

# Relating



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# INTRODUCTION TO THE DIMENSION OF RELATING

Relationships seem to be what matters most for human beings. According to some social psychologist good relations are the only reliable indicator of happiness (Tice & Baumister, 2001).

In fact, others found that self-esteem reflects our social relations: if we are well surrounded and can count on others we have high self-esteem, and if we do not think we have good relations then we have low self-esteem (Leary, 2005). Finally, some evolutionary psychologists assert that the human brain evolved specifically to deal with the challenges of social interaction (Cosmides & Tooby, 1992).

Most of us crave the attention and recognition of others. However it is all a question of a subtle balance: too much attention, too much recognition equally may be perceived as intrusive or threatening. Sometimes we find a happy reciprocal balance. When this happens, we feel 'connected' to each other.

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# How is relating relevant in adult education?

There are at least three different angles from which it's worth exploring relations within adult education.

## 1. Horizontality vs verticality

One of the key features of a learning experience is the hierarchical distance between learners and facilitators.

In a vertical organisation of relationships the roles are asymmetrical: the educator is seen as the one possessing the relevant knowledge, responsible for passing it to the learners, who are passive recipients. In a horizontal organisation the contributions of participants are validated; their experiences considered important.

Several factors can influence the orientation of a pedagogical intervention towards either a vertical organisation or a horizontal one: the personal disposition and training of the educator; the institutional culture; the national culture of the educator; the disposition and culture of the participants.

## 2. Relational intentions

Adult educators can use different self-presentation strategies according to how they would like their participants to perceive them, and what the emotions they would like to generate in them.

Ingratiation focuses on appearing likeable and pleasing to others. Self-promotion wants to transmit competence and gain respect. Intimidation seeks to inspire fear, establish a power hierarchy and take control. Supplication calls for the nurturing of the educator and solicits an obligation of help from participants. Exemplification is to promote oneself as an example of moral superiority.

Though at first sight you might think that some strategies are more adapted to the teaching context than others, our aim here is to simply raise awareness of those we tend to use most, and to see to what extent they are aligned with how we think of ourselves.



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## 3. Connectedness

A lot depends on where the educator places their focus: is it on the programme, on the task of teaching or is it on participants? Being attentive to participants allows the educator to adjust the dynamics even according to issues that are not expressed explicitly, but may be important to the group process.

# Questions for self-assessment

## Questions to answer before watching your video

### Open questions

- Do you know what your recurrent 'intentions' are during daily interactions ? (informing others, motivating them, seducing them, looking for admiration etc..)
- Do you know what your recurrent 'intentions' are during your teaching activities ? (informing others, motivating them, seducing them, looking for admiration etc..)
- When do you feel connected to others in a daily situation? What makes you feel disconnected?
- Do you know when you feel connected to your learners? What makes you feel disconnected?

### Questions you can use to take quantitative measurement

Please answer using the 1 to 5 scale where 1 stands for "*not at all*" and 5 for "*very much*" / "*very often*"

- To what extent are you aware of the looks of others ?
- To what extent are you aware of searching for attention, to be seen by others?
- To what extent do you have the sensation that you are unable to connect to your learners as well as you would like to?
- To what extent do you change your communication style (rhythm, posture, tone etc.) to help you reach your learners?
- To what extent is the attention of others a source of stress for you?
- To what extent does *the attention of others give you pleasure* ?

### After watching your video

Watching the video what do you observe about your relationship to your learners?

Is there anything you would like to change concerning your choice of relational dynamics?



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