significance in the United States would perforce include the following: structural-functionalism (in its various modern guises); psychological anthropology; Weberian theory; neo-Weberian theory (associated particularly with Talcott Parsons and his students); ethnoscience; ethology; interactionalism and ethnomethodology; cultural ecology; structuralism; phenomenology; symbolic theory; and Marxist theory (in its several guises). Obviously the suppositions and forms of anlaysis encompassed by these respective approaches are amenable to being combined with, and understood in light of, the suppositions and analytic frames associated with other apporaches. Several approaches, however, are partially or largely contradictory with each other.

The several theoretical positions listed are not of equal significance for the understanding of educational problems, nor within anthropology more generally. We shall discuss a few frames of analysis, methods of inquiry, and conceptualizations of the broad anthropological enterprise which would seem to have usefulness to research in anthropology and education. This discussion is intended to be illustrative rather than inclusive, since, of necessity, we must limit ourselves to a small number of the potentially fruitful approaches to educational research in anthropology. And even in consideration of these few approaches, our presentation is schematic rather than comprehensive. Additionally, several areas of anthropological research, yet unmentioned, are not irrelevant to investigations of anthropology and education; the work of physical anthropologists, for example, is of importance to issues touching on education.

We do not deal with this genre of study, however, since our primary concern is with social and cultural anthropology. Secondly, we make no direct reference to research techniques, as important as they may be for investigating specific problems. We separate methodology from technique and consider the former to be more directly tied to theory. While research techniques can be used by many researchers working from within a host of perspectives, methodology is enjoined by and informs major theoretical questions. With these caveats in mind, we begin our examination of several of the schools of inquiry useful to contemporary anthropology and education.

Social and cultural anthropology encompasses a varied set of theoretical positions but is unified in its attention to a set of issues and strategies which are relevant to the study of education. The long-standing tradition within anthropology of cross-cultural research and comparison provides a valuable dimension as well as a potential warning to researchers concerned with one classroom or school or even with one community. That people have created a host of institutional forms within which to educate their young and a myriad of ideologies through which to explain or revise those forms, makes it impossible to conceive of any one structure, ideology, or set of perceptions and interactions as being universal, and thus inevitable. This point should not be lost when American anthropologists turn with increasing effort to the investigation of their own society. The tradition of cross-cultural research creates awareness of the *artificial*, if often analytically useful, divisions and boundaries assumed to exist between so-called social wholes. Correlatively, research in educational contexts outside the United States provides comparative frames of reference for studies of American society. Cognizance of the existence of other ways of structuring and conceiving the social world than those which are most natural to us — our own — instills awareness of the assumptions behind the taken-for-granted aspects of our own society.

Anthropology, as a whole, has been increasingly involved in investigating the relation between the individual and the collective levels of social life. A tendency to stress the individual or the collectivity to the relative exclusion of the other is among the less auspicious lagniappes of the classical sociologists to sociological and anthropological theory: Emile Durkheim, whose notion of collective representations has informed much subsequent research, gave little that might aid in the study of individual creativity and variation; conversely, Max Weber's rich description of the workings of social orders stressed the significance of individual motivation and intention but, in comparison, neglected collective structures and understandings. Since Weber and Durkheim did their work, anthropologists and sociologists have understood the significance of each approach, but also the need to balance, or perhaps expand, each in terms of the other. The persistent anthropological conundrum of how to delineate and classify the mutual effects of individual people and of collectivities on one another has been inherited full-grown by anthropologists of education. Infants are not yet the adults they become, but are born into and socialized through a social order which upholds certain conceptions of reality. How a society induces collective understandings in social actors and how social ac-

tors alter those understandings are questions posed, more or less directly, by each of the anthropological approaches with which we are concerned here. The salience of such issues increases in studies of social alteration, where these issues are significant to both micro-studies of change within specific educational settings and macro-studies of the wider social context within which institutional and noninstitutional education is effected.

The first and most general approach we shall consider is cultural transmission or, more specifically, the investigation of the processes of cultural transmission. This term, this perspective, long associated with studies in anthropology and education, may well be considered the *sine qua non* of most cultural anthropologists involved with education. It may also stand as the anthropological definition of education itself. Sigificant research has been carried out by an illustrious roster of anthropologists employing various models of cultural transmission in their analyses of small-scale societies, large homogenous societies and of complex, culturally heterogeneous settings. In essence, anthropologists directly involved in questions of cultural transmission focus on the forms through which values and attendant behavior are taught and the specific content of the societal, cultural, or group value system. Within this broad framework, a variety of pertinent questions can be raised. George Spindler, for example, pinpointed a major issue, one which informed his own development of a model for a study of acculturation, when he inquired whether the culture transmitted by the school constrains instrumental choices children make of urban lifestyles and the means to them. Cultural transmission, as a focus of anthropological inquiry, however, is not a theoretical "school" of inquiry. It does not posses a commonly accepted body of unique theory and lacks a linked, coherent methodology. It is, in fact, an important focus or definition of a field but not a school of inquiry. The theoretical underpinnings of cultural transmission stem from a number of subdisciplinary "schools"; high among these stands psychological anthropology.

This school, methodologically rigorous off-shoot of the culture and personality interests of anthropology in the past, offers much to the systematic study of education particularly in its examination of cross-cultural variations of learning processes, socialization, and social change. Patently, differences in the forms through which teaching and learning occur exist from society to society. From earliest childhood through adulthood, individuals are socialized as members of particular groups; in this process the content of group membership is appropriated by individuals who become social actors in specific parts of specific social orders. Individuals learn which actions and beliefs are acceptable, "sane," or possible. They learn *how to perceive* reality and how to change aspects of that reality. Psychological anthropologists have studied acculturative processes, delineating the dimensions of social change in particular situations. In their examination of phenomena such as ethnic stereotyping, the work of psychological anthropologists can and does bear directly on questions of curriculum development and academic placement. More and more this area of anthropological inquiry has approached the assessment of educational programs or institutions through the simultaneous investigation of historical and

situational factors which define the larger setting within which individuals are socialized. Furthermore, this work has brought a valuable corrective to policy makers in its stress on cross-cultural possibilities and alternatives; this emphasis reflects a basic and useful tendency within anthropology, the tendency to question basic principles, principles that other disciplines and policy planners may take for granted.

Another anthropological approach, of relatively recent vintage, commonly referred to as symbolic anthropology, is related to aspects of cross-cultural psychology. Symbolic theory is concerned with codes through which meaning is created, expressed, limited, or altered. The approach is a potentially productive avenue toward demarcating and understanding structures of systems of symbolic forms used by social actors (teachers, students, administrators, parents) to define and act in educational environments. The ways and extent to which these systems can be manipulated by individuals or groups is crucial to understanding modes of social control within schools or other educational arenas. Links at the systemic level between symbolic usages explicitly found in institutions of education and in other areas of social life can be revealed; such research will enhance comprehension of sociocultural patterns defining educational settings and activities, per se, and other parts of the social order to which these connect or in which they are embedded. This genre of research, not yet fully integrated within anthropology and education, should be encouraged.

Research which suggests the character of learning processes, motivational patterns, and codes for meaning must be contextualized in light of institutional structures and goals, both those which are explicit and those which are less apparent to social actors. Social anthropology, including structural-functional theory, provides the bases of a macro-sociology geared toward describing social structures which lie between, and often mediate, the individual and the collectivity, and offers a frame within which to examine the choices people make within social contexts. From within this perspective, researchers have demonstrated the consequence of analyzing the social structures of classroom situations as a "port of entry" to educational research. Studies of social structure combine with studies of social organization; these notions are explained by Raymond Firth, who sees social structure as establishing precedents, providing and limiting the range of alternatives; correspondingly, social organization, involving individuals' choices about sets of possible actions, expresses variance in the systemic ordering of social relations. Investigated jointly, social structure and social organization allow comparisons of student behaviors and perceptions in different types of school situations, studies of teacher-student interaction, and, at a more inclusive level, studies of the relation between schools and the communities in which they are set.

Posed as mutually supportive bases to the study of education, rather than as conflicting alternatives, the perspectives we have discussed, along with a number of others, enable the conjunction of micro- and macro-analyses in studies of education. Each pespective and the several together underscore the significance to studies of anthropology and education of combining objective and subjective comprehensions in research. This, in turn, speaks pointedly to

the study of American society and to the study of processes and structures of education within the American context by a discipline which, above all, prides itself on its cross-cultural work.

The general point, however, is not that some kinds of theory should be stressed and supported over others but that theory and theory building have practical value for anthropologists in education. Like several other specializations in anthropology, the present state of anthropology and education can best be described as ethnographic, a growing corpus of rich, descriptive literature with only limited links to theory. If the specialization is to be effective and useful, it must develop on systematic theoretical foundations. Such development would have the additional, and not inconsiderable, benefit of wedding anthropology and education more closely to the central concerns of the discipline at large.

II

Within anthropology growing attention has accrued to educational research although as a whole anthropology has only minimally focused on education and its specific manifestations in the U.S. Concomitantly, educators have not integrated anthropology into the educational discipline as they have psychology, history, sociology, and philosophy. The gap can be related to a set of stereotypes and anthropologists and educators have held about work within the other discipline. In admittedly exaggerated form, these stereotypes have included the suppositions that: communication between the "real" world of education and the "jargon-ridden" discipline of anthropology is distorted; that educators, policy makers and practitioners alike, perceive anthropological studies of education as lacking "relevance" or "practicality" and, more often than not, that such studies focus on unrepresentitive or "exotic" settings; that problems defined by educators only accidentally overlap with those defined by anthropologists; that educators do not understand the value of anthropology or that they perceive the discipline in simplistic terms, essentially a set of field techniques such as participant-observation which can be used with profit by anyone; and, that anthropologists consider the study of education as marginal to their central scholarly concerns.

Whatever their earlier prevalence, these notions and others of a similar sort, no longer hold complete sway. They do, however, contain a residue of troublesome truth, and difficulties in the integration of the two fields remain. In our judgment, the impetus for resolving these difficulties and for developing a productive symbiosis must come from anthropology which should be able to demonstrate its utility to education not through preaching but through accomplishment. What follows then are suggestions of some of the kinds and areas of anthropological activity and inquiry which, if implemented or expanded, could demonstrate the value of anthropological work within the domain of education.

Anthropology, more than its sibling social sciences, possesses a hard-earned methodology of field observation, capable of considerable accuracy in generating and collecting qualitative data, a method and frame for comparison

which should be of benefit to educators in the assessment and resolution of educational problems. The anthropological format grants a place for both objectivity and subjectivity and allows for—even insists upon—mediating the two. Uncovering and describing the researcher's own assumptions becomes a fundamental aspect of the investigation itself.

In part, these objectives and procedures have already been incorporated in certain areas of educational work. Specifically, in the evaluation of educative programs, researchers and policy makers have acknowledged the importance of the evaluator's providing "formative" as well as "summative" reports. The evaluator no longer can be conceptualized as even ideally standing apart from the group or programs being assessed; either formally or informally, evaluators themselves become part of a field situation which it is their responsibility to assess. Concretely, such congruence of perspective in anthropological and educational work is underscored by a basic similarity in their tasks. Both the educator and the anthropologist observe the behavior of people carrying out their everyday lives rather than of people in controlled, artificial laboratory situations.

Anthropologists must attend carefully to the real perplexities and predicaments of practicing educators *and* to the expediencies of the educational solution. This prerequisite, only fitfully carried out by anthropologists in education, necessitates a serious review of traditional modes of anthropological study and presentation. Such reevaluation must focus on processes of data collection and analysis and on forms through which anthropologists and educators can respond to the insights and dilemmas of the other. Within school situations, anthropological work heavily depends on intensive communication and interchange with school and other educative personnel, not simply in order to gain research entry but to understand, define, and categorize parameters of the problems with which individuals who work in these settings must deal. Key problems are not always obvious to school personnel and students insofar as they are embedded in particular situations and have specific perspectives or particularistic concerns and interests. Definition of the basic conundrums may emerge through research which includes dialogue between anthropologist and educator. Anthropologists, in work *with* school personnel, in sharing understanding, and in refining and redirecting conceptualizations in light of those held by the other, can enhance their own attempts to contextualize descriptions of roles and activities within the school and of underlying, often conflicting, assumptions about various sectors of the school population.

Within the last few decades anthropologists, working in schools where they have aimed to achieve close articulation with practicing educators, have studied classroom interactions between students and between students and teacher and have investigated the several interfaces between schools and the larger communities. Work has begun on the study of administrative tasks and on the evaluation of innovative educational programs. Without doubt, a wide choice of specific research problems is available, limited only by the theoretical interests and practical concerns of the research. Antropological investigation, geared toward the examination of American education, and thus

of the larger society, can fruitfully heed both the normal workings and implicit structures of educative environments and more dramatic strains of conflict or events of crisis. Each focus entails recognition of the aids in understanding the other.

While not unique in experiencing moments of obvious exigency, the recent history of American education seems unusually beset with clusters of interrelated crises, reflecting contradictions within the society as a whole. The New York City teachers strike of 1968 is one particularly trenchant instance. This event, and others, such as those related to the issue of bussing children in Boston, have been protrayed in a myriad of journalistic accounts and popular reports. Yet, serious attention to these events by anthropologists is minimal. Frequently, at moments of crisis the basic nature of a society is revealed, as social processes are framed through the terms and activities of conflict. At such moments and through such events, contradictions are brought into focused play, and possibilities for future activity and structure may become apparent. Because "reality" is framed when it is disputed, variant stresses individuals and groups give to aspects of their realities become more intense and more patent. For the anthropologist, insights gained in situations of crisis speak to the character of the social order as it appears in the more "normal" course of things. Events of the New York City teachers strike stand as a startling, if unblest, enactment of hostilities and oppositions which had defined and which continue to define processes of education in the City. The antagonisms between parents and teachers, conflicts between various definitions of learning or of society, opposing stances and perspectives which emerged with clarity during the strike can be related to a large set of less dramatic everyday life problems which harry parents, school personnel, and students. Analyses of crises in education and in schools address encompassing and quotidian problems as well as those defining the moment of upheaval.

The more qualitative work of anthropology brings a needed dimension to the almost completely quantitative studies of psychology, sociology, and economics carried out in the domain of education. We grant that social scientists, occasionally even anthropologists, have gone far in the study of problems and comparisons in education through the use of quantitiative methods. A plethora of tests and studies, carefully designed and evaluated have demonstrated, among many things, that American children often graduate from high school unable to read or that teacher responses and perceptions have critical consequences for students' learning processes or that college graduates are not uniformly equipped to understand the morning newspaper. Such research, to a certain degree, has outlined the gross objective conditions of American education. But there has been relatively less success in articulating *why* children—and then adults—cannot read or perform successfully in educative situations and in illuminating how children *can be* taught to read and to perform successfully.

To some extent quantitative research and science *are* objective, though most would concede that statistics can, and do, lie. However, knowing that children cannot read, even on the basis of extremely reliable tests, cannot tell

us what to do about that fact. It is precisely because such research aims at maximum objectivity that it reaches its limit in providing the facts of the case. Problem solvers and policy makers have traditionally taken and continue to take the results of objective tests and then, in applying common sense to the data at hand, often we might add informed common sense, generate possible solutions and policies. We suggest that research which seeks to investigate the assumptions and values behind behavior and research that is consciously intended to place the researcher inside the system under study, goes one significant step farther and becomes the necessary partner to more quantitative modes of study.

Anthropology, part of the social order in which it is created and expounded (like anthropologists who are joined to the social actors they observe) is an inherently political activity. This does not mean that anthropological analyses cannot be carefully reasoned and conducted, academically informed and methodologically sophisticated; they must be all these, if they are to be of any value at all. Further, there *is* room and need within anthropology for the creative use of quantitative techniques, techniques developed from within or borrowed and adapted from neighboring sciences. But the final testing cannot be done on score cards nor through systems models. This can occur only in a world where people actually live. In abstracting from reality the anthropologist, like other social scientists, selects some parts for study. The crucial step, succeeding this abstraction, entails the reexamination of abstractions against concrete behaviors and activities. At another level, this procedure is conceptually similar to one long employed by those formulating action programs and by those responsible for policy implementation. A program or a policy is right, if it works. Obviously, what it means "to work" is itself vital and should be part and parcel of projected policies and blueprints for social reform or alteration. More than evaluation, it is a research task uniquely suited to the interests and strengths of anthropology.

III

By this point, we have suggested the crucial relation between theory and research problems, illustrating this vital link by focusing on several approaches to anthropological theory. In a broader sense, we stress that anthropological analysis of American education, still in its early stages, must contextualize educational systems and environments within sociocultural processes which define and undergird the society more generally. We shall conclude with several concrete recommendations which speak to the creation of a material base within which educational anthropology can most effectively proceed. A fundamental issue, in this light, is that of the training necessary for competent work within the field. While several models may produce positive results, we must still delineate ingredients necessary to any such program.

Firstly, there should be little disagreement that graduates of programs in anthropology and education should not be middle-level technicians but thoroughly trained anthropologists. Their preparation should include exposure to an competence in pertinent anthropological theory; exposure to and

understanding of current educational issues and practice; the development of practical skills of initiating and implementing research, as well as communicating results and ideas across disciplinary and professional boundaries. Secondly, if graduates are trained anthropologists, they should be acknowledged as such by their peers in the discipline at large. Without such status parity, any existing gap between anthropology and education and the so-called mainstream of the discipline widens with pernicious results for both. More pragmatically, the miniscule anthropological faculties at schools of education cannot even pretend to provide all the thorough and time-consuming training necessary for a doctorate in anthropology and education. Consequently, anthropology and education programs need to create, if they do not already exist, to maintain, and to strengthen their ties with their respective university graduate departments of anthropology. While maintaining administrative autonomy, they cannot and should not exist in disciplinary isolation. Such bonds, rather than constricting, secure and elevate academic standards of excellence; offer easy access for program students to specialized but necessary subject matter available only in the larger disciplinary setting; and, quite vitally, foster integration and articulation of the specialist in anthropology and education with all anthropologists.

The specific recommendations which follow concentrate on ways to deal with two amorphous conditions which, left unattended, complicate and jeopardize the future of educational anthropology. The first is the rudimentary theoretical development and unevenness in current anthropological work in education, a condition that erodes the readiness and ability for serious new effort; the second is the inefficient utilization of anthropologists interested in education, a condition which erodes the posibilities and opportunities for serious new effort. The following recommendations, in slightly abridged form here, were presented in the *Chairman's Report* to the Committee on Anthropology and Education of the National Academy of Education (1977):

1. In the organization of the specialization, we strongly recommend support and development of the best of the now functioning educational anthropology programs in schools of education. They are the logical pivot to connect discipline to domain as well as the obvious wellspring of research and training in anthropology and education. In the near future, we expect that no more than three or four of these programs would or should be supported. Ideally, they would require staffing at higher levels than presently exist; fellowship support for a limited number of graduate students; and seed funds for initiating long-term discipinary research and for involvement with interdisciplinary projects. We suggest that this could be facilitated through the following mechanisms:

    a. The creation of a modest national fellowship program which would provide support for no more than fifteen or twenty graduate students annually. Selection should be competitive and based on merit, with fellowships allocated proportionally to functioning educational anthropology programs.

    b. The creation of a modest program which would permit the utilization

of competent anthropologists outside of the schools of education on
an ad hoc, adjunct, or visiting basis in functioning educational an-
thropology programs. These anthropologists are presently available at
university departments of anthropology or at nearby institutions and
could be utilized for the teaching of occasional courses, for a full
semester, or for an academic year. The costs would be kept minimal
but the long-term impact on the specialization could well be profound.

c. The functioning programs in educational anthropology should be en-
couraged to move towards closer and more intimate cooperation. Even
with the limited funds now available, we conceive of a program which
would facilitate an exchange of scholars between these programs on a
semester or academic year basis. Such interchanges, which could well
involve the occasional advanced graduate student, may do little for
creating a critical mass of scholars at any particular place but would
provide absolutely imperative infusions of new ideas and perspectives
into hitherto isolated units of disciplinarians.

d. We believe that high priority must be given to the development of a
capability in educational anthropology for examining recurring crises
and contradictions in American education. The systematic analysis and
comparison of data collected at carefully selected crises points could
prove one of the most valuable sources for understanding and dealing
with contemporary problems.

e. We suggest the initiation of planning for an institute of advanced
studies in anthropology and education. This institute would draw
together scholars of promise and renown, provide opportunities for the
refinement of theory and methodology, serve as the center for postdoc-
toral studies, and as a forum for the interdisciplinary investigation of
education. The actual establishment of such an institute at this point in
the development of the specialization would be premature, but plan-
ning now for the future is essential.

2. The task of improving the quality and developing the theoretical bases
of educational anthropology includes a number of factors. Among these would
include the need for deliberate and formal raising of standards of work; the
public acknowledgment of superior productivity; and, directions for profitable
lines of inquiry research. With these dimensions in mind, we offer the following
recommendations:

a. Educational anthropology has earned the right to be considered a
serious disciplinary specialization. We believe it imperative, therefore,
that where they do not already exist, competent, objective peer reviews
be instituted at national agencies and private foundations which fund
research of this kind. Competent review and selection of research
guarantees the development of quality and growth. Funding agencies
must fully assume or clearly delegate responsibility for elevating an-
thropological research in education to more sophisticated and useful
levels. They must judge that the objectives of proposed research clear-
ly are related to problems understood by educators to be problems in

education and, of equal importance, that the theoretical and attendant methodological bases of proposed studies are sound and relevant. It cannot be overstressed that without explicit linkages to theory, we doom ourselves to lifeless descriptions of particular settings and specific situations and deny ourselves the opportunity of comparison and meaningful generalization.

b. At this stage in the development of the specialization, it is important that recognition be given to, and interest focused on, current works of quality and worth. Therefore, we recommend the establishment of a biennial award, under the auspices of the National Academy of Education. This prize would guarantee the early publication of the work selected within a series format.

c. In terms of theory and problem focus, we urge that high priority be given to anthropological studies of education and the educational process in mainstream America.

d. We further urge that high priority be given to the examination of crisis and conflict in educational settings. Not only will such studies illuminate the specifics of revealing cases but provide one of the more useful of the several theoretical bridges between anthropology as social science and the more practical world of education.

e. Finally, we urge investing in anthropological and interdisciplinary research which focuses on those several broad social and structural factors which influence and condition the American institution of education. Without the contexts provided by macro-social science, micro-studies become less valuable and useful.

It is our opinion that much if not all of what has been recommended can be achieved—and without recourse to substantial new funding. With careful planning by agencies and foundations, the present funds available from all sources to educational anthropology can be retargeted and reallocated. We view the future of educational anthropology with optimism—despite the recent escalation of economic and social pressures on American education. The potential of the specialization for enriching the work of parent discipline and education alike, we would maintain, has just begun to be appreciated by both.

Endnotes

1. This essay draws on the *Chairman's Report*, Committee on Antropology and Education of the National Academy of Education (1977), prepared by Lambros Comitas.

References Cited

Althusser, Louis
   1971 Ideology and Ideological State Appartuses (Notes Toward an Investigation). *In* Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays. Ben Brewster, trans. Pp. 127-186. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Barnett, Steve
    1977 Identity Choice and Caste Ideology in Contemporary South India. *In* Symbolic
        Anthropology. Janet Dolgin, David Kemnitzer, and David Schneider, eds. Pp. 270-
        291. New York: Columbia University Press.
Comitas, Lambros
    1977 Chairman's Report. *In* Report and Working Papers. Pp. 1-55. The Committee on
        Anthropology and Education of the National Academy of Education.

PRACTICING ANTHROPOLOGY

The first issue of *Practicing Anthropology*, a new publication of the Society for Applied Anthropology, is scheduled for September 1978. Thereafter, it will be issued every two months. *Practicing Anthropology* is a career-oriented publication designed to encourage and facilitate communication among persons who practice anthropology in their work and in other aspects of their lives, regardless of where they are employed or of what professional degree they have attained. The publication's special interest is in careers and other activities that originated or were substantially developed outside of academic settings. Developments in each of the major fields of anthropology will also be considered.

Practicing Anthropology follows a journalistic format and publishes a variety of material, including current news items, career information, reviews, and short articles. The publication encourages informality and the communication of personal experiences in the practice of anthropology, without sacrificing professional quality or integrity. Its emphasis is on actual and present activities rather than on future possibilities or past achievements. *Practicing Anthropology* will strive to begin as and remain a reliable guide to the uses of anthropology in modern life.

The Editor seeks news items, announcements, articles, and article ideas for *Practicing Anthropology*. Clarity and economy of writing style are at a premium. Editorial correspondence should be directed to Erve Chambers, Editor, *Practicing Anthropology*, Department of Anthropology, University of South Florida, Tampa, Florida 33620. To subscribe to the publication, send $5.00, for six issues, to *Practicing Anthropology*, 1703 New Hampshire Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.