Anthropology – Basic Concepts & Methods

Objective/Activity Description:
Students will understand the core concepts of applied cultural anthropology and learn how its tools can be put to use.

Time: 60 min

Skills:
- Listening & observation
- Note taking
- Critical thinking
- Research design

Materials:
- Notepads & pens
- Whiteboard & markers

Background:
Anthropology provides tools and a conceptual framework for exploring questions about humans and our place in the world. This workshop is an introduction to applied cultural anthropology and its practicality for community research.

Resources:
- A participatory action research (PAR) guide developed at The Field Museum: http://archive.fieldmuseum.org/par/?_ga=1.171610469.453104451.1357763521
- http://highschoolanthropology.com/

Procedures:

1. State the goal for the workshop: to help students understand the core concepts of applied cultural anthropology and learn how its tools can be used

2. Define anthropology – the study of human beings, past and present. Name the subfields – physical, linguistic, archeology, and cultural.

3. Ask if anyone knows an anthropologist, in real life or movies. (Margaret Mead; Indiana Jones)

4. State the focus today is on cultural anthropology (also called social anthropology). This subfield examines how human beings organize socially, govern, and create and share meaning. How people live in and interact with their environment. And an emphasis in this workshop on applied anthropology which is the practical application of anthropology theory and methods to the needs of society.

5. Discuss common careers for anthropologists. Some they might expect (Research, Teaching, Museums and Parks), and some they might not (Marketing/advertising/sales, the Law, Politics, Communications, and business consulting.)

6. Discuss anthropology as “the science of cultural diversity.” What is culture? A system of shared beliefs, values, and behaviors that members of a society draw upon that shapes their way of life.
7. Culture activity. Ask students to pair up with someone they do not know well and interview each other about the culture they see themselves a part of. 5 minutes for each interview.

8. Report back and discuss (10 minutes). After a couple participants share what they discussed, ask the group whether anyone heard something surprising or unusual? Do they see these differences as cultural? Lead students in the direction of realizing we often think of culture as limited to displays of group membership (celebrating hero and holidays). In reality it is often the parts of our lives we take for granted — thinking they are just how reality works everywhere — that are the powerful parts of culture; they shape what we do without our having to think about it. It often takes people who are not like us to show us that what we think is universal is cultural.

9. Explain that what makes anthropology a science is that it is systematic and comparative in its approach to exploring questions about humankind. Without this, it would create only speculation and opinion based on descriptions. Ask the group what value science-based information has over opinion in our society, and discuss.

10. Discuss the anthropological approach to research problems. What does all scientific research start with? A question. (Applied cultural anthropologists often develop research questions with the community residents and organizations they work with.) A hypothesis. Test the hypothesis by gathering and analyzing data.

11. Describe primary data gathering methods.
   a. Participant observation – the researcher studies the social life of a group by sharing in and documenting their activities.
   b. Interviewing and focus groups
   c. Asset mapping

Reflection:
- End the session by asking the students to name the 4 sub fields of anthropology, and what value scientific research about social issues has over opinions. Ask who in the workshop might like to become an anthropologist, and why.