



## Module – Relations

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### 1. Why teach this module?

Relations are fundamental to sociality and their complexity and distinction is a testament to the different ways humans engage with other people and things. Everything happens in a relation and as teachers we have the responsibility to notice different qualities of relations in educational settings and how they affect the learning process both for our students, for ourselves and educational institutions: interpersonal relations and institutional relations, power relations, kinship, race relations, gender relations and class relations to name a few.

### 2. Ethnographic Entry Points

It is no surprise then that the scholarly work that focuses on relations is wide ranging, fragmented, dispersed and at times elusive. However, when we look toward educational practices, we can notice the most prominent aspects to focus on are the ways in which educational practices reproduce unequal power relations be it gender relations, class relations or race relations (MacDonald, 1981). On the other hand, focus can also shift to ways some particular forms of relations like for example race relations, gender and class relations or kinship affect and influence the life worlds of students you teach and ways they affect their learning experience.

Ethnographic approaches contained in this module inherit the usual connotations of ethnographic work: attention to detail, exploration of social phenomena, and search for meaning. They also shift focus towards a specific theoretical area, namely feminist standpoint theory (Harding, 2011) and the concept of situated knowledge. Situated knowledge demands that we acknowledge our objects of knowledge as actors and agents, as well as to see our own production of knowledge as constantly embodied and partial (Haraway, 1988).

### 3. Ways of understanding

As Marilyn Strathern (2018) points, there is no specific or singular definition of the term relations, anthropological, or otherwise. However, relations are a privileged site of anthropological inquiry. Often taken for granted as a prime object of study. This habit of taking the term relations for granted originates from the simple idea that people's ability to relate to one another is often considered as a fundamental truth about human existence. It is considered self-evident that people all around the world are immersed in relations with things, beings and entities that form their environment.

This module will cover theoretical debates and different perspectives on relations, specifically concerning, but not limited to social relations, power relations, race, gender and class relations, institutional relations, interpersonal relations, kinship relations, etc. and illuminate them with specific ethnographic examples in the educational setting. It will also propose possible ways to think with, make, uncover, or awake specific relations in the educational setting.



Relations are everywhere, but institutions, with the educational institution as the finest example, have a particular way of producing, reproducing and transforming specific kinds of relations that are imbued with power. Race, gender, sexuality, class, disability are just some of the categories that are co/re/produced in those relations. Education has a way of normalizing hierarchical and uneven relations even when it subscribes to claims of equality, reciprocity, and freedom. Ethnographic approaches, examples and theoretical underpinnings of the module are directed toward opening different ways of seeing those relations.

This module utilizes a plethora of ethnographic research in diverse educational settings that do not always share theoretical underpinnings but are committed to accountable research and educational practice through a focus on specificity and detail of those educational experiences and relations that are often marginalized, rejected, dismissed or just taken for granted.

The module starts with theoretical questioning of relations as such (Feldman 2011, Strathern 2018) and moves to the exploration of “situated knowledges” (Haraway, 1988, Harding, 2011) starting from acknowledging our own positionality in the field of relations and connecting it to ethnographic examples of relations in action in specific educational settings. These will form a base for methodological exercises that are useful for discussion and understanding of:

- varied ways in which we are immersed in relations and how do they shape our educational practice and experience? (Ingold 2011, 2017)
- how are specific types of power relationships reproduced in institutional settings? (Ortner, 2006, MacDonald 1981, Strathern 2005)

#### 4. Suggested Exercises

Exercises are intended to make educators aware of their own network of relations first, so the starting point is an autoethnographic assessment of different dimensions of relations they are imbued with and by acknowledging their own positionality. Exercise is imagined as a self observation assignment (of different lengths depending on the course) in which teachers are asked to observe and note on their everyday relations. The final product of the exercise is a short essay on their positionality in their respective educational setting.

We then move to the collaborative part of exercises in which teachers are paired in groups and assigned to read and comment on the essays produced in an earlier exercise. This will allow for widening the perspectives of all involved and open the discussion on the differences that arise from different positions in the field of relations and how these positions affect, specifically their educational practice.

Final exercise will be one of roleplaying imagination in which teachers will be asked to assume a position of one of their colleagues (for example: white male middle-aged teacher will be asked to imagine himself as young women of immigration background – the positions will depend on the diversity of the group itself and based on their positionality essays) and try to detail how this shifting of roles changes their everyday relations with other teachers, students, parents and alike.

#### 5. Learning Prospects

- comprehend basic theoretical approaches to relations in anthropology and their usefulness for pedagogical practice
- reflect on relations they are embedded in and the ways they influence their pedagogical practices
- distinguish different methodological approaches to educational research and their usefulness for different educational settings and issues



- use some of the ethnographic methods in their own didactical practice to improve learning outcomes

## 6. Literature

Feldman, G. (2011). "If ethnography is more than participant-observation, then relations are more than connections: The case for nonlocal ethnography in a world of apparatuses". *Anthropological Theory*, 11/4: 375–395.

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### Further Readings

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