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Book Review


Andreas Petrik, David Jahr & Christopher Hempel (eds.) 2021: Methoden der qualitativen Politikunterrichtsforschung. Acht Persepektiven auf eine Unterrichtsstunde zum Thema Wahlen [Methods of qualitative social studies education research. Eight perspectives on a “elections” lesson]. Frankfurt am Main: Wochenschau. 272 pages

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What do we want to learn about social studies classrooms? Which approach is suitable to explore social studies education, and on what grounds? What research methods do exist in order to examine what we want to learn? The editors of this book deal with these key questions of qualitative research in social studies education / citizenship education to compare different research methods.

For this purpose, multiple researchers use different methods to analyze a lesson in *Gemeinschaftskunde* [social studies education] in which 9th grade high school students express their views on controversial political topics, facing the upcoming elections in the state of Saxony. Following a lesson introduction with a cartoon that parodies election campaigns of different parties, students alternately deliberate theses from the “Wahl-O-Mat” in group-work, Germany's official voting advice application. 21 girls and five boys discuss the parties' political positions in the Saxon state parliament – i.e. theses on migration or social welfare – and thereby express their personal points of view. Objective of the lesson: What do political parties stand for in the state elections? Drawing on this, the teacher asks the students to do a mock vote at the end of the lesson using a questionnaire.

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The opening lesson report (David Jahr, Jens Oliver Krüger) is particularly noteworthy, as it turns the readers into observers of the lesson. This report invites reflection on the research approaches after the observation, providing deep insights into learning processes. Research approaches are:

- Fachdidaktische Analyse [Didactic Analysis], Sibylle Reinhardt
- Politikdidaktische Rekonstruktion [Didactic Reconstruction], Bastian Vajen and Dirk Lange
- Diskursanalyse [Discourse Analysis], Jens Oliver Krüger and Tilman Grammes
- Metaphernanalyse [Metaphor Analysis] Dieter Koop and Leo Mayatepek
- Objektive Hermeneutik [Objective Hermeneutics], Carla Schelle
- Kontexturanalyse [Contextual Analysis], Christopher Hempel and Christian Herfter
- Dokumentarische Methode [Documentary Method], David Jahr
- Fachdidaktische Argumentationsanalyse [Didactic Argumentation Analysis], Andreas Petrik

Sibylle Reinhardt emphasizes the student perspectives in situations such as the controversial or non-controversial handling of their statements in peer-to-peer interactions. She shows how "latent topics" (p. 48) come up which the students develop themselves in group work, for example students' concerns about migration.

In line with this, Bastian Vajen and Dirk Lange plead for the reflected integration of students' ideas to initiate well designed learning processes which they reconstruct focusing on student statements. Juxtaposing student perceptions and scientific understandings of social welfare cuts results in the description for a better design of social studies lessons.

Using discourse analysis, Jens Oliver Krüger and Tilman Grammes emphasize the reconstruction of Positionierungen [statement formations], i.e. how students and their teacher negotiate positions and positioning. Readers learn how students turn the positioning request from their teacher into positioning themselves to that very request. Students make the "positioning to this positioning request" (p. 88) to the topic of discussion.

Dieter Koop and Leo Mayatepek analyze the metaphors used by students in the lesson, because they "provide information about the constitution of the speakers, their horizon of values and interpretations" (p. 111). As a result, both authors discuss normative dimensions of the constitution of political topics.

Carla Schelle provides a highly detailed analysis, using the example of potential cuts in social welfare, too. She highlights that the "subject matter and the speakers are mutually" (p. 128) related to each other. It becomes clear that for the students the topic is also about social positioning in society while talking about society in the classroom.

Christopher Hempel and Christian Herfter point out that task completion dominates classroom interaction: "Communicative spaces open up when (and only when) the task is considered 'done'" (p. 154). Accordingly, tasks control students' activities and the discussion of migration or social welfare.

David Jahr focuses on a sequence of the lesson in which some of the students discuss in group work whether religious education should be abolished in schools. In doing so, he reconstructs that all group work is characterized by "peermilieu-related positional negotiations" (p. 152).

Andreas Petrik emphasizes the structure of argumentation and reconstructs students' premises and the course of discussion. By reconstructing two students' reasoning, the author identifies concepts of inequality like processes of "othering". He concludes that the design of the lesson inadvertently provokes emotions and the expression of "gut feelings" instead of fostering arguments based on facts.

Each contribution intends to reflect the respective method for social studies education / citizenship education to establish guidelines for a "future empirically grounded theory of social studies education" (p. 265). The contributions complement each other, as three reading samples illustrate:

First, the complex nature of social studies education emerges in a particular way: readers easily understand the methods by tracking down the strengths of qualitative approaches systematically. What information do metaphors provide about students' patterns of interpretation? How do learners argue about migration issues? How can young people's questions and topics gain attention in classroom discussions? These and other issues are thoroughly addressed with the eight different approaches to examine teaching and learning processes in social studies.

Second, the book manages to balance dense descriptions and analyses of the lesson in the case study with the ambition to serve as a "textbook" (p. 8) for social studies education research. The consistent structure of the articles – "basics", "methodological procedure", "interpretation", "conclusion" and "discussion" – as well as illustrations and introductory reading aids assist in this. Readers are drawn into methodological knowledge that allows them to constantly discover new didactical key questions.

Third, the final chapter by Andreas Petrik provides a comparison of the opportunities and limitations of the different research approaches. In this chapter, he uses a micro-macro model adapted from sociology to systematize the presented methods and to explain "social theoretical traces" (p. 226): Which readings of social action, social order, or social change define a method? This classification leads to a further development of criteria for qualitative research and a comparative analysis of the eight methods. The book concludes with a model that presents the methods as "forms of knowledge" (p. 262), Petrik thus pleads for co-operations between the different approaches.

The book not only serves as a textbook for the eight different methods but also sets standards for qualitative social studies education research. In sum: A major contribution to empirical research in social studies education / citizenship education.