

## **Three, Two, One, Action: Incorporating Video Projects in Class Pedagogy**

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### **Introduction:**

Anthropology lends itself to experiential learning in the classroom setting. Those of you teaching anthropology who are here at the Applied Anthropology conference (and have decided to attend a panel on Engaged Learning) are almost certainly using hands-on activities with your students. These sorts of ethnographic exercises are pedagogically useful because they uncover layers of meaning, rely on inductive reasoning, and allow students to generate theory grounded in the empirical world. Likewise, using video project assignments encourages deep engagement, increases student recall of new knowledge, and links visual cues to memory. Video projects also encourage creativity and teach transferable technological skills. In this panel, we explore the pedagogical praxis of combining ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviewing, with video-making projects to encourage deep student engagement and durable learning. We will end by show clips of a student made film.

Media literacy has been emphasized as important for college students in this “technocultural” age (Jocson 2015, pg. 30). It enhances collaboration, participation, creativity, problem solving, technological literacy, organizational skills, and communication skills (Jocson 2015; Bijmens et al 2006; Willmot et al 2012). Students are motivated by the potential for their work to reach larger audiences through distribution and public presentations (Jocson 2015), and

they are driven by the potential that such work can have on people's attitudes and beliefs on issues of importance to them.

The strengths of anthropological inquiry and film-making amplify each other for a high-impact pedagogical practice. Like student ethnographers, student film-makers must work with unfolding evidence, make editorial choices about what to include and how to represent others, and reflect on their own emotions and perceptions as they plan, film, edit, and present their work (Rabiger 2014). For these reasons, we argue that video-making projects in anthropology classes constitutes a high-impact pedagogical practice that enhances student learning, combining the ethnographic eye, the desire to reflect on lived experiences, and the technological sensibilities of today's college student.

### **Student Process - Arantxa**

In our anthropology classes, we planned, filmed and edited short films as a way of deeply exploring our subject matters while building our technological skills, and we produced videos that could be shared with a wider audience. I will briefly describe the two projects that Professors Block and Sheehan have used, then elaborate on my experience of making one of them.

The first assignment is for Prof. Block's Transnational Anthropology class, where students conduct original research in a semester-long documentary film project that analyzes a particular transnational cultural case study.

The second assignment, which I participated in, was for Prof. Sheehan's Food, Culture and Society course. Our video project explored the significance of food for human life, and emphasized multidisciplinary and holistic understandings of human relationships with food. I will briefly share with you my group's process for making our film, which was on perceptions of

American dietary habits by international students. In our film, we hoped to promote understanding and awareness of the unique views on being healthy from international students in our own communities.

To begin, we conducted participant observation of students in the various food-serving venues on campus to better understand food norms of both American and international students. This helped us gain a grasp of the potential issues to explore in our film, and aided us in developing specific questions to ask during interviews.

Before filming, we watched a training video made by our university's media center, which taught us the basic skills of filming, data storage, and editing. We then did a training session in the media lab, which gave hands on demonstrations of these skills, and also allowed us to practice editing interviews provided by the media center using Final Cut Pro. We also learned about filming b-roll, lighting, camera angles, and how to add stylistic elements to our film. The media center support was invaluable to our process.

After analyzing the responses, working through the video tapes, cutting and pasting clips, and adding music and pictures, the final video was complete. Through our film, we captured the essence of the dining centers, the contemplations students had of their own food practices and home country habits, and the views they had on the American diet and lifestyle. It was evident how taste and appetite preferences form the lived experiences, patterned practices, and associations which govern all our meals: what we prefer and desire to eat, the dialogue about food, how we view food, and our relationships with food. To give some examples, Sebastian, an avid athlete from Austria, emphasized fitness and accordingly ate plenty of vegetables and meats. While his views focused on the physical, Somdatta, from India, emphasized the mental and emotional importance of food; she expressed "happiness," and "feeling" as essential to her

food choices. Food is our daily sustenance; it is a key way of forming bonds, and reflects a culture's values, traditions, preoccupations, and even fears. Could there be a better way to examine culture than through food? This video project helped us bring some of these ideas to life.

### **Acquired Skills - Maddie**

Video projects are useful because they help us to gain a unique set of skills that enhance our understanding of anthropology, and transfer to other areas of our education, both technically and conceptually. We gained a lot of skills and competencies from these projects, but I'll shorten the list down to three things:

First, we gained skills that are essential to our success as students and future employees. These projects required us to plan, organize our data, think across different kinds of materials, and schedule filming and editing well in advance of the deadline. Being able to work in a group and effectively carry out a semester-long project requires a lot of interaction and planning between group members. It also requires a sense of mutual responsibility and accountability.

Second, through this creative process, we improved our communication and presentation skills. We learned how to have open dialogue with people we wanted to learn more from. We had to think ahead about what we wanted our end product to entail, but also think through what kinds of questions would elicit interesting and honest responses from the people we were interviewing. Our interviews not only helped us with our video projects but also gave us the opportunity to interact and talk with people we otherwise rarely encountered. For example, my groupmates and I interviewed a fellow classmate of ours named Jordan about the harmful effects of silence towards injustices and bigotry on our campus. Outside of class I had never spoken

with him, and through this interview he opened my eyes to a perspective that I hadn't even thought about. He described situations where as a student of color at a largely white school, he faced dual pressures of being expected to always speak out against injustices, while also simultaneously having to recognize when to stay silent in order to avoid causing more harm to people facing oppression. It was a powerful exchange for me because he didn't just answer the questions we had for him about diversity and inclusivity, he helped me understand just how complex the issue we were talking about is. We also had the opportunity to present our research both here in Philadelphia, and on our own campus, in public venues and through a medium that is accessible to a range of audiences. Through these processes, we were able to explore a creative mode of ethnographic research, and enhance our presentation skills, while complementing the ideas and theories we are learning about in our classes, and rethinking them in a new form.

Lastly, we gained technological skills that are increasingly desirable in our highly digital world. The filming and editing skills we gained, through the support of our school's media center, helped us understand how to frame the narrative we wanted to tell. In making decisions about which segments to keep and which to cut, where to add music, B-roll, narration, and still photos, we engaged with anthropological skills and concepts that are useful in our studies.

### **Deepened Understanding of Anthropology - Julia**

Anthropology allows us to look at culture in a way that no other social science can. Through research and direct contact with other cultures, it pushes us to challenge our perceptions of ourselves and others. Video projects exemplify this kind of engagement, as they provide a closer look at anthropological concepts and cultural practices, while amplifying some of the issues of representation and reflexivity that anthropologists encounter in their fieldwork. Being able to physically see anthropological concepts and practices in front of one's own eyes is a powerful

way to communicate cultural difference to an audience. In comparison to doing a research paper, video projects allow for greater interpersonal interactions. This medium allows the researcher to interact directly with the people he or she is working with. This allows the researcher to experience the nuanced and immersive approach that anthropology emphasizes, giving students a sense of what fieldwork might feel like. This is vital to the researcher's understanding of what they are studying, as it allows them to make connections between different aspects of their work. Many of the projects, especially for the transnational anthropology class, were focused on social justice issues. Film projects that explored such pertinent issues were able to inspire the researcher, the participants and the viewers to action. This direct contact with social injustice or people who have experienced social injustice is a driving force of motivation to make change. It's much more impactful and thought-provoking to witness something first hand than to hear it from someone else or read about it.

More practically, film projects visually engage students and other audience members as viewers are able to see anthropological concepts directly in front of them. This makes spreading knowledge on research topics much more effective, especially when paired with an event such as our University's Scholarship and Creativity Day, where student research is presented across campus. Students who are visual learners benefit more from video presentations, as videos increase their ability to recall information, and videos are easier to distribute widely in a form that audiences want to watch. When is the last time you convinced all your friends to read one of your papers?

In our increasingly globalizing and changing world, my peers and I see the benefit in supplementing traditional classroom approaches to teaching anthropology with more innovative assignments such as video projects. We find it important to be better preparing students to foster

anthropological skills in more creative, varied, and experiential ways that can communicate important issues – both local and global – to a wide range of audiences, capitalizing on student’s interest in engaging meaningfully with social justice issues and new technologies. Doing projects like this helps us become better equipped to do that.

We are now going to show you a short segment from a previous Transnational Anthropology class.

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