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Educational anthropology and allied approaches in global perspective

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Abstract Around the world there are a number of approaches to the anthropological study of education, as well as allied approaches rooted in other disciplines like sociology. They share family resemblances, but also vary in the main foci of their studies. This article describes some of the approaches, citing the United States, Mexico, and the United Kingdom as examples. It explains why scholars sometimes fail to recognize the significance of one another's work across national and also disciplinary boundaries, and points out benefits of mutual recognition when it is achieved.

Keywords Anthropology of education · Ethnography · International comparisons · Qualitative research · Sociology of education

Anthropologie der Erziehung und verwandte Ansätze in einer globalen Perspektive

Zusammenfassung Weltweit gibt es etliche Ansätze anthropologisch orientierter Untersuchungen zur Erziehung und verwandte Näherungen, die in anderen Disziplinen wie der Soziologie verortet sind. Sie teilen gemeinsame Grundannahmen, aber sie unterscheiden sich auch durch die Fokussierung der Studien. In diesem Beitrag werden Beispiele aus den USA, Mexiko und dem Vereinigten Königteich vorgestellt. Gezeigt wird, dass nationale und disziplinäre Grenzen dazu führen, dass die Arbeit anderer Wissenschaftlerinnen und Wissenschaftler aus demselben Gebiet

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oft nicht wahrgenommen oder ihre Bedeutung unterschätzt wird. Die Vorteile der wechselseitigen Beachtung und Anerkennung der Arbeiten werden aufgezeigt.

Schlüsselwörter Anthropologie der Erziehung · Ethnographie · Internationale Vergleiche · Qualitative Forschung · Soziologie der Erziehung

1 Introduction

Eras of internationalization or globalization come and go in academia (Schriewer 2004). For example, pan-European exchange flourished during the Renaissance, whereas in 1900 social scientists like Durkheim were developing deliberately national disciplines (Mosbah-Natanson 2008). Today, academic journals that are called "international" seem to signal a new global era, but some critics worry that the "global" label masks what is really dominance by U.S. and UK-based scholars. In this context, I discuss the field of the anthropology of education and allied disciplines as they are practiced in different parts of the world, illustrating family resemblances across nations but also illustrating what is distinctive about local practices differentiated by parent disciplines as well as by nation or language. I argue that although the differences make it valuable for practitioners to know one another's work across national and linguistic boundaries, too often anthropologists of education (especially those of us who work in the United States) fail to give one another's work its proper recognition.

2 Anthropological study of education and allied approaches

Because of the overlap among anthropology of education, qualitative sociology of education and related fields, I refer in this essay to educational anthropology *and allied approaches*, including studies that draw on a similar philosophy and the same methodology, that is, ethnography.

The overlap can be traced to commonality between the parent disciplines, anthropology and sociology. In the United States, anthropology means "the study of humans, past and present" (AAA 2014). The core features of anthropological discourse are attention to the historical (including within the broader discipline the study of human evolution); a comparative approach; a focus on local action and local meaning; a holistic analysis, that is, interpretation of local action and meaning within their broad systemic context; and finally, a focus on the cultural, that is, on the production of symbolic meanings (Levinson and González 2008). Within the study of present-day humans, anthropology's primary methodology is ethnography.

The discipline of anthropology, at least when it focuses on present-day humans, overlaps extensively with the discipline of sociology—to the point that sociology has subsumed anthropology in some countries (Uberoi et al. 2008; Diallo 2011). Sociology is "the study of society" and of "the social lives of people, groups, and society" (ASA 2014). However, anthropologists, too, study the social, while some sociologists study the cultural; similarly, many anthropologists study complex societies (states)

even though states are sometimes thought to be the preserve of sociologists (Silverman 2005). Preferred methodologies distinguish the two disciplines more clearly, since many sociologists use quantitative methods while nearly all anthropologists of present-day humans use qualitative methods. Nonetheless, some sociologists, including those of interest here, also conduct qualitative fieldwork.

In other parts of the world, disciplines that resemble what I call "anthropology" sometimes go by other names (Gerholm and Hannerz 1982); for instance, those that developed from folklore or museum studies are often called "ethnology." Similarly, there are many names for work similar to or allied with the anthropology of education. These include "educational anthropology" and "anthropology and education," as in the U.S. journal *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* and as in Brazil, e.g. Gusmão (2009, cited by Gomes and Gomes 2011); *pædagogisk antropologi* or pedagogical anthropology (Anderson et al. 2011); *ethnologie de l'éducation* (Derouet et al. 1987); and *anthropologie de l'école* (Filiod 2007). One reason for the varied labels is that not all scholars agree on how to define the main object of study: Is it is schooling (*l'école*) in particular, or education broadly defined as any intervention in human learning? And what is the local term which best captures the relevant nuances of "education" broadly defined—*éducation*? *paedagogik*? *Bildung*? Meanwhile, some scholars prefer a label like "ethnography of education" or *l'ethnographie scolaire* (Vienne 2005), identifying with the research methodology ethnography rather than with an academic discipline like anthropology or sociology.[1] Departments of anthropology in the English-speaking world have rarely hired educational specialists, who more often work in faculties of education, which may explain the looseness of their disciplinary affiliation (Riehl 2001; Delamont 2011).

In Germany (if I dare, as someone who does not read German, suggest a view from the outside), work within the scope of this essay seems to belong to least two traditions. There is *Anthropologie der Erziehung* (Wulf 2001), sometimes called *pädagogische Anthropologie*, which is inspired by philosophical anthropology of education, by U.S. cultural anthropology and by French studies of mentalités (compare Mietzner et al. 2007). There is also *Ethnographische Forschung in der Erziehungswissenschaft*, which seems to place less emphasis on anthropology and more emphasis on the methodologies of ethnographic fieldwork (e.g. Friebertshäuser 1997, as cited by Zinnecker 2000).

3 Family resemblances across ethnographic approaches to education

As their varied labels suggest, these approaches to studying education are not identical. However, all of them share certain core features or family resemblances—that is, they are "connected by a series of overlapping similarities," even if "no one feature is common to all" (Wittgenstein 1945, § 67). The core features concern the research topic, the philosophical orientation to research and, as mentioned, the methodology.

First regarding their topic, all are concerned with education broadly defined, often (although not exclusively) with schooling in particular, and within that realm often (although not exclusively) with questions of equity in schooling. As I will note, some anthropologists of education examine learning outside of school. However, most

practitioners in the field focus on schooling, as sometimes made explicit by labels like *anthropologie de l'école* ("anthropology of schooling") or *l'ethnographie scolaire* ("school ethnography"). In addition, ethnographers of schooling around the world usually study education "at home," even in countries where other kinds of anthropologists usually conduct fieldwork "abroad."[2] Only a minority of educational anthropologists conduct research "abroad," and those who do usually come from countries with current or former colonies or with deep engagement in international development, such as the United States, France, Denmark, and Japan. Moreover, anthropologists and other ethnographers studying schooling at home usually study "excluded" groups (van Zanten 2011). This is not surprising, given roots of the field in anthropology, which studied colonized peoples; in sociology, with its early focus on the urban poor; and in ethnology or folklore, with its emphasis on peasants and ethnic minorities.

Second, in their general philosophical orientation, the scholars in this field tend to use an interpretive perspective; that is, they presume that reality is socially constructed and that it is therefore important to understand just how people make meaning of the situations in which they participate. This philosophy encourages scholars, when they study the excluded and marginalized in schools, to embrace cultural relativism and argue against deficit theories, which would blame students or their families for school failure.

Third, scholars in this field use a common research methodology, ethnography (an exception being work in philosophical anthropology, as in some pieces in Mietzner et al. 2007). Ethnography is a methodology that "involves long-term engagement with those studied in order to understand their cultures; uses multiple methods of generating data, and recognises the centrality of the researcher in the research process" (Troman 2010). Rather than a set of recipe-like methods, ethnography is a philosophy guiding research that seeks to understand "local contexts and local meaning" (van Zanten 2011, p. 317), not to predict or to develop general laws of behavior. The primary method of data collection is usually long-term participant observation, often supplemented by informal or semi-structured interviews; some also include the analysis of "permanent recordings of everyday life" as ethnographic research (e.g. Delamont and Atkinson 1995).

4 Varieties of anthropology and ethnography of education

As suggested, the practices discussed here vary in part because they grew from and ally with different academic disciplines. The main research themes also vary from country to country, as I will illustrate in this section with three cases, the United States, Mexico and the United Kingdom.

Again, the approaches in all three countries share some underlying common characteristics. All tend to focus on schooling, although I will note studies of education in other settings in Mexico. Most of the ethnographers in all three countries study education "at home," although a minority of anthropologists of education in the United States conduct research elsewhere. All are concerned with equity issues, and all avoid deficit theories. All rely on ethnography research. Within that common framework,

comparing the United States and Mexico illustrates differences that arise from the explicit application of anthropology to education in settings with very different histories and social structures, one part of the global "North" and one part of the global "South." Meanwhile, comparing the United Kingdom to the United States highlights the distinction between sociological and anthropological approaches.

4.1 The United States

In the United States, ethnographic studies of education developed from two different sources. On the one hand, U.S. anthropology of education grew from cultural anthropology and specifically from the study of cultural transmission within the culture and personality school, spurred by Margaret Mead's 1928 *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Beginning in the mid twentieth century, U.S. pioneers like George and Louise Spindler (2000) and Murray and Rosalie Wax expanded their interest to include not only the transmission of culture but also inequalities in the schooling of different ethnic populations within the United States. Soon young researchers who were attracted by this approach, some of them former schoolteachers, established a new subdiscipline, an anthropology of schooling, aiming to use cultural relativism to dismantle deficit explanations of school failure. On the other hand, ethnography of education also emerged during the 1960s from the post-war generation of the "Chicago School" of sociology (Becker 1999). Chicago's "symbolic interactionists" saw fieldwork as essential to understanding human behavior (Rock 2001), and some turned their attention to fieldwork in educational settings (Becker et al. 1961; Becker et al. 1968 [1995]).

Today in the United States, ethnography is popular as a research method not only among the anthropologically trained, but also among sociologists, linguists and other educational researchers. The field is large (with about 800 members of the Council on Anthropology and Education, a branch of the American Anthropological Association) and its scholars address many different research topics (Levinson and Pollack 2011). However, outsider observers notice a particular focus on questions of social justice and school failure, or the failure of schools, among ethnic and racial minorities (Delamont and Atkinson 1995; Jacquin 2006; Delamont 2011). In line with the interest in social justice, in recent years critical race theory (e.g. Parker et al. 1999) has become an influential perspective, and participatory action research, particularly among youth of colour, a valued method among scholars in this field.

4.1.1 Mexico

Mexico is another country where, as in the United State, ethnographic studies of education have strong roots in anthropology but also draw from other disciplines. In the Mexican case, however, history is the strongest disciplinary influence, for in Mexico, anthropology has always had strong ties to history (Rockwell 2009). Sociolinguistics and discourse analysis are also important, as is neo-Vygotskian cultural and historical activity theory and, for some scholars, social history and studies of *la culture écrite* from France (Rockwell and González 2011, p. 71).

Anthropological studies of education began in Mexico in the 1930s with the development of *indiginesta* projects by the government; however, the field has expanded and taken new directions since about 1990 (Rockwell and González 2011, p. 71). Today there are anthropologists and other ethnographers practicing throughout the country, including several at UNAM and at the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional. One of the most important centres is the DIE (Departamento de Investigaciones Educativas) of CINVESTAV, Instituto Politécnico Nacional. There Elsie Rockwell and her colleagues have built a rich collection of studies of classrooms and schools and of the education of rural and indigenous students (Rockwell 1998). As in the United States, they are focusing on disenfranchised students, but in Mexico that means focusing on the majority of the population rather than on a racialized minority (Rockwell 2002). Rockwell and her colleagues have also been engaged in building networks of qualitative research with colleagues in other parts of Latin America (Batallán 1998).

Several themes emerge in the Mexican work that do not completely overlap with U.S. emphases. For example, whereas in the United States many more ethnographers study schooling as opposed to studying learning outside of school, in Mexico there is a strong current of research on everyday learning processes in home and community, inspired by neo-Vygotskian perspectives and mostly focused on indigenous families (e.g. Paradise and Rogoff 2009). And when Mexican ethnographers turn their attention to classroom interaction, they include university classrooms, which U.S. scholars have neglected (e.g. Candela 2010). Anthropologists of education in Mexico also pay significant attention to teachers and their work. Importantly, they conceive of the topic as "*el trabajo docente*, the work of teaching," stressing "the collective, negotiated, historically constructed nature of this work, to be understood on its own terms, rather than with reference to prescriptive or evaluative models" (for example Mercado 1991; Rockwell and González 2011, p. 75).

4.2 The United Kingdom

The United Kingdom offers a different case, one in which the early influence of anthropology faded quickly in favour of sociology (Mills 2012). Anthropologist Max Gluckman at the University of Manchester encouraged ethnography "at home," and under his influence D. H. Hargreaves and Colin Lacey studied schools in Britain in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Goodman 2001). Eventually scholars from Manchester, who found sociological concepts helpful to analysing social class dynamics, left for departments of sociology or faculties of education—and no longer identified as anthropologists (Delamont 2011; Mills 2012). At the same time, the Chicago School and feminist scholarship inspired qualitative studies of classroom interaction (Atkinson et al. 1988). Some scholars disseminated the symbolic interactionist approach and ethnographic studies through textbooks written for the Open University throughout Britain (e.g. Hammersley and Woods 1984; Hargreaves and Woods 1984) and beyond (see Jociles 2007). A generation later, former Open University faculty members were among the founders of an ethnography and education interest group within the European Educational Research Association and of the journal *Ethnography and Education*.

Perhaps because of its sociological roots, ethnographers of education in the United Kingdom consistently attend to social class and very often to gender more than do U.S. ethnographers (Delamont and Atkinson 1995; Gordon et al. 2001). However, since the rise of cultural studies, U.K. ethnographers also pay attention to cultural processes, as in the journal *Ethnography and Education* (Troman 2010), and some have turned their attention to race and ethnicity (for example Gillborn 1997). British ethnographers of education also tend to publish more on methodology than their U.S. counterparts (compare Delamont and Atkinson 1995), perhaps to justify qualitative research in a discipline that includes so much quantitative work. Also, true to their affiliation with sociology, most ethnographers of schooling in the United Kingdom conduct research at home in spite of Britain's colonial history.

4.3 Elsewhere

Examining ethnographic studies of education in other parts of the world reveals similar patterns of variation by parent discipline as well as by nation. For example, in Denmark, anthropologists and other ethnographers tend to focus on sociability within classrooms and on what constitutes a good childhood both at home and abroad, drawing heavily from childhood studies (Anderson et al. 2011). In France and francophone Europe, an ethnography of schooling has developed within sociology of education (Raveaud and Draelants 2011), while a few ethnologists, heirs of the folklore tradition, have studied learning outside of school (for example Le Wita 1988) and a few anthropologists have looked at education abroad and at home (Filiod 2007). In Japan, sociologists and sometimes psychologists have conducted ethnographic studies of schools at home, sometimes looking at daily interactions among children and teachers and sometimes at problems like burn out among teachers, while the few anthropologists who have studied education have often focused on students from minority groups (Minoura 2011). In Central European states, ethnographic studies have to date been strongly associated with Roma Studies (Eröss 2011)—just as in China, where they tend to be associated with research on ethnic minorities (Ouyang 2011). Similarly, in Italy and Spain, both of which had seen an older tradition of philosophical anthropology of education, ethnographers today turn their attention to the education of Roma students and of the new immigrants (Jociles 2007; Gobbo 2011). In Argentina, too, anthropologists of education examine the experience of immigrant students but they also warn of the danger of describing those experiences in terms of a reified notion of "cultural diversity" (Neufeld and Thisted 1999; Neufeld 2011).

4.4 The variation and its value

In short, the terrain of ethnographic research on education is a patchwork map, sectioned off by disciplinary boundaries as well as national boundaries. In spite of the family resemblances across the approaches described here, ethnographers of education in different locations on this map do not simply conduct parallel studies of the same topics and problems in different languages. Rather, to "travel" from one community to another across this terrain affords the opportunity to see afresh, to wake up our sense of perception by trying on other lenses. What new solutions to education's

pressing problems would U.S. ethnographers see, for example, if they reconceived inequity as a problem for the majority of the world's children, as in Mexico, or paid more attention to the creation of "good childhoods" in classroom communities, as in Denmark? What would U.S. anthropologists of education gain by paying more attention to rituals and mimesis, as some of their German colleagues do, and what would German anthropologists gain by looking more closely at what U.S. colleagues call the "racialization" of minorities?

5 Mutual recognition

Unfortunately, ethnographers of education often miss opportunities to see afresh because we fail to recognize the work done outside our own communities. By "fail to recognize" I mean both fail to notice and fail to appreciate. In the first sense, scholars are often unaware of the existence of most research done in other countries. Scholars at the U.S. and British centers are especially parochial in their reading (Gerholm and Hannerz 1982; Hannerz 2008); however, asymmetry of citation systems can also mean that, for scholars outside the English-speaking North, research in nearby countries or even in their own country becomes invisible when it is not noted in English-language citation indexes (Larsson 2006). Even when scholars are aware of one another's research, however, they can fail to recognize its full significance, that is, fail to appreciate its contribution. Failure to appreciate can result not just from misreading the unfamiliar rhetorical structure of an argument (Flowerdew 2008), but also from failing to appreciate the substance of a study, specifically, failing to appreciate either its social "importance" or its intellectual "interest" (Anderson-Levitt 2014; Lillis and Curry 2010).

Scholars can fail to recognize the "importance" of a study when they do not understand its social, historical or political context. As a simple example, unfamiliarity with a nation's school system makes it more difficult to interpret a piece of educational research. As a more complex example, outside readers (like Delamont 2011) may marvel why U.S. anthropologists of education write so much about "race" because they do not know first-hand how central the race concept has been in U.S. history and current events.

Meanwhile, ethnographers of education can fail to see a study as "interesting" because of unfamiliarity with on-going conversations about the intellectual issues at hand. An academic discipline is like a conversation that takes place through citation and debate within published articles and books, but also through unpublished documents like peer reviews of manuscripts and grants, as well as through oral discussions like presentations at conferences or meetings to determine a colleague's promotion (Lillis and Curry 2006, p. 29). Over time, within such conversations a single word (like "phenomenology" or "field") or a single name (like "Goffman" or "Bourdieu") can come to evoke a world of meaning for those who have been participating in the conversations. Scholars from outside the discipline, however, can easily miss such subtle reference, so clear to insiders, and thus will fail to grasp the entire significance of an argument.

Even within what is presumed to be the "same" discipline, boundaries around national institutions create distinct conversations. For example, the conversations in nationally organized disciplinary associations or in nationally structured grant-giving agencies can develop along distinct trajectories. Language barriers further channel ethnographers of education into distinct conversations. Within a discipline within a nation, the local discipline operates as a "speech community" or "discourse community" with norms for the usage of one or more languages (Curry and Lillis 2004, p. 665). For example, Scandinavian ethnographers understand English and the Scandinavian languages but are no longer exposed to French (or German) (Larsson 2006, p. 191). Thus it is not surprising that we find somewhat different conversations developing among ethnographies of education within communities simultaneously defined by disciplines, national institutions and linguistic norms.

5.1 Toward greater mutual recognition

What might be done to improve mutual recognition of educational anthropology and allied work across these boundaries? As a simple step, some journal editors rely on the international members of their editorial boards to bring attention to the significance of manuscripts that might otherwise be underestimated. More dramatically and hypothetically, pairs of journals could commit to exchanges of articles across national boundaries, each journal publishing a manuscript that has been peer reviewed by the other. The latter solution would require funds from the journal's professional organization or a funding agency to translate the manuscripts and perhaps to subside the cost of publishing extra pages.

Reviewers and other readers can educate themselves about the contexts within which particular ethnographic conversations make sense. They can start by subscribing to electronic table of content alerts—for example, from French-language journals at portals like Cairn (http://www.cairn.info/) and the Centre for Open Electronic publishing (http://www.revues.org/), or from Spanish journals at the government-sponsored Repositorio Español de Ciencia y Tecnología. However, because monolingual U.S. readers must rely on English-language abstracts, a more dramatic step would be for faculties of education to encourage multilingualism in the United States, for example, by reinstating foreign language requirements in doctoral programs in education.

Academic journals could assist readers who are trying to read more widely by publishing reviews of the literature that synthesize research from different countries, mapping out the context of nationally important topics and current disciplinary discussions. Journals might regularly commission such reviews, which would require a financial commitment for the required extra pages. However, faculty committees and universities would also have to modify tenure and promotion criteria to reward good, analytic literature reviews as they reward original research articles.

Finally, paradoxical as it seems when the Internet makes research more accessible (and when global warming encourages us to reduce air travel), scholars need to continue to meet face-to-face across national boundaries. Internet contacts cannot substitute for face-to-face exchanges unless they build on previously established personal relationships. Ample funding for exchanges for scholars and students is critical

to building mutual recognition. International conferences, if adequately funded, can also be structured to facilitate real exchange. As an example, occasional multilingual Inter-American Symposia on Ethnography and Education have been taking place since 1989. Simultaneous translation of plenary talks at the Symposia sets the tone, but more importantly organizers arrange paper presentations to avoid ghettoization by nation, and allow plenty of time for informal mutual interpretation and discussion. Travel subsidies for scholars from the global South are also crucial.

In short, commitment by professional organizations, faculties, accrediting agencies and funders will determine whether, several decades hence, educational anthropology and allied approaches address a wider range of educational questions, and in multiple languages, or whether they further narrow the conversation to topics defined by reviewers and editors in a few English-dominant nations.

Notes

1 The methodology called "ethnography" should not be confused with the academic discipline called "ethnography" in some countries of Central Europe (Erösss 2011).

2 By "home" I mean the country where scholars are employed, no matter what their country of origin.

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