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A much-needed handbook on university pedagogy in ethnology, anthropology, and related fields

Arja Turunen

Sanna Lillbroända-Annala, Maija Mäki & Pia Olsson 2023. *Kulttuurien tutkimuksen pedagogiikka*. [University pedagogy in cultural research] Ethnos publication. Helsinki: Ethnos ry. 514 pp. ISBN 978-952-68509-7-9 (print) ISBN 978-952-68509-8-6 (pdf) ISSN 0357-511X. DOI: 10.23991/ethnos.660

University teachers' pedagogical training as well as the study and academic discussion of university pedagogy have increased significantly since the 1990s. This has improved the quality of teaching and given researchers tools to develop and reflect on their teaching and academic identity. *Kulttuurien tutkimuksen pedagogiikka* (University pedagogy in cultural research), edited by Sanna Lillbroända-Annala, Maija Mäki, and Pia Olsson, is the first Finnish publication concerning university pedagogy in cultural research. It discusses the aims and methods of teaching and learning in ethnology, anthropology, folklore research, and the study of religions. The book is a highly valuable contribution to university pedagogy in general and to the field of cultural research in particular because this kind of pedagogical discussion – at least in the form of such a publication – has been lacking in the field.

The book includes 13 chapters and an introduction that demonstrate the multiplicity of courses, teaching methods, and pedagogical theories used in these fields. The days when cultural research studies mostly consisted of attending lectures and taking exams are long gone. The teaching environment has also changed dramatically over the past decades. Qualitative and quantitative requirements have increased in teaching, but at the same time students are required to graduate sooner, which leaves teachers struggling with conflicting interests in their teaching.

The identity of cultural research is based on ethnographic research, which students practice in courses on fieldwork methods. Ethnographic methods have traditionally been considered something that cannot be taught or learned in the classroom. Students have simply been sent to the field to learn them by themselves. As the editors of the book note, fieldwork methods have been passed down to new generations of scholars by citing the advice given by the first professor of ethnology, U. T. Sirelius, to his students: you will learn by doing (*työ tekijäänsä neuvoo*). Students and scholars of cultural research have since then learned to reflect on the collection of fieldwork materials in their

theses and research reports, but we have lacked a pedagogical discussion and training concerning the teaching of fieldwork methods.

In *Kulttuurien tutkimuksen pedagogiikka*, this topic is finally discussed in several chapters that describe the aims of ethnographic research and the teaching of these methods to students. The chapters by Mitra Härkönen and Alexandra Bergholm, Outi Fingerroos and Riina Haanpää, Anne Häkkinen and Emmi Villman, and Eino Heikkinen provide various inspiring examples of how teachers have planned, structured, and taught courses of ethnographic methods, and how students have learned to acquire and develop their ethnographic skills. They also discuss the teaching and learning of ethnographic methods in the context of different pedagogical theories such as andragogy, connective pedagogy, and critical pedagogy. As all the authors emphasize, courses of ethnographic fieldwork are often the only opportunity for students to practice their future working life skills. The key to learning ethnography is, however, to provide students with tools to critically reflect on their experiences in the field. Fieldwork diaries and reports and meetings with students after their fieldwork give students an important opportunity to discuss and reflect on their experiences and what they have learned.

The emphasis on acquiring skills in fieldwork methods as a central part of becoming a professional cultural researcher was severely problematized during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. How could our students practice interviewing and observation if they could not leave their home and go to the field? New kinds of web-based communication platforms such as Zoom and Teams were luckily available and used instead. The professional identity and skills of cultural researchers were nevertheless at risk as many aspects of face-to-face interaction in the field were missing. However, this created an opportunity to critically consider what the essence of ethnographic research and analysis of cultural phenomena was, as Anne Häkkinen and Emmi Villman argue.

Ethnographic methods form a significant part of the working life skills of cultural research students. After graduating, students of cultural research work in different professions in many fields, which makes the teaching of working life skills a complex question, but students often find it difficult to orientate to working life even in professions that are typical in our fields. The chapters by Outi Fingerroos and Riina Haanpää, Christer Eldh and Carina Sjöholm, and Pia Olsson and Terhi Ainiala point out that while students acquire many working life skills during their studies, they are not aware of possessing them if teachers do not help them to recognize, name, and reflect on their skills. Although students are “learning by doing,” teachers are needed to help them understand what they are learning. Working with students and colleagues from different academic backgrounds has also helped teachers and students

of cultural research to see what makes their field and their skills special. It has also given new tools and perspectives for developing their skills further.

Orientation to working life and acquiring working life skills is a question that also concerns doctoral students, as the chapter by Maija Mäki and Hanna Nori shows. Doctoral theses are typically carried out as individual projects and not as a member of a research team like in natural sciences. How does one develop one's professional identity and contribute to the development of one's field if one is feeling lonely and isolated from other researchers and colleagues? These problems are far too easy to see as individual problems or ones caused by the difficult working environment of a specific department and university, but Mäki and Nori's chapter demonstrates that they are the result of the position of doctoral students in the contemporary university system. Doctoral students with a working-class background also often experience a feeling of being in an unfamiliar environment. Doctoral theses usually include a reflection on the research process, but it was refreshing to read a reflection on the whole process of and routes to becoming a doctor. In the future, doctoral students are supposed to graduate sooner. Mäki and Nori's chapter is an important reminder that the process of writing a thesis is not only a question of doing research. It is also a matter of becoming a professional in the academic world, which is very uncertain at the moment and does not give doctoral students the support – both economic and mental – that they need.

Although the role of ethnographic methods is emphasized in this book, as well as in the identity of cultural research, courses of ethnographic fieldwork comprise only a small part of teaching in ethnology, anthropology, folklore research, and the study of religions. The use of archival sources and archival research methods are also cornerstones of cultural research, and learning diaries and essays are still the most typical methods of study. Although they are extensively discussed in other pedagogical publications and handbooks of research methods, the chapters by Tuukka Karlsson and Viliina Silvonen, and Eeva-Liisa Bastman and her colleagues demonstrate that we need to recognize and critically discuss how archival research is taught, and what role the writing and evaluating of essays plays in teaching students in our fields.

The same applies to new methods of teaching, especially if they were originally designed to meet the needs of other disciplines. Particularly since the coronavirus pandemic, all modes of distance learning have become more common. Tiina Airaksinen and Anna-Leena Korpijärvi discuss the use of MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses) in the teaching of cultural research. These online courses were originally designed for the teaching of natural sciences, but as Airaksinen and Korpijärvi show, MOOC can also be used in the humanities with careful planning. However, this requires good skills in both information

technology and online pedagogy, as well as the ability to critically review new styles of teaching. As Airaksinen and Korpijärvi point out, the development of AI services keeps teachers busy developing new ways of ensuring that students are actually studying and learning, and not “copy-pasting”. On the other hand, Josephine Hoegaerts shows how the possibility of using podcasts in teaching has opened up new possibilities in teaching and learning as well as acquiring new working life skills. As Hoegaerts argues, we do not learn only by reading, writing, and thinking but also through our senses – which is particularly important to remember as we analyze culture and work as professionals in the cultural field. Why do we continue to evaluate learning by asking students to write reports, essays, let alone theses, while in working life, we mostly present our work and its results by giving oral presentations?

I warmly recommend this book to all researchers and teachers in cultural research, as well as all those interested in university pedagogy. It is highly important for the development of both teaching and research that teachers and researchers discuss and reflect on their experiences of teaching. I am glad that ethnologists, anthropologists, and folklore and study of religion scholars have finally started this discussion. I sincerely hope that this is the first book in a series of publications on university pedagogy in cultural research that will appear regularly in the future. There are still many topics to discuss, and the discussion initiated in the chapters of this book deserves to be continued.

AUTHOR

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