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“Share an example of what you are doing, within your domain/class, to engage students in order to enrich their learning journeys.”

Trained as an anthropologist and a sociolinguist, I strive to make my interdisciplinary undergraduate modules as practically engaging and field-based as possible. Yet while both my disciplines are amenable to such a hands-on approach, they also pose an epistemological hazard: the remote cultures and languages we study are always implicitly externalised, i.e. they are always about someone else, thereby leaving students’ own lives and beliefs myopically unexamined and thus disconnected from the topic of study. To mitigate this, I try to make each topic I teach apposite by inviting students to examine their own unquestioned beliefs and habituated practices in engaged, reflexive and experiential ways. For example, in a course focusing on language, culture and cognition, students are asked to uncover their own linguistic ideologies and the connections their personal linguistic practices have to the broader cultural issues debated in the linguistic anthropology and cognitive science literatures.

In my advanced writing and research course, one involving ethnographic fieldwork among indigenous peoples, I centre the module on an epistemological issue germane to students as emerging academic authors: specifically, how will they critically approach producing academic knowledge and ethnographic facts based on their own field experiences? In other words, rather than focus the class solely on the ethnographic data regarding the exoticised ‘other’ people that they encounter, I structure the class in a way that asks students to constantly evaluate their ongoing relationship with the people they are studying, and to consider how they can responsibly transform their ethnographic data into academic scholarship. In this way, rather than the ‘human subjects’ of social science serving as a way to tacitly and impersonally define ourselves by what (or whom) we presumably are not, I instead encourage students to be reflexive, interactive, and responsible—to work with, rather than on, the people they study.