

International Ethnography-Conference

## 'Going public'? –Ethnography in Education and Social Work and its Publics

October 31<sup>st</sup> – November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019

Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany

### Call for Papers

Ethnography maintains a tense relationship with the public(s). At first glance, it prefers small worlds, micro-level settings, cultural and institutional practices in a defined, locally observable space. At the same time, it produces public effects on the encountered local worlds – through the observers entering the field and most definitely with the publication of their observations. However, ethnography is confronted with forms of publics that are constitutive of (pedagogical) fields themselves. It also encounters traces of public media, e.g. scandalizing (social-)pedagogical institutions and influencing the understanding of education, care and learning. Currently, ethnography is itself increasingly called upon to address broader publics. Against that background the 'public' provides a useful category to reflect the theoretical and methodological developments within ethnography in educational science and its political role anew.

As for **theories of the public**, ethnography might first raise the question on how publics are being construed and also changed at the present. In the bourgeois society, the 'public' was construed as a sphere opposing the 'private', which was connoted by family and personal space. It was imagined with an emphasis on possibilities for participation, social transparency and democratic negotiation. Yet, simultaneously the 'bourgeois public sphere' established specific power relations, created particular social closures, and was last but not least also characterised by patriarchal gender relations. This conceptualization of *the* public didn't take into account the existence of 'multiple publics'. Developments in the last decade such as new media, the digitalisation of living conditions and the change of the political sphere have not only brought about new forms of the public, but are also accompanied with a still little addressed fundamental change of the public as a category. From the perspective of education and social work the following questions, among others, arise:

- Which new publics are created or changed in the course of the rising significance of participation regarding institutional and professional cooperation (e.g. transitions, education landscapes, child protection)?
- How can processes of socialisation and learning in and through digital media be captured by educational ethnography and how does the understanding of socialisation and learning itself change in these new publics?
- How does the conception of family education change in ethnography in education and social work considering the new contouring of the public and the private including 'new attentions for the family'?

**Methodologically**, ethnography is intertwined with the publicness of social practices, as they have to be visible to observe them. With social practices – also pedagogical or didactical practices – shifting to social networks and digital publics, new questions arise regarding the possibilities of observation. At the same time ethnography is woven into a game of public-making: As a practice of observation it enters fields which are structured by the difference of 'public' and 'private' themselves. In doing so, ethnography inevitably changes this difference: 'participant' observation might make 'private' spaces 'public', or 'local publics' might be drawn into the broader 'public sphere'.

Against this background, methodological questions like the following arise:

- How does the mode of 'participation', but also of data collection methods and analytical methods (the embodiment of the observer, recording technologies etc.) change in ethnographic research?
- How are publics constituted through ethnographic research in a practical way and in relation to the codes of public and private that are relevant to the field?

- Which ethical questions arise from new possibilities of investigating digital contexts or publishing the results using different forms like films, theatre, etc.?

Ethnography is inevitably **political** in carrying out its practice and establishing its relations to the field. Ethnographers present and publish their results, entering new publics laden with power relations as they do so and also creating new publics to the observed. Yet, how do ethnographers reflect and observe this political dimension in their own practice? Approaches such as 'public ethnography' mark in their self-understanding a new type of ethnographic research that, juxtaposing the descriptive and analytical ethnography, has found little consideration to date. Thus, it needs to be discussed, among other questions, how a 'public educational ethnography' may be defined:

- How does educational ethnography consider its effects not only on pedagogical fields, but also on educational science as a discipline, on media, and also on societal and political publics?

- What risks are implied in an educational ethnography that understands itself as political? How might the methodological orientation of ethnography possibly change if it claims to be politically influential? What role does 'collaborative ethnography' play in this context?

- How can ethnography become more popular to wider audiences? Which forms of representation are suitable to convey ethnographic results beyond their textual integration in theoretical discourses?

Educational ethnography studies publics, it constitutes them, and it turns with its findings to the publics. The international conference invites contributions to these three dimensions as well as discussions on their interrelations, relying on own ethnographic studies.

Contributions to the conference can be submitted in the following **three formats**:

1. **Oral presentation** related to the topic of the conference. For oral presentation, 20 minutes are scheduled as well as 20 minutes for discussion. Abstracts may be up to 500 words long.
2. **Symposia** related to the topic of the conference with up to four contributions to a common, overarching discussion. For symposia, 120 minutes are scheduled. Abstracts may be up to 800 words long.
3. **Workshops** dedicated to concrete (experimental) formats of ethnographic representation. For workshops 120 minutes are scheduled. Abstracts may be up to 800 words long.

We will especially value English-speaking contributions, symposia or workshops, as (at least) one of the parallel events will always be conducted in English. Please submit your abstract in English or German from the conference home page at: <https://mlu.de/ethno2019>. **Deadline for abstract submissions: February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019**. The outcome of the selection will be communicated by **March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019**.

For questions and additional information contact: [ethno@paedagogik.uni-halle.de](mailto:ethno@paedagogik.uni-halle.de).

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