

Martens, Matthias; Kinoshita, Emi

Cultural constructions in classroom interaction research. The documentary method in intercultural interpretation settings

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. 202-210



Quellenangabe/ Reference:

Martens, Matthias; Kinoshita, Emi: Cultural constructions in classroom interaction research. The documentary method in intercultural interpretation settings - 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. 202-210 - URN: urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-341948 - DOI: 10.25656/01:34194; 10.35468/6193-17

<https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0111-pedocs-341948>

<https://doi.org/10.25656/01:34194>

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

Matthias Martens and Emi Kinoshita

Cultural Constructions in Classroom Interaction Research: The Documentary Method in Intercultural Interpretation Settings

Abstracts

EN

In this article, we reflect on cultural constructions in empirical classroom research: We focus on cultural constructions within the classroom setting, within the data collection by videography and within the process of data analysis. Based on a brief introduction to the documentary method in classroom interaction research, we illustrate exemplarily the methodical procedure, referring to two different classroom settings from Germany and Japan. With reference to the empirical data and the interpretation setting, we will discuss some potentials and challenges in conducting the documentary method in an intercultural interpretation setting, focusing in particular on the local connectedness of the researcher.

DE

In diesem Artikel reflektieren wir über kulturelle Konstruktionen in der empirischen Unterrichtsforschung: Wir fokussieren auf kulturelle Konstruktionen in der Unterrichtssituation, im videogestützten Beobachten (Datenerhebung) und im Prozess der Datenanalyse. Ausgehend von einer kurzen Einführung in die Dokumentarische Methode in der Unterrichtsforschung veranschaulichen wir exemplarisch das methodische Vorgehen anhand von zwei unterschiedlichen Unterrichtssettings aus Deutschland und Japan. Mit Bezug auf die empirischen Daten und spezifische Bedingungen der Dateninterpretation werden wir Potentiale und Herausforderungen bei der Anwendung der Dokumentarischen Methode in einem interkulturellen Auswertungssetting diskutieren. Wir fokussieren dabei insbesondere auf die Standortgebundenheit der Forschenden.

PT

Neste artigo, refletimos sobre as construções culturais na investigação empírica na sala de aula: centramo-nos nas construções culturais na situação da sala de aula, na observação baseada em vídeo (recolha de dados) e no processo de análise de dados. Com base numa breve introdução ao Método Documentário na investigação na sala de aula, ilustramos a abordagem metodológica utilizando como exemplos duas diferentes situações de sala de aula na Alemanha e no Japão. Com referência aos dados empíricos e às condições específicas de interpretação dos dados, discutiremos os potenciais e os desafios da aplicação do Método Documentário num ambiente de avaliação intercultural. Em particular, centrar-nos-emos na vinculação local dos investigadores.

JA

本稿では、経験的な授業研究における文化の再構成について省察する。そのため、授業状況、ビデオを用いた観察（データ収集）、データ分析の過程で起こる文化の再構成に焦点を当てる。授業研究に特有のドキュメンタリー法の簡潔な導入につづき、ドイツと日本でおこなわれた二つの異なる授業状況にもとづいて方法的手続きを事例的に示す。経験的なデータとデータ解釈の特殊条件に関わって、異文化間で分析をおこなう際のドキュメンタリー法の活用について、可能性と課題を議論する。その際、研究者が自分の立ち位置と結びついていることにとくに焦点を当てる。

1 Introduction

In this contribution we reflect on cultural constructions in empirical classroom research: We focus on cultural constructions within the classroom setting, within the data collection by videography, and within the process of data analysis. Cause for these reflections was our participation in the Maputo conference where we discussed potentials and challenges of theoretical and methodological approaches to school and teaching research in intercultural contexts. This contribution is based on our workshop on documentary method (Bohnsack 2010) and will present examples from classroom research in Germany and Japan.

In the following, we will briefly introduce the methodology of documentary method in the field of classroom interaction research. Thereafter, we illustrate exemplarily the methodical procedure referring to visual data from two different classroom settings from Germany and Japan. Finally, with reference to the empirical data and the interpretation setting, we will discuss potentials

and challenges to conduct the documentary method in an intercultural (i.e., German – Japanese) interpretation setting with special consideration of the researchers cultural situatedness.

2 Documentary Method in Classroom Interaction Research

2.1 Methodology and Procedure

The documentary method is mainly rooted in German, respectively Western sociology of knowledge. It is a tool of qualitative social research that aims to analyse configurations of knowledge that are at work in personal and collective practice. As a research method, it has been implemented in a broad range of scientific fields in the German academia, but it is also used internationally (e.g., Bohnsack & Weller 2006; Bohnsack, Pfaff & Weller 2010)¹. Due to the focus on knowledge, the documentary method is often used in school-related research on professional development, classroom interaction and on teaching and learning. Based on Karl Mannheim's (1952) "sociology of knowledge", Ralf Bohnsack (2010) elaborated the documentary method as a tool to analyse group discussions. Meanwhile, the method has been applied e.g., in interview, picture, and video analysis (Bohnsack 2014; Gresch & Martens 2019; Martens & Asbrand 2022; Nohl 2010; Wagner-Willi 2012).

Basically, the documentary method focusses on social interaction and provides an analytical approach to the immanent (explicit, literal) meaning of 'what is said and done' as well as the documentary (implicit, tacit) meaning of 'how something is said and done.' Accordingly, Mannheim (1952) distinguishes two types of knowledge underlying social interaction: the *communicative knowledge* subsumes the body of theoretical knowledge the individual has available in order to articulate it explicitly. In general, this knowledge includes social norms and roles. In social interaction it is used e.g., to describe the self-perception as well as to justify the own actions. In school-related research, the communicative knowledge may subsume the teacher's knowledge concerning the students' learning, content knowledge and teaching beliefs etc. Besides this, Mannheim conceptualises the *conjunctive knowledge* that describes an a-theoretical, tacit, habitualised or incorporated knowledge. This knowledge subsumes the value orientations and behavioural routines that underlie the individuals' or social groups' (everyday) practices and suggests a generic system that creates a range of typical knowledge and actions. Mannheim assumes that the conjunctive knowledge is a situated knowledge, generated implicitly in social practice in a certain social group, milieu or social field. In talks

1 For a list with international references to documentary method, see: www.dokumentarische-methode.de

and actions, both *communicative and conjunctive knowledge* are present. Thus, research with the documentary method is interested in the specific relation between these two types of knowledge. In three steps of interpretation both types of knowledge are first analytically distinguished and second systematically related to each other:

1) The *formulating interpretation*, or the first order interpretation, is conducted from the perspective of the subjects under study and reformulates what social reality is from their perspective (Bohnsack 2010). It focuses on the communicative, reflective, theoretical knowledge of the participants, their explicated perception of their social reality. In video-based classroom research this step of interpretation is to summarise *what the participants are talking about* (i.e. to work out the structure of topics, to differentiate main topics from subtopics, and to paraphrase what the participants are talking about) and to describe *what they are doing*, e.g. the positions and movements in the room and to each other, gestures, mime, and the involved things such as teaching and learning materials, personal belongings that are present in the classroom etc. (Gresch & Martens 2019; Martens & Asbrand 2022).

2) The step of *reflecting interpretation* reveals the conjunctive, tacit knowledge from what was said verbatim and done (Bohnsack 2010). In contrast to the first interpretation step, the reflecting interpretation focuses on “how this reality is produced or accomplished” (ibid.: 102) and includes a formal interpretation of the interactional order, i.e., analyses of the formal function of utterances, gestures, and actions. To reveal the underlying implicit meaning, the researcher must change his or her analytical stance. Heuristic questions often asked in video-based classroom research are, e.g., *how* the participants discuss the framing topics, *how* students and teacher take positions in the classroom, *how* they interact, *how* the things are involved. These questions serve to reconstruct the participants’ collective orientation or habitus (Bourdieu 1996) and to work out the inherent social structure or logic that underlies the socio-material configurations. The framework of orientation or the habitus of the agents is reconstructed to analyse how the agents address the topic or act. This methodical step enables researchers to identify whether the students’ and teachers’ frameworks of orientation are collectively shared, incommensurable or related in a complementary way (Gresch & Martens 2019; Martens & Asbrand 2022).

3) In the third step, the *formation of types*, implicit and explicit meaning are related systematically as the formulating and reflecting interpretations are merged and condensed for purposes of a clear presentation in a scientific article. Rather than describing each individual case, the documentary method formulates types in terms of generalised rules and frameworks of orientation

from all cases. Throughout the entire process of data interpretation, comparative analyses are necessary to reveal the structural differences and similarities between the frameworks of orientation of the certain cases (Bohnsack 2010; Glaser & Strauss 1967; Gresch & Martens 2019).

2.2 Documentary Classroom Interaction Research: Examples from a German and a Japanese Classroom

Introducing the documentary method briefly as a tool for classroom research in an intercultural, multilingual setting, we decided to exemplify the research methodology by analysing visual data from a German and a Japanese classroom setting (stills from the classroom videos), so that we reduce interculturally caused language distortions and can concentrate on bodily and spatial aspects. Focusing on how the teacher and the students are positioned in the room and to each other, how they move, and how they interact with each other and with things, the visual data provide access to the participants' collective orientation or habitus and to the inherent social structure underlying the socio-material configurations in the classroom. In the following, some results of the formulating and reflecting interpretation will be shown. Due to the data capacity, the formation of types as a third methodical step is not accomplished here.



Still 1 (left) and 2 (right): Classroom setting, German comprehensive school

Still 1 shows a fifth-grade classroom in a German comprehensive school. We can observe a room with one teacher, about 25 students and a lot of different things (tables, chairs, blackboard, pictures, books, maps, learning materials...) that are related to teaching and learning and also to the class as a social group (e.g., the personal profiles of every student at rear wall) and the individual student (e.g., personal belongings on the tables). The things that are observable in the classroom suggest that both academic and social learning are important elements of learning culture in this school. Furthermore, the presence of learning materials provides evidence for a material-based teaching and a personalised learning approach. We can observe a decentralised classroom order with grouping which suggest the importance of student-centred interaction

and cooperative learning as the main focus of pedagogy. At the same time, the blackboard is dominant in the picture, as it is associated with the teacher and serves as a teaching instrument. The socio-material order manifests various centres of attention (Still 2). The viewing directions indicate a reciprocity of teacher and (some) students and a reciprocity among students. We can observe an ambivalence between decentralisation (table groups) and centralisation (blackboard/interactional space of the teacher). The students re-order themselves in the room according to the task and the directive of the teacher.



Still 3 (left) and 4 (right): Classroom setting, Japanese high school

Still 3 shows a twelfth-grade classroom at a Japanese high school, in which a male student is giving a presentation to the class. We can observe different participants and things in the classroom arrangement: almost 30 students in school uniforms are sitting at individual desks in six rows. To the front of the student rows, we see the student who is giving the presentation (2nd person from the right), the teacher (3rd person from the right), and on the right side of the classroom, there are some adults standing alongside the partition wall who are looking towards the teacher and/or the student who is giving the presentation. Their position in the room indicates that they are not part of the actual social order in the classroom (context information: these persons are visitors in the context of Lesson Study). The classroom itself is sparsely decorated: only a portrait and a clock are visible. The rows of students' desks are facing a dominant blackboard and a notice board with some posters. The teaching platform, lectern and the blackboard constitute 'the front' of the room, the centre of attention for all students. A reciprocal relation is constituted between the student who is giving a presentation and the students sitting at their desks, indicating that the student giving the presentation has assumed the teaching position. At the same time the teacher remains in charge, supervising the presentation from the elevated position of his teaching platform. This indicates a hierarchical social order in the classroom, as well as of knowledge production. The bodily arrangement divides the classroom into front and rear (Still 4): The front is a prominent and rather exclusive sphere of teaching, reserved for the teacher and students when selected by the teacher. Besides the teaching

platform, the difference in positions keeps the hierarchical difference between the teacher and the selected students distinct. At the rear of the classroom, all students are sitting at their desks, their bodies and direction of view oriented towards the front of the classroom. This tension between individualisation and collectivisation can also be observed in materials, the school uniforms, and the individual desks.

3 Cultural Constructions in Classroom Interaction Research: A Brief Discussion

Interpreting visual materials from classroom situations based on the documentary method in an intercultural setting, faced three dimensions of research processes: how to reflect cultural construction within the data itself, with the observation process and within the analysis process.

1. Cultural construction within the classroom setting: comparing the German and the Japanese classroom setting gives us a tentative impression of how the teachers and students act within, and (re-)produce a certain culture of learning. In the German example, we find a decentralised socio-material order. The multiple centres of attention reveal the ambivalence of personalised learning and instructional orientation. In the Japanese example, we find a clearly hierarchical order of knowledge production that constitutes the teacher-student interaction. The hierarchical social order between teacher and students is characterised by a tension between individualisation and collectivisation.

2. Cultural construction within the classroom observation by videography: Comparing both cases enables us to question how the researcher constructs a certain understanding of the classroom interaction by choosing certain instruments of data collection (e.g., video cameras), by selecting certain elements of the interaction (e.g., by the placement of the camera and choice of a certain framing), and by operating in the field in a certain way. In both cases, the research setting, and the camera view were initiated by German researchers. The researchers' camera perspective creates a teacher-centred view on the classroom interaction, as it is positioned vis-à-vis the teacher and placed behind the students. The teachers' practices can be observed in particular, while the students' practices are not in the focus. In both cases, the view of the camera indicates a main centre of attention (the 'front' with the blackboard and the teacher). The camera view coproduces a hierarchical relation between the teacher and the students, even though the socio-material order, at least in the German classroom, does not suggest this perspective. Both cameras capture the classroom interaction from an elevated position and therefore from an adult perspective.

3. Cultural construction within the data analysis: Contrasting both classroom settings forces us to ask how the choice of a research method and certain research habits or routines (e.g., how to address the field, to collect and to analyse data) create a particular understanding of the data. Due to its origin, the documentary method refers to conceptions and premises of society and of knowledge as well as of epistemology and methodology that are deeply rooted in German and Western thinking. Using the documentary method in intercultural contexts demands that researchers carefully consider the societal foundations of the research to avoid academic colonialism (cf. Takayama, Sriprakash & Connell 2016). Regarding our research routines, both authors recognised a practiced familiarity with the particular classroom setting from a German and a Japanese perspective and would characterise them as quite 'typical'. At the same time, it would be inappropriate to generalise the encountered differences in the learning culture of the two classrooms in terms of cultural differences between the German and Japanese educational system: The differences within German classrooms, e.g., are probably as large as the encountered differences between the German and the Japanese classroom. To avoid the reification of cultural differences and to reach the level of cultural comparative research, the German and the Japanese educational system would have to be observed under a far more complex research design.

Collaborative interpretation of own data as well as of data from different contexts in an intercultural setting enables – and forces – us to reflect how research objects and cultures are determined from each other. The format of a research workshop, which is embedded in the interpretation process of the documentary method and qualitative research, enables us to be aware of culturalist shortcomings.

References

- Bohnsack, Ralf (2014): The Interpretation of Pictures and the Documentary Method. In: Hughes, Jason; Goodwin, John (Eds.): *Documentary and Archival Research. Volume 2: Analysing Human Documents*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Bohnsack, Ralf (2010): Documentary Method and Group Discussions. In: Bohnsack, Ralf; Pfaff, Nicole; Weller, Vivian (Eds.): *Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research*. Opladen: Budrich, pp. 99-124.
- Bohnsack, Ralf; Pfaff, Nicole; Weller, Vivian (2010): Reconstructive Research and Documentary Method in Brazilian and German Educational Science – An Introduction. In: Bohnsack, Ralf; Pfaff, Nicole; Weller, Viviane (Eds.): *Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research*. Opladen: Budrich, pp. 7-40.
- Bohnsack, Ralf; Weller, Viviane (2006): O método documentário e sua utilização em grupos de discussão. *Educação em Foco*. Juiz de Fora, 11 (2), pp. 19-38.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1996): *Distinction. Social critique of the judgement of taste*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- Gresch, Helge; Martens, Matthias (2019): Teleology as a tacit dimension of teaching and learning evolution: A sociological approach to classroom interaction. In: *Science Education. Journal for Research in Science Teaching*, 56 (2), pp. 243-269.
- Mannheim, Karl (1952): *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Martens, Matthias (2015): Understanding the nature of history. Students' tacit epistemology in dealing with conflicting historical narratives. In: Chapman, Arthur; Wilschut, Arie (Eds.): *Joined Up History: New directions in history education research*. (International Review of History Education; Vol. 8). Information Age Publishing, pp. 211-230.
- Martens, Matthias; Asbrand, Barbara (2022): Documentary Classroom Research. Theory and Methodology. In: Martens, Matthias; Asbrand, Barbara; Buchborn, Thade; Menthe, Jürgen (Eds.): *Dokumentarische Unterrichtsforschung in den Fachdidaktiken. Theoretische Grundlagen und Forschungspraxis*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, pp. 19-37.
- Nohl, Arnd-Michael (2010): Narrative Interview and Documentary Interpretations. In: Bohnsack, Ralf; Pfaff, Nicolle; Weller, Wivian (Eds.): *Qualitative Analysis and Documentary Method in International Educational Research*. Opladen: Budrich, pp. 195-218.
- Takayama, Keita; Sriprakash, Arathi; Connell, Raewyn (2017): Toward a Postcolonial Comparative and International Education. In: *Comparative Education Review* 61 (Supplement), pp. 1-14. URL: <https://doi.org/10.1086/690455>, [accessed 20 February 2025].
- Wagner-Willi, Monika (2012): On the Multidimensional Analysis of Video Data: Documentary Interpretation of Interaction in Schools. In: Knoblauch, Hubert; Schnettler, Bernd; Raab, Jürgen; Soeffner, Hans-Georg (Eds.): *Videoanalysis – Methodology and Methods. Qualitative Audiovisual Data Analysis in Sociology*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, pp. 143-153.

The authors

Martens, Matthias, Prof. Dr. is Professor of School Research and Teaching Development at Cologne University, Germany, and academic director of University School for Inclusive Education in Cologne.

Since his early academic career in history education and school pedagogy, he is engaged in empirical educational research, in particular qualitative methodology and video analysis; domain-specific teaching and learning as well as individualised/adaptive education in secondary schools.

ORCID: 0000-0001-6593-8209

Kinoshita, Emi, Dr. is a lecturer at the Chair of General Didactics and School Pedagogy in Secondary Schools at Leipzig University, Germany.

Since her early academic career in Japan, she has majored in comparative education, history of educational thought of teachers and educators, as well as qualitative research methods from transcultural perspectives. She is now especially engaged in intercultural projects on qualitative-reconstructive classroom research and lesson development in Leipzig.

ORCID: 0000-0001-6512-4563