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Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Riemann, G. (1987). Some notes on a student research workshop on "Biography analysis, interaction analysis, and analysis of social worlds". *Biography and Society : Newsletter of the International Sociological Association Research Committee* 38, 8, 54-70. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-7299>

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Some Notes on a Student Research Workshop on "Biography Analysis, Interaction Analysis, and Analysis of Social Worlds"

This paper will be pretty much down-to-earth: we will offer some remarks about our experiences with a student workshop (1) on qualitative social research in which some empirical studies (diploma theses and doctoral theses) within the fields of biography analysis, analysis of social worlds and interaction analysis have been produced. We won't explicitly deal with the abductive logic underlying qualitative research characterized by a complex and continuous interplay of general and case specific considerations; and we neither want to sound normative nor strictly didactic ("That's how qualitative research should be done or taught"). The aim is modest: We want to give you some impressions of the organizational context and the arc of work (to use a term of Anselm Strauss) of qualitative research projects of students who have been supervised by us. We believe that a description of these features that have emerged over the last six years could contribute to a discussion of general and specific interactional and sequential characteristics of qualitative research work. And we regard a comparative investigation of the actual work as a prerequisite for spelling out and validating an empirically grounded epistemology.

First we want to stress that we don't distinguish between students and researchers in any principal terms. We look at them as beginning researchers who study interesting phenomena, collect valuable data and have some interesting investigations to offer to the community of social scientists. Of course, when starting to work with them one has to make explicit many considerations which are taken for granted within the research work of mature scientists. But at the same time it is exactly the constant necessity to explicate and discuss features of qualitative inquiries when guiding the students' research work and when confronted with the students' specific styles, strengths, and weaknesses in securing and analyzing qualitative data, which is a strategic opportunity for sharpening one's senses regarding the theoretical and methodological grounds of one's own approach.

Most of the students we are working with are not sociology students proper, but students of social work and former professionals (mostly social workers, but also teachers, ministers and others) who returned to the university for a post-graduate study of "supervision" (a type of counselling that has developed in dealing with obstinate and recurring problems of professional practices (cf. Schütze 1984a)). This has not been a serious obstacle, because most of these students learned considerable bits of sociology in the course of their present and/or former studies, and they participated in systematic seminars on various types of qualitative social research conducted by us

(1) The workshop of qualitative social research was started six years ago. It was set up by Fritz Schütze and has been mainly organized by Gerhard Riemann in the last two and a half years. In running the workshop we are being assisted by Thomas Reim, Dieter Nittel, and Peter Straus who hold degrees in sociology, educational science and social work, respectively.

every academic year. In addition, exactly these students carry with them a rich knowledge of social situations, and - having dealt with many "social cases" in their practical studies or professional work situations - they are familiar with the attitude of carefully scrutinizing the dynamics of (collective or individual) single cases and the related empirical documents. Among the things they have not previously acquired are analytical distance, technical skills for qualitative sociological analysis, the patience for step-by-step work in conducting a research project, and the sensitivity for mistakes at work in looking at and into cases (because their former practical analyses always had to be shorthand and pinpointing, fading out of awareness the dubious features of many procedures and assumptions). It is astonishing how much of exactly these virtues and capabilities they acquire during their participation in the research workshop, although occasionally it is painful for them to undergo substantial identity changes due to the fact of becoming aware of the intricacies of naturalistic inquiries into the dynamics of single cases. Of course this has consequences for their later work routines as professionals. Admittedly, in later work situations as professionals they again must conduct shorthand analyses of single cases as routine procedures. But then they will be aware of the many proclivities to make mistakes; they will know, when it will be necessary to step back and start an explicit analysis; and they will be capable of conducting full-scale case analyses using basic theoretical categories and research procedures of qualitative sociology.

We also consider it as an advantage that often our students develop their initial research interests in reflecting about their own very real professional experiences (or experiences during their professional socialization) and that they have a direct access to the fields they want to study. A recent example: A priest has probably better chances to motivate other priests to tell their life stories than a sociologist (cf. Heidemann 1986). Of course, the biographical relationship of the students to their former fields of professional practice also provides for some difficulties of conducting research within exactly these areas. Many mundane assumptions about phenomena to be studied have to be given up, and sometimes the phantasmagorical interaction of the student with the actors within the research field under study (which generally must be seen as conducive to generating empirical questions and theoretical assumptions) gets inordinately intensive (i.e. leads to extreme anger, disappointment, practical criticism or even to touches of a depressive mood). But coping with and overcoming those crises results in powerful personal developments of the students into the inner state of analytically minded and empirically sensitized sociological researchers. The newly acquired sensibilities and analytical skills are soon used for autonomous research work, and later on they enable our former students - back to professional work - to see more and more precisely than many other practitioners. Our positive experience of teaching research to students who worked as professional practitioners or undergo socialization into a profession is, of course, not new. For many years Anselm Strauss trained nurses to become qualitative social researchers alongside with students of sociology. The way we have organized our workshop has been deeply influenced by our experiences with a research team and a research seminar of Anselm Strauss.

While there are many similarities in teaching qualitative research, e.g. procedures of biography analysis, to students in general (regardless

of their disciplinary affiliation). our remarks in the last two paragraphs already reveal something of what we think is distinctive for students of social work and supervision: especially their "natural" leaning towards case analysis; the development of their themes out of practical, professional involvements; a direct access to the fields which they want to do research on; and the consequentality of their extended research experience for later professional practice with clients. When we compare them with sociology students it seems to us that the latter ones also have special strengths and "hang ups". (We have had and still have experiences with teaching and supervising sociology students, too.) Sociology students might find it easier to locate their particular qualitative study with regard to sociological paradigms, the history of their discipline, and the body of **topically** relevant literature; and they might be quite self-conscious when approaching their data (e.g., "Is this a legitimate interactionist question?", "Is my analytical vocabulary really solidly grounded in this particular basic theoretical school of thought which I claim to be adhering to?"), but it is exactly this lack of **naïveté** and this aspiration towards seeming sophistication which could turn out to be a stumbling stone: it could discourage them and block their creativity and writing. When working with sociology students we also sometimes found a devaluation of and a lack of patience for careful descriptions ("Oh, it's **just** descriptive!") which has already been criticized by Matthes 1983; a tendency towards overly quick and sometimes slightly arrogant coding (by making use of traditional sociological codes), i.e., giving it up to exhaust the analytical possibilities, which is **accompanied** by a false sense of security; a disregard for a concentration on case analyses ("What can you learn from so few cases?") which derives from their lack of previous professional, practical experiences; and sometimes a problematic distance from their informants and their life circumstances which does not help their analysis.

But, of course, it is difficult to generalize in a few words since **there** are **multiple** ways for sociology students to develop their topics and to relate to their research; and we don't claim it is more **worthwhile** to work with students who already had some practical professional experience. We just find it important to take the students' respective professional and educational biographies into account so that one can adjust one's teaching and supervising to their special strengths and weaknesses. It is different with sociology and with social work students. And it makes good sense to spend **more** time thinking about teaching sociological research skills to former, present, and future professional practitioners. When mentioning this we also think of the close relationship between Social Work and Chicago Sociology during the twenties and early thirties: i.e., during the phase in which important qualitative case analyses were published (cf. Carey 1975, Bulmer 1984). The history of this relationship and its final dissolution (which probably had problematic implications for both sides) has still to be more carefully researched.

The basic idea of the student research workshop is that the central procedures (not only of data collection but also of data analysis) are **communicative** ones. Biography analysis like other types of qualitative research, depends on various **communicative** activities. The informant is asked to tell

her or his life **history**, and during the course of narration she/he is also induced to **describe** life situations and to **argue** about systematic problems of her/his life and the respective relationship to her- or himself. The researcher has to work on these communicative materials **meticulously**. At first she/he has to follow the line of **communicative** representations of the informant, and this is basically organized in the sequential order set by the informant. This step of research is done within the **communicative** scheme of description: the researcher focusses on the representational practices of the informant and describes what is revealed about the course of experiences of the informant and how it is revealed. This type of description is still quite concrete. Later on the researcher has to compare properties of different phases of the life history, and still later she/he has to compare biographical processes of one life history with those of others. The researcher has also to ask her- or himself, what she/he will learn from the structural description of the interview in general terms; this research step of analytical abstraction consists of formulating initial general propositions within the **communicative** scheme of argumentation. Later on the general propositions derived from various interview materials are set into systematic relationships to each other, and these relationships have to be explicated by generating additional general propositions of assertions and explanations. These are further activities within the communicative scheme of argumentation.

Now, our central **basic** experience with our workshop is that the central communicative activities of qualitative data analysis, namely structural description, analytical abstraction, contrastive comparison and following up the implications of systematic relationships, can be intensified by really enacting them via **communicative** interaction within a social group of fellow researchers. Describing something to one's fellow researchers in face-to-face **communication** induces the others to contribute to the description, to reveal biases in perspective in a first description (e.g., a tendency of the researcher to take the **rendering** of the informant at face value or to force a categorial understanding on it which is not grounded within the formal features of the presentational practices of the informant) and to detect holes within the sequential line of description. The formulation of propositions of general properties of the case induces the other group members to question them or even to formulate counterpropositions, and this working of the communicative scheme of argumentation leads to a considerable densification of the results of analytical abstraction, contrastive comparison, and building of theoretical models. Of course, not the whole process of a particular data analysis can be accomplished by real interaction within the research group. It would be too time-consuming, and it would lead to the danger, that the student feels that it is no longer

her/his own research project. But the **communicative** process should be enacted exactly up to the point where the dynamics of generating structural **descriptions** and of the other communicative research activities has **been** firmly established. This is not only **socialization** into a style of research, but making use of the power of communicative schemes underlying qualitative social research; it should be exhausted even by **mature** social scientists. (We basically learned about the potential implied in open and focussed research **communication** from participating in a research team and research class of Anselm Strauss.) It is our contention that there is the quasi-legal principle of "oral procedure", i.e. that the central cases and basic research steps should be articulated and "heard": powerfully **involved** in qualitative social research.

A student workshop of qualitative social research should be organized in such a way that it sets free and facilitates the **communicative** resources of data analysis. There should be the permanent **opportunity** to get involved

within the dynamics of research interaction. This means that the students should **work together** in **small** research groups, in which everybody is encouraged and supported to start interaction. In addition, the **students** should **realize** the power of contrastive **comparisons** and of generating general categories which can be used in different research projects of various substantive topics without forcing them upon the empirical materials. This can be provided for by putting students together who follow up different substantive research questions (the principle of topical heterogeneity) and by arranging a joint meeting of research **groups** in regular intervals in order to focus on general basic theoretical and methodological questions and to share the experiences of working them through (the principle of arena debate).

Our **student** workshop consists of three interactive **small** research groups. Each of **them** consists of four to six students who meet **once** a week for three or five hours (also usually **during** the semester-bleak). Each group meets with one of our three co-workers who have extensive experiences with qualitative research procedures themselves. They are in charge of the work in their groups, i.e., they guide the participants' mutual structural descriptions of data, the discussion of theoretical **memos** and other structural steps. They set up the schedule of **meetings** in such a way that at the same **time** the norm of reciprocity of the students' sharing of the research work of each other is fulfilled on the one hand and the potentials of **communicative** interaction for the various research steps can be exhausted on the other. The co-workers tutor the individual students by continuously and specifically **commenting** on the progress and retardations of their work, they address the **"mistakes"** at work of the students and help to overcome the emotional difficulties connected with them. E.g., they explicate weak points like the failure to gain conceptual distance from data, the tendency to subsume data under suggestive, grand theoretical categories that cannot really **be grounded in data**, the neglect of formal features of a text or the failure to take the multitude of perspectives in the data into account; but they also point at strengths and progress, encourage the students to trust in their own abilities **if** they doubt that they will ever make it; and they feel satisfaction when the students become more confident and feel **it** is worth the effort.

The person who is in charge of the whole research workshop takes turns in participating in the discussion of the three working groups and chairs a plenary meeting of all members of the workshop which takes place every third week.

The function of this plenary meeting is to give overviews over research procedures and to focus on basic research steps that can be found in any qualitative research project (so that the student researcher will be able to use her or his own research capacities on various research questions; this is extremely important for a mature researcher as well as for a mature professional who should be capable to conduct thoughtful and **correct** single case analyses), to discuss methodological problems and difficulties that are of especially serious **concern** for the work of all "novice" researchers, and to give enough room for the report on and discussion of psychological and "life organizational" questions related to the first big research work in one's life. Two very important functions of these "arena sessions" are the following: the students should learn that most of their tasks and problems are similar and that they can tutor each other how to **overcome** the related difficulties; and the research supervisors should learn what sorts of social, psychological and logistic problems have appeared which **they** had not expected themselves.

The main instructor watches the interaction processes within each of the research groups on a regular base; sometimes he realizes barriers of interaction and related research work, which the group instructor and the group participants didn't realize because they are **heavily** "engrossed" in their intensive collaborative research work. Then he **will** cautiously start to influence the course of interaction without any open criticism, and later **on he** will work through the obstacles to interaction and research steps with the group instructor within a private session or **together with** the other group instructors. These sessions of **meta-reflexion** (**resembling** some bit the work of supervisor and supervisand - this we did learn from our supervision students!) are extremely important for the constant assessment of the quality of research work of interactively working together and of the teaching-learning process. In **addition, they** are starting points for revisions and amendments of teaching procedures - and sometimes even of the research procedures.

The main instructor keeps himself **informed** about the development of the individual students' research, gets to know some bits of the data which they bring in and looks over and **comments** on samples of structural descriptions and other case specific and comparative analyses. This is always done on the base of reports of the group instructors, who normally will guide the research projects quite autonomously. In looking together on the ongoing research projects, the instructors will sensitize each other for the intricacies of the related social processes of arcs of research work as well as of the identity metamorphoses which the individual students have to undergo during these novel experiences. Sometimes, besides the regular course of group visits, the main instructor is also asked to participate in the meetings when things have **become** quite complicated in terms of **difficult** text materials or obstacles to generating theoretical **models** as well as in **terms of sociopsychological** difficulties in group interaction and the individual **students' identity** changes. Then - but only then - his more active contribution in organizing the work and group process can **prove** to be helpful. During the **normal** phases of a student's research project he will exert his **main** influence via the regular meetings with his co-workers to discuss the progress, the problems, and the timing of the research **projects** in the three groups. Supervising qualitative research requires a lot of sensibility, and the face-to-face **communication** about one's own experiences with supervising such projects helps to focus on problems and "mistakes at work" which had been "felt" somehow **but not** really grasped and formulated.

The crucial point in the work of the groups is the realization of **reciprocity**: Each student is expected to take part in the verbal discussion of his or her fellow students' ideas, data and **memos**, while he or she can trust that the others invest time, energy, and creativity in participating in the description of his or her data and in the commenting on his or her memos. We have experienced that it has many advantages when the research topics in one group widely differ (this has partly to do with the fact that students often feel more free in the beginning when working on others' data than working on their own) and when **students** work together who are at different stages in their respective work: i.e., more experienced students can take part in explaining the sense of research steps **with** which they are already familiar, and in explaining them they get a firmer sense of what they have been doing themselves; they can reassure the others that certain troubles, doubts, and **insecurities** are quite normal and that they have gone through them, too; and less experienced students learn what is ahead of them when becoming familiar with the **analytical** problems the others are tackling **already**; it helps them to **cool down** when they feel discouraged and to develop a more realistic sense of **phasing** and timing.

Usually when students start to develop an interest in doing their own empirical project within our research workshop, they have already become familiar with the style of qualitative research by having participated in one of our seminars on special research procedures. So they have already become familiar with the nature of qualitative data (e.g., transcriptions of narratives and of special types of face-to-face interaction, field notes etc.) and they have already developed a sense of the arc of work of qualitative research and what its findings and insights could look like.

It is important that they have basically made up their mind whether or not qualitative research would be suitable for them before joining the research workshop so that no one will be seriously disappointed and wastes time.

When a student contacts us because of the workshop and there is still a place in one of the groups available the following activities occur (1):

1. The student not only states what he or she is interested in but is also asked to tell about the history of his or her interest in the particular problem. Thereby one can discover if the way he or she formulates the problem really reflects his or her original interests or distorts them (e.g., by adopting a restrictive and seemingly scientific vocabulary). It is also essential to find out if the student is specifically interested in social phenomena which can be dealt with in process analysis. (These are questions of basic social and biographical processes typical for the social realm under study, e.g., a social movement, biographical processes related to a career line, etc. The basic process mechanisms which the research process will result in theoretically are arrived at via theoretical sampling and constant contrastive comparison; they prove to be ubiquitous within the social realm selected for research under specified conditions.) Of course it could turn out that she or he is really more interested in questions of quantitative distribution of social features within a well defined social universe; such a research question can only be addressed via the standard questionnaire techniques of the social sciences; and then we will send the student to a more suitable supervisor. (Admittedly, there are many opportunities to base a quantitative distribution analysis on a qualitative first-hand research project, and, in the reverse, it sometimes proves useful to study certain phenomena first delineated quantitatively as theoretically astonishing, odd or extremely vague, because they presuppose social processes which are basically unknown, in a thoroughgoing qualitative approach. These combinations of qualitative and quantitative methods are normally too time-consuming and complicated for our students, and they are not very common even with mature social researchers. But there are some beautiful examples like Strauss et al. 1964/1981, and hopefully some of our more permanent co-workers will work on these triangulations of qualitative and quantitative methods in the future. Right now we still have to restrict ourselves in order to learn more about the basic process mechanism of professional work and related biographical processes. the biographical processes of suffering, working-through and attacking social problems, as well as the collective processes of social movements and social worlds. But by no means qualitative social research should only be seen as an auxiliary research step into the direction of "mature" quantitative

(1) Since our short article stresses the practical aspects of working with students, we won't go into details about the sequence of research steps and the characteristics of the kind of biography analysis which we do and teach (cf. Schitze 1983, 1984, pp. 108-115; Riemann 1987, chapter 2). A few remarks should suffice.

research. There is no epistemological legitimation for such an assessment, for the research steps can be repeated by others and are open to questions of reliability of the use of research procedures and to the questions of theoretical and empirical validity of categories.)

After being informed about what is going on in the research workshop and what is expected from the individual members, the student is asked about his or her temporal considerations (when does he or she expect to finish the study?) and how much time he or she has available. Such queries are necessary to prevent illusionary planning, disappointments, and "time panic" later on.

If the student stays interested and it is obvious that his or her still very vague research problems can fruitfully be dealt with in the research workshop, he or she is being advised to collect relevant data on one case (e.g., a narrative interview) for the purpose of dimensionalizing the research topic in first analytical terms.

2. The preliminary formulation of the topic will be the first result accomplished within the group-meeting: after the student-researcher has told about his or her interests in the problem area, the other participants comment on the data, and in continuously interacting with the data of this one case and keeping the student's interests in mind one jointly arrives at first notions of elementary dimensions of the topic. It is important that the student-researcher is actively participating, can specify his or her interests, is able to ratify the reformulation of his or her topic, and doesn't feel driven into a "wrong" direction which she/he is not really interested in. On the basis of this first formulation the student is being advised as to her or his procedures of collecting data (e.g., how to conduct a narrative interview which is specifically suited to the topic, how to avoid specific traps) and as to theoretical sampling: what cases to select in a first phase in the light of first notions about theoretical variation.

3. After the student has done a couple of interviews, he or she tells the other participants about them: about the substance of the interviews and about formal features of the narratives. This is followed by a joint comparison of the single cases in order to reach a decision about what interview should be selected first for a transcription, structural description, and analytical abstraction. The main criterion for the selection of a case is whether or not the case represents the biographical and social processes one is mainly looking for, whether or not it appears to be in the center of one's interests. And, of course, one also has to take into consideration what kinds of difficulties one would encounter during the analysis when choosing one text instead of another one - difficulties arising out of complicated formal features: sequences of conspicuous vagueness, extended argumentations etc.. To study such data could become necessary during later phases of research and it could lead to important insights, but it could prove to be quite frustrating and misleading to focus on them right from the start.

4. After the student has finished an exact transcription of the first interview the text is distributed among the participants of his or her working group who carefully read it before gathering again. During this meeting the group members first take turns to comment on the interview in general and to cautiously formulate first abstractions. This is sometimes followed by short discussions in which first propositions are backed up or put in doubt by other participants, but usually this does not

take a lot of time since there is much more emphasis laid on the actual and detailed work with the material. This first exchange of ideas is useful nevertheless, so that first abstractions can be voiced and kept in mind (as sensitizing notions that can turn out to be false or **irrelevant**) which help **members not** to drown in the microscopic details of a text later on.

The analysis of the first case (as well as the analysis of the second interview, cf. (6)) is usually **quite time** consuming and lasts a couple of weeks depending on the skills of the student and the time and patience he or she has to write down and rewrite the descriptions. Spending so much time on case analyses is quite worthwhile since the generalities that one is looking for (**like structural processes** in biographies - trajectories of suffering, biographical action **schemes**, creative metamorphoses, phases of a life cycle; other **kinds** of social processes like sequences of professional socialization; the impact of historical developments on biographical experiences) can already be discovered and spelled out in the close scrutiny of single case materials.

The participants' work with the first interview proceeds in the following manner:

- **The members** shortly discuss the interview situation and try to **critically comment** on the researcher's interviewing and its consequences for the quality of the data. And they **differentiate** between **text sorts** (narrative, **argumentative**, and descriptive sequences) that can be found in various parts of the main narrative and later phases of the interview and **share first impressions** about their representational and **communicative functions**.
- They carefully proceed in discovering and marking the narrative segments, **suprasegmental** parts, and subunits within segments, i.e., they compare their assessments and reach an agreement about the boundaries of the presentational **units** of the text - units that correspond to experiential units in the unfolding life history. Detecting these units consists of looking for **formal indicators** (especially the orderly pattern in which **segments** are introduced, detailed and **summarized**) and taking the substantive content of the narrative into account.
- In collaborating on a detailed **structural description** of the narrative the participants start off from the **narrator's own categories and predicates** and **make use** of a whole array of formal features of the text (like background constructions, argumentational vs. narrative **sequences**, discrepancies, intonation contours etc.). Structurally describing the interview consists of an attempt to reconstruct the biographical development of the narrator as it had been experienced by him or her, i.e., to explicate the structural processes of the life course, other social processes (including collective trajectories and macro-historical changes that have to be taken into account if one wants to understand the particular life history), the impact of milieu and social worlds, and the development of significant relationships; and, of course, it has to be spelled out during a description what kinds of theories the narrator developed and which functions (orientation, explanation, legitimation, concealment etc.) they serve.
- While the whole narrative is being orally described in a series of group meetings it is the individual student-researcher's task to decide what he or she can **make out** of the other participants' contributions: what he or she wants to discard or elaborate. The researcher is solely responsible for his or her own product. Acquiring descriptive writing skills and developing one's own style of description usually takes

quite some time. Students have to learn that a **structural description** is neither simple paraphrasing nor subsuming the text under previously derived categories, but a first abstraction that stays firmly and visibly grounded in data. The text of a description should **demonstrate** how analytical categories and predicates **emerge** and how inferences are being made.

- After the student has written up the structural description of the first interview which is the main part of the first portrait chapter, he or she develops a **memo** which contains an **analytical abstraction** of the first case; sometimes the group discusses the **memo** so that the researcher gets some feedback for **revising it**. The analytical abstraction consists of a **summary** explication of (a) the structural processes of this particular biography and of the interlinkage of biographical processes and other social phenomena. (b) the narrator's different kinds of autobiographical theories and how they relate to life historical experiences, and (c) the features that are case specific and those that appear to be general.

5. When the researcher has finished the first case analysis, he or she gives an oral and comparative overview over the interviews that have **been collected** in the meanwhile which finally leads to the **selection of a second case** that has to be analyzed. This decision is based on the **criterion of maximizing** differences (with regard to the first case) in order to span as much theoretical variation as possible. Usually students have to collect about twelve narrative interviews during their project in order to reach a state of sufficient opportunities to conduct contrastive comparisons between various **subunits** of the interviews. Principally speaking, as many interviews should be conducted as categories of the theoretical models and insights into their relationships could still be added and fruitfully **differentiated** (the research rule of theoretical **saturation**- cf. Glaser and Strauss 1973, pp. 111-113). And taking the quite specific research questions into account, which are formulated during the first phase of any of our research projects, the number of twelve interviews will **normally suffice**. But sometimes the dynamics of contrastive comparison and generating a theoretical **model** will point to the necessity to conduct additional interviews. This won't always be possible depending on difficulties of reaching additional informants with highly specific social features (defined in **theoretical terms**), of getting entry to them, of developing a trust relationship and of reserving enough time and privacy for doing an interview with them. If students encounter serious obstacles to reaching additional informants, it can happen that we have to skip these additional research steps, taking the time pressure of our students into account who have to **deliver** their theses **within certain time limits** (three to five months; with some preparation time, mostly additional six months). But this decision not to go on with data collection results in holes of the theoretical model, which have to be stated specifically.

6. The **second case analysis** consists of the same phases like the first one: **differentiation of text sorts**, structural description, and analytical abstraction. The student has to spend much time and patience again, but usually it does not take as long as during the first case analysis since he or she has acquired more capacities in looking for **what is important**, explicating it and writing it down. He or she has accumulated more security and has developed a more realistic sense of timing. Every student is developing his or her own distinctive style, too, and has implicit notions of what constitutes a good and esthetically satisfying text of analysis. In supervising their writing one has to be careful not to impose one's own esthetical criteria on them.

7. After the **completion** of the second case analysis the student researcher **attempts** to draw the outline of a **contrasting comparison** of the two cases. **This is the starting point for an extensive discussion** in the group in which contrasts are accentuated or elaborated, new ones suggested, hierarchies of contrasts developed etc.. Usually **it** becomes necessary to **orally** present new cases, to collaborate on a **shortcut** analytical abstraction of **them** and compare **them** since the theoretical variation within the data cannot be totally exhausted by the two or three **cases** that had been selected as "corner stones". The aim is to develop **elementary** analytical categories and to discover basic alternatives of social processes that are basic for:

8. generating a **theoretical model**. The contours of a theoretical model that fits the data **emerge in the course** of the joint contrasting **comparison**. It is important that this first sketch of a theoretical model is basically developed by the student researcher because he or she has the best knowledge of all the data, and **he/she** has to identify with the research project as **his/her** own work product after **it** has been finished. This desideratum can be realized by asking the student to deliver a first sketchy theoretical **memo** on the base of which the group can proceed. The **phase** of generating theoretical models implies the potential that the instructors **commit** serious professional mistakes, because at the end of the research everybody tends to be not patient enough to let the student do his or her own steps of generating theoretical **insights** and categories which will be slow at the beginning. The instructors normally have acquired the capability to start very fast selective coding and formulating theoretical categories, because they have a vast overview over such categories generated in previous projects. But this implies the proclivity not to look closely enough into the materials, and then the theoretical **model** enforced on the student will be shallow and not sufficiently "to the point". In addition, proceeding in such a way expropriates the student from the core of **his/her** research study.

While most of the work of building and substantiating a theoretical model is the student's "solitary" job at home, all the essential processes of theory construction are already visible during the meeting of the working group. The interactional dynamics of such a group is especially helpful for actuating the **communication** scheme of argumentation which is basic for theorizing: There is an ongoing process of confronting abstract categories (which are already the outcome of lengthy case and comparative analyses) with new pieces of data, i.e., the categories are being empirically controlled, differentiated, backed up or put in doubt; new **categories** emerge, and the whole model is constantly being respecified, is becoming **denser** and moving towards "theoretical saturation" (to use the term of Glaser and Strauss again).

9. The final research step consists of **confronting the categories and relations** of the theoretical model with **fresh data**. Finally the categories of the model and their relations to each other have to be ostensively presented and empirically warranted by relating them to selections of fresh empirical data (of additional interviews) which had not been used for writing up the portrait chapters. By relating the categories to fresh data they undergo a second phase of specification, differentiation, and **sometimes** even revision. This research step is important in order to insure the capacity of the theoretical categories, relations, and theoretical models built out of them to be transferable to, and workable on, new occurrences and sorts of single cases and empirical materials. **I.e.**, it clarifies their generality and analytical power.

When one **compares** the studies which have been completed within our research workshop one can see that quite often certain kinds of theoretical models have been used (partly in combination with other ones).

The theoretical **models** are organized around some basic theoretical building blocks which are to a certain extent related to the Chicago tradition of sociology (and Symbolic **Interactionism**), which dealt with **social** and biographical processes thoroughly. But we have to stress, that by looking into the text materials these theoretical building blocks can be found again and again, because they formulate basic structural processes of social reality. The theoretical building blocks are:

- Career models

The central idea is that there are homogeneous or conflicting, clearly defined or very vague institutional expectation patterns for the biography incumbent to move from one social and biographical state to another. The question is, how the biography incumbent deals with these institutional expectations (e.g., redefines them, enacts them carefully, etc.), how **she/** he will be able to organize the various steps of fulfilling the expectations how **the** pertinent organizations of society will try to control the movements of the biography incumbent according to certain avenues of the expectation patterns, and how this will have a deeper or less important impact on **her/** his biography. One of these career processes is **following up** the **vague** or conspicuous career lines of a **professional** occupation (e.g. Hermanns 1982 on the careers and **professional** identification of engineers). another one is the socialization into a profession (e.g. Ring 1983 on the occupational socialization and education of novice teachers; or Heidemann 1986 on the biographical background and socialization of Catholic priests!).

- Models on structural processes of the life course

Here **the** focus is on the dynamics of biographical processes themselves which gain central importance within the life course of the informant and structure **her/his** activities towards fellow interactants and towards **her-/** himself. One example is the emotionally intensive life phase of the young mother focussed on her new born child and the child's biological and **psycho-social development**, which also implies steps of maturation of the young mother herself (cf. Schmid/Semmler 1983). Another example is the dynamics of suffering and losing control over the organization of everyday **life** and - at least in-between - regarding oneself (cf. Riemann 1987 on psychiatric patients, Maurenbrecher 1955 on Turkish "guest workers", Jurgens 1985 on women in **life** situations of extreme poverty and despair ). The first process can be dealt with by the category of metamorphosis, e.g. gaining new capacities and having to integrate **them** into one's own identity **development**, the second one by the category of trajectory (cf. Strauss/Glaser 1970: being totally controlled by the overwhelmingly powerful conditions of the occurrences of decisive "outer" **and/or** "inner" events which force the biography incumbent just to react. )

- Relational models on the attitudes of the biography incumbent towards her or his life course

The central idea is that in specified life situations that are constrained by powerful social structures the biography incumbent develops a systematic relationship towards her or his biography which organizes the retrospective sedimentation of her or his life experiences and controls the outlook at **her/his** own biographical future. These systematic biographical attitudes gain a partial **autonomy** over concrete events occurring in the course of everyday affairs of the subjects; this sometimes leads to the ignoring or "fading out of awareness" of biographical experiences which could serve as counter-evidence against the **biographical** attitude.

Systematic attitudes towards one's own life which put the biography incumbent into a systematic trap which **she/he** cannot escape without systematic und decisive assistance of significant others proved to be especially interesting in our research **work up to now**. **E.g., there** is a study of how certain types of old people (with specified social and biographical features) "outlive" their own biographies due to their former life course as well as due to their present life conditions (Schwalm 1983), and there are two studies on systematic occupational traps in social work, which entangle and absorb the biographies of certain types of professionals (defined by life course features and features of work situations - cf. Kraiker/Schlichting 1983; Hüllenütter-Zimmermann 1983).

- Models on the development and changes of social worlds, social milieus, and social movements

Those theoretical building blocks fit when "sensitizing topics", shared social problems and mutually known "kernel activities" are focussed and enacted by specified **categories** of actors who live in social networks open to accelerated sociocultural change (e.g. art), who suffer under social conditions finally understood as changeable by collective endeavors **and/or** who are thrown into an outsider position towards society and have to develop their own texture of social relationships. Under all these living conditions social **forms** of mutual orientation will develop, which are organized around central topics, issues and activities. The focus of inquiry can be on the development and change of the central organizations and institutions of social milieus, social worlds, **and/or** collective movements; on the related developments and changes of the living and working arrangements of actors and their networks of **communication**, or on the impact of the unfolding and change of the social and orientational frames of social worlds, social milieus **and/or** social movements on the life course and biographical identities of their protagonists **and/or** followers. Studies have been done, e.g., on the **West German youth center** movement (Wagner 1982), on the change of the social milieu of the inner **city/old town** of Kassel during the last one hundred years (Straus 1984), on the life of women with children who choose not to live in small families but in "Wohngemeinschaften" (various people sharing an apartment or a house, who - at least partly - are not married and who - at least partly - are not related to each other) (Dreifürst 1986) or on the changes of **the social world** of German drug addicts in Amsterdam and on the impact of these changes on the everyday life and biographies of the participants in this world (Helmboldt 1987).

The various theoretical, building blocks alluded to have to be differentiated from the formal architectural principles by which the theoretical **models** are constructed. One very **common** and very old architectural principle is that of the natural history (cf. Turner in Park 1969: XXII f.). Within the **frame** work of the natural history perspective the researcher **attempts** to outline the "logical" or "natural" concatenation of types of events of the social process under study. **E.g., she/he** differentiates between various sequentially ordered stages as well as between various alternative lines of the unfolding of the social process. Each previous phase of the unfolding of the social process must be seen as conditionally relevant (1) to its following phase. The explanatory power of the natural history principle depends on the relational implications of the general shapes of

(1) **By intention** we use the term of Harvey Sacks (1967/72, lect. 6), who focussed on the sequential order of ongoing conversational interaction. The perspective of searching for conditional relevances can be transferred to all sorts of social processes.

alternative lines of unfolding of social processes and their "sequential" and "contrastive" orders as well as on the conditional relationships to be specified between previous and ensuing states of the social processes under scrutiny. - Of course, the natural history construction principle doesn't fit every type of theoretical problem in **sociological** process analysis. **E.g.** the explication of the above mentioned theoretical building block of systematic relational attitudes towards one's own biography cannot be accomplished by the architectural **implications** of the natural history construction principle. For theoretical interests on relational social phenomena the theoretical potential of chains and webs of relations between various identity states, social units, social frames, and phases of social processes must be exhausted. Most of the architectural features how to construct theoretical models still have to be **systematized** and reflected on.

At the end of our overview **it** should be stressed that **it** proved to be very rewarding to use quite different sorts of empirical materials (like transcripts of actual **communications**, narrative interviews, written autobiographies, series of letters etc.) and research procedures (like **inter-action/discourse** analysis, sequential text analysis of narrative interviews, open coding of ethnographic field notes, componential analysis of social frames, etc.) during the research proceedings in our three work groups. (This is the didactic - and at the same time - epistemological principle of the diversity of primary data collected and methods of analysis **employed**.) **By** such a confrontation with various sorts of data and research procedures, the students arrived at the principal stance that the collection of materials and the use of methods for **analysis** depends on the nature of social phenomena to be studied. The students understood the idea, that **it** should be generally possible to use any type of primary text material and harness any type of sequentializing **and/or** contrasting research procedure for their meticulous analysis if they fit the social phenomena which should be studied. The students realized, that the analysis should be painstakingly based on the rendering practices of the informants and fellow interactants.

What took shape during the numerous sessions of our research workshop is the understanding that the underlying epistemology of our qualitative research practice is identical for each of the theoretical questions asked, empirical materials used and research methods harnessed. **It** is an abductive logic of discovery which basically proceeds on the base of the guiding principle to "react to" **and** "work on" the rendering practices of the interactant and informants to be studied. Their close scrutiny enables the researcher to extract the general features implied within the "single case" text materials offered and produced by informants and fellow interactants. The extraction of general features of social processes, social frames and social units is accomplished through two central types of analytical procedures: the procedures of follow up the rendering practices of the actors and informants sequentially and to continuously embed them **within** the contexts of pertinent social processes revealed at the same time, on the one hand, and to contrastively compare the features of social processes and social frames on the other hand.

The students realized during the course of their intensive research collaboration that various sorts of data and methods of analysis can contribute to the several theoretical building blocks alluded to. **E.g., Bonke's** (1982) analysis of three series of letters of the "Polish Peasant" (Thomas and Znaniecki 1927/1959) **starts** as an interaction analysis of the reactions of the parties of letter writers in Poland and Chicago



to each other. But soon during the research process **it** became clear that the structure of interaction between the letter writers in Poland and Chicago amounts to distortions or confirmations of social relationships of the letter senders and receivers, and this immediately led to the analysis of the biographical **processes** involved: trajectories of suffering of dis-oriented and culturally deprived **immigrants** or metamorphoses of identity, i.e. gaining new opportunities to develop personally and socially. During the course of research with different sorts of empirical data and various research procedures **it** became clear to the students that every theoretical model of some complexity will employ **several** of the basic theoretical building blocks mentioned above (or others), several of the procedural strategies of analysis and several of the underlying architectural principles of theory construction. (In addition, the procedural strategies **and architectural** principles are transferable to other sorts of empirical data and areas of substantive social phenomena not tackled before, and they are translatable into each other.)

We hope that we could give an impression of some of the **didactic, interactive** and epistemological features of our research workshop and their **systematic** relationships with each other, which are pivotal for our educational and scientific collaboration with our **students**. We just think **it** is a good idea to give some room and spend some time to **communicate** about the actual research practices and practices of organizing the training in one's own "home territory".

Besides the obligatory publication of dissertations we are planning to publish some of the diploma studies which we think are worth to be noticed by a larger audience of social scientists and practitioners (1). We will start with Heidemann's (1986) study on becoming a Catholic priest. In order to keep **it** "low profile" and financially affordable, we will organize the publication ourselves with the assistance of the library of Kassel University (GhK-Gesamthochschulbibliothek).

(1) Until now about thirty diploma theses and three dissertations have been produced. Most of them are within the field of biography analysis, some in the fields of interaction analysis and analysis of social worlds.

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