

## The Documentary Method in Intercultural Research Scenarios

*Henrike Evers*

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**Abstract:** The documentary method appears to be especially suitable for preventing possible ethnocentrism in the interpretation of data in reconstructive research, as well as for precluding concessions with a static and normative cultural concept. As an illustration of this thesis, this article presents a study—undertaken at the Bremen University of Applied Sciences—in which the effects of an intercultural contact programme between international students and German families are analyzed. Special emphasis is placed on the question of the students' emotional and cognitive changes, called educational processes ("Bildung") in the educational science. The theoretical and methodological background of the study and exemplary results are presented.

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## 1. Introduction

Cultural sciences, as a transdisciplinary field of research, make use of methods of different disciplines of reference. The central criterion of choice from within this diversity of methods is the principle of the adequacy of the subject-matter (FLICK, 1999). This correspondence of subject-matter, issue and method has to be reached individually for each research project by suitable decisions of choice. In the sense of a praxeological methodology (BOHNSACK, 2003) the rightness of these decisions can be proved only in the process of research, just as the description of the overall context is possible only reconstructively at the end of the research process. [1]

The present text presents selected results of such a reconstruction. It will be shown that the documentary method (BOHNSACK, 2003, BOHNSACK, PFAFF & WELLER, 2008) and FLICK's (1999) episodic interview are especially suitable for connecting cognitive and emotional development with biographical contexts as

well as for capturing processes and effects of intercultural experiences. The main aspects of both methods (interview and analysis) are presented and reasons are given for this thesis. As an example of concrete application, the main features of the research project "educational processes<sup>1</sup> through intercultural contact"—conducted at the Bremen University of Applied Sciences since 2005 and likely to come to an end in 2009—are presented. To illustrate the thesis an example of the empirical analysis is given. [2]

Globalization and its effects, i.e. the increasing internationality/diversity of various spheres of life has become an often-cited reality. In the area of university education, this means that students ought to learn to deal with social heterogeneity already in the course of their studies. A stay abroad and especially participation in an international contact programme are good means of attaining this goal. Existing studies focus on the entire stay abroad, not specifically on the organized intercultural contact. What is more, they usually refer to earlier developmental stages (CUSHNER & KARIM, 2004; HAMMER, 2005; THOMAS, 1999). In contrast, the present study focuses specifically on the intercultural contact and the analysis of its processes. [3]

In the following, I will outline the survey's research question as well as its theoretical framework. The latter comprises the concept "educational processes" on the one hand and "culture" on the other hand. Here I will attempt to build a bridge to current cultural theory (SPERBER, 1996). Having chosen it as an intercultural research topic, I will present the methodical approach of the episodic interview as a survey instrument as well as the documentary method as an evaluation method. Then I will give reasons why these are especially suitable for capturing cognitive and emotional effects of intercultural experiences. [4]

In doing so, I will dwell on the question as to which of the documentary method's qualities make it seem especially suitable for minimizing possible ethnocentrism. Finally, I will present some exemplars from the results of the study. [5]

## **2. Issue and Theoretical Framework**

To illustrate the approach, I will begin by presenting the research question and topic. Secondly, I will explain in more detail which theoretical concepts are used to measure the expected effects on the students. [6]

### **2.1 Topic and problem**

The study focuses on exchange students who participate in a host-family programme with German families. The families allow the students to participate in their everyday lives and show them things they consider relevant. The students do not live with these families and there are no standards for the nature or frequency of the contact. [7]

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1 The German term "Bildung" in this sense is difficult to translate. It does not refer to the acquisition of knowledge, but instead to deep fundamental changes of underlying beliefs that result in a different attitude towards the world as well as towards oneself (see Section 2.1.1).

Both these aspects are agreed on individually. As a result, there are cases in which the families and students meet quite often and/or go on holiday together. In other cases which contact breaks off or fades gradually. Various constellations have been regarded in this study (from very intensive contact to contact broken off completely). [8]

The possible effects of such a host-family programme are presented here. The question resulting from this can be summarized as follows: Which emotional and cognitive changes can be noticed during the students' six-months stay in Bremen? Which of these changes can be ascribed to their participation in the programme? [9]

### *2.1.1 Theoretical background 1: Educational processes*

The fact that I speak of a "theoretical background" of this study and not of a model or a theory indicates the research style chosen. My study belongs to the "reconstructive" paradigm (BOHNSACK, 2003) in which theoretical knowledge is adopted intensively before the beginning and in the course of the empirical period. However, theoretical knowledge is not used to deduce models and hypotheses from it, operationalize and test them as in the paradigm of testing hypotheses. It rather helps to create a "theoretical sensitivity" (WAGNER, 1999) which ensures that the construction and analysis of data does not remain at the stage of description, but probes into the stage of subject-related theory construction. [10]

The emotional and cognitive changes are described with the concept of "educational processes," as has prevailed especially in educational sciences during the last twenty years (KOKEMOHR, 2007; MAROTZKI, 1990). This concept is differently understood in many sub-areas of educational sciences and there are also related concepts under other names. This is why the measurement of the students' possible educational processes in this study is realized with a triangulation of methods at the theoretical and methodological stages. Three concepts are employed here: Firstly, the educational processes are measured as possible changes of the orientation framework ("Orientierungsrahmen"). They are the main constituents of the documentary method. Secondly, the concept of "education" according to KOKEMOHR (2007) and MAROTZKI (1990) is applied to the data, in which education is understood as a change in the relationship to oneself and the world. Thirdly, empirical education research is employed, which understands educational processes as processes of "developmental tasks" (HERICKS, 2006). The extent to which the three approaches reach congruent results or whether variations can be observed is tested. [11]

In the documentary method it is the orientation framework that covers the basic human structures of behavior and thinking. In the orientation framework, "those orientations could come to light which structure peoples' experiences" (NOHL, 2006, p.11)<sup>2</sup>. Normally we are not conscious of these orientations. This is why

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2 Translations of various citations taken from the original in German language have been made by the author of this paper.

they are described as "atheoretical knowledge": "This knowledge is atheoretical, because we have it at our command in our acting practices without having to cut it right to the chase of the matter as far as everyday theory is concerned, nor to exemplify it (...)" (NOHL, 2006, p.10). If a person's basic structures of behavior and thinking change, an educational process has taken place. [12]

MAROTZKI, too, uses the concept of the (orientation) framework that organizes the subject's experiences (1990, p.41). He refers to the framework as a person's specific patterns of perceiving, analyzing, organizing and processing the world (MAROTZKI, 1990, p.33). MAROTZKI calls changes of these underlying patterns educational processes: "I would like to call such learning processes educational processes that refer to the change of punctuation principles of experiences and thus to the construction principles of organizing the world" (1990, p.41). [13]

MAROTZKI distinguishes these educational processes from learning processes in which new information is integrated into existing categories or underlying patterns. According to MAROTZKI, in educational processes not only the persons' relationship to the world changes, but also their relationship to themselves: "An increased self-reference is in fact such a self-reference, in which the subject can regard itself as the author due to its state of being imparted interactively. It is also a self-reference in which the subject gets to know itself as the one who has always classified the world in a certain way" (1990, pp.43ff.). All in all, MAROTZKI regards changes in the relationship to oneself and the world as educational processes. KOKEMOHR (2007), however, defines an educational process as "... a process of processing such experiences (...) that resist the subsumption in figures of a given concept of oneself and the world" and "include a change of basic figures of my given concept of myself and the world" (2007, p.21). [14]

Developmental tasks are regarded as tasks which the society sets different age groups of individuals and which are fulfilled by them subjectively. According to HAVIGHURST (1972), who introduced this concept, young peoples' developmental tasks might be "career," "body," "peers," "partner," and values." HERICKS writes:

*"Developmental tasks* are societal demands of people in specific life situations that can be interpreted as tasks of individual development. Developmental tasks are not circumventable, i.e. they have to be seized and processed if a progression of competence as well as a stabilization of identity are aimed at" (HERICKS, 2006, p.60; emphasis in original). [15]

### 2.1.2 Theoretical background 2: Culture

Although it could be assumed that a concept like "educational processes," which focuses on individual development processes, and a concept like "culture," which aims at collective orientations, do not have anything in common, intensive interrelationships become obvious on closer inspection. I would like to discuss by using BOHNSACK's (2003) theory as an exemplar. [16]

He classes the concept of "culture" among the "conjunctive experiences," i.e. in the "worlds of experiences" shared by several persons that lead to the formation of the common orientations that underlie the experiences. As these realms of experiences can be assigned to certain milieus, BOHNSACK's concept explains how collective orientations and, with them culture, develop through individual experience. This means that the group which would be regarded as a milieu or "culture" by BOHNSACK, is defined not from the outside (nationality, color of the skin, etc.) but distinguished by inner cohesion and shared experiences. From this perspective, interesting views on existing models of intercultural communication arise. Whereas HOFSTEDE's (2001) metaphor of "collective programming" seems too normative, SPERBER's (1996) "epidemiological model" might provide explanations for the processes in the collective realm of experiences. I will discuss this idea in greater depth below. [17]

As has already been shown, BOHNSACK proceeds on the assumption of the "shared experience" as a precondition for a certain milieu. This milieu, e.g. the conjunctive experiences, can be understood as the "culture" of a group. As BOHNSACK himself has not developed his model for cultural science issues primarily and does not use the concept of culture, the question concerning the transdisciplinary interface arises. Here a connection can be drawn to SPERBER's epidemiologic culture model. The latter proceeds from the assumption that culture consists of ideas shared by human beings and passed on through communication. Moreover he ascribes to culture material effects like documents, instruments and art, which aid the dissemination of ideas as constituent parts of culture. With this, SPERBER as well as BOHNSACK proceed from the assumption that cultural realms are characterized by inner congruity, not by outer factors, e.g. nationality. For the dissemination of ideas, SPERBER makes use of the metaphor of an epidemic for this dissemination in an analogy to the passing on of diseases: The most contagious ideas prevail and are passed on. According to this line of thought, explaining culture consists in explaining why some ideas are more contagious than others. Mental "cultural representations" arise which are shared by several individuals or a group. Here, too, the concept of ideas and convictions shared by a group can be found. SPERBER as well as BOHNSACK proceed from the assumption that cultural realms are formed in which the patterns of interpretation are congruent. [18]

Moreover, both approaches have in common that they differentiate between "publicly visible" utterances and their underlying structures, which are not visible at first. The transformation of the latent into the explicit form is accomplished by reconstructing the orientation framework of a person or a group of people, respectively. This orientation framework, i.e. the underlying opinions and convictions of a person, has to be reconstructed from their utterances and actions, respectively, and can be made conscious if the person is confronted with them. SPERBER, however, distinguishes between public and mental representations. The public ones are equivalent to BOHNSACK's visible utterances and actions. The mental representations describe the mental patterns, i.e. the fact that every person is equipped with category systems for construing

messages from perceived orders of sounds. These underlie their messages.<sup>3</sup> The parallels between the two models are obvious: If both concepts are laid on top of each other, BOHNSACK's orientation framework is equivalent to SPERBER's representation. SPERBER's category system, however, can be understood as a combination of several orientation frameworks. In his explanation of the occurrence of the category systems, SPERBER also provides guiding principles (due to the analogy of the concepts) for the processes that have to take place at the emergence of the conjunctive experiences. [19]

One difference between the two approaches is that BOHNSACK's conjunctive experiences proceed from similar experiences. In contrast to this, SPERBER emphasizes that an identical passing on of ideas does not exist. Only potentially similar intellectual worlds can be caused in the other persons—it is only possible to have similar ideas, but there is also the risk of losing all information. Another difference is the question as to how culture comes into being, which is important to SPERBER. In contrast to this, BOHNSACK focuses more on the reconstruction of the different cultural realms than on their genesis. [20]

All in all, the following similarities and differences can be determined:

<b>Similarities</b>	
SPERBER as well as BOHNSACK proceed from the assumption that there are cultural realms in which patterns of interpretation are congruent.	
Both of them differentiate between openly visible and underlying structures (SPERBER: mental vs. publicly visible representations, BOHNSACK: "intentional expressive meaning / objective meaning" vs. "documentary meaning") <sup>4</sup> .	
<b>Differences</b>	
BOHNSACK	SPERBER
Similar experiences in conjunctive realms experience.	There can never be a 1:1 transmission of ideas. The maximum is a potential similarity, but a total loss of information is also possible.
The focus is on the reconstruction of different cultural realms.	The focus is on the genesis of culture.

Table 1: Comparison of the concepts of BOHNSACK and SPERBER. [21]

SPERBER (1996) differentiates between intuitive and reflexive convictions concerning the transmission of information. The two are transmitted in different ways. *Intuitive convictions* are normally products of unconscious perceptions, e.g. assumptions about body movements, the existence of "truth" or the countability of

3 Previous communication models usually consider the public representations (sender—message—receiver) only or include the aspects of relationship, self-revelatory and appeal (cf. SCHULZ VON THUN, 2001).

4 See also NOHL (forthcoming).

things. These reveal themselves automatically and are usually a product of spontaneous and unconscious perceptions. These are similar in all cultures and there is no conscious acquisition process. *Reflexive convictions*, however, characterize the interpretation of the mental representations. Normally there is an authority that communicates them and they do not necessarily have to be understood. As an example, SPERBER quotes the situation of a child being told that plants had a sex. The child accepts this, because the information is communicated by an authority. But it does not understand it, because it has known the concept "sex" only with regard to human beings until then. These reflexive convictions vary from culture to culture, as people trust different sources. Reflexive convictions are hence passed on consciously. [22]

SPERBER's definition of "intuitive" and "reflexive" convictions is diffuse. He especially argues that reflexive convictions can change to intuitive ones if they are completely understood. On the one hand, however, this contradicts his depiction of the transmission of intuitive information (without the processes of learning). As examples of intuitive convictions he quotes abstract categories like the "countability" of concepts or concepts of "space and time." However, a reflexive conviction that turns into an intuitive conviction, is extremely specific and complex—and hence the opposite of the intuitive conviction's characteristics. [23]

Despite these limitations the division between different convictions is especially attractive. One part of them is culture-specific (reflexive) and the other culture-general (intuitive). The first one leads to confusion in intercultural contact situations. This corresponds with SPERBER's (1996) concern to invalidate the culture-relative thesis and state that there are as many realities as societies and that there is no objective truth. Thus he is successful in drafting a differentiated picture of cultural difference. [24]

All in all, it can be stated that it is possible to test SPERBER's model empirically with BOHNSACK's case-comparative approach of reconstructing the orientation framework. Through the cross-case comparison it is possible to detect whether proof of the differentiation between the intuitive and culture-specific reflexive representations can be found in an increased number of test persons. While BOHNSACK does not clarify which process serve to create analogical orientation frameworks in the realm of conjunctive experience, SPERBER presents this process unambiguously as a communicative process. This explains why a considerable degree of interpretation takes place in the group discussions that BOHNSACK originally and exclusively used in his method, before shared orientation frameworks (in the form of concentration metaphors) become visible on the surface of the conversation. Taking SPERBER seriously, one can proceed from the assumption that these are created at least partly in the discussion situation. [25]

### 3. Procedure Regarding the Question of Culture

A six-months empirical study was conducted with regard to the above-depicted theoretical background. To note possible changes in the sense of the above-outlined educational processes, the students were questioned in episodic interviews (FLICK, 1999) at the beginning and at the end of their stay. These interviews were evaluated using the documentary method (BOHNSACK, 2003). After having recorded the educational processes and other processes that had taken place during the stay abroad, the subjects were tested as to whether and to what extent those processes could be traced to participation in the programme. [26]

In the following I will take a closer look at the methods used to generate and analyze the data. I will then focus on the question as to the extent to which these methods are suitable for research on culture. [27]

#### 3.1 Method of generating data: The episodic interview

One reason for the choice of an interview type with a high percentage of narrative was the basic skepticism concerning the question as to the extent to which subjective cultural experiences can be inferred from a closed question-answer scheme. Such a closed question-answer scheme would primarily correspond to the interviewer's (cultural) pre-assumptions and thus carry the risk of the interviewer's normative selection of the information as well as of his/her holding ethnocentric perspectives. [28]

Furthermore, it is necessary to generate numerous narrations for the reconstruction of the orientation framework. Narrations offer profound access to the interviewee's world of experiences and atheoretical knowledge, which is essential for the reconstruction of the orientation framework. However, a long narration that is, for example, generated in the narrative interview, can be problematic in a foreign language, as it might impede the narrative flow. [29]

Moreover, episodic interviews offer the researcher the opportunity to complete the generally shorter narrative passages in which specific situations are displayed in their respective context (construction of narrative-episodic knowledge) through analytic inquiries (construction of semantic knowledge). The latter form of knowledge involves generalized assumptions and connections that are abstracted from the concrete situations and then generalized.<sup>5</sup> Both parts of the interview should refer to each other systematically in order to detect correspondences but also possible discrepancies (e.g. a comparison of the claim to "have become interculturally competent" and the description of concrete situations). Thus the episodic interviews are open for individual settings of relevance for the interviewees. The episodic interview is accordingly a suitable survey method for probing a relatively new research field (intercultural host-family programmes).

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5 These questions can refer to subjective definitions ("What do you associate with the word 'family'?"), they can examine abstract relationships ("Who ought to take over responsibility?") or refer to fantasies concerning expected or feared changes ("What developments do you expect?").



Moreover, it allows initial subject-related formation of theory without being trapped in the interviewer's cultural pre-assumptions. [30]

### 3.2 Analysis tool: The documentary method

The documentary method (BOHNSACK, 2003) as a reconstructive analysis tool also allows individual relevance settings by the interviewees. Thus no (culturally determined) normative selections are made, as might happen with methods that test hypotheses in the form of categories that are applied to the text. Moreover, possible ethnocentrism is limitable through "case comparison," a key concept of the documentary method. Already at a very early stage of interpretation, the case comparison concerns the case-internal and the cross-case comparison as well as the detection of the interviewer's comparative knowledge. To illustrate this, the basic work stages of the documentary method are outlined in the following and the case comparison is illustrated with an example. [31]

First of all, the analysis of the documentary method comprises the *formulating interpretation* (consisting of outline and detailed paraphrase). Here the interpreter summarizes the participants' statements in their words ("what" is said?). According to BOHNSACK (2003) the formulating interpretation begins prior to the transcription. The researcher listens to the recordings and selects relevant passages that will be transcribed. Especially in intercultural survey situations, this procedure carries the risk of (culturally coined) relevance settings through the interpreter. To avoid this, in the present survey the entire recordings have been transcribed and evaluated. [32]

The next step is the *reflecting interpretation*, in which it is important to work out how the themes mentioned are presented. After that the organization of discourse is analyzed formally: a decision is made as to whether it is a description, an argument or a narration and how the speakers refer to each other. For the reflecting interpretation "the reconstruction and explication of the *frame* in which the theme is treated, in what manner, *how*, i.e. with reference to (...) which orientation framework, is essential" (BOHNSACK, 2003, p.135, emphasis in original). Here the assumption is that orientation frameworks become obvious in passages of high narrative and metaphoric density. SCHÄFFER (2003, p.77) writes about this: "These passages are metaphoric because they express current problems of action and orientation not explicitly (literally), but in the narrative or descriptive depiction of sceneries, i.e. pictorially." Here, the above-mentioned relevance of the narrative elements of the interviews becomes important. Furthermore, the so-called positive "perceptions" outlined by the interviewees are contrasted with potential or real negative "alternative perceptions." [33]

It is crucial here that already at this second interpretation stage (reflective interpretation) both a case-internal and a cross-case comparison begin. BOHNSACK comments on this: "A reflection which is to be accomplished in an empiric-methodically controlled way has to be drawn from empirically founded and comprehensible alternative perceptions" (2003, p.38). Hence for him the comparison of cases is the core of the documentary method. The eventual

analysis and reconstruction of the cases can only take place in comparison with other cases. Consequently the case comparison is to ensure the intersubjectification of the results. In the course of this, the interpreters have to show their own perceptions. If this cross-case comparison is not drawn, there is the risk that the interpreters are trapped in their own expectations of normality and thus approach the data with cultural norms that do not do them justice. If applied correctly, however, this method ensures that precisely this subsumption of data in the interpreter's interpretation patterns cannot take place, as the reference perceptions are constructed through other cases and thus transcend the interpreter's perceptive horizon. [34]

After this phase is completed, the stage of *case description* follows. In the case description, the essential reconstructed elements are summarized and presented for the public: "It is the case description's main duty to communicatively present, summaries and intensify the results in the course of their publication" (BOHNSACK, 2003, p.139). In the case description, the case-internal and cross-case comparisons are dealt with again. Thus it becomes clear that the case description does not at all remain on a descriptive level, but—through the summary of the results of the analyses—constitutes the structure of the case. [35]

Example:

To illustrate a cross-case comparison, an example taken from the present study is presented below. It deals with Mexican students who assess the Germans as "cold." With this example it can be explained how different students develop totally different conceptualizations of the attitudes and approaches that they are confronted with during their stay in Germany, although they proceeded from almost identical concepts when they came to Germany. These different conceptualizations—which SPERBER (1996) would characterize as convictions—were worked out through gradual case comparison in the course of the analysis and thus illustrate the aspect of the construction of alternative perceptions in BOHNSACK's method. [36]

All students agree at the very beginning of their stay that there is an image of Germans in Mexico, which depicts them as "cold" or "racist." However, in this cross-case conceptualization, differences can be observed that become more individually diversified during the students' historical development. Both Sol<sup>6</sup> and Juan exhibit processes of development. Although these processes cannot be called educational processes according to KOKEMOHR's (2007) definition, different preliminary stages or levels of educational processes can be observed. [37]

At the end of his stay, Juan dissolves the concept of the cold Germans to the effect that he differentiates between physical friendliness (as can be found in Mexico e.g. in form of hugs) and friendliness that is expressed e.g. in conversations, support offers and attempts to establish contact. The latter form will here be described as "verbal friendliness" and can be found in Germany:

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6 Names changed by author.

"my experience is that all the Germans who that I have met they are really (...) friendly in the sense not like the Mexican way or the American way, that is, physical contact when you are like, oh, hallo and handshake and all those stuff, well they are in the way that, ok I'm interested in you, like I would like to have some coffee with you just to know you where are you from and what you do ... also you have my home whenever you want to (...) come back to (...) Germany or if I can help you in something or I if you need something, oh I have one in my home, I can borrow it to you, or there they are friendly and they try to be connected with you" (lines 310-322, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview). [38]

Though using the new concept, Juan meets unfriendly people. They form the negative alternative perception of the "German authorities" which are embodied, e.g. by conductors in trains or by policemen. He thinks of them as very unfriendly and harsh. Although he ranges between "friendly" and "unfriendly" on the linear range (no educational process), a basic category shift has taken place (physical friendliness vs. friendliness expressed in other ways). On the other hand, the latter would be equivalent to an educational process. The levels of education that were observed in Juan can be summarized as follows with regard to the aspect "coldness/warmth." [39]

At the beginning of his stay the experience of warmth, which is thematically related with warmth/friendliness, is exclusively associated with physical friendliness. This means that he takes his Mexican conception of friendliness as standard for Germans, too. By the end of his stay, he has developed new categories for the concept of "friendliness." While "friendliness" is expressed physically in Mexico, it has different forms of expression in Germany (e.g. verbal expression). Thus he develops cultural sensitivity. [40]

Manolo, however, dissolves the link to the nationality. He thinks of the Germans as rather quiet and reserved people, too, but in his depiction it becomes clear that he is conscious of the subjectivity of his perception and does not present it as the universal "truth." On the other hand, he points out that there are "such and such" kinds of people everywhere in the world: "I cannot make a brush about all the people" (line 97, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview). He thus gives himself a second possibility to further develop the concept of the "cold German": character attributes are not necessarily bound to nationalities. [41]

While a category shift from physical to verbal friendliness has taken place with Juan, the shift from "cold/warm" to "there are such and such persons everywhere in the world" takes place with Manolo. This can be interpreted as an educational process according to KOKEMOHR (2007) and MAROTZKI (1990). Using the concept of the developmental task, the educational process can only partly be recognized. Although a category shift takes place (whereby the developmental task "to develop cultural orientation" is worked on), Manolo is not conscious of this and the factor of reflexivity (to be conscious of the task), which is essential to the concept of the developmental task, is therefore missing. [42]

Sol, however, maintains the initial conceptualization almost completely, although the conceptions merge even in her approach. To her all Germans are and stay "cold," respectively "cold in style":

"ok German people are warm but they are in style cold ... their style of being because the way they were brought up and so seems cold to me, but in reality they're warm people ... so I think Germans are very nice but they're just brought up ... a bit cold" (lines 909–918, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview). [43]

She calls all Germans she meets and perceives as friendly or humorous "exceptional cases." However, her search for what actually accounts for the "coldness" indicates that an educational process may come about, as distinct categories are not available to her anymore. [44]

In general it can be stated that none of the students questions the concept "cold"/"warm" in general. A completely reflected intercultural approach would entail questioning this concept, i.e. making clear to oneself what actually is perceived as "cold"/"warm." Thus the students might choose a rather descriptive approach and use a descriptive characterization like "rather introverted" instead of the normative classification "cold." Another possibility of intercultural reflection would be to present the classification "cold" as relative to the observer. In other words, the students could go on speaking about the Germans as "cold," but they would always add that this "coldness" is their personal perception in the first place and that there might be other ways and means of communication through which "warmth" can be expressed and that are not yet understood by the observer. [45]

### **3.3 The role of the host-family programme for the aspect of the "Germans' coldness"**

Considering the role of the programme for the development of the students with regard to the aspect "the Germans' coldness," a wide range of effects become apparent. I would like to illustrate this with the example of the students Juan and Sol, who can be characterized as opposite cases in this regard. The host-family programme did not play a central role for Sol. Although she characterizes her host-family as very kind, helpful and open, she categorizes as "exceptions," the category under which she subsumes all friendly Germans. In her efforts to define "cold," Sol refers to her fellow students, who, for example, cannot dance. She traces only those aspects that she evaluates negatively in her host-family back to them "being German," e.g. her host mother's fear of losing her key or her "awful" outer appearance. Here it becomes clear how persistently stereotypes remain in place, especially when they are not clearly defined. The more ambiguous the criteria are and the more room they leave for interpretation, the more difficult they are to revise by means of concrete experiences in reality. [46]

Juan, however, had introduced the category of a "physical" vs. "another form of" friendliness. This other form of friendliness can be expressed, for example, in talking to each other a lot and establishing contact with each other verbally or helping each other. In the host-family programme he had numerous opportunities

to talk to his host parents extensively. He remarks: "we are just like talking talking talking talking talking ..." (lines 724-726, 2<sup>nd</sup> interview). Especially from the repetitions it can be concluded that this aspect is very important for him. Moreover the host-family has invited him to stay with them if he wants to come back to Germany. Thus it seems plausible that especially the host-family programme gave him the possibility to develop this conceptualization. In his further descriptions, his family's interest in him and their liking for him become apparent, too (e.g. in their inviting him to come on a holiday with them). Thus the host-family programme has had a strong effect on his learning and educational process displayed here through the intensive verbal exchange and due to the family's interest in him. [47]

Hence it can be assumed that the host-family programme constantly conveys a positive alternative perception against the stereotypes brought along. These are interpreted as exceptions one time but as models valid for all Germans another time. Thus the host-family programme is relevant for education in any case. [48]

The last stage of the documentary method is the typecast, a systematic generalization of the characteristics found in individual cases. In the meaning-genetic typecast, all cases that share a *tertium comparationis* with the same orientation framework are combined in one type. In the formation of sociogenetic types on this basis, the chief focus is "the clarification of the social structures encompassing the phase-sequence types developed on the basis of meaning" (NOHL, 2006, p.112). For that purpose cases are sought that correspond with regard to the orientation frameworks of several topics. The socio-genetic interpretation thus does not remain limited to the comparison of a topic in two or more interviews, but compares different *tertium comparationis* in several documents. Another socio-genetic typecast of the experiences gained in the host-family programme showed what factors are responsible for the different interpretations (host families as exceptions / host families as representatives of other Germans). [49]

#### **4. Conclusion**

Cultural orientations and intercultural competence are highly complex phenomena that are created in a mixture of collective interaction and individual constructions of meaning. This demands a research approach that grasps and empirically surveys both parts. This is achieved with the combination of different theories as presented here. The individual part is covered using the pedagogic concept of "education." Two related theories are used here: on the one hand biography research (MAROTZKI, 1990) with its conception of a changing relationship to oneself and the world, and on the other hand the empirical education research ("Bildungsgangforschung") with its concept of the developmental task (HERICKS, 2006). The collective part is illustrated with an anthropological, so-called epidemiologic model of culture (SPERBER, 1996). Here special emphasis is placed on the aspect of the transmission of cultural orientations. [50]

With the tools of empirical social research, culture and intercultural competence can be grasped empirically. The combination of episodic interview (FLICK, 1999) and documentary method (BOHNSACK, 2003) allows the reconstruction of the development of cultural orientations in a longitudinal section. For this purpose the concepts "orientation framework" and "conjunctive experience realm" are used, which can be connected with both the education-theoretical as well as the culture-theoretical models used. The methodical stringency of the approach with its consistent case comparison is an outstanding feature, as it significantly reduces the risk of ethnocentrism that always exists in empirical studies of culture. Moreover, it allows the interpreter to broaden his/her limited and culturally determined minds. The interim empirical results of the study, presented only in brief excerpts, already show that the interdisciplinary combination of education and culture theory with social research is extraordinarily productive. [51]

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## Author

*Henrike Evers* M.A. has been teaching intercultural communication and intercultural management as a free-lance trainer since 2004 and works in the field of "international affairs" at the University of Bremen. She moreover does research in neighboring topics in the field of culture and intercultural issues. There her main focus is on her dissertation project "Educational processes through intercultural contact." She holds a Master's degree in English and Spanish literature and has studied in Spain and worked in Argentina and the USA. In Germany she has worked in several international fields, among others in the international culture management and for the Bertelsmann foundation. This practical work experience now supplements her sound theoretical knowledge about culture and intercultural aspects.

Contact:

Henrike Evers

Wielandstrasse 17  
G-28203 Bremen  
Germany

E-Mail: [henrike\\_evers@yahoo.com](mailto:henrike_evers@yahoo.com)

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