

# Understanding learning in world society: Qualitative reconstructive research in global learning and learning for sustainability

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## **Abstract**

Global learning aims to change behaviour and attitudes. Changes in these areas are not easy to assess. This article discusses the documentary method, which belongs to the group of qualitative reconstructive research methods. The authors argue that this method allows reflection on collective orientations and tacit knowledge. The different steps of data analysis are introduced and explained using a research example from the field of global learning that focuses on orientations towards world society in youth encounters between youth groups in the northern and southern hemispheres.

**Keywords:** documentary method, empirical research, qualitative empirical research, global learning

## **Introduction**

Global education aims to affect the behaviour and attitudes of individuals. When conducting research in global learning and learning for sustainability, changes in the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of individuals have to be assessed. The examination

of these fuzzy constructs requires a sensitive research strategy, particularly since learners are not always aware of changes in their behaviours and attitudes, which means that they might not be able to consciously reflect upon them. An added risk when researching behavioural and attitudinal changes is that both the researchers and the public expect these changes to happen, thereby potentially influencing respondents' answers. In this contribution, we present the documentary method, a reconstructive qualitative research method that counteracts these biases. Since the documentary method aims to reflect the tacit knowledge and hidden attitudes of persons, delving beneath the surface of public discourse and political correctness, it has become attractive particularly for researching processes and results in global learning and learning for sustainability. The term 'documentary method' was introduced by Harold Garfinkel to describe the meaning-making and pattern-finding everybody engages in to make meaning of the social world (Garfinkel, 1967: 95). The method belongs to the family of ethnographic reconstructive methods by which non-visible attitudes, rules, and consensuses are made visible through research; participation is an important element of the method (see Weller and Malheiros da Silva, 2011).

The documentary method will be exemplified through a study in global learning reflecting the orientations of young people towards a global society. First, the focus of the study will be described, after which the documentary method and all steps of the research process will be explained using the study as an example. Finally, research aims in global learning and Education for Sustainability will be discussed in connection to the contribution of qualitative reconstructive research.

### **The example: Youth encounters with the global South**

The study used here as an example of the documentary method reflects the orientation towards world society of youths travelling to the global South or global North in order to meet other youth groups.<sup>1</sup> The aim was to reconstruct the global orientation of young people about the core concept of a global society. The study covered the orientation of young people from both hemispheres who had taken part in a youth exchange trip to the other part of the world and had thus had the opportunity to gather first-hand world society experiences (for the results of the study see Krogull, 2011; Krogull and Scheunpflug, 2013a; Krogull and Scheunpflug, 2013b; Krogull, in preparation). In the following, this research project is used as an example to illustrate aspects of the qualitative reconstructive research method, or, in Bohnsack's terminology, the documentary method. *References to the example are marked in italics.*

### **Fundamentals of reconstructive documentary research**

The central starting point of qualitative reconstructive research is the intention to generate in a still largely unclear and unexplored research territory useful hypotheses

guided by rules that will either be verified empirically in further research (and thus form the starting point for quantitative research) or form the basis for the generation of theory (Bohnsack, 2013).<sup>2</sup>

### **Hypothesis-generating research**

In the context of hypothesis-generating qualitative research, open access to the field is required. 'This openness refers to the theoretical and methodological level. Theoretical structures and methodological procedures in the research process must not block the view on important aspects of the research subject.'<sup>3</sup> (Mayring, 2002: 27–8). Accordingly, qualitative research intends to understand the research subjects' world of perception in their everyday life. 'Qualitative research claims to describe life-worlds "from the inside out", from the point of view people participate.' (Flick, 2014: 3). This research paradigm analyses the subjects' social construction of reality (see Berger and Luckmann, 1968).

In such research, which is both open and close to everyday life, subjective and collectively shared ideas, orientations, and values can become visible.

*Methodologically, this leads ... to a hermeneutic interpretation of subjectively intended meaning, which becomes understandable in the context of an antecedent, intuitive pre-understanding that is rooted in everyday life and of meanings that are objective and, as ideal types, recordable by any society, thus making individual and collective attitudes and actions understandable.*

Flick et al., 2007: 21

This approach to qualitative research presupposes openness and proximity to the subject of research as well as awareness of the researcher's role.

*Another feature of qualitative research is that the researcher's reflections on his actions and his perceptions in the studied field are seen as an essential part of knowledge and not as a source of interference that has to be controlled or excluded.*

Flick et al., 2007: 23

Therefore, researchers have to reflect on their impact on the research process and to include it into their analyses.

*As the orientations towards world society of young people who take part in international exchange trips have hardly been studied yet, a hypotheses-generating approach was chosen for the research project. The aim of the study was to generate a theory of cosmopolitan education. Using this method, it was possible to listen to voices 'from the South' on the one hand and, on the other to reflect on the researchers' own Euro-centric perspectives during the research process. Both aspects are fundamental for research in the field of Global Education.*

## **Orientations as implicit tacit knowledge**

Among the qualitative reconstructive research approaches, the documentary method in particular aims to analyse behaviour-influencing orientations as an expression of implied knowledge structures. It is based on the assumption that utterances have not only a literal meaning, but also a second meaning, which is hidden in these statements. Following Karl Mannheim and his distinction between different kinds of knowledge, according to the documentary method it is necessary to differentiate between the intentional meaning (the meaning of the object) and the sense of the orientation behind the intentional expressive meaning (the meaning of the document).

The intentional expressive meaning signifies what is 'actually meant' in a given statement. In the object meaning, the objective context in which the utterance or action is embedded appears. This general object meaning makes it possible to describe *what* is said or done. The document meaning, however, takes a closer look at the process of making. This is about the *how*, the way in which such an utterance or an action is constructed or how it is documented. Mannheim described this approach using the example of a friend who gives money to a beggar. 'In this case, it doesn't seem important to me what the friend had done or performed objectively nor what he "intended" to express through his act, but what, by his act, even unintended by him, gets documented about him for me.' (Mannheim, 1928/1964: 108) The distinction between an object meaning and a document meaning can also be found in the differentiation between theoretical knowledge, which reflects the generalizable and easy to verbalize pool of knowledge, and a-theoretical knowledge, which is expressed in routine-based and habitual actions<sup>4</sup> and seen as 'tacit knowledge' (Polanyi, 1966). Tacit knowledge is linked to attitude and leads behaviour.

Ralf Bohnsack, who to a large extent developed the documentary method, differentiates between communicative-generalizing and conjunctive forms of knowledge (Bohnsack, 2000: 67–69). While the former cover generalizable objective knowledge stocks, which are easy to communicate, the latter refer to forms of knowledge that are conjunctive and collectively shared in spaces of experiences as well as tacit.

Reconstruction of collectively shared knowledge is the focus of the documentary method. The aim of the documentary interpretation is to reconstruct the framework of collective orientations that lie behind the respondents' statements. Conjunctive forms of knowledge and the framework orientations can be reconstructed on the one hand from the way research subjects represent a theme and on the other from the links to different topics that are of importance during the process of manifestation.

Reconstruction at the level of document meaning gains its significance through the comparative analysis with other cases and the given thematic designs.

*In our study, we wanted to reflect how young people talked about their experiences in the other hemisphere: have the respective others been devalued, revalued, or exoticized? How have the young people spoken about daily life? Which topics caused what valuation? These issues have been carefully reconstructed in the group discussions and laid down in detailed tables.*

### **Qualitative reconstructive research as a controlled understanding of the relevancies of others**

Unlike qualitative content-analysing studies where subjective attitudes of individuals or groups are examined (Mayring, 2002), the reconstructive procedures are focused on the reconstruction of action-guiding orientations (Bohnsack, 2013). This is about the reconstruction of knowledge stocks that are not located on the surface of conscious and clear explicable attitudes and values, but which are beneath the surface and affect behaviour indirectly.

In order to reconstruct such implicit orientations of which respondents are largely unaware, a survey method is required in which respondents can set the structures and contents of the conversation by themselves.

*Like all open methodological procedures, an open interview intends to let respondents develop a topic in their own language, in their symbolic system and their relevance framework; this is the only way interviewers or observers can avoid projecting into single utterances meanings that are not appropriate. For example, if a respondent indicates in his answers that he has been brought up strictly, researchers can do very little with this statement alone, unless they project their own notions of strict upbringing therein. But he/she will learn more if this statement is put into a narrative context by the respondent and gives the respondent the opportunity to explain through a narrative the style of his/her parents' home in his/her own language.*

Bohnsack, 2000: 21

Thus, reconstructive research is based on the assumption that research subjects explain their own relevance systems, which can be made visible through the research process. The methods used here are usually based on open questions and incentives that offer respondents the opportunity to engage with them, to ignore them, or to start a controversial discussion on them. In other words, respondents can show whether and how the indicated topic is relevant for them. An interpretation aims at the 'reconstruction of the respondents' implicit knowledge' (Bohnsack, 2000: 207).

The development of the topics is done in the respondents' own language. Recognizing and reflecting their system of relevance and rules – as opposed to those of the researchers – is called by Ralf Bohnsack 'controlled understanding of the other' (Bohnsack, 2000: 20). Especially in the context of group discussions, the process of generating themes is reconstructed by interpreting the transcripts. 'The groups themselves show us where the centre, the focus of their common experience and thus of the collective is to be sought.' (Bohnsack, 2000: 46). This means that during interpretation the interaction process of respondents in particular will be reconstructed. Finally, 'interpretation is taking place through the reconstruction of the interaction process by which the characteristic selectivity of the respective group concerning the treatment of the subject can be worked out; this is itself structuring' (Bohnsack, 2000: 46).

This controlled approximation to an understanding of the other is of particular importance in the context of North–South-oriented research on global education (concerning the problems of this research, see Adick, 2014; Lang-Wojtasik, 2002). In Table 1, the different forms of knowledge and their relationship to behaviour and attitudes are summarized.

**Table 1: Forms of knowledge and their relation to different forms of presentation**

Forms of knowledge	Theoretical explicit knowledge	Tacit knowledge/practical knowledge
... drives	public manifestations	collective behaviour and attitudes
... shown by	explicit argumentation 'what is said'	framing of an argumentation 'how it is said'
... investigated by	direct research asking for these forms of knowledge, hypothesis of mutual understanding	reconstructive research, interpreting forms of communication, hypothesis of not-understanding, therefore controlled approximation to the relevancies of others

*In this study, the elaboration of the groups' relevance systems was achieved mainly by great openness from the outset. The groups were invited to share: 'You really made a trip to [Germany, Rwanda, or Bolivia]; please, tell me about your travel!' This initial impulse towards openness allowed the groups to elaborate their own relevance systems, which could then be worked out by interpreting the transcripts. This was not always easy, as the groups surveyed came partly from a different cultural context.*

*With the young people from Rwanda, mother-tongue communication was not possible; therefore, the interviews were largely conducted in French (and in Spanish for Bolivia). To rule out that the language of the group discussion influenced responses, we conducted one of the group discussions with Rwandan youth in their native language Kinyarwanda, led by a local person, using the method of 'controlled understanding of others.' Comparing the two group discussions, we concluded that neither the use of respondents' mother tongue nor the difference between a researcher from the North and a native from the South caused systematic differences.*

### **Theoretical sampling processes**

Sampling, i.e. collecting the examined research cases, takes a central position in qualitative research, as the generalization of the results at the end of a survey 'is dependent on the determination of the research units and the composition of the sample' (Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014: 177). In qualitative research, there are different options for selecting a sample, for example, by using criteria determined in advance or by the snowball method (see Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014: 182–183). The principle of 'theoretical sampling' is most frequently used to select the investigated cases and thus should be described in more detail.

This procedure goes back to the so called 'grounded theory' and is closely linked to the names of Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (Glaser and Strauss, 1967/1976). According to this method, the sample will not be determined at the beginning of a survey, but will be developed according to theoretical aspects that become evident during the analysis of the empirical data. Thus, the process of sampling follows iterative loops where the phases of collection and interpretation are linked to each other. During theoretical sampling, the researcher has to decide which data should be collected next by what analytic criteria (Strauss, 1987). This means that after the analysis of a group discussion (or an interview) a decision will be made about which additional groups (or individuals) should be included as comparing or contrasting horizon, in order to gain additional insight. Thus, the sample is elaborated during the course of the research process. If additional comparing or contrasting horizons will not produce new results, the random sample will be considered 'saturated' and thus finalized.

*Due to the research topic, the collection process started by determining as a first step the countries of origin and the target countries of the young people as the comparing horizons (from Germany to Rwanda or Bolivia, from Bolivia or Rwanda to Germany). As a further comparing horizon, different educational milieus have been identified. During interpretation it became apparent that the way travel groups were organized had a greater impact than respondents' country of origin*

*and educational milieu. Therefore, it was attempted to vary the organization of the exchange trips systematically. For practical research reasons, the sample could not be saturated at this point. Additionally, it was noted that differentiation according to age produced different results.*

## Data collection and analysis

### Data collection

For reconstructive research in the sense of the documentary method, data can be collected in different ways. The most commonly used form of data collection is the group discussion. This is due to the fact that the documentary method was initially developed mainly through the analysis of group discussions.

In group discussions (Loos and Schäffer, 2001), participants in a group that shares certain aspects of their daily lives (pupils, teachers, employees of NGOs, etc.) are given a narrative-generating stimulus, which they take as a starting point for discussions. The researchers have the option to present immanent questions initially and, at the end of the discussion, to ask exmanent questions. Group discussions provide an ideal opportunity for people to develop their own structures of relevance. Furthermore, analysis offers the opportunity to reconstruct the conjunctive orientations of the group.

Beside this method, data collection is frequently done by individual interviews. In individual interviews, it is possible to reconstruct the orientations of individual people (see Nohl, 2010). One example of this might be Bernhardt's survey (forthcoming) concerning the orientations of employees of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who are active in school education with regard to development politics. Which orientations on global education in school can be reconstructed here? The orientation of professionals who mostly work alone can be elaborated through individual interviews.

In recent years, documentary *image and video analysis* is increasingly used (see Bohnsack, 2010a; 2014; Baltruschat, 2010). This data form is particularly suitable for the collection of teaching and learning situations through videos, but also for the interpretation of images, such as the reconstruction of attitudes from photographs (see for example the work of Schuch 2013 on the perception of the global South in the pedagogy of the GDR) or from pictures in textbooks.

*For this project, it was natural to choose the group discussion method, because the young people had experienced the exchange as part of a travel group. Six months to two years after their experience, the young people were invited by researchers to participate in discussion groups and talk about their trip. Discussion groups took place in the respondents' home countries.*

## Data analysis

The documentary method provides an elaborate rule-governed approach to data interpretation.<sup>5</sup> In the following, the steps of the procedure are explained:

**Thematic course.** To organize the group discussions, a thematic order is first drafted in which the themes and time structure of the discussions are presented in tables. In this step, key issues are identified as well as those passages during which the discussion was particularly intense. These passages are also called ‘focusing metaphors’ (Bohnsack, 2003). The thematic course helps to select those passages that should be interpreted in a formulating and reflecting mode later in the work process (see below).

**Transcription.** Based on the identification of the focusing metaphors, the transcription of empirical data will take place. As a rule, the entry passages are transcribed, as the issues raised during group discussion appear here in a veiled form. In addition, the focusing metaphors are transcribed as well as those passages that serve the interests of the research work particularly well.

The transcription is focused on the literal recording of the spoken language; so all fillers (like ‘ums’ and ‘hms’) are also transcribed. This will make it possible not only to describe what sort of content the group discussed, but also how the issues have been constructed by the group (concerning the transcription rules see for example Loos and Schäffer, 2001: 57, diagram 8).

During transcription the data are anonymized. The persons involved in the group discussion are denoted by capital letters (A, B, C, etc.). In addition, female respondents are marked with a ‘w’ and male respondents with an ‘m’. Fictitious names are used for people and institutions to preserve anonymity.

*Group discussions for the research project were conducted either in German, Spanish, French, or Kinya-Rwanda. The thematic course was elaborated in German and the transcript in the language in which the group discussion was conducted. The transcript in Kinya-Rwanda was translated, all other transcripts were interpreted in the original language and only translated for work in the interpretation group (see below) as well as, in part, for publication. In the following, a passage from a group discussion of the group Larimar is reprinted as an example. For anonymity purposes, the groups were assigned group names derived from gems. The discussion of the group Larimar was conducted in French.*

*Preliminary remarks on the transcript: The Rwandan group Larimar responded to the initial impulse by formulating various aspects of the journey. In the setting of the theme (Proposition – not printed here) by Am, the basic assessment that the journey was good was explained using abstract descriptions. Bm, Cm, and Dm*

*add descriptions, also mentioning differences between Germany and Rwanda. For reasons of clarity, the interpretation is exemplified only through one paragraph (and not the entire transcript).*

*Group Larimar, passage 'The journey was good' (lines 52-71)*

- Dm For me, the journey was good ( . ) because ( . ) I visited animals like monkeys ( 2 ) I also visited primary schools (4) I have I have also ( a place ) I don't know how the German pupils ( 2 ) you saw how the German pupils learn ( . ) and
- Bm L (in Kinyarwanda) ↓
- Dm how the the German pupils move around ( 7 ) but in Rwanda ( . ) the pupils ( 2 )
- Bm LHe says that the German pupils ( . ) and for the journey to go to school for the the movement to go to school you use a
- ?m L° the movement ↓
- Bm a vehicle and the bicycles but here in Rwanda you
- Cm L ( ) ↓ Lbicycles ↓
- Bm go to school by foot and ( . ) without without needing eh eh eh
- Cm L° by foot ° ↓
- Bm without without needing ( . ) the the transportation ( 12 )
- Cm Ltransportation ↓
- Bm °continue °
- Dm It was very good ( 4 )

**Formulating interpretation.** During formulating interpretation, the selected passages undergo a detailed thematic structuring, which means that a distinction is made between upper and lower topics. In this structure, individual statements are paraphrased. The interpretation brings into focus the level of analysis of the objective and the immanent meaning and thereby the level of communicative forms of knowledge.

For the above-mentioned research project, the formulating interpretation of the cited passage sounds like this:

*Group Larimar, passage 'The trip was good' (lines 52-71), formulating interpretation,*

*For him, the trip was also good because he visited animals like monkeys, visited primary schools; He does not know how German pupils; they saw how the German pupils learnt and how the German pupils move but in Rwanda; the German pupils used for the way to school a car and bicycles, but in Rwanda they go to school on foot, without using means of transportation; it was good.*

**Reflecting interpretation.** Reflecting interpretation analyses the documentary meaning or the conjunctive knowledge level. This step reconstructs the way a group is dealing with a theme as well as the orientations and collectively shared meaning structures. In the reflecting interpretation, the central question is *how* a topic is dealt with in a group and what this documents concerning collective orientations. For the reflecting interpretation, the discourse structure of the discussion and the course will be analysed (see Bohnsack and Nohl, 2007). When reconstructing the discourse structure, it is important to see how topics are negotiated by the mutual reference of group members to one another and what sort of pattern can be identified thereby.

In this reconstruction of discourse organization (see Bohnsack, 2010b: 335; Bohnsack and Schäffer, 2007) a system of terminology has prevailed that makes it easier to see how the participants in a conversation relate to each other and develop common themes.<sup>6</sup> Parallel to this the comparative analysis takes place (see Loos and Schäffer, 2001; Nohl, 2010; Nentwig-Gesemann, 2007).

This includes comparing and contrasting horizons in the interpretation, as orientations often take shape only in contrast to various counter-horizons. 'Comparative analysis in this sense means at first that we systematically replace our own comparing horizon through the one elaborated by empirical analysis in other cases.' (Loos and Schäffer, 2001: 71; see also Nohl, 2010; Bohnsack, 2013) The interpretation is done 'against the background of empirically reconstructable and thus inter-subjectively verifiable comparing horizons' (Loos and Schäffer, 2001: 71). This creates a distinction between case-internal and case-external comparisons. Case-internal comparisons are made between different passages of each group discussion and reflect the extent to which orientations appear in various topics. Case-external comparisons refer to other groups with different or similar orientation patterns; it is of interest how the same topics may be discussed differently.

*Group Larimar, passage 'The journey was good' (lines 52–71), reflecting interpretation*

*In his elaboration Dm explained – with support by/in interaction with Bm and Cm – a difference between everyday living in Germany and Rwanda. Despite the interaction, the group remains on the level of an abstract description. It carries out a relevance setting that is comparable with the group Malachit.*

*In this small passage the external case comparison with the group Malachit is drawn.*

**Verifiability.** According to the standards of qualitative research (see Bohnsack, 2005), the evaluation process is accompanied by an interpretation group. In this case,

the entire research process has been accompanied by two interpretation workshops, which were also thematically pertinent. This simplifies the process of formation of types.

## Formation of types and theory development

### The abductive conclusion to typology

Another particular feature of qualitative reconstructive research lies in the abductive conclusion method by which the results of individual interpretations are generalized. The result is generated by comparing individual interpretations in a maximum and minimum contrast and correlating them. Through this procedure, overarching framework orientations can be identified and on this basis the orientations of each group can be specified. This process is steadily evolving in line with the number of comparing and counter-horizons that arise from additional cases from the selected sample.

The abductive conclusion was first described by Charles Sanders Peirce in 1867. Unlike deductive or inductive conclusions, this method offers openness for explanation and discovery of surprising facts, which cannot be classified in known systems and which require the development of new orders. Abduction reveals case and rule simultaneously: 'Something unintelligible is discovered in the data and, on the basis of the mental design of a new rule, the rule is discovered or invented and, simultaneously, it becomes clear what the case is' (Reichertz, 2007: 128)

This method, then, is used when a new research field is opened. The final creative abduction allows the development of new ideas. Abduction is the basis for the generation of new hypotheses and theories (Reichertz, 2004). It is not mandatory, but it is risky.

*The abduction searches for a meaningful rule, a possible valid or fitting explanation for one surprising act ... The search culminates in a (linguistic) hypothesis. Once a hypothesis is found, it is generally followed (both in quantitative and in qualitative research) by several stages of testing.*

Reichertz, 2007: 285

The typology that is compiled in the documentary method is being considered as part of the comparative analysis at an early stage of data analysis. At this stage, the sense-genetic type and the socio-genetic type can be distinguished. The orientations in the empirical material are comparatively worked out, abstracted, and specified by a sense-genetic type. The orientation patterns that are worked out in the reflecting interpretation are generalized gradually by external case comparisons.

The general dimension in the reconstructed orientation can be described as an abstracted orientation framework. On the basis of this, the abstracted orientations are specified along with the cases. Thus the particular becomes apparent in the general (see Nohl, 2010; Nentwig-Gesemann, 2007). In the socio-genetic type formation, the genesis of the reconstructed orientation is taken into account. The question is for what kind of space of experience the reconstructed orientations may be typical. It is about the analyses of 'the existential backgrounds within which the (socio-)genesis action-guiding orientation is anchored' (Nentwig-Gesemann, 2007: 316).

Through this, the level of the orientations or cases recedes into the background; it is about the reflection of 'respondents' spaces of experience that eclipse each other' (Nentwig-Gesemann, 2007: 317). The case structure disappears. 'Analysis is ... oriented toward the structure of conjunctive experience areas, that means for example socio-spatial or organization-specific structures and experiences embedded in them or interaction processes that have led to the formation of certain behaviour-guiding orientations and habitualized action practices. The relationship to a conjunctive space of experiences, discovered in some individual cases, can be typical in terms of generation, gender, or organization type, to give just a few examples.' (Nentwig-Gesemann, 2007: 317)

*In addition to socio- and sense-genetic formation of types, following Nohl (2010), a multidimensional formation of type can be described for the documentary method, in which the various dimensions of orientation form the basis for the compression to types. In the research project, a sense-genetic type formation was performed. The section of the Larimar transcription quoted above is one example of a number of passages that show the type of near-space-oriented hierarchic groups. Their orientations compare the near space of their daily lives with the newly experienced near space and organize these comparisons through the appreciation and depreciation of the respective countries of origin. World society is therefore seen through comparison of different near spaces.*

*The new emergence of globalized relationships is therefore less likely to be detected, but the world is dichotomized, separated into 'these below' and 'those above'. Depending on the country of origin, participants feel they belong either to the better or the worse side, the developed or not developed, and judge paternalistically or perceive themselves as rather incapable of acting. The sense-genetic formation of types also led to the other two types described above, in which world society was constructed on the one hand by common experiences and on the other by the contractual nature of societies.*

*Finally, the result is related to the context of the scientific discourse on the topic. In some cases, hypotheses can be formulated; in a next step, the frequency and distribution of these hypotheses regarding qualities can be researched. A second*

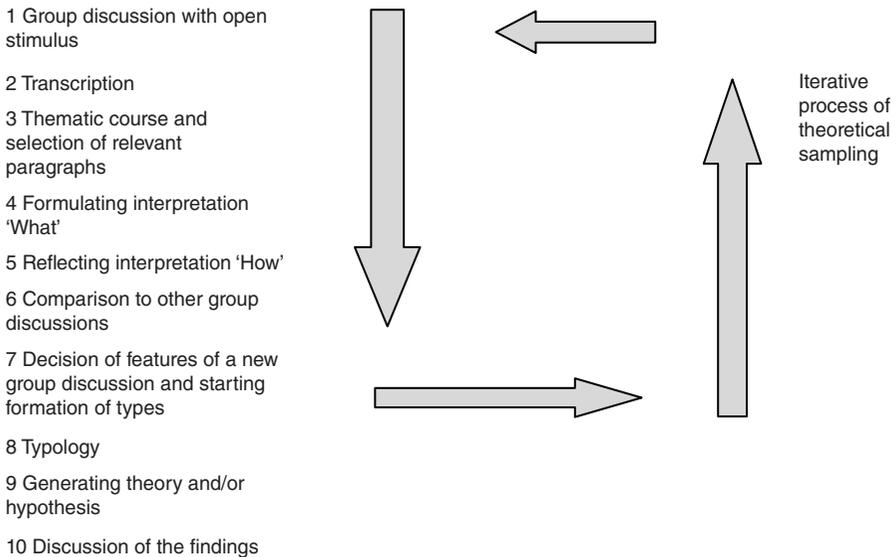
*option would be to concentrate the empirical described qualia in a theory, which would allow for a better understanding and possibly offer an explanation.*

*The results of the presented survey have been channelled into a theory of learning in world society. Using a system-theoretical understanding of world society (see Luhmann, 1975), the anthropological, learning theoretical, civil societal, and ethical dimensions of a theory of cosmopolitan education have been outlined.*

### Summary: Quality criteria of reconstructive research

While quality criteria have become common knowledge in quantitative research (even if they are not always respected), qualitative research is sometimes still perceived as subjective or arbitrary. However, it is neither if a controlled methodical approach is used (Bohnsack, 2005; Flick, 2014; Mayring, 2002: 19–40; Steinke 2004). Inter-subjectivity can be reached through controlled understanding and through application and documentation of the steps of interpretation in an interpretation group. While in quantitative research the distribution and quantity of qualities is in the foreground, here the description of the quality horizon of a scientific question is the focal point. The generalization of the results is carried out by comparison in a saturated sample and by leading into hypotheses or a theory. In Table 2, the different steps are summarized.

**Table 2: Procedures of knowledge generation in the documentary method**



## The potential of the documentary method for developing the theory and empirical research of global learning

Qualitative reconstructive research is intended to trace collective orientations and thus to ultimately reconstruct the social. It is therefore suitable for research in the context of global learning. Its conventions of world-sociality can be reconstructed by this method and the implicit, tacit knowledge, which leads behaviour, may become visible.

In fact, there are quite a few works already published dealing with the context of global learning that have made a contribution to this topic, for example, the work of Asbrand (2006; 2011) on the acquisition of knowledge and action orientation for a global context, or that of Applis (2012), dealing with the acquisition of structures for values orientation in a global context in geography lessons. The potential for these approaches is far from exhausted, as many questions in the context of global learning are still unclear, for example, what kind of world societal attitudes and orientations can be built at which period of life, by which form of learning, and what forms of action can be motivated and triggered. This form of research has the potential to contribute substantially to understanding the complexity of world society.

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### Notes

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2 Concerning the standards of qualitative research, see Bohnsack, 2005; Flick, 2005; Mayring, 2002: 19–40; Steinke, 2004.

3 All originally German quotations have been translated by the author.

4 This perspective goes back to Mannheim's conception of conjunctive spaces of experience. Such a space of experience may be described epistemologically as a 'Kontagion' (Mannheim, 1980: 155). Subjects merge together through an existential connectivity. Therefore, a conjunctive space of experience describes a collective frame for the orientations of subjects who share a collective link with each other, for example, generation, gender, or milieu.

5 The following paragraphs are based on Franz, 2010 and 2015.

6 The term 'proposition' denotes the orientation contents that are implicitly explicated in the contribution to the conversation (see Bohnsack, 2010b: 335; Loos and Schäffer, 2001: 66). Themes are constituted through these propositions and finalized by 'conclusions'. Between 'propositions' and 'conclusions' there are 'elaborations', in which the themes are explicated by 'stories', illustrated by 'exemplifications', differentiated by 'antithetic differentiations', and confirmed by 'validations'.

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