

Spendrin, Karla; Hallitzky, Maria

The role of cultural and theoretical pre-understandings in qualitative teaching research – Exemplified by reconstructions of processes of individualisation and collectivisation in lessons

Hallitzky, Maria [Hrsg.]; Mulhanga, Félix [Hrsg.]; Spendrin, Karla [Hrsg.]; Yoshida, Nariakira [Hrsg.]: Expanding horizons and local connectedness. Challenges for qualitative teaching research and development in intercultural contexts. Bad Heilbrunn : Verlag Julius Klinkhardt 2025, S. 180-201



Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Spendrin, Karla; Hallitzky, Maria: The role of cultural and theoretical pre-understandings in qualitative teaching research – Exemplified by reconstructions of processes of individualisation and collectivisation in lessons - In: Hallitzky, Maria [Hrsg.]; Mulhanga, Félix [Hrsg.]; Spendrin, Karla [Hrsg.]; Yoshida, Nariakira [Hrsg.]: Expanding horizons and local connectedness. Challenges for qualitative teaching research and development in intercultural contexts. Bad Heilbrunn : Verlag Julius Klinkhardt 2025, S. 180-201 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-341937 - DOI: 10.25656/01:34193; 10.35468/6193-16

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-341937>

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:34193>

in Kooperation mit / in cooperation with:



<http://www.klinkhardt.de>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Dieses Dokument steht unter folgender Creative Commons-Lizenz: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/deed.de> - Sie dürfen das Werk bzw. den Inhalt vervielfältigen, verbreiten und öffentlich zugänglich machen, solange Sie den Namen des Autors/Rechteinhabers in der von ihm festgelegten Weise nennen und das Werk bzw. diesen Inhalt nicht bearbeiten, abwandeln oder in anderer Weise verändern.

Mit der Verwendung dieses Dokuments erkennen Sie die Nutzungsbedingungen an.

Terms of use

This document is published under following Creative Commons-License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/deed.en> - You may copy, distribute and transmit, adapt or exhibit the work in the public as long as you attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor. You are not allowed to alter or transform this work or its contents at all.

By using this particular document, you accept the above-stated conditions of use.



Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS
DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

Mitglied der:


Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Karla Spendrin and Maria Hallitzky

The Role of Cultural and Theoretical Pre-Understandings in Qualitative Teaching Research – Exemplified by Reconstructions of Processes of Individualisation and Collectivisation in Lessons

Abstracts

EN

Everyday understanding of science implies a notion of 'objectivity' – however, many scientists have argued that gaining scientific understanding is inseparably bound to the understanding person. In this article, we argue that in (qualitative) teaching research both theoretical and cultural pre-understandings shape the results of research in a way that is enabling and limiting at the same time. We demonstrate this with examples of our own research, focusing on the interwoven processes of individualisation and collectivisation as practices of addressation in lessons, in order to account for the question, how students' self-reliant thinking and responsible participation in communities can be enhanced. Therefore, on a first level we present our research itself, introducing our theoretical framework, methodological assumptions and methodical procedures. We also set forth some key findings from two lessons that provide maximum contrast regarding school levels, subject matter, classroom size and maybe cultural context: One key finding stems from a science lesson in a rather large primary school classroom in Japan, the other from a literature lesson in a small course in upper secondary education in Germany. On a second level, we observe our observations and reflect on the implications of theoretical and cultural pre-understandings. In our conclusion, we discuss possibilities to reflect the influence of these pre-understandings in qualitative teaching research.

DE

Das alltägliche Verständnis von Wissenschaft impliziert das Konzept der ‚Objektivität‘ – viele Wissenschaftler:innen haben jedoch argumentiert,

dass das Erlangen eines wissenschaftlichen Verständnisses untrennbar mit der verstehenden Person verbunden ist. In diesem Artikel argumentieren wir, dass in der (qualitativen) Unterrichtsforschung sowohl theoretische als auch kulturelle Vorverständnisse in einer zugleich ermöglichenden und begrenzenden Weise prägend für die durch Forschung gewonnenen Erkenntnisse sind. Wir werden dies an Beispielen aus unserer eigenen Forschung zeigen. Diese fokussiert die ineinander verwobenen Prozesse der Individualisierung und Kollektivierung als Praktiken der Adressierung im Unterricht in Bezug auf die Frage, wie das eigenverantwortliche Denken der Schülerinnen und Schüler und ihre verantwortliche Beteiligung an Gemeinschaften gefördert werden können. Daher werden wir auf einer ersten Ebene unsere Forschung selbst darstellen, indem wir unseren theoretischen Rahmen, die methodischen Annahmen und methodischen Verfahren beschreiben. Dabei präsentieren wir auch einige Schlüsselergebnisse aus zwei Unterrichtsstunden, die als maximal kontrastierend in Bezug auf Schulstufe, Unterrichtsfach, Klassengröße und (vielleicht) kulturellen Kontext angesehen werden können: Eine stammt aus dem naturwissenschaftlichen Unterricht in einer größeren Grundschulklasse in Japan, die zweite aus dem Literaturunterricht in einem kleinen Leistungskurs der Sekundarstufe II in Deutschland. Auf einer zweiten Ebene beobachten wir unsere Beobachtungen und reflektieren die Auswirkungen unserer theoretischen und kulturellen Vorverständnisse. Abschließend diskutieren wir Möglichkeiten, den Einfluss dieser Vorverständnisse in der qualitativen Unterrichtsforschung zu reflektieren.

PT

A compreensão cotidiana da ciência implica o conceito de 'objetividade' – no entanto, muitos cientistas têm defendido que a obtenção da compreensão científica está inextricavelmente ligada à pessoa que a compreende. Neste artigo, defendemos que, na investigação (qualitativa) na sala de aula, os preconceitos teóricos e culturais moldam o conhecimento adquirido através da investigação de uma forma que é simultaneamente facilitadora e limitadora. Demonstraremos isto utilizando exemplos da nossa própria investigação. Esta centra-se nos processos interligados de individualização e coletivização como práticas de comunicação na sala de aula, em relação à questão de como se pode promover o pensamento autónomo dos alunos e a sua participação responsável nas comunidades. Assim, num primeiro nível, apresentaremos a nossa investigação em si, descrevendo o nosso enquadramento teórico, os pressupostos metodológicos e os procedimentos metódicos. Apresentamos também algumas observações importantes de duas aulas que podem ser consideradas como maximamente contrastantes em termos de nível escolar, disciplina, dimensão da turma e (talvez) con-

texto cultural: Uma é de uma aula de ciências numa mais numerosa turma do ensino primário no Japão, a segunda de uma aula de literatura numa turma pequena do ensino secundário na Alemanha. No segundo nível, observamos as nossas observações e refletimos sobre o impacto dos nossos preconceitos teóricos e culturais. Por último, discutimos as possibilidades de refletir sobre a influência destes preconceitos na investigação qualitativa na sala de aula.

JA

日常的な文脈では、科学研究は「客観性」という考え方のもとにとらえられることが多い。これに対し、多くの議論では、学術的意味での理解の達成は、まさに理解という作業をしている人物と分かちがたく結びついているとされている。本稿では、(質的) 授業研究において、理論的にもまた文化的にも前提となる理解のしかたがあり、この理解のしかたが研究を通して獲得される認識に対して、可能性を広げるとともに限界ももたらしめていることを論じる。筆者らの研究では、授業における呼びかけの実践としての個別化と集合化が相互に入り混じるプロセスに焦点を当てている。この検討は、自らの思考に対する生徒自身の責任、そして共同体への責任ある参加がどのように促進されるのかという問いのもとにおこなわれる。そのため、第一の位相として、わたしたちの研究をまず紹介する。ここでは、理論枠組み、方法論的前提と手続きを叙述し、二つの授業例から中心的な研究結果を示す。この二つの授業は、学年、教科、学級規模そして(おそらくは) 文化的背景に関連して、最大級に対照的だとみなせる。一つは、日本の小学校の相対的に大規模な学級でおこなわれた理科の授業である。もう一つは、ドイツの後期中等教育段階の小規模な重点コースでおこなわれた文学の授業である。二つ目の位相として、わたしたち自らがおこなった観察を観察し、自身の理論・文化に関する前提となる理解のしかたの影響を省察する。さいごに、質的授業研究におけるこれら前提となる理解のしかたの影響を省察する可能性について議論する。

1 Introduction

The everyday understanding of scientific research implies the “ubiquitous and irresistible” (Daston & Galison 2007: 29) notion of objectivity: “To be objective is to aspire to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower – knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgement, wishing or striving” (ibid.: 17). Questioning the role of cultural and theoretical pre-understandings (or even prejudice?) in one’s own research might not be very popular under these circumstances, as it feels like challenging the scientific character of one’s own

research. However, many scientists have argued that gaining scientific understanding is inseparably bound to the understanding person (Fuchs 2001: 19-21). Hence, in this text, we argue that in (qualitative) teaching research both theoretical and cultural pre-understandings shape the results in a way that is both enabling and limiting at the same time. With the aim of showing this with examples of our own research, we will move back and forth between two levels of observation throughout the text: On the first level, we introduce some of our research on individualisation and collectivisation in classroom interaction. At certain points throughout the presentation of our research, we move to the second level of observing our own observations, thus reflecting on the role of cultural and theoretical pre-understandings. These observations of observations will be presented in indented paragraphs in order to give an orientation to the reader.

Before we start with the introduction of our research, however, we need to clarify how we understand theory and culture as sources of preconceptions for research (chapter 2). Thereafter, we explain our theoretical pre-understandings of processes of individualisation and collectivisation, of lessons and of democratic education, also highlighting some of the normative implications of these pre-understandings (chapter 3). We will then explain our methodological procedures (chapter 4), before exploring two empirical examples of different lessons (chapter 5 and 6), and, at the same time, observing our observations regarding the role of theoretical and cultural pre-understandings (intended paragraphs in these chapters). In the last part (chapter 7) we will give a comparative summary of the findings concerning the lessons, reflect further on the role of theoretical and cultural pre-understandings for our research process and findings, and we will discuss possibilities of detecting and reflecting these pre-understandings, thus enhancing the intersubjective comprehensibility of reconstructions.

2 Preface: culture, theory and our research interests

2.1 Culture

To uncover the role of 'cultural' pre-understandings, we need to clarify how we use and understand the term 'culture'. With Reckwitz (2003: 285f.) and following Swidler (1986), we understand culture as an everyday practical "tool-kit" (Reckwitz 2003: 286). In this praxeological understanding, culture comprises sets of practices, being patterns of understanding the world, moving in it, dealing with objects, wishing for or doing something. These practices are formed by groups of interacting people and form these groups at the same time (Valsiner 2003). Therefore, we also interpret research practices as

a cultural phenomenon, a research culture. Due to their scientific socialisation, researchers are bound to a certain research culture, that provides (often taken-for-granted, and therefore not explicitly stated) practices, conventions and orientations for their research work. These practices, conventions and orientations can be detected in methodical procedures, theoretical considerations, ways of understanding as well as in specific research interests. However, in using these practices, conventions and orientations – which might mean maintaining as well as changing them – these researchers also (re-)produce the particular research culture. As these assumptions tend to be highly self-evident for researchers, they are not always explicitly stated.

Striving for objectivity that is, aiming to extinguish the researchers' pre-conceptions and his/her observational position from the research results, has to be regarded as part of a research culture as well – in this case, as part of a research culture that is mostly connected to quantitative measuring and positivist modes of discovery, rooted in the Western understanding of 'modern science' and a Western modern understanding of the 'scientific self' (Daston & Galison 2007: 27-38).

As stated above, in this text we adopt the attitude not to eliminate the researchers' position and pre-conceptions, but to explicate and reflect this by means of observing the observations, which is part of a specific research culture inspired by critical post-modernist ethnography (Berg & Fuchs 1993: 14f.). However, this approach remains connected to the 'Western-modern-scientist' strive for 'objectivity' – albeit reformulating it as an effort for intersubjectivity as the impossibility of perspective-free scientific insight is acknowledged.

2.2 Theory

Following Lindemann (2008: 123-126) we differentiate between three interconnected dimensions of theory: first, theoretical considerations connected to the research topic itself, in this case, to lessons; second, general theoretical assumptions about 'the social' that have implications for methodology (see 3.1); and third, theories about society in general. Differentiating between these dimensions of theory helps us to understand the different roles of theory in pedagogical research, especially regarding the phenomenon of normative assumptions.

The claim of objectivity has – at least in Western research communities – led to normativity (thinking of what should be) always being discussed as a problem for empirical research (which is required to exclusively describe what is). Yet, educational research is ineluctably linked to norms and values: Research on educational processes (for example, in the classroom) inevitably responds to the question of what seems (not) desirable from a pedagogical point of

view, i.e., as a goal for the development of others (Hallitzky et al. 2014: 74; Koller 2012: 9). Normativity here refers primarily to societally discussed values and theoretical understandings in the above mentioned third dimension of theoretical perspectives (see 2.3 for the position of this text). More specific pedagogical or didactical theories (first dimension of theoretical understandings) recur on those discussions and thus focus on different criteria or core categories of what should be researched upon. Both theoretical dimensions have enabling and limiting consequences for research possibilities (see Hallitzky et al. 2018 for a theoretical, Herfter et al. 2019 for an empirical exploration of these issues).

2.3 Interest: Why do we do research on processes of individualisation and collectivisation?

Our normative starting point is that school (and pedagogy as a whole) should strive to enhance self-determination of the pupils. This orientation seems to be a broadly accepted demand when one relies on particular values of the Western and northern hemisphere. According to Reinhard Uhle (1995), this ideal of self-determined personalities has been called the “pedagogical imperative of modernity”. However, this is not without controversy, as there are also discussions about the value of communities and about social responsibility (see Etzioni 2014 for an overview). Our research interest is rooted in this area of tension, as we argue that enhancing individual self-determination is of equal importance as a humane way of organising communities and society as a whole.

In line with educational theorists such as John Dewey and Wolfgang Klafki, we assume that schooling is not only aimed at imparting subject-specific knowledge and abilities but also at developing self-determined and socially responsible personalities who will be able to shape humane ways of living together and solving contemporary problems (e.g., Dewey 1961: 87; Klafki 2007: 52). Our research question is therefore: How can self-determined thinking as well as the abilities to shape humane ways of living together be enhanced in school?

Thus, in our research on interactional processes in lessons, we focus on the question of how teachers promote independent thinking processes of students in the common classroom interaction. Hence, we do not focus on individualisation or collectivisation in classrooms as a means to achieve better results concerning subject-specific knowledge or competencies, but as processes of shaping specific personalities and communities.

Observing our observation, the claim of autonomy and self-determination is bound to a specific cultural ‘mindset’ that presupposes the ability and right of individuals to

make their own life choices, an understanding which is connected to a theory of society linked to the movements of the (rationalist) enlightenment and emancipation from external rule. Although this mindset appears to be self-evident and universal due to its widespread occurrence and hegemony, it does not lack alternatives (e.g., Fuchs 2001: 2). The discussions that evolved because of the bias of the individual focus also show that culture bound values are not unchangeable or unquestionable – in any case, they will not lose their culturality, as the whole discussion is to be regarded a specific cultural phenomenon. We, for our case, start from this (necessarily) culturally bound discussion, as there won't be a 'non-cultural' starting point. However, making this connection and dependency transparent is the condition for leaving it open to discussion, and, if necessary, change.

3 Theoretical background: individualisation and collectivisation, lessons and democratic education

3.1 Individualisation and collectivisation

For the second dimension of theory (Lindemann 2008: 123f.), the socio-theoretical assumptions, we again refer to a theoretical framework based on praxeological and interactional understanding of individualisation and collectivisation.

In this perspective, human beings can only constitute themselves as individuals in interaction with others: The concepts of recognition (Anerkennung, Honneth 1992) or of addressation are paradigmatic for this viewpoint. The consequence is to assume an equal originality of individual and sociality: By realising human activity as a common activity, a specific sociality and specific individualities or persons are established at the same time. In practical acts of addressing and readdressing, individuals and groups use certain opportunities for action while at the same time they are 'forced' into specific patterns of behaviour, for example certain ways of moving, speaking, understanding situations, expressing emotions, etc. This 'establishing' of socialities and individualities is what we call processes of individualisation and collectivisation. They include 'reproductional' (keeping someone or something as it was) as well as 'changing' processes.

3.2 Lessons

Concerning the first dimension of 'theory' related to the specific research field (Lindemann 2008: 124), we have to explain our theoretical (pre-empirical) understanding of 'lessons'. On the one hand it refers to the presented understanding of interactional and addressational situations. On the other hand, we correspond to Kolbe et al. (2008: 130) in the assumption that two specific rela-

tions have to be dealt with in lessons: the relation of 'teaching' and 'learning', and the difference of relevant and irrelevant knowledge in regard to school requirements.

The differentiation of 'relevant' and 'irrelevant' refers to a societal context, since it enacts societal necessities, decisions and values. The 'relevance' of knowledge and abilities stems from situations beyond the lesson itself, for which lessons should prepare the learners. As 'preparational' situations, lessons are arrangements that are specifically – and separated from other parts of societal practice (Sünkel 2002: 45f.) – established with the aim of imparting and acquiring knowledge and skills.

Concerning the processes of individualisation and collectivisation in lessons, it is of a certain importance to recognise that the lesson is on the one hand a somehow 'artificial' situation and interaction – as it cannot be a lesson without 'pointing' to or 'preparing' for a situation or task beyond the lesson itself. On the other hand, for the individuals involved, it is still a 'real' situation in the sense that they address others, are addressed and re-address themselves in relation to specific expectations, norms and social meanings that are 'really' enacted (and not 'just' referenced to) in the situation.

3.3 Democratic education

Regarding the third dimension of theory concerning society in general (Lindemann 2008: 124f.), we recur on values of democratic development of individuals and society by means of education, for example following John Dewey's and Wolfgang Klafki's theories of democracy in education. Dewey's understanding of democracy can be described as a 'social idea' of respectful, tolerant, constructive, and peaceful coexistence which forms the individual and socio-moral base of societal and political democratisation: "A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" (Dewey 1961: 87). Associated to our socio-theoretical understanding of individualisation and collectivisation, the stated values of democracy and democratic education can be seen as a way of living together and forming specific shapes of individuals and communities. Connecting our theoretical understandings of individualisation and collectivisation, lessons, and democratic education, we can specify the question which we are going to look at: We ask, *how specific interactional conditions in lessons – being both 'real' interactional and somehow 'artificial' preparational situations – are connected to the emergence of special persons in specific communities* (which is a thought very much connected to the idea of 'Bildung' in Germany, e.g. Klafki 2007: 20-25). More specifically, we reconstruct our empirical mate-

rial in order to understand, how teachers promote (or prevent, respectively) independent thinking processes of individuals and joint responsibility within interactional processes in lessons.

4 Methodical procedures

As a methodological consequence of our theoretical understanding of individualisation and collectivisation, we focus on addressations that take place in the lessons. Based on the approach of videographic interactional analysis, we work with videographic material as well as with the transcripts of lessons (for a more detailed description of methodological assumptions and concrete procedures, see Leicht in this book):

We¹ first use the video data to get an overview of different groupings and focuses of attention throughout the lesson. This step is called segmentation analysis. Its results enable us to choose scenes for further interpretation according to our research question. These scenes are transcribed, taking verbal and some non-verbal information into account. In the next step, the sequence analysis, we examine the interactional practices in the chosen scene following it in sequential order. To answer our research question, we must not only 'understand' what happens in general in a kind of everyday understanding. Moreover, we have to focus on specific aspects of the interaction to reconstruct how particular modes of teaching and learning as well as norms and values of 'individuality' and 'sociality' are enacted. From this perspective, we take addressation practices, spatial arrangements and the usage of artifacts into account. To keep these aspects focused, we fix them as heuristic questions², e.g. "Which possibilities of acquiring knowledge, abilities and attitudes, i.e., of becoming a specific person who responsibly integrates into the group and contributes to the way it develops, are opened or closed in the interaction?". Due to space restrictions, we do not show the whole sequential interpretation in detail, the intention being to include the passages which are most important concerning our research question.

1 Who is 'we'? Regarding the two examples, several other researchers from our department participated in the interpretation processes, namely: Gereon Eulitz, Christopher Hempel, Christian Herfter, Emi Kinoshita, Johanna Leicht, and Stephan Weser. For this text, we as the authors re-collected the interpretations, took them further and reflected on them.

2 Heuristic questions are not the same as research questions, but rather queries that concretise specific aspects of the research question and can be posed more directly to the empirical material.

5 Empirical example I – Reasoning on and experimenting with electric circuits

Our first example is a science class from a third grade in a Japanese primary school which deals with the topic of electricity.

We focus on a scene in which the children change from three larger groups, whereby each group is working with a whiteboard at the middle tables, into the arrangement of students sitting at the side tables facing the teacher who is standing at the front of the classroom. The teacher has taken one of the whiteboards to the front and is holding it up. We chose this scene because we were interested in how the relation of individual thinking in particular groups and collective deliberation is handled.



Fig. 1: Change of the classroom arrangement before and after the chosen segment, teacher marked with an arrow

5.1 Pedagogical norms: different opinions welcome

T40³ *Listening to the discussion, I think this is interesting because the opinions are divided.*

T42 [...]

*What do you think at a glance? Is there anyone who thinks the miniature bulbs of this circuit are going to come on?
(children raising hands for their opinion)*

T44 *Then, I want to ask the minority. Each of you who think these miniature bulbs are going to come on, would you explain why?*

After the children have taken their seats and look to the front, the teacher starts with (T40): “Listening to the discussion, I think this is interesting because the opinions are divided.” In the first part (“Listening to the discussion, I think this is interesting”) the teacher positions himself somehow outside the

3 In the transcript of the lesson, our Japanese cooperation partners numbered the turns of the teacher and the students separately. For the students, the gender (‘g’ or ‘b’ for girls or boys) was added, and a consecutive number was assigned.

discussion that has been taking place in the group, but as attending and being interested in it. With the next words ("because the opinions are divided") the teacher legitimises the choice of the specific whiteboard. The 'division of opinions' seems to make something relevant for the whole class to look at: A norm of considering and appreciating different opinions is established in this situation.

After an explanation concerning the arrangement on the whiteboard, the teacher (T42) asks: "What do you think at a glance? Is there anyone who thinks the miniature bulbs of this circuit are going to come on?" The pupils are thus encouraged to express spontaneous ideas. The specific topic (whether the bulbs are going to light up when connected to the battery) enables two, and only two, different opinions: to light up, or not to light up. Furthermore, only one of these opinions can be 'right' in the sense that the prediction is going to come true.

The situation is clearly marked as a situation of learning: Different opinions are legitimate and even 'interesting', even though only one of them can be scientifically true. This enacts the pedagogical norm of the provisional nature of knowledge in learning situations (in contrast to test situations): It is ok to make a wrong prediction when you are still supposed to learn something new. Students are thus addressed as 'thinking' or reasoning individuals that have their own ideas about the subject. Even though these ideas may not correspond to scientific truth, this is seen as legitimate. Moreover, in asking the students for their prediction, the teacher himself enacts a pedagogical norm of listening to the viewpoints and understandings of the learners.

In the next utterances, the children raise their hands either for the opinion of 'miniature bulbs are going to light up' or 'are not going to light up'.

After that, the teacher (T44) addresses the smaller group, which has predicted that the lights are going to come on, as "the minority" – using a remarkable metaphor from a context of democratic negotiation and discourse. Inviting the students to explain their prediction, the teacher again addresses the students as 'thinking' individuals, who can not only make a prediction but also give reasons for it.

In terms of 'observing our observation' it is interesting what we 'saw' interpreting this scene: We do not know from this one case, why the teacher addressed this group. However, we tended to think, that the teacher would ask this group first, because the other group had the correct prediction. Some of us seemed to 'recognise' a pattern of teaching, which could be described as 'Leave the correct answer for the end because it is the answer that will have to be kept in mind'. Yet, this assumption turned out to be wrong, as the first groups prediction – the bulbs are going to light up – was right. Thus, we might have been led wrong by our preliminary – and in this case more implicit – understanding of teaching patterns.

5.2 Procedural guidance – hidden leadership: forcing reasoning and explaining

C54/ b7	<i>[...] (explanation) [...] How is it?</i>
C55/ ?	<i>Another opinion</i>
T46	<i>What do you mean [...]?</i>
C56/ b7	<i>[...] (explanation) [...]</i>
T47	<i>Turn yourself towards your classmates</i>

After the first student (C54/ b7) gives an explanation, he ends with the expression that has been translated as “How is it?”. We see this expression at the end of many students’ contributions; it seems to be a ritual of asking the other students about their point of view to what has been said. The others (C55/?) answer with expressions like ‘I agree’ or ‘another opinion’ without having to sign up or being called by the teacher. In these interactions, we can observe the negotiation about the validity of certain knowledge. This negotiation is conducted between the students themselves.

As you can see in the teacher’s next sentence (T46), he is not confirming or neglecting what has been explained as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’. Instead, marking incomprehension by ‘what do you mean’ he establishes or enacts a norm of making one’s own reasoning comprehensible for others. Yet, even though he is suspending his ‘authority’ in relation to the subject (as well as the norm of ‘scientific truth’ in favour of comprehensibility of reasons), he at the same time acts as the person who is ‘leading’ the process of discussion in terms of deciding what is the next thing to happen (like either going more detailed into the explanation or going on to the next argument).

The norm of ‘discussing the reasons with the whole class’ becomes visible when the teacher urges a student to turn towards his classmates (and not to talk only to the teacher). The fact that the teacher needs to express this norm shows a certain unfamiliarity of this way of discussion and hints that this arrangement of discussion without the teacher’s authority is somehow fragile. The patterns we described concerning this scene were characteristic for the whole part of the lesson in which the predictions were discussed.

Again, we will make some remarks regarding what we observed when reflecting on our interpretations. Some of the phenomena that we highlighted here – like the ritual of asking for opinions, the reaction of other students without being called up by the teacher, or the teacher postponing his subject knowledge – have been remarkable for us.

The fact that they were remarkable or ‘special’ is of course related to our pre-understanding of lesson interactions: We would (maybe implicitly) ‘expect’ patterns of ‘teacher questioning – student answer – teacher evaluation’ or ‘teacher questioning – student reasoning – teacher evaluation’. Since Mehan’s (1979) ethnographic

classroom studies it is known as the IRE-sequence and we observed these patterns many times previously (Hallitzky et al. 2016). This experiential and theoretical pre-understanding seems to enable us to recognise what is specific in the interaction as something special when we interpret classroom situations. The deviance of the empirical data in regard to our pre-understanding and expectations was, however, the trigger and key to be able to detect the particular pre-understandings.

Summarising the findings regarding this lesson, it is important that the teacher is not taking the role as primary addressee of students' answers and as the authority of knowledge. Thereby, a space for the joint discussion is opened. In this whole sequence the continuous uncertainty of knowledge is crucial for the process of 'finding the truth together'.

The class is established as a discussion community and the individuals are addressed and can experience themselves as thinking individuals who are able to explain their reasoning and discuss their knowledge with their peers in order to take responsibility for finding the solution.

However, in regard to the finding of truth in this lesson, the teacher's statement following the discussion of reasons and a second query about students' opinions is crucial: "But we don't know the truth if we don't do an experiment" (T57). Truth in physics is not subject to democratic principles and cannot be negotiated or decided by voting – nevertheless, in the process of finding a solution, a culture of mutual respect, valuation of different understandings and open discourse is realised. Thus, we can see possibilities of establishing a democratic culture of teaching and learning even in relation to a topic outside of democratic considerations.

6 Empirical example II – Talking about Literature

Our second example can be regarded as maximum contrast, a literature class at an upper secondary school in Germany, dealing with Schiller's⁴ drama "Maria Stuart". In addition to contrasting examples as a general strategy for generalising results, the choice of examples from different world regions might provide us with a greater heterogeneity of interaction patterns. In this way it becomes more likely that cultural pre-conceptions are irritated and thus detected (see 7.3). We interpreted this lesson with the same methodical steps and focusing the same questions, and we will show a very small part of our interpretations. Yet as the lesson itself is maximum contrast, we chose a scene, that appears somewhat similar to the one in the science class in regard to the physical arrangement and use of artefacts: The focus of attention is towards

4 Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) was a German writer, philosopher and historian. In his classical dramas he articulated an ideal of aesthetic education.

the front of the classroom after the students had formerly been sitting in decentralised groups. In this scene, an overhead transparency is shown by a student, while the teacher sits in between the other students. The topic discussed in the scene is a figure of the drama called 'Burleigh'.

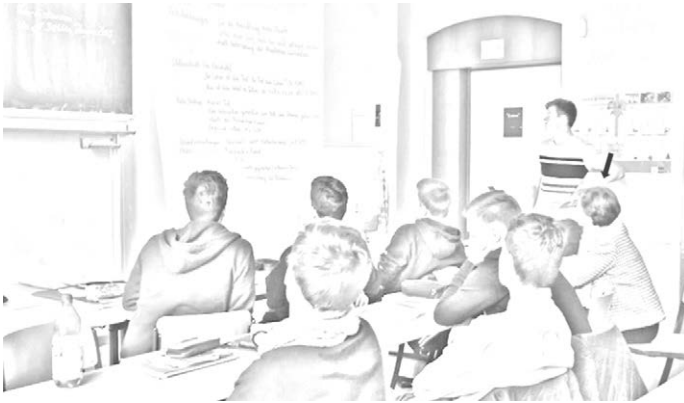


Fig. 2: Classroom Arrangement at the beginning of the chosen scene, teacher marked with an arrow

The specific spatial arrangement can already give some insights into patterns of individualisation and collectivisation here. The student who is presenting comes to the front and stands to the side, next to the projector, while talking. Thus, he takes a position where he can be seen by everyone, but one that is still different from the usual teacher's position (who is usually centred in the front). The teacher does not stay at the front, but takes a seat in the students' rows, bodily integrating herself into the listening group, and remains there when giving input and moderating the discussion after the presentation. This can be seen as an attempt to stage herself as a member of the learning group and to arrange an open exchange about the literary protagonist. At the same time, she is still controlling the course of the lesson by her moderation. Thus, the teacher's position seems somehow similar to what we have observed in the first lesson.

6.1 Are we Observing a Discussion or an Examination?

Starting the presentation of the group work, the teacher picked a student with the following words:

01 T⁵ [*students' name*] \ well why not you/ come on you will master that as good as all the others \ [...] the others are going to help you then -

Concerning this passage, two variants of interpretations came up in our research group: One of the first interpretation tendencies that was articulated in the research group was that this assignment is supposed to be an examination, as she seems to express an expectation and norm of showing competence ("you will master"). In this interpretation, the addition "the others are going to help you then" has to be read as undermining the trust in the students' competence. The second interpretation was, that she presumes a 'collective competence' and a 'collective responsibility' in a way that a mutual support and supplementation would be 'natural'. The situation would not be framed as an examination, but as a situation of collecting and discussing results within a 'thinking community' with a common task to which everyone has to contribute.

Both of these interpretations could be plausibilised, so we had to look into what happens after the student's presentation.

Before we do that, we are going to make some remarks observing our observation (or interpretation, respectively), showing that each of these different interpretations is rooted in specific preliminary understandings of 'lessons' or 'interaction in lessons'. The first interpretation resumes that the presentation of a group work is 'normally' or at least 'often' a situation with examinational character, because we 'know' that teachers use these presentations to allocate marks for oral participation. We also 'know' that school is not only about learning, but also about showing one's capacity and performance, since school, especially the German 'Gymnasium', is regarded as a selecting institution.

The second interpretation presumes that the presentation of group work connects to a common task, referring to a different pre-understanding of teaching and learning that does not include the necessity or prevalence of allocating marks for oral participation. These background assumptions might stem from teaching (or learning) experiences in primary schools (where marks for oral participation are not as frequently given) or in university (where only the final exam counts).

In this case, we can see that different pre-understandings in a group of researchers provide reasons for different interpretation tendencies and can thus lead to more di-

5 In this transcript, all the turns were numbered sequentially, regardless of who was speaking. The latter was marked by 'T' for 'teacher' or 'S (Nr.)' for a specific student. Slashes indicate lowering (\) or raising (/) of the voice, a horizontal line (-) means that the voice is held in suspension.

verse ways of understanding a lesson. However, we need to analyse how the empirical situation develops, to reconstruct how the participants understand the interaction.

After the presentation, the teacher opens a space for additional explanations and/or questions to the group. The situation seems to stay ambivalent to the students (as it was to us). The teacher's questions can be understood both in an 'examinational' and in a 'discussional' sense. One of the students seems to interpret the space for comments as a request of judging the presentation of his classmates. In the following, the teacher frames the situation more clearly as a content related discussion ("maybe the picture of Burleigh can be broadened") and not an examinational one. Then, some students take part in this discussion by asking questions or coming up with different understandings of the character.

6.2 A fragile arrangement of open discussion

The following discussion occurs as a moderated talk between readers hosted by the teacher.

- 10 S10 *I still have a question how it is meant [...]*
11 T *alright, could the others please answer/*
12 S1 *[answer]*
13 T *yes\ and s2/*
14 S2 *[another answer]*

The teacher only takes on the role of calling up the next student and sometimes re-addressing a question to the group. She does not evaluate any of the students' answers, in this way enacting a norm of 'open discussion' that is somehow similar to the first example.

After some time, the teacher again assumes a more leading role in the discussion process, integrating her knowledge about the characterisation of Burleigh into the discourse.

- 28 S4 *[...]I meant that he is not afraid of uhm of using things that*
 serve a higher purpose - [...]
29 T *yes yes exactly*
30 S4 *[...]*
31 T *yes\ well he is maybe the type for whom one could also think*
 of the phrase the end justifies the means here\ and the purpose
 you have clearly determined\ this is here about ehm saving
 England here this is just somehow his patriotism and from his
 picture of kingship - now [...] somehow I believe that with the
 ideal of leadership that he embodies here [...] that is one like
 one would say that goes back to Machiavelli

What we find in this lesson as a whole is an ambiguous position of the teacher in a fragile arrangement:

On the one hand, the situation is supposed to be (at least similar to) an open discussion. Thus, the teacher places herself as a discussing individual inside the discussing community. In this position, she passes the word to the next student, whenever someone is signing up to say something; and, even in situations where she proposes a 'solution' to the students, she marks her knowledge as 'individual interpretations' with comments such as "somehow I believe" or "I got to this thought somehow".

On the other hand, the teacher has to 'steer' the discussion to make sure that the students understand Burleigh's ideal of leadership that characterises this figure. This means that the discussion is in fact not open, but has a pre-defined solution – it is, in the end, an arranged discussion. Since the students seem not to find the solution by themselves, the teacher assumes a more lecturing role, making a longer comment on Burleigh's ideal of leadership. Even though she is still trying to frame that as a 'personal thought', the students address her in the position of a lecturer, at one point asking her to "say it again to the full extent".

The arrangement of the open discussion that we find in this lesson thus shows clearly the fragility of this proper construction – being an arrangement and open at the same time.

7 Relating and reflecting the perspectives

7.1 Relating the cases

In both lessons we find patterns of addressing the students as 'thinking individuals' in 'discussion communities' and the students can show themselves as – and in the long term learn to be – reasoning discussants or readers. In both cases it is also clear that the discussion is not in fact 'open', but it is 'guided' and the result is already predetermined by the teacher. Thus, the arrangement is characterised by a certain fragility and ambiguity, due to the structural situation of a lesson with its dual character of interactional situation and preparational learning.

In this dual character we also find the paradoxical structure of control and openness, the implicit aim that the students should not only listen to and acquire established knowledge, but also think for themselves and learn to discuss their thoughts with others. This is in line with the concepts of democratic education we introduced in chapter 3. However, with this aim, both teachers find themselves in an ambiguous position: They have to 'conceal' their knowledge in order not to inhibit students' thoughts and opinions, whilst also hav-

ing to assume responsibility for the results. Thus, in the analysed lessons we observed many instances (and ways) of balancing the poles of 'controlling' and 'opening'.

What seems to make a difference between the two lessons are some characteristics of the respective topics.

The first difference can be found in the positions that can be taken by the students. In the first example the topic – electric circuits – allows for only two different answers, but still fosters manifold reasonings in order to explain one's prediction. In contrast, in the second example, there are no clearly pre-defined positions, as the literary material opens more scope for interpretations. On the one hand, such an open exchange of arguments seems to be more realistic, but on the other hand, there is no tension between two contradictory, mutually exclusive options and the students' position is much less clear.

The second difference relates to how the students can find the solution. In the first example, the experiment will give the answer to the question under discussion – the students can (and will) just try it out. In contrast, the literary text does not give an answer about the interpretation. The students (and the teacher, respectively) do not have the option to 'try out' which understanding of Burleigh is adequate. This is why, in this case, the teacher has to 'lend her voice' to that content knowledge, she has to tell the students what they cannot conclude by themselves. This aspect seems to make a difference in the teacher's position, and this might be the reason why the fragility of the arrangement of an open discourse seems much more obvious in the second example. This at least would be a hypothesis that could be followed in further investigations.

7.2 The role of theoretical pre-understandings

Now again, we will 'observe our observation' and highlight some crucial aspects concerning the role of theoretical and cultural pre-understandings.

Concerning the theoretical pre-understanding, we have emphasised the dual character of lessons as being both somehow artificial, preparational situations and 'real' interactional situations at the same time. Starting from this assumption, it might not be very surprising to find certain ambiguities and paradoxes in the empirical data, as we did in both lessons. Hence, we might ask ourselves, whether we have not just found what we knew before, merely confirming our pre-understandings?

Maybe the answer is "yes and no".

Yes, because the theoretical assumption certainly guided our interpretation, maybe inhibiting other possible insights. For example, we did not go more deeply into the issue of how the science teacher imparts the methodical competences of conducting

experiments (which is certainly an interesting aspect in the first example). So yes, we are kept in the frame of our theoretical assumptions.

On the other hand: No, we are not 'restricted' to our theoretical assumptions, because we can find out more about the presupposed 'dual character' of lessons only by using these theoretical assumptions as a magnifying glass or a sensitising instrument. By putting special focus onto the ambivalent situational structure, we can find different ways of dealing with it. Only because of this special focus, we are able to gain some insight about how the topic and its representation connect to certain fragilities of the teaching and discussion arrangement.

The theoretical understanding thus sets a specific frame for possible results – which is at the same time enabling and limiting.

7.3 Detecting and questioning cultural pre-understandings

The topic gets a little more complicated when we turn to the impact of cultural pre-understandings. Firstly, one cannot *not* have such pre-understandings – somehow, every researcher 'knows' lessons and has expectations of how they work. Secondly, these pre-understandings are bound to experiences in daily life and are mostly not explicitly reflected upon. Therefore, these pre-understandings may influence on our interpretations 'from behind our backs' – rather unconsciously.

Their enabling role might be simply that they allow us to understand something 'at all', i.e., to not completely alienate with the situation. When researching in different parts of the world, this cultural pre-understanding probably also makes it possible to get an idea about what is going on even without understanding the language (for example, knowing a bell ringing might mean that the lesson has just ended).

In regard to the limiting aspect of cultural pre-understandings, they can guide or restrict the interpretation of a lesson. This is specifically 'risky' when the researcher cannot make these pre-understandings explicit, as in this case, the results, bound to hidden pre-conceptions, might not be intersubjectively comprehensible.

The comments in indented paragraphs have shown examples on the way cultural pre-understandings can guide (or mislead) interpretations. In these 'observations of observations' we could only reflect on those implicit cultural pre-understandings that we were able to detect and to explicate. There could – and we're afraid there will – be some more implicit presumptions in our interpretations that we have not yet discovered.

In the methodological discussion, this is the crucial point: It is only possible to 'see' implicit presumptions in the moment they are questioned – and the other way round. A special effort is needed to reflect these implicit assumptions. Therefore, it is important to find ways that provide the highest possible probability for challenging and questioning our pre-understandings as well as the highest possible sensitivity for our own interpretational routines.

In our examples, we came to question and challenge our pre-understandings for two reasons: One was the occurrence that our presumptions simply proved wrong: Thus, we have to give them a chance to fail. This chance might be higher when we analyse lessons from different cultural contexts, as our pre-understandings are pretty much formed in our own context. Furthermore, we wouldn't have realised that the group called up first had the 'right' prediction if we had not looked into the part of the lesson in which the experiment is conducted. Thus, a very narrow focus on specific scenes seems problematic, yet often necessary in order to conduct a detailed analysis. The other factor that helped in challenging our pre-understanding was the fact that interpretations took place in a group of different people with – seemingly – different pre-understandings. Therefore, as a conclusion, it is beneficial to discuss interpretations in groups of people who have different background experiences and therefore provide different interpretations. Even though some 'common' (and therefore: not challenged and not reflectable) presumptions will remain, differing interpretations can be used to question each other respectively. By asking what kind of presumptions have to be taken for one or the other interpretation to be plausible or understandable, these presumptions have to be explicated and can be discussed. The necessity of the highest possible sensitivity for the interpretational routines – starts right there: Since interpretational routines as well as explicit and implicit power relations might inhibit a 'rational' discussion of different interpretations, we have to reflect: How are different interpretations articulated, discussed and questioned, and how is an agreement reached in the end? We, for now, have illustrated this by means of examples that were remarkable to us. For a more systematic reflection, it would be necessary to use recordings and transcripts of interpretation discussions as empirical material. This, however, is work yet to be done.

References

- Berg, Eberhard; Fuchs, Martin (1993): *Kultur, Soziale Praxis, Text. Die Krise der Ethnographischen Repräsentation*. 3. Aufl., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp-Taschenbuch Wissenschaft.
- Daston, Lorraine; Galison, Peter (2007): *Objectivity*. New York: Zone Books.
- Dewey, J. (1915/1961): *Democracy and Education. An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: The Macmillan Company.
- Etzioni, Amitai (2014): Communitarism revisited. In: *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 19(3), pp. 241-260. URL: <https://www.uv.es/sasece/docum2015/Etzioni%20Communitarianism%20Revisited.pdf>. [accessed 15 June 2023].
- Fuchs, Stephan (2001): *Against Essentialism. A Theory of Culture and Society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, London: Harvard University Press.
- Hallitzky, Maria; Beyer, Beate; Hempel, Christopher; Herfter, Christian; Leicht, Johanna; Schroeter, Ellen (2016): "Was muss'n jetzt nochmal auf den Strich?" Zur Konstitution von Ergebnisräumen im Literaturunterricht der Sekundarstufe. In: *Zeitschrift für interpretative Schul- und Unterrichtsforschung (ZISU)*, 5, pp. 46-62.
- Hallitzky, Maria; Heinze, Franziska; Herfter, Christian; Spendrin, Karla (2018): Potenziale der normativen Valenz allgemeindidaktischer Theorien für die Bildungsforschung. In: *Erziehungswissenschaft* 29 (56), pp. 87-95. DOI: 10.3224/ezw.v29i1.10.
- Hallitzky, Maria; Marchand, Silke; Müller, Karla; Schneider, Dirk (2014): *Hermeneutische Konzepte empirisch erschließen: eine Herausforderung für die Allgemeine Didaktik*.

- In: Blumschein, Patrick (Ed.): Lernaufgaben – Didaktische Forschungsperspektiven. Bad Heilbrunn: Verlag Julius Klinkhardt, pp. 65-77.
- Herfter, Christian; Spendrin, Karla; Heinze, Franziska; Leicht, Johanna; Kinoshita, Emi (2019): Sehen, was sein soll? Zur normativen Valenz allgemeindidaktischer Theorien für die qualitative Unterrichtsforschung. In: ZQF Zeitschrift für Qualitative Forschung 20 (2), pp. 253-269.
- Honneth, Axel (1992). Kampf um Anerkennung. Zur moralischen Grammatik sozialer Konflikte. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Klafki, Wolfgang (2007): Neue Studien zur Bildungstheorie und Didaktik. 2. Aufl. Weinheim, Basel: Beltz.
- Kolbe, Fritz-Ulrich; Reh, Sabine; Fritzsche, Bettina; Idel, Till-Sebastian; Rabenstein, Kerstin (2008): Lernkultur: Überlegungen zu einer kulturwissenschaftlichen Grundlegung qualitativer Unterrichtsforschung. Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft, 11 (1), pp. 125-143.
- Koller, Hans-Christoph (2012): Grenzsicherung oder Wandel durch Annäherung? Zum Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Bildungstheorie und empirischer Bildungsforschung. In: Zeitschrift für Pädagogik 58 (1), pp. 6-21.
- Lindemann, Gesa (2008): Theoriekonstruktion und empirische Forschung. In: Kalthoff, Herbert; Hirschauer, Stefan; Lindemann, Gesa (Eds.): Theoretische Empirie. Zur Relevanz qualitativer Forschung. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, pp. 107-128.
- Mehan, Hugh (1979): Learning Lessons: Social Organization in the Classroom. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Reckwitz, Andreas (2003): Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken. Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive. In: Zeitschrift für Soziologie 32 (4), pp. 282-301.
- Sünkel, Wolfgang (2002): Phänomenologie des Unterrichts. Grundriss der theoretischen Didaktik. 2. Auflage. Weinheim, München: Juventa.
- Swidler, Ann (1986): Culture in action: symbols and strategies. In: American Sociological Review 51 (2), pp. 273-286.
- Uhle, Reinhard (1995): Individualpädagogik oder Sozialerziehung. Zur Ambivalenz von Autonomie und Re-Vergemeinschaftung. Bad Heilbrunn: Verlag Julius Klinkhardt.
- Valsiner, Jaan (2003): Culture and its Transfer: Ways of Creating General Knowledge Through the Study of Cultural Particulars. In: Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, 2 (1), URL: <https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1013>, [accessed 15 June 2023].

The authors

Spendrin, Karla, Dr. is a lecturer at the Chair of General Didactics and School Pedagogy in Secondary Schools at Leipzig University, Germany. After a PhD on didactic competencies for E-Learning and Blended Learning, she focuses on teaching research especially with videographic reconstructive methods. In this field, she works on methodological questions, such as the possibilities and challenges of teaching research in different cultural contexts and the role of normativity for teaching research.

ORCID: 0000-0001-6101-6020

Hallitzky, Maria, Prof. Dr. is Professor for General Didactics and School Pedagogy for Secondary Schools at Leipzig University, Germany. Her particular research interest lies in the area of research into individualisation and communitisation in the classroom in a national and international context and aspects of steering and opening up teaching with a view to learning democracy in the classroom. Methodologically, she is orientated towards methods of videography-based, qualitative-reconstructive research. She also examines the methodological significance of normativity in methodological procedures.

ORCID: 0000-0002-0867-112X