



Pedagogical Relational Teachership - A Multi-Relational Perspective

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Abstract

This paper presents a new theoretical multi-relational perspective, Pedagogical Relational Teachership (PeRT), which can support the development of new knowledge about teachers' relational proficiencies. In the field of inclusive education, PeRT can address relational challenges in today's schools by focusing on interpersonal relationships and relational values. It is a radical alternative that explores teaching conditions to enable subjectification, so that students can emerge as unique subjects. Through a relational-oriented approach, the spotlight is directed towards students' participation in their education. From a pedagogical perspective, PeRT uses a three-dimensional model highlighting interpersonal relationships at micro, meso, and macro levels within the educational system. The first dimension is based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The second dimension includes a model which highlights different aspects of relational teachership. This part of the model is inspired by Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, which focuses on children's growth in different environments. The third dimension of the model presents a tool for relational and didactic aspects in teaching. PeRT's multi-dimensional model can provide an enhanced relational understanding of different educational environments. The model can be used in teacher education, as well as in research within pedagogy, didactics, and special educational studies. Accordingly, PeRT is a new perspective that can support future empirical research on students' participation and aspects of accessibility and equity.

Keywords: *Relational teachership, inclusive education, participation, accessibility, equity;*

1. Introduction

The school is a social and relational meeting place and, in the daily interaction between teachers and students, different kinds of relationships emerge. International research reviews [1] show that trustful relationships between teachers and students are important for laying the foundation for students' growth; despite this knowledge, there are few empirical studies which deepen the relational part of the teaching profession. Since the turn of the millennium, there has been an increased focus on teachers' relational competence, which concerns how a teacher enters into social relationships with respect for the individual student. At the same time as research reveals how teachers' relational proficiencies are crucial for educational success, research also clarifies that the relational part of teaching can be learned and developed through continual daily interaction with students [2] [3]. However, the field of relational pedagogy [4] is small and largely unexplored, and needs a more precise theoretical starting point [5]. This paper presents a new theoretical multi-relational perspective, Pedagogical Relational Teachership (PeRT), that can support the development of new knowledge about teachers' relational proficiencies and how they can be established in school practice to develop trustful interpersonal relationships.

2. Pedagogical Relational Teachership

PeRT is a theoretical perspective of teaching and education. It is pedagogical in the sense of exploring opportunities and obstacles for students' participation in democratic educational relationships, with the right of the child to appear as unique [6] [3]. Through a relational-oriented approach, the spotlight is directed towards interpersonal relationships and teachers' relational proficiencies. It is an approach that acknowledges the social and relational character of teaching. The construction, mediation, and development of knowledge within PeRT stems from a relational teaching perspective grounded in intersubjective traditions of philosophy. The concept *relational teachership* can be seen as an umbrella term for this theoretical perspective. By shedding light on proficiencies which originate from empirical classroom research [3], relational teachership is a vital concept exploring how teachers relate to their students in ways that create respectful and trustful relationships.

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2.1 PeRT – a three-dimensional model

PeRT is a multi-relational theoretical perspective that uses a three-dimensional model for exploring educational relationships, in a wider web of relations from social to societal levels. The model also visualizes how pedagogy and didactics are constantly intertwined within teaching, where both the students' *participation* and *accessibility* to the subject content are essential core values.

2.2 First Dimension

PeRT is a theoretical perspective within the field of inclusive education based on *The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)* [7]. Children have a fundamental right to education and to participate in democratic educational relationships, democratic in the sense of emerging as a unique person. It is a relational approach to education that emphasizes respect for *each unique child*, and the child's right to take part in education that enables their potential. This highlights an essential shift from child policy to child rights policy. Today, there is a need for new research, as well as theories and models that can contribute to the implementation and the realization of the CRC.

The first dimension of PeRT is based on the child's rights, where four Articles are guiding principles: Article 2 (right to non-discrimination), Article 3 (adherence to the best interests of the child), Article 6 (right to life and development), and Article 12 (right to express views and to be heard). In accordance with children's participation, these Articles represent the underlying requirements for any and all rights to be realized, and the interests of the child can be regarded as an overall principle. Paramount, it is important to emphasize that rights are rights, and should not be confused with care and goodness. People are born with physical and intellectual variations, and children's different forms of being, existing and becoming, is an assignment for teachers to respond upon, in order to attend to the value of each and every child. Accordingly, PeRT is a relational perspective that values children's lives and sustains children's rights within the educational system.

2.3 Second Dimension

A relational perspective has implications for all levels of the educational system, since teachers and students are in relation with each other within their greater environment. Our actions are embedded in relationships in a complex school system and PeRT's multidimensional model was created to make relational conditions more visible.

The second dimension of PeRT's model reveals different aspects of a relational teachership, as well as the relationship between teachers and students. The model is inspired by Bronfenbrenner's [8] ecological model that focuses on quality for children and young people's growing in different environments. Bronfenbrenner describes his model as bioecological by taking the child's biological and psychological conditions into account. This differs from PeRT's relational model where the spotlight is aimed at interpersonal relational processes within the education system.

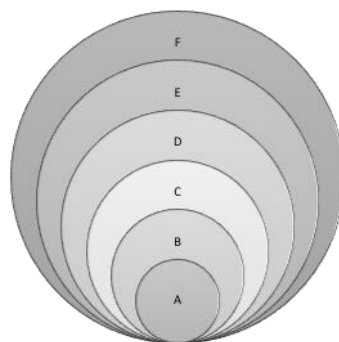


Figure 1. The model shows how different aspects of relational teachership are closely intertwined from a micro-level to a macro-level.

The ontological point of departure (A) emphasizes *the relationship as primary*. The micro-level (B) is able to zoom in on *the interpersonal interaction* when teacher and student meet face-to-face. At the third level (C), *the teacher-student relationship* comes more into focus, where a relational meaning appears as the teacher searches for *Who* the student is. The next level (D) reveals *relational aspects of what it means to teach and be a teacher*. In addition, the organizational meso-level (E) illustrates how people in the school and the municipality cooperate and manage the organization of teaching, with different collaborative forms, financial resources, teachers' proficiencies and the physical



environment. Finally, the model displays an overall societal macro-level (F) with political intentions, governance, laws, power relations, research, knowledge and global influences. On the macro-level, there are also different macro systems that together form the social macro system. Children belong to different macro systems depending on social, ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as families living in various areas and municipalities. Relationships within the family and other social circles are also part of the child when entering the classroom.

Although, the micro-, meso- and macro-levels are closely intertwined, they sometimes need to be illuminated separately. When exploring and problematizing different relational aspects, one can *zoom in* on one of the analytical levels, then *zoom out* and analyse them together.

2.4 Third Dimension

The third dimension of PeRT's model addresses how school subjects and didactic aspects are distinguished in teaching. The didactic triangle emphasizes *purpose*, *content* and *methods* of teaching, together with the classic didactic questions of *why*, *what* and *how*. But the didactic triangle is lacking the people who participate in the teaching community. PeRT's model does not only highlight these people, but also places the relationships between teachers and students at the heart of teaching. Hence, in order to create an extended relational understanding of situated teaching, the didactic triangle is expanded by four relational questions of *why*, *where*, *when* and *how*, and forms the shape of a star. These *relational questions* highlight different aspects of the emergence of the student's self [6][3].

- Why* – to create possibilities for students to speak with their unique voices.
- Where* – the in-between, the space between teacher and student, face-to-face.
- When* – the moment's acknowledgement in the now.
- How* – pedagogical tactfulness.

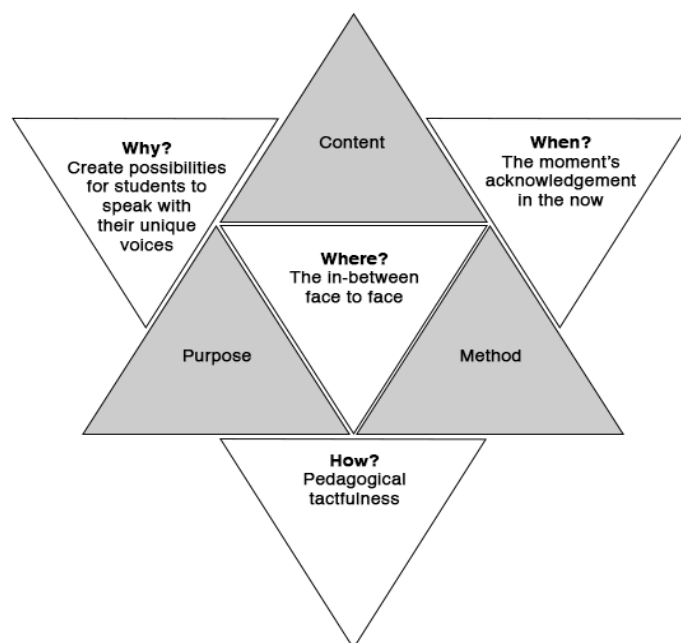


Figure 2: PeRT's third dimension illustrates a relational and didactic star.

In the search for new opportunities about how teaching can create space for the emergence of the student's self, a focus on traditional didactic issues is not enough. Teaching is a complex interaction; a teacher starts with a lesson plan and mediates the subject content during the lesson, while at the same time being involved in a wide range of interpersonal interactions. The relational and didactic star clearly shows how pedagogy and didactics converge, when teachers and students draw attention to a



topic, as well as to each other. To summarize, the relational and didactic star has potential to enlighten both relational values and didactic aspects, as well as different contexts.

3. Discussion

From a global perspective, modern education must address issues of diversity. Given human diversity, all children have an equal right to participate in education of high quality, where they can speak with their unique voices and listen to the voices of others. PeRT is a multi-relational theoretical perspective, that illuminates all levels of the education system, which endeavours to create sustainable conditions for students' participation. This relational perspective on teaching starts from the assumption of equality [6] and sustains children's right within the education system. PeRT's multi-dimensional model illustrates facets of relational teachership at different levels within the education system and provides possibilities for an enhanced relational understanding of educational environments. The model enables exploration of the nexus of relations, from micro-level to macro-level, with existential dimensions and relational values. In conclusion, it is essential to position the relationship between teachers and students at the core of the model.

PeRT is an invitation to scholars and practitioners to use the multi-relational model as creative inspiration for seeking new knowledge and understanding about *participation*, *accessibility* and *equity*. Such cooperative relational work is an endeavour about how democracy is taking place. Nothing is more important to our mutual future.

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