

An SfAA Oral History Interview with Ward Goodenough

*How Ward Goodenough Came to Write *Cooperation in Change**

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*This interview is especially interesting personally to me because early in my career in applied anthropology I used ideas developed by Ward Goodenough in *Cooperation in Change: An Anthropological Approach to Community Development* (Russell Sage, 1963). At that time I was a community development administrator for the Tohono O’Odham Nation and treated the book as “sacred text.” Further as a graduate student in the late 60’s at Arizona I was influenced by many of the other scholars he mentions in the interview, especially Edward H. Spicer but also Benjamin Paul and Alexander Leighton. A big thank you to Paula Sabloff for doing this interview and to Linda Bennett for brokering the process with Paula. The complete transcript includes discussion of Goodenough’s applied work in the Pacific after World War II. --- John van Willigen*

SABLOFF: The first question is, how did you come to write *Cooperation in Change*? Why did you decide to write the book in the first place?

GOODENOUGH: Good question. Russell Sage had put out two case books. [The first] was one that had the famous Lauriston Sharp piece in it [Editor: “Steel Axes for Stone Age Australians”]. The guy who did it was out at University of Arizona, Ned Spicer [Editor: *Human Problems in Technological Change*, 1952]. And the other was a health case book that was edited by Ben Paul [Editor: *Health, Culture and Community*, 1955]. Alexander Leighton was negotiating with Russell Sage, and my old Sociology professor, Leonard Cottrell, was, at that time, the chief of scholarly matters, whatever the title was, at Russell Sage. And they were talking about the need for some kind of a handbook where people engaged in development would give them the do’s and don’ts of development. And they came to me and asked me if I would be willing to do this, and certain remuneration too, and I could use the remuneration and so I said yes. Well, I began looking at the development of literature, and it was clear that the do’s and don’ts of development that development agents should pay attention to had been enunciated over and over again. They were right on target. People who had experience doing this were saying, you know, these were the 12 basic principles that you have to follow. And they were on target. So why was I going to just say the same damn thing over again for them? I didn’t see that.

When I got thinking about it, what I realized was that [while] these principles were being enunciated, development agents were always saying, "Yes, all very well, but my situation is different. They don't apply to me." [They said this] because they did not understand the underlying processes, social and cultural processes, human processes involved in change. They did not understand what these were so they couldn't see how these principles applied to their situation. What they needed was a kind of book on process which agents, if they knew about [and] had this understanding of the process that they were involved in, would then be able to see how the basic do's and don't principles applied to their situation. So I completely changed what I was doing and came out with a book that was a book enunciating the social psychology of cultural change. And then, of course, came the section on practice. Now you know all of this, and you want to do it, but here are the reasons why you're not going to be able to do it anyway. Our own culture of administrative organization is going to guarantee failure in any human program that we try to run over the long haul. The interests of the client population are sacrificed for the interests of the donor sponsoring populations and their regional purposes are lost and goes down the drain.

SABLOFF: Okay.

GOODENOUGH: Those are the kinds of things [discussed in the book], and then I put [in] a little bit about understanding things about cultural differences like the social organization of religion, little introductory sessions on those things. That was what emerged. The book [was developed] to go with the case studies. The thing that was interesting to me was that I got very little feedback about the book from anybody in anthropology.

SABLOFF: Mm.

GOODENOUGH: But I got some wonderful feedback from people who were doing development work in the field.

SABLOFF: Did they appreciate the book?

GOODENOUGH: I got a wonderful letter from a physician in medical work in Nigeria, for example, and [he said] the book clarifies for me everything that I'm involved in. Just really makes a huge difference. I felt very good about that. Those who were in the work and who had read it, found that it was really helpful to them.

SABLOFF: Good. I want to stop you one minute and ask you two questions to clarify.

GOODENOUGH: Yeah.

SABLOFF: Number one, you said Leonard Cottrell?

GOODENOUGH: Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr.

SABLOFF: Okay.

GOODENOUGH: Who was a sociologist, social psychologist at Cornell University who then was made chief scientific officer, of the Russell Sage Foundation. And I had taken a course with him at Cornell.

SABLOFF: Okay. And why did Alexander Leighton come to you?

GOODENOUGH: Well, Alexander Leighton came at Cottrell's suggestion.

SABLOFF: What was Leighton doing there? Were you friends with Leighton?

GOODENOUGH: Leighton was, in some way or other, promoting the case study things with Russell Sage. Leighton was, himself, very much involved in applied. And he was, himself, a psychologist who got involved in our camps for Japanese custody in World War II, and was working with them. And I remember . . . I think it was he, telling a story about his consulting with the Japanese elders there. [Leighton asked,] "would it be all right if we did this?" [The elders responded] "Look, Mr. Leighton, you can do whatever you want and if we like it, it's all right, if we don't like it, we hate you anyway." [chuckle] So go ahead and do as you want. [chuckle]

SABLOFF: [chuckle] Great.

GOODENOUGH: He liked telling that story on himself.

SABLOFF: I bet. How did you come to focus on the concept of cooperation as the core of the book?

GOODENOUGH: Well, because I saw the process of development [as] a cooperative endeavor between the agents of development on the one hand and the client community on the other. And without establishing an agreement on what they were

doing, cooperating in that, it wasn't going to work.

SABLOFF: Had someone said this before? You said you read a lot of material.

GOODENOUGH: I read some material and what the material did was imply that, but it didn't say it explicitly. And actually the title was . . . Ruth [Goodenough] and I were talking about it a lot, it was her idea to give that title.

SABLOFF: A couple of more questions about the book. What were the major constraints associated with completing the project? What happened to the book? You said it in the introduction, or the forward, it took you 10 years to do this.

GOODENOUGH: Yeah, I had a year's leave at the Ford Center in Stanford to finish them. By the end of the first six months I had a draft and Ruth and I looked at it, it would not do. It was lousy. The question was what was needed? And so what was needed was what it became. And so I started writing the book all over again from the very beginning with now a clear conception of where I was going, what I was having to do, and then incorporating stuff from what I had done into it as essentially a new book. So that was why it took that long. And I was for a lot of it I was feeling my way.

SABLOFF: It's because this was pioneering.

GOODENOUGH: Yeah.

SABLOFF: How did you know it wasn't any good?

GOODENOUGH: [chuckle] That was easy. It wasn't any good! [chuckle]. It hadn't addressed the problem.

SABLOFF: Okay. So you needed to write one version in order to get down to the essence.

GOODENOUGH: What that did was clear the decks of the rubbish and now I could see where it was we had to go and what we had to do, Ruth and I together. She was a great help.

SABLOFF: What was her role in the book?

GOODENOUGH: Hmm?

SABLOFF: What was her contribution to the book?

GOODENOUGH: Her contribution was our talking, and she helping clarify for me things having to do with the psychology of it. She was an ABD in Social Psychology.

SABLOFF: Mm.

GOODENOUGH: And so she had a very good perspective on the social psychological aspects of all this business. Those things had to be addressed. And so between [us] we kicked it back and forth and it grew and there was a point where I was ready to give her co-authorship, but then other things interfered. Her brother's wife died in childbirth with the fifth child, leaving her brother, who had just started a new business and working hellish hours to get that off the ground, with four children aged 11 to 2 and a new baby. And I had Ruth on the plane out to Phoenix and I knew she was coming back with the baby. So she became a full-time mom again.

SABLOFF: Let's move on to other things. What has been the role of applied anthropology in your career?

GOODENOUGH: To be honest with you, I have not followed it very closely. I'm a past president of the Society for Applied Anthropology. I did Cooperation and Change, but I have not thought of myself as an applied anthropologist. I get Human Organization and I look at the titles of the articles and there are very few of them that deal with things and issues that particularly interest me. Not that they're not worthwhile, but it's just my own interests lie elsewhere. I've been basically interested in looking at the problems of applied anthropology from the point of view of what looking at those things does for me as a scientific or pseudo-scientific anthropologist. Not from the point of view of application, but from the point of view of our understanding the nature of human processes which is what, as [an] anthropologist I'm concerned about. And I've written a paper in which I pointed out that attention to the problems of application can teach you a lot about the pure stuff.

SABLOFF: Okay. So applied anthropology is always dealing with rapid change situations and these are like experimental stations or something to watch in order to build theory, is that a decent way of summarizing it?

GOODENOUGH: Well, it could be I suppose. I hadn't thought of it that way, but with the experience of writing *Cooperation in Change* where I found that I was dealing with what ostensibly was applied anthropology, but in fact I was dealing with human social and cultural process.

SABLOFF: Right.

GOODENOUGH: And I was having to develop a theoretical approach to the understanding of those processes.

SABLOFF: You were talking about applied anthropology research as stimulating your own theoretical thoughts on process.

GOODENOUGH: Yeah.

SABLOFF: Social process.

GOODENOUGH: I was thinking about problems of applied anthropology. I wasn't doing applied anthropology research, I was just thinking about the problems that applied anthropologist development agents are dealing with, and what did I, as an anthropologist, [was] to contribute to thinking about that business? And what did being stimulated from the applied approach to think about that business, what did that . . . how did that improve my own thinking, theoretical orientation as an anthropologist. I found that it did.

SABLOFF: Okay. Good. Any last words?

GOODENOUGH: Nope. [chuckle]

SABLOFF: Okay. [chuckle] Thank you for this.

An Invitation from on the Society for Applied Anthropology Oral History Project Readers are invited to suggest persons to be interviewed for the project to me at (ant101@uky.edu) or 859.269.8301. Think of the anthropologists that made a difference in places where you live and work. Often the person making the suggestion is asked to do the interview. The collection of SfAA recorded interviews and transcripts is archived at the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Library. Their url is:

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