

RESEARCH

SEMINAR



RELATIONAL
INQUIRY IN THE
SOCIAL
SCIENCES



CO-ORDINATOR
A/PROF
SCOTT EACOTT

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Scott Eacott leads the Advancing Relational Thinking (ART) Lab in the School of Education at UNSW Sydney. He has developed a distinctive relational research program, best captured in *Beyond leadership: a relational approach to organisational theory in education* (2018, Springer). A/Prof Eacott has been invited to speak about his relational approach in Norway, Canada, Indonesia, South Africa, Mexico and all states of Australia.

Using a variety of approaches, my classes are distinctive for their privileging of rigorous and robust discussion and debate of key ideas. Unlike conservative lecture or tutorial models, my teaching approach draws on the traditional research seminar model.

The seminar approach involves faculty and participants engaging in meaningful dialogue around key readings. In particular, it is about challenging participant's ways of thinking and seeking to develop a commitment to the logic of scholarly debate – argument and refutation.

It is expected that all participants complete the necessary pre-reading for classes and are prepared to offer their position and defend that position in the face of criticism. It is through this justification that I believe the greatest learning takes place.

SEMINAR

OVERVIEW



While relations have always been central to the social sciences, there has been increasing interest and even a 'relational turn' in contemporary social thought and analysis (Dépelteau, 2018; Donati, 2011; Emirbayer, 1997; Prandini, 2015). The fundamental shift of relational scholarship is a move away from seeing the social world as one constituted by things to one focused on unfolding relations.

As Pierpaolo Donati (2015) argues, society does not have relations but is relations. Relational scholarship is however not a homogeneous space. There are many different forms (e.g., Dépelteau, 2018). What they share is that in moving away from an entity based approach.

Relational scholarship allows us to understand the world in ways not previously possible. For higher degree researchers (including honours candidates), it offers both a methodology and a suite of theoretical resources.

This seminar provides an introduction to relational sociology and in particular Eacott's [relational approach](#). Emphasis will be given to locating this approach as both a methodology and suite of theoretical resources and it can be mobilised for the study of any topic of interest.

COURSE

OVERVIEW



SCHEDULE / READING LIST

This seminar involves a number of readings from books, edited collections and journal articles as the basis for rigorous and robust scholarly debate of ideas.

PRESCRIBED TEXT

Eacott, S. (2018). *Beyond leadership: a relational approach to organisational theory in education*. Springer.

Topic One: Relational approaches to the social sciences

Essential Reading:

Dépelteau, F. (2018). [Relational thinking in sociology: relevance, concurrence and dissonance](#). In F. Dépelteau (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology* (pp. 3-33). Palgrave Macmillan.

Supplementary Readings

Emirbayer, M. (1997). [Manifesto for a Relational Sociology](#). *American Journal of Sociology*, 103(2), 281-317.

Prandini, R. (2015). [Relational sociology: a well-defined sociological paradigm or a challenging 'relational turn' in sociology](#). *International Review of Sociology*, 25(1), 1-14.

Vandenberghe, F. (2018). [The Relation as Magical Operator: Overcoming the Divide Between Relational and Processual Sociology](#). In F. Dépelteau (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Relational Sociology* (pp. 35-57). Palgrave Macmillan.

Topic Two: The *relational* approach**Essential Reading:**

Eacott, S. (2019). [Starting points for a relational approach to organizational theory: an overview](#). *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership*, 4(1), 16-45.

Supplementary Reading:

Eacott, S. (2019). [The relational approach and social epistemology in educational leadership: a rejoinder](#). *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership*, 4(1), 166-193.

Topic Three: Underlying generative assumptions**Essential Reading:**

Eacott, S. (2018). [Embedded and embodied auctors](#). In S. Eacott, *Beyond leadership: a relational approach to organisational theory in education* (pp. 81-94). Springer.

Supplementary Reading:

Bourdieu, P., Chamboredon, J.-C., & Passeron, J.-C. (1991[1968]). Part one - the break. In P. Bourdieu, J.C. Chamboredon, & J.C. Passeron, *The craft of sociology: epistemological preliminaries* (R. Nice, Trans., pp. 13-31). Walter de Gruyter.

Topic Four: Problematising the research object**Essential Reading:**

Eacott, S. (2018). [Beyond "leadership"](#). In S. Eacott, *Beyond leadership: a relational approach to organisational theory in education* (pp. 95-111). Springer.

Topic Five: Constitution and emergence**Essential Reading:**

Eacott, S. (2018). [The matter of context](#). In S. Eacott, *Beyond leadership: a relational approach to organisational theory in education* (pp. 113-128). Springer.

Supplementary Reading:

Selg, P. (2020). [Causation is not everything: on constitution and trans-actional view of social science methodology](#). In C. Morgner (Ed.), *John Dewey and the notion of trans- action: a sociological reply on rethinking relations and social processes* (pp. 31-53). Springer.

Topic Six: Beyond analytical dualism**Essential Reading:**

Eacott, S. (2018). [Overcoming analytical dualism](#). In S. Eacott, *Beyond leadership: a relational approach to organisational theory in education* (pp. 129-142). Springer.

Supplementary Reading:

Guy, J.-S. (2019). [Structure and Agency: Problem and Solution](#). In J.S. Guy, *Theory Beyond Structure and Agency: Introducing the Metric/Nonmetric Distinction* (pp. 25-47). Springer International Publishing.



Topic Seven: Generative contributions

Essential Reading:

Eacott, S. (2018). [Productive thinking](#). In S. Eacott, *Beyond leadership: a relational approach to organisational theory in education* (pp. 143-163). Springer.

Topic Eight: Reviews/Critiques of the relational approach

Essential Reading:

Elonga Mboyo, J.P. (2019). [Moving forward amidst the swirls: Reframing the relational approach as a step 'beyond' leadership](#). *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership*, 4(1), 47-79.

Supplementary Readings:

Bogotch, I., Bauer, S., & Su-Keene, E. (2019). [New beginnings, repeated: The continuing search for educational leadership](#). *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership*, 4(1), 110-146.

Branson, C.M. & Marra, M (2019). [Leadership as a relational phenomenon: What this means in practice](#). *Research in Educational Administration and Leadership*, 4(1), 81-108.

English, F.W. (2018). [Relational goods, democracy, and the paradox of epistemic privilege](#). In S. Eacott, *Beyond leadership: A relational approach to organizational theory in education* (pp. 189-197). Springer.

Gunter, H.M. (2018). [Advancing the intellectual development of the field](#). In S. Eacott, *Beyond leadership: A relational approach to organizational theory in education* (pp. 167-176). Springer.

Oplatka, I. (2016). [Educational administration and the relational approach: Can we suffice contextual-based knowledge production?](#) *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations*, 25(2), 41-52.

Riveros, G. (2016). [Thinking relationally about the 'school leader'](#). *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations*, 25(2), 15-24.

Wallin, D. (2016). [Productive conversations from a feminist perspective](#). *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations*, 25(2), 25-40.

All readings, essential and supplementary, will be made available to participants through the [UNSW Library](#).

In addition, a list of further readings / resources will be made available by the seminar co-ordinator.

Further opportunities include joining regular ART Lab meetings and monthly meetings of an international network of relational theorists.

THE ART LAB



The **Advancing Relational Thinking Lab** is pushing the edge of what we know about the social world. Our work is located within a network of renowned and emerging scholars whose ongoing work is seriously and consequentially engaged in theoretical and methodological developments in relational research. Scholarship from the team is therefore aimed at the forefront of contemporary thought and analysis and in doing so, stimulates dialogue and debates in the the field.

We are constantly seeking outstanding researchers whether they are Honours, Masters, Doctoral, Post-Doc, Interns, or Visiting Scholars to undertake projects that advance our goal of changing the way people think and act through the *relational* approach. Current opportunities can be found in the [2021 Research Prospectus](#).


The **Advancing Relational Thinking Lab's** primary purpose is creating a research environment dedicated to fostering and delivering internationally recognised research and research training.

This is achieved through weekly Lab meetings, monthly international network meetings, an annual symposium, and establishing collaborations with key national and international scholars and research centres to develop new and ground-breaking theories and methodologies relevant to the contemporary world.

For details contact [A/Prof Eacott](#)

FEEDBACK AND

TESTIMONIALS

A man in a dark jacket and light shirt is speaking at a seminar. In the background, a presentation slide is visible with text including "How Victorian princ...", "0 report", "Prime Min...", and "schools mus...".

A/Prof Eacott's Relational inquiry seminar provided the opportunity for rich and diverse opportunity for discussion, critique, analysis and perhaps most powerfully, conversation. His approach of combining an overarching structure and encouraging naturalistic dialogue offered the participants meaningfully opportunity to engage with each other's ideas as colleagues.

Guy, PhD candidate in education

The Relational Inquiry seminar provided a useful forum to critically explore and deconstruct ideas. It was really useful for me as a new PhD student to help my thinking about theory in an applied way. It allowed deeper review of the relational literature with applicability across disciplines, projects and interest areas

Paul, PhD candidate in social policy

Such a valuable contribution to my thinking about theory and its application! The session structure, key texts, supplementary readings and A/Prof Eacott's thoughtful facilitation provided an environment conducive to rigorous examination of ideas and robust discussion.

Kath, PhD candidate in sociology of health

A supportive and generative forum within which to explore the *relational* approach. It challenged me to question and engage with my assumptions about research

Ben, PhD candidate in disability studies