Celebrating the Local

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Celebrating the Local*

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This chapter is a cheerleading pep rally, a game plan, and the beginnings of a how-to-do-it instruction manual for "engaged" local anthropology. It assumes a beginner's knowledge, but the chapters in this volume demonstrate that scholars are bringing a wide variety of expertise and sophisticated activities into their local communities.

Engaged Anthropology in the Profession

On the one hand, historically anthropology could be said to have displayed some snobbery regarding local fieldwork, or even fieldwork within the USA. On the other hand, the work of distinguished forefathers and mothers includes numerous endorsements for the anthropology of the local. Margaret Mead's prolific writings included many in a popular genre, including articles for *Redbook* magazine (Gordan 1976). Margaret Mead's teacher Franz Boas, recognized as the founder of the discipline in the United States when he developed the doctoral program at Columbia University in the late 1890s, "wrote for, and spoke to, the public at large" (Blakey et al. 1994, 298). Margaret Mead's colleague Ruth Benedict, said, "The purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences."[1]

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Coming forward in time from Margaret Mead, we need look no further than some of the leading lights of anthropology for confirmation that we should be going local. Roy A. (Skip) Rappaport (1994, 245) advocated "engaged cultural anthropology" committed to "cultural pluralism and democratic participation." *Diagnosing America: Anthropology and Public Engagement*, edited by Shepard Forman (1994), includes chapters from nine anthropologists who formed the American Anthropological Association's Panel on Disorders of Industrial Societies, including two presidents of the American Anthropological Association, James Peacock and Roy Rappaport. The book ends with "A Statement to the Profession" by the panel that warns, "American anthropology stands at a crossroads. We have the opportunity to engage on the major social issues that are confronting our society, or we can remain peripheral to them . . . Anthropology grows narrower, more constricted in theme and purpose as we compete to serve our professional goals rather than direct the discipline toward the generation of knowledge that has some more useful purpose" (Blakey et al. 1994, 295, 297).

The American Anthropological Association encompasses forty sections and ten interest groups. Of those fifty, between fifteen to twenty percent are clearly applied. The Society for Applied Anthropology itself was founded in 1941. The National Association for the Practice of Anthropology began in 1983. In 2007, the American Anthropological Association added a standing Committee on Practicing, Applied and Public Interest Anthropology (CoPAPIA). The *American Anthropologist* added a section and editors for Practicing Anthropology in 2008 and Public Anthropology in 2010. The Public Anthropology section "charts the vast range of forms practicing anthropology is taking . . . Anthropologists are increasingly engaged in a vast range of communities and reaching numerous constituencies outside captive students and narrow academic scholarly circles"

(Wali, Checker, and Vine 2010, 638). The interest in "engaged anthropology" is substantiated by the explosion of articles in the last several years defining and analyzing it. *Collaborative Anthropologies* was launched in 2008. *Current Anthropology* devoted an issue to engaged anthropology in 2010 (Volume 51, Supplement 2, October 2010). Some authors are concerned about neoliberal universities co-opting engagement with communities (Checker 2014). Others describe ways they helped shaped their universities' centers and programs that promote university-community cooperation and engagement (Bennett and Whiteford 2013; Hyland and Bennett 2013; Hyland and Maurette 2010; Norris-Tirrell, Lambert-Pennington, and Hyland 2010; Whiteford and Strom 2013). Low and Merry (2010) developed a categorization of the various forms engaged anthropology can take. Granted, these writings are not all focused on engaging with LOCAL communities, which is the focus of this volume.

Engaged Anthropology in the Community

The hallmarks of the discipline of anthropology render anthropologists useful to local communities and organizations that need help with planning, data gathering, or communicating to power holders. We offer an internal/insiders' perspective; theories for what culture is and how it works; comparisons and alternatives; and systems analysis that views cultures as integrated parts, emphasizing that change in one part precipitates change in others. Our methods allow for learning about the cultural processes of various entities—schools, factories, organizations of all kinds. We need look no further than our own methods for how to proceed when working with local communities.

The theme of the Southern Anthropological Society's fifty-first annual meeting was "Reinventing and Reinvesting in the Local for Our Common Good," with the motto "Connect. Exchange. Impact."

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The meeting's icon was the striking East Huntington Bridge, a 900-foot cable-stayed bridge over the Ohio River in Huntington, West Virginia. The bridge provides an acronym for the relationship between the academy and the community through local engagement.

Be a Bridge

B Be willing to cross Boundaries

R Reduce jargon; Relate; Communicate

I Keep your Identity—pay attention to your community partners' Identity

D Don't compromise your method or theory

G Get Connected

E Engage

Discussing these directives in a different order will allow us to successfully arrive at Getting Connected and Engaged.

D—Don't compromise your method or theory

A distinction is often drawn between basic research and applied research. However, when going local, there is no need to abandon our best ethnographic research methods. Researching an essay on methods, I queried anthropologists with wide-ranging field sites—in places far away, in dangerous places, in safe places, and in local places—about their fieldwork experiences. I heard very similar stories. It was not difficult to draw an overall picture of how fieldwork progresses, fieldwork's pitfalls, fieldwork's decisions and strategies. When going local, use anthropology's method and theory—but explain them to your constituents. Retain your research mode—but realize that your community partners might not share it.

A project undertaken with undergraduate anthropology students and residents of local counties in the New River Valley of Virginia provides an example of pedagogy, professionalism, pitfalls, and successes. The Power Line Project began in an Appalachian Studies Seminar with a class project focused on resistance in Appalachia. An example of ongoing resistance was occurring next door to the University—the controversy surrounding the proposal by Appalachian Power Company (ApCo, American Electric Power) to build a 765,000-volt power line from Oceana, West Virginia, to Cloverdale, Virginia. The 765s, as they are called, use power towers that are 8 stories high (132 feet) with 200-foot wide rights-of-way. This particular line would have 333 towers and stretch for 100 miles. The power line would "wheel" power generated in old coal-fired power plants (grandfathered by the Environmental Protection Agency) to the Atlantic coast, increasing power flow to eastern cities. It would cross rural mountainous counties of Appalachian Virginia and West Virginia. Some of the proposed routes would cross National Forest land.

Activists from this and earlier environmental controversies, power company executives, and academic experts on social movements and culture change visited the classroom. Then students met the protagonists on their home turf to interview them. The class created a twenty-five-page script for a simulated "town meeting," with students taking on the various roles in the debate. They impersonated local land-owning protesters, company personnel, and representatives from the National Forest and the Appalachian Trail, using their words, and feeling their emotions. A thirty-minute simultaneous video and slide show was developed from the scripted town meeting.

The sense of place versus the place of progress came head-to-head in residents' and power company's perspectives on the power line. Residents who came to the class said, "We are a thinly settled

rural relatively poor area lying between surplus generation in the west and growth area in the east . . . They're making us a national sacrifice area . . . They're going to peddle power over us." The decisions regarding whether to build the power line, and if so, where, rested in the hands of state government bodies regulating utilities, labeled the Public Utilities Commission in West Virginia and the State Corporation Commission (SCC) in Virginia. Because some of the proposed routes of the power line crossed federal public land,

Radford University students Megan Scanlow and Shannon Scott visit with Ruth Reynolds on Ruth's front porch in Maywood/Simmonsville community of Sinking Creek Valley. Megan and Shannon are two of the participants studying "cultural attachment to place" under the direction of Melinda Wagner PhD, Professor of Anthropology, Radford University for Citizens for Preservation of Craig County. Ruth, a much beloved citizen of Craig County, on July 17th celebrated her 80th birthday. Practically all those years have been spent on Sinking Creek. Ruth says "if that power line's anywhere in Craig County, it's too close for me." Shannon commented "so many of the people we've talked with have that attitude. They appear to love all the county as if it was their backyard."

CPCC discusses alternatives proposed by Forest Service

Two of Melinda Wagner's students researching "cultural attachment to place" interview an 80-year-old, lifetime resident of Craig County, Virginia. Clipping from *The New Castle Record*, New Castle, VA, 1994. (Courtesy of *The New Castle Record*)

an environmental impact assessment was required, with the U.S. Forest Service as the lead coordinating agency. Cultural attachment to land, along with many other aspects of the ecology and geology of the area, became a significant issue in this assessment.

Citizens who had served as resource persons for the Town Hall project requested an ethnographic study of cultural attachment to land in their county. The study we completed served as a supplement to the required environmental impact assessment. As we were called upon by other counties that lay in the path of various proposed routes for the power line, study of cultural attachment to land expanded to include eleven semesters, more than one hundred undergraduate students in four different courses, and 223 residents of five counties. It resulted in over four thousand pages of transcribed interviews ranging from twenty minutes to six hours in length, and over three thousand pages of computerized linguistic analyses of these data, along with some two thousand pages of thematic content analyses. It produced four technical reports, chapters and articles co-authored with students, an honors thesis, and numerous student and faculty presentations and performances on campus, for local historical societies, and at meetings of the Appalachian Studies Conference, the Southern Anthropological Society, and the American Anthropological Association, and expert witness testimony before the State Corporation Commission (Wagner 1999).

The motivation for beginning the cultural attachment to land studies is summarized in a statement by Setha Low (1994, 68): "Within the politics of place, poor people's neighborhoods are always the most vulnerable because the local constituency does not have the political and economic power to struggle against the definitions and decisions of governmental officials and private entrepreneurs." These definitions tend to be economic in idiom, and, as such, are at odds with understanding the complexities of cultures. Skip

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Rappaport (1994, 265) wrote, "Under these circumstances essential public concerns which cannot be put into economic terms remain not only inaudible but even unarticulated."

We were also propelled by the fact that, according to the literature, ethnographic methods were becoming more accepted in social impact assessment (a part of environmental impact assessment) because of their ability to capture the natives' point of view. Colleagues like Benita Howell at the University of Tennessee contended that whereas a governmental regulatory commission might dismiss the emotional testimony of residents, carefully collected and analyzed ethnographic data might be attended to.

Eliot Liebow has asked, "Who ought to sit at the table when the big decisions get made? . . . Whose values should inform the choices?" (Liebow 1998/1999, 18). Following these questions, we determined that the objective of this project was to create ways in which citizens' environmental concerns such as cultural attachment to land could come to the table. Through rose-colored glasses we said, "It is a goal of this project to develop a method that is anthropologically sophisticated, informed by symbolic and political economy theories and by scientific positivist and humanistic interpretive approaches, yet that is at the same time practical for environmental impact assessment and community-based environmental protection efforts" (Wagner 1999, 2002, 2009). We sought a method that was nuanced yet practical.

Holding to the observation that resiliency is fostered by hearkening to narratives of downs as well as ups, some pitfalls will be discussed here. But as will be seen, they are the same pitfalls encountered in our research at large. For the most part, strategies for coping have already been developed.

I—Identity

This principle argues for the importance of keeping your Identity and paying attention to the identities of your community participants, and to their understandings of yours. As in traditional anthropological ethnographic fieldwork, the role we played was not always interpreted in the same way by us—anthropologist and anthropology students—and by our informants/collaborators/community partners. For example, I had told our major informant in a phone conversation that this kind of work was called cultural conservation. When the six student members of the first research team and I drove to his house to make entree and to become oriented to the county, he said, "I know you think you have a culture to conserve here, but we have a power line to stop" (Wagner and Hedrick 2001).

Again, how different is that from basic research? It is common for the ethnographer's role to be conceived somewhat differently by the ethnographer and by informants. A disjuncture in the understanding of the ethnographer's role requires exploring the differing perspectives with community partners, whether or not the research is "applied." An example from NSF-funded basic ethnographic research—applied only in the sense that a purpose of ethnography is to make the world safe for human differences, in Ruth Benedict's words—demonstrates the necessity to handle a similar issue in that milieu. The same issues occur and the same strategies work.

During research in conservative Christian schools during the late 1980s, scandals rocked the evangelical world. Collaborators in the Christian schools were concerned that my book would vilify them, as they thought journalists' reports were doing. Discussions of the methodology of anthropological data gathering ensued. They understood. They started pointing out *patterns* to me, in case I missed them. I explained that anthropology tries to capture the "natives'"

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point of view. One of the teachers said, "It's funny how you under-
stand people better when you get to know them and understand why
they do things" (Wagner 1983; 1990).

Building rapport and trust are a part of the methodology of basic
and applied, international and local work. Undertaking the cultural
attachment to land research, I was not fully aware of the distrust the
local residents had for the colleges and universities in the area until
I received this letter of thanks from Craig County resident Charles
Spraker, handwritten on lined yellow paper: "We're all proud of you
and your students for helping us open our eyes and see that what we
know, feel, and are can be of value and is not useless . . . You know,
Melinda, when we first started getting involved in this process . . . we
were actually scared of our own colleges, as some of us thought they
were looking down on us."

Ultimately, the cultural attachment to land research did yield
rapport. The rapport gained between residents and university fac-
ulty and students fostered a nearly fictive kin relationship, and cer-
tainly a symbiotic one. Charles Spraker wrote: "We gained a lot from
our involvement with you and your students and you all made us feel
good about our station and way of life. So you, dear Melinda, learned
from us and we learned from you, so in the end we're all winners."

We need look no further than the American Anthropological
Association ethics statement for how to proceed when our identi-
ties and our collaborators' views of our roles seem to collide.[2] At the
start of a long-term relationship with community partners who col-
lect oral histories from local residents, the AAA Statement on Ethics:
Principles of Professional Responsibility was circulated. The group
members themselves adapted it for their purposes:

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Floyd County Oral History Project
Adapted from the American Anthropological Association
Statement on Ethics

Principles of Professional Responsibility

1. **PROTECT & HONOR**
   In research, anthropologists' first responsibility is to those they study. When there is conflict of interest, these individuals must come first. Anthropologists must do everything in their power to protect the physical, social, and psychological welfare and the honor, dignity, and privacy of those studied.

2. **SAFEGUARD TRUST**
   Where research involves the acquisition of material and information transferred on the assumption of trust between persons, it is important that the rights, interests, and sensitivities of those studied must be safeguarded.

3. **RESPECT ANONYMITY**
   Informants have a right to remain anonymous. This right should be respected both where it has been promised explicitly and where no clear understanding to the contrary has been reached. This applies to the collection of data by means of cameras, recorders, and other data-gathering devices, as well as to data collected in face-to-face interviews. But everyone should understand that anonymity may be compromised unintentionally.

4. **FAIR IS FAIR**
   There should be no exploitation of individual informants for personal gain. Fair return should be given for all services.

5. **THINK AHEAD**
   There is an obligation to reflect on the foreseeable repercussions of the study.

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6. **SHARE INTENTIONS**
The anticipated consequences and likely forms of publication of re-
search should be communicated as fully as possible to the individuals
and groups likely to be affected.

7. **MAKE FULL DISCLOSURE**
Anthropologists should fully disclose the aims and sponsorship of
research.

8. **BE A GOOD GUEST**
All work should be performed in full recognition of the social and cul-
tural pluralism of host communities and the diversity of values, inter-
ests and demands in those societies.

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B—Be willing to cross boundaries

In order to communicate successfully with community partners or
the public at large, it is necessary to:

R—Reduce jargon; Relate; Communicate

One of my long-term community partners said while listening to
students discuss Foucault, "Let's take these lofty ideas and put them
on a hay bale." Notice that she did not say, "Let's take these lofty
ideas and throw them into the cistern." She didn't want them to be
thrown out. She wanted them to be communicated. Sabloff (2011)
and later Moskowitz (2015) and others have noted a characteristic
of anthropology that makes communicating to non-anthropologists
problematic. "The basic anthropological story does not embrace a
model of taking the extraordinary and making it ordinary, of mak-
ing it relevant to people. Rather, we take the extraordinary and make
it complicated" (Sabloff 2011, 413, quoting Daniel Linde's blog).

Engaged anthropology requires a commitment to communicate
in forms useful to the community partners.

An engaged anthropology assumes a special responsibil-
ity to the communities of persons it studies. Rather than
extracting knowledge from its social environment in
pursuit of purely academic goals, knowledge developed
within a community should be democratically produced,
analyzed, and reported. This assumes our engaging the
community in determining the goals of research and
the methods by which it will be carried out. It also in-
cludes the community in the dissemination of research
results that may involve nontraditional formats such as
newsletters, forums, block meetings, or creative perfor-
mances. Such democratization of knowledge does not
preclude more traditional forms of academic discussion
and reporting; nor does it diminish the anthropologist's
potential role as interlocutor, speaking to powerful insti-
tutions outside the community. It does require the an-
thropologist to consider carefully the various audiences
for anthropological research and appropriate strategies
for communicating with them. (Blakey et al. 1994, 300)

Our foremothers traditionally wrote in ways that communicated
with the public. Margaret Mead's editor, John Wiley, said of her, "She
wrote as she spoke, very fluently and very fast. Clarity and sanity
were her goals." If Margaret Mead were alive today, she would be a
regular on the talk shows. Dr. Margaret would be as well-known as
Dr. Phil. She would be asked for the anthropological perspective on
all manner of things. And she would weigh in.

Now our students are carrying engaged anthropology to new
heights. No one epitomizes cooperative collaboration with commu-
nity partners at every stage of the research better than Eric Lassiter,
co-author in this volume and who, I am proud to say, was my stu-
dent as an undergraduate. Lassiter's award-winning collaborative

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ethnography represents the ultimate in community participation (Campbell and Lassiter 2010; Lassiter 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2008, Lassiter and Campbell 2010a, 2010b; Lassiter et al. 2004; Papa and Lassiter 2003).

So as not to present an overly Pollyannaish view of the strains inherent in engaged anthropology, permit me to describe challenges that arose as the cultural attachment to land studies entered the high stakes power arena of the legal-like proceedings of the State Corporation Commission. In the new role of expert witness, I felt the heat of the grilling on the stand.

Students and I had been engaged in various projects—collecting oral histories for a county's museum, interviewing retired coal miners to learn about the place of religion in their lives for a Coal Mining Heritage Association—that were very satisfying to all concerned. These projects were also innocuous from a power point of view as there was no power establishment fighting back. The power line project upped the ante, pitting citizens against a corporation and the government body regulating it.

Our first research reports on cultural attachment to land had been given to citizens' groups to do with as they liked in their efforts to conserve their culture and preserve their environment. Then two adjoining counties requested that we present our report directly to the state regulatory body for utilities and testify in a hearing before this body. This brought us face-to-face with the legal arena and carried with it the new role of expert witness.

Stringent deadlines for citizen input were imposed by the State Corporation Commission and the very short timeline demanded some changes to the study design. It would not be possible for a cadre of trained students to compile extensive participant observation fieldnotes and to conduct and transcribe interviews, undertake analyses of these texts, and write the report, as we had done in the

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past. Citizens suggested that they themselves could conduct and transcribe the interviews.

This was a new level of citizen science. Previously residents with whom we worked had provided orientations for me and the student researchers and smoothed our entree into their communities; this time residents would be collecting data themselves. To help resident interviewers with data collecting, a comprehensive project manual compiled with my colleague Mary LaLone—which included open-ended questions that had been tested in my previous research—was developed, and workshops on ethnographic interviewing were conducted. If our experiment worked, perhaps it could serve as a model for allowing citizen input in the legal arena, especially for communities with little money or in situations with little time allowed.[3] My colored glasses became even rosier and I wrote, "The objective of this project is to create ways in which citizens' environmental concerns—such as cultural attachment to land—are rendered audible in a legal venue by being articulated through scientific means" (See Wagner 1999, 2002, Wagner and Hedrick 2001).

Both old and new trends in anthropology encouraged this new level of partnership. Collaboration has been advocated in anthropology since modern-day methods of fieldwork were formed; the trend is toward ever more collaboration. For example, the National Park Service in its Applied Ethnography Program headed by Muriel Crespi mandated collaboration with natives in learning about the relationship between culture and environment. Similarly, the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Community-Based Environmental Protection program advocated citizen involvement and citizen data collecting.

We worked closely with the one attorney hired by the two counties to represent them at the State Corporation Committee hearing. In contrast, several attorneys and paralegal assistants from a large

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law firm worked on the side of the power company. Our attorney's background in engineering stood him in good stead with regard to understanding technical issues surrounding the power line. He was new to anthropology, but he learned quickly and became a strong advocate for ethnographic methods.

While we in the social sciences see this newborn interest in attending to the intangible aspects of culture in environmental impact assessments as a foot in the door, the corporations and utilities who are required to undertake the assessments see it as the camel's nose under the tent. And one way the camel will be kept outside is via the definition of science. Ethnography is seen as not scientific, whether it is or not. In the State Corporation Commission hearing examiner's report of the hearing, words implying expertise and science were applied only to certain activities and persons and not others. The six uses of the term "expert(s)" referred to those who studied real estate values, karst topography, and bats. Likewise, "research(er, ers)" referred to health, real estate values, and bats. All uses of "science" referred to studies of health-related issues. As the attorney for the protesting residents wrote in his "Exceptions to the Report," "the Report details the qualifications and professional experience of the witnesses supporting the Examiner's findings while failing to provide similar information for witnesses with opposing views."

As I took the stand in one of the sumptuously-appointed hearing rooms in the large State Corporation Commission building in the far-from-rural-counties state capital to defend ethnography in general, and our study of cultural attachment to land in particular, the weight of legal definitions pressed in. As folklorist Mary Hufford has said, there is a suspicion of storytelling and a separation of storytelling from science. Michael Orbach (2000) noted that policy managers use the stories of natural history—for example, the life history of a fish—and treat it as science, but stories about people are a different

story. Although I have thought the often-quoted "Anthropology is the most scientific of the humanities, and the most humanistic of the sciences" captures anthropology's strength, it was clear that in this court-like atmosphere it was necessary for ethnography's image to be as scientific as possible. (The quote is probably Kroeber's, usually cited from Wolf 1964.)

One issue to raise its head was bias. For most of the hour and a half I was on the stand, the opposing attorney and I talked past one another concerning bias. Bear in mind that ours was not a study of attitudes toward the power line. Our study was an ethnography of particular aspects of culture with the guiding question, "Is there cultural attachment to land here, and if so on what is it based?" Thus, the only way the study could be biased, as far as we were concerned, was if it had been done in a way that demonstrated that cultural attachment to land was actually there when it wasn't, or vice versa. For the ethnographer, bias may arise in two ways. The first is that the researcher may hold unconscious points of view that prevent her from seeing certain things, or cause her to see only certain things at the expense of others that are equally present. Our methods avoided these pitfalls by using a standardized, although very open-ended, set of questions and by analyses that utilized a good deal of quantification. A second source of bias is that data could be collected in such a way that the interviewer might lead the interviewee to information, making it appear that the interviewee had more cultural knowledge than he or she actually had. Or the interviewer might interrupt the interviewee, not affording the opportunity to display cultural knowledge that was actually there. Again, our methods painstakingly controlled for this through an evaluation process that scrutinized the interviews before analyzing them. Thus, from our point of view, careful controls against bias had been an integral part of our methodology.

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But for an attorney, bias is a different breed of cat, and the legal definition of bias can be used to endeavor to discredit. To avoid the appearance of bias in the legal sense, i.e. having a prejudice for or against one of the parties in the proceeding, I (and student researchers) had avoided becoming a member of or appearing at meetings of any of the protest groups or talking with the media. Nevertheless, the opposing lawyer's several specific questions culminated in this summary question, "Was this not power line opponents interviewing power line opponents for the purpose of opposing the power line? Is that not biased?"

Questions about the power line were not included in the set of questions to be asked. Because we were plumbing the culture of the area, the power line did come up in interviewees' discussions. That is not surprising. The interview transcriptions themselves were acquired by the opposing attorneys under a motion to compel discovery with which we complied after student researchers had carefully redacted all names. Opposing attorney staff members had diligently combed through the 449 pages and located three uses of the word power line. On the stand, I told them about seven more that they had missed, because to me this did not constitute bias. Instead, concern about the power line was an emerging part of the culture, and just one of several components of a larger cultural theme that the student researchers had discovered through coding and thematic analysis, namely "Protecting the Land." Other components of this theme included concern over trash being left on property and fences torn down, active county planning commissions, and resident-approved zoning regulations.

In the long run, the State Corporation Commission itself wrote: "The Commission disagrees with the Hearing Examiner's conclusions on bias in Ms. Wagner's study. We give weight to the study's conclusions that residents of the two counties . . . have individual

and communal ties to particular pieces of land. We accept her conclusion that these residents have 'emotional, economic, and social connections to their surrounding landscapes.'"

The stories of the human community, in all their fullness and all their complexity, have to be told. It is worthwhile to strengthen the links between anthropological ethnographic research and local communities because "As soon as our attention turns from a community as a body of houses and tools and institutions to the states of mind of particular people, we are turning to the exploration of something immensely complex and difficult to know" (Redfield 1960, 59). The "BRIDGE" strategies noted above should allow us to Get Connected and Engage with local communities. If we are convinced that we have the methods and strategies to do engaged anthropology, how do local communities benefit?

Community Benefits

Sharing anthropological expertise with community members, non-profit organizations, government agencies, or people who need help communicating with government agencies is empowering. At the State Corporation Commission decision-making table, the communities' voices were amplified because of the data collection and analysis that the cultural attachment to land project provided. A second source of empowerment was unanticipated. A by-product of the relationships we formed with the residents is that it raised awareness of cultural heritage. Linking with a university professor and students was empowering with regard to demonstrating to the culture-bearers that others valued and were interested in their cultures. It chipped away at the accretions built up by years of stereotyping of rural Appalachian people. When student researchers presented a play that they had created to the Craig County Historical Society, impersonating Craig County residents with words from the

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interviews, an audience member commented, "This has made me proud of my heritage," a feeling she had never before felt. The next day one of the students said, "I couldn't sleep at all last night; I was so wound up after that reception we got." Local historian Nancy Kate Givens said that letting families know about the results of the research was pleasurable. "They knew they had been here forever, but no one had presented that as something to brag about" (Link, Brady, and Givens 2002, 150). This same thought is captured by Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor (2013, 149) when she wrote in her autobiography, "Every people has a past, but the dignity of a history comes when a community of scholars devotes itself to chronicling and studying that past."

Citizen involvement in the research—that is, collaboration—was critical to empowerment. Native-born Giles County resident, Doris Lucas Link, wrote, "When I became involved in the AEP fight in 1993, I never imagined it would take me to college [to teach my classes about her community], make an amateur architect of me, send me to the state capitol to speak before the [State Corporation Commission], . . . [and cause me to speak] at an Appalachian Studies Conference" (Link, Brady, and Givens 2002, 138-39).

Community voices at the table will be fortified by professional work obtained within their means and within a symbiotic relationship. As mentioned earlier, engaged anthropology comes in many forms. Description of a project undertaken for several years by my colleague, Mary LaLone, provides an example of a different type of project with some of the same and some different benefits. Dr. LaLone and her students, in partnership with a grassroots community group and local government offices, rescued the coal mining heritage of Montgomery County, Virginia, that was in danger of being forgotten. Mary's first project was the New River Valley Coal Mining Heritage project. Working with the Coal Mining Heritage

Association, students collected elders' oral histories and compiled them into a set of books: *Appalachian Coal Mining Memories* and *Coal Mining Lives.* These two volumes contain sixty-one interviews with forty-three men and thirty women, describing their lives as coal miners, miners' wives, and miners' children. The community partners expanded to include the county planning office when the oral history project led to the Coal Mining Heritage Park project. LaLone and her students wrote a 136-page consulting report: *Coal Mining Heritage Park: Study, Plans, and Recommendations* (LaLone 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2009).

Mary LaLone's Radford University students interview
former miner Fred Lawson describing mining tools.
(Photo courtesy of Mary LaLone)

In 2005, the Appalachian Studies Association conference was held at Radford University, with the theme *University Community Partnerships.* The plenary session celebrated several of these partnerships from the New River Valley of Virginia, including Mary

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LaLone's projects. Jimmy Lee Price, a community partner in the Coal Mining Heritage projects, spoke at the 2005 plenary session, describing how the projects had benefited the community.

> We wanted and needed to create a coal mining heritage park that could combine history, education, science, and recreation, and promote the health along the Huckleberry Trail—and so it was a big job and we didn't have the expertise to do it, didn't have the training, didn't have much of the technical support that we needed. Besides it would have cost us hundreds of thousands of dollars to hire consultants and engineers. I've estimated that the university saved us approximately a quarter of a million dollars in consulting and engineering fees. Not to mention the cultural and social benefits to all the partners . . . And so, what we received from this partnership, I'll just enumerate a few things. As I said, probably a quarter of a million dollars in consulting and design costs free of charge. Human resources—unbelievable and gratifying to work with.
>
> One of the things we did was to invite the students to our monthly meetings and fed them good home cooked meals and then we learned to sing each others' songs. I've kind of used that as a bridge, as a cultural bridge, and it occurred to me one night, well we're so different, from different environments, what do we have in common? And I thought "Hey, we can all sing Amazing Grace." And so we did—and we learned essentially to sing each others' songs and to speak each others' languages.
>
> And so we gained a crucial influence of major university involvement. This element built our own power and influence in dealing with government officials, the press, and other institutions. Or, I'll say it this way, it was a creation of a larger community of actors. And so it just sort

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of doubled or increased our power to do what we needed
to do. (Price 2005)

If we are convinced that we possess strategies for doing engaged
anthropology locally, do we have strategies for being *allowed* to do
engaged anthropology locally?

Strategies for Being Allowed to Do Anthropology to Benefit Local Communities (How to Fit it into Your Professional Life and Career and Get Credit for it)

In an alternative culture that we could easily create in our minds,
the default would be locally engaged anthropology. It would not be
something that needs defense. What if the word "local" were as cel-
ebrated as the word "global"? What if universities were as concerned
about localizing their curricula as they are globalizing and interna-
tionalizing them? But they are not. So, alas, engaging locally requires
defense. Where does that defense come from?

Professional Labels

"Engaged anthropology" has come to be the umbrella term for a
wide range of activities. Kozaitis (2013) notes that "Anthropologists
in the United States have named the production and application of
empirical knowledge to help meet human needs and solve social
problems as applied, action, practicing, professional, militant, activ-
ist, engaged, public, advocacy, public interest, and praxis anthropol-
ogy" (Kozaitis 2013, 137).

Professional labels that are used across disciplines include "Par-
ticipatory Action Research" (PAR), "Participatory Development,"
and "Social Capital." Eliot Liebow's (1998/1999, 18) quote mentioned
earlier captures the essence of participatory development: "Who
ought to sit at the table when the big decisions get made? . . . Whose
values should inform the choices?"

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I must register a bit of discomfort when using terms such as "stakeholders" and "social capital." I have decried the overwhelming place economy has in our society when set beside concerns for environment and sense of place. Yet we in social science are now using economically-derived terms to describe ways to help communities voice their concerns and to balance economic needs with other cultural values. Nevertheless, the vocabulary of social capital may help to describe some of the ways engaged anthropology can proceed.

A broad definition of social capital is "the connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." The terms that define different kinds of social capital—bonding, bridging, and linking—refer to which groups are connecting (Furbey et al. 2006; see also Woolcock 2001 and Gilchrist 2004). For example, linking social capital forms relationships "between people or organizations beyond peer boundaries, cutting across status, and similarity, and enabling people to exert influence and reach resources outside their normal circles" (Furbey et al. 2006, 7). Social capital as it played out in the power line projects helped to make a place at the table for local communities. Resident David Brady wrote, "These studies helped the community . . . articulate the issue of attachment [to land] to decision-makers at the state and federal level" (Link, Brady, and Givens 2002, 145; Wagner 2009).

These professional labels may buttress the recognition of engaged anthropology at the university level and the individual career level. Senior faculty have a special responsibility in fostering this recognition. Those who sit on department, college, and university personnel committees that frame the standards for tenure and promotion have a duty to work to broaden the scope of valued activities to include engaged work. Define this work as professional and as professionally important. Assure junior faculty that if they engage in this kind

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of work, it will not be seen as a shortcoming on their Faculty Annual Reports and it will not be a detriment when decisions are made about the future of their careers. I am not the first, nor will I be the last, to say this. The American Anthropological Association panel's Statement to the Profession in *Diagnosing America* notes, "Anthropologists have become increasingly submerged in a professional ethic that rewards the development of abstract theory over practice, encourages individual attainment over collaboration, and places a premium on arcane debate over engagement with broader publics and pressing social issues" (Blakey et al. 1994, 297). Jeremy Sabloff, in his Distinguished Lecture at the 2010 American Anthropological Association, made the point that the trend in counting numbers of peer-reviewed articles—rather than a more qualitative evaluation that would take into account the significance of public anthropology work—needs to be reversed. He invokes former AAA president James Peacock's shibboleth that we need a "public or perish" stance (Peacock 1997; Sabloff 2010). In 2008, the Consortium of Practicing and Applied Anthropology (COPAA) published a 12-page document on "Promoting Applied Scholarship for Tenure and Promotion," and COPAA regularly discusses these issues at their annual meetings (Kahnna et al. 2008; see also Bennett and Kahnna 2010).

If junior faculty discover that a research report, or analysis report, or other item useful to their community partners is not enough for their personnel committees, they could consider publishing their results in organs dedicated to community or regional work or to the pedagogical benefits of the work. Another strategy which can be both practical and satisfying is to connect with area studies: Appalachian Studies, American Studies, Women's Studies. Connections can open new arenas for research, for collaboration with colleagues, and for venues in which to present research. Making these connections formed one of the recommendations of the American

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Anthropological Association's panel on Disorders of Industrial Societies.

Whiteford and Strom (2013) note that "service" activities, though required for faculty, are undervalued in tenure and promotion protocols. Sabloff (2011) noted that teaching is also often undervalued. But separating teaching from professional work from service to the community is old news. Ever since Ernest Boyer's vision was published as *The Scholarship of Engagement* in 1996, connecting the three—teaching, research, and service—has been an honorable thing to do. "The scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems."

Accreditation, which may sometimes seem to contribute little to the goal of student-learning, can, nevertheless be used to move the concern for the local forward. For example, for the last several five-year accreditation cycles, schools accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) have been required to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP). The current QEP for Radford University is the Scholar-Citizen Initiative (SCI) which dovetails with collaborative work with local communities.[4]

Pedagogical Labels and Pedagogical Benefits

Evolving pedagogical labels demonstrate an interest in activities that convey students beyond the classroom. In evolutionary chart form (oldest at the bottom), some of them are:

> Engaged Pedagogy
> High Impact Practices
> Student Engagement
> Transformative/Transformational Learning
> Scholar-Citizen
> Experiential Learning
> Service Learning

What are the pedagogical benefits for the undergraduate and graduate students who participate in these research and service endeavors? Kozaitis (2013, 150) notes that "public engagement by university faculty and students . . . requires empirical data, intellectual rigor, political responsibility, critical sociocultural analysis, and theoretically informed strategies and methods of partnered reforms that reinforce social justice."

The projects described here worked as pedagogical tools to cause undergraduate students to do extraordinary work and to dispel stereotypes of Appalachian mountain people they may have carried into the classroom with them. There were several reasons they were motivating to students. For example:

1. The final products had an audience beyond the teacher.
2. Sometimes grants and contracts were received, symbolizing the worth of the students' work to outside audiences.
3. The students were dealing with real people, and sometimes the real people have real problems. Student Danny Wolfe, speaking of the power line Town Meeting project, said, "The fact that we were dealing with real people and a topic that we could relate to was the key to making it a success. We tried to put ourselves into these people's shoes . . . Before the project and fieldwork were done, we felt a part of their lives and the wiser for having taken on this task."
4. Students and teacher worked together as research colleagues, creating a community of learners. Student Shannon Scott said, "This project was not done in a normal classroom setting where we were told what needed to be done. Instead we were all able to work together—students and professor—in a democratic way. Everyone's input was taken into consideration. Never did we feel like what we had to say was unimportant . . . My self-esteem was raised, because my professor trusted me to do this work."

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For undergraduate and graduate students, projects of engaged anthropology with communities allow a view into sophisticated anthropological work, and can open avenues to explore after graduation. Shannon Scott said that the cultural attachment to land project

> . . . not only gave undergraduates a project to put on their resumes, but it also gave them the opportunity to get out into the field and experience what doing anthropology is really about. By getting involved in this project, students were given the opportunity to work in an atmosphere where what we did would really matter . . . For many of us this was not a project for a grade but a project that allowed us to work one-on-one with our professor and gain the knowledge and self-esteem that will be needed when we move out of undergraduate school into either a career or graduate school. (Wagner, Scott, and Wolfe 1997)

Gary Cutlip, then Bland County administrator, wrote a letter to each undergraduate student researcher, in which he said, "Those who have seen the study are most impressed with your work . . . You provided us with a document that will prove to be invaluable to the county in many ways . . . We wish you much luck in your future endeavors as an anthropologist. May your enthusiasm continue to provide you with challenges that will make differences in the future of our country."

At the *University Community Partnerships* plenary session of the 2005 Appalachian Studies Association, Mary LaLone's student, Stacy Spradlin Haynes, spoke about what the Coal Mining Heritage projects had meant to her as a student. Her speech that day revealed another reward for students. Practicing anthropological skills enhances the depth of observations of lives lived, including one's own.

CELEBRATING THE LOCAL

In one short semester, we were taught how to interview, how to transcribe, and how to edit these interviews—but that's definitely not all that we learned. We also learned that college does not have to be a time for us, as students, to only be on the receiving end. While at college, through partnerships like this, we can actually give back to the community around our school. I was only eighteen at the time of this class and here I was being asked to sit down with people who were in their sixties, seventies, eighties, and even nineties, and have a two hour or longer conversation with them about their lives . . . And I also thought that growing up in a coal mining community, I knew all the stories that had been told about the area. I thought I knew exactly everything that was going to be said—but boy did I have a lot to learn!

It wasn't until I sat down with my great-grandmother who was ninety-six years old at the time that I began to actually feel these stories that I had heard all of my life. That day I listened to great-grandmother tell about when she was fifteen years old and she jumped the Huckleberry Train with my great-grandpa and ran off to Tennessee to get married. Now granted, I'd heard that story umpteen million times, but that day as I sat down with her, I saw the longing in her eyes for her sweetheart who'd passed away years before I was even born. I heard the hesitation in her voice as she described what it was like to come back home to her daddy, who to say the least was not very happy with them for running away. I saw the tears stream down her face as she described the ups and the downs of raising thirteen children on a miner's income. That day, I felt her unwavering faith in God that spanned her entire life. I realized the burden that she

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> carried all those years—the burden of whether that day, tomorrow, or next week, she would be made a widow and her children would have to grow up without a daddy.
>
> Today, as a wife and a mother, those words that my great-grandmother spoke to me bring comfort to my own soul as I undertake the task of raising my own children . . . As I began to feel these stories that I'd heard my entire life, I realized the weight that all of us can carry on our own shoulders—the weight of our own heritage. While some may carry theirs lightly, I made the decision to carry mine with boldness, with honor, and to do all that I can to preserve this heritage. (Haynes 2005)

Just as Mary LaLone's student observed the rebound to her own life of her foray into ethnographic research, so too Adams and London and Klaaren in this volume describe the multiplex learning that occurs. An oft-repeated quote from Margaret Mead says, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." I have wondered whether Margaret Mead would have taught Anthropology in high school. I don't know if she would. (She did write a book about anthropology for high school students.) But I would. And I do. Community partners at the Floyd Story Center, a nonprofit organization, Floyd County High School, and Radford University are in our tenth year of *Roots with Wings: Floyd County Place-based Education Oral History Project*. Radford University mentors work as part of an intergenerational team to teach high school students how to conduct ethical, methodologically sound interviews; record using state-of-the-art audio and video equipment; transcribe; create searchable tables of content; research historical background; archive; extract a theme from hour-long interviews; and create movies. The overall goal of the project is to make connections among the multi-aged

participants: high school students, university student mentors who teach ethnographic research skills, adult community partners, high school teachers, university faculty, and elder interviewees. Youth taught to capture the wisdom of elders learn lessons of past hardships and absorb demonstrations of coping skills. Research has shown that connections like these propagate children who are more resilient in the face of challenges such as negative stereotyping, community and family dysfunction, or culture change, because they have a "strong intergenerational self."

Radford University ROOTS WITH WINGS
student mentor shares movie-making expertise
with Floyd County High School students.
(Photo courtesy of Melinda Bollar Wagner)

It is worthwhile and necessary to develop the links between anthropological ethnographic research and local communities because the stories of the human community—as full, rich, complex, and intricate as they are—have to be told. Eric Lassiter (1999, 7) wrote in the *Anthropology Newsletter*: "The more we extend our conversations

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to include those traditionally outside anthropological discourse, the more we can foster our unique perspectives as anthropologists. Making ethnography relevant to our consultants—who are increasingly becoming our readers—is more than a methodological or theoretical move, it is also an ethical act." It's the right thing to do. Go into the grandest building on your campus grounds. Look around. Look up at the chandeliers. Look at the walnut paneling. Look at the terrazzo floors. Ask yourself—why is this here? What should we be doing as a university situated within this place—this place with real people with real problems and with real perceptions and understandings.

APPENDIX:

COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS LED BY MELINDA BOLLAR
WAGNER, 1983-2017

In chronological order:

- The ABC's of Appalachia and Beyond the ABC's of Appalachia
- Appalachia: A Tourist Attraction?
- Mileposts and More: The Blue Ridge Parkway
- Crossings: Into Twentieth Century Appalachia
- V-QUEST (Virginia Quality Education in Science and Technology) Learning about Teaching
- Cultural Attachment to Land in Proposed 765kV Power Line Corridors
- Spiritual and Cultural Significance of Mountains in National Parks, Exhibit at Great Smoky Mountains National Park Headquarters
- Religion in the Coal Mines
- Floyd County Traditions
- Little River in Floyd County, Project for the New River Land Trust
- Appalachian Studies Conference at RU, 2005, Showcasing University-Community Partnerships
- Mountain View Cemetery
- Floyd County Migration
- Religion and Health in an Appalachian Community Project
- Appalachian Social Movement Project
- Appalachian Regional Commission Appalachian Teaching Project: Sustaining the Community Mind for Long-term Community Resiliency: Rural Appalachian Values Assessment in Floyd County, Virginia, Project for the Floyd County Community and Economic Development Office
- ROOTS WITH WINGS: Floyd County Place-based Education Oral History Project

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NOTES

1. See Goldschmidt 1976 and Schensul 2010 for a discussion of this history; Low and Merry 2010 provide an update on the history of engaged anthropology.
2. See also Checker, Davis, and Schuller 2014 for discussion of competing expectations. See Johnston 2010 for a discussion of ethics. See Moskowitz 2015 for a less optimistic view of synchrony between academic and applied anthropology.
3. A model for participatory research/citizen science was the Appalachian Land Ownership Study conducted in 1978-1981 by the Appalachian Alliance and administered by Appalachian State University and the Highlander Research and Education Center.
4. See *https://www.radford.edu/content/scholar-citizen/home.html.*

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