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Juggling and Joining Perspectives and Relationships —Multicultural Researchers in Multilocal Frames of Reference

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Key words: ethnography; El Salvador; marginalization; transformative paradigm; socio-economic context; research relationships; multilocality; multilingual research; reflexivity; positionality

Abstract: In the face of globalization, more and more researchers have multicultural and multilocal backgrounds. This creates both challenges and possibilities. When combined with conducting research in a context in which people have experienced high levels of social marginalization, the intricacy of the research process increases. Much time, care, and reflection are required to secure ethical conduct and the validity of the research, and to facilitate results that are relevant for all those involved. The transformative paradigm and postcolonial indigenous research methodologies are theoretical frameworks that can guide this process.

In this article, we describe some of our experiences while developing an ethnographic dissertation project in a marginalized urban school and its direct surroundings in El Salvador. It is written from two perspectives: Christine SCHMALENBACH writes from her perspective as a German researcher who grew up in Mexico and did research in El Salvador. Mechthild KIEGELMANN writes from the perspective of a mentor who oversaw the project from Germany and was pivotal in spurring and enriching processes of reflection. We share our experiences form the research process hoping that they will be helpful for researchers and advisors in similarly complex situations.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Challenges and Possibilities
   3.1 Gaining access
   3.2 Coming to terms with limitations to research
   3.3 Dealing with the complexity of social structures
4. Conclusion
   4.1 Resources for and in research relationships
   4.2 Language barriers
   4.3 Embracing misunderstandings
   4.4 Safety of all members of the research relationships
   4.5 Responsibilities and feelings of guilt
   4.6 Changes in relationships after data collection and potential conflicts of interest

Acknowledgments

References

Authors

Citation

1. Introduction

It has been stated that although "most ethnography has been conducted traditionally by independent researchers in individual sites [...], ethnographers really never work alone" (LeCOMPTE & SCHENSUL, 2010, p.227). The relationships in which ethnographers engage can be very complex. This complexity increases when the research takes place in contexts where people have experienced social marginalization (MERTENS, 2009). It becomes even more complicated when researchers have a multicultural and multilocal background, living and working in different settings, sometimes across countries or even across continents, and "span[ning] their life over separate worlds"[1] (BECK, 2007, p.131). At the same time, multilocality can provide additional resources and new perspectives for the research project. [1]

In this article, we elaborate on some of the processes involved in such a project. The ethnography described here is a dissertation project. The first draft of this article was written during the time of data analysis. At the time of its final submission, the dissertation had been defended and was being prepared for publication (SCHMALENBACH, 2018/in press). Rather than a detailed account of the entire ethnographic research process such as that of LAREAU (1996), this article is focused especially on those experiences that had to do with the different perspectives and relationships which influenced the research. We describe how the principles of the transformative paradigm (MERTENS, 2009) and the postcolonial indigenous research methodologies (CHILISA, 2012) informed our decisions, where we encountered difficulties while attempting to put them into practice, and how we dealt with them. During this process, we noticed that the neat division into "insider" and "outsider" can be blurred for researchers with multicultural and multilocal backgrounds, that relationships go beyond clearly definable roles in the research process, and that an overly simplistic depiction of the project and the results would not do it justice. Although we have not searched for generalizable solutions to all the challenges we encountered, we hope that the conclusions we draw from this experience can be helpful and encouraging for other multicultural and multilocal researchers and for their advisors who are not directly involved in the field but connected to the processes anyway. [2]

We are writing from different roles in the research process: Christine SCHMALENBACH is a German ethnographer with a Mexican background who spent 12 months doing research in El Salvador (11 months in 2013 and another month in 2014). Mechthild KIEGELMANN is a mentor of hers in Germany who, in the context of a Ph.D. colloquium with Christine SCHMALENBACH's main advisor Christoph DE OLIVEIRA KÄPPLER, oversaw and supported the process from the development of the project design through the completion of the analysis. She provided input on ethical, theoretical, and methodical aspects of research, and contributed to the reflection of relationships and processes. In order to keep the text readable and make our different perspectives on the topic visible, we have written our names at the beginning of the respective paragraphs. Those

1 All translations from Spanish and German texts into English are ours.

instances in which we have used the pronoun "we" mark the conclusions to which we arrived together after exchanging thoughts and ideas on a topic. With this procedure we not only engaged in a process akin to an apprenticeship, a metaphor used by WEGENER and TANGGAARD (2013) to describe supervisor and student co-writing, but also made use of central principles of cooperative learning such as positive interdependence and an interplay of individual and group accountability (JOHNSON & JOHNSON, 1999, pp.75-81). At the same time, this allows us to make more explicit some of the different positions and relationships that can influence a research project. The topics of subjectivity, positionality, and reflexivity have been discussed in *FQS* from its very beginnings (BREUER 2003; BREUER, MRUCK & ROTH, 2002; MRUCK & BREUER 2003; RUSSEL & KELLY, 2002). With this article we hope to contribute to this discussion. [3]

We start by describing the background of the study and how it developed (Section 2). Then we proceed to describe some of the challenges we faced in the process, the strategies that helped us encounter them, the possibilities we found, and the resources we could build on (Section 3). Finally, we connect the experiences from this project to similar experiences in projects by other doctoral students from our Ph.D. colloquium and draw conclusions for the preparation of qualitative researchers (Section 4). [4]

2. Background

Christine SCHMALENBACH: I received an invitation to work alongside co-workers from a local Christian nongovernmental organization (NGO) in El Salvador who were working with children and their families in high-risk settings in a metropolitan area. We had been in contact for several years and I had previously visited the project. They asked me to make use of my dissertation project to help them look for teaching methods that were appropriate for their context and provided me with the contact to a school in a high-risk neighborhood at the margins of San Salvador with which they had cooperated for years. [5]

To narrow down the breadth of the topic of my dissertation to a manageable size, after a review of literature I decided to focus on teaching methods that involve the cooperation of students with each other. These methods have been shown to have positive effects on both academic achievement and social-emotional development, especially for "vulnerable student populations" (GINSBURG-BLOCK, FANTUZZO & ROHRBECK, 2006, p.746). I received positive feedback on this idea from the NGO and the principal of the school and my advisors from the university in Germany. [6]

Much research has been done in cooperative learning (GILLIES, 2014; LÓPEZ ALACID, 2008; SHARAN, 1990; WEHR & VON CARLSBURG, 2013). However, some authors criticize that the cultural background of the students is often not sufficiently taken into account (BOEKAERTS & HIJZEN, 2007; PHUONG-MAI, TERLOUW, PILOT & ELLIOT, 2009; THANH, 2013). The topic had also risen in conversations with contacts in El Salvador (and did indeed rise again later).

Teachers felt that reforms and new methods were imported from other countries and imposed on them without considering the local situation. After conversations with my advisors and colleagues and drawing on recent literature on the transformative paradigm in research and post-colonial research methodologies (CHILISA, 2012; MERTENS, 2009), I decided to put an emphasis on culture and surrounding conditions and chose an ethnographic approach (for more information on the design of the project see SCHMALENBACH, 2013, 2018/in press). [7]

My multicultural background left its mark on my research from the first moment[2]: Although Germany is my country of origin, I grew up in Mexico, where my parents worked in a humanitarian project in a small village in the mountains. There I was first confronted with the topics of social inequity and solidarity in the interaction with my own peers. I noticed that even as we grew up together, we had a different amount of access to resources—a difference that seemed unfair to me and brought with it a feeling of social responsibility. Spanish is my second language, and after returning to Germany at age 16, I have kept in touch with friends in Mexico. In the meantime, I have become a special education teacher with a specialty in learning difficulties and emotional and behavioral difficulties. It meant a lot to me to be able to go back to Latin America for a dissertation project and to work with children who grew up under challenging circumstances. I consider this opportunity a chance to bridge the resources of my different locations and backgrounds for the benefit of both educational research in general and the students in El Salvador specifically. [8]

As a theoretical framework for the project, I chose the transformative paradigm according to MERTENS (2009). This term is used as an umbrella term for paradigmatic perspectives such as feminist theories, critical race theory, and participatory and emancipatory approaches (MERTENS 1999, p.5; 2009, pp.63-66). Following this paradigm, I sought to include voices that have not been considered sufficiently (MERTENS, 1999, p.5), and chose a perspective of human rights and resilience (MERTENS, 2009, pp.12-19). I also drew upon the work of CHILISA (2012) and other authors from the area of postcolonial indigenous research, which implied an emphasis on local knowledge and forms of knowledge production "so that colonial and imperial impositions are eliminated" (pp.38-39). Central to both paradigms are such values as "respect, connectivity, reciprocity, and a desire to see research contribute to a better future" (CRAM, CHILISA & MERTENS 2013, p.17). This paradigm emphasizes relationships as a basis for knowledge (CHILISA, 2012, pp.108-123). CHILISA (p.113) and WILSON (2008, pp.62-63) both explain how, from this perspective, the researcher becomes part of interconnected circles of relationships to which he or she is accountable. [9]

2 Our use of the term "multicultural" follows the definition of NGUYEN and BENET-MARTÍNEZ (2010) who use it as referring to "individuals and societies who position themselves between two (or more) cultures and incorporate this experience (i.e., values, knowledge, and feelings associated to each of these identities and their intersection) into their sense of self" (p.106)

While CHILISA criticizes ethnography as it was used in the context of colonialism, she suggests a cyclical approach to ethnography as it was developed by GONZÁLEZ (2000) as one of the guiding frameworks that "in the ontology of connectedness illustrate relationships, the cyclical nature of all experiences" (CHILISA, 2012, p.183). This approach parts from the idea that everything in life happens in cycles, just as the year with its seasons, and that everything is interdependent. Each phase of the cycle needs to be dealt with appropriately and carefully, rather than allowing preconceived designs to dictate the research process (GONZÁLEZ, 2000). Sensitivity, awareness, and preparedness of the researcher are crucial, and "all forms of experience must be respected and given attention due to their interdependent nature" (p.634). [10]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: After first hearing about Christine SCHMALENBACH's research interests, I encouraged her to consider connecting it to the research perspective proposed by MERTENS and her colleagues (MERTENS, CRAM & CHILISA, 2013). Since I had worked on research ethics and on conducting empirical research from a qualitative perspective in psychology, I was familiar with the discussion on postcolonial research in social sciences and suggested to connect the dissertation with this emancipatory approach (GAHLEITNER & KIEGELMANN, 2005; KIEGELMANN, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009, 2018). As I stress the importance of research relationships throughout the whole process of any research project, the formation of authentic and trust-enabling relationships with persons in the field seemed paramount to me. [11]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: Throughout the project I was confronted with different challenges that are somehow related to each other. Some of these challenges are a normal part of any ethnographic study, e.g., difficulties while gaining access (BREIDENSTEIN, HIRSCHAUER, KALTHOFF & NIESWALD, 2013, pp.50-70; GOBO, 2008, p.118), deciding what questions to ask (KROTZ, 2005, p.278), living between different cultures (BREIDENSTEIN et al., 2013, p.68), and dealing with the social and cultural complexity of the setting and its representation (KELLE, 2003). However, we have come to believe that as the complexity increases when working from a multicultural and multilocal background, so do the challenges and the possibilities. [12]

In the following part of the article we will elaborate on these challenges and our answers to them, hoping that our experiences can be of help for other researchers who plan to do research in similar contexts and with similar parameters. [13]

3. Challenges and Possibilities

3.1 Gaining access

Christine SCHMALENBACH: The neighborhood in which I worked is not very accessible to outsiders. Most neighborhoods in the area are dominated by different gangs, which makes life dangerous for the people living there, whether they are in a gang themselves or not (PEDRAZA FARIÑA, MILLER & CAVALLARO, 2010). What is more, there is a general perception of people living in *comunidades* [informal settlements] like the one in which I worked, as (potential) criminals which makes it difficult for them to find jobs. This criminalization also leads to police raids perceived as arbitrary by the members of the *comunidad*. There is a high level of mistrust, and outsiders are advised strongly against entering a *comunidad*—both by other outsiders and by the people who live there. My way of gaining access was through the NGO that had worked in the *comunidad* for years. Their dependability and respectful interaction with the people there had earned them the trust of the residents of the *comunidad*. They gave me the opportunity of working with them in their programs and getting to know their work on several shorter stays in El Salvador before the dissertation project started. When I responded to their invitation and returned for the ethnographic study, they introduced me as a researcher and as one of their volunteers and took me along on some of their house visits. Through them I also got to know the principal of the school inside the *comunidad* during one of my shorter visits. She welcomed me to form part of their team during my stay of one school year. Through my regular presence at the school and my interaction with teachers, students, and parents, I got to know many of them personally and learned to appreciate and respect them. [14]

Of course, this way of gaining access also gave me a predefined role as a researcher who was at the same time part of the NGO and the school. This role restricted my access to some data (see below). However, it also gave my stay an accepted justification and the possibility of getting to know different perspectives on my research topic: Cooperative learning at school. I had the impression that as a teacher for special education with a specialty in learning difficulties and socio-emotional difficulties and as a researcher in education, I was also appreciated as a resource by many of the participants. It was not possible to contact all the participants before defining the research objective as would have been the case in a truly participatory research project. I had to rely on the invitation of the NGO and the principal. However, I soon noticed that the aim of supporting learning processes was one that I shared with teachers, students, and parents alike. Both co-workers from the NGO and teachers told me they would be grateful for any idea that helped them facilitate the learning of the students. In conversations, parents expressed how important the academic success of their children is to them and how this is a regular cause for worry. I explained my project to them, saying that I wanted to do research on which teaching methods were helpful and how they could best be employed at a school like theirs. I told them it was something I had to do for my studies at the university but that I would also write a book on it with information and ideas for teachers in similar situations.

Of the families of around 120 students at the school, most parents and students welcomed me and the project wholeheartedly. Only six of the older students (7th to 9th grade) and one head of a family decided not to participate[3]. [15]

Using the method of participant observation and interviews, I focused mainly on grades 2-5. I also started teaching some classes in these grades mid-year in cooperation with their teachers, carefully introducing some cooperative methods that the children did not yet know. After some initial reluctance, the children became more and more motivated to work in groups and try out new ways of working. I told them that their view of these methods was very important, as they as students were at the center of the school and they were experts concerning whether these methods worked for them or whether they should be altered. They took their cooperation with each other and with me very seriously, giving feed-back on what they liked and did not like at the end of group work and discussing solutions in focus groups to problematic interactions at the end of the school year. [16]

My childhood and youth in Mexico and my knowledge of and contact with other pedagogical projects in similar contexts in Latin America were helpful for gaining access. I felt comfortable in the *comunidad* and with the people I met there, and conducting research in Spanish was no problem. However, I did have to be careful not to generalize from my former experiences just because of a feeling of familiarity. At the same time, I was aware that my German passport, my European looks and my affiliation with universities (both a Salvadoran and a German university) would keep me from fitting in entirely. [17]

Also, Salvadoran Spanish differs from my Mexican Spanish and I had to be careful concerning how to ask questions and how to understand the received answers. The co-workers of the NGO were very helpful in revising interview questions and explaining local expressions. When talking with some of the children, I came to admire their patience with me, as they sometimes explained their local slang expressions to me two or three times until I finally got the meaning. For example, now I know that "hallucinating" in this context can be an expression for "feeling superior to others," an attitude one of the students resented very much in some of his classmates. [18]

Another example of my gaining access to the specific constructs and cultural meanings of expressions involved the parents' expectations from teachers and students. With co-workers of the NGO, I had the opportunity to visit several families. After a few visits, I noticed that when the co-workers asked questions about the interaction between parents and children, the parents would often answer, among other things, "les aconsejo" (which could loosely be translated as "I give them advice"). After a while I started asking the parents what kind of advice they gave their children, and their answers helped me to better understand what hopes and educational priorities they had for their children. For example,

3 She decided that the children should not participate without remuneration. In the case of the other youths no concrete reason is known. However, it is possible that they perceived being asked questions as a threat.

many of the parents said they told their children not to spend much time on the street ("no andar en la calle" [to be/walk/wander/rummage around/be involved in the street], "no andar vagando" [not to loiter]), to avoid addictions ("vicio" [vice]) and to invest in their future by studying and becoming professionals. The latter was often combined with the parent's worry of not being able to provide for their children in the future and wanting them to be able to take care of themselves. Other values that were mentioned several times were obedience and respect for elders. [19]

Language was and still is an aspect of access in other ways, too. I conducted interviews in Spanish, wrote my field notes in German (my mother tongue), and wrote my dissertation in English. Initially, I presented quotes both in English and the original language. This was my way of seeking access to the international scientific community and of keeping the conversation open with my colleagues and advisors while at the same time honoring the mother tongue and the original expressions of participants. In the process of preparing the dissertation for publication, however, I noticed that including long quotations in both languages increased the volume of the book considerably and therefore created new complications. Also, the more original quotations I included, the more it became difficult to anonymize participants due to the idiosyncrasies of their expressions. Finally, I decided to publish the dissertation entirely in English. Following the premise of providing access to research results so that they can be used locally (GONZÁLES y GONZÁLES & LINCOLN, 2006), I accepted an invitation to an interview on the radio program of a Salvadoran teacher cooperative, offered in-service teacher training in cooperation with the Universidad Don Bosco in El Salvador, and am writing articles in Spanish for Latin American journals. Keeping the different audiences in mind while staying authentic in my research and my writing is challenging, but it is also worthwhile, especially because the results can be helpful both for the people who participated in this project as well as for their peers. [20]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: Due to different needs of research participants and of a scientific community, I always advise that researchers prepare different forms of reports on their research results. Christine SCHMALENBACH traveled back to the research site and presented her results in person. Others of my advisees have produced one to four-page summaries of those results that participants were explicitly interested in. In a study on early language development of children from disadvantaged families, we produced a short summary of those useful child caring practices that we observed within the "sample" of parent-child dyads. [21]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: Anonymization can be seen critically from the viewpoint of postcolonial indigenous research methodologies, as it deprives authors of oral texts (such as in interviews and conversations) of being acknowledged as originators of this knowledge (CHILISA, 2012, p.119), of being held accountable by their relationships, and of holding the researcher accountable (WILSON, 2008, p.63). Several of the participants in my project would have liked to be named, especially the professionals I worked with (teachers and co-workers of the NGO). However, due to the ethnographic nature

of the study in which all participants were connected to each other in some way or another, it was not possible to publish the names of some participants while maintaining the anonymity of those who preferred it. I decided to change the names of all participants and not to describe individual cases in detail and made this transparent to participants from the beginning. [22]

The process of gaining access with its challenges and possibilities made me even more aware of the different relationships and roles with which a researcher is engaged and how the tension this produces can be seen both as a difficulty and as an opportunity. At the same time, it made me come to the same conclusion to which others have come: That the position of insider or outsider is not as static as it would seem (EPPLEY, 2006; ST. LOUIS & CALABRESE BARTON, 2002), as both researchers and participants have "multi-layered identities" (RYAN, 2015, §1). [23]

3.2 Coming to terms with limitations to research

Christine SCHMALENBACH: Having a set role as a researcher in teaching and as a collaborator of a local Christian NGO provided me with access to valuable information about the learning processes of the children in the school and their surrounding conditions. However, it also restricted the access to information in other aspects: The everyday experiences of the children and their families were important to me, but for the sake of safety of all involved, I never asked questions about illegal activities. This would have involved questions about gangs and gang membership. Through legislation and policies in the context of *Plan Mano Dura* ["Operation Iron Fist," started in 2003], there has been a criminalization of "markers of gang membership [...]: tattoos, hand signs, 'illicit association', carrying a rock" (MOODIE, 2010, p.203)[4]. [24]

My avoidance of broaching gang-related issues, including tattoos, hand-signs, graffiti or gang-related scribblings, excluded me from a local form of storytelling that I would have otherwise pursued, following the ideals of postcolonial indigenous research (CHILISA, 2012). It also prevented me from studying in the field the idea of finding support and solidarity through membership in a gang (CRUZ & PORTILLO, 1998; PORTILLO, 2003). Yet, for reasons of research ethics and to avoid endangering the participants and myself, this exclusion was sensible and meaningful (KIEGELMANN, 2018). However, even without bringing up the topic of affiliations and concrete gang related activities, I could learn a lot about the effects of this social conflict on the people in the *comunidad*: the

4 The term *mano dura* (which could be loosely translated as "iron fist" or "strong arm") describes a set of policies introduced by president Francisco FLORES in 2003 which includes an anti-gang law ("Ley Antimaras") which was inspired by the zero-tolerance policy in North American cities such as New York and "aimed to facilitate the detention and prosecution of suspected gang members based on the newly classified felony of illicit association" (CRUZ, 2011, p.143). Since then, policies have changed several times and some preventive initiatives have been implemented to some extent (CRUZ, 2011; HUME, 2007). However, belonging to a gang is still illegal according to current legislation (the decree 458 of the legislative assembly from 2010 known as "ley de proscripción de maras, pandillas, agrupaciones, asociaciones y organizaciones de naturaleza criminal" [law on the prohibition of *maras*, gangs, groupings, associations and organizations of criminal nature]). Police raids happened every once in a while in the *comunidad* in which I did the research project.

consequences of living in a neighborhood with ties to a certain gang, the dangers of possible contact with members of another gang when leaving the neighborhood, and the experience of being criminalized and discriminated against for living in this neighborhood. These issues were brought up by participants from time to time alongside stories of struggling for financial survival and hopes for a better future for the next generation. [25]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: The more abstract information about challenges in this *comunidad* were sufficient data for addressing the research question about meaningful methods of school instructions and didactics. From a German scholar's distanced perspective on El Salvador, I suggested the inclusion of the existing information about structural challenges and the dangers of gang related violence in El Salvador into the research analysis. However, I did not advise Christine SCHMALENBACH to endanger any of the participants or herself by focusing part of the investigation on gang culture. Even though field data on the specific processes of how gang culture can affect cooperative learning approaches in a school could not be collected here, the focus of the research on a didactic question is very appropriate. The socio-political context of the lives of Salvadorans living in a *comunidad* in the current situation of gang conflicts is part of the analysis and can be included by drawing on additional sources aside from interviews, such as publications by other researchers who used a different approach in their work. Also, although it was not addressed directly, much information about pressures, challenges and opportunities that the specific aspects of the social context provide can be analyzed by using the existing data. In collaboration with my colleague Tamara BEAUBOEUF, I explicitly suggest reading for information about social context within interview data from conversations about non-political "private" issues (BEAUBOEUF & KIEGELMANN, 2000, 2006). For Christine SCHMALENBACH's dissertation, interviews within trustful research relationships in the field were focused on questions about teaching methods and experiences of teaching, learning, and cooperation in the school and in the close context of the school. The final analysis and interpretation of the data paid more attention to the socio-political context (SCHMALENBACH, 2018). [26]

In addition to the complex relationships of the researcher in the field, the project was also discussed in collaboration with colleagues in Germany, both in the Ph.D. colloquium and at conferences. On the one hand, the distanced perspective within the academic German setting helped to elicit questions that promoted a deeper understanding of the social reality and the data of the study. Not being involved in the everyday experiences in the field, I was able to take a more abstract view on the information of the project and support the process of data analysis with the more distanced understanding. Yet, on the other hand, as one of the "invisible" German colleagues in the background, I indirectly influenced the research relationships. Rather than focusing on her field experiences only, Christine SCHMALENBACH needed to explain to her colleagues overseas what she was experiencing and consider their feedback. This brought into the project even more perspectives that had to be considered. Also, it forced Christine SCHMALENBACH to make the processes in the field explicit and explain them to

outsiders even while she was still involved in them. Dealing with this challenge deepened her reflection. At the same time, we noticed that through the exchange with a researcher with multilocal social relations (HILTI, 2009; WEICHHART, 2009), the differentiation of data analysis and interpretation was enhanced even for those colleagues who are more loosely connected to the research project and who are located only in one social context, i.e., German academic institutions. For example, insights from Christine SCHMALENBACH's work and the intercultural perspective with a sensitivity for local phenomena could also enrich the interpretation of data from studies conducted by Ph.D. students in Germany. They, too, had to reflect on their own positions in different networks of social relationships inside and outside the field. [27]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: Through my cooperation with the Universidad Don Bosco, I also had (and have) a continuous dialogue with Salvadoran researchers from the areas of psychology and education. They provided me with information about Salvadoran research in these areas, and with special literature and contacts. They also gave me advice on what to consider when doing research in El Salvador, suggested new ideas, and discussed my approaches, data and preliminary findings with me. Discussing my research with colleagues from different countries and backgrounds broadened my horizon considerably. For example, I noticed how different terms are defined differently in diverse contexts although the translation seemed to be a literal one. At an international conference on cooperative learning[5], I met Clotilde LOMELI AGRUEL, a Mexican researcher in cooperative learning, who called my attention to everyday definitions of cooperation and collaboration in Mexico (e.g., cooperation as supporting someone or a cause with money) which could be very different from academic and pedagogical definitions (personal communication, 2013). I noticed that this partly applied to El Salvador, too. In another instance, Salvadoran colleagues explained to me that the word "method" in El Salvador is used as what would be called "didactic approach" in Germany (e.g., Salvadoran teachers spoke of the "constructivist method" or the "deductive method"). At the same time, being confronted with different realities in different contexts made me more sensitive to the details of what I was encountering in the field. For instance, from colleagues from Great Britain I learned how a history of financial and productive cooperatives and the explicit reflection on it can enhance the national understanding of cooperative learning, something I had not known from Germany. This made me even more aware of the cooperatives in El Salvador which I had already unexpectedly encountered as a topic in interviews with the teachers. [28]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: The example of emic concepts for "cooperation" within the local field, within Salvadoran academic discourse, and within the Western academic discourse, illustrates the complexity of the multilocal positioning of this research. It also shows how this complexity provides the chance for richer data analysis, i.e., a benefit from the point of view of research methodology. [29]

5 International Association for the Study of Cooperation in Education (IASCE) conference 2013

Christine SCHMALENBACH: Having chosen the transformative paradigm to frame the project, I was determined to assume a perspective of strengths and resources instead of focusing on deficits. However, this proved to be a challenge, too. One aspect of this challenge was that I had been introduced as a special education teacher with a specialty in learning difficulties and socio-emotional difficulties. I often had the impression that both teachers and parents expected me to diagnose deficits in the children and "fix them" (an expectation posed to special education teachers that I am confronted with in many settings in Germany, too). Another aspect was the research interest with which I had come. It had developed out of a need I had been presented with: Finding methods that help improve learning processes. Teachers and parents often told me about the problems they saw in the children, the reasons they suspected for the problems, and the resources they lacked to deal with these difficulties. At the International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI) in 2013 I had the opportunity of speaking with Donna MERTENS, the social scientist who coined the term "transformative paradigm" (2009), about this struggle I was having. She encouraged me to look for strengths by focusing on the survival strategies that participants were using to get through their daily lives (personal communication, 2013). As a special education teacher specialized in behavior problems, I was used to sometimes reframing "problem behavior" of pupils as coping strategies that had become helpful to those young people when facing neglect, abuse, and social discriminations. After the conversation with Donna, I started applying this strategy more consciously to the interviews and conversations I had in the field. [30]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: Christine SCHMALENBACH's study benefited from the relationships with researchers outside of the field work, such as Donna MERTENS. From the perspective of an advisor located in Germany, but connected to colleagues like Donna, I could introduce Christine SCHMALENBACH to a wider network of like-minded members of a wider research community. These networks play a key role in her study. Indirectly, the relationships with other researchers outside the field, as well as Christine SCHMALENBACH's use of conceptual findings about research methodology in the available literature, shaped the specific research relationships in which she engaged at the location of data collection in the field (cf. KIEGELMANN, 2003). [31]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: As I started working side by side with some of the teachers in the field and we tried out new cooperative methods with the students, they (re)discovered strengths in the children that could be used in teaching and learning processes. One teacher who had been rather resigned at the beginning of the project gave this answer when, in our last interview, I asked her what she would advise to teachers thinking about introducing cooperative learning methods in their classrooms:

> "First, you must trust the student. You really never finish discovering the abilities, capacities, aptitudes of the children [...] I am telling you I had my doubts that this method would work because I knew them as lazy, irresponsible, playful, many different negative aspects, but I didn't have the faith in them to say: 'Yes, they will be able to do it, let's give them the opportunity.' I believe you had more faith than I did.

> [...] So, this is what I would recommend to any teacher, especially us teachers working with this type of children, and coming upon an infinity of problems [...] perhaps it is to them [the children] that we should especially give access to something new. So, you must trust the students and give them the opportunity. That is my recommendation" (Juliana[6], October 2013). [32]

Although her frustration with the general situation and with the students is still perceivable in this interview, she had also opened up to new perspectives and to a new focus in her work. In this case, the relationship as colleagues who face new experiences together was important. [33]

3.3 Dealing with the complexity of social structures

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: In the following section, we further elaborate on the general methodological issue of attention to socio-economic contexts that are important for the specific social processes which are investigated in a small scale qualitative research project like the one described. We are aware that the educational pathways of children in this specific context cannot simply be understood or even supported only by applying a new didactic approach within their classrooms. The wider socio-economic context needed to be included into the analysis. [34]

First, we draw attention to attempts at capturing social context in a more quantitative way. Then, we explore the challenge in more depth by shedding light on the question of how the specific socio-economic context can affect the research relationships and research results. [35]

When conducting research in the field of educational opportunities and socio-economic disadvantages, researchers often rely on the Winkler-Index (WINKLER & STOLZENBERG, 1999), i.e., quantitative measures of educational level, occupational prestige, and income. For example, WEINERT and EBERT (2013) used measures for highest existing occupational level in a family in combination with the educational level of the mother (who is assumed to be the main caregiver for children). Another example of an attempt at understanding the environment in which educational success or failure occurs is counting the number of books available in the household where children grow up (BOS, SCHWIPPERT & STUBBE, 2007). Yet, the everyday experiences of children in educational settings within their specific social contexts are often more complex than indicated by certificates or number of years in schools, financial budget, and quantity of print media. [36]

However, qualitative approaches do not provide an easy solution to the problem either. BOURDIEU's (1983) notion of different forms of capital provides ideas of what resources and restrictions to access can look like. Nevertheless, when doing research in a specific field, a researcher is confronted with a complexity of

6 The names of all participants have been changed. The interviews were conducted in Spanish. The quotes have been translated by Christine SCHMALENBACH.

relationships and experiences of participants that become comprehensible only slowly and in fragments. [37]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: Following the premise of the transformative paradigm to include "voices [that have been] absent, misrepresented or marginalized" (MERTENS, 1999, p.5) was a challenge connected to the issue of attention to the wider socio-political contexts. I wondered whose voices might apply in the context of my study. My first instinct was to see the students as victims of structural violence in a system that makes access to education difficult for them even when the school is in their neighborhood. Or was the *comunidad* as a whole affected, with its culture and its coping strategies differing from the mainstream culture in El Salvador and the accepted norms in Salvadoran society, the criminalization they are exposed to and the difficulties that brings for finding jobs and other perspectives outside the *comunidad*? Regardless, even inside this neighborhood there were differences that made drawing clear lines difficult. [38]

For example, the *comunidad* is divided by its inhabitants into different areas according to the perceived wealth/ poverty of the people who live there. Also, there are differences in the available living area per family, the material their house is made of, the possession of legal papers for the property on which their house lies and varying levels of struggle to make enough money depending on access to jobs (formal, informal or illegal), the availability of relatives, helpful neighbors, or other acquaintances. Furthermore, in this social context, the economic situation of a family is determined by relatives living in the USA or Canada and their willingness to send money back to their family in El Salvador. Another aspect relevant to the socio-economic status of a family is whether a parent can count on his or her partner to share the burden of raising children and providing for their needs, or whether one person must carry this load single-handedly. In the latter case, the role of relatives and neighbors becomes even more important. The absence of reliable adults and the need of many parents to accept whichever job they can get, can lead to children having to assume tasks that in other circumstances would fall under the responsibility of grown-ups. For example, when one parent is in jail or has left the family and the other works full time, the oldest sibling in the house might have to take care of the household and be responsible for smaller siblings and their education, even when he or she is barely a teenager or even younger. Even within this situation there are differences as to how much emotional and practical support children receive, either because of the availability of their parents from a distance (e.g., parents in the USA or in jail who make phone calls as regularly as possible) or by neighbors or relatives. The presence of the NGO with its medical and educational services is perceived as a resource by many inhabitants of the *comunidad,* as they are aware that other *comunidades* do not have it. In this way, the NGO with its Christian values and its resources that caused this *comunidad* to be different from similar neighborhoods was an additional factor in the social context of my research. My availability to provide schooling services and support in every day teaching changed the resources of this *comunidad* as well, although mostly for a limited time. [39]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: The presence of a local Christian NGO in this field makes the notion of what is an indigenous perspective become salient: The help of this NGO was key for gaining access to the field. Without the safety and contacts offered by this NGO, I might have rejected supervising a dissertation project in which the researcher endangers herself too much. Yet, by entering the field as a representative of this NGO, Christine SCHMALENBACH participated in relationships that could be interpreted as imposing Western Christian values on the people in the field. In this line of argumentation, a "real" indigenous perspective could be constructed as absent within this field setting. Yet, without this research, the NGO still would be present in the field and thus shape the experiences of the inhabitants there. Rather than assuming the existence of perceived "real perspectives" in such a line of argumentation, I followed MAXWELL's (2012) realist approach to qualitative research and engaged in supporting this dissertation project. [40]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: Since the focus of my study was not on individual cases or on connections between socio-economic status and other aspects of life, but rather on local forms of interaction in the context of the school and its surroundings, I could forgo operationalizing and measuring the exact social status of individuals and their families. Instead, I described the variety of aspects that influenced the relationships and well-being of participants from their perspective, and the different motives people in this context had for being solidary, working together, helping each other on the one hand, or choosing other, conflicting, forms of interaction (such as competition, aggression, exclusion, and distancing themselves) on the other hand (SCHMALENBACH, 2018). [41]

It has been criticized in different contexts that professionals working with children, for example in the areas of education and mental health, have a particular image of how children and youth should be and behave (CUSSIÁNOVICH, 1997; GÖTZ, 2006; HILLER, 1989, HILLER & JAUCH, 2005; UNGAR, 2004), which leads to a "middle-class colonization of the living environment of children and youth growing up under conditions at the margins of society" (BAUR, MACK & SCHRÖDER, 2006, p.9). UNGAR elaborates:

> "Developmental psychopathologists and criminologists imply in their work that children all grow towards something which, as Nancy Lesko (2001) discusses in her review of adolescents in sociohistorical contexts, explicitly defines positive outcomes in a particular model of functioning. Typically, the model fits best with the way white men create orderly homogeneous communities that reify definitions of what normal is supposed to be" (2004, p.12). [42]

A similar tendency can be observed in El Salvador where teachers have strong convictions about how normal behavior must look and how values are supposed to be lived out. Many of the children and the grown-ups in their surroundings fall short of this standard. One teacher said: "So these are patterns that the children are seeing as normal. Something that is not normal in our society, right?" (Leonardo, March 2013). [43]

However, it would be a very constricted view to see teachers solely as representatives of main-stream society with its value system and colonizers of the living environment of marginalized children and to exclude teachers of the category of "absent, mis-represented or marginalized" voices (MERTENS 1999, p.5). The conflict between the local culture and the expectations of mainstream society was broached as an issue during the interviews and during conversations with the teachers struggling to find the right position between the different expectations they had to deal with and with their own expectations as to how successful teaching had to look. They described the limits they saw to their work: Not only was the social context with its culture a challenge but also the lack of resources in materials, time and space, and a lack of support they perceived from many parents. They hinted at the dangers they had to confront while working at this school and others in similar contexts and the necessity of carefully deciding how to behave and what to say, the longing to simply survive and be able to take care of their own families. Some of them described a feeling of being left alone in their work. For example, one teacher described his work as "struggling against the tide" while another mentioned the feeling of being on "an island with lots of sharks around us." [44]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: This example illustrates that a definition of what and who "mainstream" society and "colonizer" is, is complex. Christine SCHMALENBACH, as a researcher rooted both in European society and in a segment of Latin American culture, is both explicitly and strongly distanced from colonizing politics, and yet benefits from resources and privileges of access to a European university system that has benefited from the history of colonization. In addition, both of our European-US university connections provide access to voice and being heard in the international community—access that the participants in the field lack. [45]

The question of access to resources by relatively privileged activists has been discussed by WELCH (2000 [1989]) in her concept of an ethic of risk. She elaborates that there is a power differential between on the one hand those activists in the field who struggle for social justice in their home community and who do not have the choice to leave and on the other hand those activists or researchers who have a choice about continuing to struggle for social justice or giving up in the face of failures or of mistakes that resulted in hurting others. In other words, as researchers in the field, we do have the choice "to go home"—the teachers and children Christine SCHMALENBACH worked with for a year were already home and most are most likely still there, continuing to teach, learn, and cooperate in education and social relationships in this particular school. [46]

By the time this article was written, Christine SCHMALENBACH had left the home of the research participants and continued her work outside of the role of a teacher involved in the everyday activities of the school where she conducted her field work. The focus of her work had changed. She was now in the process of making sense of her field work. By analyzing her data, she strove to develop a theory that would be supportive not only of the children and teachers she met at

the school in the *comunidad* in which she conducted her research, but also for a more generalized population of students and teachers. [47]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: Another aspect became clear in the interviews with the teachers: their strong sense of responsibility for their students, for being there for them, listening to them, and trying to give them the help and support they needed:

> "The part that I feel that the school has to give most of all, not the school, the teachers, is the part of paying attention, the interest you have to invest, knowing how to listen to them, understanding them, knowing how to orient them, in what moment you should do it" (Juliana, April 2013).
>
> "[...] but most of them somehow find trust in you and see that perhaps there is a way you can help them with their problems" (Jaime, April 2013). [48]

This sense of responsibility often went beyond their concrete students to become a strongly desired positive change in society:

> "When I am older they will be the youth and then I want/ I would like to live in a better society, not worse than what we have now. So perhaps this can help them change, right? Being an entity of change, in a positive way, in society" (Leonardo, April 2013). [49]

Just as with the parents and children, teachers were not a homogeneous group but instead differed from each other to a certain degree in their experiences and opinions. During the process of collecting and analyzing the data, I concluded that children, parents, and teachers were all part of a complex system in which they strove to survive (and sometimes thrive) the best they could in different ways. Most of them felt responsible not only for themselves but also for others, some followed strong ideals and aspirations, developing new ideas and looking for possibilities; some were resigned to their situation, and trying to make it through somehow. During my time at the school and in the *comunidad*, I saw ambivalences and inner conflicts, and yet this system survived. Obviously, the voices of children, parents, and teachers had to be included as equally as possible to gain a fuller understanding of this complex social setting. [50]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: Researchers, regardless of affiliation to qualitative or quantitative research methods, face the challenge of developing theories that are simple enough to be communicated and understood by others, and yet include the complexity of the social reality with all its nuanced relationships and parts. [51]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: There are no easy answers for researchers when they deal with this complexity, neither while collecting data nor while analyzing them, interpreting them, or writing up the results. These are some of the approaches I chose while in the field: [52]

I tried to involve as many members of the field as possible, respecting the challenges they had to deal with and the strategies they used, becoming an additional protagonist in the field. While I sometimes communicated with them

separately (e.g., in individual interviews and conversations), I also looked for intersections in which the different groups of participants had the space to share their points of view with others. The feedback and opinions of the students (especially of Grades 2 to 5) in the end played a much more central role in the research than I had anticipated at the beginning. They seemed to take their role as collaborators within the school setting as well as within the research project very seriously and gave me feedback on teaching methods, perceived difficulties, and possible solutions. They did this during class, in conversations during recess, in individual interviews, and during focus group interviews. In a focus group interview, several students expressed how important it was for them to be asked for their opinions when it came to small group learning:

> Edgar: "Only now that you have come, we have seen opinions about: 'What did you like about the group, what didn't you like?' And before that, you can go and ask in every, every classroom and no one, no teacher does that. 'What did you like about your group?'—nothing. Whether you worked well, none of that."
>
> Elisabet: "Since they put us in groups and that was it."
>
> [...]
>
> Edgar: "And if you turned out well, you turned out well, and if you turned out badly, that's your problem" (Focus group, October 2013). [53]

Teachers shared their opinions in interviews, in conversations, and in participatory teacher training sessions on cooperative learning where we discussed the usefulness and transferability of certain methods. I worked more closely with two teachers who taught in Grades 2 to 5 and we tried out methods together, interchanging ideas beforehand and reflecting on the results afterwards. It was team teaching in the messiness of everyday school life. As such, it gave me interesting new input from teachers and students and it strengthened my relationship with the teachers as we were working together, confronting challenges and limits, looking for solutions, and trying out new options together. Juliana, the teacher quoted above, described her conclusions from this process with these words:

> "[...] Somehow it changed their cassette, their CD [...] and they saw another form of working [...] I had my doubts at the beginning [...] I didn't believe it would work, do you remember? For the same reason, because of the children. In practice, I really fell on my face and saw that it does work. So, I say: If it works with this type of children, with this type of students, who live in a *comunidad* like this one, [...] how should it not work in other places? So, I'm telling you: I am going to bag these experiences and take them with me and they will be very helpful for me" (Juliana, November 2013). [54]

I was invited by the principal to carry out three meetings with parents. I tried to conduct them in the most participatory way possible. For instance, I asked parents to share their experiences and ideas on teaching cooperation to children. At one point, it was possible to briefly bring parents and some teachers and students together to talk about the different forms of support they hoped to receive from each other and the support they were prepared to give each other. [55]

This process required a gradual growth of trust and appreciation for each other. Some colleagues outside the field expressed doubts about whether I really needed an entire school year with two to three days a week at the same school. Looking back, I noticed that many of the changes that happened in the classrooms and in the relationships with students, teachers, and parents took place in the last third of my stay, i.e., when I felt that I had finally gained enough trust and had developed enough understanding of the culture and of the local situation. The interaction among the children started to change, they showed more interest in class, and their grades improved as the teachers started perceiving and considering capacities they had not been able to show earlier. Several of the parents expressed their gratitude for this outcome. I am convinced that it would not have been possible in less time and with a more distanced research relationship. [56]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: In addition to engaging in research relationships that are based on trust that develops only over time, the benefit of this research approach is that Christine SCHMALENBACH was able to collect and analyze data on a social process of applying a collaborative teaching approach, rather than just collecting data through punctual measures. MAXWELL (2012) points out the difference between the focus on process and on variables in social research. [57]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: The year I spent in this school in El Salvador gave me an idea of what is possible when research draws on the assumptions of the transformative paradigm and postcolonial indigenous research methodologies. I am still in contact with the school and with different people from its surroundings and I have visited them again since. I myself have learned a lot during the process. I have become even more aware of the need of respecting local and individual survival strategies—regardless of how they are seen by other participants and whether I myself see them as helpful or not at first sight. At the same time, I have noticed that it is possible to carefully bring novel ideas to the field that facilitate the development of new (and perhaps additional) survival strategies. [58]

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: Seen from the distanced perspective in Germany, I notice that Christine SCHMALENBACH could listen and engage carefully in respectful research relationships. This way, she could conduct research based on data that appear as valid on a particular question about schools. By taking an empowering stance towards all members in the field she met, she also influenced these members by making their voices heard. As a psychologist, the process of empowering persons by listening and engaging in trustworthy and respectful relationships within research projects is familiar to me (KIEGELMANN, 2009). [59]

Christine SCHMALENBACH: During the analysis, interpretation, and writing up of the results, I had to confront the challenge of reducing the encountered complexity to make it comprehensible for myself and others, while at the same time giving it its due appreciation. In the end, what I can present are pieces of a puzzle with no claim to completeness (SCHMALENBACH, 2018). The metaphor of a crystal, coined for qualitative research by RICHARDSON and ST. PIERRE

(2005) and picked up by MERTENS, seems much more accurate. According to MERTENS, this metaphor "conveys the central point that knowledge is multifaceted [...] Triangulation suggests limits, whereas a crystal is a prism that grows, changes, and alters" (2009, p.62). Also, the cyclical approach to ethnography by GONZÁLEZ proves helpful here:

> "What results is a research process and outcome that is intentionally and necessarily both personally and academically tentative and dynamic. Like the circular progress of a spiral, the researcher and theories develop cumulatively and rhythmically, with no claims of absolute knowledge. Rather the results are reported with *tentative certainty* ..." (2000, p.628). [60]

Both metaphors (the crystal and the spiral) confront me with the limits and the possibilities of the phases of analysis, interpretation, and writing up. On the one hand, "the very act of recording in writing the essence of culture changes it to something it is not" and "freezes it" (p.645), on the other hand, there is not a definite end point to the research. [61]

4. Conclusion

Mechthild KIEGELMANN: When looking back at the years of working with Christine SCHMALENBACH, I see several aspects of this working relationship which are relevant in my work with other doctoral candidates as well. [62]

4.1 Resources for and in research relationships

While developing a research question is crucial in designing a study, I encourage researchers to invest time and energy into building research relationships. I advise doctoral candidates who are inspired by intrinsic motivation for their research. When entering research relationships, the researchers benefit from reflecting on the privileges that go along with working towards a doctoral degree, e.g., access to time and academic support for investigating questions that they personally really care about. Some of the candidates had to overcome hardships in order to get to this phase in their carrier. Many research participants allow the researchers close insights to experiences and life conditions that are less free and safe, such as the pupils, teachers and parents in the dissertation of Christine SCHMALENBACH (2018). Respectful negotiation of new research relationships includes facing up to inequality and taking an active stand of responsibility against exploitation. [63]

4.2 Language barriers

Along with acknowledging multilocal frames of reference that include the university setting and relationships with research participants, there often comes a realization that learning "the language" of the participants is part of the work. When someone collects data in a language that is new for her or him, insights into the culture around the new language are easily noticed, e.g., when learning about Deaf cultures and Sign languages in the course of research on multimodal language development (KWON, VALLOTTON, KIEGELMANN & WILHELM, 2017/in press; KIEGELMANN, 2009). Yet, even when the different social contexts are located within the same dominant language, new idioms or idiosyncratic use of phrases can be encountered, e.g., the specific use of Spanish that Christine SCHMALENBACH got to know or when adults collect data in the context of youth culture (see e.g. CHRISTL, MORGENTHALER & KÄPPLER, 2012). [64]

4.3 Embracing misunderstandings

Qualitative researchers who invest in respectful research relationships can design studies in which participants "are asked to shape the research process itself instead of just answering questions or being observed" (VON LAUTZ, 2012, p.21). In this sense, I invite doctoral candidates to embrace participants' statements and invest especially in those pieces of information that the researcher at first does not understand. Because challenging theoretical assumptions can lead to new insights, serious listening can inspire researchers to shift away from an original research focus. VON LAUTZ (2012), for example, successfully learned to understand some of the interests and needs of her research participants and then focused her research anew in order to understand research participants who did not have much experiences of successful lobbying, for example women living in care facilities for persons with intellectual disabilities. [65]

4.4 Safety of all members of the research relationships

Christine SCHMALENBACH's work definitely was conducted within the most dangerous context that I have encountered as an advisor so far. I am impressed by her courage and commitment to conduct research on cooperative learning and school structures in the midst of life threatening violence. When designing the study and also during the entire process of her work, she made thoughtful decisions about research ethics, including protection of participants, but also about self-protection. While avoidance of harm of participants is standard in ethical research design, in my work I often need to emphasize a need for avoidance of danger for the researcher herself (KIEGELMANN, 2018). Christine SCHMALENBACH chose the focus of her research questions carefully, focusing on reducing danger when making a commitment to the specific issues to be studied. It is the context of protection of all members of research relationships where I often stress humility and encourage that candidates acknowledge the limitations to the scope of a dissertation project. I keep repeating that in my opinion the acts of defining the specific focus of a research project and formulating the research questions involves mourning about all the other work

that cannot be done as well (in German "Themenfindung ist Trauerarbeit" ["topic finding is grief work"]). While limiting the scope of a research project due to limited resources and time, doctoral candidates I advise often also cope with feelings of sadness about a much smaller social benefit of their work that they would like to pursue. Besides safety reasons for all involved in the research relationships, including those affected by a later publication of practical applications of the research results, I learned from ethicists another important reason for humility: a culturally shared sense of individual "almightiness" that has been passed on in dominant cultures of the global north. The Black womanist CANNON (2006) has pointed out for a long time the danger of overestimating a presumed individual potential for causing social change alone. Socially committed research such as Christine SCHMALENBACH's work with emancipatory approaches (MERTENS, 2009) and postcolonial indigenous research (CHILISA, 2012) joins larger social movements into her multilocal frames of reference and relationships. The complexities of social change are something that MÜLLER is currently experiencing in the context of her doctoral thesis in Germany within her research relationships with former volunteers in economic development projects. Retrospective meaning making in the position of safety in Germany touches wider social structures and global economic relationships and social movements (personal communication, 2017). Juggling and joining perspectives and relationships within several geographic, historical, and social locations is salient in MÜLLER's research and Christine SCHMALENBACH's experiences alike. Both are coping with the challenges of embeddedness in a complex web of social locations and their insights enrich other researchers in the group that I advise. In turn, my encouragement of collaborative learning within this group benefits from Christine SCHMALENBACH's expertise on the psychology of collaborative learning as well. [66]

4.5 Responsibilities and feelings of guilt

Furthermore, attention to the complexities of social movements involves once again the acknowledgment of membership of the privileged group of academics with access to resources for conducting a dissertation research. Critical reflection of privileges and interwoven membership within several and different social groups is also relevant in the current psychological research that ROSARI conducts for the doctoral thesis she is currently working on: Already during her graduate studies she experienced the usefulness of her knowledge about clinical psychology when she volunteered in her native Indonesia in supporting traumatized children after a large earthquake in the university town. Currently, she experiences limitations to the possibility of providing services for a large number of traumatized children when conducting research on achievement motivation of traumatized refugees who attend schools in Germany. As in other relationships of psychologists with traumatized persons, she knows about the phenomenon of "survivor's guilt," and yet is able to overcome the temptations of stifling and looking away (personal communication, 2017; see KIEGELMANN, 2007 on research relationships within trauma psychology). Christine SCHMALENBACH engaged in emancipatory research methodologies. ROSARI juggles even more complex multilocal frames of reference, including joining her

research participants in using German as a foreign language and negotiating academic research and clinical work. [67]

4.6 Changes in relationships after data collection and potential conflicts of interest

Data analysis and especially discussions of research results within the context of relevant scientific literature sometimes evokes further feelings of sadness in researchers, sometimes even a sense of betrayal of "informants" with whom the researcher established trustful relationships. I advise doctoral candidates to spend serious energy in avoiding conflicts of interests when entering research relationships. When Christine SCHMALENBACH searched for participants for this study, she carefully spent a lot of energy in gaining trust of gatekeepers and articulation of both her own interests in this endeavor as well as her expectations from potential participants. She did not offer to solve the problems of the families she met nor promised services to children and teachers which she could not provide. Clearly stating the interest in engaging in a wider academic discourse on educational psychology at the beginning of her field research later helped her when leaving for Germany to work on final data analysis and writing up the research report. Her current distance to the interviewees was clearly announced and the relationships were not cut off, but changed towards less frequent and more distant contact. Similarly, in his dissertation research, KNORR (2012) did not promise better schooling conditions for the young people with an autism spectrum disorder when engaging with them in research relationships and also working with their parents and teachers. When he discussed his research findings within the context of the relevant literature, he later was able to point out his findings of a tendency in the interviewed parents to overestimate school problems while at the same time their children had a tendency to evaluate their schooling experiences as just fine. By engaging in a discussion of his findings with previous research on special education, he pointed out his findings on differences in understanding of schooling conditions in parents, teachers and pupils without getting involved in specific family conflicts between parents and their adolescent children about achievement motivation and school conditions. When doctoral candidates hesitate to distance themselves from the intimacy in research relationships during the phase of data collection, I point to the special nature of research relationships that are built on the interest of data collection of a dissertation project and thus are different from private personal relationships. [68]

Christine SCHMALENBACH and Mechthild KIEGELMANN: This is one of many qualitative research projects conducted in Latin America. Every possibility of exchanging experiences and ideas with other researchers in this area has been very valuable for us (for example at the ICQI special interest group "A day in Spanish and Portuguese" or at other conferences and colloquia). We conclude that qualitative research is not an easy process, much less when researching topics like inequity and exclusion/inclusion from a position of being embedded in multiple socio-political and geographic locations. [69]

Some of the challenges we have encountered are: difficulties in access to the participants due to the precarious situation they live in; juggling the different languages (or variations of a language) and perspectives involved, both in the field and in the area of academia; coming to terms with limits of research when certain topics are taboo for a role a researcher has taken and imply danger for participants; finding a viewpoint of strengths and resilience when confronted by participants with expectations focused on deficits; dealing with the complexity of social structures in the field while at the same time trying to take a stance consistent with the transformative paradigm; being rooted simultaneously in multiple locations and societies; and trying to break down this complexity into comprehensible representations without oversimplifying it. [70]

Being aware of these challenges has helped us to deal with them, sometimes by finding a solution for a difficulty, sometimes by accepting the limits. However, we have also noticed that there is another side of the coin and that some challenging situations bring with them new opportunities: Being situated in different contexts as a researcher facilitates access to more resources—for the researcher, the project, and participants. It can enrich the project through the availability of more perspectives and understandings. The different languages involved can make the results applicable to a much wider audience. [71]

However, finding solutions to challenges or even new possibilities is not something that happens automatically. This project has shown us once again how important respectful and dependable relationships are. They are especially important when working in contexts where people have had existentially threatening experiences of social marginalization. This includes finding a core research question that is relevant for participants and also sharing available knowledge and resources with them. None of it would have been possible without previous contact with gatekeepers and results would have been much shallower if less time, patience, and trust had been invested in building relationships and getting to know the context and local culture. Speaking the language of the country and being sensitive to local nuances was crucial as well. Altogether, we find that accepting the challenges and working with them or around them was worthwhile. [72]

Acknowledgments

In this article, we describe a dissertation project developed at the Faculty of Rehabilitation Sciences of the TU Dortmund University in Germany, with Prof. Dr. Christoph DE OLIVEIRA KÄPPLER (TU Dortmund University) and Assistant Prof. Dr. Nelson PORTILLO (Boston College, Lynch School of Education) as advisers. The text of this article was proofread by William STRADER.

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