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The Temptation of Documentation: Potential and Challenges of Videographic Documentation and Interpretation. A Case-Study from a Civic Education Research Project in Germany

Insights into the civic education classroom can be gained through *videographic documentation*. Videographic material offers, as I argue in this article, great possibilities: Through a *reconstructive approach* insights into dimensions of civic education such as spatial organisation, symbolic representation and non-verbal communication may emerge. In this way, a deeper understanding of *informal political learning in school* can be obtained. These aspects have not yet been considered in depth with videographic documentation primarily employed to date in *teacher training* contexts and lesson evaluation.

The case study I present here was inspired by the *documentary method* and both the potential and limitations of videographic interpretation are discussed in this context. The study also suggests that what is not offered by videographic documentation includes insights into the *individual and collective integration* of experiences in civic education lessons.

Keywords

videography, reconstructive approach, documentary method, gender, recognition

1 Introduction

1.1 Katharina, discussing peace and war

While Katharina is talking, Nico turns towards the boys in the back and apparently tries to communicate with them. When Katharina ends her statement, he – by now he had turned towards the discussion table again – is looking downwards and says (silently and without any clear emotion): “see, we already got her... there we go again”. Till is laughing and clapping, while Katharina, smiling, looks at Nico and shakes her head. Between the teacher, Till and Nico a discussion starts regarding whether they convinced Katharina or not.

The description of this short sequence is part of a more complex process of interpretation. The case I work with in this text is that of a fourteen year old girl, Katharina, who took part in a project conducted by the Chair of Didactics of Civic Education at the Philipps-University Marburg and her Civics teacher (see Henkenborg, Mambour and Winckler 2014). One of the outputs of the project was a videographic documentation of a teaching unit composed of ten individual lessons. In addition to this audiovisual documentation, we also conducted focus-group discussions and interviews with the students. In this paper, I focus on a video-sequence in which Katharina discusses the question of whether peace can be made through war with three of her classmates. The video shows how meaning is constructed beyond the spoken word through the facial expressions, gestures and the symbolic performances in interaction. In the following text, I consider, on the basis of the above

example, the potential and challenges of videographic documentation. My readings, or possible explanations or frameworks within which this particular videographic extract can be interpreted, are considered in the light of further data related to this particular sequence emerging from other sources, including recorded group work and interviews.

1.2 Insights into citizenship classrooms – figuring out what to do

The Call for Papers for this particular issue asked for insights into citizenship classrooms and a reflection on the art of documentation. On first considering this call, my intention was to write a video-based documentary interpretation of Katharina’s case. On further reflection and re-reading the call, I realized that I wasn’t being asked to foreground my own interpretation.. Instead, the call asked for reflection on the art of documentation. To be honest, it was somewhat unclear to me what the “art of documentation” implied. However, the Journal of Social Science Education has already focused on qualitative research in the field of civic education. The issue was called “*voices from the classroom*” (JSSE 3/2010), while the current issue bears the title “*insights into the classroom*”.

I understood that as a shift from auditive to visual data-based research, i.e. from *voices* to *insights*, and took it as an opportunity to share my experiences with videography. And as I was part of the aforementioned project, I can return to different kinds of data, videos, recordings from group work, focus-group discussions and interviews. With this, I am in the privileged situation of being able to consider which of these documents help to illuminate which dimension of what happens in the classroom.

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I will start with a short introduction to the project itself and our experiences with the documentation of civic education lessons in school. We, the project-team including Professor Henkenborg with his team and the school teacher Dr. Gerrit Mambour, focused on the work with videography in order to get documentation with which we could work in academic courses and in the training of teachers. Our initial focus was not research based. However, we later decided to consider the material in a workshop on the documentary interpretation of videos.

1.3 Why videography?

There are many ways to document what happens in the classroom. Indeed, as videography poses more challenges to researchers than having to deal with solely auditive documentation, one might ask: why videography? The technical challenges are bigger, the juridical questions stricter, the limitations regarding the authenticity of lessons are greater and last but not least: the material generated is much more complex.

However, the video can be considered a method of mimetic character (see Tuma et. al. 2013, 34) and has the potential to bring the researcher very close to the complex processes in the classroom. It contrasts with researcher observation in that the observation and reconstruction of what happens both sequentially and simultaneously can be repeated and shared. This helps to make interpretations more transparent. In addition, in contrast with interviews or group discussion, the video offers insights into the corporal and symbolic dimension of interaction (see Fritzsche, Wagner-Willi 2013, 268). In our experience, this contiguity poses challenges and requires great awareness, specific attitudes and sophisticated standards of interpretation.

Considering the state of the art of documentation in our field, I now reflect on the question of whether the specific potential offered by a video-documented lesson has been made use of in our field. This is followed by a video-based, documentary interpretation, and then by increasingly complex material necessitating further interpretation obtained when data from other sources was taken into account. This will be used to identify what the video doesn't show and why there might be a 'temptation' to jump to conclusions too quickly.

The two main questions are:

- Focusing on videographic documentation, what needs to be considered methodologically when we work with documentation of lessons?
- Focusing on the case of Katharina, which data delivers insights into which aspects of learning and socialization?

2 Teaching political competencies. A collaborative project between school and university

Ever since international comparative studies such as PISA became a reference point for the political and academic discussion about the quality of education,

many magical terms like 'outcome governance', 'standardization', 'competencies' and others have emerged. The educational and didactic disciplines intensified empirical research and fed into the professionalization of teachers. In the field of the didactics of civic education – faster than in other areas of social science education – models of core political competencies were formulated and published. Nearly all protagonists found such developments to be a good opportunity to stress what they had always considered to be of importance for the development of political responsibility.

We, like many others in the field of the didactics of civic education, wondered how to actually implement the innovations in the academic training of teachers. How do we teach future educators to plan and construct lessons according to competencies? And in what way do these lessons differ from traditionally planned ones? Questions like these marked the beginning of this project which had two goals: First, to produce a book on the process of planning and evaluating the ten lessons which made up our teaching unit and second, to create a CD with videographic material that could be used in training contexts. We were fortunate in that we found Gerrit Mambour, a teacher who was already interested in the discussion around competencies and agreed to both join the planning team and allow himself be filmed teaching the unit in question.

In December 2011, the lesson planning was finished and the technical equipment set up. In the last three weeks before the Christmas break of 2011 the project was realized and ten lessons were documented.

2.1 Working with videographic documentation – experiences and challenges

In early 2012, we started the process of video-based reflection. Considering those sessions in hindsight, I am quite surprised by our first approach to the materials, how quickly we judged, how difficult it was to keep a certain distance and how often we brought up superficial explanations for the teacher's and students' behavior: "if he only explained that, the students would have understood it perfectly!" "look, you can see he is ashamed because she said it like that"... When I analysed videographic documentation in my own classes at the university I noticed a similar phenomenon. While videographic documentation is generally considered of particular value in contributing to understanding of the complexity of interaction in a lesson, the question of how to analyze and interpret the video remains relevant.

In the literature two different ways of dealing with videography in the context of school are identified. The first stems from educational ethnography and approaches the documented lessons as unfamiliar, as obscure, as new to the beholder. The viewer adopts a reconstructive attitude which means that he or she doesn't aim to pass judgments on the quality or effectiveness of lessons and doesn't explain behaviour



psychologically (see Fritzsche, Wagner-Willi 2013, 269). The second can be seen in the context of quality management and evaluation-research. According to this latter approach, one observes the documented lessons according to given quality standards, the attitude adopted here may be considered less open and to have a greater focus on assessment.

For Professor Hans-Werner Kuhn in Freiburg, the interpretation of lessons is a core-competence of teachers and one which is strongly associated with sensitivity, awareness and carefully considered judgment (see Kuhn 2004). This view reflects in my opinion the optimum approach to the use of *videographic* documentation. There are many ways to document processes of teaching and learning. These include dense description, reflective portfolios, records and transcriptions, interviews, analysis of work sheets or videographic documentation and all of them have both potential and associated challenges. Out of all these, the videographic data needs to be handled with the most care in both research contexts and in academic courses as it can become a distorting mirror when used to focus on the deficits without reflecting on the fact that documentation are never more than a fraction of reality (see Dorlöchter et al.).

3 Insights into the classroom – The state of the art of documentation

Qualitative empirical research into what goes on in the classroom has produced a rich fundus of insights, although the systematic documentation and provision of documentation has been rare so far. In short, this is the state of the art of documentation in the field of civic education in Germany. But what does that mean in detail? The implications of this state of affairs are considered in the following sections.

3.1 The empirical turn and the dilemma between practical use and methodological reflection

The so called ‘empirical turn’ in the didactics of civic education, the change from mainly theoretical and normative scientific work to a more empirically oriented research, resulted in a variety of empirical approaches to political learning in school. The three aspects of the so called ‘didactic triangle’, the teacher, the student and the subject, were the focus of various research projects and helped to understand what is actually happening in the classroom as well as to link this enhanced understanding to the theories and normative standards of the academic discipline (Grammes 2007; Schelle 2007).¹

Gaining insights into classrooms, especially videographic insights, is a challenging and time consuming task. As mentioned above, in addition, the data is hugely complex. In order to avoid arbitrary interpretation, particular methodical standards must be employed. Therefore it comes as no surprise that videographic projects are generally conducted by research teams. Nearly all research projects in which

civic education lessons were documented arose from cooperations between universities, schools and teacher-training institutions (e.g. Gagel, Grammes and Unger 1992; Grammes, Weißeno 1993; Massing, Weißeno 1997; Kuhn, Massing 1999).

Obviously, for an academic discipline such as the didactics of civic education which performs both teacher training and research on the various topics of civic education, cooperation between university and school is reasonable. We find ourselves nonetheless facing a dilemma whereby an (understandable!) focus on practical use goes hand in hand with a certain lack of methodological discussions in educational and teaching research (e.g. in Schelle, Rabenstein, Reh 2010). This lack of methodological reflection in turn reduces the ability of researchers to adhere to standard procedures when it comes to interpreting material and thus reduces the comparability of findings in the area.

3.2 State of the art – What we have, what we are missing

There are of course those interested in methodological research (e.g. the anthologies edited by Richter 2000 and Schelle, Richter 2006; also Schelle 2003). Kuhn, in particular has developed a method he called ‘politikdidaktische Hermeneutik’ (civic education hermeneutics) and also took part in several videographic projects (for an overview see Kuhn 2008). Furthermore, as mentioned before, he himself described the interpretation of lessons as a ‘core competence’ of teachers (Kuhn in 2004) and stressed the significance of methodological reflection. Nonetheless many of the contributions in anthologies edited by Kuhn rather *present* interpretations than reflect their work from a methodological perspective.

An absence of methodological reflection and clear standards of interpretation does not, of course, imply that the texts are without value. On the contrary, they offer many benefits and help to focus on core questions of didactic thinking.² The lack I refer to becomes relevant when we compare the state of the art in our field with the methodological reflections and standards that exist in the educational sciences and research into teaching in particular. It would be desirable if, instead of everyone following their own procedures of interpretation, more standardised methods including, for example, as *Objektive Hermeneutik* (objective / structural hermeneutics), *Konversationsanalyse* (conversation analysis) or *Dokumentarische Methode* (the documentary method) were used with the choice of method dependent on the particular focus of the research.

Therefore, an intensive discussion around theoretical and methodological approaches as well as particular techniques is called for in civic education. As Sander (2007) concludes, many methodological approaches have been developed and tried, but there is no elaborated overview of two aspects in particular: 1) which methods could be used for the interpretation of lessons in our



field? 2) which methodological approaches actually help to answer which questions? A possible approach to the categorisation of methods could be to define them as evaluative or reconstructive. Evaluative methods focus more directly on questions of learning and teaching, while reconstructive methods would focus more on implicit aspects which might only indirectly answer questions concerning the arrangement of lessons, but should help to understand informal processes of political socialization during the lesson.

What we have are video-documented lessons from various projects on the one hand and case studies, mostly based on transcribed lessons and interpreted very differently, on the other hand. While there is no video-archive of civic education lessons which would make the material available to a larger set of researchers, we do have some anthologies containing studies about lessons, of which some even include a CD with videographic material.

Although the methodological discussion in the field of the didactics of civic education isn't that extensive, there are some valuable publications in which we find a greater focus on methodological questions (e.g. Richter 2000). Yet most of the interpretations focus on the spoken word during a lesson – while visual, non-verbal aspects, performative and symbolic dimensions of interaction have not yet been considered in a systematic manner.

Yet two aspects merit a mention. Firstly, there is an awareness of and interest in aspects such as spatial organisation and materials in civic education research (see Grammes 1998). Secondly, the focus on language at the expense of pictorial and spatial embeddedness of social practice reflects a more widespread tendency in this regard in qualitative research in general (see Fritzsche, Wagner-Willi 2013, 269).³

Concluding the overview on the state of the art of documentation, I would like to highlight two aspects of the video-projects in our field. First, to the best of my knowledge, most projects were situated in training rather than research contexts and, as a result, discussion and analysis focused more on issues of lesson quality than reconstructive questions. Second, while the projects used videography in order to document lessons they focused on language in their analysis, thereby rather neglecting the specific potential videography offers.

4 Videographic interpretation – potential and limitations

4.1 The documentary method

The context in which Katharina's case was interpreted was a workshop on videographic interpretation using the documentary method.

The method is part of the reconstructive paradigm and derives from Karl Mannheim's *Wissenssoziologie* (sociology of knowledge). The documentary method had initially been developed for the interpretation of group-discussions (see Bohnsack 1989. Further variations for the interpretation of biographic interviews (see Nohl

2005) and for the interpretation of pictures and videos (see Bohnsack et. al. 2007) were developed (also see: Bohnsack, Pfaff, Weller 2010 in English). Working according to the rules of the documentary method one has to abstain from assessing. The reconstructive attitude and the interpretation process instead help to understand underlying dynamics of interaction, collective orientations and the production of shared experiences and meanings. Attention is paid to *how* things are done or said and to the performative aspects of interaction (see Tuma 2013, 50; Fritzsche/ Wagner-Willi 2013).

As Schelle, Rabenstein and Reh (2010, 60) comment, the potential of this method has not been exploited for the study of lessons to date despite the fact that it could be an appropriate tool to analyse and understand the interconnectivity of content and social processes, for example during group work (see Schelle / Rabenstein / Reh 2010, 60) and might thus illuminate the relationship between formal and informal learning.

4.2 A sample interpretation

This preliminary interpretation arose from a workshop about the documentary interpretation of videos is not presented here as a model approach but is instead intended to provide an example of one way in which one could deal with videographic material according to methodological standards (see Wagner-Willi 2007).

In the interpretation of the sequence we focused on the student, Katharina. She and three classmates discuss the thesis: 'Peace cannot be made through war! Or can it?' While Nico and Till argue that peace can be made through war, Katharina and Julia argue that it cannot. The discussion follows a certain structure: introductory statements, free discussion, final statements.



The Discussion between Katharina, Till, Nico and Julia⁴

(Use your videoplayer to shift to fullscreen mode)

The interpretation was inspired by the question of how experiences in civic education lessons are integrated into the formation of a political self-image.⁵ The videographic interpretation should help in gaining an understanding of what Katharina actually experienced. For this purpose, we concentrated on the nature of the interactions and identified three different levels which intermingled, clashed with and intensified one another with certain consequences for Katharina.



- The interaction between the students as experts in the debate: Communication here happens rather seldom and is disturbed easily by peer-specific interaction, such as the demonstration of dominance by Nico or the expression of annoyance by Katharina:

KATHARINA: yes, as I already said, that depending on how you **define** peace and war it is uhm (..) @well@ not possible uh to make peace through war; if one sees it like that what we have in Libya now is peace; for(.) yea if you see it like that(.) well then(.) alright then maybe the war is justified(.) but (...) if you define peace and war differently °then(.) not°

NICO: see, we already got her (..) there we go again

Taking the nonverbal aspect into account, Nico focuses on the students at the back and doesn't look at Katharina. His posture and gestures are rather effortless and 'cool'. His spoken words, 'there we go again...' refer to a general experience he had had with convincing Katharina. It seems that Nico does not really see Katharina as a debating partner by whom he might be challenged..

Her gestures and facial expressions in turn give the impression of both amusement and annoyance in that she reacts to Nico's comments nonverbally. She smiles, she shakes her head, she crosses her arms, she roles her eyes. Her verbal response then follows and is, according to her body language addressed to Till, not Nico.

- The interaction between the Mr. Mambour and the adolescents: The interaction on this level is dominated by *educational* interventions by Mr. Mambour. Through minimal gestures such as pointing at the adolescents and nodding, he remains the one who grants permission to speak. One could say that he carries out his task very much in the role of a teacher, which here means that he structures the debate in terms of its content.

Teacher: But I want to look at another point (..) because I think there are some similarities [...]

... and intervenes pedagogically:

Teacher: @I don't have the impression that you convinced her!@ not yet.

- The debating adolescents follow this to different degrees; for Katharina the combination of pedagogical intervention and structuring of content has ambivalent consequences. Although the teacher rebukes the boys, he supports the devaluation of what she said with no consideration of her argument and as such contributes to her marginalization.
- The interaction between the students directly involved in the debate and their classmates who are not: Non-

verbally the student, Nico, communicates with the boys in the back rows or at least tries to. The intensity with which he tries to communicate with these students might indicate that he sees *them* as his counterparts. His low level of commitment to the debate goes along with the (non-verbal) communication with the boys at the back and the level of ironic interjections towards Katharina goes hand in hand with the degree to which his classmates reduce the communication with him.

4.3 Recognition and gender: interpreting the sequence readings

Readings of the interaction suggest that this case can be framed in terms of gender roles and according to *Anerkennungstheorie* (recognition theory).

First reading: recognition theory

For example, starting with the latter, one possible interpretation of what happens during the sequence is inspired by the *Anerkennungstheorie* (theory of recognition) of Honneth and the transfer of that theory to civic education by Henkenborg (Henkenborg 2002). Following this perspective, one could view the debate as a struggle for recognition. The students' status as experts in a debate is repeatedly questioned by the teacher's performance (structuring the content, intervening pedagogically). *Kognitive Achtung*, which means to experience oneself as someone who has rights, isn't certain. The fact that Katharina's argument had been misunderstood by Nico and then ignored by the teacher could be interpreted as a lack of *Soziale Wertschätzung* or the experiencing of oneself as someone who contributes something of value.

An uncertain struggle for recognition documents itself in the interaction in the sequence. Katharina tried to participate in terms of content but had difficulties asserting herself in the confrontation involving the denial of her status as a debating partner. That denial was acted out ironically by the student Nico and was intensified by the fact that the teacher, while rebuking the boy on a pedagogical level, ignored her argument just as the student did.

Second reading: gender

A second possible reading ties in with perspectives on gender and political socialization. Studies (Kuhn 2010) suggest that even where girls know as much as boys do, girls are less self-confident about it. In the field of the didactics of civic education, these gender-specificities have also been confirmed empirically (see Kroll 2001; Boeser 2002). Reinhardt (1996) suggests that gendered access to the world can be differentiated.. According to her, girls prefer subjects from the private sphere and demonstrate a social rather than a political orientation. One might discuss whether this assumption can be proved by the sequence?

My answer to this is different though. If one makes gender specificities a categorical presupposition, one will



find them confirmed. Other approaches have been established (in other social-sciences and also in the educational school-research; for example see Faulstich-Wieland et.al. 2004) which no longer focus on the differences but on the common *process of their production*⁶. For the gender reading, the question as to whether further orientations and attitudes can be found remains relevant.

Considering how her self-image is documenting itself in the debate and what the experience of the debate in turn meant to it, both readings suggest a rather 'pessimistic' view. Taking into account what happened to her argument, ironical comment by Nico (there we go again), translation by Till (I understand her...), dismissal by the teacher, one must think that she lacks the experience of *soziale Wertschätzung*, in terms of an evaluation of her way of thinking about war and peace. Concerning the gender-reading it remains unclear, whether the case Katharina can be seen as an example of a rather stereotypical way of 'doing gender' or not.

In reconstructive research, findings arise from an intensive process of comparison. That pertains to the work with videography as well. In other words, the interpretation of the case should not be based on one single sequence and one single piece of data. Instead, triangulation with other data such as interviews is recommended (see Fritzsche, Wagner-Willi 2013, 278-279).

4.4 Completing the picture: Contradictions and complementary information from additional documentation

Other data from our project raises some interesting issues. They do not only touch on the readings, but also demonstrate what the videographic documentation does not offer, an insight into the self-reflective integration of experiences.

The three documents I offer here are, in different degrees, such self-reflections: There is the advance engagement with the debate in group-work during which Katharina and two classmates prepared for the debate (material 2: group work). There is a focus-group discussion with some of the students after the lesson, including Katharina and Nico (material 3: discussion after lesson ten). And there is an interview with Katharina six months after the debate, in which she and I watched the video and reflected on it (material 4: excerpts from an interview with Katharina).

Space limitations mean that a full interpretation of these additional documents is not possible, however an attempt is made to formulate questions and indicate to which aspects of the readings developed from the video they might be compared. I am aware that many further questions from the field of didactics might be considered. However, I focus on those aspects connected to the readings above, i.e. recognition and gender as well as to the formation of a political self-image.

4.4.1 Own perspectives, should they be considered or not?

I: What did you think when you just watched that?

KATHARINA: @typically these two!@

I: @okay?@

KATHARINA: yea that's what I thought really ehm (...) to be honest I don't understand why he said that we convinced her that I didn't understand when I stood there @ but(.) I don't know it's typical of them of him

This sequence from the interview with Katharina (material 4) makes what Nico did a general behaviour, something 'typical'. On the one hand she describes it as puzzling 'I didn't understand when I stood there' but on the other hand the description as typical 'of them of him' makes it a general matter which hasn't much to do with her.

Still, in the way she talks about political conversations, it becomes obvious that she is rather uncertain about the value her statements and thoughts have:

KATHARINA: well actually when we talk sometimes with some then I don't have problems with it. But (..) I only say something if I am certain about it when I am absolutely certain about that I exactly(.) like that I really know how I mean it and how I want to say it and yea (...) that's why I think that sometimes it seems like I don't say much because (.) yes

I: mhm

KATHARINA: because I know I have to be @really certain@

(..)

I: well you uhm just described that they didn't understand what you said (...) and uhm is it like(...) do you have an impression like this often in conversations about politics?

KATHARINA: sometimes yes but then I know that it has to do with me that I sometimes (.) @ just say anything and it doesn't make much sense or (..) yea. But generally yea(.) °mostly I think that people understand what I say and how I mean it°

This uncertainty had probably been confirmed in the debate. If we look into the group-work in which they prepared themselves for the debate (material 2) she presents herself differently:

KATHARINA: (we present that) so I'd be available for that debate

CLAIRE: e:h what?



KATHARINA: so on Monday we shall one of us be there and represent us in that debate

CLAIRE: you wanna do that?

KATHARINA: yea. I would do that

SARA: I'd also do that but I don't mind(.) if you wanna do that desperately you can do that;

KATHARINA: Cool! @(.).@ but no you can also do it, I'm not so hot about it

And even after the debate, Katharina disagrees with Nico's statement concerning the wrong ones who took part in the debate (material 3):

NICO: no, with the discussion round as such I liked it but it was the wrong persons well I don't want to say that somebody didn't fit in it but uhm

JAKOB: °but that's what you're doing indirectly°

(...)

I1: How did you like the debate? Did(.) well(.) did you(.) feel good or did you find have you rather been uncertain?

KATHARINA: well yea(..) actually (..) the wrong ones I don't see it like that I think it like normally it's always the same ones I mean(.) and now it had been others uhm

ERIK: °see Nico°

In terms of issues around recognition, the value of her contributions to political conversations remains unclear to Katharina. On the other hand, she makes use of the right to participate in a debate on a political question and presents herself as used to Nico's behaviour and not overly concerned by it.

4.4.2 Doing gender, undoing gender

The group-work (material 2) shows that the girls approached the question of the debate quite differently and not according to a shared 'female access' to the world: While Katharina wanted to bring up an example from the private realm to illustrate why peace cannot be made through war, Sara doubted the transferability of the private example to the political sphere and insisted on a political case as an example:

KATHARINA: Look. I'd do it like that(.) argument for the statement(.) we have. Death(.) and innocents(.) that is linked again to. When when people in war, that hits a family with children (...) and then(.) you don't find peace anymore because then of course you have like feelings of revenge and

CLAIRE: yes

KATHARINA: and eh (...) yes in my opinion peace cannot be made then

SARA: but the question is if that(.) the politi-(.) if that politically considered somehow works out then(..) because when they(.) for example like in Libya have a dictator then you also have to look for someone you can really establish peace again because I mean if you have again someone who acts like Gaddafi because he thinks he had all the power that's cool actually(.) to be here on the top and then

In the focus-group discussion after the debate (material 3), the students place one another along a continuum from introvert to extrovert. What we see confirms that most of the girls are introvert and don't participate in political conversations, what one could understand as an act of 'doing gender'. But at the same time it's a matter of personality, not gender for them – which can be understood as an act of 'undoing gender':

I1: You said now with the girls it's like this with the boys it's like that it came up that the girls don't say much during the lessons

ERIK: here it is like the boys destroy their good grades again with talking too much well so it is in Mrs. – always

JAKOB: well in comparison I would say that the boys are more active

KATHARINA: yes

NICO: yes

I1: especially in that school subject or is it

KATHARINA: no it's everywhere like that

JAKOB: especially in our class

ERIK: yea. Especially in our class(.) in this class it's very different(..)(pointing to another classroom)

JAKOB: hm=yea

I2: why is that?

JAKOB: because of the individuals themselves

NICO: it's these really shy girls

ERIK: (?)

KATHARINA: Yea I would see it like that as well

The gender-reading can be developed and changed by the student's orientations. Gender is a differentiating factor for them, but not the most important one.

All these aspects help to reconstruct Katharina's self-image. The video is one and its potential lies in the link that can be built up to a specific situation or sequence in a specific lesson. Other data, especially the interviews, helps to reconstruct how such situations are embedded in common orientations or individual perspectives.

5 Conclusion

I focus here on videographic interpretation and consider it to have significant potential to develop our perspective on what happens in the classroom. Moving from a narrow perspective and focus on questions of immediate didactic importance, a reconstructive interpretation of videographic documentation leads us towards an understanding of what is happening between individuals as well as of the informal processes of political learning through socialization.

This potential cannot be made use of if videographic documentation of lessons functions as a means of assessing what teachers do. Rather, the video should help to understand, through reconstructive interpretative work, how students experience a class and how the processes of political learning happens in connection with performances and artefacts (see Kolbe et.al. 2008).

At the same time, it seems important to me to reflect on what videographic documentation may not offer, an insight into the self-reflective integration of experiences. The art of documentation could be developed in different directions: 1) videographic documentation of lessons in order to gain insights into the complexity of experiences in the classroom and 2) documentations of reflective integration of these experiences, possibly through interviews or through the interpretation of learning-diaries (see Youniss, Yates 1997).

A systematic overview and provision of what has already been collected in the field of civic education would be helpful. As it should be self-evident that the documentation itself is not a key to understanding what happens in the classroom but instead provides a basis for interpretation, an intensified reflection on methodological questions and standards would also be helpful.

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Endnotes:

¹ For example, in our video-project we used a productive combination of theoretical claims and empirically grounded criteria. We evaluated the lessons we had documented using 'learning traps' identified in previous studies as particularly associated with civic education on the one hand and with a system of didactic



principles and quality criteria on the other (see Henkenborg, Mambour and Winckler *in press*)

² For example, we see this in Gramme's (1998) "Kommunikative Fachdidaktik" where the focus on research questions offered findings of great importance for the academic discussion in our field despite the fact that the work with the empirical material followed individually constructed methodological procedures.

³ In the educational sciences there are by now concepts of a cultural-science based research of learning culture. To be differentiated from the normative concept of a 'new learning culture' which the authors criticise, culture here is constituted in pedagogic practices and can be reconstructed empirically through video-based interpretations (see Kolbe et. al. 2008).

⁴ The documents I offer come from the project mentioned above. The spoken language is German. The translated transcriptions of interviews or group discussions should be handled with care because a translation is always a methodologically uncontrolled interpretation and therefore unreliable. So it would be best if you as a reader work with the German original, my English translation, a dictionary and the will to reflect my efforts critically. It is different with the video and, in the context of its specific visual potential, maybe a good thing if you watch the film without the English transcription as you will necessarily focus on the nonverbal aspects of communication, its physical representation and on the spatial organisation of the situation and therefore approach the documented situation with the reconstructive attitude, I claimed.

⁵ Of course there are many other questions from the field of political learning which could be discussed with the material, for example: what positive or negative implications come from the method debate as such and the specific thesis the students have to discuss? What could be described as Katharina's cognitive map on politics?

⁶ This shift from gender-differences to the process of 'doing gender' goes back to theoretical innovations in gender studies since the 1980's which haven't necessarily reached the research in the field of didactics of civic education in Germany yet.

