Articles

Ethnographic Methods in Nonprofit Management

Juliana Flinn[1]

Abstract

As undergraduate programs in nonprofit management education proliferate, they increasingly incorporate service learning, experiential learning, and an emphasis on inclusiveness and diversity. To effectively face these challenges, such programs would do well to look to cultural anthropology, especially the methods of ethnographic research. Cultural anthropology has far more to offer than a list of behavioral traits about obscure peoples in the world: It offers a methodology for how to learn through experiences, a number of strategies to promote inclusiveness, and a framework that promotes an openness to having one's assumptions challenged. This article provides an analysis of the use and value of ethnographic methods while working for Big Brothers Big Sisters in rural Alaska, followed by recommendations for incorporating anthropological methods and concepts into nonprofit management education.

Keywords

American Humanics, Big Brothers Big Sisters, cultural anthropology, nonprofit management education

Programs in nonprofit management education at both the undergraduate and the graduate level have been proliferating, and courses in topics such as management, fundraising, public relations, volunteer management, and risk management serve to ground students in nonprofit management skills. Thirteen professional development competencies in areas including board development, fundraising, risk management, volunteer management, and others have been identified by American Humanics, a national organization promoting undergraduate nonprofit management education. Furthermore, a majority of programs are indeed associated with American Humanics (Dolch, Ernst, McClusky, & Mirabella, 2007). While lauding the professionalization

[1]University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Corresponding Author:
Juliana Flinn, Professor of Anthropology and American Humanics Campus Director, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, 2801 South University, Little Rock, AR 72205
Email: jbflinn@ualr.edu

of the field and the growth in nonprofit management education, a number of analyses of nonprofit management education have nonetheless pointed out ongoing challenges and needs. O'Neill (2007), for example, asserted that programs must be grounded in the changing and ongoing needs of the nonprofit sector, not the needs of faculty and universities. Mirabella (2007) discussed the increasing complexity of the nonprofit world, especially with the growth in partnerships and collaborations; therefore, she advocated devoting increased attention to competencies in building and managing such relationships. She also discussed the rise in number of programs with an international emphasis and consequent needs to develop skills for managing NGOs in other countries. Yzaguirre (2007) posed a challenge of a very different nature: be inclusive, stay passionate, nurture creativity, and challenge the status quo. American Humanics has indeed added a new required skill, diversity awareness, to help ensure that graduates can understand, appreciate, and effectively interact with people from a wide variety of backgrounds and in diverse cultural contexts. In this article, I argue that cultural anthropology, especially the methods of ethnographic research, can play a vital role in addressing these challenges. Cultural anthropology has far more to offer than a list of behavioral traits about obscure peoples in the world: It offers a methodology for how to learn through experiences, a number of strategies to promote inclusiveness, and a framework that promotes an openness to having one's assumptions challenged. Classroom and community service learning opportunities can and should be structured to facilitate student learning of these methods and strategies.

Anthropological methods, insights, and concepts have long been used for both traditional and applied research, and applied anthropology has a long history in the discipline. It has not been without its critics, however, who have focused largely on ethical and power issues; applied anthropologists have been accused, for example, of working on behalf of colonial and other imperialist powers, lacking theoretical focus, and actively promoting change rather than remaining true to anthropology's purported goal of understanding without interfering (for reviews of the history and nature of applied anthropology and debates within the larger discipline between applied and other branches of anthropology see Kedia & van Willigen, 2005; Rylko-Bauer, Singer, & van Willigen, 2006). The participatory methods of applied anthropology have been incorporated into a number of development programs (see Chambers, 2008, for an overview of the rise of participatory action research, including the role of anthropology), although this has not occurred without criticism. For example, outside experts, even when they consult with local people, nonetheless do the speaking, recommending, and articulating of issues, with local voices heard only indirectly, thus reinforcing rather than challenging existing power structures (Panayiotopoulos, 2002).

In this article, I argue that the methods and concepts of anthropology should not remain solely in the hands of expert consultants but infused into the hands of practitioners. In the nonprofit context, these methods are valuable for carrying out the program work in a nonprofit organization, especially when the position requires a knowledge of the community and an ability to learn from people in that community, in order to provide the best services. Ethnographic methods—primarily participant observation and

open-ended interviewing—can be useful for a variety of such work situations, especially those that entail learning about a community, operating in a cultural system that differs from one's own, building rapport with people of a variety of backgrounds, and interviewing or even just talking with others with an ability to suspend judgment and to listen for meaning. Other anthropologists have written about the value of anthropology for research on behalf of nonprofit organizations (e.g., Lewis, 1999; Mulhare, 1999) and about the general value of anthropology for a variety of careers (e.g., Omohundro, 1998), but more attention should be paid to the value of an education in anthropology, especially experience with ethnographic methods, for careers carrying out the work of nonprofit organizations. What follows is an analysis of the use and value of ethnographic methods while working for Big Brothers Big Sisters in rural Alaska, followed by recommendations for incorporating anthropological methods and concepts into nonprofit management education.

After more than 20 years of teaching and conducting research in cultural anthropology, I took a sabbatical leave to work for a year in a nonprofit organization, in part because I had taken on the responsibility of directing an American Humanics program. I volunteered with AmeriCorps VISTA and specifically requested a site that would allow me to work with people of a different background than my own. When I accepted the Big Brothers Big Sisters position in Alaska as rural mentoring coordinator, I had anticipated putting into practice specific nonprofit managerial, fundraising, and public relations skills, but over the course of the year I found that I drew heavily on my ethnographic research skills and experiences, even though my work had been largely in the Pacific Islands rather than in Alaska. In other words, I wasn't drawing on any particular knowledge of the ways of Native Alaskans (or White Alaskans, for that matter); I was drawing on acquired skills in observing and analyzing, in weighing reactions and consequences, in revising understandings, and in listening and suspending as much as possible my own assumptions and judgments.

In many respects, however, I was also like countless other employees new to a job and new to a community. There is at least a new language and behavioral expectations associated with an organization to learn, in my case with Big Brother Big Sisters, and this included terms such as "match," "Little," and "Big." And even when it seems on the surface as though one is working within one's own community, chances are that the people served come from a different background, especially if a different racial and/or different class group is involved. A number of employees of nonprofit organizations are not constituents of the particular ethnic and class groups their organization is designed to serve. My experiences learning about a new organization and new community are thus not unique to my situation of moving temporarily to Alaska and working with a different cultural group than my own; the issues were simply more evident.

During my sabbatical year, I worked for Big Brothers Big Sisters Greater Fairbanks Area (which has since merged with three other Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies to become Big Brothers Big Sisters of Alaska). The main office was in Fairbanks, but I was associated with the Rural Programs of the Fairbanks agency and thus stationed in the town of Bethel. This town of about 6,000 people is the major port on the Kuskokwim

River in southwestern Alaska, in the midst of the tundra of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. About two thirds of the population is Yup'ik Eskimo, and a majority of the children—the Little Sisters and Little Brothers—are Yup'ik, whereas most of the volunteer Big Brothers and Big Sisters are White "outsiders," typically professionals who have recently moved to the town, often planning to remain only a few years.

First and foremost, what I found most valuable for my work was the general anthropological attitude and fieldwork research strategy of remaining as open as possible to learning, to forming relationships, and having one's assumptions challenged. As anthropologists, we pride ourselves on acknowledging that we need to take our time to learn about a new community, we must remain open to and even be on the alert for the unexpected, we focus on face-to-face personal encounters and relationships rather than just written records or surveys, we value learning through participation and observation, and we strive to uncover meaning our participants imbue to situations and relationships. Finally, we may not always succeed in putting aside our own assumptions and understandings, but we are open to having them challenged. These are all valuable methodological contributions that anthropological training can provide to the successful operation of a nonprofit organization. This may seem obvious in cases where a White woman from middle-class Little Rock moves to rural Alaska and works with Yup'ik Eskimo, but it may be even more important for the White woman from middle-class Little Rock who takes a job with Big Brothers Big Sisters in Central Arkansas, where most of the children in the program come from poor African American families. It may be even more important for the middle-class African American woman who takes such a job. The woman moving to Alaska presumably assumes she will face differences and may arrive with fewer assumptions; those already in Little Rock are far less likely to realize how open they must be to having their understandings challenged.

In the introduction to a collection of articles analyzing anthropological research applied to solving human social problems rather than traditional research focused on exotic peoples, MacClancy (2002) eloquently laid out the value of the ethnographic fieldwork perspective:

> One real strength of fieldwork is that it allows anthropologists to take very little for granted. Since different peoples comprehend the world in different ways, what is common sense for one group may well be deep-set prejudice, if not nonsense, for another. Thus an anthropologist, newly arrived in the field, presumes very little and has to be prepared for even her most cherished preconceptions to be overturned. (p. 5)

Even introductory cultural anthropology courses teach students this basic notion. At times the focus is on exotic peoples students are not likely to meet; a classic reading which probably makes its way into almost all such courses vividly illustrates how an anthropologist working in southwest Africa finds his attempts at generosity met with ridicule because of differing cultural attitudes (Lee, 1969). A number of collections have come out illustrating how anthropologists, when they make these

mistakes, learn from them (e.g. DeVita 1990, 1992, 2000). Seemingly exotic, such insights may sound irrelevant to nonprofit management in the United States, but I would argue otherwise. Even anthropologically naive travelers anticipate encountering at least some differences when they visit another country, but such expectations are not typically the case within the United States. Rather, people are quite likely to assume that their reality is that of others, potentially resulting in serious problems. Differing beliefs about how to be polite, for example, can even lead to accusations of racism (Bailey, 2001). We are a highly complex society, and we can't expect to know the details of appropriate behavior for all peoples we might encounter. What anthropology has to offer is a strategy for learning about values, norms, and appropriate behavior through real-world encounters and experiences.

Participant observation over an extended period of time is the primary ethnographic method of cultural anthropologists, and it proved as valuable to my nonprofit job as it had to my previous ethnographic research. We anthropologists participate as we observe; we observe as we participate. As a key aspect of our research, we actively seek out community events and settings for opportunities for participant observation. In a respected text dealing with anthropological research methods, Bernard (2006, pp. 368-369) discussed "hanging out" as an essential component of participant observation. Rather than engaging in formal interviews, questionnaires, or other methods of carefully structuring a situation, the ethnographer who is hanging out attempts to fit in with ongoing events and conversations. If the community is one a person is already living in, it may be critical to realize the value of hanging out in new types of settings if the target group is not one's own. It may well be the case that a new employee at a nonprofit lives and socializes in one ethnic and class group but serves people in other groups.

In Bethel, therefore, it was essential that I hang out in settings that involved the various constituencies of the community, as my job technically involved all of Bethel. Nonetheless, Big Brothers Big Sisters had made it clear that they hoped I could make inroads in the Yup'ik community. Thus, I could not take the easy route of hanging out simply with others like me, with people from "outside" (the local term) or with other Caucasians. I needed to find settings involving Yup'ik. In addition to the fact that a large percentage of the children in the program were Yup'ik, it was a part of my charge to recruit more Yup'ik mentors as volunteer Big Brothers and Big Sisters. I was also hoping to develop partnerships with native corporations and to put together an advisory council with strong Yup'ik representation.

So how would I find such settings and opportunities? I was living in a town of about 6,000 people, with many of them transient. Many were outsiders on contract for a couple of years at the health center or the schools, and other residents were Yup'ik villagers in town looking for jobs. One choice I made was to attend church services and participate in associated activities. From prior reading, I knew that the Moravian Church had a large Yup'ik parish and that the area had a Russian Orthodox and Roman Catholic presence as well. Despite the discomfort I felt as an anthropologist about missionaries having encouraged local people to abandon their indigenous religious beliefs,

the reality of the current situation is that Yup'ik are currently Christian of various sorts. I asked a few people to find out which churches were most likely to include a good percentage of Yup'ik; then, in part because I was raised Catholic, I chose the Catholic Church and discovered that it indeed had a good percentage of Yup'ik who participated. Furthermore, a social event typically followed a morning Mass, and these provided good opportunities to get to know people. The first Sunday I attended was particularly propitious because the event was more elaborate and longer than usual; instead of just coffee and doughnuts, it was a welcoming breakfast for five Jesuit Volunteers who were beginning a year of service. For me, it provided an opportunity to hang out and see if I could meet people. That time, and in fact for all subsequent occasions, it was important not to take the route of sitting down with people I thought I would be most comfortable with. Even though the Caucasians looked more like me and I would be more comfortable sitting with them, I eyed other tables for an empty spot with some Yup'ik women and men. I sat for a bit and gradually we started some casual conversation. Interestingly enough, these people turned out eventually to be valuable contacts. For example, because of the relationship begun that day, one of the women later agreed to serve on an advisory council I set up for Big Brothers Big Sisters in Bethel.

It was admittedly not always comfortable to approach a table of strangers, especially when the people spoke a different language. It was much easier to drift to a table where I felt I could readily join into a conversation. Furthermore, there were times that conversation ceased when I sat down, and it was obvious that I'd made the people at the table uncomfortable. A couple of times, despite good intentions, it became clear that there was little I could do, so I politely found a way to leave. I had to be willing to deal with such discomfort and failure, but anthropologists have to learn to deal with such situations as an occupational hazard. Taking those risks is essential to building new relationships. And learning how to deal with easing the discomfort of those others without offending them is just as critical.

Hanging out and staying open to opportunities are also central to developing and strengthening relationships. Obviously it's not enough to simply meet someone; relationships must be cultivated, and often they must be nurtured first in casual, unstructured, nonthreatening contexts. Bethel is a small town, and one readily runs into friends and acquaintances. Visiting the post office to check on mail, buying groceries at the local store, visiting someone at the hospital or dental clinic, for example, were all possibilities for running into people and slowly building relationships. It was important to take advantage of those opportunities and take the time to talk, even when otherwise in a hurry. Building relationships was critical to the success of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program in Bethel just as building relationships and rapport is for conducting successful ethnographic research. Taking the time to talk, to show interest in the other person, to listen to what they have to say were valuable, even when it didn't appear to directly further the Big Brothers Big Sisters cause.

Engaging in such activities can involve pushing one's comfort zone, even after the initial meeting. Especially with outsiders, Yup'ik at times could be more shy than what I'd encountered at home, though perhaps less so than when I began fieldwork in the

Pacific. For example, I had to be willing to politely take the initiative in a number of cases and say something along the lines of, "Didn't we meet at church last month?" At the same time, I had to be sensitive to culturally appropriate ways of taking the initiative in causal encounters to avoid appearing aggressive or pushy.

Learning to build rapport, a critical skill in ethnographic research, was relevant for my Big Brothers Big Sisters work in contexts other than developing relationships through casual encounters. An ability to build rapport assists with conducting successful formal interviews as well. Ethnographic research grounded in participant observation almost invariably also results at least in the researcher engaging in unstructured conversations, and interviews of all sorts, ranging from unstructured to semistructured to structured, are fundamental to almost all research projects (Bernard, 2006, pp. 210-317). Ethnographers need to develop sufficient rapport so that people are willing to talk with us and to be honest with their answers. We need to learn ways to ensure that they are comfortable with issues of anonymity and confidentiality and that they believe we are genuinely interested in what they have to say, regardless of how mundane it might seem to them. In fieldwork research we need to learn ways to let the person interviewed lead the process, and at the same time we need to be able to probe and encourage participants to provide more information. Finally, we learn to attend to issues of language, of pacing, of presentation of self, and we need to realize that even seemingly minor matters such as dress and site affect the interview process and results.

A major part of the work with Big Brothers Big Sisters involved interviews, and these ranged over a variety of types of people and situations. To elicit useful, honest answers, it was critical to have some measure of rapport with the children and adults being interviewed. One type of interview involved talking with and listening to children who were prospective Little Brothers and Little Sisters, who could range from children as young as 6 to teenagers. Most were Yup'ik, but not all. Initial interviews with children are designed to determine whether they are appropriate for the program and what sort of Big Brother or Big Sister would be best. Assuming the child is appropriate for the program and a suitable Big Brother or Sister can be found, the two are subsequently "matched." After an initial match meeting to introduce the pair, follow-up interviews take place monthly to support and nurture the match. I conducted some of those match support interviews, but AmeriCorps VISTA guidelines are such that this sort of case work was not supposed to be a significant part of my job; VISTA positions are intended to focus on capacity building rather than direct service. Nonetheless, because I was on site, I conducted some formal as well as numerous informal match support interviews. There were additional interviews with participants at the end of a year of a match or the end of a school year to help evaluate the match, determine whether there were unaddressed problems or issues to deal with, and also acquire data valuable for assessing the success of the program and securing future grants to support the program. Interviews with parents of prospective Little Brothers and Sisters varied widely, too. Some participants were young parents, some were grandparents. Some were male, some female. Sometimes a couple participated in the interview. And again, as with the children, there were subsequent interviews during the course of a match.

Finally, there were interviews with prospective volunteers, and these interviews held the additional complication of requiring the Big Brothers Big Sisters staff person to be sensitive to potential threats to child safety.

In all cases, a certain degree of rapport had to develop for someone to feel comfortable talking. The questions for the various types of interviews are standard with Big Brothers Big Sisters, but there is nonetheless leeway in how questions can be phrased and freedom—in some cases almost a mandate—to follow up. For example, there is flexibility in how the interview process is introduced and structured, and flexibility in where interviews take place. In other words, many of the same options open to an ethnographer were available to me with my new position.

To assist with building rapport, I had to learn to operate under a more Yup'ik communicative style—or at least recognize and accommodate myself to the process. In particular, I had to learn to wait for answers to my questions. As an anthropologist, I knew that communication styles vary, so I was open to the notion that the Yup'ik style could be different; therefore, I listened when given advice by local people and carefully watched what happened when I began interviewing. I learned, for example, that especially with children, it was helpful to wait 30 to 60 seconds while they thought through what they wanted to say, and I learned to realize that averted eyes were signs of respect for an adult, not disinterest or impudence.

To help people feel comfortable enough to talk freely and honestly, I could use tools I'd learned from fieldwork such as paying attention to my tone of voice, showing genuine interest, and providing validation to those I was interviewing. In discussing ethnographic fieldwork, Bernard (2006), for example, suggested that when getting started with interviews,

> Explain that you simply want to know what *they* think, and what *their* observations are. . . . Keep in mind that people who are being interviewed know that you are shopping for information. There is no point in trying to hide this. If you are open and honest about your intentions, and if you are genuinely interested in what people have to say, many people will help you." (p. 215)

The same applies in the nonprofit context with Big Brothers Big Sisters because an interviewer cannot come across as simply carrying out a routine job or just filling in blanks on the page. I had to communicate, for example, that a child's attitudes and thoughts mattered to me. What he or she liked to do or didn't like to do, what sort of adult they would like to spend time with—the answers to these questions made a difference. Thus to obtain useful information, I had to communicate that I cared about the answers and that they really mattered. To assist in that endeavor, as much as possible I attempted to allow the interviewee to lead. Yes, I needed certain answers to specific questions, but if someone veered off the topic, if they started talking about something else, or if they interpreted the question in an unusual manner, it was nonetheless valuable to let that person meander. First of all, it almost always provided useful information anyway. If, for example, a child seemed to provide disconnected

answers such as responding with, "Yesterday I went on a snow machine," when I asked what they wanted to do with a Big Brother, I learned something of what the child was interested in and clues as to what sort of volunteer interests and personality would match up with the child. Second, especially if I made it clear I was interested in what someone said, it made them more comfortable with answering other questions.

My Big Brothers Big Sisters interviewing was also facilitated by some of the fieldwork tactics I'd learned that help prompt people to continue talking and that communicate an ongoing interest in what they have to say. As Bernard (2006) pointed out for ethnographic fieldwork,

> The key to successful interviewing is learning how to probe effectively—that is, to stimulate a respondent to produce more information, without injecting yourself so much into the interaction that you only get a reflection of yourself in the data." (p. 217)

The same applies to other interview contexts, including Big Brothers Big Sisters. Even though the Big Brothers Big Sisters questions are standardized, there are nonetheless ways an interviewer can encourage both the children and the adults to not only answer but to elaborate. Staying quiet, for example, especially with the Yup'ik children, was always helpful. It was a bit of an art to figure out when it was nonetheless time to step in and ask the question again or rephrase it—and to do so without sounding impatient. The key in both the fieldwork and nonprofit context is to communicate a sincere interest in what people have to say. Simply waiting for perhaps 30 seconds or more helped, especially with Yup'ik participants. And to encourage additional information or elaboration, I often made some sort of comment to indicate interest. If, for example, a child said she liked running around, I could say, in a positive, interested tone, "Ah, you like playing outside." I could also easily say, "What else?" or "What do you do when you're playing outside?"

Connected with the matter of rapport and also parallel to concerns about confidentiality in research undertakings are issues of confidentiality and privacy when conducting the interviews. In fieldwork, we are obviously interested in eliciting honest answers, and we are also bound by ethics and by law to receive informed consent and to respect privacy. So I was quite comfortable facing similar issues in the nonprofit sector. I took time to explain to those I interviewed the limits of what I was allowed to reveal and what I was obligated not to reveal of what they told me during the interviews. For example, with high school students who were applying to be volunteers for a school-based program, when I came to required questions about drinking and drug use, I found it prudent to remind them that I was not permitted to repeat what they said, that only Big Brothers Big Sisters staff members had access to their answers. In this case it was critical to have truthful responses, in order to decide whether prospective volunteers would be appropriate role models for children and whether the children would indeed be safe, and it was important to establish enough of a rapport so that there was a reasonable chance of the high school students telling me the truth. It wasn't

the only source for obtaining such information, but I found it did indeed turn up some honest answers about drug and alcohol usage.

I also knew from previous experience in the field that the settings for interviews could have an impact, positive or negative. Rather than routinely call people into my office for interviews, I deliberately looked for opportunities to conduct interviews where people were most comfortable. This accomplished a number of objectives. First, it helped communicate a sincere interest in what they had to say. Second, the more comfortable they felt, the more likely they were to provide lengthier, more useful answers. Third, the more comfortable they felt, the more honest and revealing they were likely to be. Fourth, I could also often glean additional information about someone from a work or a home setting, as I often interviewed parents in their homes, and I often interviewed prospective volunteers in their work settings. I could learn something of a child's family when going into the home. I could learn more of a volunteer's background seeing the work setting—and for, example, how he or she might interact with others in that setting.

I knew to be careful about how I dressed and not to rely on so-called common sense from my own background. Alaska in general was much more casual than I was used to, and I listened carefully when I heard people commenting on the dress of others. I was particularly intrigued when listening to a Yup'ik friend talk about someone who had failed to dress casually and how intimidating that felt. I don't think I wore a dress or fancy coat the entire time I was there. And I avoided scarves and jewelry. Just as with fieldwork, dressing like the local people was critical. And dressing appropriately for interviews took extra thought.

Furthermore, in anthropology we are trained to step outside of our own cultural assumptions and understandings. Gledhill (1994) eloquently pointed out that anthropology

> attempts to examine social realities in a cross-cultural frame of reference. In striving to transcend a view of the world based solely on the premises of European culture and history, anthropologists are also encouraged to look beneath the world of appearances and taken-for-granted assumptions in social life in general. This should help us to pursue critical analyses of ideologies and power relations in all societies, including those of the West. (pp. 7-8)

This certainly came into play when a staff position with Big Brothers Big Sisters became available in Bethel. The national standards of practice require that applicants have a bachelor's degree, a seemingly reasonable and innocuous requirement. The sociocultural context in Bethel, however, is such that the impact of this standard perpetuates existing inequalities in the local community and actually hinders the development of a strong, locally based program. I was able to craft a proposal articulating these concerns along with a specific plan for recognizing alternative qualifications for the job. The newly formed advisory council supported the measure that was forwarded to the main office and its governing board. What with significant

changes in the organization of the Alaska Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies coupled with my departure, I do not know what happened in the wake of the proposal. My point, however, is that the anthropological background facilitated recognition of the problem and then articulation of the issues and formulation of a proposal to rectify the situation.

Participant observation as a general method also turned out to be worthwhile in other ways connected with learning about the community and making relationships. Not only was it valuable to attend community events, such as the Kuskokwim 300 dog mushing race, the Cama'i dance festival, fiddle dances, concerts, and the like, but it was also valuable to volunteer for events as further opportunities for participant observation. I volunteered to help with a fundraiser, to assist with a disaster simulation, to teach a course at the university, to teach a "Friday Club" at the high school, and to pursue other opportunities that presented themselves. Each time I also took advantage of the opportunity to explain what I was doing in Bethel. Even if those conversations were not explicitly recruiting conversations, they helped people to get to know me and the organization, and I was able to meet new people and cement relationships with others that I had met. This in turn led to other opportunities. I came to be seen as a player, which helped Big Brothers Big Sisters. For example, I was invited to participate in a conference with the Bethel nonprofit tribal organization. A relationship with that organization is valuable for the long-term success of Big Brothers Big Sisters and those contacts can play a role in helping to shape a culturally appropriate version of the program. Furthermore, one of the staff joined the advisory council and another committed to an interest in volunteering.

We also learn in anthropology how to listen, how to focus on the emic (insider) perspective, how to do our best to put aside what we think ought to be the case, and at least view our own thoughts as hypotheses to be tested. Any basic cultural anthropology course teaches these ideas, but without such a course naive realism reigns. Many people aren't even aware that others may classify kin differently than we do, define childhood differently, hold alternate notions of family roles and obligations, and understand a host of other aspects of culture quite differently. So I was primed in Bethel to remain open to what people had to say and to seek their personal emic perspective. I witnessed the value of this stance when comparing my reaction to someone else's when interpreting the answers a volunteer gave about paying for match meetings. The local Big Brothers Big Sisters policy recommends that expenses associated with a match outing be split between the volunteer and the child's parents, but the reality in Bethel is that volunteers tend to be financially far more secure than the parents of the children in the program and thus end up paying the full amount for activities such as eating out together. The key issue is whether or not this is problematic. For example, if someone said, "It's not a problem," my job was to determine whether she was being honest. A potential colleague who firmly believed it was wrong for a volunteer to pay a child's expenses interpreted a volunteer's response to this question as indicating that she saw it as a problem, a clear case of not being able to put aside beliefs about what ought to be the case in favor of truly listening to what the volunteer had to say. I don't claim to have invariably been correct in my interpretations; my

point is that my training helped me listen for a person's thoughts and beliefs while putting aside what I thought the answers should be.

Finally, I also put my anthropology to use when I worked to help ensure that Big Brothers Big Sisters fit the local cultural situation. Aspects of the program could obviously fit with local ways without me doing much of anything, as the choice of activities would be in the hands of the volunteers and children. Nonetheless, I made it clear that traditional Yup'ik activities were more than appropriate. Furthermore, an advisory council member explicitly recommended some organized events for volunteers and children that would be consistent with traditional Yup'ik mentoring practices, especially by organizing small groups to sit with elders as they told stories, discussed traditions, and appropriate behavior, or demonstrated an aspect of their heritage. It would be a way of continuing a pattern of traditional mentoring into the present and strengthen a sense of identity and connection to Yup'ik heritage.

In sum, nonprofit management education programs can benefit from exploring what cultural anthropology has to offer. Borrowing from the methods and concepts of cultural anthropology promotes an ability to learn through experience—through active participation and critical observation—how to appropriately interact and develop relationships with people of diverse backgrounds. These methods allow practitioners to learn about the communities they serve, including the critical ability to listen and understand issues from the perspective of local people in those communities. Rather than assume they know what the issues and problems are, and therefore, presumably also assume they know the solutions, nonprofit managers can more effectively discern and meet local needs and work with local people to craft culturally appropriate programs.

Programs preparing students for careers working in nonprofit organization, such as American Humanics, the program I am most familiar with, include courses on management, public relations, fundraising, and the like, and they are certainly essential and help students acquire certain competencies. But these programs can also benefit by exploring the ways in which ethnographic research methods, especially participant observation, can contribute not just to the acquisition of the new diversity awareness competency that has been defined for American Humanics but also contribute to the ability of future nonprofit leaders to learn through experience and service. With increasing emphasis on service learning and with the emphasis at least in American Humanics nonprofit management programs on experiential learning through the internship and cocurricular requirements, these ethnographic methods provide clear strategies for implementing that learning process. Nationally American Humanics has a focus on service to humanity, on inclusiveness and appreciation of cultural diversity, on experiential learning as well as service learning, and on developing competencies that include an ability to work with, recruit, motivate, and appreciate people of diverse backgrounds (see detailed analysis by Ashcraft, 2001). Where better to look than to the methods of cultural anthropology for learning how to get along with others as well as acquiring an ability to learn from experience, from participation, and from observation?

Ideally, students would take a cultural anthropology course focused on ethnographic methods, but there are a variety of strategies that can be employed as activities

or units in other courses. The key is to avoid a focus on memorizing traits said to be associated with certain cultural groups but instead to have students acquire strategies for learning about other ways and for staying open to revising their assumptions and understandings. Students should be challenged with active learning experiences in the classroom and with service learning opportunities in the community. There are a variety of resources for finding classroom activities that challenge naive realism and thus help students realize the extent to which they make assumptions grounded in their own cultural and background that may not be applicable elsewhere. A Web site where a variety of simulations and games can be found is http://www.carla.umn.edu/culture/resources/exercises.html, and other, specifically anthropological, activities can be found in Rice and McCurdy (2000, 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008).

Second, service learning opportunities can be structured so that students have the opportunity to explore methods that ethnographers employ (see, for example, Hébert, 2008; Hyatt, 2001; Keene & Colligan, 2004). To maximize the anthropological learning aspect, students should volunteer to work in an area and with people and an issue they are not familiar with. Before beginning their work, students should not only conduct some background research but they should also be asked to specifically articulate their assumptions about what they expect to find. Then during their projects, they should regularly write field notes about what they are learning about the people, area, and issue. In other words, students should act as ethnographers learning about a new culture, new community, new beliefs, new values, new expectations of behavior, and thus they should take extensive field notes as they learn. To facilitate this learning, students should be encouraged to explicitly consider both participant observation and open-ended interviewing as ways of learning, as outlined in this article. Finally, students should reflect on their field notes and actively look for ways in which what they assumed has to be readjusted.

Although these methods and anthropological stance typically are used in contexts of cultural diversity, they are useful for addressing other types of diversity, including age, gender, disability, and sexual orientation. Then instead of memorizing and then probably forgetting a list of traits (which may or may not even be applicable to individuals), students acquire skills and strategies for how to learn appropriate ways of working with a wide array of diverse peoples in a variety of contexts.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

Funding

References

Ashcraft, R. F. (2001). Where nonprofit management education meets the undergraduate experience: American Humanics after 50 years. *Public Performance and Management Review, 25*(1), 42-56.

Bailey, B. (2001). Communication of respect in interethnic service encounters. In A. Duranti (Ed.), *Linguistic anthropology: A reader* (pp. 119-146). Cambridge, MA: Blackwell.

Bernard, H. R. (2006). *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (4th ed.). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

Chambers, R. (2008). PRA, PLA and pluralism: Practice in theory. In P. Reason & H. Bradbury (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* (pp. 297-318). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

DeVita, P. R. (Ed.). (1990). *The humbled anthropologist: Tales from the Pacific*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

DeVita, P. R. (Ed.). (1992). *The naked anthropologist: Tales from around the world*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

DeVita, P. R. (Ed.). (2000). *Stumbling toward truth: Anthropologists at work*. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press.

Dolch, N. A., Ernst, M., McClusky, J. E., & Mirabella, R. J. (2007). The nature of undergraduate nonprofit education: Models of curriculum delivery. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 36*(Suppl.), 28-50.

Gledhill, J. (1994). *Power and its disguises*. London: Plato.

Hébert, M. (2008). Teaching research methods through service-learning. *Anthropology News, 49*(6), 15.

Hyatt, S. G. (2001). "Service learning," applied anthropology and the production of neo-liberal citizens. *Anthropology in Action, 8*(1), 6-13.

Kedia, S., & van Willigen, J. (Ed.). (2005). *Applied anthropology: Domains of application*. New York: Praeger.

Keene, A. S., & Colligan, S. (2004). Service-learning and anthropology. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 10*(3), 5-15.

Lee, R. B. (1969). Eating Christmas in the Kalahari. *Natural History, 78*(10), 14-22.

Lewis, D. (1999). Revealing, widening, deepening? A review of the existing and potential contribution of anthropological approaches to "third-sector" research. *Human Organization, 58*, 73-81.

MacClancy, J. (2002). Introduction: Taking people seriously. In J. MacClancy (Ed.), *Exotic no more: Anthropology on the front lines* (pp. 1-14). Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Mirabella, R. M. (2007). University-based educational programs in nonprofit management and philanthropic studies: A 10-year review and projections of future trends. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 36*(Suppl.), 11-27.

Mulhare, E. M. (1999) Mindful of the future: Strategic planning ideology and the culture of nonprofit management. *Human Organization, 58*, 323-330.

Omohundro, J. T. (1998). *Careers in anthropology*. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

O'Neill, M. (2007). The future of nonprofit management education. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 36*(Suppl.), 169-176.

Panayiotopoulos, P. (2002). Anthropology consultancy in the UK and community development in the Third World: A difficult dialogue. *Development in Practice, 12*(1), 45-58.

Rice, P., & McCurdy, D. (Eds.). (2000). *Strategies in teaching anthropology*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rice, P., & McCurdy, D. (Eds.). (2002). *Strategies in teaching anthropology* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rice, P., & McCurdy, D. (Eds.). (2004). *Strategies in teaching anthropology* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rice, P., & McCurdy, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Strategies in teaching anthropology* (4th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rice, P., & McCurdy, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Strategies in teaching anthropology* (5th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rylko-Bauer, B., Singer, M., & van Willigen, J. (2006). Reclaiming applied anthropology: Its past, present, and future. *American Anthropologist, 108*, 178-190.

Yzaguirre, R. (2007). Nonprofit and philanthropic studies: Education for what? *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 36*(Suppl.), 184-187.

Bio

Juliana Flinn, as a cultural anthropologist, has conducted ethnographic research in Micronesia, Belarus, and the United States. In 1999 she started the American Humanics program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and she recently completed a year working for Big Brothers Big Sisters in rural Alaska.