

Annotated Bibliography

Discovering the Other: Study Abroad as Fieldwork

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Among practitioners of study abroad programs, there is an unwritten understanding that crossing cultures is one of the most meaningful educational experiences available to college students. Likewise, the closer this process comes to cultural emersion where the student lives as a participant in the host culture, the more meaningful it is.

Yet even with this understanding and a significant body of literature concerning the psychological¹ and social² effects of crossing cultures, there is seldom a formal structuring of this process as an educational activity in itself. Certainly, study abroad is almost always couched in educational settings. But these settings do not deal directly with the most important aspects of the experience: encountering and understanding a culture different from the home culture of the student.

Perhaps a different approach, one of formalizing the informal cultural learning that takes place during study abroad, will help. Such a process should enable the students to treat the experience as an educational exercise so that the process will reify the understanding that they gain. Instead of waiting to the point of reentry³ to address the effect of crossing cultures, the student could formalize the study abroad experience by approaching it as cross-cultural field research. Students, no matter the circumstances of their educational experience, could be prepared to do fieldwork.

Fieldwork asks the researcher, as far as possible, to share firsthand the environment, problems, background, language, rituals, and social relations of a more-or-less

bounded and specified group of people. The belief is that by means of such sharing, a rich, concrete, complex, and hence truthful account of the social world being studied is possible. (Van Maanen 1988, p. 3)

The goal of cross-cultural fieldwork is to know the “other”: “This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world. . . . To study the institutions, customs, and codes or to study the behavior and mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realizing the substance of their happiness—is, in my opinion, to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man” (Malinowski 1922, p. 25).

Much of the literature used as reference for practitioners in preparing orientations for study abroad students is derived from cross-cultural psychology. It is usually devoted to preparation of students with information about the host culture and analysis of the psychological process of crossing cultures. Although the analysis of self in cultural isolation is a useful exercise, it may be more useful to approach the cross-cultural experience as research.

Fieldwork has several important elements. The first and most significant is living the culture of the people who are being studied.

Fieldwork usually means living with and living like those who are studied. In its broadest, most conventional sense, fieldwork demands the full-time involvement of a researcher over a lengthy period of time and consists mostly of on-going interaction with the human targets of study on their home ground. (Van Maanen 1988, p. 2)

The closer the experience comes to “living the culture,” the greater the potential for learning. “To understand a strange society, the anthropologist has traditionally immersed himself in it, learning, as far as possible, to think, see, feel, and sometimes act as a member of its culture and at the same time as a trained anthropologist from another culture.” (Powdermaker 1996, p. 9)

A second step of fieldwork is to create a record of the interaction. This is traditionally done in descriptive fieldnotes. These notes then

become an archive of empirical data and a reference point for the personal change and development of the fieldworker. Such descriptions are not just a factual account of what was observed. “Rather, such writing involves active processes of interpretation and sense-making: noting and writing down some things as significant, noting but ignoring others as ‘not significant,’ and even missing other possibly significant things altogether.”⁴

The recording of experiences can also take multiple forms: a personal journal as well as actual notes and records of events and observations. However, the key element is that these notes and observations are made with the specific purpose of writing a report that summarizes and analyzes the experience, the third and final stage of fieldwork. This writing up is regarded as the culmination of the experience and the *raison d’être* for pursuing it in the first place. Not unlike the problems of reentry, the writing of this analysis and interpretation is often filled with angst and introspection.

It is very difficult to appreciate and understand what goes on in another culture in the terms of the people who live in that culture. It is even more difficult to communicate such an appreciation and understanding—once it is acquired—to members either of one’s own culture. . . .One consequence of this is that certain of the more important utterances of fieldworkers about fieldwork may be understood at once by their experienced colleagues, but they may be misleading or ambiguous to inexperienced people who do not know what it is like to live and work in the limbo between two cultures or societies. (Wax 1971, p. 42)

Even though the burden of “writing it up” is a weighty one, the experience of study abroad practitioners indicates that it is consistent with the psychological process of readjustment to the home culture of the student. Creating a written document to record the experiences of the student should complement the inevitable personal adjustment.

In summary, let me suggest a model approach. Students who will be studying abroad should have a component in their

orientation that prepares them for fieldwork. A theme for fieldwork, in the form of expectations and outcomes, should be articulated and written by the student. This orientation component should include an expectation that the experience of studying abroad will be analyzed and interpreted in a formal written report. To write this written report, records in the form of journals and fieldnotes should be made of the study abroad experience.

When the student returns, as part of the validation of the study abroad experience, he or she should write a report on the experience. This report should draw heavily on the written theme of the study abroad experience and the records maintained by the student during the time abroad. This final report can be the subject of meeting between the students and project coordinator or with other students in the structure of a formal reentry program.

Notes

¹There exists a very large body of literature concerning the psychological effects of crossing cultures. Most study abroad practitioners are familiar with this literature. See, for example, Richard W. Brislin, *Cross-Cultural Encounters* (Pergamon Press, 1981); John P. Fieg and John G. Blair, *There Is a Difference* (Meridian House International, 1989); John J. Berman, ed., *Cross-Cultural Perspectives* (University of Nebraska Press, 1990); Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter, *Communication Between Cultures* (Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991); Edward C. Stewart and Milton J. Bennett, *American Cultural Patterns: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Intercultural Press, 1991); Richard Brislin, *Understanding Culture's Influence on Behavior* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993); R. Michael Paige, ed., *Education for the Intercultural Experience* (Intercultural Press, 1993); and Gary Althen, ed., *Learning Across Cultures* (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 1994). Also interesting are handbooks and guides for cultural adjustment. See, for example, Donald Batchelder and Elizabeth G. Warner, eds., *Beyond experience: The Experiential Approach to Cross-Cultural Education* (The Experiment in International Living, 1977); Craig Storti, *The Art of Crossing Cultures* (Intercultural Press, 1990); Craig Storti, *Cross-Cultural Dialogues* (Intercultural Press, 1994); and L. Robert Kohls, *Survival Kit for Overseas Living* (Intercultural Press, third edition, 1996).

- ² The social aspects of cultural difference are well articulated by the work of the anthropologist Edward T. Hall, who is better known in intercultural communications studies than in anthropology. He has written numerous books. See, for example, *The Silent Language* (1959), *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), *Beyond Culture* (1976), and *The Dance of Life* (1983), all available from Anchor Books.
- ³ The formal reporting and debriefing of student learning in the other culture is usually centered on that point at which a student reenters his or her own culture. It is thought that this is the most crucial and most neglected aspect of cultural learning. For example, see Clyde N. Austin, ed., *Cross-Cultural Reentry* (Abilene Christian University Press, 1986).
- ⁴ Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 8.

Bibliography

The literature annotated here is from a subset of literature in cultural anthropology that deals with ethnographic fieldwork: the basic research exercise of cultural immersion. This bibliography is meant to offer a representative sample of literature in anthropology that deals with the fieldwork experiences of researchers. Cultural anthropology is devoted to the concept of “discovering the other.” Its method of inquiry is often referred to as participant/observation: the researcher lives the culture while observing it. Since so much of the fieldwork experience deals with personal adjustments to living in different cultures, the literature is charged with the problems of adjustment and understanding so common to study abroad experiences. This literature is particularly relevant to those interested in cross-cultural learning and issues in cultural adjustment.

Agar, Michael. 1980. *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*. New York: Academic Press.

A classic text in field methods that discusses not only what it is to do fieldwork but also what it is like to be in the field. Agar has done fieldwork both inside the United States (narcotics users) and abroad (India and Austria). He is familiar with the crossing of cultures and the unique position in which is puts one who is attempting to do fieldwork on a culture group that is significantly different from that of the researcher.

Belmonte, Thomas. 1979. *The Broken Fountain*. New York: Columbia University Press.

A very personalized ethnographic account of the author's research in the slums of Naples. It is told in terms of a journey and his learning about cultural difference. According to the author, "A book, if it is to be more than a manual or a bulletin, must always manifest the peculiar quality of the author's life as it has involved others" (p. xiii). The first sentence is indicative of the entire text: "I arrived in Naples on a cold, wet, abysmally grey day of early April" (p. 1).

Bowan, Elinore [Laura Bohannan]. 1954. *Return to Laughter*. New York: Harper and Row.

This novel, constructed out of the fieldwork experience of Laura Bohannan among the Tiv of northern Nigeria, is a dramatic account of profound change in the researcher during her first year in the African bush. It is the classic story of the outsider caught up and deeply involved in the culture of the other—classic because it deals with all the issues of crossing: ethnocentrism, loss of self, ambiguity, cultural relativism, ethical conflict, religious difference, and personal change.

Chinas, Beverly. 1993. *La Zandunga. Of Fieldwork and Friendship in Southern Mexico*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

A very human account of the "pleasures and pitfalls" that Beverly Chinas experienced while studying women's roles in rural Zapotec society. The book covers more than twenty years of fieldwork and reviews the personal development and change of the author in the context of Zapotec culture. In the process it also considers the personal attachments that result in fieldwork and how these attachments affect the work of the individual.

Dumont, Jean-Paul. 1978. *The Headman and I: Ambiguity and Ambivalence in the Fieldworking Experience*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

"This book is about the Panare Indians of Venezuelan Guiana and me, the investigating anthropologist" (p. 3). Dumont had already written a book about his experience when he decided that he needed to delve into the question "Who was I for the Panare?" The work is self-reflective and deals with the effect of fieldwork on the researcher. "I have not attempted to test anything, only to understand the relationship that fieldwork created" (p. 13).

Fernea, Elizabeth. 1965. *Guests of the Sheik: An Ethnography of an Iraqi Village*. New York: Doubleday.

Although in some ways a classic ethnography, Fernea's level of participation in the Arab culture in Iraq has resulted in a very personalized account of what it is to be a Muslim woman in traditional Islamic society. Her daily life was spent with the women of the town and gives a seldom-seen female perspective of daily life in an Arab village. The book also deals specifically with the rigors of crossing from American to Iraqi culture.

Fowler, Don D., and Donald L. Hardesty. 1994. *Others Knowing Others: Perspectives on Ethnographic Careers*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Series of essays by seven anthropologists about their long-term work in recording other cultures and what they learned about those cultures and themselves in the process. The basic concepts of cross-cultural adjustments are examined in the essays: culture shock, self-discovery, culture as an engine for change, personal relationships across cultures, and preparation for living in another culture. Fieldwork experiences include Afghanistan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Spain, Italy, and the United States.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

In most ways, a very abstract work on the nature of and theory behind his fieldwork. However, this work creates the important concept of thick description and also includes the essay "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." Whereas most of the book is strongly academic and summative in tone, this last essay is a personal account of an event that for Geertz captures the essential elements of Balinese culture and how he came to realize them. Both the concept of "thick description" and the style of this essay have had a great impact on both the construction of ethnography and the approach of anthropologists to fieldwork.

Glesne, Corrine, and Alan Peshkin. 1992. *Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*. London: Longman.

A very simple introduction to field research. It discusses the fieldwork experience of the authors and offers easy-to-understand advice on doing research. The text reviews the stages of qualitative research: research design, pilot studies, interviewing techniques, use of theory, data

analysis, and writing it up. Of particular interest is the chapter “Being There: Developing Understanding Through Participant Observation.”

Golde, Peggy, ed. 1970. *Women in the Field: Anthropological Experiences*. Berkely: University of California Press.

A groundbreaking series of essays that discusses the specific and unique experiences of women doing fieldwork in cross-cultural settings. Each of these women anthropologists has had to deal with the influence of her gender, as well as the subject of her study, on the mechanics of establishing a living-working relationship with people of another culture. The authors have responded with a wide variety of personal reactions to their circumstances and strategies for successful adjustment to another culture. The book includes discussions of fieldwork in North America, Latin America, Africa, Melanesia, Europe, Southeast Asia, and India.

Kulick, Don, and Margaret Willson. 1995. *Taboo: Sex, Identity and Erotic Subjectivity in Anthropological Fieldwork*. London: Routledge.

This series of essays argues that emotions such as erotic attachment to the other or the culture of the other are an avenue of cultural discovery and insight into self. It is also an inevitable aspect of living in another culture and can provide a touchstone for cultural insight. The essays demonstrate how the erotic subjectivity and sexual experiences of a researcher can constitute a powerful vantage point from which to call into question a number of concepts such as the nature of fieldwork, the place of subjectivity in reflexive understanding, and the validity and meaning of the self-other dichotomy. Essays deal with fieldwork in Korea, the Netherlands, Fiji, the United States, Indonesia, and Greece.

Kumar, Nita. 1992. *Friends, Brothers, and Informants: Fieldwork Memoirs of Banares*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

The book is about the practical experience of fieldwork in India. Kumar’s writing is based on a field journal. She has attempted to refrain from rewriting and crafting a fresh narrative that explains in retrospect the complexities of the encounter between Self and Other. As she explains, the book is “a narrative that objectifies the fieldworker by focusing on the initial shock of realization that the encounter is a sensitive, creative process calling into play latent, unacknowledged facets of personality as well as more deliberately cultivated professional talents, and that in this difficult process the research is surprisingly unprepared” (p. 2). Perhaps the unique perspective of this book is that Kumar is a

native Indian who did her graduate work in the United States and the returned to India to do research, but in a cultural location and setting unfamiliar to her.

Lawless, Robert, et al., eds. 1983. *Fieldwork: The Human Experience*. New York: Gordon and Breach, Science Publishers, Inc.

A set of essays written by anthropologists about their fieldwork experiences. The emphasis is on what they learned about themselves doing fieldwork and how it changed their lives. The essays discuss research in Latin America, Southeast Asia, the United States, India, and Micronesia. Many of the issues discussed are relevant to all persons who live in cross-cultural situations. “Nothing in the field is ever quite so clear as it was back home. And a lot of the unfamiliar experiences and strange events in the field somehow become understandable only when anthropologists return home to face the demands for a structured ethnography” (p. xii).

Liebow, Elliot. 1967. *Tally’s Corner: A Study of Negro Streetcorner Men*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Regarded as a classic of urban ethnography. Although the supporting material is very dated, the ethnography itself is an example of how an outsider can gain entrée to a community and learn a great deal about it. The text is the story of men Liebow learned to understand and his unwillingness to accept a simplistic notion of their lives. Of particular interest is the appendix, “A Field Experience in Retrospect,” in which Liebow talks about adjusting to a new culture.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd.

Malinowski is considered the father of fieldwork in cultural anthropology. In this, his most famous work, he recognizes the absolute necessity of learning the culture and language of a society in order to understand it. He also lays down the principles for good ethnographic fieldwork. His difficulties in adjustment and final triumph in terms of cross-cultural understanding still ring true. “To study the institutions, customs, and codes or to study the behavior and mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realizing the substance of their happiness—is, in my opinion, to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man” (p. 25).

Powdermaker, Hortense. 1966. *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Another personal and retrospective review of many years of fieldwork experiences. It reviews work in Melanesia, the United States, and Africa. Powdermaker emphasizes the personal aspect of fieldwork. "The continuing relation between personal feelings (sensory, aesthetic, emotional) and intellectual perception stressed—how the anthropologist feels as well as what he does, since he is part of the situation studied" (p. 14). The author candidly discusses how the choices of housing, personal relationships, and personality traits affect understanding and insight into the host culture.

Rabinow, Paul. 1977. *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

A remarkable early work dealing with the introspective analysis of fieldwork and its contextual impact on the fieldworker. It is notable because of its frank description of the author's very personal adjustment problems. Not only is Rabinow at ease with himself but he makes the important point that human understanding is always an emotional and moral exercise as well as an intellectual and academic one. He argues that fieldwork is at once an experiential, reflective, and critical activity. The final resolution of fieldwork is knowing the other. "That I would journey to Morocco to confront Otherness and myself was typical of my culture" (p. 161).

Shostak, Marjorie. 1981. *Nisa, The Life and Work of a !Kung Woman*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

This book is the story of the life of Nisa, a member of the !Kung tribe of hunters and gatherers from southern Africa's Kalahari Desert. It is also the attempt of Marjorie Shostak, a Harvard anthropologist, to collaborate in the telling of the tale with Nisa so that the story is the translation of Nisa's story, not its deconstruction and reconstruction by the fieldworker. Both Nisa and Shostak are unusual people, and their collaboration has resulted in an unparalleled account of !Kung life from a personal, rather than social or ecological, perspective.

Smith, Carolyn, and William Kornblum, eds. 1989. *In the Field: Readings on the Field Research Experience*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Social scientists who engage in ethnographic field research often become deeply involved in the lives of the people they are studying. This experience can have a profound effect on the researchers, who often must

reexamine their values and attitudes and may be forced to make choices that are not required in the ordinary course of events. This volume is a set of personal accounts of field researchers. The authors describe how they became accepted by the people they wished to know, how they built and maintained relationships with their informants, and how they sorted through the personal changes that fieldwork presented to them. Although all of the descriptions deal with the United States, the same problems of cultural adjustment that one finds in study abroad are present here.

Van Maanen, John. 1988. *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

An interesting attempt to classify the writing of fieldwork experiences by classifying ethnographies into the more or less introspective approaches to analysis. It examines the principle that the results of fieldwork are at least as dependent on the personal characteristics of the fieldworker as on the methodological orientation. Fieldwork takes place on an uncomfortable margin between culture groups. The role of an ethnographer is to decode one culture while recoding it for another.

Wax, Rosalie. 1971. *Doing Fieldwork*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Although the theme of this book is fieldwork, it is really a retrospective analysis of Rosalie Wax's personal change as a result of cross-cultural living. It is about the adjustments necessary for a person to be successful in another culture. "Thus, a fieldworker who approaches a strange people soon perceives that these people are saying and doing things which they understand but he does not understand" (p. 11). Wax reviews her personal fieldwork experience in Japanese American relocation centers and on a Native American reservation. It is obvious from reading the advice and experience of the author that the personal circumstances of the fieldwork experience are almost identical to those of the student who must live with and adjust to another culture.

Whyte, William. 1984. *Learning from the Field: A Guide from Experience*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

The author of *Street Corner Society*, a seminal work in urban ethnography, discusses his own learning lessons as a field researcher. Although mostly a discussion of theoretical considerations in formulating and carrying out fieldwork, Whyte also delves into some of the factors in the decisions he made in his own fieldwork.

Wolf, Margery. 1992. *A Thrice Told Tale: Feminism, Postmodernism and Ethnographic Responsibility*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

The author, a feminist anthropologist, uses three texts developed from her fieldwork on women in rural Taiwan: a piece of fiction, her fieldnotes, and an article on her research, to explore the concept of “text.” Each text represents a different perspective, is composed in a different style, and serves different purposes, even though all are based on the same events. The major focus is on the construction of text based on a common set of data. It delves into these questions: How is the textual rendering of empirical data dependent on the construction of reality by the observer/author? How do empirical events change in their recording and reporting? Can one ultimately really understand a culture when it is learned through the experiences of others.