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Abstract

In Spring 2010, seventeen students enrolled in my Laboratory in Ethnography course. This 300-level anthropology course is designed to give them hands-on experience with qualitative research methods. Operating under the assumption that many methods courses fail to instill adaptive expertise in students because instructors foreground content over process, I combined elements of problem based learning and purposeful reflections when designing this course. Students responded well to the format and appreciated the opportunity to learn about subjects that interested them through the application of anthropology methods. From my analysis of their online reflections, it is clear that students understood the methods and most were able to evaluate their usefulness within the context of their individualized projects. However, students struggled with synthesis and were reluctant to combine or modify the methods covered in class and in their texts. This finding suggests a need for us to better understand our students’ problem-solving skills, which I hope to address in future iterations of this course.
**Introduction**

E302, Laboratory in Ethnography, is a course designed to introduce undergraduate students, predominantly anthropology majors, into the hallmark methodologies of our discipline through hands-on participation in qualitative research. It is a relatively young course within our department, and is taught every spring semester by a different graduate student. Beginning in Fall 2010, it will be taught in both the fall and spring semesters. This was my one and only opportunity to teach this class at Indiana University Bloomington. I had full responsibility for the course, from designing the syllabus to teaching and assessing student learning. In the past, this course has included a service-learning component. Informal conversations with past instructors and faculty revealed that this was not a highly successful format for teaching an introductory methods course, so I removed this requirement and introduced a problem based learning approach.

There were seventeen students enrolled in E302 during the Spring 2010 semester. This is a significant increase from past semesters, probably due to its recent inclusion in the subset of courses that count towards a major in anthropology. Seven of the students are male and the remaining ten are female. The majority of students are either anthropology majors or minors, with the exception of one business major, one undecided, and three who are involved in the Individualized Major Program. These latter three students presented me with a unique opportunity to tailor the specific assignments to their specialized needs. The class makeup was rather homogenous, though there were two non-traditional students who were also from minority ethnic groups. What I found particularly impressive about this group of students was their collegiality. Oftentimes discussions would flow with minimal input from me, the instructor. Students responded to one another’s points directly, often referring to one another by name. In addition to the atmosphere I tried to cultivate, this particular room
lent itself to interaction, with a large conference table in the center and a ring of desks around the table. Rather than facing the podium, students faced one another. This, I believe, was a major contributing factor to the free-flowing conversations and sense of intellectual community that developed over the course of the semester.

Because this was a 300-level course, most students were upperclassmen and had had some prior experience with anthropology. Therefore, most students had some degree of background knowledge of major concepts like culture, ethnography, and cultural relativism. Within the first week, students had already selected a research question that they would explore throughout the semester, applying the research techniques taught in class to their own personal interests. By the end of the second week, we had covered the purposes of a literature review, and students had begun doing background research on their topics. From that point forward, the course was divided into small units that focused on a particular method.

At the beginning of the course, I repeated a maxim I had once heard about research: you cannot save by analysis what you have bungled by design. My goal in this course was to stress the importance of research design, always putting the research question, data collection, and analysis into alignment with your goals as a researcher and your research style. To this end, I had the following objectives for my students:

1. Identify a research question
2. Conduct a literature search
   a. About the chosen geographic area
   b. About the research question
3. Think about the logistics of working in a given community
4. Select a methodology
5. Implement the methodology
An unstated goal of the course was for students to become more creative problem solvers, using ingenuity to make a perfect fit between their research question and the ‘cookie cutter’ methods taught in class. I sought to achieve this by pairing purposeful reflection with problem-based learning. (See Appendix A – Course Syllabus, below)

**Objectives**

As I prepared my syllabus for this course, I was experimenting with backward design for the second time. I wanted to make sure that every session and every assignment contributed to my ultimate goals for these students. My primary objective was for students to walk away from my course with the confidence that they could adequately solve anthropological problems. Though I had never before taught a methods course, I identified one common tendency that I feel interrupts the learning goals I set out for my students: scattershot approaches to teaching methodological content over adaptive expertise results in shallow learning that is minimally applicable to typical ethnographic research projects. My general approach to this course was an attempt to avoid the temptation of overloading my syllabus with content, which the students may or may not ever use. Rather, I wanted my students to walk away more confident in their ability to solve anthropological problems in the field.

**The problem**

The type of expertise cultivated in most methods courses is incongruous with the type of expertise needed by an anthropologist working in the field. Someone with adaptive expertise exhibits flexibility and is constantly in the process of evaluating and reworking their procedural capabilities; someone with routine expertise, on the other hand, is highly efficient in accomplishing tasks, but lacks the flexibility to adapt to new situations (Lin et al 1999:44). For an anthropologist, life in the field tends to get very messy and unruly. Because we work in a natural laboratory, we often have to adapt our methods on the spot to accommodate our constantly changing context. This demands adaptive
expertise. However, this is often difficult to achieve in a one-semester course, which is why many methods courses result in students achieving only routine expertise. In short, there is an incompatibility between the type of expertise demanded of an anthropologist in the field and the type of expertise we generally seek to instill in our students.

**The innovation**

My innovation for the Spring 2010 E302 course was to pair purposeful reflection with problem based learning to encourage the growth of adaptive expertise in my students. Because my innovation was a course design approach rather than a particular lesson or scaffolding tool, it is difficult to isolate variables and present an unambiguous evaluation of the innovation. However, I chose this approach because this was a new course for me and I did not have any preexisting content to modify. I also felt it was justifiable to sacrifice some of the reliability of this study in the service of my students’ development.

Robert Delisle defines problem-based learning (PBL) as “a teaching technique that educates by presenting students with a situation that leads to a problem for them to solve...They interpret the question, gather additional information, create possible solutions, evaluate options to find the best solutions, and then present their conclusions” (Delisle 1997:v). One of the primary benefits is that “[a]ctive instructional techniques like PBL can motivate bored students and raise their understanding and achievement” (Delisle 1997:5). The ability to motivate students is a great benefit when teaching topics courses at the university level because theses courses attract a wide variety of students who may simply enroll in a course to fulfill a university requirement. Though Delisle’s book on PBL is dedicated to using the technique in K-12 classrooms, his observation that it “is ideal for classes with a range of academic abilities” is extremely applicable to the college setting (see Delisle 1997:12). PBL also lends itself to interdisciplinary goals, encouraging students to draw on skills learned in a variety of disciplines (ibid:10). College students often have difficulty transitioning from one class
to the next because their professors expect them to think like an expert in their particular discipline; therefore, this is a great way to work within the structure of a liberal arts education, giving value to a wide variety of expertise and styles of learning.

Reflection and problem solving are closely tied facilities (Lin et al 1999:44), which is why I believe purposeful reflection is a key component of any methods course that seeks to improve students’ problem solving abilities. Reflection is also an important part of an active-learning classroom because it deepens students understanding of their actions and allows them to abstract principles from their own experience to better understand the subject matter. There is scholarly support for the idea “that students learn more from educational activities when they are prompted to reflect on experiences” (Bos and Shami 2006:497). This abstraction is essential if students are to transfer learning from one domain to another (ibid). However, this is a particularly challenging aspect of teaching. Therefore, intentionally structured my course to encourage reflection about students’ increasing problem solving abilities.

**Implementation**

In designing this course, I was committed to foregrounding the process of thinking like an anthropologist. I was willing to sacrifice some content ground if I could encourage my students to become more creative problem solvers. However, the syllabus was naturally structured around methodological units, each of which followed the same general pattern:

1. On the last day of the previous unit, students respond ‘cold’ to a hypothetical research dilemma and proposed a methodology. This was done in a think/pair/share format; students were given some time for independent brainstorming before sharing with a partner, then with the class as a whole. Almost invariably, students initially proposed solutions to the problem that drew upon the unit just studied. However, after a few minutes of group discussion, students proposed extremely unique solutions, building off of one another’s
suggestions until we arrived at a very specialized solution to the problem at hand. This approach excited such interest, that students would periodically stay after class to continue offering evidence as to why their solution was the best fit.

2. At home, students completed a reading assignment on the appropriate method. This was my way of introducing disciplinary content into the course, but only after students had the opportunity to propose their own solution to the problem. I wanted them to learn the appropriate method, but without stifling their own creativity.

3. In the next session we discussed the methodology as a class. In these sessions I would often do a series of 15-minute microteachings interrupted by a think/pair/share or independent brainstorming session to avoid students losing focus.

4. The following class was a hand-on session in which students practice the method in a supervised environment. For example, we practiced interviewing in class, borrowing the “speed dating” format. Students sat along either side of the conference table and each person had 3 minutes to interview their partner before the right-hand side of the table slid down one spot. Whenever possible, these sessions closed with a 10-20 minute debriefing period in which we discussed what worked well, what didn’t work well, and what they would do differently next time. I also asked them what they learned from using this method that they wouldn’t have learned otherwise.

5. Finally, students completed an independent assignment using that methodology and/or participated in an online forum to discuss the pros and cons of that particular method for their project.

Throughout this process, I implemented Classroom Assessment Techniques (see Angelo and Cross 1993) such as minute papers and muddiest point papers whenever I deemed it appropriate. This type of assessment was always formative, and I was sure to give feedback to students on their minute papers during the next class session.

Case Study: The Visual Methods Unit

“Visual Methods” was one unit covered in this course, and is presented here as an example of the five-step design used to structure my course.

Step 1: Students were introduced ‘cold’ to this hypothetical research problem:
Consider this...

An anthropologist who has never been fishing in his life has decided to conduct research on commercial fishermen in Canada. Because things happen so fast once the men locate the fish, they do not have much time to deal with a pesky researcher’s questions. Furthermore, their technique is very tricky and it would be ages before the researcher could learn enough to actually be useful on the boat. Finally, the men are a bit suspicious of the researcher, unwilling to talk to him, and they don’t like him loafing about while they work. (adapted from Collier and Collier 1986:20-23)

Your job is to work with a partner and suggest a method for this researcher to try.

Figure 1 This is the actual powerpoint slide shown to students for their think/pair/share activity

Step 2: Students were given the following at-home reading assignment:

Chapter 14 of Visual Anthropology by Collier and Collier 1986
(posted to Oncourse)

Step 3: We discuss the method in class. Below are the lesson plans for this session:

Tuesday February 9, 2010
Week 5, Lesson 1

Teaching Materials:
• Homework Assignment Sheets: Photography Project
• Poster size photos for in-class activity
• Framing guides

Reading Due: Chapter 14 of Visual Anthropology
Student Work Due: None

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:00-1:10</td>
<td>Warm-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Framing exercise:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:10-1:40</td>
<td>Discuss Chapter 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:40-1:45</td>
<td>Think/Pair/Share</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1:45-2:05| Slideshow            | For each photo in the slide show:  
  1. Is this a photo that helps answer a research question or is it merely |
illustrating research?

2. If it answers a research question, what might that question be?

**ALMOST ANY OF THESE PHOTOS COULD PROVIDE DATA AS LONG AS THEY WERE PART OF A SYSTEMATIC PLAN TIED TO A RESEARCH QUESTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2:05-2:10</td>
<td>Practicalities</td>
<td>Practical considerations of photography as research method:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Probably using a digital camera – any cases in which you would want other format?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• What size camera? (do you need specialty lenses or do you need something that slips into a pocket unobserved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you need/want a tripod?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you need something completely unique (i.e. Flexivle's automatic camera hat for capoeira)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you need hard copies of the film in the field or can that wait until you get back home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optional, if time allows</td>
<td>Think/Pair/Share</td>
<td>In what situations would photography as a research method be inappropriate?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:10-2:15</td>
<td>Wrap-up</td>
<td>Takeaway Points:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• There’s a big difference between using photography as a research method and using it for illustrations</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• After getting a feel for the context and discovering what aspects of the culture are important to record, you need to be systematic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Make sure your photos gather usable data (i.e. countable/measureable things not just pretty images)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Assign Homework- photography project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Preview next time: Meet in lobby of Mathers’ Museum, bring paper and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
something to write with.

Step 4: Students complete a hands-on assignment in-class. Rather than take photos themselves in class (due to technology and time restrictions), we went to the Mather’s Museum to look at a photography exhibit.

Step 5: Students then completed the following assignment on their own:

**Photography Assignment**
Due: February 16th

The goal of this assignment is for you to think about the utility of visual methods for your proposed research project and to practice using a shooting guide to structure your photography.

**Instructions:**
1. Think about how visual methods might help you answer your research question and decide what you can do in Bloomington to approximate that data.
2. Create a shooting guide that details how you will collect this photographic data.
3. Select between 15 and 25 photographs to present to the class.
4. Below each photograph, write one to two sentences that tell what kind of data you see in the photograph and how it answers your research question.

**Formatting:** You will turn in a power point file as your final product. The first slide will be a title page with your name and title of the work. The second slide will be your shooting guide. Each subsequent slide will be a photograph with descriptive sentence(s).

**Grading Rubric:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Fair</th>
<th>Poor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Original Title</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3-1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title is original and fits project</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Title is too vague</td>
<td>Does not have original title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shooting Guide</strong></td>
<td>15-13</td>
<td>12-10</td>
<td>9-5</td>
<td>4-0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearly &amp; logically structures each shoot</td>
<td>Seems clear, but a bit vague or illogical</td>
<td>Too vague</td>
<td>Very cursory or absent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment

I collected data at all points throughout the semester to gauge the development of adaptive expertise in my students.

At the beginning of the semester, I asked students to rate themselves as problem solvers on a scale of 1-5 where 1 was “not very good” and 5 was “could solve any problem.” This was done on the first day alongside other “get to know you” type questions such as major, favorite anthropology course taken so far, etc. Sixteen of the seventeen students completed this activity. No student rated themselves lower than a 3. The average rating was a 3.8. The most frequently (44%) selected rating was a 4. One student rated himself as a perfect 5. Overall, students came into this course with high confidence in their abilities as problem solvers.
I repeated this question at the end of the semester. Fifteen of the seventeen students completed the activity. As a whole, their self-confidence as problem solvers increased; students gave themselves an average score of 4.2. Nine students gave themselves higher ratings than they did during the first activity, four students gave themselves the same ratings as before, and two gave themselves lower scores than before. Gains or losses were either of a half point (in seven of the cases) or a whole point (in four of the cases). The student who rated himself as a 5 in the first session again rated himself as a five. An additional student also gave herself a 5 rating, but “only because [she has] a better idea of where to learn what [she doesn’t] know.”

Throughout the semester, students were required to submit periodic reflections online. This was a required portion of the course, and grades were assigned on the basis of completion only (all or nothing). I used a deductive approach to analyzing this data. I was looking for the presence or absence of three elements (my codes) borrowed from Bloom’s taxonomy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Codebook used for deductive analysis of students’ online forum posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comprehension</strong> - Did the student’s reflection indicate their understanding of the method? Do they seem to have a grasp of the purpose and basic procedures associated with the method?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No understanding and/or merely restates words and phrases from the prompt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Synthesis</strong> - Could the student tailor the stock method to their given project? Did they have the ability to imagine the method being used in non-traditional ways or in conjunction with another method?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation</strong> - Could the student make a well-reasoned judgment about whether or not this would be an effective method?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first reflection asked: “What should you do to prepare before you do participant observation?” This was a brainstorming prompt, not intended to be analyzed according to the above codebook. It was merely designed to introduce students to the online forum and help them think about the upcoming class.

The second reflection asked: “What was the most provocative thing you learned from listening to one another's presentations?” It was likewise not meant for deductive analysis. The point of this reflection was twofold: 1) for students to learn from reflecting on one another’s work; and 2) to engender the sense of community I was trying to foster in this group. This second goal seems to have been effective as this was the only reflection for which a majority of students replied directly to their peers’ responses. In all other reflections, students tended to start a new “thread” with their post.

The third reflection asked: “Would a survey be appropriate for your research question? Why or why not?” This was the first prompt that really asked students to reflect on the congruence between their project and a particular method. This assignment was due during the seventh week of the course, which meant they had had significant exposure to the problem based learning format and had already completed two previous posts. Twelve of the seventeen students in the class responded to this prompt – suggesting that the online forum is perhaps not the ideal format for encouraging participation. Only two of the twelve students received a perfect score (i.e. had all three codes present) in their response (see Figure 1 below). All responses contained evidence of comprehension. Typical responses included references to survey as a good way to gather a lot of data quickly or mentioned its value as a quantitative method. Most of the students (75%) were able to evaluate the usefulness of this method with respect to their particular project. The problem, however, seemed to lie with their ability to synthesize information. Evidence of synthesis was only present in one-third of students’ responses. A common pattern in the data was for students to be able to comprehend the method
and evaluate its use, but not tailor fit it to their particular project; four students exhibited this pattern (see Figure 2 below).

For my research question, surveys would be one of a few methodologies I'd use. To me, it is important to have both qualitative and quantitative data and surveys would provide the necessary means for quantitative data. I would be able to chart the data and see any consistencies or correlations among different companies and different people. I would be able to sort the data based off age, race, work experience, and educational experience. There are so many different variations that you can play with in order to see different trends and draw conclusions. I would definitely save this method until the end of my work. It is important to fully understand the people you are making a survey for as it will give you insight in writing the survey as unbiased as possible. Also, it will give me time to interview potential surveyors and get a feel for the general attitude. This will make writing the survey much easier. I would also be taking as many photographs as possible in order to see any trends I may want to poll in the surveys.

Figure 2 Example of a student with a perfect score on the “Survey and Your Project” reflection; all elements present
I think using these things would definitely be helpful in my research project. My topic is Greenland Inuit and their struggles for modernization. Surveys are perfect for gathering a little bit of information, from a lot of different people. One negative I found with surveys is that they can be very bias. They are voluntary, so the the fact that only people that want to take it skews the results. But other than that it is quick and effective and a good way of obtaining quantitative data.

The fourth reflection asked: “What will be your biggest challenge in selecting a research sample? What sampling method should you use in your proposed research?” The first part of this prompt was designed to encourage brainstorming in my students; it also demonstrates their comprehension of the sampling process. Synthesis, in this context, refers to a creative implementation and/or appropriate combination of the stock sampling methods. Evaluation referred to a student’s ability to confidently propose a sampling method and provide evidence for its appropriateness. Eleven of the seventeen students responded to this prompt. There was much greater variation in students’ scores on this assessment than on the survey question. On the one hand, there were four students with perfect scores; yet there were also two students who scored 0/3. Only six of the eleven students exhibited comprehension of what is meant by sampling methods. For example, many students anticipated problems that had more to do with establishing rapport
than sampling methods per se. And while these two concepts are certainly related in that they both contribute to data collection, they are far from interchangeable. This confusion was evident in class, and students struggled far more with this concept than any of the others presented in the course (see Figure 3 below). Interestingly, nine of the eleven respondents were able to evaluate the use of a particular method, even if they had very weak comprehension. This I attribute to the use of a flow chart I gave them in class, which was designed to guide them through the selection process. Synthesis was again weak, with only five of the eleven able to propose mixed methods and/or a novel use of a sampling method. However, this is a slight improvement upon the prevalence of synthesis in the third response.

Figure 4 Example of a low scoring response to the "Sampling Methods" prompt; note the misunderstandings of the methods and the overall lack of confidence
The fifth response asked: “What was the most useful thing you learned from this reading, *Designing Funded Qualitative Research*?” This prompt was simply to ensure that students engaged with the reading prior to a scheduled guest speaker. It does not figure into my analysis.

The sixth response asked: “Would focus groups be appropriate for your proposed research? Why or why not?” Students needed to show their understanding of what a focus group was and its basic procedures, and they needed to evaluate its usefulness for their project. However, I was also hoping to see them struggle with it and try to reinvent it for their project rather than adopt or reject it wholesale (synthesis). There was a high rate of completion for this assignment (16/17). There were only two students whose responses did not indicate comprehension; however, I believe this is not due to a lack of understanding. In both cases, focus groups were incompatible with their project, so they dismissed it outright and gave little explanation of the method, its benefits, and its drawbacks. Students also did extremely well at evaluating this method’s usefulness for their project, only one of the sixteen failed to do so. However, synthesis was again lacking. Only six of the sixteen did this. The other 63% failed to do so. On a positive note, however, this represents a modest increase in the number of students giving evidence of synthesis and five students received a perfect score. This may be attributable to an in-class activity done in conjunction with the focus group unit. I had students work in pairs and make recommendations about what method(s) they could use to address a particular problem; focus groups were always an answer, but students started to recommend them in conjunction with other data collection techniques.
The seventh and final response asked: “What is the one topic we covered that remains most ‘muddy’ for you?” This reflection was supposed to be completed before our final meeting; it was a modest attempt at just in time teaching. I had hoped to briefly recap some of these areas that were most unclear to them in order to bring some closure to our term. However, response rates were lower than I had hoped. This prompt was not included in my analysis.

**Analysis and Reflection**

Based on students’ self-evaluation, and upon their open-ended responses to a questionnaire about what they learned in this class, students are more confident in their
abilities to solve anthropological problems as a result of taking E302. Building such confidence in my students was one of my instructional goals; however, I was also interested more objective measures of their adaptive expertise, which is why I analyzed their online forum posts.

Although this was not my original intention at the outset of the semester, the bulk of my data comes from students’ online reflections. According to Lin et al., “reflective thinking...usually occurs when problems or situations encountered are perplexing, complex, and meaningful or genuine to people” (Lin et al. 1999:46). This, I believe, explains the successes of my innovation. Students knew that every assignment in the course contributed to their final research proposal. One of the continually reinforced lessons in my course was that a well-designed research project would put everything (question, data, and analysis) into alignment with the larger goals of the project. Students were able to see a parallel between this research philosophy and the underlying design of the course. All assignments were put into alignment with the demands of the final assessment. Therefore, they knew that every task was genuine in the sense that it would help them organize their thoughts for the final project.

However, my analysis of these online reflections revealed that students are far more capable of evaluating particular methods in the context of their own project than they are at proposing new methods or synthesizing the different methods they have learned. This is an interesting finding because evaluation is often considered the pinnacle of intellectual achievement. It may be that my reflection prompts were too vague, and this is something that needs more sustained consideration. It is also worth noting that in some cases, the method was downright incompatible with the student’s project, in which case no amount of tailoring would make it fit. In such a situation, I would neither expect nor desire to see synthesis. However, I think the problem goes a bit deeper. Our educational system had conditioned students to give the teacher what he or she wants; therefore, I was hesitant to tell them to synthesize various methods and propose novel
solutions to their problem. I felt like that would defeat the purpose. True success, in my eyes, would have been an independent realization that no method is “one size fits all.” What makes this even more perplexing to me is the fact that students knew they were being graded on completion only, which means that there was a very low level of risk involved in the assignment. During class we repeatedly discussed the infinite possibility for variation within these methods, but I did not see evidence of this learning in their individual online responses. However, when we discussed problems in a think/pair/share format, students were incredibly creative. They built upon their peers’ ideas and came up with amazingly creative responses. Why is it then, that when students responded to my prompts online that they tended to treat methods as an either/or proposition?

During our last class session, I had the opportunity to discuss the overall impact of the course with my students. When asked what they learned this semester, one student responded, “I learned that I like small classes.” Other students immediately agreed and began discussing the merits of intimate seminar-style classes that encourage interaction between students. This is not the kind of information I intended to generate, but it affirmed my sense that students had built an intellectual community around the topic of ethnographic methods. Students also expressed an appreciation that they had been given the opportunity to learn both the methods an anthropologist uses and content of their choosing, which is a primary goal of problem based learning. After soliciting their opinions and reflections, I shared with them the results of my analysis of their Oncourse forum posts. They were likewise confounded by their reluctance to create innovative methods when doing these exercises independently. We agreed that this was something they could work on in the future, but I would like to find a way to encourage this type of thinking in a more straightforward way before I teach the class again.

Perhaps one way to address this shortcoming would be to replicate the interactive environment of a think/pair/share during their online reflections. According to Bos and
Shami, it is relatively easy to elicit students’ reflections on their own work, but building an online environment in which they comment on their peers’ work is far more challenging (Bos and Shami 2006:496). I was not as successful as I had originally hoped in encouraging students to comment on each other’s forum posts. This type of dialogue is important because “reflective thinking involves social inter-actions because one needs multiple perspectives and feedback on one’s own performance and understanding” (Lin et al.: 1999:46). The only time a majority of students took part in this type of dialogue was when I explicitly encouraged them to do so. Otherwise, their general tendency was to start a new forum thread with their own personal reflection, which was devoid of references to their peers’ posts. In the next iteration of the course, I will need to develop strategies to encourage more cross-fertilization on the online forum. This could be done either through structural changes to the layout of the online system, which would require more technical expertise than I currently possess, or through more explicit instructions about commenting on peer work.

**Next Steps**

Throughout this process, I have remained committed to the idea that problem-based learning, combined with purposeful reflections, is an effective way to develop adaptive expertise in students. This is particularly important for students studying anthropological methods because the unpredictability of working in a natural laboratory setting demands flexibility and creative problem solving. However, in retrospect, I think I could have taken this approach even further. I think I too fell victim to the trap of trying to ‘cover the content.’ Perhaps my course would have been even more effective if I had simply presented students with a series of problems throughout the semester and allowed them to determine their outside readings for themselves. Of course, that is not to say that students should be completely let loose, but I could provide them with a list of suggested readings as resources to support their own inquiries.
I would consider this a successful attempt at an exploratory project, but I need to be more conscious of aligning my teaching tools and my data assessment during the next phase of this investigation. The next time I have the opportunity to teach this class, I will most likely rework some of the online reflection prompts so that they can be evaluated using the deductive scheme borrowed from Bloom’s taxonomy. I will also rephrase the prompts for reflections three, four, and six to more directly address the issues of comprehension, synthesis, and evaluation. An important goal of this course is to foster critical thinking in my students, and I need a better assessment device that starts measuring their development from the very first day of the semester.

I also need to be more conscious of analyzing my data throughout the semester. Many of the in-class reflections and assessment techniques addressed dimensions of critical thinking, and could have been subjected to the same deductive analysis as the online forum posts, but I generally commented upon and returned these documents without analyzing them first. I found that it is easy to have good intentions about assessing student learning at the beginning and end of the semester, but easy to lose sight of those goals during the fast pace of academic life during the semester itself.

What I’ve Learned from the Teagle Collegium

One of the most beneficial aspects of the Teagle Collegium was the interdisciplinary nature of our discussions. Our group was composed of anthropologists and biologists as well as graduate students from communication and culture. Sometimes there would be clear divisions between the disciplines, and at other times there would be schisms within disciplinary groups. Early in our interactions, we had an intense conversation about whether it was more important to foreground content or process (see Bransford et al. 2000:144). We also disagreed on whether or not it was necessary to build a base of content knowledge before students could be expected to think like someone in the discipline. This conversation stayed with me. My initial inclination is to say that
process, or thinking like an anthropologist, is far more important than content. Once the student has cultivated the ability to think like an anthropologist, it is fairly easy for them to build their content knowledge. However, I acknowledge teaching anthropology is greatly facilitated by students having a baseline understanding of general concepts like cultural relativism, ethnocentrism, and ethnography. Perhaps the most important thing I gained from participating in the collegium is becoming more comfortable with my own uncertainties. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is a relatively young field, and we are continually discovering new things about best practices and how students learn. The beauty of the collegium is that it introduces new teachers to the process of identifying problems or bottlenecks, proposing solutions, and testing the results of those innovations. I believe that treating bottlenecks as opportunities to learn something new about teaching and learning reduces the anxiety and frustration instructors feel when they encounter disconnects between their goals and their students’ performance. This approach is something I intend to cultivate throughout my career as a teacher.
References

Angelo, Thomas A., and K. Patricia Cross

Bos, Nathan, and N. Sadat Shami


Delisle, Robert
  1997 How to Use Problem-Based Learning in the Classroom. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Design.

Lin, Xiaodong, et al.
Appendix A – Course Syllabus

Instructor: Lauren Miller Griffith (lem2@indiana.edu)
Meetings: T/Th 1-2:15 in BH 011
Office Hours: Wednesday 10am-1pm in SB 348

Anth E302: Lab in Ethnographic Methods

This course will prepare students to design and conduct an original ethnographic research project, whether domestic or international. By the end of this course, students will be able to select and implement appropriate methodologies based on the unique demands of their research question. This involves five components, each of which will be addressed in this course:

6. Identify a research question
7. Conduct a literature search
   a. About the chosen geographic area
   b. About the research question
8. Think about the logistics of working in a given community
9. Select a methodology
10. Implement the methodology

Students will select a research question that addresses an international issue or community at the outset of the semester.¹ The course will introduce students to the various components of ethnographic research. Students will practice ethnographic methods in-class and as part of their homework. All homework assignments will be related to the research question selected at the outset. The class will culminate in a

¹ Exceptions will be made for students wishing to do a local service project, but this project must be defined, approved by me, and contact must be made with the target organization by the 3rd class meeting of the semester.
viable research proposal that could be used as the basis of a capstone project, Fulbright proposal, etc.

**Expectations:** I have incorporated a number of active learning techniques into the lesson plans for this class because I believe that you learn better when you are engaged in the material and not a passive consumer of knowledge. To make the most of this format, you must put energy into class preparation. I appreciate your feedback on this format. I also demand a civil classroom. Please remember common courtesies such as turning off cell phones and adopting a professional demeanor in all of our interactions.

**Late Policy:** All due dates for exams and projects have been given to you on this document. If you miss an exam due to a university excused absence, a make-up exam will be administered in a timely manner. Documentation is required. I recognize that you have many demands on your time as college students and sometimes there are extenuating circumstances that interfere with your schoolwork. Barring emergencies, any request for an extension must be made at least one week ahead of the scheduled deadline. The granting of extensions is at the instructor’s discretion. If I feel an extension is warranted, you will agree in writing to the revised due date. You will be docked 5 points per day for all late assignments.

**Academic Misconduct:** You are responsible for your own behavior and I will follow the procedures outlined in the student handbook in any cases of academic dishonesty. See below for the IU policy on plagiarism:

3. **Plagiarism.**
Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else’s work, including the work of other students, as one’s own. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged, unless the information is common knowledge. What is considered “common knowledge” may differ from course to course.

a. A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, opinions, theories, formulas, graphics, or pictures of another person without acknowledgment.

b. A student must give credit to the originality of others and acknowledge an indebtedness whenever:
   1. Directly quoting another person’s actual words, whether oral or written;
   2. Using another person’s ideas, opinions, or theories;
   3. Paraphrasing the words, ideas, opinions, or theories of others, whether oral or written;
   4. Borrowing facts, statistics, or illustrative material; or
   5. Offering materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgment.
Grading

Participation (10%)

This will be determined on the basis of written in-class assignments such as warm-ups, minute papers, short responses, surveys, etc. These written assignments are useful for clarifying your own thinking and to help me gauge your understanding of various topics. Grades will be all or nothing.

Oncourse Reflections (10%)

Periodically, you will be asked to post a reflection on Oncourse under the Forum tab. These assignments are meant to: 1) deepen your engagement with course content on a personal level and 2) help generate ideas for your final research proposal. Your reflection will be graded on the basis of completeness, not on content.

Assignments (40%)

Throughout the semester, you will complete various assignments that give you hands-on experience with the different methods used by anthropologists. You will be given a grading rubric for most assignment as a guide for my expectations. Any assignment without a rubric will be graded on the basis of completion.

Research Question – Due 1/14
Annotated Bibliography – Due 1/19
Concept Map – Due 1/21
Living and Researching Abroad – Due 1/26
Field Notes – Due 2/4
Photography Assignment – Due 2/16
Survey Instrument – Due 2/25
Interview with a Key Informant – Due 3/9
Literature Review – Due 4/6
Content Analysis Codes – Due 4/20

Midterm exam (20%) – March 11th
Exam will be taken in-class and will take the form of short essays.

Research Proposal (20%)

This is the culmination of various written assignments proposed throughout the semester and takes the place of a final exam.

Required Texts

Bernard, H. Russell

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene Nagy, and Patricia Leavy, eds.
2004 Approaches to Qualitative Research: A Reader on Theory and Practice. New York: Oxford University Press.

Other readings will be available via Oncourse under the resources tab.
Lauren Miller Griffith – Course Portfolio – Spring 2010

Note: You will often find it helpful to bring these readings to class.

Weekly Schedule
T 1/12 Course Introduction
   Readings Due: None
   Work Due: None
Th 1/14 Introduction to Library Research (meet in main library lobby)
   Readings Due:
   1. Mary George: The Elements of Library Research (Oncourse)
   2. Bernard Chapter 4
   Work Due: Research Question
T 1/19 Literature Reviews
   Readings Due: Pink
   Work Due: Annotated Bibliography
Th 1/21 Graduate Student Round Table
   Readings Due: Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research (in A to QR)
   Work Due: Concept Map
T 1/26 Participant Observation
   Readings Due:
   1. On the Native’s Point of View by Clifford Geertz (Oncourse)
   2. Bernard Chapter 13
   Work Due: Living and Researching Abroad
Th 1/28 Field Notes
   Readings Due: Bernard Chapter 14
   Work Due: None
T 2/2 In Class Activity – Participant Observation
   Readings Due: Ethnography and Participant Observation by Paul Atkinson & Martyn Hammersley in Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry
   Work Due: Oncourse Forum Post
Th 2/4 Participant Observation Debriefing
   Readings Due: None
   Work Due: Field Notes
T 2/9 Visual Methods
   Readings Due: Chapter 14 of Visual Anthropology (Oncourse)
   Work Due: None
Th 2/11 Visual Methods [Meet in Mathers Museum Lobby]
   Readings Due: Photographs within the Sociological Research Project by Jon Prosser and Dona Schwartz (A to QR)
   Work Due: None
2/16 Visual Methods Debriefing
   Readings Due: None
   Work Due: Photography Assignment
2/18 Survey
   Readings Due: Bernard Chapter 10
Work Due: Oncourse post

2/23 In-Class Activity: Survey
Readings Due: None
Work Due:
1. Oncourse post
2. Bring 20 copies of your survey to class

2/25 Sampling
Readings Due: Bernard Chapters 6 & 8
Work Due: Survey Instrument

3/2 Interviewing
Readings Due: Depth Interviewing by Miller and Crabtree (A to QR)
Work Due: Oncourse Post

3/4 In-Class Activity: Interviewing
Readings Due: Bernard Chapter 9 [except pp.232-239]
Work Due: None

3/9 Interviewing Debriefing
Readings Due: None
Work Due: Interview summary

3/11 Midterm Exam

3/16 Spring Break, No Class

3/18 Spring Break, No Class

3/23 Navigating the Internal Review Board
Readings Due: Designing Funded Qualitative Research, J. Morse (Oncourse)
Work Due: Oncourse Forum Post

3/25 Digital Ethnography (Guest lecture via Skype)
Readings Due: TBA
Work Due: None

3/30 Digital Ethnography
Readings Due: Introducing Online Methods by Mann and Stewart (Ato QR)
Work Due: None

4/1 Focus Groups
Readings Due:
1. Focus Groups by David L. Morgan (A to QR)
2. Bernard pp.232-239
Work Due: None

4/6 In-Class Activity: Focus Groups
Readings Due: None
Work Due: Literature review section for final proposal

4/8 No Class – Instructor Attending Conference

4/13 Text Analysis
Readings Due: Bernard Chapter 17
Work Due: Oncourse Forum Post

4/15 In-Class Activity: Text Analysis
Readings Due: None
Work Due: None

4/20 Grounded Theory
  Readings Due: Grounded Theory by Kathy Charmaz (A to QR)
  Work Due: Content Analysis Codes

4/22 Ethics
  Reading Due:
  1. “You Still Takin’ Notes?” by Barrie Thorne (A to QR)
  2. Bernard pp74-78
  Work Due: None

4/27 – Seeking out Research Opportunities
  Readings Due: None
  Work Due: List of research/fieldwork opportunities

4/29 – Where do we go from here: wrap-up, reflection and next steps.
  Readings Due: None
  Work Due: Oncourse Forum Post

Final Research Proposal due by 5pm on 5/5