



## Module – Selfing and Othering

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### Why teach this module?

A glance at the schoolyard on a regular morning is all it takes to realize that processes of group formation and boundary making are an essential part of social dynamics of education. Who is in which group? Whom do you stand with? Whom would you rather not stand with? What are the differences based on? Why do these dynamics take place? Whether in the schoolyard, in the classroom or even in the teachers' room - the basic question here is primarily about the dynamics of how constantly boundaries and differences are drawn between individuals, thus creating groups. For what reasons are relationships established, maintained and, if necessary, severed? Unfortunately, the attention for group formation often only arises when it leads to conflicts. These conflicts are not only interpersonal or "purely personal" in nature, but can be observed and examined from a social science perspective. As a teacher, one has the responsibility of making the dynamics in the classroom pedagogically meaningful. In this respect, the goal of this course is to equip the participants with sound analytical anthropological knowledge of the mechanisms and dimensions of privilege (and the lack thereof) and selfing / othering in educational contexts. This forms the basis for designing work in the classroom accordingly and innovatively.

### Ethnographic Entry Points

A consideration of the plethora of ethnographic research in everyday school life shows that even in the most diverse local contexts, recurring themes exist. Perhaps, these are well known to you personally. The publication by Moncarda Linares (2016) provides a very detailed and good overview of the concept of Othering and makes clear that a debate on Othering and cultural sensitivity in the classroom belong together. She also describes many examples of its application in research within the classroom. Based on the experiences of students in two primary schools in the UK, Shereen et al (2003) show the complexity of inclusion and exclusion processes and the importance of a political understanding of classroom dynamics. Also in the UK, Murtagh (2019) uses the "Othering" concept to identify the hardships and challenges that teacher trainees who have children face in their work practice. Finally, two ethnographers highlight the importance of dialogue spaces with regard to the conflicts which people of color - educators encounter in the American context when learners are predominantly white (Rasheed 2018) and vice versa (Bryzzheva 2018).

These few examples may provide a small overview how selfing / othering processes become relevant in educational settings and produce different privileges for different social groups. Much of the research has been conducted by practitioners with their own teaching practice and is therefore practice-oriented and relevant to everyday life.



## Ways of understanding

In combination with the ethnographic record, a collection of theoretical approaches will be used. The anthropologist Gerd Baumann describes not only the majority but also the production of boundaries between majorities and minorities as processes of "selfing and othering" (Baumann 2004: 19). Both processes play a crucial role in the development of racism. The phenomenon of racism becomes analytically more tangible when understood as a form of identity formation through exclusion and / or demarcation. Baumann distinguishes three "grammars" - orientalism, segmentation and encompassment - or social discourses that construct self and others. He presents these three grammars as classification schemes, each with their own process of selfing / othering, as a theoretical framework for understanding the sociocultural phenomena of inclusion and exclusion. He argues that peoples' "need for demarcation" is a plausible explanation for the ease with which racist or discriminating ideas enter into the opinion-forming processes of groups. This demarcation acts to guard the "unity of the group" by denouncing or "warding off the threat from outside" (see Baumann 2004: 19ff). Baumann does not insist on the exclusivity of these three grammars, since for any social situation of selfing and othering, multiple grammars are often used simultaneously and interchangeably. Rather, he sees them as partly competing and partly complementary variants of identity and alterity constructions. Social and cultural anthropology has extensively discussed and criticized that while majorities are perceived in their difference, minorities are focused on their culture, nature and described as homogeneous. This also leads to debates about power and the hierarchy of privileges of different social groups.

Approaches to Selfing and Othering are useful to discuss and understand:

- The ongoing process of people differentiating themselves from one another;
- Linked to this is the process of defining oneself through demarcation from others;
- How this becomes relevant in the educational context and
- And ultimately to recognize when this process begins to cause serious problems

## Suggested Exercises

Firstly, participants are provided with a sound theoretical overview which they can apply in their pedagogical practice. Secondly, small-scale research projects will be conducted. Participants will construct their own field by choosing an educational institution and produce a *thick description* of the chosen setting in regard to privileges or the lack thereof. The well-known anthropologist Clifford Geertz used the term "thick description" to characterize a certain ethnographic approach, which explores how people are constantly involved in meaning-making processes by means of action, perception and interpretation.

During this research, it is essential to capture as much information about the specific site of interest. Of which parts does it consist? Where is it situated, and what does that say about the privileges of the pupils studying there? Who are the people working and studying at the institution, and what are the relationships between these groups as well as within them?



Special focus should be given to the structural and institutional discrimination of migrant children and their families. The monolingual habitus (Gogolin 2008) created enormous imbalances between majorities and minorities in classrooms all over the world, although other forms of (dis)privilege such as able-bodiedness (or lack thereof), positions of gender, sexual orientation or socio-economic status must be taken into account as well. To understand how selfing / othering processes produce inequalities and privileges are the first step towards a learning environment with equal opportunities.

## Learning Prospects

- participants are equipped with a sound and transdisciplinary knowledge about mechanisms and dimensions of privilege (and the lack thereof) in the educational context
- participants are skilled to develop ethnographic sensitivity in their educational setting
- participants are skilled to conduct own research projects to examine processes of selfing / othering
- participants gain insight into the way privilege (or lack thereof) can be perpetuated through the educational system and can reflect on their own role as a subject of education

## Literature

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