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“...not simply say that they are all Nazis.” Controversy in Discussions of Current Topics in German Civics Classes

Studies have shown that the Requirement of Controversy defined in the German Beutelsbach Consensus is repeatedly violated in the practice of teaching Civic Education. However, little is known about the impact that different teaching settings have on the quality of controversy in the classroom. In this article, two scenes of classroom discussions that deal with current topics are analysed and compared by using reconstructive research methods: the ‘Numbers of the Day’ [Zahlen des Tages] as a teacher-centred classroom discussion and the ‘Weekly Newsreel’ [Wochenschau] as a student-led classroom discussion. We could reconstruct an active prevention of controversy in the ‘Numbers of the Day’. In contrary, the discussion in the ‘Weekly Newsreel’ is developing in a modus of disagreement. By analysing the discussion with the documentary method, we show that this controversy is based on homogeneous (and so non-controversial) shared orientations among the students. This leads to the result that the foreground of a discussion should be distinguished from its background of milieu-based orientations. This outcome raises new questions regarding controversy in Civic Education classrooms.

Empirische Studien haben gezeigt, dass es im Politikunterricht regelmäßig zu Verletzungen des im Beutelsbacher Konsens verankerten Kontroversitätsgebots kommt. Wenig ist hingegen darüber bekannt, wie sich bestimmte didaktisch-methodische Settings auf Ausmaß und Formen der Kontroversität im Unterricht auswirken. Im vorliegenden Artikel werden zwei solcher Settings, in denen aktuelle gesellschaftliche Themen verhandelt werden (die ‚Zahlen des Tages‘ als lehrerzentrierte Klassendiskussion und die ‚Wochenschau‘ als schülergeleitete Klassendiskussion), hinsichtlich ihrer Auswirkung auf Kontroversität im Klassenzimmer qualitativ analysiert. Rekonstruiert werden konnte einerseits ein weitgehendes Verhindern von Kontroversität bei den ‚Zahlen des Tages‘. In der ‚Wochenschau‘ hingegen entfaltet sich durchaus eine Kontroversität im Klassenzimmer. Mit Hilfe der Dokumentarischen Methode kann dabei aber gezeigt werden, dass auf der Ebene des impliziten Wissens mehrere, teilweise problematische geteilte Orientierungen in der untersuchten Klasse vorliegen. Dies führt zur Feststellung, dass man Lerngruppen hinsichtlich ihrer Kontroversität auf zwei Ebenen unterscheiden muss: auf einer schneller kontrovers erscheinenden, vordergründigen Ebene und einer tieferliegenden Ebene des milieu-basierten Hintergrunds kollektiver Orientierungen. Diese Diagnose stellt neue Fragen bezüglich Kontroversität im Politikunterricht.

Keywords:

Civic education, requirement of controversy, documentary method, beutelsbach consensus, classroom discussions

1 Introduction: Controversy as a requirement for civic education

Controversy is an important characteristic of Civic Education. Although it can be seen as a “cross-subject matter task” (Grammes, 2010b, p. 106) in school generally, it foremost regulates both the design of teaching (curriculum and teaching methods) and the way of

conducting communication in Civic Education classroom. Deeply based in the idea of a democratic and pluralistic society, it defines the work ethic of a teacher in Civic Education (Grammes, 2014b, p. 266f.). Controversy found its way as a commonly accepted teaching principle for this subject in 1976, as it was placed in a prominent position in the Beutelsbach Consensus [*Beutelsbacher Konsens*]. This paper was the outcome of a conference in the small German town Beutelsbach, where scholars of Civic Education discussed different ideas of the foundations and aims of this subject (Reinhardt, 2007, p. 69). The conference took place in a highly controversial political environment as the parties in (West-)Germany disputed about the appropriate answers to the polarized atmosphere following the student protest in 1968. The Beutelsbach Consensus expressed the shared views of the debate. Thus, it represents the end of a dispute between different ‘schools’ of Civic Education. Today, the Beutelsbach Consensus is still regarded as a basic law for teaching in Civic Education (Petrik, 2013, p. 21). It is regulating the planning, conducting and reflection of teaching Civic Education and can be considered as a “Meta Strategy” (Reinhardt, 2013, p. 102).

One of its three principles is the Requirement of Controversy [*Kontroversitätsgebot*]. It basically demands that everything has to be presented in the classroom in the same controversy, as it is discussed in science and politics outside the classroom. No points of view, no options and no alternatives should be speculated in order

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to give the students a real opportunity to form an opinion about a political topic by themselves. The 'Requirement of Controversy' is connected to another principle of the Beutelsbach Consensus: the 'Ban of Overwhelming' [*Überwältigungsverbot*]. It is not acceptable in a democratic society to indoctrinate students with the usually more elaborated perspective of the teacher – whether intentionally or not. The third principle can be seen as the main purpose of Civic Education. Student-orientation [*Schülerorientierung*] is demanding to enable the students to analyse the political situation and their own interests relating to the political situation and to empower the students to act in their interests towards a change in society. Although the concentration on these three principles alone is not without its critics, the Requirement to Controversy in Civic Education is not questioned in general.ⁱ

In the practice of teaching, controversy shows its character as an idea of differences and ambiguities and in the appearance of various *perspectives* on lesson-topics (Grammes, 2014b, p. 271). Controversy is formulating a claim how to deal with a political topic in the classroom: it must be developed considering various-perspectives. At a minimum, this means that the single perspective of the teacher must be complemented with those of the students. An important marker for controversy is contradiction: "Controversial political issues (...) are unresolved questions of public policy that spark significant disagreement" (Hess, 2002, p. 11). Studies have shown that although the concept of controversy is highly accepted among teachers, it is repeatedly violated in the practice of teaching (for Germany see Reinhardt, 2007; Grammes, 1998; for the United States see Hess, 2009; Niemi & Niemi, 2007). The missing of taking position and discussing controversial topics can be seen as "the Ideology gap in Civic Education" (Petrik, 2010). A Study of Henkenborg, Krieger, Pinseler and Behrens (2008) has shown this phenomenon in particular for East Germany, the regional context in which our study was conducted as well. They have noticed a widespread refusal of bringing conflicts into the classroom. The authors stated that this denial of controversy is founded in a narrow understanding of democracy among the teachers they observed. Democracy is seen then as based in institutions but not as a dynamic process of struggling and arguing (Henkenborg, 2007, p. 41).

This widespread gap between the aspiration of constructing a political topic controversially and what happens in reality in Civic Education classrooms is of interest in this article. In contrast to research that focuses on the 'input' or 'output' of teaching, we want to emphasize the "space in-between" (Grammes, 2010a, p. 2), the *situation* of teaching as a setting that is affecting the acting and communication of the people involved in a specific way. We want to illustrate how different settings have a different impact on controversy. Therefore we use two scenes from two different lessons of Civic Education that we videotaped in the suburbs of a city in East Germany.ⁱⁱ The interpretation of this material is carried out with the documentary method, aiming at

"reconstructing the [milieu based] implicit knowledge that underlies everyday practice" (Bohnsack, Pfaff, Weller, 2010, p. 20). In both scenes there is a highly emotionalising and current topic in the classroom and they are handled in the way of a classroom discussion. In the first scene – the 'Numbers of the Day' [*Zahlen des Tages*] – teacher and students deal with the terrorist attacks on the editorial office of the satirical magazine "Charlie Hebdo" that took place in Paris on 7th January 2015, two days before this lesson was conducted. In the second scene – the 'Weekly Newsreel' [*Wochenschau*] – the classroom discussion is combining the terrorist attacks in Paris with the xenophobic and islamophobic movement of 'Pegida' that was in the centre of media coverage in those days.

The acronym 'Pegida' stands for "Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident". This political movement is based in Dresden, the capital of Saxony, with smaller offshoots around Germany. Along with the appearance of the right-wing populist party 'Alternative für Deutschland', 'Pegida' represents a growing right-wing populism especially in East Germany (Adam, 2015; Decker, 2015). The Pegida movement carries out weekly demonstrations since autumn 2014, primarily and with the highest numbers of participants in Dresden, and it is accompanied by a high media attention. 'Pegida' offers the possibility of expressing fears and reservations against refugees, Muslims and the political and social establishment. This includes the instrumentalisation of Islamist terrorist attacks such as in January or November 2015 in Paris. On the one hand, 'Pegida' can be seen as a local or regional phenomenon with causes in the history and political culture of East Germany. On the other hand, the populist positions articulated by 'Pegida' are a subject of nationwide disputes and they are comparable to the discourses that are led by right-wing populist movements and related political parties in other countries in Europe and beyond (Wodak, Khosravini, & Mral, 2013).ⁱⁱⁱ Both classroom scenes presented in this article refer to these discourses and therefore have the potential to be controversial.

The article is structured as follows: In the next section, we present the research method and the theoretical perspective that we follow to analyse the lessons in short (2). After that, we present the results of our documentary interpretation and didactic reflection of the two mentioned scenes – the 'Numbers of the Day' (3.1) and the 'Weekly Newsreel' (3.2). In the last section, we want to conclude our findings and summarise some perspectives we see in the interpretation of everyday classroom situations using the documentary method (4).

2 About qualitative research on teaching

The aim of the research project is to reconstruct social practice in educational contexts. In sociological terms it can be said that we want to understand the common sense constructions performed through patterns of orientation (Bohnsack, 2010). To value this phrase, some key points of our assumptions will be explained next. Qualitative researchers refer to a big variety of



theoretical and methodological approaches (Krüger 2010, p. 53). By doing so they have in common, that not a characterisation (as a description) of a social field is important, but the question *how* social reality is accomplished in everyday practice. For this reason pre-formulated theories are not used to understand the respective field. The researcher concentrates on the relevant actors. They are taken seriously as creators of social reality. That is why approaches like the one we use are understood as *praxeologically* and *knowledge based*.

It is important that the “orientation towards understanding [is] a principle of gaining knowledge” (ibid., 54). Thereby we follow the idea that actions can be analysed because they are embedded in orientations and constructions (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 12). Hence, the interpretations done by researchers are connected to everyday life constructions of actors. These constructions are the starting point of the research process. In other words qualitative research is per se reconstructive research (ibid.) Therefore, what we show as a result in this article is reconstructed common sense. Nevertheless it is essential to emphasise that the constructions we are looking for are not inevitable reflexive for the actors. They are often part of an unconscious and complex knowledge. Hereby the difference between *implicit* and *explicit knowledge* is significant.

To reach this goal it is important to be familiar with the context we took an inside at. Similar to praxeological approaches (e.g. Reckwitz, 2003) teaching in class can be understood as a social field itself. The practices happening in class are routine actions. They are based on speaking and linguistic use, but – at the same time – they are also defined by moving of bodies and handling of things in the classroom (Martens, Petersen, & Asbrand, 2014). All these elements are part of the emphasised common sense constructions. Within this perspective we take distance from attempts that understand teaching and learning as simple intended actions and focus on how Civic Education is carried out in class. The observable acting in educational contexts is structured by independent orientations, which are created in a “conjunctive space of experience” (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 105). Regarding teaching and learning, we have to be aware of the multidimensional overlapping of these patterns of orientation in the classroom, which can be educational itself or from outside school (Przyborski, 2004, p. 49). The overlapping process shows not only the relations between different conjunctive spaces of experience but also the relations between milieus and the educational organisation. In addition students as well as teachers due to their social affiliation to milieus bring orientations into school (Nohl, 2007).

Since we understand Civic Education as an *everyday school* situation we need to observe the lessons. That is why we use data, which was created during a videography in school. Compared to a ‘simple’ observation a videography holds the advantage of showing the complexity of an educational situation more precisely. This includes facial expressions and gesturing as well as nonverbal activities. Moreover due to the possibility of

repetitive viewing it is possible to change the focus. Already the first results can be reviewed intersubjectively because of using the original videos. Since our research project is characterised by an explorative character, we used the videography at one secondary school in the surroundings of an East German city.^{iv} From December 2014 to January 2015 we observed seven lessons (9th, 11th and 12th grade) of Civic Education (each 90 minutes) done by three different teachers. One camera filmed the classroom with the students and another one focused the teacher and the board. Because of these positions we captured the actions and reactions of all persons in class.^v At the same time we did participant observations and used this protocols to structure the data. Furthermore we used the material handed out in class for our analysis. As a first result we got an extensive corpus of data. To start with a more detailed analysis, a transcription of specific situations in class was done.^{vi} Important for the selection of specific parts for the interpretation are the so-called focusing passages or focusing metaphors that “are characterized by detailed or dense depictions (what we call metaphorical density) and by a high commitment (what we call interactive density). The identification of these passages makes it possible to get a quick and valid access to the central patterns of orientation.” (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 104f.) For this article we chose an open (student-led) and interactive discussion (‘Weekly Newsreel’) because different opinions appear at first glance. In contrast we selected a more structured scene including conversations towards the teacher (‘Numbers of the day’).

The empirical analysis of these scenes was done in orientation towards the *documentary method*. Since our here shown analysis is mainly focused on the verbal interactions, we treat the interactions in class similar to a conversation. Doing so, we are able to use the instruments worked out by Przyborski (2004, p. 50ff.). According to that, we separate between *formulating* and *reflecting* interpretation. These steps include separating the “immanent and the documentary meaning” (Bohnsack, 2010, p. 110). The first step of the formulating interpretation “is the decoding and formulation of the topical structure of a text” (ibid., p. 111). After that, “the task of the reflecting interpretation is [...] the reconstruction of the framework of orientation” (ibid.). This includes the question of how the participants refer to each other. Thereby it can be found out, if the patterns of orientations performed during class are collectively shared. In short, we reconstruct the content, the way the content is produced and how it is handled within the interaction in class.

3 Empirical case studies and didactic interpretation

3.1 The ‘Numbers of the day’: A quiz show on the latest terrorist attacks

In one of the civics classes that we videotaped, we were able to observe a frequently used way to address current events. The so called ‘Numbers of the Day’ is a variation of a common ritual in Civic Education, known as e.g. ‘Current Hour’ [*aktuelle Stunde*]. The teacher writes



numbers on the board. Students guess the current event that is represented by the numbers and discuss this event altogether. The lesson that we present here took place the next days after the terrorist attack at the headquarters of the satire magazine 'Charlie Hebdo' in Paris in January 2015. This event, which caused stir and controversy all around the world, is the subject of this nearly 15-minute sequence.

While the teacher is writing down three numbers ("88, 12, 2") on the board without any explanation, some students immediately raise their hands. She is surprised by this active participation and jokes about the difficult decision of choosing the student who can try to answer first. No one seems to be confused about these three numbers. This shows that the students here are very familiar with this ritual. Furthermore, the situation in the classroom as well as the relation between the teacher and the students seems to be relaxed. The following 15 minutes can be characterised as a typical form of classroom-interaction with a very common *three-turn communication*: teacher is asking, student is answering and teacher is evaluating. At first, she addresses the entire class and directs the attention to the listed numbers:

5	Teacher: Ok attention, for all of you to think about. Eighty-eight, twelve and two are the figures of the day.
6	Lukas: Eighty-eight thousand.
7	Teacher: Oh eighty-eight thousand, yeah sure, sorry, are the figures of the day. Now, I'll do it like in primary school. So attention, in the order in which I call you now, everybody can deal with one number. Ben, you can tell us the first number.
8	Ben: Ok, so twelve people were killed.
9	Felix: (nice) ((laughing))
10	Ben: Should I say more?
11	Felix: That's it.
12	Ben: Ok, so twelve people were killed in an attack in Paris.
13	Teacher: <u>Very nice</u> , and that was even a sentence.
14	Ben: Yes, but the one before was also a sentence.
15	Teacher: That was also a sentence. That were two sentences.
16	Mia: Um eighty-eight thousand police officers are looking for these twelve people, um for the two offenders.
17	Class: ((groaning))
18	Teacher: ((claps her hands)) We may only name one number. ((laughing)) But it was very difficult now I can see that.

With her statement the teacher initiates the well-known instructional ritual (5) and explains – after a brief correction (6, 7) – the special rules for today's task (7). Anyone who is assigned has to speak out the one fact that is symbolized by one of the numbers. She points out the low complexity of this task herself by marking it as a

typical requirement of primary school. Possibilities for the solution of the task are already clearly limited. The aim is to guess and mention a part of the event represented by the numbers. This narrow procedure is perpetuated by the teacher strictly. Insisting on the rule "one number one student", there is no possibility for the students to establish links or explain their own perceptions of the current event yet. The setting appears to be that of a quiz show orchestrated by the teacher as the show master, leading the audience (class) through the show. This allows distance to the event that is neither framed as an emotionally touching nor a controversial one. The first student that is assigned mentions the killing of twelve people (8). Potentially unsettled by the laughter of another student (9), Ben reconfirms with the teacher if his response was sufficient (10). While Felix is already prompting him to stop (11), he expands his answer by adding "in an attack in Paris" (12). With his answer, Ben accepts the prefigured setting and the role of the teacher as the moderator of the show. The teacher validates the purely descriptive mentioning of a fact as an adequate response (13). Thus, the frame within which the topic will be discussed seems to be clarified. This is followed by a brief discussion about the formal characteristics of the response (14-16), whereby the conversation is moving away from the actual content of the statement. Also the substantive statement of Mia who accidentally solves the other two numbers is handled formally by making her infraction the subject of the discussion. It is clear – and the teacher admits it at the end – that the rules of the game are hardly compatible with the substantive connection of the three numbers. From a didactic perspective, students are reduced to "solvers of crossword puzzles" (Grammes 1998, p. 301) and have no chance to unfold their perspectives towards the topic at all.

The context of the events is then discussed, after the basic facts have been clarified. The teacher leads the conversation consistently and keeps showing her already established communication pattern from the opening sequence. The topic continues to be handled abstractly and non-politically. The form of speech remains the benchmark of the teacher's evaluative comments. Whilst the subject of the discussion is structured in the above-mentioned way, the discussed subject seems to have little impact on the mode of the conversation. The subsequent phase is about the consequences of the jointly reconstructed events:

62	Teacher: Ok, what was yesterday? What reactions of the world do we know about? What do politicians say, how do people react? What happened in Paris? What can one say, Emma?
63	Emma: Well, quite a lot are just unsettled now because um because of the freedom of the press, and the freedom of speech. That, well, fears could rise again, what can happen in France, can happen with us, too. If something critical or something else is in the newspaper now, and perhaps there is also some sort of generalisation of um Muslim people that they are just different.
64	Teacher: Islamist satire. Things like this, where terms are quickly thrown together, where they say all followers of Islam-
65	Tim: Well it also matters-
66	Teacher: Just a little moment. Could be under a general suspicion now, um, to commit terrorist attacks, too. I generalise <u>very</u> meanly. Um yes, <u>that</u> must be set very, very right, and reactions of Imam for example have indeed shown that they dissociate from this very, very, very clearly, ok. What else happened?
67	Tim: Well, that plays into the hands of organisations like now for example Pegida in Dresden, because well they speak against the Islamisation of the West. And well if Islamists want to restrict the liberties that indeed are codified in our Constitution, um, this just plays into their hands and they will find even more followers and yes, that isn't ideal.
68	Teacher: Um I still have to ask again, um, in the terminology and also what is behind, Tim you have used it for the second time now, that's why I just have to ask again. You said Islamists. Are these are these all the followers of Islam? Or why do you say Islamists?

The teacher asks a series of questions about reactions to the attacks in Paris (62). Doing so, she sets a very broad framework with many possible connections for the students. It is only clear that one must be able to contribute something. Thus, the event itself seems to be somehow significant. Emma who responds, then suggests two aspects: firstly, the fear of attacks in Germany and, secondly, an instrumentalisation of this danger of terrorist attacks by discriminating Muslims collectively as “different” (63). She formulates her response carefully and remains distant from the events. Simultaneously, the briefness of her statement and the use of words such as “just” or “again” indicate that the discourse she refers to is known in class. The teacher connects to the second aspect by demanding the correct use of terms and warning about the generalisation of people (64). This statement is important to her: she interrupts Tim to speak out against generalisations in all clarity and elaborates her position in reference to the representatives of Muslims who clearly distanced themselves from the attacks (66). With that, the debate about Islamophobia becomes the subject of the conversation, which is only connected indirectly with the terrorist attack. Her final question (“What else was happening?”) is remarkable: it can be read as an attempt to end the talk about the consideration introduced by Emma, even before an actual negotiation could take

place. Instead of picking up the different answers from the students more intensively, the question goes back to the reconstruction of events and does not focus in an interpretation of these events, as laid out in the student’s statement. What is documented here is the orientation towards a pattern of interaction, in which the students are assigned to reconstruct the events, whereas the teacher alone disposes the interpretation of these events. However, the next student does not connect to the question raised by the teacher, but rather focuses on the Islamophobic movement of ‘Pegida’ (67), which is omnipresent in the public debate and can be seen as the place where the previously mentioned generalisation takes place. The now fixed intention of the attack – the restriction of the freedom of press and opinion – appears as a real danger that threatens the constitution and that ‘Pegida’ warned of since a long time. ‘Pegida’ will therefore benefit, which – according to Tim – was “not ideal”. What interests us at this point is only the connection performed by the teacher, which is why an in-depth interpretation does not take place here. The teacher does not deal with the thoughts of Tim, but responds to the term “Islamists” used by him. She brings up the (rhetorical) question if all Muslims are meant with this term. Thus, she shows herself not as equal dialog partner, but again as a moderator with the task to monitor the formal correctness of the statements. As a consequence, the flow of the conversation is interrupted by problematizing conceptual differentiations.

Conceptual differentiations also shape the further conversation and they are marked by the teacher as retaining knowledge. The implicit plan of the teacher where this whole discussion should go to undermines the potential of the discussion for unfolding diverse perspectives and for becoming controversial. Another inhibitory factor for controversy is the narrow form of conversation: By picking up and evaluating every single contribution of a student, the teacher is controlling the development of the conversation based on her single perspective. This narrow form of communication is often criticised for its inability of giving room for the students and their perspectives and to be unsuitable for controversy (e.g. Schelle, 2003, p. 60). Thormann (2012) has shown, that different arrangements of teaching have different effects regarding the way a political conflict is discussed in classroom. Hereby, the narrow form of classroom communication keeps the students at distance to the ‘foreign world’ of politics (ibid., p. 330). At the end of our example here, again a student tries to bring up the topic of Islamophobic movements. This is followed by an abrupt change of subjects by the teacher, asking what happened the day before at 12 o'clock in Paris. After a lengthy final monologue of the teacher, the transition to the actual and totally different topic of the lesson (economics and the ‘magic square’) is made. Today’s topic discussed in the context of the ‘Numbers of the Day’ stands on its own and is not part of a wider teaching unit.

One basic teaching principle of Civic Education is its ‘principle of topicality’ [*Aktualitätsprinzip*]. There are

good didactic reasons to bring ‘up-to-date topics’ such as the terrorist attacks in Paris into the classroom: Education can become less abstract and closer to the everyday lives of the students. Its primary function is to increase motivation. In our example the ‘Numbers of the Day’ is motivating the class indeed: We can see an agile discussion in the classroom, the students pay attention and no one is disturbing the conversation. However, the setting ‘Numbers of the day’ is *preventing* controversy. By making the students to ‘solvers of crossword puzzles’, it is *increasing* the unfavourable effects of teacher-centred communication in the classroom. The unsatisfactory quality of this form of education is implying the question, why it is conducted in the classroom at all? What is its function besides increasing motivation of the students by bringing in current topics? Teaching has its own practices – rituals that are known by all participants and, by experiencing these rituals many times, the knowledge about these rituals becomes incorporated. The special form of a lesson *transforms* subjects that are critical to talk about (e.g. violence, dead, suffering) into expressible topics. It makes an answer like “very nice” (13) a possible connection to a phrase like “twelve people were killed in an attack in Paris” (12). This distanced form of talking about a topic in classroom as shown in this example is transforming the topic into an expressible one and takes away its potential textual risk to jeopardise the lesson. This phenomenon was also worked out by Meseth, Proske and Radtke (2004). They observed how teaching is perpetuated by teachers *and* students and by their ‘expert knowledge’ to communicate in a certain way about ‘vulnerable’ topics like nationalism and holocaust in history classes. The point is that this distanced form of communicating is likely to prevent disagreement and controversy.

From a didactic point of view, we have to ask for the impacts on this setting for learning. Civic Education has a specific conceptual problem that no other subject has: every political problem, case, solution etc. has its own fleeting place in *time* (Petrik, 2013, p. 42f.). For instance, every international conflict that is happening right now, will probably be history next year. Therefore Civic Education should be conducted as *exemplary* learning (Grammes, 2014a). The *particular* occasions of the *particular* case ‘terrorist attacks in Paris’ have to be analysed as an example for something *general* (like the contradiction between security and freedom). The curriculum for Civic Education in Saxony^{viii} (Sächsisches Staatsministerium für Kultus, 2004) is defining some general subject fields in which the particular case could be included easily (for tenth grade an obvious connection is the field of ‘international relations’ with the subthemes ‘conceptions of peace and peacekeeping’, ‘European integration’ or ‘analysing an international conflict’). The teacher in our example is not connecting the topic to one of these fields. This is another indication that the main reason to bring in the topic is its topicality and that the teacher has a different plan during the discussion about it, what the schedule for this lesson should be actually. The discussion is staged as a private and delimited chat

about a current topic. A clear point of learning is neither visible nor made transparent by the teacher.

As we have seen, the main problems regarding controversy here are the narrow teacher-centred communication and her implicit schedule, intensified by the form of the quiz show, in which the setting is framed. Regarding this, our second case becomes interesting. In the ‘Weekly Newsreel’ there is no narrowing framework like a quiz show and the teacher is completely out of the discussion.

3.2 The ‘Weekly Newsreel’: A students’ debate on how to deal with a xenophobic movements

In another politics lesson at the same school we found a different variant of how current events are integrated into the classroom. Like the setting ‘Numbers of the Day’ the ‘Weekly Newsreel’ is around 15 minutes long and it is usually performed at the beginning of the lesson. This time, it was conducted at the last third of the lesson due to a test that the whole class was writing at the beginning. Basically, the ‘Weekly Newsreel’ is a presentation of one or two students about current topics. As well as the ‘Numbers of the Day’, this setting can therefore be seen as a variation of the ritual ‘Current Hour’. The presentation is divided into two parts: in the first part the students give a lecture to inform the class about current national and international news of the past week. In the second part they are supposed to initiate and lead a discussion. In our example, this discussion is kicked off with a provocative message by questioning the common negative public attitude towards the islamophobic movement ‘Pegida’. It is very likely that the students in the class have heard and discussed this topic outside the classroom before, as ‘Pegida’ is a widely discussed object in the public debate. The teacher is not interfering in this discussion at all. He sits aside and observes the conversation to give marks. After the discussion the teacher gives a statement to some aspects he observed during the conversation. The fact that the discussion is framed by school evaluation as well as the applause the students give themselves at the end of it, marks the passage as a typical and ‘artificial’ school discussion unlike a parliamentary debate or an everyday life discussion. Contrary to the ‘Numbers of the Day’ we can mark this setting as a ‘student-led free classroom discussion’ – a teaching method that is supposed to be suitable for controversial conversations at a first glance (Grammes, 2014b, p. 271). The discussion itself is, besides the fact that the teacher sits aside, a well-known school ritual: students that want to talk raise their hand and the moderator is disposing the right to speak.

The discussion is initiated by Jörg, one of the moderators, asking: “Islamist terrorism is all over the world and everybody criticises Pegida - are we against the wrong ones?” Before he presented his question to the class, he framed it as “provocative” and thereby differentiated it from his own potential opinion. With his question he compares the handling of two current and controversial phenomena. They are related because ‘Pegida’ publicly presents itself in an opposition to



‘Islamism’. The moderator thereby emphasised the problem of rejecting ‘Pegida’ and its (anti-Islamic) goals in a time of repeated “Islamist terrorism”. With this question, the *topic* ‘terrorism and Pegida’ is transformed into an *issue* (Leps, 2010). By connecting ‘Pegida’ with the terrorist attacks in Paris (and elsewhere), the topic becomes a disputatious question. The question is demanding to take position and to argue for it.

In the first part of the discussion, a rather conventional form of teaching and classroom communication is reproduced. The students talk quite distanced about the topic and argue about using terms in an adequate way. This ‘technical mode’ of talking is very similar to the discussion in the setting ‘Numbers of the Day’. It creates distance and ‘helps’ to avoid an own political positioning. By commenting nearly every statement of the audience, the discussion leader Jörg is copying a typical teacher behaviour (‘three-turn communication’). He is preserving the common way to talk about political issues in school as seen above in the ‘Numbers of the Day’. But in opposition to the ‘Numbers of the Day’, his comments do not have the strength to lead the discussion in a certain direction. As a student, Jörg might not have a wider plan of embedding the topic in the schedule and so the contributions of his classmates do not have to be formed in a certain perspective. After this first ‘technical’ part, the discussion is developing more and more into a modus of disagreement.

In the second part of the discussion, more emotionally charged political contributions are made. The students have time and space to elaborate their opinions towards the issue. The content is developing from a more general classification of ‘Pegida’ (How is the connection between terrorism and ‘Pegida’? Is there a connection between refugees and so called Islamisation? What are the positions of ‘Pegida’?) to the refugee policy in Germany (Is immigration necessary? How to deal with immigrants? How to manage immigration?) and finally to the role of the media. Most of these topics have not been included in Jörg’s original input but emerge during the interaction, as they are specific political issues represented by the ‘Pegida’-Movement.

The statements of the students are stretching a wide field and controversies in the classroom are developing. An example for a concrete point of controversy within the discussion is the question if counter-demonstrations against ‘Pegida’ are legitimate. The student Paul is starting this subtopic:

26	Paul: [...] and for this reason there’s so much popularity and to respond simply with counter-demonstrations <u>without</u> any sense- as an example, for example, um, I told this already in history class, um, friends of mine who are in Dresden to study there, um, they sometimes go to these they just went a few times to these protests, Pegida. There are some at the <u>university</u> , professors, who actually <u>command</u> them to participate on counter-demonstrations. So <u>without reason</u> , although they don’t even <u>inform</u> themselves properly. And that is that’s just a nuisance.
27	Jörg: You’d say one has to take the program’s points seriously.
28	Paul: You <u>have to</u> take this seriously and you have to take these people seriously. And not simply say that they are all <u>Nazis</u> .

Here, Paul calls counter-demonstrations against ‘Pegida’ “senseless” (26, also see below). Later on, the student Kathrin is defending the right to demonstrate against ‘Pegida’ (“to send a signal”). She is placing herself in opposition to the statement of Paul. On the *foreground* of the discussion we can see a lively and controversial debate also in other subtopics. Controversy becomes a characteristic of the classroom discussion. Didactic thinkers mark differences between different students groups and the resultant consequences for the teacher’s acting. Sibylle Reinhardt (2015, p. 31f.) distinguishes four groups. In a *politically heterogeneous class controversy is present* and the teacher is in the role to simply chair this controversy. In a *politically polarised class controversy is present* but can become *too heated*. Therefore, the teacher is supposed to make sure that everyone is *respecting* the rules of a fair discussion. In a *political homogeneous class controversy is missing* and so it is up to the teacher to bring in missing positions. Finally, teachers have to become ‘political’ as well in a class that is *uninterested* und *not spontaneously* willing to discuss. Our discussion ‘Weekly Newsreel’ seems to belong to the first group of a political heterogeneous group (with the specificity that a student is doing the moderation role usually conducted by the teacher).

We want to argue that defining a class discussion marked by many, even multi-perspective statements as a controversy group can be too hasty. There is a need to look closer to a discussion and distinguish its *foreground* from its *background* of cultural based orientations. This distinguishing points back to the methodology of the sociology of knowledge, where there are fundamental differences between the foreground of the communication and its underlying milieu-based orientations (see above). Analysing a class discussion with the documentary method gives the possibility to expose this orientations. For example: With the above mentioned statement of Paul (26), he is not only disqualifying counter-demonstrations as senseless, he is also opening an orientation. By a narrative about his friend in Dresden, Paul opposes the lack of a substantive debate and the denial of an own judgment by state institutions. Instead, the agenda of ‘Pegida’ must be taken seriously and a dialogue on the related positions has to be enabled, as



he elaborates his previously raised argument together with Jörg (27, 28). The designation of protestors as “Nazis” is marked here as a strategy of ‘Pegida’-criticising people to prevent a debate. This orientation is proving to be collectively shared in the class, even though the subsequent discourse shows that a fundamental rejection of counter-demonstrations is not dominating after all. Instead, it is crucial *how* the individual articulates their own convictions (in this manner, controversy is downright demanded by this group of students).

Two other – in the end not rejected orientations – are enfolded in the classroom discussion, as we can see in this sequence:

45	Astrid: I think the point is not that we- want to get rid of the foreigners who are working, but rather of those who are somehow a bit of a burden to the state who come and think they don't have to do anything and get ((looking at Caro)) how did you call the money?
46	Caro: They get very little, I mean, they get a lot of money from <u>us</u> , I mean, yes, from us. They get their asylum money, they get- like Paul said before about this <u>asylum camps</u> where they are squeezed in, I don't believe that, that well I don't know about that, but they still get their housing benefits and they get <u>a lot</u> , they get apartments from us.
47	Astrid: And that's the point where I say <u>that's</u> not OK in my opinion. I think it's right when they integrate here and try to settle in here, in German, when they go to <u>work</u> or study, or so, in that sense I have no problem at all and I think neither do most followers of Pegida. It's simply about the many people who are a drain on our pocket and who simply don't care because they believe it will be fine somehow, that they are dealt with a little bit now.

First, we can see that the students participating in this discussion construct themselves as representatives of the community's majority. This community is to be distinguished from ‘the others’ in a rigid manner – from the foreigners and especially from the Muslims. This clear difference is not questioned by anyone, it is rather reproduced by a lot of statements. Second, a difference between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ foreigners is articulated and passed on. This distinction remains dichotomous. The acceptance of immigration in the community is thereby dependent on the economic benefits of immigrants and their willingness to integrate. Such economic benefits and integration are nevertheless subject to certain conditions, such as being able to work. It can be said that politics is hardly considered from the perspective of certain values or of the law, but rather focuses on economic distribution and performance. Astrid and Caro jointly conduct the distinction between good foreigners (the well-integrated ones who go to work or study) and the bad foreigners who “do nothing” and still “get money” (45-47). In a pictorial and dramatic language, these foreigners are designed as a burden from which one must be freed. On the other hand, the argument is also characterised by relativizing expressions (“I think”, “somehow”, “I don't know”, “a little bit”) that may indicate an uncertainty, a search for reasonable terms for the situation. What is also striking here is the emphasis on the community to which they feel they belong to and

that they separate from the foreigners. Foreigners remain vague and strange, but still have to be economically supported without “deserving it”.

Another student – almost shocked about the previous contributions – responds to the now emotionally-charged talk about the question of how to deal with certain groups of migrants by referring to “Islamisation” as the actual subject of the discussion. This change of subject can be read as an attempt of executing a ‘ritual conclusion’. The moderator, however, ignores this attempt and elaborates the concept of a control of immigration depending on the expected benefits (“to look specifically who we need”) and the willingness to adapt (“who integrates”). He brings the Canadian immigration system as a role model, which works like an authority argument. So far, he is completely in line with Astrid and Caro that have spoken before, but chooses nevertheless a different, less emotional language. He shifts the mode of the debate once again towards a stronger technical discussion and makes it compatible with the context of a school lesson. Finally, the discussion ends by request of the teacher.

Overall, the setting allows indeed a quite controversial debate as well as the articulation of different positions, but the arguments are taking place within a common framework, under common assumptions. Some of this shared orientations are ‘unproblematic’. The one ‘*Individuals should be able to form an independent judgement within a differentiated debate and without being patronized or being taken in by others*’ is undisputed in theory and practice of Civil Education as it is a part of the Beutelsbach Consensus (see 1). But some orientations lead to statements that could be considered as problematic. This includes for example the non-reflected use of vocabulary used by ‘Pegida’ to defame groups or individuals such as ‘press of lies’ [*Lügenpresse*], the missing sensibility to distinguish different groups of migrants, the construction of a major society (“we”) in opposite to the people that come to Germany or that have a Muslim background (“them”) and the purely economic perspective in assessing migration. Recent studies have shown for the German context that this orientation can be a condition for the enveloping of racism and xenophobia (Decker, Kiess, & Brähler, 2014). Applying the documentary method, we could reconstruct homogeneity on the level of implicit knowledge. So, the class can be defined as a *homogeneous* group referring to their cultural-/ milieu-based background.

In other words: Regarding to the levels *what* the students say and *how* they say it, we have to mark this group as *political heterogeneous* but *cultural homogeneous* and in this perspective *controversial on the first level* but *non-controversial on the second*. Problematic for the ‘Requirement of Controversy’, as the Beutelsbach Consensus defines it, is the missing of some perspectives in the classroom like the orientation of Muslim believers towards the topic or the critical questioning if ‘Pegida’ is a legitimate dialogue partner in a democracy at all regarding their human rights-critical announcement and their refuse to talk to people with a different point of

view. This now enlarged *gap of cultural-based positions in Civic Education* is very hard to fill by the teacher. This is a challenge of practice first: Is it even possible in everyday practice of teaching to *recognise* the missing perspectives, claims and orientations in discussions (where there is almost no time for intense interpretation of group discussions)? And it is a problem of the teacher's background secondly: The level focused by the documentary method is the level of implicit knowledge that is by definition hard to expatiate because it is deepening on experiences and not on communicative knowledge. Can a teacher, who is (very likely in our case) coming from the same milieu as the students, even bring in the missing perspectives, claims and orientations into the discussions?

4 Conclusion: The instructional setting as a framework for the emergence of controversy

In both sequences that we summarised here current and potentially controversial events are topics of politics lessons. In both lessons the Islamic-motivated terrorist attacks in Paris play a role, which are discussed – more or less explicitly – against the background of the Pegida-Movement that is particularly active in Saxony and that was very present in the media at this times. In both classes, this takes place in a special setting apart from the actual subject teaching. These two settings, however, differ significantly when we look to their impact to controversy.

In the first case, a quiz show is staged, which is the occasion for the reconstruction of current events. The teacher takes the central role as a moderator and comments on every statement without any exception. Students repeatedly bring in the consequences of the terrorist attacks on the discourses of their local environment. However, the teacher does not pick up these comments. Instead she tries to move on with the reconstruction of the events (already known by the students) on the one hand and demands conceptual differentiations on the other hand. Apart from a little slip of one of the students, here is no clear occasion to do so. Assuming that the teacher is aware of the controversy about the Islamophobic 'Pegida'-movement, this insistence on conceptual differentiation seems like a preventive educational action. In this respect, the teacher is having the same premise as the students: the terrorist attacks are particular important to the discourse on Islamophobia. However, she does not discuss the topic in respect of the content, but rather in a formal sense. As a consequence, the sequence becomes a conversation that is rather sluggish and with a low density of interaction, occasionally relaxed with small jokes. Perspectives of the students that are based on certain experiences from outside school appear, but seem to get domesticated through the on-going teaching pattern. A controversial negotiating of this issue is thus actively prevented.

In the second case, on the contrary, a student-led discussion is offered by the prestructured setting in which knowledge and convictions about political issues

generated outside school may be introduced and deployed. Here, students use the opportunity to address the current discourse on xenophobia and Islamophobia that is familiar to them through their outside-school environment. Due to the higher interactive density, we were able to reconstruct markedly collective orientations in this classroom, which refer to a homogeneous milieu of the students. Differences are continuously produced between the locals and the foreigners, whereby the perception of these foreigners is determined by their economic contribution and their cultural proximity to the locals. At the level of communicative knowledge, we can observe a controversial discussion in this sequence, however, the underlying assumptions are basically homogeneous. In regard to the Beutelsbach Consensus the teacher is supposed to irritate these collective assumptions and establish pluralism, based on the different experiences he should have got – at the latest in the following teacher-centered discussion.

The comparison of these two sequences shows, how much the instructional setting frames the handling of controversial issues in Civic Education lessons. That is, while in one case the teacher and her strict orientation towards the perpetuation of a didactic settings prevents the deployment of a controversial debate, there is a controversial debate in the other case, in which – however – certain fundamental perspectives do not emerge. In both settings we have reconstructed und reflected problems regarding controversy. This is by no means a critique to the two teachers observed. Everyday teaching and qualitative research are in conflict because there will always be more elements to desire in comparison to what actually happens in the classroom (Breidenstein, 2015, p. 18). Qualitative research has the chance to point out problems that cannot be seen in everyday practice of teaching with its restrictions in time and administrative guidelines. Using documentary interpretation, the *development of the topic* can be analysed. Furthermore, with this method a difference can be made between the *foreground* and the cultural-based *background* of a discussion in school and by this a more differentiated image of school classes is becoming available. The praxeological approach is highlighting the *routines* of teaching by shifting the didactic judgement at the beginning of analysing to a later point of interpretation. A more complex understanding of teaching situations is possible by the *concept of multidimensional orientations* (framed inside and outside school) that are affecting the talking and acting of the people involved. Regarding this, a distinction can be made between shared orientations among the students that result from joint *inside-school* experiences and from such orientations that are based in *outside-school* experiences. Shared outside-school orientations among the students of a class can be reflected as *collective* preconditions for teaching – a central didactic question for planning lessons.

Controversy in Civic Education is highly depending on the way a topic is presented in the classroom. Conventional forms of classroom communication like the 'Numbers of the Day' seem to be rather unfavourable for



controversy. Free student-led discussions without a teacher interfering give more space to enfold the student's perspectives and evolve into disagreement. But in free discussions other problems regarding Civic Education come up. In our example we reconstructed how the topic was skipping from one to another very fast. Without a teacher participating in and framing the discussion, there is a remarkable lack of control. Many subtopics do not get disputed, some misconceptions remain 'wrong' in content and some very critical statements remain uncommented. More framing methods in Civic Education that are not focussed on the teacher, but help to concentrate the discussion by narrowing the statements – like 'fishbowl discussions', 'panel discussions' [*Podiumsdiskussion*] or 'pro-contra-debates' (Grammes, 2014b, p. 271) – have to be considered as an alternative. More structure in the procedure may help to 'tame' a class-room discussion and to prevent it from being a place of repeating superficial knowledge. Another remaining question is the limit of controversy. In a democratic society the teacher needs to clarify, which statements in classrooms are legitimate and which statements cross the limits. At least, positions that are questioning the human rights of certain groups or individuals cannot stand on the same level like other positions (Pohl, 2015/ Sander, 2009, p. 247). A lot of 'Pegida'-statements that came into the classroom as seen above, are such 'borderline cases' for Civic Education. It is again up to the teacher to interfere and position himself in such cases – maybe to the detriment of controversy, but in defence for democracy.^{viii}

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Endnotes

ⁱ One point of contention is how far controversy in Civic Education classroom should go. Is it merely the mapping of positions that are already present in science and politics or is it more about ‘discovering’ marginalized and yet not drafted positions ([Eis, Lösch, Schröder, & Steffens, 2016](#)).

ⁱⁱ The scenes and interpretations are outcomes of a research project located at the University of Leipzig (see www.erzwiss.uni-leipzig.de/allgemeine-didaktik-und-schulpaedagogik-des-sekundarbereichs/personen?view=proforschungsprojekt&id=204)

ⁱⁱⁱ Examples are the National Front in France, the United Kingdom Independence Party, the Lega Nord in Italy, the Freedom Party of Austria, the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands or the Tea Party movement in the United States. With the Swiss People's Party, the True Finns, Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Polen right-wing populist parties are now also involved in European governments.

^{iv} The discussion were recorded in Saxony, the ‘heartland’ of the Pegida movement (see 1). Hence, we can assume that the corresponding right-wing populist positions reach into the mainstream of the society (Decker et al., 2014). At the same time, questions of how to deal with such positions are relevant for Civic Education in principle and anywhere.

^v It must be remembered that the observer is not in an absolute position. He or she is part of the social interaction. Hence, if we participate as researchers in class the students will also react towards us.

^{vi} The transcription is oriented towards the guidelines of TiQ (Bohnsack, 2014, p. 253ff.): ((laughing)) = scenic comments, very nice = stressed, (nice) = uncertainty in the transcription

^{vii} In the Federal Republic of Germany education policy is executed by the German Länder.

^{viii} The study was designed exploratory. Thus, we could only gain sporadic insights into the practice of teaching Civic Education in (East-) Germany. It would be eligible to realize more, also comparative studies focusing on controversy in Civic Education classrooms, depending on different didactic settings and in the context of different milieus, which are represented by the members of a class.