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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Sammelwerksbeitrag / collection article

Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:
Verlag Barbara Budrich

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:
Krüger, H.-H. (2010). The Importance of Qualitative Methods in the German Educational Science. In R. Bohnsack, N. Pfaff, & W. Weller (Eds.), *Qualitative analysis and documentary method in international educational research* (pp. 53-74). Opladen: B. Budrich. https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-317500

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Mitglied der
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The Importance of Qualitative Methods in the German Educational Science

This paper outlines the importance of qualitative methods in German Educational Science. Therefore it begins with a subject definition and description of basic principles of qualitative research, and outlines the historic lines of development of the qualitative approach in Germany starting from the 18th century. In the following steps four different theoretical positions of qualitative research and the central methods of data collection and analyses will be described. Finally an exemplary insight is given in the topics and themes of qualitative research in Germany, some problems in the current research landscape are outlined and perspectives for the further development of qualitative research in educational science are established.

1 The Term and the Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Since we can observe a renaissance of qualitative approaches in social science in Germany over more or less three decades, qualitative methods lost their alternative and exotic character and became an important and 'normal' segment in the field research methods in educational science and beyond (see Flick et. al., 1991). For German educational science this process included the possibility to refer to its own hermeneutic traditions, as well as to prepare modernity and internationality with the application of such theories and approaches.

However, the term 'qualitative research' is a generic term for very different theoretical and methodical approaches to social reality. If one leaves these different scientific-theoretical or disciplinary perspectives out of consideration, the following common characteristics can be found: First, the description "qualitative" does not have anything in common with the quality of research projects or the qualification of the personnel. The characteristic of the qualitative-empirical research is rather the aim to grasp objectively the integral features (qualia) of a social field (see Terhart, 1997: 27). Second, because qualitative research aims at a complex analysis of the respective field, the openness of the field approach is an important condition. Qualitative research strategies do not want to put pre-formulated theory concepts on the respective field or, like quantitative research, to check pre-formulated hypotheses in real life. They want to gain generalizations and models out of

the researcher's own genuine experience in the research field. The research process is structured through questions and theoretical reflections, but these are to be permanently modified and extended during the survey (see Lamnek, 1988: 22; Strauss/Corbin, 1998: 8).

The third common feature of all approaches is the conscious perception and the integration of the researcher and the communication with the research issue as a constitutive element of the cognition process. The interaction of the researcher with his research objects is systematically reflected as a momentum of the establishment of the research issue itself. The decision of which channels are essential for this construction is dependent upon the theoretical position surveying the construction process (see Flick, 1995: 41). The orientation towards understanding as a principle of gaining knowledge is a fourth common feature of qualitative research approaches. One should understand the view of a subject or of several subjects, the course of social situations and the cultural and social regulations matching a specific situation. Some forms of qualitative research are confined to the reconstruction of the social world from the perspective of the acting person. However, other approaches investigate the way people produce social reality with interactive processes or they try to analyze major structures of action of which the subjects are unaware, but which have momentous importance for their action (see Krüger, 1999: 204).

Among the various theoretical traditions of qualitative research there are not only different positions concerning the cognition principle of understanding. Regarding the question of the practical importance of qualitative research, there is also a wide variety of opinions. There are, on the one hand, approaches of deliberate ethnographic "indifference", which only want to understand and describe the world outside, or reconstructive procedures trying to decode latent structures of the senses. On the other, there are communicative-dialogue methods – referring to the activating social research - trying to produce learning processes aimed at researchers and the interviewees (see Altrichter/Lobenwein/Welte, 1997: 655). Moreover, in view of a communicative validation, the surveyed subjects are to be integrated in the interpretation of the data (see Heinze, 1995).

Therefore, a final common feature of qualitative research has already been indicated. Over the last decades this feature has dealt intensively with the justification of the validity of the findings and the definition of its own quality criteria. One of the approaches has been the reformulation of the classic quality criteria of the empirical quantitative research in the context of qualitative research (especially the criteria validity and reliability). In order to replace the classic quality criteria, appropriate quality criteria for qualitative research have been developed in some approaches over the last years. One of the best-known concepts is the concept of analytical induction. Here, after the development of a temporary theory based on case studies, research-

ers will keep on searching for exceptions to the proposition in question until a universal rule can be established (see Bühler-Niederberger, 1994). Another approach is the method of triangulation. This keyword comprises the combination of different data, different researchers or different research teams, the combination of different theoretical approaches or different analyzing methods of the same phenomenon (see Denzin, 1989: 237). In the current methodological discussion it is still in dispute whether triangulation is a strategy of validity or not; a strategy of validity, as Denzin argues, amplifies the "epistemic power" of qualitative research. On the other hand, there are constructivist approaches emphasizing the idea of the constructivism of methods – they refer to the point that through the use of different methods there cannot be a more valid or real picture, but only a more diversified picture of the complex research subjects (see Kelle, 1997: 197; Marotzki, 1999: 126).

2 The History of Qualitative Research in Germany

Although the recent history of qualitative research in West Germany and other European countries started in the 1970's, qualitative research approaches like biography research and ethnography have a past history going back to the 18th century. Trapp and Niemeyer tried to establish a modern scientific pedagogy taking into account the importance of biographic and ethnographic approaches for a theory and practice of education. Lives and autobiographies as well as the observation of children were the empirical basis of pedagogical thinking formulated in the 18th century (see Krüger, 1995: 32). In the 18th century there can also be stated the beginning of a scientific preoccupation with the subject of biography in the following sciences: historiography, literary studies, philosophy and psychology. The philosopher and theologian, Herder, referred in his analysis of contemporary ability psychology to documents of written biographies, notes of doctors and friends and prophecies of poets. K. P. Moritz collected in a "Magazine for Experience Psychology" documents on extraordinary experiences in the lives of people - they can be considered as an early contribution to the development of psychopathology (see Thomae, 1991: 249).

This development of qualitative research was continued in pedagogy and in some parts of psychology, but not until the first decades of the 20th century. However, in pedagogy the representatives of pedagogy as a cultural science did not contribute to the renaissance of qualitative research (it could have been in the form of biographical research). This is rather astonishing because, as far as Wilhelm Dilthey (1910) is concerned, experience and self-biography are the center of the "construction of a historical world in the arts". One of his students, Georg Misch (1900) published the first compre-

hensive depiction of a "History of Autobiography". Finally, representatives of pedagogical psychology and developmental psychology, like Clara and William Stern, or Charlotte and Karl Bühler, succeeded in using ethnographical and biographical methods to benefit psychology and pedagogy. In the context of the Hamburg Institute of Youth-Studies led by William Stern, Martha Muchow carried out a survey on "The Lebenswelt of a City Child." After her suicide, her brother, Hans Heinrich Muchow, went over her manuscripts and published a book (see Muchow/Muchow, 1935, 1978). This book can be regarded as one of the first contributions to an ecologically oriented lebenswelt research on street socialization of children and adolescents. The Austrian educationalist and psychoanalyst, Siegfried Bernfeld, gave qualitatively oriented youth research a new impetus as well, by interpreting diaries as a source of adolescents' cultural self-portrayal. Starting in the twenties, Peter and Else Petersen developed first approaches for a pedagogical ethnography in the field of school and curriculum research based on the observations of pedagogical situations in the Jena-Plan-School. They emphasized a phenomenologically inspired concept of pedagogical fact research (see Friebertshäuser, 1997: 523)

While qualitative material and research approaches in pedagogy and in some fields of psychology reached their first peak in the twenties, they did not play a part in German sociology – apart from a few important surveys like Jahoda's, Lazarsfeld's and Zeisel's study on the "Unemployed of Marienthal" (1971), which was impressive because of its successful combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. At that time, the situation in American sociology was totally different. In the twenties and thirties the Chicago-School of sociology carried out a great deal of case studies on the lifestyle of deviant groups, on the cultural problems of immigrants, or on the biographies of juvenile delinquents. Important works out of this context were the survey on the lebenswelt of Polish farmers in Europe and the USA by Thomas and Znaniecki, or Trasher's and Whyte's studies on youth gangs and street corner society, which were inspired by the field research works of Park. However, by the end of the thirties, the research work of the Chicago School had lost its importance in the overall picture of American sociology, and was later replaced by the statistically operating social research.

In post-war West Germany, sociology and psychology also followed the quantitatively oriented American model with a few exceptions. In sociology a few studies coming from the field of family and youth sociology (Thurnwald, 1948; Jaide, 1969) integrated detailed abstracts from qualitative interviews in their depiction. In psychology there were works from the field of gestalt psychology and, above all, Hans Thomae's works on the psychological biography, based on the collection and interpretation of biographical data (see Thomae, 1991: 250). In the first and second post-war decades, the educational sciences were dominated by cultural scientific theoretical ap-

proaches, and therefore qualitative research work was rather rare. There were the surveys of Bertlein (1960) and Roeßler (1957), which took the tradition of qualitative research from the twenties up by bringing out the mentality of West Germany's post-war youth on the basis of school-essays. Stückrath's and Wetzel's study "About the Expression of the Child" (1962) can also be added, with a rare example of ethnography, documented with photos showing children in the classroom (see Zinnecker, 1995: 4).

After the "realistic change" proclaimed by Roth (1962) in the course of the sixties, there was a stronger turning to quantitative empirical methods including the respective scientific-theoretical thought in the educational sciences. In the era of educational reform (1965-1975) political authorities asked for empirical findings on education and socialization in school, vocational training and further education (see Terhart, 1997: 31). The concept of action research experienced its brief peak because it promised the investigation and improvement of pedagogical practice at the same time (see Krüger, 1999: 191). The end of educational optimism meant a turning to a skeptical attitude concerning the efficiency of empirical quantitative research and the unrealistic hopes of action research to change pedagogical practice fundamentally through research.

In the late seventies, there was a renaissance of qualitative research in the educational sciences and the neighboring disciplines in many European countries at the same time. The new interest in the traditions of phenomenology (Husserl) and understanding sociology (Weber, Schütz) gave the revival of qualitative research a new impetus. Especially the broad reception of the American theoretical traditions of symbolic interactionism (Mead, Goffmann, Blumer), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, Cicourel) and the naturalistic social sciences (Schatzmann, Strauss), first in West German sociology (see Habermas, 1990; Arbeitsgruppe Bielefelder Soziologen, 1972), then in the educational sciences (see Mollenhauer, 1972; Brumlik, 1973; Parmentier, 1993), and with some delay in psychology (see Jüttemann, 1985), influenced methodological attempts to develop a concept of a qualitative research approach. Whereas the first phase of the reception of qualitative research approaches in the educational sciences and in the other social sciences was determined by programmatic grounds and methodological attempts of delimitation against quantitative research, a common research practice began in the course of the eighties. This period finally showed that the differences within the qualitative research approach were greater than had been expected. Those differences had been obscured by the general opposing standpoint towards quantitative research. After the first phase of reception of qualitative concepts and the second phase of empirical practice and methodological differentiation, the third phase in the nineties can be described as a process of normalization (see Terhart, 1997: 33). Qualitative research was nationally and internationally accepted both in the educational sciences, and in the other

social sciences. This research trend is now established and confirmed in textbooks and handbooks (see Friebertshäuser/Prengel, 1997; Krüger/Marotzki, 2006; Flick/Kardorff/Keupp et al., 1991), specialist journals, respective sections in expert societies, institutionalized research teams etc., although the financial research support so far has not reached the amount that can be found in the quantitative research.

If one compares the development of qualitative research in the German-speaking area as shown above with the course of the Anglo-American counterpart described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 7), it seems that the processes of consolidation and differentiation of qualitative research in Germany are parallel to similar developments in the USA during the seventies and eighties. However, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994: 10) more recent discussions in the USA are characterized by debates concerning a crisis of representation. This means there is a loss of confidence in the known forms of presenting ethnographic experience and writing of ethnographic reports and a revival of action-oriented methods in social research. At the moment, it is not so much about the proper use of interview and interpretation methods, but about the art and policy of interpretation (see Denzin, 1994: 501). In the German discussion on the further development of qualitative research there are constructivists and representation-critical reservations – mentioned in the context of ethnological, sociological and educational ethnography and gender research - about the possibility of showing self-experience and explaining it to others (see Berg/Fuchs, 1993; Hirschauer/Amann, 1997; Kelle, 1997). Also the approaches of an activating social research have experienced only a certain renaissance in the attempts to develop concepts of practice research. In the last years this renaissance has become more important in the field of evaluation research and organizational development (see i.e. Flick, 2006).

3 Theoretical Positions in the German Qualitative Research

The term “qualitative research” comprises several approaches which differ sharply in their theoretical assumptions, their object perception and their methodological focus. In recent years, several attempts have been made to classify those different theoretical and research approaches. Whereas most authors agree on the issue that from the historical point of view, qualitative research goes back to the traditions of cultural science hermeneutics (Dilthey-line) and phenomenology (Husserl-line; see Lamnek, 1988: 49; Marotzki, 1999: 325), there are big differences concerning the attempts of classifying the recent qualitative research scene. In the American handbook, *The Landscape of Qualitative Research*, Guba and Lincoln (1998: 203) distinguish between four scientific-theoretical concepts: positivism, post-

positivism (critical rationalism), critical theory and constructivism. With the help of this system, they want to classify the different approaches of qualitative social research in the English language area. However, those classifications are hardly suitable for German qualitative research, because there are few correlations between the scientific-theoretical program of critical rationalism and qualitative research (as an exception, see Merkens, 1997), and only the concept of objective hermeneutics developed by Oevermann can be regarded as an elaborated methodological concept in the field of critical theory. Lüders/Reichertz (1986), and later Flick (1995) and Marotzki (1999) offered more plausible suggestions for the classification of qualitative research approaches. On the basis of these ideas a system that distinguishes between descriptive, ethno-methodological, structuralist and post-modern approaches is explained below. Each approach is characterized by the respective interests, theoretical assumptions and research methods.

3.1 Descriptive Concepts

The aim of qualitative research approaches belonging to this group is to understand the social reality and the views of people acting in it as they are. Within this qualitative research trend there are different variants. First there are approaches and studies that continue the traditions of cultural anthropology and ethnography, diving into an unknown lebenswelt, culture or subculture and on the basis of the results of observations and questionnaires they can make statements on the structure and interaction dynamics of a social field. The researcher - coming from outside – reports on a different culture with the intention to portray the observed social world as faithfully as possible (see Gubrium/Holstein, 1997: 28). Referring to the classic ethnographic field studies of the Chicago school from the twenties and thirties on the lebenswelt of migrants or juvenile delinquents, field research in sociology and educational sciences has reached a new peak since the seventies (see Hitzler/Honer, 1991; Friebertshäuser, 1997). In the educational scientific context there were surveys on the everyday life of elementary pupils (Krappmann/Oswald, 1995), the lebenswelt of junior high pupils (Projektgruppe Jugendbüro, 1975), or on the images of a young world delivered by the media (Vogelsang, 1994).

A second line of qualitative research, which also follows a rather descriptive approach, is represented by those approaches and studies following a specific interpretation of the theory of symbolic interactionism. The aim is to work out the subjective sense that the individuals see in their action and in their environment. Researchers analyze the way subjects label objects, events and experiences according to their importance. The reconstruction of such perspectives becomes the instrument in the analysis of social worlds (see Flick, 1995: 30). This research concept was empirically put in concrete terms

in some studies in educational scientific biography research. On the basis of the evaluation concept of social scientific paraphrasing, the subjective views of female students from a correspondence degree course (see Heinze/Klusemann, 1979) or of female adolescents brought up in a home (see Kieper, 1980) could be shown. Also the research program on the analysis of subjective theories coming from psychology and formulated in the last decade aims at the bringing out of subjective views e.g. of pupils (Fromm, 1987) or advisers (Flick, 1989). Therefore, it can be assigned to the rather descriptively oriented line of qualitative research.

3.2 Ethnomethodological Concepts

The qualitative research concept of ethnomethodology developed by Garfinkel (1967) and Cicourel (1974) surveys the way people make, maintain and change sense in social situations. From the historical and theoretical point of view, ethnomethodology refers to Schütz's tradition of social constructivism, which perceives the cognition process as a constructive, sensible action. The ethnomethodological researcher is especially interested in methods used by members of the society to construct reality. For him, it is not primarily about describing but about reconstructing the regulations of social action. The ethnomethodological research program has been methodologically applied mostly in conversation analysis, concentrating on the reconstruction of the rules of communication. However, more recent studies, so-called "studies of work," do not only survey the formal rules of communication, but also the interactive methods within the scope of working processes and the knowledge forming the basis of those methods (see Bergmann, 1991).

Schütze (1983) added the narrative structural approach to conversation analysis. In contrast to the socio-constructivist assumptions, this approach aims at the deduction of process structures in biography on the basis of a reconstruction of narrative structures in autobiographic interviews. Following the research program of ethnomethodology, a broad research practice developed in sociology during the last decades – especially in the field of family, industrial, and academic sociology (see Amann/Knorr-Cetina, 1991; Eberle, 1997). In the educational sciences, however, the ethnomethodological approach has been used only in the context of a few selected fields, such as school research, youth welfare research, or adult education research (see Parmentier 1989, p. 559; Nolda 1997, p. 704).

3.3 Structuralist Concepts

The common characteristic of the third type of theoretical approaches is that there are cultural systems of the senses, framing perception and creation of subjective and objective reality equally (see Flick 2009, p. 62). Here it is important to distinguish between the surface of experience and action, which is accessible to the subjects, and the deep structures that cannot be reached directly by individual reflection, and which are understood as an action generating force. Though, these deep structures can be seen differently by the several qualitative research approaches belonging to this position.

The aim of the concept of psychoanalytic depth hermeneutics is to work out the latent subconscious in social forms of interaction and life stories. It was theoretically established by Lorenzer (1972) and put into concrete methodological forms by Leithäuser/Volmberg (1988) in various social and industrial psychological project connections. Since then, educational scientific childhood and school research has tested it as well (see Leuzinger-Bohleber/Garlichs, 1997). The concept is not only about individual unconscious contents, but also about the unconsciously used style of language. Coming from the same theoretical tradition, the ethno-psychoanalytical approach, established by Devereux (1967) and developed further by Erdheim, Nadig et al., examines the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee from a psychoanalytical perspective, and consequently can focus on a culture's unconscious.

Another concept that aims at the reconstruction of deep structures is Oevermann's concept of objective hermeneutics. Structuralist models developed by Chomski and Piaget provide the theoretical background of this concept. In contrast to psychoanalytical depth hermeneutics, the central idea is not the reconstruction of psychological unconscious structures of a case. The central goal is rather to work out the objective social structures that gain acceptance, which does not depend on the subjective intentions of the participants. Taking up that research program, a broad research practice has developed in the last decade in sociology and educational sciences, spreading from cultural sociology to school and youth research (see Garz, 1994).

Other qualitative research approaches aiming at the reconstruction of social and cultural depth structures of social action have been developed in the structuralist-oriented ethnology (Levi-Strauss/Barthes), or in recent approaches concerning a discourse analysis in text linguistics, in the sociology of knowledge or in the socio-historically oriented educational sciences (see Keller, 1997: 319). Decisive ideas for those developments came from the studies of Foucault (1974), who, within the frame of his discourse analysis, reconstructed the scientific development against the background of the genesis of power techniques.

3.4 Postmodern Concepts

Qualitative research emphasizing aspects of the construction, perspective, ambiguity and complexity of social reality, can be assigned to the postmodern position. That includes on the one hand new approaches of a reflexive ethnography, first developed in the American discussion and then published in the German speaking area in Berg/Fuchs's (1993) volume. These new approaches do not want to present a true and a uniform copy of a strange lebenswelt. Instead they emphasize the social production of ethnographic texts and they refer to the point that the research process is a permanent process of negotiation for the perception of the lebenswelt. According to that the dialogue between the researcher and the interviewee should also be documented in ethnographic reports. The aim of a complex decentralization of the ethnography is to overcome the monologist and authoritarian description of the researcher (see Berg/Fuchs, 1993: 87). In this new variant of a reflexive ethnography the traditional term of representation is replaced by a strict perspective (see Marotzki, 1999a: 335). In the German ethnographic discussion Knorr-Cetina (1989) represents a position analogue to this argumentation. She developed the research concept of an empirical constructivism. She demands a reflection regarding the constructive character of ethnographic research methods and a consideration of the fact that in a research process social realities are produced interactively (see Kelle, 1997: 197).

Koller (1999) formulated a different methodological position in the educational scientific context, taking up the philosophical argumentation of the postmodern era discussion explicitly. Following Lyotard's philosophy of conflict, he pleads for an acceptance of divergent versions out of the interpretation of intercultural research in order to do justice to the conflict found in the empirical material.

4 Steps and Methods of Qualitative Research

How do the detailed research steps and the central surveying and analyzing methods of qualitative research appear below that level of different theoretical approaches and methodological positions? Of course, the choice of research designs and methods is strongly connected with the theoretical and methodological ideas. Nevertheless, there are some common characteristics regarding the conception and structure of the research process as well as the survey methods, whereas especially the analyzing methods vary considerably, depending on the chosen respective methodological positions.

In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research is not oriented towards a linear research model that scrutinizes the real life validity of opera-

tionalized hypotheses coming from theoretical model assumptions. Qualitative research, as a discovering form of theory formation, rather follows the model of a research process in which data collection, interpretation and the resulting knowledge finding are closely linked. The search for further data is finished at the moment when a theoretical saturation of the findings in the respective research field has been reached (see Strauss/Corbin, 1998: 159). Although qualitative research does without prior thesis formulations, this does not mean at all that there are no clear formulations of questions at the beginning of the research process. A less clearly formulated question holds the danger that there remains a helpless researcher facing mountains of scripts afterwards. Furthermore, in qualitative research projects the selection and combination of the empirical material as well as the decision of what instruments should be used for data survey and evaluation depends on a detailed and clear catalogue of questions.

Compared with the majority of quantitative surveys, the criterion of statistical representativeness does not often play a significant role in the selection of cases or case groups in the qualitative field (see Merkens, 1997: 100). It cannot be the aim of qualitative research to give statements on quantitative relations, because normally there are only a small number of cases (see Fuchs-Heinritz/Krüger, 1991: 23). In the context of qualitative research there is a widely used selection strategy called "theoretical sampling," developed by Glaser/Strauss (1967). Here, decisions about the selection and combination of empirical material (cases, case groups, institutions) are only made during the survey and evaluation process. The selection of specific persons, groups or fields is oriented towards the central criterion of the theory that has to be developed out of the empirical analysis. For a further theory development, more interesting hypothetical contrast cases must be sought after the interpretation of the first cases. The evaluation and use of further material is finished when a survey group has reached the "theoretical saturation," i.e. there is nothing new to be found anymore (see Krüger/Wensierski, 1995: 196). Whereas theoretical sampling focuses especially on the developing theory, the concept of "analytical induction" tries to cover a prior developed theory by using and analyzing divergent cases (see Bühler-Niederberger, 1991).

It has become increasingly difficult to overview the wide method spectrum of data collection and survey. According to the respective activities, one can distinguish between three methodological forms. The first group comprises the so-called non-reactive methods, in which the researcher is neither participant nor protagonist in social situations in order to gain material; he works only with the material that he can find. In the educational sciences, for example, the collection and evaluation of diaries, autobiographies and students' essays has a long tradition going back to the 18th century. The second group is made up by the different observing methods in which the researcher

demands a material generating activity. The researcher has to work out his access to the field, has to play a certain role, has to make notes and has to evaluate them continuously during the course of the project (see Terhart, 1997: 14). The different observing methods can be distinguished according to the degree of proximity and distance to the field of observation, but also the degree of the prior structuring of the observation process - in which rather open and flexible methods of observation are preferred.

The third group contains different interviewing techniques wherein the researcher has to rely on intensive cooperation with one or several persons being surveyed. This is on the one hand, a group discussion method where collective fields of experience in groups can be disclosed (see Bohnsack, 2006). On the other hand, there are different qualitative interview methods, which can be classified according to the degree of prior structuring on the part of the researcher. Currently, the most commonly used form of the open interview in qualitative educational research is the narrative interview developed by Schütze (1976). It aims at the luring out of the entire biography or a thematic or temporal part of it. The problem focused interview is an example for half-structured forms of oral interviewing where, after an open narrative request, the interviewer – with the help of a "main connecting theme" - can bring in his problem focused interest in the form of specific questions. Strongly structured main connecting theme interviews are relatively closed interviewing variants. They are used in expert interviews in order to work out the contents of expert knowledge (see Krüger, 1999: 209).

In the face of the enormous expansion and differentiation of evaluation strategies in the qualitative educational and social scientific research, it is not easy to cluster and classify the different types of interpretative data evaluation. However, with reference to the previously introduced different theoretical and methodological positions within qualitative research, three lines of qualitative data analysis can be roughly differentiated. A first group of interpretation methods focuses its interest in data evaluation on the describing disclosure of the lebenswelt and the comprehension of the subjective sense. The concept of qualitative contents analysis developed by Mayring (1991) belongs to such descriptive variants of data evaluation, which is especially suited to evaluate large quantities of text (see also Kuckartz, 1992). In the first explorative phase of the contents analyzing evaluation, the available material is examined and a system of central categories is established; then further material will be examined according to these categories. The disadvantage of this method is the turning away from the level of individual case interpretation towards a category-oriented, cross-sectional analysis. Heinze's (1995) rather descriptive concept of social scientific paraphrasing is more committed to a detailed evaluation of the individual case. It tries to grasp the action-oriented everyday life theories of the interviewees in a multistage interpretation course on the basis of narrative interview records.

A second group of evaluation strategies aims at formal rules or process structures of social action. In the center of this conversational analysis, which is regarded as the main current of ethnomethodological research, is the analysis of formal mechanisms and principles where conversations on everyday life are structured and specific situations will be created. The material basis are transcriptions from tape or video recordings of everyday life conversations, but also of consultations or trials (see Bergmann, 1991: 218). The narrative structural method developed by Schütze (1983) is actually based on the method of a formal text analysis in the evaluation of autobiographical ad-lib narrations; but in further evaluation steps the separate narrative segments will be structurally described and combined in a biographical general abstract. It is not primarily the aim to reconstruct the subjective interpretations of the narrator, but the connection of biographical process structures.

As a third method within this type of interpretation techniques the documentary method can be called, which has been developed by Ralf Bohnsack (2006; Bohnsack/Nentwig-Gesemann/Nohl, 2001) and others for the analyses of group discussions. Aiming at the reconstruction of collective orientations and milieu-related experiences the method nowadays is also applied to biographic interviews, photographies or videos.

A fourth group of evaluation methods tries to decode those structures which are successful as a generative model and do not depend on the knowledge and will of the agent. Apart from the concept of psychoanalytical text interpretation focusing on the discovery of the latent unconscious in biographies and social interactions, the concept of objective hermeneutics (Oevermann, 1988) must be mentioned here in this context. It is to work out the objective relevance and the latent structure of the senses of remarks or social actions. Oevermann put this concept to a first empirical test in the context of a family sociological study. Now all sorts of other materials, such as interviews, photos, or even works of art are analyzed with this method (see Garz, 1994). At the center of this methodological process of objective hermeneutics is the sequence analysis. Here, at the beginning, the first sequence of a text is to be interpreted in the context of an interpretation group as extensively as possible. Then the interpretations coming from the first sequence are transferred to the second sequence and examined for their compatibility. In this way, the interpretations are increasingly reduced and differentiated by each sequence, new interpretations are added until a case structure can be seen. The reconstructed latent structure of the senses of the case is to be tested in additional sequences and finally the researcher tries to falsify it. Starting from the individual case reconstruction - the objective hermeneutics reaches the structural generalization with the help of the falsification principle (see Reichertz, 1991: 226).

5 Topics and Types of Qualitative Research

What are the fields that can be surveyed in the context of qualitative research with the help of the portrayed research methodological instruments? Just a quick glance at the current research reports, relevant handbooks and standard literature makes clear that almost all aspects of everyday life have become subjects of qualitative research projects. The spectrum of topics extends from new youth biographies, interactions in court, communication in fire brigade emergency calls or the lebenswelt of bodybuilders or handymen, up to the analysis of scene magazines or talk shows. Because of this wide variety, it is not possible to give a complete overview on all topics of qualitative research. In what follows, I confine myself to emphasizing primarily on the fields of qualitative research in the educational sciences. For a thematic classification, an orientation towards central types of qualitative research is helpful. There is a differentiation between biography research, interaction studies, lebenswelt analyses and qualitative content analyses of cultural documents – which deal with different dimensions and aspects of social reality.

The field of biography research is the qualitative research type, which currently has a central position in the educational sciences. Biography research concentrates on the survey and evaluation of told or reported accounts of life-style. The source materials are either biographical texts produced by the research instruments of the expert (e.g. narrative interviews) or sources (diaries, autobiographies), which are already to be found in social reality. Important research fields of the educational sciences are general status passages in the biography, but also educational biographies of pupils, students or adults in different pedagogical institutions. Even the biographies of professional educationalists and honorary working people are now examined in the different educational scientific disciplines (see Krüger/Marotzki, 2006). Another field in the educational biography research are the historical analyses concerning former socialization conditions, educational practices, educational institutions or processes of growing up. Here are many points of contact with the socio-historical and oral history research (see Krüger, 1997: 43).

The second main focus of qualitative research comprises microscopically oriented interaction studies - although, they are more prominent in sociology than in the educational sciences. Nevertheless, during the last two decades educational qualitative research has carried out conversation analysis, the labeling approach concept and recently surveys on evaluation strategies of objective hermeneutics. They deal with stigmatization processes in schools or educational institutions, tactics of pupils in the class, interaction conflicts between younger and older children in the class and schoolyard; with conversations in ecological teams of adult education or with consultations in different areas of social work (see Combe/Helsper, 1994; Lüders, 1997).

A third major qualitative research type in the educational sciences is lebenswelt studies. Following socio-phenomenological and interactionistic theory traditions, as well as ethnographic field research approaches, this research trend has shown strong development in the last decades. Here, everyday life in elementary school, internet, home or juvenile court, the extra-curricular lebenswelt of junior high pupils, students, people living in homes, Star Trek fans, or the milieu of hooligans or music bands are the subject of research (see Bohnsack/Marotzki, 1998; Bohnsack et al., 1995; Jakob/Von Wensierski, 1997).

A fourth center of educational scientific research refers to the qualitative content analysis of meaningful documents. The focus is on material, e.g. essays by pupils or students, which have been collected and evaluated for decades in qualitative educational scientific research. Other cultural documents, like the picture or the photo, have been a subject of scientific analyses in art historical and ethnographical research for a long time. In the context of educational scientific research, both were rediscovered as sources only recently (see Lenzen, 1993; Mollenhauer, 1997; Fuhs, 1997). The analysis of movies and television programs has likewise become more important in educational scientific research only in the last decade. The impulses came here mainly from researchers surveying those visual documents with reference to the interpretation method of objective hermeneutics (see Garz/Kraimer, 1991; Kade, 1997).

6 Current Problem Areas of Qualitative Research

The overview on the subjects and research fields of qualitative educational scientific research given in a broad outline shows that meanwhile, in the educational sciences and in the neighboring social scientific disciplines alike, a wide research practice has established itself. A wealth of qualitatively oriented projects has been carried out over the last decades; they have sought mostly to fulfill the criteria and standards of qualitative research logic. Despite of this apparent record of success, there are at least three problem areas, which are presumably characteristic of the current qualitative research scene.

First, there are not enough continuous research lines regarding content and time in the field of qualitative educational scientific research. The permanent conceptual reworking of approaches and research programs rather foils a cumulation of experiences and results (see Helsper/Herwartz-Emden/Terhart, 1998: 6). Although there are occasional attempts at systematically matching research lines, as seen in the field of student's biography research (see Helsper/Bertram, 1999: 267), they have hitherto remained exceptions. In the field of qualitative educational scientific research there is

also a lack of secondary analyses of material previously surveyed by researchers. Normally, in many qualitative projects with narrow topics, new material is surveyed at a great expense and later not available for other researchers. One major reason for this is that so far there are no comprehensive archives and documentation systems for qualitative educational scientific research. Then the technical and structural preconditions for continuous research could be given.

A second and rather methodological problem that still characterizes several studies can be described with the keyword: "confusion of qualitative and quantitative research logics." Many studies try to answer two questions at the same time by sampling, which is oriented toward external socio-structural characteristics. On the one hand, they stick to the methodological option for a qualitative action, but on the other hand, they want to portray typical experiences, and make quantitative distribution statements according to the selection of the surveyed group. However, representative results according to distribution statements cannot be the outcome of qualitative studies, which do not follow the rule of the big number.

A third central problem of current qualitative research is what Terhart (1997: 38) characterized as the question of portrayability of results. The criticism concerning the reflective-theoretical statements of the truth, and the comments regarding the constructive character of research methods and the dialogue character of ethnographic reality perception that proceeds out of the context of the new reflexive ethnography or empirical constructivism might be justified. Maintaining such an absolute position most likely leads to problems. Finally, because of representative-critical reservations, the researcher's own problems in dealing with representative questions could become the actual subject of the research report (see Terhart, 1997: 39).

7 Prospects of Qualitative Research

What are the challenges resulting from the current research situation for the further development and improvement of quality standards in qualitative educational scientific research? First of all, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive documentation system for the securing and exchange of qualitative data in the educational sciences. Through the establishment of those technical and structural requirements, better conditions for the continuous development of research programs and for two types of subsequent research can be achieved: first, for the implementation of qualitative replication studies, which take up again the questions and survey instruments of older studies under different social conditions; second, for the realization of secondary analyses where formerly surveyed qualitative data are evaluated anew with different formulations of questions.

Further empirical research tasks facing future qualitative educational scientific research are first of all a stronger combination of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches. Consequently, on the basis of detailed individual case interpretations and with the help of a qualitative classification on biographies and interaction constellations gained through case comparing contrasts, a quantitative study can examine in a second step the distribution according to frequencies. Second, it is necessary to combine the so far dominating biography analytical methods with other qualitative research methods, like the interaction analytical and ethnographic methods, in order to examine the more complex connections between biography development and the interactive and institutional conditions of the pedagogical fields of action (see i.e. Bohnsack/Marotzki, 1998; Helsper/ Böhme/Kramer et al., 1998). Third, it seems to be useful and desirable to continue the attempts to conceive a picture-hermeneutics. Those attempts have become common in qualitative educational scientific research in recent years, and they are especially eager to develop those evaluation methods further which do not treat visual documents as texts, but which emphasize the specific character that is inherent in pictures. In the face of the rapid transformation process towards an information society, educational research approaches a new field – the digital socialization space, it can be regarded as the new learning environment alongside the traditional institutions.

Finally in the context of internationalisation of processes of life and learning a stronger international networking of qualitative educational research and a development of cross-cultural research is badly needed. Financial, language and cultural communication problems seem to be the major barriers in this field. Additionally most qualitative research methods so far are not fully established, so that every cross-cultural qualitative project has to break new ground. Nevertheless there are first attempts in biographic, youth or childhood research (Renner, 1999; du Bois-Reymond et.al., 1994; Weller, 2003) and volumes like this give reason for hope that in other fields of educational research similar projects soon will be established.

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