

TAN Workshop at EASA2012.

Questioning 'quietness': teaching anthropology as cultural critique

Convenors

Jakob Krause-Jensen (Aarhus University)

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Abstract

Anthropology is - and should be - a disquieting discipline: it uses its methods of participant observation and comparison to question home truths and taken-for-granted ideas. Yet university reforms urge and force us to make our education programmes more 'job-relevant'. How do we develop courses and programs that enhance our students' criticality, sensitivity and imagination, yet enable them to gain employment?

Anthropologists are employed in a variety of places outside academia: museums, municipalities, ministries, companies, community organisations and NGO's and advocacy groups. Anthropologists' positions in these organisations vary widely. Some take on administrative tasks, where their anthropology is almost incidental. Some work as 'culture expert' in interdisciplinary teams. Some are employed in maverick positions, valued as being part of the organization, yet with a distanced and critical view of its operations.

Should teachers focus on developing their students' theoretical imaginativeness and cultural critique, and leave it to their ingenuity to find employment? Or should courses incorporate skills for which there is demand in the workplace?

This workshop invites people to share ideas and teaching experiences of how to use anthropological research strategies, concepts and methods to gain a critical and creative understanding to be used in workplaces. Examples could include:

- Using classical anthropology (segmentary lineage, magic, and dirt...) to generate surprising insights into how contemporary organizations work.
- Exploring how to understand everyday worklife as part of large-scale political and institutional changes.
- Using ethnographic methods to get fresh perspectives on organisations and life within them.

PAPERS:

Ten years after: practices of teaching and learning anthropology in Europe revisited

Dorle Drackle

Abstract

During the last ten years, the Teaching and Learning Network has focused its activities on the analysis and the interpretation of the changes taking place in the different nationalities and regions of the European Higher Education. In the aftermath of the 1989 political movements, social anthropologists got to know each other and started to discuss their radically different ideas of the scope of the discipline and the practices of teaching and learning. This was especially true for the divide between - generally speaking - East and West as well as South and North. It was felt that even though Europe is divided by various national traditions, some of them dominate the discipline internationally in a powerful and hegemonic way; they are said to set standards for publication, for teaching and learning outcomes and performances in classrooms and conferences.

From my experience as TAN network coordinator, European teaching and learning traditions today still differ enormously. It is not quite clear if current trends especially in the Anglo-Saxon anthropology can be applied everywhere. It seems to be more likely, that each national or regional tradition has to adapt to the international scholarly environment on the basis of their own set of rules and teaching and learning traditions. For example, it is not decided yet if critical thinking is everywhere the highest esteemed value. After standardizing the discipline through Bologna, it is time to critically assess and listen closely to our respective neighbors' vision of anthropology.

1) A passion for 'critical thinking'?

Dimitrina Spencer (Oxford University)

Abstract

'Critical thinking' has been valued significantly in the learning of anthropology as a way of knowing, being and doing. However, an ethnographic exploration of its meaning in daily pedagogical practice reveals potential limitations that may be of relevance beyond the specific teaching setting under study. The explicit cultivation of 'critical thinking' entails a particular view of personhood, a specific vision for anthropology and a set system of values. For example, individualised intellectual reasoning/thinking is prioritised over affective (relational) understanding; deconstruction becomes a goal in itself; and anthropology remains focused on a militant political project rather than on an emerging empathic understanding. Drawing on existential anthropology and recent studies of affect in resolving pedagogical dilemmas, I turn instead to 'relational reflection' - it presupposes an 'informed subjectivity', a 'capacity for inclusion' and an ontological and epistemological openness. It also allows for developing and practicing an ethic of care.

2) Footprints on toilet seats: if business students learn ethnography, shouldn't anthropology students also learn the business process?

Siew-Peng Lee (Brunel University)

When footprints keep appearing on women's toilet seats, why did posters with "Please do not step on the toilet seats" go unheeded? Squatting on toilet seats might seem an unhygienic practice to us, but could it be that from the perspective of those who are used to "squat toilets" it is the practice of sitting down on pedestal toilets that is "dirty"? How then do we change this behaviour?

Clearly anthropology has a place outside academia in understanding and changing behaviour. Given that people - and therefore culture - are key to business processes, business/corporate anthropology has made major inroads in north American and some European universities. Ethnography is now an accepted methodology in the research of "company culture" as can be seen in several business (research) textbooks (Bryman and Bell, 2011, Paul, et al 2010, Saunders, et al, 2009).

This paper will

1. explicate through examples research methodologies shared by change management consultants in a business setting and an anthropologist in the field, drawing on the writer's experience at Accenture,
2. discuss why and how anthropology departments in UK could benefit from preparing graduates for the business world to prevent them from being lost in it (eg Mascarenhas-Keyes, 2001), and
3. identify aspects of academic anthropology that are contrary to the requirements of the corporate context (eg language, audit culture, teamwork structure) and propose some solutions.

This paper begins from a retrospective view, but would then draw on existing literature as well as the writer's research on management consultancies.

3) Teaching anthropology to kids who do not want to learn it

Erella Grassiani (University of Amsterdam) Ellen Bal (VU University Amsterdam)

Abstract

This paper is based on our experiences teaching a course on identity, diversity and related issues in a recently established Liberal Arts College in the Netherlands. Our course was mandatory for all students and part of their core curriculum. After four attempts and making various alterations to the course curriculum and teaching methods, we are still confronted with resistance and 'passive aggression' from a number of students. In this paper we attempt to analyze our experiences and we will try to answer the following question: How can we teach the value of our discipline to a new generation of students with broad interests who may not have chosen to study society from an anthropological perspective? In this paper we will firstly describe the scientific and institutional contexts in which we teach the course and we will try to unravel the elements which contributed to an unsafe teaching and learning environment. Second, we will attempt to analyze and explain the personal resistance that many students felt while attending our course and while dealing with sensitive and personal issues such as identity, diversity, reflexivity, and subjectivity. Finally we will describe a number of basic requirements for successful teaching and we will try to develop new (pedagogic) strategies to teach a new and often critical public.

4) A place where open minds meet: the role of formal pedagogical training for teaching and learning in higher education

Paulina Mihailova (Stockholm University)

Abstract

Starting in the 1980s, the spill-over of managerial ideas from the spheres of industry, business and finance to various public spheres has resulted in discussions of the need for public service providers to be kept accountable. For higher education, this shift has been accompanied by new organisational forms structuring academic activity, as well as new ways of conceptualising academics' professional roles.

Brought down into the framework of higher education policy reforms in Europe, the following paper aims to problematise the requirement of formal pedagogical training in order to be certified as a university teacher - an idea vehemently promoted by university management. Not denying the value of such training, ethnographic accounts show that taking courses in university pedagogy as a 'must' is often experienced as yet another way of evaluating academic performance and subjecting teaching to explicit and externally imposed criteria (as demonstrated by the increasing importance attached to the certification of teaching skills and the careful documentation of course content, objectives, outcomes, etc.,).

In particular, the discussion will focus on the experiences of teachers as students, in the context of pedagogy courses provided at Stockholm University. How do academics involved in those courses conceive of the effects of formal training on their teaching? What happens to discipline-specific values and competencies, when everyone is required (under Bologna) to embrace the same pedagogic philosophy of constructive alignment (Biggs, 2003), adopt the language of learning outcomes, and assign the same standards to diverse academic practices?

5) Questioning the fears of students

Laura Glauser (University of Bremen)

Abstract

Drawing both on my fieldwork in German academic career services and my experience in teaching anthropology, my paper addresses the economic fears of students. I will show how my research findings shape how I teach anthropology. I try to unsettle taken-for-granted ideas about self, society and the job market as well as to reflect on the students own fears.

I will begin my paper by showing how academic career services try to enhance the "employability" of their clients while promoting ideals of self-government, self-marketing and self-reliance. Fearing to fail economically, students try to conform to these discourses and begin to rethink themselves along the lines of their marketable assets. Instead of relating economic problems to societal reasons or the lack of social capital, they feel insufficient and tend to blame themselves for not being economically successful.

In my teaching of anthropology, especially in my current course about precarious work I encourage the students to challenge these so called market-requirements as taken-for-granted ideas. To enhance the students ability to be critical and their sensitivity I use exercises promoting self-reflection, critical reading of ethnographic texts and ethnographic interviews. By focusing on the students themselves rather than on "others" or "objective" measures of economic success "in the real world out there", we might help students of anthropology to understand why they feel insufficient and to develop a critical perspective of social power relations.

6) Local Practices of Participation of Academic Staff in the Context of Internationalization of Higher Education. A comparative study Denmark/Sweden.

Ioana Bunescu (University of Malmö)

Abstract

The study aims to shed light onto how the global pressures to internationalize higher education, due to the liberalization of the welfare state, increasing migration flows, and the decreasing public spending on education, affect the reproduction and, in some cases, the critical reformulation of roles of social scientists employed as academic staff.

One of the challenges of internationalization today is the mounting pressure on academics that results from the pressures on universities to recruit large numbers of students as a response to European and national policy requirements to widen participation to higher education. This process is nonetheless taking place without a matching allocation of resources to universities to manage diversity and to an increasing teaching and ad-hoc diversity-coaching load on the employed academics. At the same time, there is an increased pressure and anxiety on the same individuals to produce and publish new research in order not to 'perish' as academics.

This research is intended as a comparative institutional ethnography of practices of academic staff based on participant observation and interviews at sampled international departments at universities in Denmark and Sweden, two countries that exemplify the Scandinavian welfare state. The selected departments are understood as institutions embedded in national, regional and global structural contexts, and, in the same time, as locations in which social and scientific/critical practices are reproduced and, sometimes, reconstituted as forms of agency.

7) L'enseignement d'anthropologie au Brésil: Théorisation, terrains, engagements

Miriam Grossi (UFSC)

Abstract

Marquée par une longue tradition d'engagement auprès des groupes minoritaires et subalternes, l'anthropologie au Brésil, s'est vue demandée à proposer des politiques publiques, dès l'arrivée au pouvoir du parti des travailleurs en 2002. Après huit ans de gouvernement Lula et par l'entrée de la nouvelle présidente Dilma Rousseff, les anthropologues brésiliens se posent des questions sur le rôle de

l'enseignement de l'anthropologie pour faire face aux demandes politiques et questions éthiques qui y sont attachées. Mais, si ces demandes d'action ont provoqué l'engagement d'une partie de la communauté scientifique, d'autre part elle a mené à une position de défiance qui place l'enseignement d'anthropologie comme exclusivement théorique. Notre proposition est de réfléchir sur ce riche moment de l'enseignement de l'anthropologie brésilienne pour contribuer aux questions proposées dans ce panel sur les défis de l'enseignement actuellement.