Learning and Unlearning from School to College to University: Issues for Students and Teachers

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Abstract

This paper is based on research carried out on transitions in the educational lives of students. The paper will argue that the problem of transition is a challenging one: students have certain challenges in making the transition between stages of education, and educational institutions are not sufficiently aware of the need to address the question of "unlearning" involved in transitions. The word "transition" in this context indicates a process of unlearning what was known in the previous stage and learning what is required in order to be an effective student in the next stage. This is partly because of the nature of the examination system that frames pre-university education in the UK. The problem of transition is not just a question of *telling* students what was less effective about how they did things before and how they should now do things differently, but of understanding the student perspective holistically. Teachers need to understand that the students have been engaged in a number of *activities* that are not just intellectual, but also social and embodied. Unlearning and learning therefore is a much more complex process than might appear on the surface. Students of the new A-level in anthropology face these same challenges but anthropology provides the potential for meeting these challenges - partly because of the nature of the subject matter and how it needs to be taught, and partly because of the close relationship between the A-level and the wider anthropology community.

Introduction

A number of key skills underpin academic success in formal learning, both in secondary school contexts and within Higher Education. These include the ability to work independently and take responsibility for their own learning; a high level of literacy such that they can cope with a variety of readings; the ability to present their views clearly in a variety of formats with effective arguments to support these views; evaluative and critical thinking skills; and the development of personal qualities such as self-discipline, good organisation, time management, and an ability to relate to others with both confidence and empathy. However, though there may be broad agreement on the qualities educators aim to develop both in secondary schools and at university, the education system is divided into stages, each with their own institutional framework and culture. This means that young people go through a number of stages, which do not necessarily build on the previous stage in terms of practice. In other words, in order to be successful at the next stage of education, students often need to *unlearn* many aspects of being a student from the previous stage if they are to successfully negotiate transitions. In this paper, I will focus particularly on the process of developing the above qualities and competencies during two different moments of educational transition: into university and from GCSE to A level. This paper is based on formal anthropological research as well as on my experience as a practicing teacher at all three stages of education. I will first argue that anthropology has a vital contribution to make to the understanding of education both from a theoretical and practical perspective. I will then present my findings, demonstrating the problems faced by both students and their teachers in coping with the demands of transition, which require both learning and unlearning. Finally, I will discuss my experience with teaching the new A-level in anthropology. I will argue that, though it faces many of the same problems as other A-levels, it has the potential for helping students manage the process of transition by unlearning and learning effectively.

Transitions Research

Although only a small part of anthropological research takes place within a formal educational environment, the discipline has contributed to the understanding of learning in everyday life, in a broad range of social and cultural contexts. This interest in exploring the acquisition of different kinds of knowledge and skills, through a variety of practices and social relationships, has enabled anthropologists to suggest a number of potentially useful

conceptual tools relevant to education. For example, Tim Ingold (2000; 2001) dissolves the distinctions between body, mind and culture, reflecting the importance of practical engagement in the acquisition of skills. Lave and Wenger (1991) discuss "situated learning," and apprenticeship, emphasising the holistic quality of the learning process. My own research in Scotland focused on the importance of "activity" in understanding how people came to have particular views and practices with respect to the natural environment. By "activity" here I mean that it is important to understand what people are actually *doing*. It is the "doing" that brings together all aspects of the person in a particular moment in time, including their mental processes, their embodied responses, and socio-cultural influences. This approach to educational research was taken by Rebekah Nathan in her study of university students (2005). She couldn't understand why they were not conforming to her expectations of what university students should be. In order to understand them better, she enrolled as a university student and proceeded to "do" what the students did. Her approach may not be practical, ethical or appropriate for other educational contexts, but the ethos behind it, stemming from the basic premises of anthropology, is that we need to find ways of understanding students' perspectives as they engage in the process of learning.

I first became interested in doing research on transitions when working as a postgraduate teaching assistant at Goldsmiths College, whilst at the same time working part-time as a Philosophy A-level teacher at Havering Sixth Form College. I had become concerned that the way we teach the A-level was not preparing students for the expectations of university study. In addition, I realised that the undergraduate students were struggling with many aspects of the course. Together with Victoria Goddard, I approached C-SAP with a project proposal that would enable us to try and understand the issues students were facing. We carried out the research both in the anthropology department of Goldsmiths and Havering Sixth Form College from September 2002 to July 2003 and continued to do a further year in order to pursue avenues that arose from the first year of the research. When I returned to full-time A-level teaching in 2006, I took the opportunity to further develop the transitions research. One of the main findings was that the way in which A-levels are taught causes problems for students at university; however, A-level teachers were adamant that they had to teach the way they did because of the way students were taught at GCSE. I therefore spent two years, supported by the college, researching the transition between school and college. This involved following a cohort of students through their two years at college as well as visiting a number of feeder schools (schools that send students to the college). I continue to add to my research findings as an integral part of my role as a teacher and an anthropologist, even though the formal part of the research is concluded. This now includes my teaching of the new A-level in anthropology.

Based on informal and formal unstructured interviews, observation and personal experience, and listening to conversations between students and between teachers, I amassed a wealth of data which gives a wide-ranging picture of how the students experience education and the "teaching experience." It is data which is not "owned" by me but also by the students as they are knowingly involved in the research process. In this way, the students can consciously take control of their own learning and both the teacher and the students can become anthropologists. As both teachers and students gain an understanding of the whole experience, they will necessarily "unlearn" previous ways of approaching teaching and learning and make their own choices. The findings, as presented below, were made available to the students and the teachers and discussed with them. Their interpretation of the findings and how they relate them to their own experience will affect future findings. In this respect, anthropological research on the learning experience is open-ended, with a continual process of unlearning and learning, ideally under the control of both the teachers and the students involved in the research.

Research Findings Part I: Transitions to University

When students come to university, they experience a very different educational system. In order to be effective in the new environment, they need to unlearn many of their views on what education is and their role in it. They go from having what many would complain is an excess of attention from their teachers to being left largely on their own to organise their learning. The amount of time spent in lectures and seminars in the course of three years seems very small. One student, for example, commented,

> I started thinking about how much time we actually spend being taught and I realised that that in a three year degree, we have only one and a half years of teaching: a total of 60 weeks over three years!

Students at two other universities spoke about having one lecture a week and then a meeting with their tutor every two weeks. They didn't even know the other people on their course. The students' prior experience of education was of being "taught." If they were not being "formally" taught, then it wasn't education. They had to

"unlearn" this assumption and "learn" that education was largely about what they did rather than about what was done for them. This proved very difficult for many students. Students can feel overwhelmed by how much they have to take the initiative in organising their own learning. They were unclear about what they were supposed to be aiming to achieve: they felt that they lacked guidance. Some comments from student participants reflect this sentiment:

- We had two lectures at the beginning and then were told to do presentations so had no guidance from the lecturer. There was no direction; it was jumping in the deep-end. We were told to read a book and analyse it but we didn't know what to do.
- There is no direction, I need direction.

Again, these quotes from students show that they were not used to being in an environment in which they were so free. They needed to unlearn dependency and learn independence - not an easy thing to do.

Another major issue in the process of unlearning and learning is the acquisition of seemingly basic skills such as reading. Though for many students the ability to read and an interest in reading was developed in school, most students were not aware of what reading entails at university. They liked the fact that they had more freedom to read what interested them, but the difficulties they encountered with the skill of reading critically or strategically overshadowed the positive feelings. One student said, "it's a very new experience to have to go away and read something. In sixth form you are given the information." When I asked first year students in the first few weeks of term what were their first impressions, the first comment was "the amount of reading [is more than we expected]." In the course of the year, reading emerged as problematic for the students in a number of ways. Some of the comments from different student included the following:

- The reading is very technical and theoretical and it is hard to study on your own. You read and make notes and get bored half-way through.
- I have to force myself into the library. I do a lot of photocopying. I use what other people have underlined. I try and relate it to the seminar and lecture but many people ask- why are we reading this?
- There is so much I don't understand, I do all this reading, I can't possibly understand it all.
- Reading is difficult. There are words that aren't in the dictionary. I wasn't expecting all this reading. It's very theoretical.
- I know I have to read this or that, but I don't know what I need to learn.

These quotes show clearly that the students' previous experience did not include the kind of independent learning, particularly in relation to reading, that is expected at university. However, it is not simply a question of 'learning' how to read, in this instance - though the lack of skill in reading is a key part of the problem. Instead, we need to understand not only what skills students may lack, but also what attitudes towards reading and the purpose of reading might need to be unlearned. This is why research conducted at the previous stage of education, in secondary school contexts, is so important.

For students in the research, essay writing skills also needed to be both unlearned and learned. As with reading, prior educational experience can form a platform from which to learn new skills. However, students found that there were differences in how they were meant to approach essays and they desperately wanted more guidance. One student, for example, expressed problems with guidance on essays, saying "I still don't know what is expected. I make criteria for myself." Many students, particularly in the first year, found it difficult to choose an essay topic. This was partly because they did not understand the essay titles. It was suggested that seminars could provide an opportunity to discuss essay titles and possible routes to addressing them. Again, first year students in particular were unclear about the expectations of tutors regarding essays. The confusion was related to questions of content but also format and conventions (for example with referencing conventions, or the degree of personal opinion expected).

Feedback was considered to be a very important learning opportunity. Where tutors provided detailed feedback, students felt they had been able to learn and improve. However, feedback was often perceived as unhelpful, either because it was insufficient or because it did not indicate ways in which the student could improve. This was felt by students who obtained good essay grades, for example high 2.1 grades, and were given positive comments but no indication as to what they needed to do to get a better grade. Tutors frequently commented on

the poor quality of students' writing. Essays showed that students were confused about the conceptual content and the use of ethnography to support argument. Furthermore, the quality of the writing itself was poor. The problem was especially acute in the case of first year students but was also significant amongst the second year students. Badly written and poorly organised essays could involve tutors in very slow and time-consuming marking, before they could even broach the merits of the argument. A related issue was the inability of many students to organize their time effectively. Furthermore, essay deadlines had a knock-on effect on seminars, as absenteeism rose around the time when essays were due in.

Students soon became aware that they needed to "unlearn" many aspects of how they approached their studies. They soon adjusted to the different system in terms of going to lectures, reading, writing essays, and participating in seminars. The problem was that they wanted more guidance in what they were actually supposed to learn. It could be argued that the experiences of these students are a normal part of university education. Some students that I interviewed in the third year thrived on the challenges they had to overcome. However, some students respond negatively to these challenges and instead of enhancing learning, the obstacles lead to demoralisation. Several students confessed that they were on the verge of dropping out. One second-year student said she felt very demoralised at the moment. "I wish someone would ask me what's wrong," she commented. She spoke to me about another student who had deferred: "I can't understand it, he's lost. If only someone had given him some help, tried and talk to him [sic]. You need to have someone who is interested and concerned. He had loved the course [sic]."

The conclusion that I draw from this research is that students are experiencing difficulties that do not contribute positively to the process of unlearning and learning. These difficulties are the result of not having the appropriate skills such as an ability to read and write academically as well as of having habits that are not conducive to working independently. The key is to find a balance between encouraging and fostering independence and initiative and giving students the necessary support to do this. As one student says, "it's like wearing size ten shoes with size three feet." I would certainly agree that the students need room to grow and develop, but perhaps the shoes should be slightly smaller. In order to support the students effectively in making the transition to university, we first need to understand why they have such the problems. In other words, we need to know what might need to be unlearned and what experiences, knowledge and skills they have which can be developed further. With this in mind, I will now consider the findings of the research done at Havering Sixth Form College and the feeder schools.

Research Findings Part II: Transition to A-Level Study

In order to understand what needs to be unlearned, we need to understand exactly what the student experience is prior to university. In England and Wales there are a number of pathways that students can take in order to gain a university place. Apart from specialised 'access courses', all pathways involve the acquiring of at least three "Advanced Levels" or "A-levels," or an equivalent qualification such as the International Baccalaureate (IB). The site of study, as a Sixth Form College, is a relatively recent addition to the educational scene. It has been traditional for more middle and upper middle class students to attend a secondary school, often a grammar, church or independent school, which would have its own sixth form. The students would make the transition directly from GCSEs to A-Level in one school, and then move onto university. What happened in Havering is typical of other parts of the country. In 1991, the borough closed many of the school sixth forms and opened a new sixth form college. The aim was to encourage students from all social backgrounds to carry on with their studies, taking A-levels and then going to university. The more well-off students in the borough still tend to be in schools with their own sixth form but the college has been a huge success for both middle and working class students, attracting many who would not have wanted to stay on at school but wanted to do A-levels rather than a vocational course.

Studying for A-levels is a significant period of transition. It seems in some ways to serve as a stepping stone from school to the next stage, at the same time building on prior school experience as well as requiring that students unlearn attitudes and practices that may be a hindrance to moving on. This conclusion is drawn from students themselves who comment on how they don't feel attached to the college in the same way as they did during? secondary school. In addition, they are in a hurry to get on to the next stage, which represents freedom from both parents and "schooling." For some students, A-levels is a half-way house in which they have a taste of freedom by choosing the subjects they want to do; but at the same time it is not enough and they yearn to rush

on to what they see as the beginning of life under their own control (perhaps an illusion, but this is the feeling expressed by many of the students that I have interviewed and spoken to).

There is considerable evidence from my research that students come to A-levels carrying many weaknesses from their studies at GCSE level. College statistics for the year of research show that over half of the students scored below the 70% target from the diagnostic tests in communication, computing and mathematics. This is despite many having achieved a pass at GCSE. Teachers regularly comment on how students are "spoon-fed" at GCSE. This comment is made on an informal basis as well as discussed in reports from the principal for governors. One of the main feeder schools, has homework clubs such that the students can do well without ever having to do work on their own. Students themselves commented on how much their teachers helped them at GCSE - in one case, even to the point of telling them answers during the exams.

The students had little experience of doing independent study at home. The schools were aware of this problem and tackled it by having extra homework clubs and after school revision. They targeted the students who they think can get at least a "C" as it is the A-C pass rate that matters for the statistics. This has been called "educational triage" by David Gillborn and Deborah Youdell (2006). They compare teachers' strategy to that of a first aider who has to prioritise the individuals who are in the most danger of dying (failing) but still have a chance of surviving (in this case, getting a C grade). The problem of not doing homework continues at college. Teachers wonder why students don't do work at home but if they understood students' past experience, they would understand the extent of the problem. However, the college does not have any way of tackling the issue and students commented that they could get away without doing homework because the teachers didn't chase them. The teachers' attitude is that this is college, and they shouldn't have to chase students. Similar problems are found with attendance. Without the strict monitoring of attendance they have at school, students soon realise that if they decide to have a "lie-in," that there will be no repercussions. The college is not set up with sufficient staff to be continually chasing student attendance.

Teachers also commented on the general lack of motivation and willingness to engage in the learning process, whether in lessons or at home. A number of examples were given of some of the better students, with Oxbridge ambitions, who were not willing to working independently. They wanted to be told the answer by the teacher. What was the point, they said, of doing it themselves if the teacher was just going to tell them the right answer eventually? The key question is: what do I need to learn for the exam? Teachers felt that it is unusual to find a student who is willing to do the little bit extra just out of general interest. And, regardless of this lack of initiative and independent study skills, these students will succeed in getting an A or B and achieve a place at their chosen university. Such experiences follow on from the problem of how students were taught at school. They were unwilling to unlearn their previous dependence on the teacher and the focus on the exam.

These findings suggest that students need to learn a new way of studying at A-level. The activity of sitting down quietly at home and reading, thinking, taking notes, putting ideas together, making connections, organizing ideas into essays and learning beyond exam preparation are all activities that many students have not done previously. In the study above, such activities were foreign to students. For the most part, learning was done at school, under the direct supervision of the teacher. The problem of reading that was highlighted in the university findings has its origin in pre-university education. The majority of the students studied will not read anything more than a newspaper or a magazine. When doing the end of year review with the Religious Studies students, some students commented that they didn't like to have to read anything. They preferred getting the information from the teacher through hand-outs or notes on the board. One teacher commented that even asking students to read a paragraph in class seemed to be a lot to ask. The A-grade students may be more willing to read, but not significantly so. At a Philosophy Teacher Training day, the examiner relayed how his Oxbridge candidates were unwilling to spend time reading philosophy texts that weren't required for the exam.

The way students are used to learning is in this way at odds with how they should be learning both at A-level and at university. The challenge for A-level teachers is to somehow encourage students to unlearn these previous habits and attitudes and learn necessary skills. They need to unlearn the approach to study that encourages them to rely exclusively on the teacher to provide them with "what they need to know." However, as the findings show, A-level teachers find themselves reinforcing the ways of teaching and learning from previous stages of secondary education, thus ensuring that the transition is not fully made.

The main factor influencing the approach to teaching in both schools I visited, and at Havering Sixth Form College is the pressure to get good exam results. This situation is not untypical and educators are regularly

challenging the regime that has been forced upon them by successive governments through the use of League Tables (Gillborn and Youdell 2006). Teachers who try and encourage independent learning often have negative experiences, mainly because to do it properly they would need so much more time. There is so much material to "get through." The anthropology A-level has a similarly high level of content and many teachers have complained about the difficulties in covering the whole specification. The teachers find themselves rushing through topics by spoon-feeding the information to the students in the form of teacher-produced hand-outs that give the students "everything they need to know," through resources like topic summaries and sample essays.

This issue was highlighted in a Philosophy training day given by the exam board for A-Level Philosophy. The examiner was commenting on the high percentage of passes in the A2 exams. He claimed that it is not that standards have gone down; rather the students have got better at passing exams. Or rather, "the teachers have got better at teaching students to pass exams." One teacher then commented that this was an indication of "how our teaching has in fact got worse" because we were no longer teaching the students how to think. This supports the data from Havering; even students who achieve high grades will be unlikely to have the independent study and thinking skills so necessary for university. The implications for university departments is that they will have to take into consideration the past experiences of the students, in particular with regards to their ability to read, write essays and work independently. It is not a question of just giving students information on how they are supposed to study at university; the students' approach to learning needs to be *actively unlearnt*. These new university students have a whole history of being students in very different contexts, which is reflected not just in what they know or what they can and cannot do, but is also embedded in who they are as social and embodied human beings.

It would be much easier for universities to undertake such a drastic learning/unlearning strategy if schools and colleges were able to change their own practices. The implication of my research at the pre-university level is that the current A-level and GCSE system prioritizes exam results above all else and has caused teachers to foster a culture of passivity, instrumentalism and dependency. Far too many young people have a low level of academic literacy and are overly reliant on the Internet. This is despite the best intentions of teachers, who desperately struggle to find ways to truly educate. These findings should go some way to explaining why students are increasingly having difficulties at university. Rather than getting students to unlearn those past attitudes and practices from school that are detrimental to their development, A-level teachers find themselves, usually against their will, reinforcing and further embedding students' previous approach to learning.

Research Findings Part III: Transition Research and Teaching the New Anthropology A-level

The process of transition, of unlearning and learning, has manifested itself in a number of ways in the new anthropology A-level. The A-level was designed and promoted by the Education Committee of the Royal Anthropological Institute (RAI). There were two A-level teachers on the committee. There was considerable concern on the part of the committee to make the A-level acceptable to university departments, in terms of both content and the skills it would develop, thus helping the process of transition rather than hindering it. However, designing an A-level on paper and bringing it forth in reality are two very different things. Making a list of topics or areas to be covered is only part of the process of A-level teaching. It is also necessary to consider the exam and the examination system, the limited time available, and the students themselves and the general problem of transition. In addition, the A-level is not necessarily taught by anthropologists. Currently there are sociologists, psychologists and archaeologists, which means that they may interpret what is actually written in the specification differently than an anthropologist would.

Moving from the ideal to reality involves a certain degree of unlearning, in the sense that one may think there is a clearly defined view of what anthropology is and how it should be taught, but this does not always neatly match the teaching of anthropology in practice – particularly in the relatively uncharted waters of anthropology at the pre-university level in the UK context. Anthropology has moved out of the university and at this level is in the hands of the examiners, teachers and the students themselves, who are both learning about anthropology as well as creating it within the context in which it is being taught. As teachers desperately struggle to find teaching ideas and material that are accessible and motivating to their students, they may well stray from what is considered to be anthropological by professional anthropologists. This then raises the questions for both students and teachers about the boundaries of anthropology. Then there is also the question of what counts as ethnography. Students see Bruce Parry in the BBC programme *Tribe*, fully immersing himself in a ritual or other cultural practice and they ask, "why isn't this anthropology?" How long do you have to spend with a group of people for it to be truly

ethnographic? Is anthropology defined by whether the person is officially called an anthropologist? Thus, the untying anthropology from its firm base within universities raises all sorts of interesting questions. Rather than the new A-level students learning what anthropology is, we may find that there is a certain amount of *unlearning* of what academic anthropologists have traditionally thought of as the boundaries of the discipline.

At Havering College, I share the teaching of anthropology with another teacher, currently an anthropology research student at Goldsmiths College. We are both committed to preparing students adequately for university study and not simply "getting them through" exams. However, this was an uphill struggle: immediately, we faced the same problems of transition (the need for unlearning) identified in the research described above. Students are unaccustomed to engage in the activities that we would want them to do as part of their study of anthropology, in particular reading ethnography. This then causes problems for teachers who begin to stretch the boundaries of what might be considered an ethnographic example. These issues relate to the problem of unlearning. For students, we want them to unlearn their previous study habits and response to reading. Teachers are confronted with the question of what to do with their previous assumptions of what anthropology is. Teachers who aren't specialists will have to unlearn common prejudices about anthropology – that anthropology is principally about the study of exotic tribes, for example. Teachers who have been trained as anthropologists face another question: to what extent do they need to unlearn what they have been taught in their particular university department about what anthropology is in order to effectively teach the A-level to the actual group of students they are working with?

The examiners also have a key role to play in defining anthropology. As they set the exam questions, they are essentially sending a message to teachers about what is important for the students to learn. In other A-levels, the content of the discipline is not open to question. This means that both teachers and examiners of the Anthropology A-level have to unlearn a passive attitude towards the teaching of the subject and become aware of their responsibility as active creators of what is defined as anthropology. This is a huge responsibility, which poses many challenges. An example of the way in which the examiners, teachers and students work together to create and define anthropology is can be seen in the use of ethnography. Examiners have stressed the importance of teachers using ethnography as a basis for their teaching. This followed on from the ethos of the specification as designed by the RAI. However, there is a shortage of accessible and readable ethnographies that have direct relevance for the specification. Being anthropologists, my teaching colleague and I had our own libraries and gave extracts of relevant passages to students. We did struggle, though, to find ethnographies that would be accessible to A-level students. Even when providing extracts for a range of reading abilities, some students found the task of reading ethnography impossible. One student commented that even reading a couple of what we considered straightforward paragraphs was beyond him. Even many of the more able students wouldn't even read extracts at home (for the various reasons discussed in the transition research), or else would read it but not take notes on it or answer the questions we set. The end result was that many teachers use ethnographic films as a way of delivering some ethnographic content for the topics.

All of these practical problems arise from both the challenge of implementing an exam specification and the students having to unlearn previous study habits and approaches to reading, lead to the question of what counts as an ethnographic example. This is another area in which unlearning and learning have a role to play. How much unlearning should actually take place would form an interesting debate. Accepting that at least initially students will be unable to read whole ethnographies or even complete chapters or journal articles requires the teacher to think carefully about what the essential features of an ethnographic example are.

Despite the above issues, we have made some progress in unlearning and learning. We expect that if we continue to increase our demands on the students, they will gradually read more complex ethnographies, learn to use them effectively in analysing and illustrating issues and concepts, and they will also be willing to do more work outside lessons. The hope is that the A-level anthropology students will arrive at university equipped with the skills to work independently. In this way, we hope teaching anthropology A-level will contribute to the process of helping students unlearn the approaches to learning that they have brought with them from their school experience. They will have made reading and working independently an integral part of their lives - not just something they are doing because they are told to do it, but because they both want to do it and are able to do it.

Conclusion

This article has argued that anthropology is an important vehicle for understanding the complexity of the educational experience, both in terms of its theoretical insights and in terms of research methods. This is because

anthropology focuses on the whole person who is involved in embodied activity in a particular context. It seeks to actually understand the learning experience from the student perspective. Thus, taking an anthropological approach to research on the problem of educational transitions and the process by which students learn, unlearn and learn again as they go through the different stages of education, has helped illuminate key issues that can then be more effectively addressed by both teachers and students. One of the most important issues to be addressed in the context of pre-university education is the fact that students have difficulty in working independently and reading and writing in an academic context. This is the result of past habit and experience, the culture of schools and college, and the examination system, which has encouraged certain types of learning activities that need to be unlearned in order to acquire the other qualities and competencies that education aims to develop in young people, such as high levels of literacy, responsibility, self-confidence and critical thinking.

These issues are also problems for the new anthropology A-level. This cannot be helped, to some extent, because the anthropology A-level is taught in the same context as all other A-levels and therefore cannot escape the limitations and constraints of that context. However, the nature of the subject matter, the way in which it needs to be taught and the skills it develops provides the opportunity for "unlearning and learning" *prior* to university, thus making the transition to university study less problematic, with less "unlearning and learning" having to be done for both the students and their university teachers. The other advantage the anthropology A-level has over other subjects is the close relationship with universities. The work of the RAI Education Committee, such as providing training and resources (Callan et al. 2012; Hendry and Underdown 2012), initiatives such as Teaching Anthropology, and many examples of university lecturers working with individual A-level teachers creates an important space. This space provides the opportunity for teachers and students from all stages of education to work through the challenges they face in their struggle with both unlearning and learning as well as *deciding* what needs to be unlearned and learned.

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