

The Art of Documentation in Citizenship Education Study

Tilman Grammes Yi Zhu

Abstract: The art of documentation is critical movement to the division of academics and everyday teaching and learning at school as well as the theory and practice within citizenship education study. It also exhibit itself as a criticism and an alternative to the popular quantitative research such as international large scale assessment, aiming at reconstructing and interpreting the space ‘in-between’ educational input and output. What it concerns are the crises as crucial moments of ‘Bildung’ inside the civics educational practice. Insofar as the art of documentation, different approaches can be used to the civics educational process. The applicative case of the art of documentation in contemporary China shows that everyday practice and the ‘traces’ of a civics lesson by teachers and students should be documented, while the case of former GDR shows that the interpretation of the historical documents can find meanings and establish relevance for today’s civics educational practice.

Keywords: Citizenship Education; the Art of Documentation; Wisdom of Practice; Crisis; Reconstructive and Interpretative Study Method

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1. The Background: the Class Structure, Practice and Theory in Citizenship Education Study

Z: As a reader of *Journal of Social Science Education (JSSE)*, I am quite interested in one issue in 2014, titled as *Insights into Citizenship Classrooms: The Art of Documentation and Description*. However, this term, ‘the art of documentation’ seems to have a vague implication, and even might have caused some puzzles to one contributor. (Winckler 2014) So how do you, as one of the chief editors of this issue, would illustrate this term?

G: This term is not my invention. I try to explain my and some of my colleagues’ intentions for using this small paradigm, as an alternative and opposition in scientific research. The basic idea is about **class structure** in academics. We may know about social class analysis, from Marx and Engels, the working class, the bourgeois class and conflict between them and in society. With the same approach, let us move to science, to academics’ life. Our feeling is that there is also a class division in pedagogy. There are thousands of school teachers, kindergarten educators, social workers and so on, doing heavy and good work, as working class people. Then there are ‘bourgeois class’, I mean the theorists, in academics. They are telling the everyday teacher what the

meaning of it is, and what they should do.’ So this is the division. There is a saying in English, ‘those who cannot teach teach teachers’. But the real knowledge is not within university or in academic educational science. The true knowledge is in action, in practical pedagogy. Therefore, it is so important and it is the first step that here we should document **the wisdom of practice**, the true knowledge which is in practice. So it is a kind of changing power, giving the power to the teachers and students and less contrary from ‘top-down’. This is the basic idea of the scientific movement. You see, this is a critical movement and a critical approach, because it says that the academic educational class neglects the wisdom of practice in real education.

Z: What do you think has caused the neglecting?

G: To my feeling, it has something to do with people’s misconception of theory and practice. It is kind of dualism, let’s say, here, the book is theory, and what happen in classroom is practice. This is incorrect, however, because you can say reading this book is a practice and in classroom there is a lot of everyday theory. You can prove it by asking the teachers and students why they do this or that. They will tell you, ‘I do this, because I...’ These are teachers’ teaching theory and students’ learning theory. Theory is a systemic reason, not just an arbitrary one. If you make an interview with school teachers, they have very systemic reasoning about their field of practice. So the misconception of theory and practice is also spatial. You cannot say theory is ‘book, university and academic’, meanwhile you cannot say practice is ‘schoolhouse, teacher and child’. You see both theory and practice in the same place. We differentiate **three levels of theory** here. First level is theory in action. John Dewey has said experience is theory in action. Take the soccer game as example. The teams act the theory of strategy in the play. That is the first level, and the second level is after the play. You can make an interview with all the soccer players about why they do like this. The level is reflective theory. Then comes the third level, i.e. the scientific theory or meta-theory. So there is the theory in action, theory about action and theory about theory, the meta-level. In the art of documentation, I don’t replace theory by practice, we replace academic theory by other kinds of theory instead. The art of documentation, as a critical movement has a response to the so-called ‘**citizenship industry**’ (Splitter 2011). For me, this phenomenon is a discourse in educational science, in academics. It means a **close choke**; academics are writing books for other academics, they are doing conferences with each other. Another metaphor, this is like an old airplane, each wing of which has two parallel layers. One is university, the other is everyday schooling, but both never connect. You could see it is kind of ‘double-talk’. There is academic talk in itself, and there is practical talk in itself, but there is no link between them.

2. The Art of Documentation, as a ‘Reconstructive’ and ‘Interpretative’ Method in the Empirical Study on Citizenship Education

Z: But somehow, educational scientific research should and must establish a link, if it will proceed, even only for itself. It seems to me that the art of documentation attaches

more importance to the everyday practice within educational institutions, and has claimed that the scientific researches should go beyond the tower and be related to it. However, there are different scientific approaches to everyday teaching and learning, for example, ICCS 2009 and the forth-coming ICCS 2017. How can we tell the particularities or advantages of the art of documentation as one of these approaches?

G: The approach can be ‘top-down’, giving nominative guidelines, or it can be what is called ‘empirical research’. In the latter, this is what academics usually say, ‘Ah, we do empirical research and this is how we talk with practice.’ Like you have mentioned, the international **large scale assessments**. But what is it? It is data! You just have numbers as a result. However, numbers are different from education. There are many gradings, say, this is ‘3’, ‘4’, ‘5’ or else, different levels for the testees. The testing results may not be objective, repeatable and reliable, according to different testing situations. I could say international large scale research is much more subjective than any research I do here. It is mythical narrative, for example, to say that some students in some regions are more intelligent than others, only because they do better in some standardizing tests, such as mathematics and English. Such researches with quantitative data do not really help to make the job of education more transparent or simple. In what way can the data be relevant to the teachers’ everyday profession? Are they meaningful to teachers? However, these questions remain relevant to qualitative research as well. (Grammes 2010) So in mainstream quantitative research, you lose the wisdom of practice, too, for you don’t collect it and you get rid of it.

Z: So does the art of documentation belong to the qualitative method in the empirical study on citizenship education? How do you see the difference between the research paradigms of the large scale assessment and the art of documentation?

G: For me, the conflict is not about the qualitative or the quantitative things, because in qualitative research, we count as well. We count, for example, how many questions are put in a Chinese classroom, compared with a German classroom. As we know today, it is not an opposition. These are not two things. In Germany, in research methodology, it is a standard to say that every quantitative method has a qualitative aspect, and vice versa, every qualitative research has a quantitative element in it. So that is two side of the same thing. The real conflict is about **the academic discipline**. Which discipline do we use? Is assessment the discipline of educational science? No! I would say it has nothing to do with science of education. This large scale assessment is another thing. It is testing, and testing is a psychological method! You should know, when you do large scale assessment, you are doing work as a psychologist. But we want to know about education, and then we should use the methodology of science of education itself, not use that of psychology in the field of education. Education has its own term. In Germany, it is a tradition from Herbart to think from education, not from behavior. So when we talk about the art of documentation, we could find a better term as ‘reconstructive’ or ‘interpretative’ method, than ‘qualitative method’, distinct from large scale assessment. This is about the ‘in-between’ question.

3. The Focus of the Art of Documentation, on the 'In-between' and the Crises inside

Z: In the JSSE issue of *Qualitative Research-Voices from Social Science Classrooms*, you said in the editorial that the 'reconstructive' or 'interpretative' research focuses on the space 'in-between' educational input and output. (Grammes 2010) Could you give some illustrations of what does it exactly mean?

G: Imagine there is a classroom, me, as the teacher, you and some others as students. So for psychologists' approach, they say we don't know what is inside your head, like a black box, we can only see the behavior and performance, test what is input, and what is output, with a questionnaire, with which we can have a look before and afterwards. Then we can show and say this works or that works. OK! Very interesting information! But, this is irrelevant for practical teachers, for the wisdom of practice. What pedagogues and science of education wants to know is 'in-between', i.e. the **domain-specific teaching and/or learning process between input and output** within the classroom. So this is a pedagogical approach. You look at the performance in the logic of practice. I have ever called it 'Frag-Antwort-Struktur', or the question-response-structure. This is the basic of education, especially of didactics, of teaching a lesson. You always have a question, and then next step, the answer, and evaluation, then next question... We call this 'learning'. In the art of documentation, we actually do not work on everything of teaching and learning. We look for special situations in this 'in-between' structure. We especially look for **crises, or interruptions, or differences**. So when teaching a lesson, something stops, or breaks down! Then we say 'OK, this is an interesting moment, let's videotape it.' Then we can discover or interpret the meaning of it.

Z: Why crises are so important?

G: Because the theory is that you need a crisis to produce '**Bildung**'. Bildung builds in life crises. Now you have question and answer, you have disturbance and irritations. Where can you read such pedagogical theory in western theory of education? This is an idea of Socrates and Plato two thousand years ago. This is an idea that human learning happens in a crisis. It is not repetitive learning. You know 'the cave metaphor' in Plato's *the Republic*. This famous metaphor has educational as well as political dimensions and represents the links between politics and education. It is about authority, democracy and power, about truth and ideology. It is about the relationship between the leaders and citizens, the teachers and students as well. What are the philosophers doing before they go up? What do you think is the crucial moment? They turn their heads and bodies! With educational method, we should focus on such **turning points**, and I don't think large scale assessment can focus on these, for it is not about going into and through, but about before and after the process. This turning point is another question, and it is a performative approach. If you turn, you have to stand up, go around, and change

perspectives, and then the teachers or the philosophers will come back to the citizens in the cave telling them what he has seen and what the citizens do. But the citizens will probably convey disagreement, puzzle or even resistance. That is the crisis confronted. For the point of education, the key is how the enlightenment is or can be given, the extent and the moment. Imagine you give a lesson about Nazi massacre to the primary school pupils, and you let them watch the pictures or videos. Would this practice be allowed or appropriate? Another point is that the teacher cannot bring the wisdom into the students or citizens' mind. They cannot be indoctrinated and they have to experience themselves. They have to stand up as well, turn and look out. Then you see here you have a crisis and it is the place where Bildung happens.

4. Different Approaches to the Art of Documentation in Citizenship Education Study and Applicative Cases: Contemporary China and the GDR

G: For educational science, because the study object is a process of civics teaching and learning practice, we need to document, describe and interpret the crucial moments of crises within this 'in-between' space as the site of Bildung towards the discovery of meanings. To put it simple, the art of documentation is indispensable for scientific research on citizenship education. The first step for study is that we need archives with documentation. In every science, there are archives. Just like when we go to the faculty of fine art, could you imagine, it has only theory of art and yet no painting works? Same way, it is a scandal that science of education is like science of art without any artist's works. Every week in the world there are millions of performances of teachers and students in citizenship classrooms and schools. This is not a minor thing, but a relevant social fact. We could document them and know what happen in these performances. It is a scientific task.

Z: In the editorial of *Insights into Citizenship Classrooms*, you talked about several 'turnings' in the art of documentation, for instance, from the exclusive verbal form of documentation to pictorial and spatial ones. What are you concerned here?

G: There are different approaches to the art of documentation. Why are these diverse approaches important? Because teaching and learning is a performative practice, not just sitting on a chair reading books, but combined with doing. It also takes place in a certain surroundings or contexts, in which there are students, pictures, symbols or something else. Education is not just a communication but communication and interaction. Education is also not only a verbal thing but practical and performative action. So we use **performative, pictorial and spatial approaches** and see, for example, what similarities and differences can we observe from the pictures of symbols? Do they represent specific regional or national culture or a kind of international 'world' of citizenship education classroom? (Grammes 2014)

Z: Your works on citizenship education in former German Democratic Republic (GDR) (*Staatbürgerkunde in DDR: Ein Dokumentenband*), as well as the co-editing and

publishing work of *Moral and Political Education in China* in 2015 can be applicative exemplars for the art of documentation. Finally, let's talk about the ideas for structuring the two 'documentary style works', shall we?

G: The two cases are different in time and space. GDR is a historical thing, while China still exists and is much bigger than GDR. So you should have much more documents from political and moral education in China. Now I give the question back to you, say, please bring me documents from **everyday practice of moral and political education** in Chinese schools, what could you bring to me?

Z: I think I can bring you textbooks, students' homework, the exercises students do in class, and from the teachers' point of view, the teaching materials. I can also download videotapes of moral and political lessons in primary schools or middle schools from the internet.

G: You got it. The German audiences would like to learn about these everyday practices of moral and political education in different level of school, different regions of China, north and south, west and east. We would like to have it in German language, or at least in English. But it is pity we don't have it. We do have such *Journal of Moral Education*, in which we have information about the written curriculum, the guidelines and textbooks. But the question is the textbook is not the 'performative' textbook. What we need is the textbook in lesson or in teaching and learning action, indicating what the students and teachers do with it. To analyze a textbook and to analyze students who is snoozing when read such textbook are two different things. This is what qualitative research will do.

Z: You mean not analyzing the textbooks book itself, but analyzing how the textbooks and materials like that are being used in the teaching and learning process and the interaction between teachers and students.

G: Yes, and the textbook in the head of students in the end. Because we cannot look into their minds and see what happen, you have to elicit it and produce documents, making interview, collecting materials, etc. We collect the '**traces**' or footsteps of a civics lesson by teachers and students. Just like 'Yumiko' individual case study in Japan (Hiroyuk and Go 2014), that is an excellent example. There is tradition of lesson study in China, too. JSSE will warmly welcome a 'Yumiko' case from China.

Z: So how about the case of GDR?

G: As for the example from GDR, I have made the methodological exercise among students in Shanghai. We thought about the GDR didn't exist any longer, only from 1949 to 1989, and we are sitting here today. So what documents could we collect when we want to get information about the process of civics lessons in GDR? The students in Shanghai said, 'OK, we could look into the teacher journals; we could have

interviews with teachers, students and parents; we could take photographs from old classrooms; we collect students' textbooks. So we make historical archives from all of them.

Z: Could you please give some illustration of meanings you have found in the end of the study on civics lessons in GDR? After all, the interpretation is the very significant dimension of the art of documentation.

G: The civics lesson in GDR is a historical question. So you could ask me what its relevance for today is. The point of GDR case is about the relationship between teaching and learning. In GDR they taught Marxism, Leninism and the politics of the party, and the students learnt them. However, it did not work. Of course there were economic and political reasons, but there was a reason in education itself as well. It didn't work because teaching is not the same as learning. The teachers can teach, but the students are likely not to believe in it, or even they believe. What the teachers in GDR faced was, for example, the difficulty in teaching the routing process of historical development, from capitalism, socialism to communism in the end. In terms of socialist education, you cannot teach like feeding, because socialist education means emancipation. So the students had to discover the rule of history by themselves. But the problem is how they could discover the hidden rules. The teachers and students wanted to prove such idea in teaching and learning by process itself, not by indoctrination, because indoctrination is too weak for people to believe it emotionally, which means they have to gain knowledge only by their own experience.

Z: Set aside the dispute on political ideology, you mean the dilemma confronted by the teachers in GDR was, they would like to break the teaching approach of indoctrination and teach the students by experience in teaching and learning process, but they failed to find empirical evidences to support what they believed or wanted the students to believe.

G: Yes. But you should know in the background of GDR, the teachers could not commit it failed, it has to be proved. Difficult task, isn't it? This is some kind of the myth of Sisyphus, pushing the big and heavy stone up the slope again and again. This is what civics teacher in GDR do and how they work. To my feeling, all civics teachers in the whole world could be like 'Sisyphus' teachers, and this is why I say historical study on the situation in GDR is relevant to today's topic. By the art of documentation, **from the 'bottom-up'**, we could get a better knowledge of what the teachers act and how the students react to their teachers in the teaching and learning practice. You will have traces of lesson from teachers and students to see which works and to know how it works. In the field of education, the German word 'Vermittlung' has both concepts of teaching as giving the body of knowledge and teaching as transformation, which means negotiating knowledge in the subject, among students, as we have talked about the 'cave metaphor' by Plato. The traditional concept is the teachers teach and students learn what the teachers teach. Today we call it 'indoctrination'. You have a teaching goal, subjects

and means, and then you succeed. Now from historical and qualitative empirical research we know there is no such thing. What we know is, teaching and learning is not a forcing 'machine', but a process of negotiating practice.

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