

Book Review

Sophie Wulk, University of Cologne

TEACHING AND LEARNING THE EUROPEAN UNION. TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE METHODS

Editors: Baroncelli, S., Farneti, R., Horga, I., Vanhoonacker, S.

Abstract

The topic of the book is teaching and learning in European Studies. In its holistic approach, this volume combines chapters addressing the general features and particularities of the academic discipline as such, delivering empirical findings on the nature and type of relevant pedagogies and examples of best practice examples in this field.

Keywords

European Studies; Teaching and Learning; Active Learning; Innovative Teaching.

The book's focus, as the title already gives away, is the rapidly evolving field of European Studies. Although it mainly emphasises pedagogical aspects, the volume also manages to sketch a more general picture of European Studies' programmes, their origins, purpose and current features. It portrays innovative teaching experiences and various active learning methods relevant for the field.

In a commendable format, the book addresses those involved or about to engage in the instructional design and teaching of European Studies. When looking for a piece to grasp the discipline better, to understand dimensions of employability, to get insights into existing pedagogical approaches as well as examples of best practice or to be inspired for one's own teaching, this volume is one of the very few available options. The lengths of chapters were ideal for reading, well-structured with regards to the information they provided.

Divided into three parts, the first section of the book establishes the context in which the field of European Studies emerged, continues to develop and evolve. Those interested in the history and evolution of European Studies programmes should consider reading the introduction by Baroncelli, Farneti and Vanhoonacker. It provides the reader with background information about the discipline and addresses its particularity: the parallel development of the discipline alongside the actual European integration process as a *sui generis* phenomenon.

Those audiences looking for input on professional education might find the chapter of Gijsselaers, Dailley-Hebert and Niculescu valuable. It analyses the potential of European Studies programmes to prepare future employees for new labour market demands, which require them to work in dynamic, complex and ever changing environments. In this context, the authors consider European Studies as a perfect laboratory for the relevant teaching and learning goals, such as understanding and functioning in an applied fashion and focusing on problem-solving skills.

That the demands from the labour market in this area of expertise shift away from content to competencies is reflected also in the next chapter written by Bearfield, which will appeal to those audiences interested in the human resources policy of the European Union. The article concisely summarises the review and reform process of the human resources selection strategy of the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO), to outline the current outlook. Being aware of the competences required helps potential course designers of EU Studies to adapt the content and support potential applicants in their preparation for the exams.

Those readers concerned with practical application, this time in relation to European active citizenship, will also be interested in the chapter contributed by Van Dyke. She explores ways in which (higher) education programmes can support active citizen education. She argues that for a strong citizenry it is necessary that political science instructors foster an understanding of practical political decision making and democratic deliberation. She considers active learning, such as through simulations, as central in order to foster European consciousness and to develop civic skills, as a prerequisite to becoming a lifelong engaged European citizen.

Audiences interested in questions of multilingualism in Europe and the necessity for it to be reflected in European Studies will find stimulating insights in the second part of the book which opens with a chapter by Franceschini and Veronesi. Although states still tend to prefer to adhere to one nation, one language ideologies, the authors argue that multilingualism as a major cultural characteristic of Europe should be reflected in its higher education landscape. For them, higher education cannot be limited to transmitting knowledge *about* Europe, but should be devoted to offering a space for communicating *as* Europeans.

Readers looking for insights into the added value of visits to the EU institutions and internships will find Chapter 6 by Lavallo and Berlin of interest. It depicts the experiences of an intense study tour and internship programme for Canadian students. This programme is depicted as having been highly successful in helping non-EU students understand the EU.

Chapter 7 by Baroncelli, Fonti and Stevancevic and Chapter 8 by Fonti and Stevancevic are concerned with innovative teaching methods in European Studies. The authors present and assess the findings of an empirical study which clearly shows that the use of innovative methods and tools is still limited. Fonti and Stevancevic write about an international research project in which 300 professors and researchers were asked about their use of teaching methods, such as internships, distance learning and exchange programmes. Their finding is that the majority of lecturers have yet to incorporate innovative teaching methods and tools habitually into their teaching. However, further research is needed to identify more concretely the factors leading to this outcome.

In Chapter 9, Baroncelli addresses a readership looking for information on linguistic pluralism in European Studies and the Jean Monnet Programme. Her results reflect education policy as a field where the EU's role is primarily to support and supplement member states' action. Two-thirds of the programmes, in all their diversity, are taught in the domestic language, only one-third is taught in English. Interestingly, English is definitely the lingua franca: there are no cases where there was another foreign language than English used.

The third part of the book is relevant for those interested in actual teaching practices. Chapter 10 by Jones and Bursens focuses on the impact of simulation games. The authors positively assess the transatlantic EuroSim simulation using data from 2007-2010 with regards to its affective and cognitive learning dimensions. It provides important insights into these aspects of teaching with simulation games and gives excellent insights into a best-practice example. Chapter 11 by Natalia Timus is directed at those audiences interested in the opportunities and challenges of distance learning in European Studies. According to Timus, distance learning is a suitable tool for teaching European Studies because it is able to incorporate a variety of theoretical frameworks, practical experiences, models of teaching and makes mobility more accessible. Timus directs us to consider, however, that distance learning leads to more responsibility for all parties involved.

Chapter 12 is a helpful source for Problem-Based Learning. Maurer and Neuhold provide a very detailed and informative account not only of their long-standing experiences with this method, but give substantial background information and detailed descriptions of practical steps. For them the approach is just as process-dependent, needing regular reviews and adaptations, as the discipline of European Studies and the integration process itself. The chapters that follow assess Web 2.0 technologies for teaching European Studies. Chapter 13 by Mihai looks at blended learning, thus combining different modes of delivery, both traditional and online forms of teaching. For the author, blended learning is particularly suitable for the complexity of the subject and the diversity of the audience in European Studies. Those considering blended learning methods should, however, be aware of the fact that learners need to be particularly flexible to adapt to this approach and that such techniques require intense planning and organisation.

The final chapter, 14, written by Farneti, Bianchi, Maygründter and Niederhauser, addresses the potential of social networks for teaching European Studies. Those readers interested in the participatory and hence democratic quality of Web 2.0 technology might find stimulating insights here. For the authors, social networks give opportunities to enhance democratic dialogues and to build and ensure lasting active citizenship. The key for a successful integration of Web 2.0 technologies into the classroom is the appropriate literacy to handle these tools appropriately. Acknowledging Web 2.0's potential to contribute to the emergence of a European public sphere underlines that it might be worth investing in this kind of literacy.

As becomes clear, the book assembles a variety of topics, perspectives and approaches within the realm of European Studies' pedagogy. In this combination, a variety of specialised interests are addressed. Therefore, it is not necessarily a book to be read from beginning to end, rather it resembles a handbook or compendium, from which readers select chapters depending on the specific information sought. Considering the limited number of publications in the field of teaching and learning European Studies, this book makes an important contribution. In its very broad approach to the field, this volume is also a clear signal that more detailed research is needed. Almost every chapter in the book touches upon a different topic, each of which could be dealt with individually in a separate book publication. This also explains the only very loose connectedness of the different chapters in the book. Hence, the book at hand highlights the diversity of the field, strongly suggesting more detailed research in this area. Contributors discuss the ways of teaching and learning within and about a *sui generis* entity. They seem in large parts to agree that grasping such a complex and dynamic entity needs a matching pedagogy which facilitates students in being able to understand, engage, react and communicate effectively within, about and across the EU.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

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