

Foreword

The essays collected here present serious issues concerning the state of anthropological teaching practice in some European contexts. This is something with which we are constantly concerned in our daily teaching duties. More often than not, we practise what we preach. As teachers, we often fall back on our set patterns and methods of delivery and lecturing, patterns that have become largely unavoidable after years of teaching and offering the same courses. As anthropologists living in both the classroom and in public, we present our public persona and do not consciously reflect on the ways in which we communicate, how we gesture, and how we express ourselves with others. These are not easy issues to deal with. Similarly, anthropologists working in Europe have avoided asking questions about whether or not anthropology should be taught similarly to other disciplines. Neither have we asked whether our subject deserves special consideration: if anthropology differs from the other social science fields, as I believe it does, then how is this difference translated in the classroom and in teaching/learning settings. These are serious problems and should in no way be avoided. The pioneering volume, *Learning Fields Volume1: Educational Histories of European Social Anthropology*, deals with the little known, and much less understood, aspects of teaching and learning processes within the field of social and cultural anthropology. The editors, Dorle Dracklé, Iain Edgar, and Thomas K. Schippers deserve high acclaim for their efforts and painstaking task of assembling such a broad perspective on teaching and learning anthropology.

Anybody reading the two volumes published by Berghahn and team-edited by members of the Teaching Anthropology Network of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), should be aware that these books have a short, but very telling history. How did this concern with teaching practices arise? What is the significance of publishing such endeavours? First of all it must be stated that, unlike educators in general, anthropologists have been rather diffident about their classroom activities (though see the introduction for an historical résumé of anthropological writing about the educational context). For a long time they have even appeared almost ashamed of their actual fieldwork practices; but the postmodernist trend of

the 1980s and, increasingly, the 1990s changed all that. There is really no good reason for this lack of attention paid to their 'home-grown' (teaching) practices, especially in view of the fact that anthropologists are so used to dealing with human diversity and cultural complexities in both time and space. That is why it is important to provide a brief account of the beginnings of the present volume. It was at the biennial meeting of EASA in Barcelona in 1996 that Ulf Hannerz sounded the anthropological alarm-bell by stating that while we know a lot about what we do in the field, we know practically nothing about our own scholarship inside the classroom. Hannerz proposed to form a network – an informal anthropological think-tank – aimed at exchanging views on what it is we do. His call did not fall on deaf ears. Under the umbrella of the Teaching Anthropology Network, a group of scholars began to meet regularly at annual international gatherings: first in Barcelona in 1996, then in Stockholm in the same year; in 1997 in Piran (Slovenia); in 1998 in Frankfurt am Main; in 1999 in Göttingen; in 2000 in Krakow; and in 2001 in Lisbon. At every meeting increasing numbers of interested scholars came forward to inform us of their special and varied activities. In one way or another, these network meetings all concerned the way we practise and teach anthropology, the difficulties that arise in the process, and, not least of all, the most novel and up-to-date methods of transmitting knowledge and enhancing students' performance in the anthropological classroom.

It is, however, important to realise what this volume offers and what it cannot do. It obviously presents a somewhat incomplete overview of a few areas of teaching practices. Underlying this concern is the following assumption: if it is true that the main goal of general education is to promote a society's and country's economic development, then it must also hold true that anthropological education should contribute to cultural advancement. This should also allow for the possible development of critical voices, and of universal as well as culture-specific values and interests. These concerns have often been voiced in general educational discussions. Anthropological education, on the other hand, appears to be much more controversial and far less well understood. Even though there exists a whole range of views as to what anthropology should offer to students, amongst scholars and the general public alike, most contributors take it for granted that anthropology has much to offer besides just exciting and exotic materials intended to widen the general interests of students. Nevertheless, there is disagreement among practising academics as to whether anthropology properly contributes to the general development of the intellect. There are those of us who strongly believe that it does; there are others who are less convinced. Needless to say, anthropology cannot be expected to do the job on its own. It requires the support of other disciplines as well, even those that originally came about as offshoots of anthropology, such as ethnic studies, cultural studies, gender studies, etc., only to emerge later as separate disciplines in their own right. In general, we can agree on the proposition that anthropological education should extend our understanding of human evolution, the range of civilisations, the well-being of humanity,

and, specifically, cultural diversity. There are other issues, such as war, disease, human conflict, inequality, and unequal development in time and space that are increasingly being adopted as the standard topics of anthropological curricula. Thus, in many countries, anthropology is included in the educational and pedagogical curricula in order to teach such issues. However, as the first volume's themes aptly illustrate (*Learning Fields Volume1: Educational Histories of European Social Anthropology*, edited by Dracklé, Edgar and Schippers), national traditions differ vastly in both the content and context of what they consider important and what they deem wholly irrelevant.

Most of the contributors are from the West (the U.K., U.S., Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy), countries with longer democratic educational practices than in Central and Eastern Europe where for decades official Marxist-Leninist schooling determined the nature of education. Not surprisingly, then, more interests have been generated in recent years in Western universities about teaching practices than in the East. For this reason alone, the book may be criticised for providing a platform for Western-dominated theories, less concerned about other cultures and anthropological traditions. While this criticism may be of some concern, I should like to call attention to the fact that *Learning Fields Volume1: Educational Histories of European Social Anthropology* offers an excellent selection of articles on national anthropological traditions across the European continent as a whole. In this volume – also an outcome of the Teaching Anthropology Network's meetings – many contributors present a non-Western European view. Another justification is that to date most anthropological volumes on education have been published by and for American scholars, with no or very few European contributions included. This edited collection manages to carve a space for European scholars to discuss their own work. Finally, I should emphasise that the plethora of teaching practices perhaps makes for a somewhat uneven selection. The volume's strength lies in its selection of special-case anthropological studies on, for example, Italian ethnodrama and its use in anthropology, humanistic group methods in the U.K., the uses of exhibits in academic practice in the Netherlands, ethnomusicology, digitised techniques, reflective and reflexive practices, and the uses of visual aids and film techniques.

Hopefully this pioneering volume will generate further collections in the coming years. There is a great need to understand what takes place when anthropologists offer their knowledge and material to students, colleagues, informants, and to the general public. These different educational contexts require different anthropological sensitivities and understandings of what takes place between the teacher/anthropologist and the student/non-specialist. Our knowledge and understanding of these settings is rather rudimentary and needs to be tested and refined as well as challenged. I believe that the time is ripe for more reflection and a greater sharing of ideas that reveal our teaching practices and the parallel learning processes that accompany them. I cannot but hope that in the near future similar volumes will appear, volumes that will either reinforce or, alternatively, challenge the many theories offered

here, and by so doing assist in the development of fresh and sound ways of sharing anthropology with others. If colleagues take up this challenge, then these volumes will include chapters describing not only European educational settings and practices, but also African, Asian, Latin and South American methods and approaches to teaching. This, too, is what anthropology is all about.

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