Since the GreenWalk, several curriculum projects have moved forward at City Tech that use the combination of neighborhood investigation, active student learning, and complex problem solving. This project led directly to a year-long NEH-funded faculty development grant entitled “Water and Work: The Ecology of Downtown Brooklyn,” which uses the Brooklyn waterfront as a text. In a pilot course that was developed during this grant, students are becoming creators of original material that speaks to the history, economy, and development of this location. Professor Matthew Gold, in turn, secured a grant entitled “Looking for Whitman,” which involves faculty and students at City Tech, NYU, University of Mary Washington, and Rutgers University at Camden in a concurrent, connected, semester-long inquiry into the relationship of Walt Whitman’s poetry to local geography and history. Professor Richard Hanley was also awarded a grant entitled “Along the Shore: The Landmarks of the Brooklyn Waterfront” to explore the nature and multiplicity of American urban landmarks along the Brooklyn waterfront. To keep open the circuits of real-world learning, our college continues to encourage innovative pedagogy. The next step is to more fully institutionalize the use of its fantastic location.

References


Chapter 15

Sparking Student Scholarship Through Urban Ethnography

Kenneth J. Guest

Each May the students in my course, “The Peopling of New York,” gather in Chatham Square in the heart of Chinatown for their final exam—a 2-h student-led walking tour of East Broadway, the vibrant 10-block thoroughfare that has provided the matrix for our semester-long exploration of immigration and New York City. Shoppers, job seekers, cooks, and waiters hustle by as my students’ research teams review their presentations before getting started. My mind returns to the cold January afternoon at the very beginning of the semester when I led the walking tour for these then wide-eyed and worried first-year undergraduates. What an incredible educational adventure we have been on together over 4 months as students have used anthropological fieldwork techniques to uncover the rich history and dynamic contemporary life of this immigrant community. Through careful mapping of the blocks of East Broadway, historical research, and participant observations in community organizations, along with interviews with shopkeepers and shams, bus drivers and busboys, hipsters and honchos, tenants and teachers, we have sought to understand the New York immigrant experience while immersing students in active primary research in the laboratory of the most urban of global cities.

The Peopling of New York is one of the four required core courses in the curriculum of the Macaulay Honors College, City University of New York, and is taught simultaneously to over 300 students on seven CUNY campuses. This case study focuses on the evolution of my thinking, my pedagogical strategies, and my students’ educational experiences over nearly a decade of teaching this seminar at my home campus, Baruch College. In particular I examine the transformation of the seminar as I shifted its emphasis from a chronological presentation of New York’s immigrant experience with a neighborhood research component to a semester-long student-driven collaborative research project through the deep integration of ethnographic fieldwork. The change has transformed my students into active researchers rather than as passive learners, pushed them to act and write like anthropologists.

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269
East Broadway: The Street as Organizing Principle

This 10-block-long thoroughfare stretches from the vibrant new areas of Manhattan’s Chinatown to the historically rich and rapidly gentrifying Jewish sections of Manhattan’s Lower East Side. Over the past 20 years, hundreds of thousands of new Chinese immigrants from Fuzhou in southeast China have transformed the western half of East Broadway into a dynamic central business district for their collective lives and economic activities. Along East Broadway can be found immigration lawyers, travel agents, Chinese doctors, hometown associations, wedding parlors, banks and money transfer agencies, restaurants, and temples. The East Broadway Mall under the Manhattan Bridge is the hub of a Chinese restaurant industry now expanding rapidly across the country. Two dozen employment agencies place workers in all-you-can-eat buffets, and Chinese buses leave from the mall to deliver restaurant workers all along these routes.

The eastern end of East Broadway became the center of Jewish immigrant life beginning in the 1850s and continues to reflect that history and contemporary Jewish life today. Prominent Jewish institutions such as the Daily Forward newspaper, the Educational Alliance, the Young Israel Synagogue, the Bialystoker Home for Aged, and Shtiebel Row noted for its dozens of small village-oriented synagogues still line the street and actively serve the community. The intersection of immigrants and immigrant histories along East Broadway create tensions and opportunities—both for community life and for student research—that shift as the neighborhood grows.

New York’s immigrant history has been lived for over 300 years along this street. The wealthy Delancy and Rutgers families cultivated the land as orchards and farmhouses and north of the city proper in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Later, ownhouses and mansions of the downtown elite were built along East Broadway’s uncivil greenswards. With the rise of the East River port along nearby South Street, East Broadway in the 1800s became the bedroom community to working-class lockyard laborers. Two-story wood-framed residential buildings were superseded by five-story tenements built around Chatham Square at the west end of the street. As an eastward extension of the Five Points district, this section of East Broadway came to be known for its intersection of races, ethnicities, languages, and cultures.

Today the buildings along East Broadway tell wonderful stories about the neighborhood’s immigrant history. Many bear the names and symbols of immigrant entrepreneurs and landlords of past generations. The Chatham Square Library, elegantly designed by McKim Mead and White, was one of the first acquired by the New York Public Library through the largess of John Jacob Astor and, along with the Seward Park Library, became the center of learning and community life for wave after wave of immigrants. Block after block of tenement buildings echo the dense immigrant life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Seward Park Cooperative Apartments tower on East Broadway’s east end where hundreds of tenements were demolished in a 1950s urban renewal project led by Robert Moses.

The story of East Broadway continues to evolve today. As Manhattan real estate prices continue to climb, long-term residents are being pushed out. Garment factories are being converted to upscale residential lofts. On the street’s eastern end, the Jewish Daily Forward Building has become a luxury condominium. The Young Israel Synagogue, gutted by fire, remains vacant. The Seward Park condominiums, originally a public-private middle-income housing development sponsored by New York City and powerful, Jewish-led labor unions, are no longer restricted to middle-income housing and are being flipped at market prices. Restaurant supply stores are being replaced by hipster art galleries and coffee shops. And at the mid-point of the street stands the new luxury apartment house appropriately called “the Crossroads.”

This is the complicated world of East Broadway that I seek to immerse my students in each spring. And with each new semester of The People of New York, East Broadway and New York’s immigration story come alive with more depth and more vivid colors, both for my students and for me.

The Students

My students in this second-semester freshman seminar are very diverse and highly motivated. Most are graduates of New York City’s public high schools with high SAT scores and grade point averages. The Honors College at CUNY was created to keep New York City’s top students—who might otherwise choose top-tier private universities—within the New York public university system. At CUNY they receive full tuition scholarships, a $7,500 academic opportunity fund, a laptop computer, academic advisers, and priority registration (perhaps one of the most significant benefits in a school where the largest deterrent to graduating in 4 years is getting into the required courses). Each seminar averages 20-22 students. Baruch College has been ranked regularly as the most diverse college in the country. Baruch’s students are 35% Asian, 35% White, 15% Hispanic, 10% Black, and 5% other. Seventy percent are immigrants themselves, and more are children of immigrants. Our Honors College students fit many of these demographics, but with far fewer Hispanics and rarely any Black students. Our Asian students are primarily Chinese, and our white students are primarily from Eastern Europe, Russia, and the former Soviet Republic. Many are sheltered by their immigrant parents despite living in cosmopolitan New York City. And most are averse in their academic life. They work diligently and competently at the tasks presented to them, but they often avoid uncertainty at all costs, a tendency exacerbated by the high pressure to maintain a 3.5 GPA to retain their scholarships. “Can you review the course requirements one more time?” “How do I get an A?” “What exactly are your expectations for this paper?” These
The Course

During the first 5 years of teaching *The Peopling of New York*, my course structure was a bit predictable, but tidy and well delivered—perhaps the right approach for the first few times through a course, but eventually a bit stagnant. I began with an introduction to immigration theory, followed by the history of immigration in New York and then a component on contemporary immigration including a research project in Manhattan's Chinatown. Over the course of the semester my students learned about patterns of immigration, push-pull theory, and transnational migration. They were introduced to the historical flow of immigrants into New York, from the Dutch and English to the Irish, Germans, Italians, and Eastern European Jews. Study of post-1965 immigration from India, the Dominican Republic, and the former Soviet Union provided case studies to complement fieldwork in Chinatown over the final third of the course.

Why Immigration?

I believe teachers should teach to their strengths and from their passions, so developing an entire course on immigration and New York City has been a pleasure. For the past 15 years I have been studying the immigration of rural Chinese from the farms and fishing villages near Fuzhou, in southeastern China, to New York City. My original work explored these experiences through the lens of religion, both in New York and in China, as Fuzhouese immigrants, many undocumented and smuggled into the United States for exorbitant fees, created and recreated religious communities, rituals, and meanings and used them to build links between New York City and home (Guest, 2003). My current research (Guest, 2009) focuses on the development of East Broadway as a gateway, hub, and launching pad for Fuzhouese who work in the network of all-you-can-eat Chinese buffets and take-out restaurants in an ethnic Chinese restaurant economy expanding across the United States.

Immigration provides an excellent lens for examining New York, and New York provides an excellent laboratory for considering immigration. Immigration has driven the New York experience for 400 years, creating an expectation of ethnic interaction, diversity, and receptivity to a constant flow of new people and ideas. And the remarkable diversity of immigration to New York City provides a unique laboratory to understand both immigration’s history and contemporary characteristics. This is particularly important for my Baruch students, 70% of whom are immigrants themselves and are intensely engaged in trying to understand their own journey and their position in their new home country. For them, an academic study of immigration helps universalize their own very personal and often highly mythologized family migration experience and begin to see patterns and institutional factors that frame each individual’s decision to migrate.

Why Fieldwork?

Despite the rich trove of resources to make a course on immigration and New York City interesting to undergraduates, the original version of my course only really came alive late in each semester when students engaged in fieldwork in Chinatown. My research and, more fundamentally, my perspectives on the world have been transformed through fieldwork experience in China and New York. I have come to believe that careful development of fieldwork skills—the ability to analyze cultural patterns and systems of power in the groups of people we encounter—is essential not only for the successful professional anthropologist but also for the successful human living in our complex contemporary cultures. So, as an anthropologist, I integrate ethnographic fieldwork into all of my courses, whether they focus on religion, immigration, New York, or the introduction to cultural anthropology. I begin with the premise that my students are anthropologists already. They just don’t know it. They meet new people, enter new situations, and have to figure out how to make sense of and interact with diverse groups in their workplaces, classrooms, families, and religious communities. In my classes I teach them to recognize and develop their own skills for observing and analyzing the world around them. Fieldwork also provides a sharp contrast to the research strategies most undergraduates are introduced to in college. Leaving the classroom and engaging in direct, experiential primary research provides an opportunity to engage both the body and the mind (see Rice & McCurdy, 2007; Clifford & Marcus, 1986).

So perhaps it is not surprising that *The Peopling of New York* came alive at this point in the semester. Despite the short duration of their research on organizations in the Chinese community, these projects consistently evoked more intellectual curiosity, discussion, and even surprise than any other component of course material. Students often react with initial reluctance toward doing fieldwork. “We have to do what? And go where? And talk to who?” But with rare exceptions, by the end of the course, students point to the fieldwork experience as the highlight of the semester. Fieldwork creates opportunities to directly engage with people, to cross real and imagined cultural divides, and to extend learning beyond the classroom. Students who take risks in these areas surprise and please themselves and continually impress their instructor. Student research projects are consistently strong and show an impressive level of engagement not only with the research subjects but also with new research methodologies. Over the semesters, fascinating papers have focused on health clinics, hometown associations, schools, employment agencies, bus companies, temples, and even kung fu schools.

Despite this success, I grew increasingly frustrated with key aspects of the course:

- The difficulty in linking the history of immigration with the present
- The lack of correlation between student research projects even though they were all conducted within a spatially limited Manhattan Chinatown neighborhood
The Transformation of My Classroom

In the fall of 2006 I attended a master teacher lecture by Stephen Brookfield sponsored by the Baruch Office of the Provost. Brookfield (1995), author of Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher, encouraged us to turn students from passive learners to active ones by treating them as young scholars who could take more responsibility for their education. This got my brain going and my heart pumping. How could I create that dynamic in the classroom, inspire students to think of themselves as scholars, and create a learning community between student and faculty? So the following spring, after 5 years of teaching The Peopling of New York, I threw out my tried-and-true syllabus and decided to experiment. If fieldwork was exciting my students, why not transform the entire semester into a collective fieldwork practicum, rather than save it for a final project? If I wanted more active students, why not turn design of the seminar over to them? And if students were struggling to find thematic and analytical continuity through a general study of Chinatown, why not narrow the spatial focus to a study of just one dynamic street? The result has been a total transformation of the classroom, my students, and my own teaching. The process is much less predictable (Did I mention scary and exhilarating?), requires incredible flexibility, and places enormous responsibility on the students for the course’s success. But the shift in teacher–student power dynamics and the creation of space for students to take responsibility for their own learning have brought freshness, vibrancy, and depth to our study of The Peopling of New York.

Seminar Design

My Peopling of New York course is now designed as a collective semester-long ethnographic research project to explore immigration in New York City through the lens of one street, East Broadway. The course immerses my students in East Broadway right away. In the first week of class, we meet in Chatham Square and I lead a 2-h walking tour of East Broadway. Though the semester is 16-weeks long, I feel I have a limited window of opportunity to grab my students’ attention. And I want my students to immediately recognize that this course will require a different approach from them than their usual undergraduate course. At the beginning of the walking tour, I distribute a worksheet with questions designed to push them beyond a tourist’s viewpoint and to begin to open the door to developing a scholarly agenda.

Mapping the Blocks of East Broadway

The walking tour, while a stimulating way to begin the semester, is not enough to break down the students’ anxiety about field-based research nor is it adequate to embed East Broadway in their senses or fuel sustained intellectual engagement. So we move to stage two: the mapping of East Broadway. Over the next 2 weeks, student teams tackle the street block by block. Each self-selected team of two or three students focuses on one block. They walk up and down. They sit and watch. They eat in the restaurants, buy things in the stores, climb up the stairs, and talk to shopkeepers and nuns, street sweepers and delivery guys. They draw it and photograph it. They take careful notes. At the end of 2 weeks, the teams report their findings to the full class and East Broadway begins to come alive in our classroom. I am often impressed with the creativity of the mapping presentations. Students bring all their computer skills to bear in developing multimedia presentations, usually using PowerPoint as the primary platform and including drawings, photos, Google Earth images, and sometimes even video and sound. The sights, sounds and descriptions, funny stories, and uncomfortable moments elicit knowing nods, curious questions, oohs and aahs, technical questions about how they created a certain effect, and recollections from the walking tour. To begin the analytical process I ask students to reflect on key issues and dynamics they observed along the block as well as organizations that seem to play key roles and might be of interest as a final project later in the semester. Returning to questions we considered after the walking tour, we think again about “Where do they see power relations in play? Where do they see evidence of change?”

In this new seminar design, one central goal early in the semester is to facilitate student interaction with the neighborhood as soon as possible and as often as possible. Students need time to work up the courage to deeply engage the neighborhood, and they need multiple visits to begin to move beyond sometimes overwhelming feelings of excitement or discomfort toward carefully observing and analyzing the community they are studying. Fieldwork is an unfamiliar research strategy. But the walking tour and mapping projects are straightforward projects, with clearly defined
methods and end goals that provide a clear framework for students’ initial engagement with the community. Sending students out in teams of two is also a key to the project’s success as the camaraderie helps overcome fear of the unknown and provides an immediate opportunity for debriefing and analyzing what the students are seeing, hearing, thinking, and feeling.

After each mapping presentation, and in a lengthy debriefing and analysis session at the conclusion of all the presentations, students are asked to identify and prioritize key neighborhood dynamics and issues for further exploration during the semester. A large portion of the syllabus for the remaining weeks of the semester has been left blank. I want them to identify the key themes, dynamics, questions, and issues that will frame the rest of the semester and around which we will organize readings, resource people, and discussions. This is a key and difficult moment in the effort to empower students to become active scholars rather than passive learners. They usually expect that at this point I will tell them what is important and what we will talk about for the rest of the semester. But the awkwardness and uncertainty of this moment in the classroom trajectory creates space for students to take initiative about their own educational process. To help students think about key concepts, I might ask them to imagine writing a book about East Broadway and to organize their research and writing into dynamic chapters that capture significant aspects of their research and communicate them easily to others.

My classes have chosen some great topics. One year we focused on restaurants and labor issues and were able to meet with restaurant workers on strike and their labor organizer advocates. Another year we focused on housing, real estate, and gentrification and were able to meet with a tenant organizing group and the zoning committee of the local government community board. Other topics have included health and medical care, government investment (or lack of it), interethnic conflict, immigration laws and policies, historic preservation, and religion. Adding these components mid-semester is time consuming and a bit precarious, but clearly increases students’ engagement and passion for the class research project.

Primary Research on an Immigrant Organization

Following the mapping of East Broadway, students focus exclusively on primary research in an organization along East Broadway through which they will be able to gain insight into contemporary immigration in New York City. Students have chosen libraries, post offices, Buddhist temples, bus companies, employment agencies, Western Union, Jewish schools, old-age homes, housing projects, law offices, and art galleries. While no outcome is predetermined, students must show evidence of active participant observation, successful interviews, and analysis of their organization using some of the themes that emerged during our historical study of immigration. The use of organizations as the primary unit of research serves several important purposes. Students have a specific place with regular activities to which they can return repeatedly to conduct participant observation and compare changes and similarities from visit to visit. Organizations usually have some preserved history that can be accessed through use of primary documents or oral history interviews. And organizations have recognizable leadership structures through which students can access information and analyze dynamics of power, conflict, and change that give insight into individuals, the organization, and the East Broadway community. Regular check-ins during class time allow the students to reflect on research challenges that may seem unique but often prove common through many projects.

History Through the Lens of East Broadway

Our study of East Broadway includes a historical component. We examine immigrant flows into New York City through secondary texts, but always with the framework of East Broadway in mind. How did immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Italy, and Eastern Europe affect the development of East Broadway? Our second strategy is for each student team to investigate the history of their block, building, or organization. Students create a database of sources and methods for conducting the historical research by posting suggestions on our Blackboard site. In the New York City context, these suggestions range from the NYC Municipal Archives photo collection, the Buildings Department Web site of permits and violations, the real estate Web site www.propertyshark.com, the New York Public Library map room, the Landmarks Preservation Commission, the local public library collections, the New York Historical Society, online maps and databases, and the New York Times archives. The midterm covers the New York immigrant history as presented in secondary sources, drawing out themes of ethnic identity construction, race, immigrant incorporation and assimilation, women, power, and stratification. The midterm also includes written and oral components during which individuals or research teams must present the history of their block, building, and organization as well as a research strategy for the remainder of the semester.

Final Projects

The course culminates by drawing separate research projects into a comparative framework. Themes and through-lines are teased out and lead to deeper analysis of immigration in New York City. Research projects focused on community organizations are reported in a 15-page term paper and presented to the full class in multimedia framework during the final 2 weeks of the semester. Classmates pose questions and engage in discussions exploring similarities and contrasts between organizations. In addition, the class collaborates to create a Wiki of East Broadway. Wikis (think Wikipedia) are open-source, online documents that are easily created and easily modified by multiple users (Ferris & Wilder, 2006). Our course Wiki allows students to consolidate research material accumulated over the semester and post it in a common online project. Photos, videos, mapping projects, historical
Chapter 16
Building Community in Professional Education:
Team Learning by Design

Carol M. Connell

Raising his hand, Solomon sought to make an exchange, “Professor Connell, our team RASNER is willing to trade two shapers for a plant and a coordinator.” Sarah answered back, “Team TQM (Total Quality Management) will trade you one coordinator. We are also looking for a Networker, if you have more than one.” The two teams—RASNER and Team TQM—were attempting to create well-rounded teams, made up of individuals who had specific skill areas lacking in the current team configuration. The process is called rebalancing. To understand what team skills they possessed and what skills they still needed, all team members had taken a team roles assessment test that allowed them to understand their individual role preferences and those of their team mates. In fact, there was only one self-defined “networker” in the class: a member whose specific skill was communicating with the world outside the team to obtain scarce resources to complete team activities. There were several “plants,” creative types who applied novel solutions to problems, and “questioners,” students who liked to play a devil’s advocate role. There were “shapers,” students who sought a leadership role; “coordinators,” students skilled at organizing activities and carrying them through to completion; and “team workers,” students who wanted to provide functional support to the team activity. The class was learning about the need for balance after reading work by teaming expert Dr. Meredith Belbin, who had written extensively on the importance of well-defined roles and role diversity to high-performance teams.¹

How does an organizational behavior class of 30 students, most of whom have little or no prior experience in organizational work teams, learn about teaming and high performance, the current sine qua non of teaming? I believe that they cannot—unless they become teams, learn as teams, and produce as teams. That was my goal

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References

¹Dr. Meredith Belbin has written a number of books on teaming, including: Management Teams: Why they succeed or fail (1981), The job promoters (1990), Team roles at work (1993), The coming shape of organization (1996), Changing the way we work (1997), Beyond the team (2000), and Managing without power (2001).