Ethnography, education and the social web (7.5 Credits)

Ph.D. Course. Spring 2013

2: Field of education


3: Entrance Qualification

All students who are registered as Ph. D. students in the educational sciences and related fields media and communication studies, library and information science, anthropology, sociology, science and technology studies, youth studies or information systems research who are using or plan to use qualitative methods to research emergent learning, collaborative and epistemic practices mediated by emerging web-based technologies. It is expected that participants have already completed a masters level dissertation that involves the use of qualitative research methods. Students who do not yet have a masters exam, may be eligible if it is clear that they are preparing for a Ph. D. training in a relevant field. For such applicants, the application should contain a recommendation letter from a supervisor. If there are more than 20 applicants, students will be selected based on an assessment of the relevance of the student’s research plans and qualifications to the course objectives. The selection process is carried out by the course-leaders in cooperation with the leadership of the research school.

4. Course Content

The course explores evidence-based qualitative research focused on emergent learning, epistemic and communicative practices mediated by the social web (e.g. blogs, wikis, social networking sites, game worlds and massively open online courses). It starts by asking, ‘what is ethnography?’ and charts the development of the ethnographic tradition from its origins in cultural anthropology to its application in the field of online research. Key principles (e.g. participant observation, field work, immersion, being there, the ethnographic interview, theoretically informed rich description) are discussed with reference theoretical and empirical studies. On a more practical level, the course provides an introduction to some of the ethical challenges confronting contemporary Internet researchers and the use of Computer Assisted Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS).

5. Learning outcomes

After completing the course the student will be able to:

- Describe the origins and development of the ethnographic tradition as it relates to the field of education
- Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of key debates, concepts and issues within the rapidly evolving field of qualitative Internet research
- Analyse and discuss research methods and practices used by contemporary qualitative researchers conducting field work in technology rich environments
- Explore how social-cultural ways of thinking about learning and development can be used to interpret data produced through ethnographic inquiry
- Negotiate the ethical challenges of conducting qualitative internet research

6. Required Reading

List of required reading is enclosed.
7. Assessment

Participation in all course activities is a requirement. This includes active participation in online activities and physical meetings. In addition, participants will prepare an audio-visual presentation of their research project and a short paper (3,000 words) that draws on literature and ideas discussed in the course. Both will be peer reviewed by course participants and assessed by course tutors (5 credits). For the second part of the course participants are required to write a research essay (5000 words). To gain the additional 5 credits, this paper must be presented at a peer reviewed conference or seminar.

8. Grading scale

The grades are pass or fail

10. Course evaluation

The results will be communicated to the students and will function as a guide for further research, evaluation and development.

11. Additional information

The course will be hosted by the Department of Education, Communication and Learning, University of Gothenburg. All teaching and examination will be in English. Students who satisfactorily complete the course will be invited to join an advance course.

Required Reading


Beach, D. (2010a) Identifying and Comparing Scandinavian Ethnography, Ethnography and Education. 5: 49-63: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17457821003768455


Recommended Reading


Marquez Da Silva, S. & Landri, P (eds.) (forthcoming 2012) Rethinking Educational Ethnography: researching online communities. Online: [URL]

Dirksen, V., Huizing, A., & Smit, B. (2010). 'Piling on layers of understanding': the use of connective ethnography for the study of (online) work practices *New Media & Society, 12*(7), 1045-1063.

**Exemplary studies**

doi: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2011.590160

