

Introducing anthropology at schools

Global challenges and local strategies

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This is a trying but also exciting period for engaging with past initiatives and future challenges of introducing anthropology into secondary education. The roundtable on “The Teaching of Anthropology in European Secondary Schools”, organized by ANUAC and AISEA during the EASA Conference in Milan (July 2016), was an opportunity to hear about some valuable experiences from different national contexts and to internationalize the initiative further.

I take the opportunity of this *Anuac* Forum to sketch how the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA, www.wcaanet.org) has approached this issue over the past two years, a period during which I served as WCAA Chair¹. Also, in order to contribute to the dissemination of innovative local initiatives in the field, I give the example of an extracurricular program in anthropology for secondary school students that has been developed since 1994 in the Petnica Science Center, Serbia.

The WCAA became involved with the issue of secondary education in anthropology when the UK’s Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) announced that Anthropology as an optional A-level subject, introduced in the UK in 2010, would be terminated by 2018. Informed about this decision in

1. This is the period between October 2014 and June 2016.



February 2015, the WCAA Organizing Committee, with the approval of David Shankland, Director of the Royal Anthropological Institute (which had initiated the A-level Anthropology Program), wrote a letter to the AQA board in support of the Program². This action was taken in coordination with the Executive Committee of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES, www.iuaes.org). At the same time, both organizations assisted in distributing a petition, “Save Anthropology A-level” that had been initiated by a group of UK colleagues, and sent support letters to add to the then growing number of statements from other anthropological associations and eminent scholars. WCAA and IUAES also wrote a joint letter to *The Guardian* newspaper to raise public awareness and to solicit support for the same cause in the UK. We received a bureaucratic explanation from AQA and no response from *The Guardian*.

This situation inspired a wide and dynamic discussion among WCAA delegates (all presidents of national anthropology associations) and WCAA Advisory Board members. The discussion included exchanges of experiences from diverse national contexts on past and present initiatives, and on successes and failures in introducing anthropology into secondary education. For example, we learned that Norway has been successful in introducing and keeping alive such a program, that Portugal had introduced such a program but then abandoned it, that Cameroon has anthropology in teacher training colleges as well as in public and private secondary schools. These were only a few such cases in which anthropology has been nationally accepted as a secondary school course. Many more examples indicated that there had been no initiative, that there were those that had failed from the very start or those that, despite being pushed through legislation had failed to be realized. I thought that this provided an important collection of experiences to start with and to develop in a wider international setting in which WCAA could offer an adequate communication platform.

It also became evident that this potential should be integrated into the WCAA’s major project – the Global Survey of Anthropological Practice (GSAP), which had been inaugurated at the WCAA Biennial Meeting in Taipei (October 2014). Initiated and developed by Greg Acciaioli assisted by three other task group members, Vesna Vučinić, Chandana Mathur, and Lorne Holyoak, the project’s purpose is to collect information from all WCAA member associations concerning how anthropology is practiced in various national contexts. The aim is to develop a survey questionnaire that gathers information about the state of affairs in different countries regarding: (a) edu-

2. AQA is an independent education charity and the largest accreditor of academic qualifications taught in schools and colleges in UK.

cational, research, and applied anthropology activities; and (b) anthropologists' employment, status, criteria for advancement etc., along now with the addition of (c) non-university education.

The first phase of the GSAP was reported on at the WCAA Global Survey of Anthropological Practice Symposium, organized at the IUAES Inter-congress in Dubrovnik (May 2016). One of the symposium's five sessions, devoted to "Teaching Anthropology Outside the Traditional Anthropology Program", included papers by Paul Nchoji Nkwi, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, and Vesna Vučinić respectively focused on secondary education experiences with anthropology in Cameroon, Norway, and Serbia³.

These papers and the presentations at the 2016 EASA roundtable revealed three major avenues that may be pursued in struggling for anthropology's presence in secondary education. One is to try to introduce "Anthropology" as a subject in its own right, first as an elective and then possibly as a mandatory course. The second is to fight for the right of anthropologists to teach other (existing) secondary school social science courses, such as history or geography. This would allow the introduction of an anthropological perspective into non-anthropology courses which could (possibly) be more beneficial than having non-anthropologists teaching anthropology. The third avenue is to experiment with different modes of teaching, either in secondary schools that agree to be try-out cases or by establishing specific programs outside the regular secondary school educational system.

In what follows I present a unique educational program in anthropology that is being realized within the Petnica Science Center, Serbia (Istraživačka stanica Petnica, www.petnica.rs). Before doing that, however, I must mention a few facts about the institutional presence of anthropology education in Serbia. To date in higher education, anthropology is represented and taught only in the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade. There, a Department of Ethnology was founded in 1906, and renamed Department of Ethnology and Anthropology in 1990 (Naumović 2008; Nedeljković 2014). At present, the Department has 16 full-time faculty and 9 part-time junior faculty involved in teaching BA, MA and PhD programs.

Initiatives for instituting our discipline in secondary education have reached as far as formally allowing ethnologists/anthropologists to teach "Civil Education", an elective course, in vocational secondary schools. In practice, however, this principle is not being realized, primarily because the

3. P. Nchoji Nkwi, "The Teaching of Cultural Anthropology in Cameroon Public and Private Schools: The Challenge of an Emerging Society"; T. Hylland Eriksen, "A Small Drop of Anthropology: Experiences from Norwegian Secondary School"; V. Vučinić Nešković, "Challenges and Opportunities for Secondary Education in Anthropology: An Innovative Education Program in Socio-Cultural Anthropology in Serbia".

already employed staff teaching social sciences (e.g. sociology, geography or history) is required to take on this subject's content as a means to ensure they have a full teaching load. Other than that, a few ethnology/anthropology graduates are employed at secondary music and ballet schools, where they teach "Ethnology" or "Ethnomusicology".

Despite this grim context of secondary school anthropology within Serbia's regular educational system, there is one highlight. It is at the Petnica Science Centre, an institution for innovative scientific education that offers, among others, an alternative year-round course in anthropology. Situated in a picturesque village near the town of Valjevo (western Serbia), the Petnica Science Center offers programs in 15 different natural and social/human science disciplines. Founded in 1982 as an independent nonprofit organization, the Center has become the largest and most active of such institutions in Southeast Europe. In its early days, it was financially supported by the firms and institutions of former Yugoslavia. Since the early 1990s, it has come to be funded primarily by the Serbian Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, by other Serbian ministries and, to a small extent, by various domestic and international funding organizations. Starting with a few small buildings, it has been developed into a relatively large complex, equipped with boarding facilities (a 100 bed dormitory with restaurant), a library (with 40,000 books and journals), laboratories, and a teaching resource center (with classrooms and modern electronic equipment). Participants in the Center's programs are chosen from among the best and most motivated secondary school students in Serbia and surrounding countries, all of them having been recommended by their teachers to attend the Petnica Science Center's programs. The basic concept is to involve each participant in a small research project and to take them through all its phases, starting from theoretical inquiry, methodology, actual research and writing, to publishing their work.

Under the initiative of an Archaeology Program coordinator, and with the support of the Center's director, in 1994 the Petnica Science Center board introduced a Socio-Cultural Anthropology Program. They invited two younger members of the University of Belgrade's Department of Ethnology and Anthropology (Vesna Vučinić and Slobodan Naumović) to conceptualize and organize the first course. The course was structured in terms of the Petnica Science Center's general framework, which comprised a cycle of four seminars, occurring each winter, spring, summer, and fall.

The Program starts with the winter seminar (January-March) to which the selected applicants are invited. Students attend a week long seminar comprising an intensive set of lectures and discussions. The Program coordina-

tors choose topics that are most representative of the contemporary discipline, and invite their colleagues from academic and research institutions as lecturers. The four-day spring seminar (April-May) involves students who have expressed interest in continuing with the course and teaches them basic anthropological research methods. During that time participants start to define their own individual research topics, helped by the Program coordinators.

The summer seminar (June-August) lasts about two weeks and is devoted to students realizing their individual research projects, assisted by the Program coordinators and undergraduate anthropology students recruited for the purpose. Some projects have assumed that the students have undertaken fieldwork in their hometowns beforehand, while others have required fieldwork in Petnica village or the nearby town of Valjevo. Papers analyzing the ethnographic data are finalized in the coming months with the best being published in the Center's journal, *Petničke sveske*.

Finally, the fall seminar is organized to focus on a particular new topic based on the major themes of the students' completed research and according to the Program coordinators' interests. In the first year of the program, we chose to work on "Urban Anthropology" and "The Use of Tradition in Contemporary Political Campaigns in Serbia" as the main themes for the summer research seminar, while the fall seminar was devoted to "Visual Anthropology".

In subsequent years, colleagues who led the Program in Socio-Cultural Anthropology chose various other themes. They also divided the participants into two groups – beginners and the continuing students, with the second group being permitted to pick a new research topic or to continue working on their previous topic.

Since the Petnica Science Center has a potential to diversify and extend its programs to primary school pupils and to teachers, as well as to international participants, there is scope for further development of the Program.

What I have outlined above provides examples of failure, success, and new experiments in secondary level anthropology courses in different national contexts. But it indicates clearly that there is scope, in the present excitingly turbulent and uncertain time, for anthropologists to position our discipline in secondary school curriculums. While we heard details, during the 2016 EASA workshop, of why the Anthropology A-level in England and Wales was perceived as unsuccessful by its financiers, we also heard how it may very soon gain new life in Scotland. In addition, we learned about the University of Poznań's Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology's trial efforts to teach anthropology in all four grades of a local secondary school in

Poland. In Italy anthropologists have succeeded in pushing through a law that enables anthropologists to teach social sciences at secondary schools. In the USA, the AAA's Anthropology Education Task Force has produced a report on the possibilities for action in various educational contexts⁴. This is all good news.

The main recommendation for our future efforts could be that we should work from both ends – at global level (in order to make a coordinated international framework for social action) as well as at national level (in order to influence educational reforms and changes in current legislations). However, we should not forget the very local, grassroots initiatives and opportunities which provide spaces for experiments that may be good models for others. Another recommendation is that we need to create a pool of the existing text-books and visual materials that are presently used in secondary education in anthropology.

It is clear that we need to continue to exchange our experiences so that we can learn from one another. To achieve that, we need to organize a large international workshop or conference that focuses specifically on non-university anthropology education, with the aim of enabling synergy between global, national and local strategies.

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4. The report may be accessed at <http://s3.amazonaws.com/rdcms-aaa/files/production/public/Anthropology-Education-Task-Force-Report-2015-FINAL2.pdf> (accessed November 1, 2016).