

## Teaching Ethnographic Methods for Cultural Anthropology: Current Practices and Needed Innovation

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### Abstract

Historically, ethnographic methods were learned by cultural anthropology students in individual research projects. This approach creates challenges for teaching in ways that respond to the next generation's calls to decenter anthropology's White, heteropatriarchal voices and engage in collaborative community-based research. Analyzing syllabi from 107 ethnographic methods training courses from the United States, we find the tradition of the "lone researcher" persists and is the basis of ethnographic training for the next generation. There is little evidence of either active reflection or team-based pedagogy, both identified as necessary to meet career opportunities and diversification goals for the wider field of cultural anthropology. However, we also find that, by centering the completion of largely individual research projects, most ethnographic methods courses otherwise adhere to best practices in regard to experiential and active learning. Based on the analysis of syllabi in combination with current pedagogical literature, we suggest how cultural anthropologists can revise their ethnographic methods courses to incorporate pedagogy that promotes methodologies and skills to align with the needs of today's students and communities.

### Keywords

teaching, methods, cultural anthropology, ethnography, diversity

### Introduction

Cultural anthropology, in the North American tradition, is often defined by the methods of ethnography. Historically, however, ethnographic methods have not been central to the training curriculum; rather, ethnographic practice has often been mostly self-taught through the process of *doing* fieldwork (Drisko, 2016; Garner et al., 2009; Rabinow, 2007). While there is still much scholarly debate about what ethnography *is* when teaching (Ruth et al., forthcoming), we view ethnography as a methodological approach towards engaging in research. Understood in prior generations as a rite of passage to becoming professionalized, this teach-yourself model was often bundled with assumptions of fieldworkers (usually White men and women) studying non-White "others" in foreign locales (Gottlieb, 1995). Even as explicit ethnographic methods courses have emerged for training students for fieldwork, they still mostly continue the tradition of assuming students will follow the "lone researcher" archetype (Galman, 2007; Jessee et al., 2015; Snodgrass, 2016; Yates-Doerr, 2020).

There are many concerns related to this pedagogical approach to ethnographic training. First, college instructors typically emulate the teaching strategies they encountered as students (Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016), so there is a potential lack of interest or capability among those faculty in positions to teach ethnographic methods. Second, the overall range and complexity of social science research methods is expanding, but emerging anthropologists may not have opportunities to learn even the basics of research design, sampling, scaling, statistics, and so on. Third, opportunities for larger-scale funding for anthropological research are in transdisciplinary projects and competence in disciplinary methods is central to participating in those teams. Even when singular researcher's relationships with communities and research participants create opportunities for team research, without

appropriate training, anthropologists are not equipped to take advantage of those opportunities. Fourth, the lone-wolf model is a transactional one, rather than a relational one (Brayboy, 2005; Hart, 2010; Nicholls, 2009; Smith, 2021). That is, students are not taught how to engage in relationships that are reciprocal and to locate power in, with, and through the communities where they are working (Brayboy et. al., 2011; Smith 2021; Weber-Pillwax, 2001).

To discover and describe how cultural anthropologists teach ethnographic methods in North America, we follow prior syllabi studies (Bers et al., 2000; Fuentes et al., 2021; Glesne & Webb, 1993; O'Brien et al., 2009; Primiano et al., 2020; Stanny et al., 2015; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011) to analyze 107 course syllabi and compare the results against best practices for educating a diverse student body. Our analysis confirms that the lone researcher model is still central to how ethnographic methods are being taught. But we can also point to pedagogical innovations that respond to the above concerns and to many courses that adhere to best practices for teaching methods. In fact, while faculty in the United States may depend on student feedback for promotion and may have pressures to ensure a minimum amount of enrolment for courses to count toward teaching, they have relative freedom to design and change substantive course content (Schultz 2019).

Taking into account both general best practices for methods instruction and critiques of the history of the field, we provide a series of recommendations for faculty who plan to teach ethnographic methods – points that are also relevant for students who want to learn them. Because part of our strategy involves identifying the ways ethnographic methods training overlaps – or not – with best pedagogical practices, in the next section we background the literature and philosophy we used to establish our core analysis.

## **Best Practices: Some Background**

### ***I. Active Teaching Practices***

There are many teaching practices to consider when designing a course, from creating syllabi, to using assessments, and overarching teaching methodologies (Fuentes et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2009; Primiano et al., 2020; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). Here, we focus on teaching practices that are known to enhance learning outcomes for an ever-diversifying student body, including an increasing number of first-generation students as well as students of different races, ethnicities, genders, sexual orientations, and socioeconomic statuses (Pryor et al., 2007). Successful practices are learner centered, where the teacher becomes a guide and facilitates the learning experience (Weimer, 2002). One marker of learner-centered practice is active learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), where students “do things” and develop analytical skills by reading, discussing, writing, and exploring their own perspectives and practices (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Examples of high-impact active learning strategies include role-playing, debates, simulations, and case studies (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Fink 2013; Stanny et al., 2015; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011). Student-centered practices can also lower the power difference between student and teacher (Weimer, 2002), which, in turn, allows the focus to be on all students, not just a select, privileged, few.

Actively engaging students aligns with critical pedagogy, which has long championed a model of learning where students and teachers are co-learners, as opposed to what Freire (1970) called the “banking model,” where the teacher deposits information and students receive it by passively listening. hooks (1994) instead advocates the use of “engaged pedagogies,” where students share their experiences, listen, and engage in discussion to co-create knowledge (see also Tejeda et al., 2003; Zembylas, 2018).

### ***II. Encouraging Diverse Voices and Inclusivity***

Related to this, feminist, anticolonial, and anti-oppressive pedagogies advance reformed relationships between teachers and students. They are also designed to increase community and power sharing within the classroom, and to enhance focus on diversity of personal experiences (Hahna, 2013; McCusker, 2017; TallBear, 2014; Webb et al., 2004). These critical and engaged pedagogies seek systematic change, such as upending racism and oppression (Brayboy, et. al., 2011; Giroux, 1998; Hahna, 2013; hooks, 1994; McCusker, 2017; Smith, 2021; TallBear, 2014; Webb et al., 2004). Notably, instructors are still an integral part of the learning process, creating the curriculum, posing questions, and interacting with students, directing discussions, and sharing their experiences and knowledge when appropriate (Aliakbari & Faraji, 2011). Students learning to be reflexive about

their own positions is also relevant to doing ethnography, as it can enhance relations with the communities with which they conduct research (Mitchell, 1993).

### ***III. Experience – with Reflection***

Students need to learn methods by doing them, and active learning is considered the best means for doing so (Drisko, 2016; Earley, 2014; Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016; Nind & Lewthwaite, 2020; Sangaramoorthy & Kroeger, 2020; Strayhorn, 2009). There are three best practices for teaching qualitative methods, including ethnography, that stem from active learning principles: 1) making the research accessible; 2) experiential learning, and 3) reflection (Kilburn et al., 2014; Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016).

(1) Abstract ideas about doing research must become accessible for students. This is best done with active learning by having students tell and write up personal stories, show and explain/interpret videos, supply vignettes for interviews, or analyze secondary data sets. Throughout this process, students should be actively engaged in discussions about the material.

(2) Experiential learning means students collect and analyze their own data, which can result in better understandings of complex, abstract ideas (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, 2018). Activities for collecting data can be singular exercises or part of a student's or faculty member's active research project.

(3) In small- or large-group discussion or in written assignments, students can reflect on their positionality in regard to data collection and analysis, including their positions of power and their changing identities as they meet challenges they encountered. They can reflect actively on how they could have approached the research in different ways and how they could implement what they have learned in future research. Incorporating reflection into teaching ethnography is particularly important given the centrality of reflexivity to ethnographic practice itself (Aunger, 2003; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

The best practices for teaching qualitative methods, then, is having students connect to research through experience and then reflect on those activities (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Kilburn et al., 2014; Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016). Key to this is that students need the opportunity to practice to become skilled researchers (Nind & Lewthwaite, 2020) and students need tasks and activities, such as research projects, that build the skills required (Preissle & Roulston, 2009; Strayhorn, 2009). Many qualitative methods courses adopt a "signature pedagogy" of requiring students to complete a research project (Eisenhart & Jurow, 2011), and the bulk of the grade often depends on them completing the project successfully (Glesne & Webb, 1993; Hurworth, 2008).

### ***IV. Encouraging Collaboration and Teamwork***

Team-based research projects, where students have clearly assigned tasks and roles, are active learning experiences that are both beneficial and enjoyable (McWey et al., 2006). Group work aligns with critical and feminist pedagogies that seek to distribute the learning process more equitably across students (Howard 2001). When interacting in discussion groups, peer reviews, team projects, and collaborative writing, students learn and retain more information and skills (Howard 2001), including how to manage emotions and conflict in the work environment (Gallagher & Wessels 2011).

This is important for the anthropology methods curriculum because in 2020, 23% of adults over 25 in the United States had a bachelor's degree, but just 2% had a doctoral degree in any field (U.S. Census 2020). Methods training for undergraduates in anthropology, then, needs to prepare people for nonacademic jobs. Among other things, this means teaching students how to collaborate on research teams. Ultimately, this skill is just as important for anthropology students who do go on for the Ph.D. since (1) most jobs for students with that level of training are also *not* in academe; and (2) tenure track jobs at research intensive universities increasingly require the ability to work on interdisciplinary team projects.

## Methods

### *Data Collection*

In June 2019, we sent a survey on methods teaching in anthropology to 21,344 members of the American Anthropological Association's (AAA) email listserv and received 1,354 full survey responses. While this was only 6% of the listserv, the responses are from anthropologists who teach or have taught research methods. Of the 1,354 respondents, 140 accepted our invitation to upload a copy of their methods syllabi. Here we analyze the 107 syllabi that focused specifically on ethnographic methods. The participants who submitted syllabi received their Ph.D. between 1975 and 2018, with 102 currently employed as teaching academics. The research was approved by Arizona State University's IRB: STUDY00010117.

Sample titles from the selected 107 syllabi include *Ethnographic Research Methods*, *Qualitative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Research Methods*, *Qualitative Field Methods*, and *Social Science Research Methods*, and were from institutions across North America and from both advanced undergraduate- and graduate-level courses. Syllabi were structured similarly (i.e., with course descriptions, required reading lists, student or course learning outcomes, and a course calendar or list of required assignments). Any identifying information on the syllabi such as instructor information, course number, and university/location details were redacted for analysis.

### *Coding and Analysis*

Our coding system was designed to identify best practices for teaching qualitative methods that included elements of active learning, experiential learning, and reflection, and overlapped with critical and feminist pedagogies and/or considered inclusivity. We used the syllabus rubric suggested by Stanny et al. (2015) to code for best practices of college teaching. While syllabi certainly do not contain complete pedagogical and instructional information, they do offer an unobtrusive assessment of instructional content (Glense & Webb 1993; Stanny et al. 2015; Willingham-McLain 2011). We updated some codes to be more specific to ethnography, included detailed descriptions of what can be coded, and added additional codes related to inclusivity statements, pronouns, and elements decentering White, Western, colonial-settler, heteronormative voices, and/or enhancing inclusive spaces of learning. Where existing codes did not capture important emergent themes, we added five items based on the literature, on creating inclusive environments, and on teaching qualitative methods (active learning, experiential learning, reflection, student research project, and writing a proposal).

Two authors (AR and KM) independently coded a subset of segments to test interrater reliability for all 58 resulting codes. Cohen's Kappa ranged from 0.8 to 1.0, indicating high levels of agreement (Landis and Koch, 1977). This is a strong indicator of the consistency of the coding. One author (KM) then coded each syllabus for presence or absence of the codes using MAXQDA2020 software. She reviewed each syllabus for evidence of the 58 codes and used software to code segments at the paragraph level. Any uncertainties in coding were discussed with the lead author. Rather than inferring intention of the instructor, we would not code for presence if it was not clearly within the code perimeters—this decision makes the coding reliable and consistent, but also means we may have missed instances where the presence of a theme was merely implied and not explicit. After coding, KM produced a 1/0 spreadsheet to indicate the presence or absence of each code in each syllabus. We calculated code totals and percentages as indicators of code salience, and we extracted exemplars for specific codes used in the analysis (Bernard, 2017).

### **Limitations**

Our findings concentrate on the plans laid out in the syllabus, but as experienced teachers, we know that the syllabi alone do not tell us conclusively what happens in the classroom. For instance, having a statement of diversity and inclusivity can set expectations, but the classroom environment may not foster inclusion for everyone. For future research, we recommend interviewing teachers of ethnographic methods and conducting direct observations in classrooms in North America and in other countries.

## Results

### *Active Learning*

The majority of syllabi (92%) used active learning techniques in the classroom. The most frequent example is discussions of class readings; some classes included discussion of methods practiced inside and outside of class. Often, participation grades were tied to students actively engaging in class discussions, such as, “We will have several exercises and activities ... designed to introduce you to practical uses and applications of qualitative techniques. These will not be graded per se, but will be included in the participation component of your grade” (Syllabus A139). Fully 78% of syllabi include grades for class participation, a high impact teaching practice in the Stanny rubric because it can create more inclusive spaces by allowing students to think through their ideas in a small setting with colleagues before verbalizing to the class as well as creating a more collaborative environment (Tanner, 2013). An example is: “Class participation includes discussing the assigned texts and one’s own exercises, as well as constructively engaging others’ exercises and other contributions” (Syllabus D59).

A minority of syllabi explained the different learning modalities such as: “Students will be exposed to a variety of instructional methods to include, class lecture and discussion, video films, slide presentations, audio samplings, writing, hands-on applications/exercises, and performance. Students will also be required to participate in online activities” (Syllabus A1906). Instructors also described course formats as “workshops” where students were able to practice the methods in class.

This course will operate like a collaborative workshop. Your readings outside of class will introduce key principles and strategies of research, and in the classroom, we will evaluate and apply these principles and strategies to new situations and sets of data. Class sessions will be divided between short lectures, discussion of methodological issues, practicing research methods, and work on individual projects. (Syllabus A1813)

In another class: “Workshops will involve activities like conducting participant observation on campus, writing fieldnotes, and roleplaying interviews” (Syllabus A1487). These active learning techniques begin to cross over with experiential learning.

### **Experiential Learning and Research Practice**

Experiential learning was identified in 93% of the syllabi. Overwhelmingly, experiential learning was represented by a research project (80%). For example:

The field research project will involve making observations, conducting interviews, and other relevant data collection, and gathering secondary data on a specific problem you design. The project must involve at least three different data collection techniques, with participant observation and interviewing being required as 2 of these methods (i.e., participant observation, interviewing AND media analysis, OR a survey, OR a focus group, OR life history, etc). (Syllabus A1266)

In various assignments, students come up with an individual research question, decide on data collection methods, collect and analyze the data, and write up their results. Many syllabi had projects spanning the semester, as in this example:

Final Ethnographic Project: This will be an approximately 10-page (single-spaced) ethnography. This project will be graded on the quality of its research design, (clarity of research question, fit between question and methods), the research data (both in terms of its substance and the extent to which it demonstrates the successful application of qualitative methods), and the final written product (i.e., originality, organization, evidence, conclusions). Please note that you cannot pass the course without submitting this final project! (Syllabus A1714)

Some projects were split into smaller parts to scaffold for the final project, such as, “All students in this course will be expected to conduct original research focusing on answering a research question using multiple ethnographic methods. Ideally, students will build up to their final project by using weekly assignments to get started on methods for their research papers” (Syllabus D217). In 46% of the syllabi, instructors implemented

the high impact practice of turning in multiple drafts of a paper that are revised for the final project, but only 32% incorporated peer review (another high impact practice where students learn about the peer-review process, improve their writing, develop communication skills, and develop professionally (Chittum & Bryant, 2014)). Of the remaining 21 syllabi (20%), 14 required a research proposal (not a project) and 7 required neither.

Even if classes included a research project, they often incorporated other hands-on, experiential assignments such as: “To hone your skills in research design, interviewing, and qualitative data analysis, you will carry out a small interviewing project” (Syllabus A1813) and “Students will learn to collect ethnographic data through a series of individual and group exercises and will write field reports” (Syllabus A1040). The most common activities were conducting participation observation, taking field notes, and interviewing.

### ***Encouraging Reflection***

Just 36% of the syllabi included one or more of three types of reflection activities.

- (1) Students might reflect on the methods of data collection (27%), such as their experience with participation observation and interviews. For instance: “After you complete the interview, you will write a 2-page reflection on what you intended to accomplish through the interview (i.e., topic, main research question), how the interview went, and what you learned through the process of designing and conducting the interview. Be sure to include reflections on what went wrong or limitations that you encountered” (Syllabus D98). Here, the stress on reflecting on what mistakes were made to learn how to do it better is quite beneficial for the learning of methods (Kilburn et al., 2014; Lewthwaite & Nind 2016).
- (2) Students could have instructions to reflect on the data collected while in the field (6%). “You should also immediately get in the habit of keeping a field journal – a personal notebook that you carry around all the time and jot down your reflections and ideas as you go along over the course of fieldwork” (D75).
- (3) Students engaged in readings about positionality (18%) and reflexivity (47%), but only 3% had explicit assignments. One 2-page written positionality reflection assignment had the following preamble: “One of the most important aspects of qualitative research is the researcher, who is often considered a research instrument. It is therefore important to be explicit about researchers’ biases, positionality, and worldviews because it helps us understand the motives and assumptions they make in their work” (Syllabus A2295). In another assignment, students were asked to “engage the readings on positionality, ethics, and insider/outsider perspectives” (Syllabus A1266). These types of reflections are a fundamental aspect to approaching fieldwork with a robust understanding of the dynamics of difference and power (Ruth et al., forthcoming) and are thus important for training in ethnography.

### ***Diverse Voices and Inclusivity***

Inclusion of diversity statements within the syllabus indicates an instructor’s intentions and values as well as makes the classroom environment more welcoming for all voices (Fuentes et al., 2021). Some 60% of the courses included at least one reading or video that presented a non-White, non-heteronormative perspective (e.g., indicated by titles that included different ethnicities, religions, genders, and sexualities). When present, these types of readings were generally used as support for that week’s topic—such as ethics, fieldwork, interviewing, and analysis—rather than as a directive for the course as a whole. For example, one syllabus used the Ornelas et al. (2009) article “Understanding African American men’s perceptions of racism, male gender socialization, and social capital through photovoice” in the week on text analysis and finding themes (Syllabus D198).

This is not surprising, given that most of the readings in the syllabi focused on doing fieldwork, interviewing, and research ethics and not subject areas or geographic regions of research. Only 18% of the syllabi discussed decolonizing or Indigenous methods, pointing to a lack of engagement with non-colonial–settler–driven materials (Ruth et al., forthcoming).

Support for students with disabilities was present in 56% of syllabi. However, just 7% of the syllabi included an inclusivity/diversity statement focusing on the value of all voices and experiences, such as the following:

#### **Inclusive Classroom Statement**

I am committed to fostering a climate of inclusion and acceptance in this course. It is my intent that students from all backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students’ learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be

viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to foster a learning environment respectful of gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, immigration status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups. In addition, if any of our class activities conflict with your religious events, please let me know so that we can make arrangements for you. Please let me know if you would like me to use specific personal gender pronouns (PGPs) when communicating with you. (Syllabus A1820)

Note the last sentence above, asking for student pronouns, a relatively new but increasing practice. There were only 7 syllabi (6.5%) that included statements about using students' preferred names and pronouns and one other syllabus where the instructor listed her pronouns next to her name, a practice considered relevant to inclusivity and welcomeness for all students, not just non-binary or transgender students (Pryor, 2015).

### ***Teamwork and Collaboration***

Collaborative group projects were included in 15% of the syllabi. Of these, 3 syllabi incorporate peer review of the group work. One example follows:

group project focusing on a local community with an interesting culture and social organization at [REDACTED]. You will form into 3-5 teams, depending on class size, each of which will explore a different domain of university culture and/or organization using interview, observation, or some combination of the two to gather your data [ . . . ] The final report is worth 50% of your final grade (100 points on a 200-point scale). (Syllabus A2147)

In one of these collaborative classes students decided collectively on the research topic and interview protocol, then carried out data collection independently, and finally collectively analyzed and decided how to represent the results. This focus is on individual research projects and is concerning for the training of future anthropologists who will need skills for team-based research. Yet, given the time commitment and resources needed for collaborative projects, this may be due to institutional and resources limitations.

### ***Discussion & Recommendations***

Overall, these North American courses on ethnographic methods adhere to the best teaching practices of active and experiential learning, but lack practices or elements that suggest broader inclusivity, collaboration, and reflection. We have three recommendations for consideration by cultural anthropologists who teach ethnographic methods.

#### **Recommendation 1: Include Training Relevant to Collaborative Research**

The lone researcher mentality continues to be pervasive in the training of cultural anthropologists in North America. This is a missed opportunity for students to (1) improve their research and collaborative skills, (2) develop their self-esteem and critical thinking abilities, (3) learn to share their knowledge, and (4) understand the variety of perspectives and personal experiences that can impact ethnographic research (hooks, 1994; Jones, 2014). Students will need all of these since research funding for solving real-world problems is increasingly granted to collaborative teams, not to single researchers and most of the jobs available to MA and PhD graduates in anthropology are outside academe—jobs that require a host of translatable skills (USBLS, 2020). Having skills for team-based research, anthropologists will be better equipped to work with diverse people, communities, disciplines, and industries. This will not hinder those who do solo research, as anthropological practice is inherently collaborative with the people and communities we work.

For instructors who include a research project in a methods class, we recommend making those projects collaborative enterprises and using collaborative pedagogies, like setting up student research teams to ensure greater inclusivity and diversity across social identities, disciplines, and trainings (Campbell & Lassiter, 2010; Gallagher & Wessels, 2011; Howard, 2001; McWey et al., 2006).

Teaching collaborative research skills is not easy for instructors who were trained in the lone-researcher tradition. Writing collaborative field notes, for instance, means having team members meet to discuss and triangulate what was seen and heard to revise and expand field notes soon after data collection (Sangaramoorthy & Kroeger,

2020). To do this thoughtfully and effectively, instructors need dedicated curriculum time to design their classes (and learn about inclusive and decolonizing pedagogies—see recommendation #3). Activities for learning team-based skills can be done in collaborative ethnographic research in online virtual worlds (Snodgrass, 2016)—a strategy that one author (JGS) found particularly useful during the COVID-19 pandemic. That training works best when students work in groups to formulate clear research questions (following principles described in Luker, 2008), are guided on how to move from field note “jottings” to more complex “scenes” (Emerson et al., 2011), develop interview protocol guides based on exemplars, periodically participate in small breakout problem-solving groups, experience hands-on software training (with programs like MAXQDA for qualitative data management and analysis), and move iteratively in a collaborative and reflexive lab setting from less-structured participant-observation activities to more structured forms of data collection and analysis, like interviews and questionnaires. We also suggest having students discuss their strengths within their groups and have each group assign specific duties accordingly so that students can have ownership of their contributions.

### Recommendation 2: Continue to Emphasize Active and Experiential Learning

Many courses already follow this recommendation, but it is worth highlighting since there are enormous benefits to active and experiential learning of how to sample, conduct participant observation, take field notes, manage data, write memos, develop and apply codebooks, analyze, and write up data (Kilburn et al., 2014; Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016; Strayhorn, 2009).

Many popular and accessible books include instructions for all these methods, as well as exercises (e.g., Bernard, 2017; Bernard et al., 2016; Campbell & Lassiter, 2014; Dengah et al., 2021; DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010; Emerson et al., 2011; Fetterman, 2019; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; LeCompte & Schensul, 2010; Murchison, 2010; Saldaña, 2009; Schensul & LeCompte, 2012; Spradley, 2016). These resources offer guidance for students whether in a methods class or learning on their own.

Instructors can refer to the many journal articles for tips on teaching on specific qualitative and ethnographic methods (see, e.g., Chenail, 2018). For example, some research suggests the best way to learn participant observation is through applied lessons that teach key participant observation skills, such as simulated field work activities (Levine et al., 1980). Another subset of the literature focuses on ways to teach fieldwork, such as online virtual-world field settings (Snodgrass, 2016), or collective and collaborative fieldwork, like a class that meets from 10pm to 1am to study the city at night (Makagon, 2013), or an ongoing fieldwork project at a local housing collaborative (Schmid, 1992), or a “fifty minute” mini-ethnography project aimed at teaching students to look at familiar settings in new ways (Trnka, 2017). Some of the literature describes methods of teaching how to interview—like having students participate in group-based interviews conducted on their fellow students (DeLyser et al., 2013), or requiring students to recruit and conduct a team-based focus group with their fellow students (George, 2013).

There is literature on methods and exercises for teaching specific forms of data analysis, like teaching thematic analysis using a personal ads exercise (Stalp & Grant, 2001), practicing structured coding exercises on real data (Clarke & Braun, 2013), or activities like debriefing (Scharp & Sanders, 2019). Other recommendations center around the importance of teaching more daunting aspects of the research process—such as ethics—by using methods that are relevant and easily applicable for students, for example, using vignettes from reality TV (Burr & King, 2012), or by incorporating reflexivity on research ethics into a local applied methods project (von Unger, 2016).

### Recommendation 3: Add More Reflection

Based on this sample of syllabi, reflection on positionality and on the methods learned is largely missing in North American ethnographic methods training. This is particularly concerning, given the importance of reflexivity to ethnographic research (Ruth et al., forthcoming; Mitchell, 1993). We recommend that instructors incorporate student reflections and classroom discussions on those reflections especially for team-based work. This can be in the form of questions about what worked best, what students found most difficult, what mistakes they made, what they liked and disliked about the methods, what tactics they used to overcome any challenges, and how they could see themselves using the method of reflection in their own research. Exercises to develop skills in reflexivity and reflection on positionality can be incorporated in a methods course by having students discuss how their own position changed throughout the fieldwork, how employing reflexivity changed their approach to the research, and how their presence as researchers impacted research overall. Reflexivity and positionality as



cornerstones of both ethics and decolonized methodologies can be incorporated into most experiential learning assignments.

This brings us to one of the most important takeaways of this research. The field of anthropology has long been criticized as imperialistic and colonial (Deloria, 1969; Pels & Salemink, 1994). In addition to teaching decolonizing research methods in the classroom (Ruth et al., forthcoming), we can incorporate decolonizing pedagogy to respond to such critiques because that pedagogy is “guided by a conceptually-dynamic worldview and set of values that make it anti-capitalist,<sup>1</sup> anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-homophobic” (Tejeda et al., 2003, p. 7). Decolonizing pedagogy responds to this critique of the power dynamics between ethnographers and participants (e.g., Harrison, 2019; Jobson, 2020; Rosa & Bonilla, 2017; Shange, 2019) by centering voices from historically marginalized peoples and working to dismantle the harmful consequences of colonialism (Primiano et al., 2020; Smith, 2021; Zembylas, 2018). One way to do this is to require, throughout a methods course, readings by historically marginalized voices such as Black, Indigenous, and people of color as well as voices from LGBTQ and non-binary people (Atkins et al., 2021; Fuentes et al., 2021; Primiano et al., 2020). Through modeling our classrooms as collaborative spaces, we can have open discourse of power dynamics in the classroom and active, experiential learning practices that create shared spaces of learning and re-envision power structures in the classroom.

In closing, we provide some concrete ideas that we think responds to the current moment in ethnographic methods teaching as well as to longstanding critiques of anthropological methods as extractive and transactional rather than relational. Instructors can include their pronouns in their syllabus as well as encourage students in class to state their pronouns, if comfortable doing so (Pryor, 2015). Instructors can revise course expectations and policies that reflect Eurocentric standards and expectations and decenter the instructor’s authority in the classroom (Kishimoto, 2018). Examples include allowing flexible attendance, flexible deadlines, ungrading (i.e., not using traditional grading systems), as well as either creating spaces for small group participation (rather than grading on whether students speak up in large group discussions) or eliminating participation grades all together (Atkins et al., 2021; Blum & Kohn, 2020; McCusker, 2017; Primiano et al., 2020). If possible, have smaller class sizes and/or utilize small discussion groups that encourage the sharing of power and knowledge in the classroom (McCusker, 2017). This may prompt many of us—especially White, colonial-settler scholars—to reconsider our own positionality in the classroom and confront our own biases and assumptions (Allen, 2004; Matias & Mackey, 2016). We therefore may need to rethink *how* we are teaching including our roles in the teaching process, the content we present, the structure of the class activities, and the assessments we use.

### **Disclosure statement**

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<sup>1</sup> At a practical level, current anti-capitalist work largely focuses on deepening economic hybridization, by nurturing alternative practices like fair trade, cooperatives, informality, reciprocity, and so forth (Gibson-Graham, 2008) in order to rectify injustices that are endemic to historical developments of capitalism (Fraser, 2017; Marx, 1867/2019; Robinson, 1983).

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