MultiPluriTrans in Educational Ethnography

Approaching the Multimodality, Plurality and Translocality of Educational Realities
Ethnography has established itself as a key strategy of qualitative research in education, because it is so versatile, flexible, and ambiguous. Its growing importance coincides with an increasing diversity of «discovered» educational realities. In the process, many basic assumptions have turned into genuine tasks of research. Where are the places and times of learning, education, and social work to be found? Who are the actors and addressees? How are education and learning performed and enacted? The contributions to this volume discuss the multiple challenges that ethnographic research has to confront when exploring the multimodality, plurality, and translocality of educational realities.

Sabine Bollig (PhD) is research associate at the University of Luxembourg.
Michael-Sebastian Honig (PhD) is Professor of Social Work at the University of Luxembourg and head of the research group »Early Childhood: Education and Care«.
Sascha Neumann (PhD) is Professor of Educational Research at the University of Fribourg (Switzerland) and head of the University’s Centre for Early Childhood Education (ZeFF).
Claudia Seele (M.A.) is research associate and PhD student at the University of Luxembourg.

For further information: www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-2772-5
Content

Approaching the Complexities of Educational Realities
An Introduction
Sabine Bollig/Michael-Sebastian Honig/Sascha Neumann/Claudia Seele | 9

WHERE IS THE FIELD?
About the Transnationality, Translocality, and Multi-Sitedness of Education and Ethnography

Ethnography “is not what it used to be”
Rethinking Space, Time, Mobility, and Multiplicity
Jane Kenway | 37

Experiences with Multi-Sited Ethnographies in Transnational Studies
Stephan Wolff | 57

The ‘International Preschool’ as a Translocal Field
An Ethnography of the Production of ‘International’ Education in Japan
Yuki Imoto | 79

The Multiple Geographies of Early Childhood Education and Care
An Ethnographic Approach to the Places and Spaces of Young Children’s Care Arrangements
Sabine Bollig | 99
**Who are the Actors?**
Multiple Actors of Education: From Humans to Networks, Technologies, Organisations, and States

**Transsituating Education**
Educational Artefacts in the Classroom and Beyond
Tobias Röhl | 121

**Matters of Learning and Education**
Sociomaterial Approaches in Ethnographic Research
Tara Fenwick, Sarah Doyle, Maureen Michael, Jennifer Scoles | 141

**ICT in Classrooms**
The Practical Side of a Technical Order
Christoph Maeder | 163

**School Entry Proceedings as Organisational Practices**
Ethnographic Perspectives on the Interferences between Governmental and Situated Regulations
Helga Kelle | 175

**The Political Economy of Prison-Based Treatment and Re-entry Programming in Illinois and Chicago**
Robert P. Fairbanks II | 195

**What is Education?**
Dealing with the Complexity of Educational Phenomena – Multimodality, Plurality, Heterogeneity

**Designing Meaning**
Social Semiotic Multimodality Seen in Relation to Ethnographic Research
Gunther Kress | 213

**Bringing Sound Back into Space**
Multimodal Ethnography of Early Education
Oliver Schnoor | 235

**Language Practices and the Accomplishment of Educational Realities**
An Ethnography of Multilingualism in Luxembourgish Early Childcare Settings
Claudia Seele | 257
The Empiricisation of “Bildung” in Early Childhood
Ethnographical-praxeological Perspectives on the (Trans)locality and Corporeality of Education
Marc Schulz | 279

Family Life as Education
Ethnographic Perspectives on how Familial Education Emerges in Families and in Educational Family Research
Dominik Krinninger | 297

Notes on Contributors | 315
Approaching the Complexities of Educational Realities
An Introduction

Sabine Bollig, Michael-Sebastian Honig, Sascha Neumann, Claudia Seele

THE EMERGING FIELDS OF EDUCATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

In its broadest sense, the term “educational ethnography” in the title of this book refers to an area of qualitative research, which draws on fieldwork methods to approach the phenomena of learning, education, and social work. And yet, the term alludes neither to a single academic discipline, nor to a uniform methodology. Educational ethnographies are not only at home in the educational sciences, but also in cultural and social anthropology, social-policy analyses, childhood studies, human geography, applied linguistics, urban and cultural studies, pragmatic psychology, and not least the sociology of education. While every research labelled as such relates to educational and socio-educational fields of action or educational processes, there is considerable variation in what exactly marks them as ‘ethnographic’ – not only between disciplines but also within those. Are educational ethnographies a type of cultural research, practice analysis, or narrative inquiry? What forms of data production are paramount: the gathering of documents, videography, audio recording, or the researcher as a participating and writing field-research instrument? The same applies to the question of what is meant with ‘educational’. How do we model the objects of ethnographic research on education and social work: as interactions, institutions, cultures, practices, or discourses?

Initially, it seems undisputed only that educational ethnography is a field-related research methodology that focuses on the collection of so-called natural data in the fields of education, care, and social work, describing these fields from an emic perspective, i.e. based on the participant observation of local practices. Beyond that, educational ethnography reveals to be extremely diverse and multifaceted. It may therefore be hardly surprising that the title of this book takes up three of the most popular prefixes in current social and cultural
studies – ‘multi’, ‘pluri’, and ‘trans’ – but deliberately dispenses with the no-less popular ‘inter’. For if the term educational ethnography has to point to a coherent field of research, then it must be understood per se and from the beginning as an interdisciplinary field.

The concept of the field – as used generally to denominate the objects of ethnographic research as well as its ‘places’ – reflects the diversity, ambiguity, and dynamics that currently characterise educational ethnography. Fields are defined by unsharp boundaries and a moving web of relationships between different people, positions, objects, artefacts, statements, or topics. In other words, the existence of fields cannot be thought without their continuous emergence. The notion of ‘field’ can also be used to refer to the development of educational ethnography itself: it is in many ways an emerging space of qualitative research on education, learning, and social work. This dynamic terrain is about to establish itself increasingly as a central arena for the knowledge production in educational research, not least due to its openness and ambiguity.

As a strategy of fieldwork, ethnographic research owes its success in educational science certainly to its resistance to ‘grand narratives’, as offered by structural functionalism or Marxist theory; it opposes them with studies aimed at the local meaning of educational practices. But perhaps ethnography has also established itself as one of the key strategies of qualitative research in educational science because it is so versatile, flexible, and ambiguous: both stable enough to appear as a relatively uniform research style that promises a critical perspective to one’s own disciplinary knowledge of educational realities by ‘making the familiar strange’, and amorphous enough to serve the respective interests, perspectives, and contexts of ethnographic researchers. Accordingly, the still growing importance of ethnography for educational research is accompanied by an increasing diversity of ‘discovered’ educational realities and by an ever expanding and differentiating research practice. In this process, the prefixes multi-, pluri-, or trans- are attributed ever more frequently not only to the research topics of educational ethnography (e.g. multi-modality, pluri-locality, trans-nationality, and so on), but also to the ethnographic research strategies themselves (multi-sited ethnography, pluri-vocal ethnography, trans-national ethnography, etc.).

This trend also marks the entry point of this volume, which starts from the assumption that the increasing importance of ethnographic strategies in educational research coincides with a more flexible, dynamic, and diversified conception of the objects of study. Apart from the plausibility of this assumption, there is not only the question what counts as ethnographic in the context of educational ethnography, but also in how far educational ethnography has contributed to a more fundamental change in perspective on educational phenomena. Is the trend towards a greater complexity of problems and research designs a consequence of the expansion of ethnographic research in education,
or is it – conversely – supported by significant changes in the ways educational research constructs its objects of investigation? A central question of this volume therefore concerns the relationship between the object of educational ethnography and ethnography itself as a research strategy that actively constitutes its very objects of research.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OBJECT AND METHODOLOGY
IN THE HISTORY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

From the culturalisation of ‘the Other’ to field research ‘at home’

Ethnography in education and ethnography on educational phenomena has several historical roots, which all emerge at the beginning of the 20th century and which all exceed the context of educational studies in a narrow sense. The Canadian cultural anthropologist Daniel Yon characterises the period between 1925 and the 1950s as the “formative years” of educational ethnography (Yon 2003: 413), followed by a period of consolidation during the 1960s (see also deMarrais/Armstrong/Preissle 2010). This characterisation refers to a development which has taken place first and foremost in the field of American educational anthropology. In addition – or even in contrast – to this position, Sara Delamont and Paul Atkinson speak of “two traditions of ethnography in education” (Delamont/Atkinson 1980), emphasising the important role of the British sociology of education in that process of consolidating educational ethnography as a distinct field of study since the 1960s. In the German-speaking countries, the beginnings of educational ethnography can also be traced back to the early 20th century, even though ethnography would only recently establish itself as a method of educational research in this geographical context (Thole 2010). Accordingly, the history and the current state of educational ethnography cannot be described in other terms than a scattered, multi-local phenomenon (cf. also Larsson 2006; Anderson-Levitt 2013).

Although no comprehensive history of educational ethnography has been written so far, there are some important aspects worth to be noted. Educational ethnography emerged around the 1920s with a special interest of cultural anthropologists in the socialisation and enculturation of children and young people in – at first – ‘exotic’ cultural settings. The classic examples here are the cross-cultural studies by Margaret Mead from the 1930s. From this starting point, educational ethnography developed into a subdiscipline of cultural anthropology, seen as a distinct field of ethnographic accounts of educational institutions ‘at home’ (Yon 2003). The rise of ethnographic fieldwork ‘at home’ was characterised by both social reform movements at the time and the interest in the explanation of cultural change. Ethnography’s distinctive benefit was
seen as its ability to ‘culturalise’ as well as ‘localise’ these social processes at the same time, or in the words of Yon, “to take the reader into the actual worlds of subjects in order to reveal the cultural knowledge that is working in a particular place, as it is actually lived through its subjects” (Yon 2003: 412).

Also emerging as early as the 1920s was an interest in the ethnographic exploration of educational fields, as exemplified by the works of George and Louise Spindler (see Spindler 2000), Murray and Rosalie Wax (Wax/Wax/Dumont 1964), or the Chicago School. These stood in the context of a range of processes: industrialisation, urbanisation, migration and the associated problems of social integration. Ethnography consolidated itself as a research strategy in the sociology of everyday life. It made visible the lives of marginalised groups, such as youth subcultures, the poor, migrants, or non-white people, especially so in North America. Within the growing disciplines of sociology, psychology, and educational studies, ethnographic approaches became part of a field of qualitative research with the aim of highlighting the specific cultural worlds of children and youth, as well as exploring their lifeworlds as distinct sites in society and independent spaces for learning and socialisation. Studies with an interest in educational focused on how socialisation phenomena, such as juvenile deviance, could be understood from the cultural context of subcultures. In the German speaking area, ethnography consolidated around this view on social change, first as research on children and youth that enquired about the specific cultural conditions in which young people are involved as members of specific groups, or the educational demands that arise from the living conditions of young people from the working class (cf. Thole 2010).

Besides the interest in marginalised groups and subcultural niches, ethnographic approaches have also increasingly gained importance as a means to investigate educational institutions and practices themselves. This interest has given rise to a distinct tradition within educational ethnographic research. Educational institutions, such as the school, have come into view as reproductive microcosms of society. Examples are the classic works on the “hidden curriculum” of school culture in the 1960s and 70s (Jackson 1968; Rosenbaum 1976; Zinnecker 1975). Current international ethnographic research has spread to include numerous subjects, from different kinds of educational institutions – like schools, kindergartens, nurseries, residential care homes, universities, or adult learning arrangements – to various kinds of educational practices – such as teaching, classroom management, informal and non-formal learning, pupil assessment, street work, or youth counselling.

**From descriptive to analytical ethnography**

Educational ethnography has moved away over time from a naturalistic, essentialising perspective on the supposed strange, unknown, or new. These had
been the focus of earlier forms of ethnography that were oriented on lifeworlds and empathetic understanding. The sociology of everyday life and ethnomethodology presented key epistemological perspectives that allowed focusing no longer only on the “curious subcultures” (Breidenstein et al. 2013: 25) in an increasingly differentiating society, but also putting into view the micro-social processes of accomplishing everyday realities – or, in other words, the ‘doing of’ learning, education, and social work.

This shift in perspective was not only linked to a changed definition of the object of ethnographic research, but also to a change of its gesture of discovery. As articulated by Thole (2010: 31) for the German-speaking context, the ethnographic gaze shifted away from the “static registrations and empathetic understanding of what had been found, towards the identification and reconstruction of the processes of reality production” (transl. by the authors). Accordingly, it was no longer only about rendering visible and familiar the culturally strange, like subcultures, rather such ethnographic strategies promised to cultivate a certain epistemological style that variegates the normal distance to social phenomena through different strategies of “rendering the familiar strange” (Amann/Hirschauer 1997, transl. by the authors). Connected to this was an altered conception of the relationship between strangeness and familiarity, the very conceptual dualism from the semantic field of ethnography that still points most strongly to the historical roots of this research method in social and cultural anthropology (cf. Bollig/Neumann 2011). The focus has shifted from the intentionality of actors to the social meaning of an event, in which a specific regularity is assumed from the outset with respect to its practical accomplishment. Compared to the action-theoretical naturalism of ethnographic research focusing on lifeworlds, actors step into the background as subjects and centres of action, while instead the situated local practices of which they are part come to the fore. Accordingly, it is less about understanding the subjects than about explaining the situational performative logic which the actors produce as much as they are subjected to it. One could also say with Lofland (1995) that ethnographic research has become more and more “analytical”.

As a result of this development, the questions that can be answered with the help of ethnographic research changed radically at the end of the 20th century. The ‘analytical turn’ in ethnography not only set the starting point for observations of all social institutions and areas of life in terms of their everyday accomplishment, but it simultaneously also raised the question for whom these changes of normal distance, these observer-relative descriptions of social phenomena, were to be understood as discoveries. Because it “makes the familiar strange” as Breidenstein, Hirschauer, Kalthoff, and Nieswand (2013: 31) point out, ethnography has commended itself as a methodological strategy that allows different and new descriptions and analyses of the discipline’s objects.
This strategy attempts to pursue the fact that experiences of inconsistency are always relative to the observer. They emanate from a difference between her or his objectivist assumptions about rules and norms on the one hand, and the internal logic of the irritating reality on the other. Accordingly, the researchers’ attention increasingly focuses on the heterogeneity, decentralisation, dynamisation, and destabilisation of those fields which are observed by ethnographic research as educational realities. In this process, the gaze of educational ethnography turned increasingly to the processes through which educational fields are created as educational, in which they construct their addressees, render their forms of action into routines, produce their professionalism, or generate the very problems that they promise to solve. The unfamiliarity, novelty, and peculiarity of the phenomena under research increasingly turned from a presupposed property of the objects into a matter of perspective.

This process appears to be still on-going. Currently, this becomes evident when looking at the increase of studies focusing on trans- and supra-local educational phenomena, as well as research that takes a multiplying and observer-relative perspective on the ‘local’. As with early ethnographic research ‘at home’ in the first half of the 20th century, the shift from descriptive to analytical ethnography was based on diagnoses of contemporary society and interpretations of an (accelerated) cultural change. References are made to the increasing cultural dynamics in a globalised world, as reflected in the transnationalisation of educational fields and education-political discourses, the dynamics of migration movements in “traveling policies” (cf. Lindblad/Popkewitz 2004), or the digitisation of everyday experiences. The perspectival shift leading to increasingly complex research approaches and understandings of the object is based not only on changes in the matter, but also on different forms of theorisation. New trends in social and cultural theory – such as the so-called post-structuralist theories of practice, networks, and discourse – invite to overcome the singular focus on interactions and locally performed realities. The accomplishment of the realities of learning, education, and social work is, thus, no longer tied exclusively to the agency of human actors and to the configuration of their relations in a certain place and at a certain time. With the changing theorisation, ethnographic research participates in conceptual developments in social science and cultural studies, developments that increasingly override the well-established distinctions between ‘micro’ and ‘macro’, structure and process, intention and function, local and global, situation and context, individual and society, or even between human actors and non-human artefacts. In this way, they question also to some extent the previous research responsibilities within the scientific division of labour.

These developments entail significant changes both for questions of the constitution of objects as well as for the relationship between objects and methods. For example, in recent educational ethnographies, political structures and
social discourses are not only considered as structural conditions of action in educational fields, but analysed as integral parts of their practical logic. Furthermore, educational practice is no longer only considered as a locally bounded phenomenon. It is more likely to be described in the conceptual frameworks of hybrid, dispersed, networked, transnational, and thus supra-local figurations. This also increases the awareness of the internal diversity of educational realities. On the one hand, this concerns ethnic, gender, linguistic, generational, and other differences and their interconnections in the institutional everyday life. On the other hand, the multimodal and praxeological diversity of the processes of education and learning moves more clearly into the focus of a perspective that is more sensitised to these phenomena and – in this sense – constitutive of its research objects. In this context, it is increasingly questioned whether only people can act in educational fields, or if not objects, spaces, bodies, and artefacts need to be included in the research process as active participants in the practical accomplishment of educational realities.

**The objective of this volume**

Given the developments described above, we argue that both past and present ethnographic research in education and social work can be understood as a continuously renewing attempt to approach a constantly changing social world by means of fragile patterns of orientation and interpretation. The change of perspective is thus not merely motivated by ‘caesuras’ or ‘new’ phenomena, but also by the experience that interpretation routines become inadequate. This also means that the history of ethnographic research must not be (mis)understood one-dimensionally as a history of cumulative improvements. There seem to be two motifs that stand out in the history of educational ethnography and that determine its dynamics:

- On the one hand, the development of educational ethnography was never based solely on methodological or theoretical assumptions, but above all on continuously changing understandings of its objects and certain assumptions about socially, politically, or professionally induced developments in the fields studied by educational ethnographers. In this context, the increasing importance of ethnographic research could be interpreted as a response to changes in the constitution of educational realities themselves.

- On the other hand, educational ethnography also claims to create a form of knowledge about its objects of investigation that is different from other methodological approaches. This claim is based on two promises: the possibility to study the dimensions of an object or a field that had not been recognised before, and the possibility to observe objects in a different way than done – for example – by traditional educational theorists, quantita-
tive researchers, or professionals. The methodological strategy of ‘making the familiar strange’ forms the pivot to this end. It addresses not only the knowledge of the actors that are familiar with the field, but also the theoretical, literally disciplined, prior understandings of the researchers (cf. Bollig/Neumann 2011; Green/Skukauskaite/Baker 2012). This demonstrates the strong interest of ethnographic research not only in discovering new worlds and phenomena but also in questioning what is supposedly known about various ‘realities’.

In light of these two recurrent motifs, the outlined developments in educational ethnography aim at more fundamental questions than might be noticed at first sight. Many basic assumptions have transformed into tasks of research, such as locating the times and places of learning, education, and social work, defining its actors and audiences, observing how education, teaching, instruction, and/or learning are performed, and determining how education is to be understood in the first place. These research tasks demand not only a more complex construction of the research objects, but also lead to new methodologies and research designs.

This volume aims to explore these issues by referring to several underlying fundamental questions which are addressed in three separate sections.

- In the first section, titled “Where is the field?”, the book gathers contributions on research strategies and designs that both question and challenge the traditional understanding of the locally bounded field site in educational ethnography.
- In a similar manner, the contributions to the second section, titled “Who are the actors?”, present and discuss perspectives and research strategies that aim to transcend the traditional imagination of the human being as the centre of action in education.
- The third section, “What is education?”, contains contributions that investigate the multimodal dimensions of educational processes with regard to the different entities, places, and practices involved. These have until now been neglected by conventional ideas of educational phenomena, which have been principally perceived as based on personal relations and face-to-face interactions.

Besides reflecting on these more fundamental questions, this volume also aims to discuss the innovations, potentials, and ambiguities of the research strategies that accompany the mentioned tendencies in educational ethnography. These innovations, potentials, and ambiguities can be identified at several levels, which are all addressed in the individual contributions to this volume, albeit with different weightings.
• On a *theoretical level*, the described tendencies ask for novel approaches which are suited to explore the transnational, multimodal, plurilocal, multiprofessional, etc. realities of learning, education, and social work, while also investigating how explorations of this kind change traditional and taken-for-granted assumptions about the constitution of these realities.
• On a *methodological level*, the on-going developments raise the question of what challenges fieldworkers in ethnographic research have to respond to while they are trying to explore the plurilingual, multicultural, multimodal, or transnational etc. dimensions of educational settings and how this affects the ways of doing ‘participant observation’.
• On an *empirical level*, the question arises which insights ethnographic research can contribute to the understanding and reconstruction of educational fields as perspectively, positionally, territorially, linguistically, or modally diversified realities.

**EMERGING FIELDS IN EDUCATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY — THE CONTRIBUTIONS IN THIS VOLUME**

**Where is the field?**

Ethnographic observations routinely do not refer to distinct objects in a strict sense. Rather, ethnographers are interested in phenomena which – in their perspective – appear in the form of so-called ‘fields’. However, the relation between the field as the central reference point of ethnographic investigations and the objects and issues of ethnographic research has always been an arbitrary one (Candea 2007). On a methodological level, which is expected to connect theoretical assumptions and empirical operations with one another, it is therefore barely surprising that it is especially the concept of the field itself which is affected by the current dynamic of re-conceptualising the realities investigated through educational ethnography.

In the traditional “ethnographic imagination” (Willis 2000) the concept of field was fundamentally committed to the idea of localisability as one key dimension of early naturalism in ethnographic research. Similar to ethnographic research in cultural anthropology, educational ethnography also assumed that ‘being there’ (Bradburd 1998; Watson 1999) is the essential characteristic of fieldwork. Thus research could not take place elsewhere than “in the field” (Atkinson/Hammersley 2007: 3), and observation, therefore, seems to be only possible through participation as a specific and internally diversified form of active local presence (see Cloos 2008). Accordingly, the implicit localism of the field concept has been one of the most prominent reference points for methodologically oriented self-critique in ethnographic research, as it has evolved both in-
side as well as outside the framework of educational ethnography (Breidenstein et al. 2013; Gupta/Ferguson 1997; Hannerz 2006; van Maanen 1988; Salzman 1986). The localism of the traditional field concept has not least been one of the primary reference points in the debate around the so-called “crisis of representation”, as it has been coined by Marcus and Fischer (1986). The critique raised in this context came down to the following question: if the locality of fields requires the presence of the researcher, what are the consequences for the possibilities of representation (see Fabian 1990)? This is because the understanding of a locally bounded field also limits the opportunities of gaining ethnographic knowledge to what is representable as occurring naturally, at a specific place, in order to authenticate the experience based on local presence as ‘real’, ‘different’, and ‘exclusive’.

Over the last two decades, the regularly articulated critique on the classical rationale for the ‘field’ in ethnographic research has stimulated a fundamental rethinking of the traditional concept and the practices of fieldwork relating to it (Sluka/Robben 2007). It is therefore barely surprising that, until today, the methodological discussion in ethnography has produced a number of approaches that can be understood as an attempt to overcome the localism and naturalism of the ethnographic field concept (Amit 2000). Primarily, they all react in different ways to the experience that the ‘field’ is not bound to only one place but potentially could be “everywhere”, as Deborah D’Amico-Samuels formulated it in the early 1990s (D’Amico-Samuels 1991: 83). This approach has been particularly common in ethnographic research dealing, for example, with virtual spaces, like networks and internet communities (cf. Henriksen 2002; Wittel 2000). It is also common in research that investigates geographically moving ‘subjects’ and forms of data, such as groups of migrants or the addressees of educational practices in general (cf. Mintz 1998), as well as documents, ideas, artefacts or digital communications. Other examples of how the traditional concept of field is increasingly questioned can be found in methodological debates on historical ethnography, an area of research where a local presence within a ‘field’ is impossible, since the object of interest has ceased to exist (Fenske/Bendix 2007; Maase 2001).

One of the most elaborate approaches in this respect is the so-called “multi-sited-ethnography”, as it was labelled by George Marcus in the middle of the 1990s, while he was highlighting a new methodological trend having emerged in ethnographic research from the early 1980s (Marcus 1986, 1989, 1995; also Falzon 2009; Coleman/von Hellermann 2012; Pierides 2010). Here, the attention of the researcher is no longer dedicated to one single ‘field’ that has to be explored as a whole and over a long time. The ‘field’ which multi-sited ethnography has in mind rather consists of different settings and contexts, and the researchers follow their (materialised) objects of interest (people, things, biographies etc.) through multi-local environments and periods of time. This
kind of “mobile ethnography”, as Marcus (1995: 99) writes, “expands from its committed localism” and finally displaces the field-related research strategies. More precisely, we can witness a methodological decoupling of ‘place’ and time on the one hand and the ‘field’ on the other.

Today, the consequences of the continuing critique of ethnography’s traditional localism are noticeable not least in the discussion of methodology and the development of research strategies in educational ethnography. This development is closely related to the experience that – especially in the age of globalisation – the limited focus on the locally bounded or single sites of education (e.g. classrooms, playgrounds, school buildings, or youth centres etc.) restricts investigations to locally situated events, and tends not only to forget the overarching discursive and political frameworks of local (educational) processes, but also their network-like interconnections to other sites within the same institutions, as well as to the surrounding social space of milieus, different socio-political sites, audiences, neighbourhoods, or other institutions of the same kind (Pierides 2010; see also Epstein/Fahey/Kenway 2013). The more conventional strategy is to follow the participants to different sites (for example from the classroom to the teachers conference in Breidenstein 2006) within the same setting or across different settings (for example studies investigating the diverse offices involved in case management processes of welfare services, see Nadai/Koch 2011). In addition, there are now more complex research designs which involve nothing else than the transnationalisation of the whole research process (see e.g. Huf/Panagiotopoulou 2011).

In line with this, Jane Kenway, co-leader of the current research project “Elite Schools in Globalizing Circumstances: A Multi-Sited Global Ethnography”, discusses in her contribution in how far the approach of multi-sited ethnography changes the traditional imagination of space, time, and mobility in ethnographic research. On the one hand, she points out to which extent current ethnographic research is still depending on the traditional idea of the single, locally bounded field or site; on the other hand, she also explains how traditional notions of space, time, and movement can be reworked in research praxis.

The methodical, methodological, and practical challenges of multi-sited ethnography are also at the centre of Stephan Wolff’s contribution. Drawing on his experiences with supervising doctoral projects making use of transnational field research, Wolff discusses the material, temporal, and social conditions that enable as well as limit the production of ethnographic knowledge in this context. In doing so, he also shows how practicing transnational research at multiple sites not only goes along with questioning the traditional imagination of individual sites and situations, but also with a continuing search for the objects of investigation and their analytical re-conceptualisation.

Another approach to conceptualising and exploring the trans-locality of the field is applied by Yuki Imoto. Instead of following people to various places of
occurrences, she reconstructs the trans-local character of an international preschool in Japan by tracing the individual stories, trajectories, and biographies of the different actors involved in this setting in order to reveal the trans-local character of the whole field. Thereby, she shows that the exploration of a field’s trans-locality is not only a question of where research is conducted, but also how it is conducted at a special site in terms of bringing back the trans-local relations of every day practice.

The field of early childhood education and care is also the focus of Sabine Bollig’s research, which aims at exploring the fractal reality of children’s day-care days in Luxembourg by observing this reality not at the single sites of day-care centres, but from the vantage point of children’s care-arrangements. On a theoretical level, her research applies a practice-theoretical approach to analyse how specific places and events are connected within the genesis and the actual ‘doing’ of these care-arrangements. On a methodical level, she develops a specific kind of multi-sited ethnography which transcends a locally bounded perspective on early-childhood-education institutions by ‘following’ and ‘tracing’ the multiple realities which coincide and interact in the daily accomplishment of distinct day-care childhoods.

**Who are the actors?**

The new emerging understanding of ‘field’ in educational ethnography and research on social work affects not only the expansion of places and settings or the translocalisation of objects under investigation in general. By moving away from a human-actor-focused situationalism, it also draws attention to the diversity of actors, agents, and agencies that are involved in these (trans-)local practices of education and social work. With the ‘analytical turn’ in educational ethnographies, ethnography’s ‘emic perspective’ could no longer be justified hermeneutically in how it had tried to understand subjective experiences, but in how it conceptualises these experiences by looking at the local level of social and societal processes. At first, this shift brought research to the fore which reconstructed the social and historical conditions and institutional dynamics as structural contexts or ‘super-structures’ of subjective experiences. But since the 1970s, the de-substantialisation of such cultural or structural concepts brought with it a radically different understanding of the actors in education and social work, extending even to the concept of the actor as such. This emerging decentring of human actors has been raising the question not only whether there are other actors besides human beings that should be taken into account, but also if the earlier strong centring on actors is still playing a role in ethnographic research. On a methodological level, this does not only affect how agency is linked to particular instances – independently of whether these are people, things, or systems – it also raises the question of how someone, or if anything at all, can become ‘agentic’.
A part of educational ethnographies has dealt from an early stage with more abstract ‘actors’, such as organisations and institutions, and has moved their ‘internal logic’ and ‘internal life’ into focus. This meant that the organisations themselves came into play as actors, for example, within their political and local environments (e.g. school development processes). But of equal importance was the question which positions for actors organisations ‘offer’ to their members and how the interests and agency of those are institutionally constituted (e.g. Wolcott 1973). Given that agency in education or social work is almost entirely performed within organisational contexts, the term ‘organisation’ is thus to be understood not only as referring to a separate level of rationality, but also as the pivot which allows analysing the educational action of individual actors in its welfare-state or market-based constitution.

In contrast to this, discourse- and field-theoretical conceptions of education and social work move their actors directly into the complex dynamics of discourses and fields, but without giving them the status of actors independent of their respective contexts. Along their traditionally critical attitude, educational ethnographies nurtured a special interest in the processes of habituation (Bourdieu) or subjectivation (Foucault) of learners and teachers alike, as reflected, for example, in the recently emerging ‘performance culture’ in schools (e.g. Rasmussen/Gustafsson/Jeffrey 2014). Ethnography appears here as a particularly potent approach to describe the production of certain subject positions in specific processes of embodiment. But, keeping the discursive structuring of those positions in mind, the aim is likewise to identify them as part of social processes that work across different localities and scales. While elaborating on those “ruling relations” between social discourses and everyday life, Dorothy Smith (2005) coined the term “institutional ethnography”, whereby the texts and documents that circulate between different practical contexts are given particular emphasis (‘textually-mediated social organisation’).

This interest in the interplay of complex constellations of actors has also influenced theoretical designs that describe the social as network (Latour), assemblage (Deleuze/Guattari), or arrangement (Schatzki), even though these theories do not principally address the ‘ruling relations’ but more directly processes of concatenation of bundles of practices, scattered in time and space, and their rhizome-like connections. Looking at who the actors of education and social work are, these so-called ‘flat ontologies’ (Marston/Jones/Woodward 2005), however, also share a perception of actor positions merely as nodes inside networks, i.e. they try to determine these as a medium and outcome of multiple, connected practices and their trajectories (cf. Eßer 2014; Oswell 2013; Bollig/Kelle 2015). Paradoxically, in this context, the actor-network-theory with its interest in networks of translation (Latour 1996) still holds on most firmly to the traditional conception of the actor, even though it simultaneously elicited the most radical decentring of human actors by ascribing actantiality to all so-
social entities, people, objects, discourses, etc. Latour’s position can in many ways be understood as a key driver in the establishment of sociomaterial approaches, since it emphasises the ‘scripts’ and services of objects, technologies, and artefacts in the fields of education and social work (see, for example, Kontopodis 2007; Lenz Taguchi 2010; Fenwick/Edwards 2013). Its radical symmetrisation of humans and non-humans, however, is strongly criticised, especially with respect to its concomitant intentionalistic concept of the actor (Hirschauer 2004; Sørensen 2009; Neumann 2012; Rabenstein/Wieneke 2012). Instead, the “interplay between practices and objects, between interactivity and inter-objectivity” should be brought to the fore, as advocated by Kalthoff and Röhl (2011). Considering this heterogeneity of theoretical conceptions of the actor and empirical actor positions, two elements are at stake when investigating the actors of education and social work: who is involved in which ways as an actor in the everyday production of education and social work, and what must be seen in which ways as an actor?

Identifying the actors of educational realities is of consequence for the constitution of the objects of research and for the methods deployed, as shown in the section “Who are the actors?”. The contributions gathered in this section discuss this not only with reference to different research fields and research questions, but also regarding their various conceptualisations of the ‘locus of action’.

Tobias Röhl’s contribution provides a conceptual framework for an ethnography of learning and teaching that focuses on the sociomateriality of school practices and, therefore, takes the local practices of teachers and learners seriously, while still accounting for practices that extend beyond the here and now of a given situation. He argues that adopting a sociomaterial perspective brings with it both an agential and a transsituative shift, which emphasises how objects ‘act’ as mediators between the local classroom practices and other sites. Therefore, such a transsituative perspective on education calls for a multi-sited ethnography in which the researcher follows the material mediators connecting different sites.

The text by Tara Fenwick, Sarah Doyle, Maureen Michael, and Jennifer Scoles deals with practical questions of sociomaterial approaches in the context of research on professional learning. Using three doctoral projects in progress as example, the authors reveal how “sociomateriality” – in the concrete interplay of research field, subject, and social-theoretical approach – can be studied by developing appropriate and innovative research methods.

While these two contributions emphasise objects and artefacts as ‘actors’ of education, Christoph Maeder argues in his empirical contribution not to lose sight of the work of humans which has to be done in human/non-human relationships. He uses the example of ICT in the classroom, in this specific case computer and whiteboard, to reveal the continuous situated repair work
undertaken by students and teachers necessary in the first place to use this technology for learning processes. Therefore, Maeder points to how ICT and pupils assemble in the classroom, and to how materials and everyday practices melt into human activity, which is entangled with the meanings and cultural discourses of artefacts.

The contribution of Helga Kelle deals with interferences of governmental and situated regulations in the school entry procedures of German primary schools. By advocating an ethnographic approach that integrates organisational and governance-analytical research perspectives, she demonstrates the productivity of such a methodology of educational ethnography, highlighting the practical interdependencies of educational policy, socio-spatial environment, infrastructure, school culture, and local types of proceedings.

This section finishes with the contribution of Robert Fairbanks, which deals with the complex governance of prisoners in the context of US recovery programmes for incarcerated drug abusers. His contribution uses a material analysis of the history and contextualisation of these recovery programmes linked to mass incarceration in Illinois to show how ethnographic case-study methodology should be combined with historical analysis, critical theory, and a multi-scalar and multi-sited ethnography in order to comprehend provisionally the complexity and contradictory nature of prison reform on the ground.

What is education?

Given the inventory so far, this book aims at relating recent methodological developments in ethnographic research and the corresponding empirical findings to overarching questions concerning the empirical foundations of educational theory and the modes of constructing objects and building theory in educational research. In this sense, the basic question is how educational realities can be observed as such, and what entities and processes constitute the fields of education, learning, and social work. Just as the places and actors of education and learning have turned from presuppositions into the very questions of research, likewise the meanings and demarcations of what is to be identified as ‘educational’ in the first place have been called into question.

Ethnography with its decided posture of openness, its gesture of discovery, and its scepticism towards the taken-for-granted has had a notable share in the process of dissolving or challenging the objects and boundaries of educational research. It is fundamentally concerned with how a given social reality is constituted in the very process of its enactment (e.g. Lüders 2000; Thole 2010). With its radical empiricism ethnography thus helps to deconstruct the established disciplinary knowledge about what is education and how it is constituted (see also Honig/Neumann 2013). By taking a methodical and reflexive distance to the aims and intentions of professional pedagogical practices, it is “decentring
the pedagogical gaze” (Hünersdorf/Müller/Maeder 2008: 13) and promoting a non-normative understanding of education (Honig 2004). An analytical ethnographic approach methodologically suspends any preconceived understanding of ‘what is going on’ – in this case education – and focuses instead on how the educational practice is constituting itself in the course of its enactment (Honig/Neumann 2013), how ‘learning subjects’ are accordingly addressed and subjectified (Beach/Dovemark 2011; Reh et al. 2015), and how they develop the related knowledge ‘to know’ (Kalthoff 1997).

At the same time, this approach also calls attention to the dispersion and diversity of educational phenomena outside the traditional institutional spaces of education, care, and social work. Rather than presupposing what is educational about – for example – the fields of employment agencies, development aid, or medical assistance, it aims at describing and reconstructing how specific processes and practices are operationally performed and demarcated as ‘education’ in opposition to what is not ‘education’ (Hünersdorf/Müller/Maeder 2008: 14). Phenomena like education, learning, or personal development are disassociated from individual actors and predetermined spaces and are instead investigated as the products of social practices, which themselves generate the preconditions to observe these phenomena as individual processes (e.g. Bollig 2013; Schulz 2013; Neumann 2014). The sites where education is constituted are no longer predefined and, above all, they are not confined to the physical boundaries of institutional settings like schools, classrooms, childcare centres etc. The question is how educational fields manage to observe themselves and be observed by others as a specific and distinguishable ‘educational’ social reality (Neumann 2013: 21) – in other words: how do they produce their own ‘accountability’? With these considerations, the ethnographic approach is eventually distancing itself from any subject-centred and normatively predetermined understanding of education, moving towards a more praxeological and performative view (Hünersdorf 2008: 36; Wulf/Zirfas 2007). The focus is not on the effects, the successes, or the failings of education, but on the actual processes of ‘doing education’.

This volume, and particularly the last section, is thus centring on the complex interrelationships between the empirical exploration and the theoretical conceptualisation of the research objects in educational ethnography. ‘Education’ is no longer tied to specific places and actors as a given fact; rather it is conceptualised as a complex practical accomplishment that is produced both by specific (trans-)local processes going on in the fields of educational research and by the ethnographic gaze itself. Researchers therefore ask how educational fields are constituted as such, how they construct their actors and addressees, how they develop practical routines and create distinct forms of professionalism. Answers to these questions require novel and innovative methodological approaches, methodical strategies, and research designs. Ethnography as a
both socially and spatially mobile research strategy is well suited to overcome
the restricted focus on individual interactions, typical of the pedagogical gaze,
thus decenering the notion of the unity of time, space, person, and action (Neu-
mann 2013: 21). Drawing on various kinds of empirical data, this methodology
also allows directing the attention beyond the interactions between profession-
als and their addressees, towards the institutional, organisational, material,
corporal, etc. dimensions and modalities of the everyday practice in settings
that are encoded as ‘educational’.

In this regard, the multimodality of educational realities refers, on the
one hand, to the diverse (spatial, temporal, sensual, material, etc.) layers of
social organisation and practice (cf. Atkinson/Delamont/Housley 2008), and,
on the other hand, to the (multimedia, hyper-textual, poly-vocal etc.) forms
of representing ethnographically generated knowledge (cf. Dicks/Soyinka/
Coffey 2006). By drawing attention to the detail and complexity of social life,
ethnography is itself developing into a more sophisticated, complex, and multi-
layered approach. It increasingly focuses on the “multiple modes of social
construction that are available to the ethnographer and that are constitutive of
the complexity of everyday social life” (Atkinson/Delamont/Housley 2008: 214).
A multimodal ethnography thus explores how the narrative, the visual, material,
the body, space, place, and time interrelate and connect in the accomplishment of
social orders and realities as a dynamical, nonlinear, and emergent process (see
also Dicks et al. 2011). Meanwhile, this sociological approach to multimodality
is building on the theoretical foundations of social semiotics with its interest in
the multiple modes of meaning and meaning-making (e.g. Kress/van Leeuwen
2001; van Leeuwen 2005; Kress 2010). In order to go beyond a naïve ‘integration’
or additive model of multiplicity in ethnographic research, ethnographers
finally need to draw on a theoretically informed and empirically grounded
understanding of how the different modalities of social life function and how
they can be analysed.

In this line, the contribution by Gunther Kress presents the basic theoretical
framework of a social-semiotic approach to multimodality, exploring its links
and possible points of connection with ethnographic research. Particularly the
notions of meaning-making as “semiotic work” and signs as the “traces of prior
semiotic work” lend themselves as possible analytical tools for an ethnography
that is interested in the multiple layers in which social realities are constructed
and given meaning.

Oliver Schnoor then explicitly picks up the notion of multimodality to exam-
ine the practical and situated interrelations of space, place, and sound in the
enactment of early-educational realities in Luxembourgish childcare centres.
His analyses demonstrate how pedagogical practices construct their own ac-
countability as professional educational practice through particular spatial and
sonic practices, which are by themselves bodily rooted and materially mediated.
The next chapter by Claudia Seele also draws on research in Luxembourgish early-childcare settings, adding the specific multilingual dimension as part of the complexity of this educational field. She focuses on language not simply as narrative but as a both situated and contextual social practice that contributes to the construction and differentiation of the institutional social order and thus to the practical accomplishment of early education.

This practice-theoretical perspective is taken further by Marc Schulz in his article on education as a trans-local phenomenon, which is actively connected to, but not exclusively rooted in, the individual child’s body. Rather, the performative enactment of education is dispersed – spatially as well as temporally, materially and personally – across the everyday early-educational practice. The central concern then is not what education is, but where, when, and how it is made visible, presented, and ascribed to the child.

In the final contribution, Dominik Krinninger exceeds the realm of publicly organised care and education, focussing instead on the family as an important, yet often neglected, setting where education is constituted. His article sheds light on the interplay between theoretical and empirical perspectives in the construction and exploration of the ethnographic research object. Arguing for the use of complex theoretical tools in order to grasp the complexities of the object of study, the author understands the family as a “social figuration”, where different personal, social, and material relations intersect in dynamical ways. The ethnographic observation in this case focuses on the private household only as an entry point into these complex interrelationships, consciously not equating the site and the object of research.

**Conclusion**

The contributions gathered in this volume demonstrate that current developments in educational ethnography have serious consequences not only for educational ethnography itself (this might be taken for granted), but also for the basic understanding of educational phenomena in general. However, by providing this brief and – in this sense – also perspectival and selective inventory of approaches, we do not claim to cover the whole range and variety of MultiPluriTrans-tendencies in educational ethnography. It should also be obvious that the general questions providing the logical structure of this volume, are, in fact, overlapping and cannot easily be separated from each other. The way the field of research is conceptualised, for example, necessarily also influences to whom agency is ascribed and which assumptions are made about the processes considered as ‘educational’ and vice versa. This also applies to the several levels of reflection addressed in this volume. Theoretical assumptions inform methodological decisions while also shaping possible empirical
insights, which, in turn, can initiate further theoretical reasoning and so on. The recursive relation between these levels is also reflected in the different entry points chosen by the authors of this volume to develop their arguments. Not least, their papers also open up a wide range of topics and valuable questions, demonstrating both the variety of educational realities and the perspectives under which they can be explored.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The contributions to this volume are revised and expanded versions of papers held at the conference “MultiPluriTrans. Emerging Fields in Educational Ethnography”, which took place in Luxembourg from November 21-23, 2013. This conference was co-funded by the Luxembourgian National Research Fund (Fonds National de la Recherche, FNR). We thank all participants for the stimulating and productive discussions, and we thank all authors of this volume for the outstanding cooperation. Our goal was not simply to gather unconnected, individual contributions in this volume, but to create the most coherent possible connection between them, while focusing on the overarching research question. This has demanded a lot of patience and commitment from them.

The editors would also like to thank Melanie Monzel and Pit Péporté for the technical and linguistic improvement of the manuscript. Their dedicated, meticulous work and their patience greatly disburdened the editors and represent an irreplaceable contribution to the success of this project.

Finally, we want to thank the Research Unit INSIDE at the University of Luxembourg and its head, Prof. Dr. Dieter Ferring, for the generous financial support.

REFERENCES


Delamont, Sarah/Atkinson, Paul (1980): “The Two Traditions of Ethnography in Education: Sociology and Anthropology Compared.” In: British Journal of Sociology of Education 1/2, pp. 139-152.


