

Student-Faculty Research: Collaboration in a Liberal Arts College

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Doing field research as an undergraduate, mentored by my professor, sold me on anthropology as a career. Consequently, I have been convinced that the experience of field research is nearly essential for learning to use anthropology, whether in an academic or non-academic context. My purpose in this essay is three-fold: (1) to sketch a narrative of some of the ways I have encountered and developed opportunities for research collaboration with my students and former students, (2) to outline the differences I see between the role relations of student-teacher and research collaborator-mentor and (3) to elaborate on some of the roles of the researcher in relation to the wider community.¹

Opportunities

As an undergraduate at Carleton College I was fortunate to be selected by my anthropology professor, Frank C. Miller, to participate in two summers of research on a northern Minnesota reservation, funded by the National Science Foundation's program in Undergraduate Research Participation (#G-21671). I now can see that experience as the triggering event for my subsequent career path in anthropology, and I see Miller as the most important influence on my academic career. That field research on Chippewa adolescents provided the basis for my senior thesis that led to a co-authored publication (Miller and Caulkins 1964). The experience was the foundation of my commitment to empirical anthropology. During my graduate training at Cornell University I took a number of courses in research methods and used a wide variety of techniques in carrying out my dissertation research in Western Norway.

Consequently, when I took my first teaching job at Grinnell College in 1970, it seemed reasonable to suggest that we add a required research methods course to the major. That emphasis continued: currently we have both ethnographic and archaeological methods courses offered in the seven-person anthropology department. In 1974 I helped establish the Grinnell-in-London Program, which brought college students and faculty to London for courses that particularly utilized the London environment. Courses were arranged in two phases: phase I of 10 weeks in which students took several courses concurrently, and phase II of 4 weeks in which students took only one intensive course. This allowed me to develop field schools in urban ethnography in London, followed by an intensive course in regional studies on the Welsh border. My students produced hundreds of

pages of field notes, wrote quick ethnographic analyses while still in the field, and often did independent study projects back at Grinnell to work on more polished reports to be presented at the Anthropology Section of the Iowa Academy of Science meetings. More than 65 students experienced field research either in London, in a small town, or both over the years that I taught on the Grinnell-in-London program. Among the anthropologists who did their first field research on this program are Susan Hyatt, at Temple University, and Joel Robbins at University of California, San Diego. I am equally proud of those former students who are using their anthropological training in non-academic contexts.

At that time I regarded the U.K. as a teaching laboratory, but not as a site for my own research. By the time I had taught the Grinnell-in-London course four times, however, I was ready for my own research on small high-technology firms and regional development in Wales, Northeast England, and Scotland (Caulkins 1992, 1995a, 1995b). I hope that this research partially compensated for an earlier failing in my teaching during courses in the Welsh border country. During the 1970s we experimented with visual anthropology, taking Super 8 films of farm life and livestock markets in this rural area. We showed the rough-cuts in pubs and meeting halls and asked locals residents if we had gotten it right. Had we left out anything that they thought should be included? The major criticism we received was from young adults, just out of college, who complained that we made the region look unidimensional and old-fashioned. I realized that we had focused on the implicit contrast between London and the border country and, in the next decade, tried to widen the diversity of student projects. Perhaps my subsequent research on high-technology firms also redressed this imbalance.

In an additional summer of fieldwork in Wales, focusing on regional development and small manufacturing firms, I obtained college Grant Board funding for Elaine Weiner to work with me after she had completed an M.A. and before she entered a Ph.D. program. The goal was to provide some field research experience for Elaine and to assess changes in the development of manufacturing firms in mid-Wales since my initial research in 1987. Some of the resulting publications (Caulkins and Weiner 1998a, 1998b, 1999) were critical of the strategies of development agencies that tend to ignore indigenous low-growth firms while courting high-growth firms (see also Caulkins 1999). We argued that these firms were frequently invisible in most organizational theories, but can be regarded as "egalitarian" firms in Mary Douglas' grid/group analytic frame (Douglas 1978, 1982, 1989, 1992; Thompson, et. al 1990). I described my increasing involvement in various applied and advocacy roles in local communities in an article on "Stumbling into Applied Anthropology: Collaborative Roles of Academic Researchers" (Caulkins 1995b).

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While on sabbatical at the University of Durham, England, I collaborated with one of my former students, Susan Hyatt, then a Ph.D. candidate at University of Massachusetts-Amherst, on some pre-dissertation research she was carrying out while attached to the University of Bradford. Sue had been a student on the first Grinnell-in-London Program. I introduced her to consensus analysis and analyzed the data she e-mailed to me in Durham (Hyatt with Caulkins 1992). Now that she is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Temple University, we have continued our collaboration, using consensus analysis in a variety of settings (Caulkins and Hyatt 1999).

Adaptability and Intellectual Curiosity in the Field

Unlike Sue, who is a brilliant field researcher, some of my student collaborators have been less than successful in the field. One, in a sudden revelation of self-knowledge, phoned me the night before our group departure for the field and said that she didn't want to go because she realized that she didn't like talking with people. I allowed her to concentrate on historical and archival research while other students talked with people. Another student became furious with an informant (an emotion she hid from him but not from me) when he told her much more than she wanted to know about the manufacturing plant of which he was proud. He was wasting her time! Another held a grudge against the entire world for a week when a defective washing machine deposited a grease stain on her favorite white blouse. Adaptability is the single most important quality for a good field researcher, but, unfortunately, it is not easy to teach. Sometimes the best we can do is to teach students such approaches as how to "work" an event and hope they will generalize the lesson. I sent three of my research assistants to an outdoor church fair in Wales, where I expected them to learn something about the role of these events in the life of the community and develop contacts for later interviews. After a few minutes I saw that they had no idea how to accomplish these goals. They were moving from booth to booth in a group (for safety?), looking at the displays and talking quietly among themselves, not making contact with any of the locals. I took them aside and emphasized that they would have to split up, introduce themselves, tell what they were doing here, and ask about the fair. "Watch," I said as I left them and walked up to the Vicar, introduced myself, and inquired about further details of the fair. As I chatted on with the Vicar I glanced back and saw my students drifting off in different directions, with more determined looks on their faces. Within 20 minutes everyone knew who we were, and we had promises of dozens of fruitful interviews.

Intellectual curiosity and an ability to discover connections among events and ideas may be nearly as important, and may be somewhat more teachable. One student on my Grinnell-in-London phase II project in Northern England wanted to study attitudes toward environmental problems in a small town. We had heard that a local factory had been responsible for the accidental pollution of a nearby stream and a resulting fish kill two years previously. She decided to interview the manager. She arrived at the factory just in time to see all the

employees and management out front, posing for a photograph showing the manager receiving an award from the local development agency for high standards of environmental awareness. Hearing about this afterward, I could hardly contain my excitement at my student's fortuitous arrival on the scene of an event that could become the focus of her ethnography.² She seemed merely annoyed that everyone had been too busy to give her an interview with her pre-structured questions. Sometimes students lack sufficient perspective to see the potential significance of either unusual events or daily practices around them. One student in Wales preferred the romanticized "Celts" of popular fiction to the real people she encountered. While some of this problem can be attributed to differences in intellectual curiosity, some is inherent in the student and teacher roles, which I contrast with the research collaborator and mentor roles.

Student vs. Collaborator Roles

Among the key features of the student role is the overwhelming sense of having a less powerful position in a relationship in which "work" (written or oral) is exchanged for a grade, one among many that must be accumulated at the end of four years. It makes sense, then, for the student to obtain explicit directions from the instructor on what must be accomplished, how it is to be accomplished, and by what deadline in order to earn a specific grade. This role tends to circumscribe or limit the amount of work attempted ("What exactly do I have to do?") and discourages intellectual curiosity, since that might lead to more or different work. The teacher, of course, provides the structure and the evaluation for the work produced. This role relationship is counterproductive for research collaboration. I urge, instead, a different role set, one that acknowledges the mentoring relationship, and a flexible or open-ended definition of the common task of learning about a research problem. The collaborator must feel safe to venture new ideas and exercise intellectual curiosity, particularly if it leads in unanticipated directions. When my collaborator is as driven as I am to unravel the research problem, then I know that I have succeeded in redefining our roles from student-teacher to collaborator-mentor. In the student role the major question is "when is the work done?" In the collaborator role the question is "where does the problem lead?" Thus, instead of student behavior focused on a complex of grades/precise instructions/deadlines/task circumscription, I hope to foster behavior focused on problem formulation/field adaptability/problem "solution"/task flexibility. This is the way I like to work with colleagues, and I hope that student collaborators can be brought into a similar relationship. Obviously, the role relationships I have described occur in regular classrooms as well. We all recognize the difference between those treasured students who "collaborate" enthusiastically in a class, compared with those who are most concerned with task limitation. Obviously, too, I am referring to a continuum between the collaborative and the student role. I first became aware of the extremes of this continuum while teaching the ethnographic research methods course, which involved brief

research projects. Those who did the best work adopted the collaborative role.

Accessible Research Topics

Colleagues in other departments have sometimes assured me of the impossibility of "using" students in their research. They explain that they work in a language, sometimes an arcane hyper-scholarly version of English, that is inaccessible to students and that students don't have the background to interpret the text(s) with which they work. Yes, I nod in agreement, that is why I don't have students work with me in Norway. One often has to move away from one's research specialty (Norwegian civic culture in my case) in order to facilitate collaborative research. I developed research sites in English-speaking areas, with accessible topics, so that I could engage students. At least that is the story that I tell. My narration of the development of another research project will reveal that I had somewhat less intentionality than good fortune in that regard.

Carol Trosset, who had carried out dissertation research among Welsh speakers (Trosset 1993), taught at Grinnell for a year while completing her dissertation. We had met at a summer institute previously and had been in the field in Wales during the same time, pursuing very different kinds of projects. Later, we designed some collaborative research after she took a series of temporary teaching positions elsewhere. She and I were co-principal investigators for a National Science Foundation grant (DBS-9213430) to study the diversity of constructions of Welsh personhood, using systematic interviewing techniques and consensus analysis to test and refine the findings of her participant observation research. We applied to NSF under the general program, rather than the Research at Undergraduate Institutions program, primarily because there was less paperwork, but were advised that if we did the additional forms we could fund one or two undergraduates to help us with the research. This opportunity reminded me of my own experience, in the distant past, as an undergraduate researcher. Carol and I decided that we could accommodate more than two students on the project. With the NSF RUI grant, along with funding for four additional students from the Grinnell College Grant Board, we were able to employ six student research assistants in Wales during the summer of 1993 (Caulkins and Trosset 1994, 1996; Trosset and Caulkins 1993, 1994). Three of these students later wrote senior theses based on their research and presented papers at conferences. All have completed graduate degrees in a diverse range of fields, including anthropology, performance studies, international relations, museum studies and urban planning.

Following the Problem

One of our Welsh informants/consultants, who had been raised, educated, and employed in a Welsh-speaking area, complained to me about our research instrument, a battery of narratives employing positive or negative examples of behavior exemplifying concepts of personhood that Trosset had identified in her field research (Trosset 1993). The

narratives, he contended, had nothing to do with Welshness, but were just aspects of human nature. While we were fairly confident that responses to the narratives varied cross-culturally, we nevertheless needed to test that assumption. Back at Grinnell during the fall semester of 1993, I subjected my students to the narratives and asked how "American" the behavior seemed to each of them. I reasoned that if the students answered in the same way as the Welsh, then we had, in fact, tapped into what was probably a Euro-American pattern of responses. My students, however, gave very different answers. As I explained the results of the comparison in my class on American Culture, I mentioned that it would be interesting to study a Welsh-American population to see if their responses were more similar to those of their American neighbors or the Welsh in Wales. At the time I had not realized that there was a substantial Welsh-American population in Iowa. After class, Tina Popson, a first-year student from Knoxville, in one of the Welsh areas, came up and told me that she would be very interested in the possibility of such a study ("I am really pumped about it" she exclaimed in her sports vocabulary). Her enthusiasm was contagious. After checking with NSF, I was able to get a small supplemental grant from the program for Research Experiences for Undergraduates for the following summer to carry out a study among Welsh-Americans in Iowa. Grinnell College also added internal funding to allow me to enroll five students in a Directed Summer Research project.

Our research design called for interviews with Iowans who identified simply as "Americans" as well as with particular ethnic ancestry. Vickie Schlegel, one of my advisees, helped expand the research instrument by adding narratives pertaining to work and success. Tina Popson specialized in interviewing the Welsh-Americans. We worked together on various projects during all four of her undergraduate years, and she presented papers at two national conferences and has a paper published in a conference proceedings (Popson 1997). Both she and Vickie Schlegel also presented papers at the Iowa Academy of Science meetings. This year Tina completed an M.A. in museum studies and is taking a professional position in a neighboring state. Without her enthusiasm for the project I outlined in class, I probably would not have developed the project.

My scholarship would have been poorer if I had not. I pursued research on Welsh-Americans and eventually published some of the results in an encyclopedia article targeted for high schools and public libraries (Caulkins 1997). I considered this a good opportunity to make my research accessible and widely available to a non-scholarly audience. One finding I reported in the encyclopedia article was not particularly well received by Welsh-American readers. I noted that few of the persons in our survey had extensive knowledge of Welsh history or Welsh culture, a finding that was in keeping with Richard Alba's study of Americans of European ancestry (Alba 1990). Some readers indignantly accused me of faulty scholarship. In other cases my article was cited by organizers of short courses and workshop on Welsh culture as a justification for signing up to learn more about one's

heritage. If anyone is motivated to prove me wrong, I would be most gratified. My aim was not to be egregiously insulting, but to contrast this finding with the more remarkable result that the Welsh-Americans responded to the narratives more like the Welsh than like their fellow Americans.

Student enthusiasm has driven other aspects of this growing project. As a consequence of giving conference papers on our findings in Wales, we were often told by members of our audience that what we regarded as "Welsh" concepts of personhood were, in fact, widely distributed in the British "Celtic Fringe." A pre-med student who had also taken several courses from me, Annette Giangiacomo, confided that she wanted to take a semester off and visit Ireland. I offered to give her a focus for her semester away, since she had proved to be such a good field researcher in my methods course. It was a perfect opportunity, she thought. After some planning and a successful grant application to the college Grant Board, Annette set off for several months in Ireland and collected 42 interviews, using the same research instrument that we had used in Iowa. Tanya Hedges, who carried out research in Iowa on German and Irish-American identity, and Annette both presented papers on their research at the Iowa Academy of Science annual meetings. After graduation, Tanya went to Ireland for six months of research, using narrative interviews in regions different from Annette's. Tanya found a job after the grant money ran out and stayed in Ireland for more than a year before returning to the U.S.A. to begin an M.A. program in American Studies. While Annette is immersed in her medical studies, Tanya has continued her involvement in the project and recently presented a conference paper (Hedges and Caulkins 1999) and is collaborating on a manuscript for publication.

Road Hazards on the Path to Professionalism

Virtually every good student can benefit from experiencing the professionalism of scholarship, which has applications in government and business as well as in the academic world. Bringing students through the full round of scholarship, from formulating a research problem through constructing and analyzing data, writing up an interpretation, and presenting it either to a professional or lay audience, is a potentially satisfying but hazardous undertaking. Some students have difficulty focusing sufficiently to formulate a good research problem. Others are not well equipped to meet the unanticipated problems of field research with adaptability. Still others have difficulty in seeing clearly what they have experienced and learned in the field and are satisfied with the most banal of interpretations. To some degree these problems can be

overcome through modeling at each stage of the research process. Modeling is another aspect of the process of making the research accessible.

One phase of research that, I suspect, is rarely made transparent to student collaborators is the potential irritation of the peer-review process in publication and grant writing. Strangely, not all peer-reviewers recognize the brilliance of our insights, the compelling nature of our arguments, or the suppleness of our prose style. They may have ego-deflating comments on all of those aspects of a manuscript or grant application. I make a point of showing student collaborators the peer reviewers' comments on whatever I have been writing at the time. I try to indicate how the reviewers' comments are positioned theoretically and try to show how any negative comments might be reasonable from that perspective. I then discuss how I am going to respond to the suggestions. One needs to show that most peer-review criticisms are constructive rather than gratuitous. By modeling this kind of adaptation to criticism we signal to students that our own and others' critical appraisal of their work is meant to help, not wound.



Dancers at Scottish Highland Games
(Photo by Douglas Caulkins)

Even if all the analysis and writing goes well, however, one still cannot control what happens at the presentation of a conference paper, often the first step into professionalism. The worst in my experience occurred at a conference that I judged to be a non-threatening and comfortable venue for a first paper presentation. It was an interdisciplinary conference that seemed to draw presenters mainly from older faculty at service-oriented public universities. Having heard a number of low-key papers of less than outstanding scholarship the

previous day, my former student arrived at our panel on a sunny Saturday afternoon with a chip on her shoulder. I began to get a sinking feeling when the chair of our panel engaged me in conversation while we waited for an audience. He wanted to know if I ever got back to Wales, the setting for our paper. His assumption was that I hadn't been to Wales since my hair turned silver and that I was just re-packaging tired and threadbare material. If so, then his expectations for the scholarly rigor of the panel were, obviously, minimal. It eventually became clear that the potential audience was more attracted to the sunshine than to our panel. The other panelists refused to do as I had suggested in the absence of an audience: tell our papers to each other informally. Angry, hurt, and disappointed, my former student did not have a good introduction to the professional world of scholarly conferences. Furthermore, she held me responsible for the debacle.

In contrast, some experiences of first paper presentations can go very well. When Anna Painter presented a paper based on her senior thesis at the 1999 Central States Anthropological Society meetings (Painter and Caulkins 1999), a faculty member from a good university asked her some questions in the discussion period. Finding her articulate and convincing, he invited her to apply to his graduate program.

Celtic Cultures Project

Anna Painter is one of two students who have played important roles in the latest phase of what has come to be called the "Celtic Cultures Project," an extension of the research in Wales and Ireland. Meredith Good did a summer research project in Highland Scotland under my direction, funded by Grinnell College Grant Board. Anna, after taking her junior year abroad at the Institute of European Studies Program at the University of Durham, carried out similar research in the Northeast of England. The results of the narrative interviews had been quite similar in all of the "Celtic" regions we studied, so it was crucial to discover whether or not that similarity carried over into a non-Celtic but peripheral region of the British Isles. Anna's research in the English Northeast provided that test.

Over the years I had been successful at getting Grinnell College Grant Board funding for summer research for my students. The stipend for students was now up to \$3,000 for 10 weeks of research. More and more faculty in the social studies and humanities divisions had begun to develop collaborative research projects with their students, with the consequence that the once-ample budget was increasingly strained. A workshop I led on student-faculty research had resulted in proposals for increasing the amount of such mentoring in the curriculum and for a faculty workload accounting system that would reward rather than penalize faculty for directing such projects.

The college, tapping into its billion-dollar endowment, has now set aside funding for a number of student-faculty research projects. One day this semester, in my Urban Society class, I spoke about a germ of an idea for a project on the politics of identity in Scotland. The project would deal not only with the elections for the new Scottish Parliament that took place on May 6, 1999, but also with the impact in Scotland of the 1996 academy award-winning film "Braveheart," about the 13th century Scottish hero who fought against the English. After class, Kristina Valada-Viars spoke with animation about having been at the Edinburgh Festival the summer of 1996, where everyone talked about *Braveheart*, either attacking the film for its historical inaccuracies, or defending it for its inspiring message about the hunger for Scottish freedom. She would be eager, she said, to help carry out that research project. The rest, as one might say, is predictable. Seven students and I are preparing to launch this project as I write, with funding from a generous grant from Grinnell College. I think we are all eager to get started. I have never tried—or been able—to keep my research and my courses separated, but have treated both as intertwined works in progress, never quite completed, always leading to more questions and more evidence to ponder. It is gratifying to have enthusiastic company in that task. ■

Notes

1. National Science Foundation grant (DBS-9213430) is gratefully acknowledged, as is the generous support of the Grinnell College Grant Board. Dean James Swartz and Associate Dean Paula Smith have been supportive of my research collaboration with students. Lorna Caulkins, Carol Trosset, Brooke Heaton, Elizabeth Neerland, Laurelin Muir, Anna Painter, Lara Ratzlaff, Sarah Silberman, and Kristina Valada-Viars made helpful comments on the manuscript. My thanks as well to Carol Trosset and Sue Hyatt for their collaboration and intellectual stimulation over the years. A special thanks to Frank C. Miller, who started me down this path.

2. See Philip Carl Salzman (1999) for an excellent discussion of the focus on events in anthropological research.

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Work and Success in a De-industrialized English Region.

Anna Painter and Douglas Caulkins

Historically, coal mining and heavy industry occupied a central place in the social, economic and political fabric of Northeast England.¹ During the century in which mining and the associated steel industry prevailed, these industries were the focus of regional culture and identity. However, the prosperity and success of the traditional Northeastern industries declined, and the region experienced extensive de-industrialization, beginning in the 1960s. These events heightened the Northeasterners' sense of depravity and difference in relation to the more prosperous Southeast. Nevertheless, as the leading newspaper in the region proclaims, while "King Coal may be dead in County Durham ... his spirit lives on. The great sense of community created by shared experiences among those living and working in the coalfield has defied the industry's passing" (Mason 1998). If this sense of community continues, do Northeasterners share similar ideas about work and success? Do they agree about the characteristics of cultural practices in their region? Alternately, has the loss of their traditional industrial focus weakened their regional identity and values? Do Northeasterners see themselves as fundamentally different from or similar to the English of the more prosperous Southeast, centered on London?

During the summer of 1998, Painter conducted an eight-week interview study (N=69) focusing on issues of work and success in Counties Durham, Cleveland, and Northumbria.² Consensus analysis of a battery of 21 scenarios, or short narratives from daily life, shows a high level of agreement about Northeastern cultural practices among a diverse sample

of 69 consultants resident in the three counties. Additional analysis of the material collected by Painter suggests shared ideas within the discourses around work and success.

Life in the Industrial Era

The coal and steel industries dominated the economic landscape of the Northeast, especially from the Industrial Revolution (circa 1780) to the 1960's (Smith 1989:12). In 1923, the coal pits in County Durham employed 170,000 people. Both Consett and Middlesbrough had large British Steel Corporation plants that also employed many people (Smith 1989:132). How did the seemingly dominant presence of these industries affect the regional people and their culture?

Writing about neighboring Yorkshire, Dennis, Henriques, and Slaughter (1979) argue that members of coal mining communities were drawn together by the shared memory of their past struggle with the traditional industries (14) and their class consciousness (35). "The participation in and sharing of a common set of community relations and experiences through time gives confirmation to those characteristics, considerably strengthening them" (83).

Like the coal pits, steel works also had a significant impact on the areas of the Northeast in which they were located. Discussing the effects of a plant closure in Consett, County Durham, Sinfield (1981:165 cited in Smith 1989:132) said, "The blow was all the greater because the steelworks had dominated the local economy for 140 years. In a classic company town, the Consett Iron Company had owned the shops, the houses, and the collieries as well as the steelworks." Therefore, it seems probable that the steel industry had a similarly important impact on regional culture in the Northeast.

Anna Painter graduated from Grinnell College in 1999, with Honors in Anthropology.