

## **Review Essay: The Case Studies in Education and Culture From Cradle to Grave**

*Reviewed by*

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We have been asked by the editor to write a review essay of the "Case Studies in Education and Culture" series (CSEC) published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston, and edited by ourselves. This review is written from the perspective of the insider. It is less a review of the series than of the environment in which educational anthropology and its field arm, ethnography, must survive. We will not attempt any systematic analysis of the 17 volumes of the series. This we leave to others. Two reviews of the series as a whole appeared in the 1970s (Grambs 1974; Foley 1977) and some of the volumes have been reviewed separately (though rarely) in the *American Anthropologist*. The review by Grambs is particularly useful because it is written by someone intimately familiar with professional education.

The series was conceived one fine June day in 1964 as we picnicked with Harry Wolcott on the shore of Oregon's McKenzie River. Louise was the one who first voiced the idea. "The Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology" (CSCA) series with Holt, and with David P. Boynton as anthropology editor, was underway and doing well. Our convictions about the utility of case materials in instruction seemed justified. It appeared to us that a similar series focusing on education in a variety of cultures would be useful and would help determine the shape of the then-emerging educational anthropology.

The process of soliciting potential authors known to have carried out intensive, long-term field research and able to write effectively about it began even before we had official sanction from the publishers. After three years writing, editing, negotiating, and developing a format, the first five volumes appeared in spring 1967 (Gay and Cole, King, Singleton, Warren, and Wolcott). It is not an accident that four of the first five volumes were authored by our former graduate students (all except Gay and Cole). We knew about their fieldwork and were sure of their training. These original studies have had the greatest longevity in the series and have been among the most widely used.

The next batch of case studies was being worked up by the time the first ones were published. In 1968, Margaret Read's *Children of their Fathers* (Ngoni) appeared, followed shortly in 1969 by Jocano's on a Philippine barrio and Williams on Borneo childhood. The next three appeared in 1971 (Hostetler and Huntington, Rosenfeld, Ward). Three more (Peshkin, Grindall, Leis) were published in 1972, and three more in 1973 (Wolcott, Modiano, Collier). At the time, we thought there would be many more. We

submitted a number of proposals and first drafts for consideration but the publisher did not accept them.

The reason they were not accepted was that the series as a whole had not performed well enough "sales-wise" to make it sufficiently profitable to publish them. Yet according to Joel Maring's survey (1982), the series, together with G. Spindler's edited volumes (1963, 1974) or regarded separately, constitute the most widely used text materials in educational anthropology! Therein lies a problem that is not only ours as editors but one for our field as a whole. In a nutshell, we talk mostly to ourselves. We do not reach very far afield into either anthropology or education. And even the number of educational anthropologists as potential users of publications may have shrunk. In June 1969, shortly after the Council on Anthropology and Education (CAE) was formed (1968), we had a healthy 1,575 members. Today our membership, exclusive of institutional subscribers, is about half that figure. Of course there are a number of people in both anthropology and in education who teach some version of educational anthropology who are not CAE members, but we don't know how many.

If sales volume is a problem, perhaps we can learn something from looking at the most popular studies. Although it would be inappropriate to give exact sales figures, we can say that the high sellers in the series were Gay and Cole, Huntington and Hostetler, King, Rosenfeld, and Wolcott (1967). It is interesting that three of them are among the first published. All the high sellers were in print for more than a decade. As of this writing only the Hostetler and Huntington (1971) and the Wolcott (1967) studies survive. The highest sales figure reached in any one year for any one case study was under 5,000 copies. The average yearly sale for each volume was a fraction of that figure.

The cost of the studies to users rose from the \$1.75 originally intended in 1967 to \$7.95 in 1983. The initial concept of the series, as for the CSCA series, was that it should consist of low-cost paperbacks to allow each student to purchase several cases. This concept was challenged by the continual rise in price. Together with the damaging availability of second-hand copies, from which book stores and suppliers make substantial profits, but publishers, editors, and authors do not, sales figures for each volume have declined soon after its publication. The rise in retail price was fought all the way by us and by David Boynton, but escalating costs in paper, printing, binding, warehousing, accounting, and distributing necessitated continuous repricing. We cannot argue the matter intelligently for we do not know the exact costs. Our impression is that the repricing was justified, given the need of the publishers to show a reasonable profit.

This cost and profit problem, and the second-hand copy problem, continuously have plagued the publishing industry and have resulted in the recent elimination of virtually every paperback series in anthropology and most of them for other disciplines as well. It is a tribute to David Boynton and to his publishers that the CSEC series grew as large as it did and was allowed to live as long as it has. Without Boynton's support and interest there would have been no series in the first place.

How can we characterize the five most popular volumes? Gay and Cole's study of the learning of western mathematics concepts and operations among the Kpelle is now a classic. It is one of the first publications in a long-term study of cognition and culture by Michael Cole and associates (see Cole 1978) that has become an essential reference point for anyone interested in the subject. Rosenfeld's study of a Harlem slum school is described by Grämbis (1973:63) as required reading "...for every prospective teacher and administrator," for it tellingly portrays the intense brutality of a system that does not really seem to 'see' children (black and Puerto Rican). Hostetler and Huntington's study of the Amish tells us how these conservative communities have fought against submersion in the state-mandated school programs and have used schooling as a major vehicle to support self-determination and self-maintenance. King's study of the Indian/Eskimo residential school at "Mopass" in the Canadian northwest reveals how the educational policies implemented in such schools destroy native cultures and native children. Though King is far from dispassionate in his analysis, written from his vantage point as teacher in that school for one year, the study can be termed "objective" if objective means telling the truth. Wolcott's volume related, in vivid Wolcottian style, what it was like to be a teacher in an isolated Kwakiutl village school near Blackfish Sound, British Columbia, where he was charged with the task of teaching the children his culture and not theirs. He later put his experience in perspective in an essay on the teacher as an "enemy" (Wolcott 1974).

The studies by the latter four (above) all have one thing in common — they take an essentially value-oriented position in their views of the educational process they study. Whether objectivity is damaged by this it is hard to say. Our feeling is that they managed to tell the truth but interpreted the truth in a value matrix.

Gay and Cole's study is less explicitly value-oriented. Implicitly this work attacks educators and others who think people like the Kpelle are stupid because they have difficulty learning our kinds of things our way. But the major appeal of the Gay and Cole study, we think, is intellectual. They defined and analyzed a very interesting and significant problem and let the reader in on the difficulties in conceptualizing and researching it.

We thought for awhile that what would be most useful to educational anthropologists and their students would be studies of educational processes in non-western cultures. We promoted 11 such studies that the publishers accepted: Collier, Gay and Cole, Grindal, Jocano, King, Leis, Modiano, Peshkin, Read, Singleton, Wolcott (1967). The more "successful" from a sales-oriented point of view were those from North America (King, Wolcott, Collier). None of the studies of overseas non-western education and culture relationships, except Gay and Cole's, was on the better selling list, although in our opinion as educators and anthropologists some of the best studies in the series are in this group.

Both of these observations, that a strong interpretive value orientation and a North American research site are positive indicators for wide use among educational anthropologists, suggest that the field is dominated by

an applied domestic orientation. The "overseas" studies, particularly Leis' interesting study of Ijaw enculturation and Williams' dramatic and detailed study of the socialization of children among the Dusun of Borneo, may seem to have little to do with problems "at home." And yet, some explicit studies of educational problems "at home," such as Martha Ward's ethnography of how poor black children in a Louisiana parish learn speech that is facile but different from school norm speech, did not make the better selling list, and prematurely (we think) went out of print. Something of the same can be said of Wolcott's (1973) study of an elementary school principal. This has been described by anthropologists as a classic ethnography (Basham and DeGroot 1977). It is without doubt the most intensive ethnographic study in the series. Wolcott discusses the problems of disseminating his work to educators in a recent article (1982).

We have a general problem in our field of which, it seems to us, the rise and fall of the CSEC series is a symptom. We not only talk mostly to ourselves; we do not talk much to anthropologist nor to professional educators. The reasons are complex. For example, Hostetler and Huntington published two case studies with us as editors — one on the Amish (1971) in the CSEC series and one on the Hutterites (1973) in the CSCA series. The two are comparable in style, scope, authenticity, concern with education, and even the kinds of communities studied. The Hutterite case study has always been a best seller in the CSCA series context. Though the Amish study is one of the best sellers in the CSEC series, it is not at all in the same range.

We think there is a pervasive prejudice against education within anthropology. We rarely address this problem, but the evidence of it is extensive. Probably most of us can recall instances of overt, denigrating prejudice, without having to be paranoid. A galling instance in our own career was the refusal of the editors of the *American Anthropologist* to publish a review of *Education and Cultural Process*, (Spindler 1974). It was relegated to the Book Notes section and received one short paragraph. It was considered peripheral to the core of anthropology. The volume contains 20 original papers as well as 6 reprints, and it is a major statement in the field. The concerns, concepts, and methods presented clearly were anthropological. Other books by our colleagues have met the same fate. We could write an essay about the uphill battle for recognition by the American Anthropological Association during the early years when our former students were applying for fellow status, about the battle for recognition in the university context, and about the devastating comments made, often unwittingly, by some colleagues in anthropology about educationists, education students, and interests in education.

Even when anthropologists, dimly aware that we CAE people are up to something, try to give us recognition, they display their ignorance. In a recent paper on cultural acquisition a prominent psychological anthropologist cited "Spindler's 1963 conference" as having implications for people interested in the subject of his paper. He thus ignored all the other work done

by educational anthropologists on cultural acquisition, cultural transmission, and learning and misreported the date of the original conference by nine years! Further evidence may be gathered without effort at any national AAA meeting. Though CAE has probably the best organized program within the meeting context and offers the most sessions (so many that some complaints about favoritism have been heard) very few "real" anthropologists are observed at any of these sessions. With some notable exceptions, those who do attend are most young people looking for employment who are desperate enough to consider rubbing elbows with educationists and bending their criteria of worthy research problems enough to include schooling as a cultural process.

In another manuscript a colleague recently suggested that we should examine an interpretation of the relative influence of the postpubertal versus the prepubertal years in cultural transmission, and he represented the recognition of postpubertal influence as a new idea. C.W.M. Hart first proposed this notion during the 1954 conference that we convened, and his paper has been included in our edited volumes three times (G. Spindler 1955, 1963, 1974)! Although this colleague is an expert on initiation ritual and controls the literature very well, he was unaware of this paper. To him, it simply is not part of the corpus of anthropological literature on the subject, for reasons that should by now be obvious. Judging from reactions and comments by esteemed colleagues, it seems doubtful that any of them have ever read *anything* that we, ourselves, have written or edited that could be called educational anthropology. We are judged solely on the basis of our publications in what they regard as psychological anthropology or cultural dynamics. Of course, from our own point of view everything we do has a certain unity and continuity, irrespective of subdisciplinary boundaries.

Anthropology as a discipline has long been bedeviled by a death drive displayed in its ethnocentrism, parochialism, and iconoclasm. Though the majority of anthropologists are probably just not interested in education, cross-cultural or otherwise, this substratum of prejudice is a real and damaging barrier to a full realization of what we can contribute to our mother discipline.

We are not much more, and are perhaps even less, effective with educationists. Grambs notes that educators, trained largely in statistical, experimental, and questionnaire-survey research methods, have not been inclined to seek insight and instruction in anthroethnographic studies. Though she regards the series as providing "... extraordinary, effective, and moving portrayals of how education, for better or worse, occurs in a wide variety of settings" (1973:61), she opines that very few educators know of its existence and would not be inclined to use it if they did. But she also regards some studies as more useful to educators than others. She feels that the "enculturation" studies (Read, Jocano, Williams, Leis) are of less interest to educators than those centering on problems closer to home, such as Rosenfeld, Ward, Huntington and Hostetler, and Wolcott's study of the principal.

Of course the relationship between anthropology and education works two ways. Although educators are refractive to anthropological concepts

and case studies, anthropologists often have appeared to educators as irrelevant or patronizing even when face-to-face with them in common endeavors. A recent surge of interest in ethnographic research per se, though not necessarily the content produced by these methods (cf. Wolcott 1982), probably will result in some increase in educationist acceptance of studies by anthropologists, but we do not look for a sudden explosion of approval and utilization on the part of educators. The resistance to the concept of the case study is in itself formidable. A prominent educationist said to us, when we told him that one of our case studies sold only about 1,000 copies a year, "I think that is very surprising — that so specialized a topic would sell that many copies!" The use of case study material in an inductive pedagogy is quite foreign to much of the teaching by both educators and anthropologists — probably because they were not themselves taught inductively.

The concept of the case study as a sample of the never-ending variety of human adaptation that nonetheless exhibits all-important commonalities is not a part of the ethos for most educationists or for a surprisingly large number of anthropologists. The CSEC, as well as the CSCA series, is based upon this idea. Without in depth case material from a number of cultural settings, it would be impossible for us to teach any of the subjects we teach: introductory anthropology, psychological anthropology, Native American cultures, anthropological perspectives on American culture, education and anthropology, ethnographic methods, or cultural transmission. The immediacy and reality of case material provide experience for the students and reference points for the instructor that seem, to us, indispensable. *We begin everything* we teach with in depth case material. Generalizations and abstractions — in short, theory — are what we work toward, but they are hollow without case material. Generalizations, and even respectable theory, become glib and assume appearances of validity, even of profundity, that are illusory without cases to support them and to provide opportunities for generating new and challenging interpretations.

## Conclusion

The "Case Studies in Education and Culture" series may have been an idea ahead of its time. It was certainly ahead of its supporting disciplinary base. Although the series was widely used within that base and doubtless influenced its character, there was not enough support to make it a success for a large commercial publisher. It appears that we must enlarge the potential market by enlarging the impact of our discipline on anthropology and on education. Or we must find a new publisher who will be satisfied with more modest returns. Or we must reinvent the series in some new form.

If there is to be such a series probably we must do all three, whether "we" is us or someone else. It seems unlikely that increased impact can occur within the existing context of anthropology as a discipline. It may occur to a limited extent within education, as the new ethnographic salvation to vexing research problems is celebrated — through we predict a short duration

for the present explosion of interest. Finding another publisher is a possibility, and we have had inquiries from publishers who would be satisfied with a lower volume of sales. The third alternative, reinventing the series, will be necessary if the second is implemented.

It would be natural for the reinvention of an education and culture series of case studies to move toward the model offered by current USA-side ethnographic studies. Though this model could be of great utility, it could not suffice as an adequate model for case studies in educational anthropology. Such case studies must be informed by concepts of culture, social structure, cultural transmission, and cultural acquisition, and by the definition of their mother discipline as cross-cultural in scope. Without this conceptual base and without the perspective that the cross-cultural view can give us, our discipline will be reduced to a minor holding company for secondary techniques for collecting and collating data on topics defined largely by current educationist and political interests. Of course the nature of our concerns makes us interdisciplinary in problem formulation and analysis, if not in method. Nevertheless, our parent discipline is anthropology. Although our mother may reject us, we must cultivate our relationship.

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