Exploring teaching and learning about the Corona crisis in social studies webinars
A case study

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- Learn how video conferencing affects learning and teaching in social studies lessons in times of physical distancing.
- Explore how teachers and students organize learning processes in webinars.
- A case study that catches three key observations for blended learning in virtual social studies classrooms.

Purpose: Due to the Corona pandemic in 2020 schools needed to handle a challenging situation: They needed to find solutions to the question how lessons can proceed in times of physical distancing. This stages a broader need to reflect on how learning processes are organized with digital media. Thus, insights into concrete teaching and learning interactions can help to better understand lesson designs in virtual classrooms from a didactic perspective.
Methodology: This article aims to document a webinar of a German 9th grade class in its moments relevant to social studies teaching. Thus, this paper provides insights into an explorative case study that uses recordings and classroom observations. In order to analyze knowledge processes in digital contexts didactically, the "Wissensdidaktische Hermeneutik" serves as a qualitative research method.
Findings: The documented sequences of the webinar that deals with the recent media coverage of Corona show that the webinar takes into account both the learning needs of the students and an urgent social studies topic. Therefore, the social studies teacher uses advance organizers through her own explanations so that all students can stay on the same page. Furthermore, she introduces elements of the Flipped Classroom that display implications for social interaction in social studies webinars – particularly for the speech act "to explain".

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1 Introduction: The Corona Virus and virtual claasrooms

In late 2019, the media education division of the German Educational Research Association (GERA) published a state-of-the-art article which presents scenarios about future developments of virtual classrooms in school. The authors of that article wrote that virtual classrooms may soon not only simulate or complement analogue teaching and learning. Instead, digital tools like webinars[1] or learning management systems could change the modeling of teaching and learning processes significantly (Grabensteiner & Schneider Stingelin, 2019, p. 92).

Due to the Corona pandemic in 2020, these reflections on future developments quickly became a reality for many schools. After the first schools were temporarily closed, students, teachers, parents, educational researchers and society at large discussed how to handle this situation: How can lessons proceed when students and teachers are no longer allowed to be physically present in the classroom? How can students learn effectively under these circumstances, considering their different learning needs and social backgrounds?

These questions are key to teachers who had to find digital solutions rapidly. Teaching and learning needed to be rethought with very little time to spare. During this time, school and education not only became a central topic of media coverage in light of a developing digital learning culture and current status reports on the state of digitization (e.g. Muuß-Merholz, 2020; Kiesler, 2020), classroom researchers also highlighted remote schooling processes in general. A representative study – that was carried out during the nationwide home schooling in Germany – allows insights into the potentials and challenges of virtual classrooms (Deutsches Schulbarometer, 2020). The study examined, among others, which platforms German teachers used to communicate with their students, their opinions on the increase of social inequality due to distance learning or which task and teaching formats were used.

The collected data stages a broader need to reflect on how teachers and students organize learning processes while using digital media and to explore "which students will face barriers when attempting to learn online" (Muilenburg & Berge, 2005, p. 30). In addition to representative data, insights into concrete teaching practices can help researchers better understand lesson designs in virtual classrooms from a didactic perspective.

During the Corona crisis, Ms. Huber, a district school teacher in Hamburg, Germany, tries to figure out which topics are suitable for teaching with video conferencing and if there are differences between the school subjects that need to be addressed. Obliged to conduct remote schooling, she uses a video conferencing tool to host a social studies webinar. The topic of the lesson is media coverage of the Corona virus and how it affects society socially.

This article aims to document this lesson in its moments relevant to social studies teaching and to state observations from a didactic perspective. With Ms. Huber's lesson we can gain deeper insights into the design of social studies teaching and learning processes via webinars. The following questions lead the analysis:

- How does video conferencing affect learning and teaching in social studies lessons in times of physical distancing?
- Which didactic and subject-related actions lead the modelling of virtual classrooms?

2 Digital teaching and the primacy of educational perspectives

Information technologies have helped to automate various processes in society. Digitization serves as a general term to grasp societal transformations through digital media in all human practices (Downey & Gibbs, 2020; Kammerl, 2018). Even if information technologies affect society as a whole, digital media have different impacts in different contexts: The use of digital media in arts or politics follows a different logic than, for example, in economics. This applies to education, too (Benner, 2015). Educational perspectives should model the concrete use of digital media in lessons:

Professional teachers examine how digital media can be adapted to the logic of learning processes that differ from subject to subject. They consider how digital media can benefit the acquisition of knowledge or support learning processes aligned with individual learning needs.

In Germany, this primacy of educational perspectives on teaching is not only emphasized in strategy papers that set political directives for education and teaching (BMBF & KMK, 2017), but it was also picked up in public discourse recently. Teachers found that lessons in school are too complex to transfer them digitally without rethinking multimedia structures. Parents observed that e-mailing task sheets does not automatically lead to successful learning. And students demanded support from teachers and parents in organizing learning processes in different subjects (New York Times, 2020; Kailitz, 2020).

The complexity of the acquisition and transfer of knowledge became visible – and the task of didactics to model learning processes both in the interest of the students and in considering structures of the topic from different subjects. It was therefore also a question of how curricular content can be taught under the current conditions. "A listing of the content only" (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 205) which can be worked off is neither sufficient for lessons in school nor in virtual classrooms. Both informal and professional observations circled around how to incorporate curriculum, subjects and concrete learning processes with digital media.

In international curriculum research, the concept of "coherence" (Schmidt et al., 2005) tries to grasp these interrelationships to help examine teaching and learning didactically. Without didactic perspectives that address the contents in its subject logics, the acquisition and transfer of what is worth knowing becomes confusing and leads to the following: "content-topic lists without sequence or progression, no sharpening of the conceptual focus, an over-crowded curriculum, and one without clear signposts to either learners or teachers as to what is to be learnt, when, and what follows what." (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 205)

What does this mean for social studies lessons with digital media? From a didactical perspective, it is not sufficient to examine teaching by focusing merely on technological issues (Kammerl, 2018). Instead, the focus must be on the *coherence* of teaching and learning processes that digital media are supposed to create. Thus, curriculum researchers address "the principles of conceptual progression, and these differ by subject. [...] If the curriculum does not signal these different conceptual logics clearly enough, incoherence will be the result" (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 205-206). Social studies educationalists can subsequently ask: "What are the animating principles which must be grasped by learners" (loc. cit.) of social studies disciplines?

This research question is relevant for teachers in order to organize learning processes within social studies contexts. The documentation of Ms. Huber's webinar, that focuses on the media coverage of Corona, can help to approach distinct disciplinary forms of social studies in virtual classrooms.

3 On recording webinars

The documentation of webinars is challenging. Just as lesson planning has to be designed differently using digital media, documentation should also take various factors into account. Since the present lesson was designed as a webinar within a few days, research methodology needed to be applied quickly. Simple implementable screen recordings suggest an easy-to-understand documentation of webinars. This involves the risk of losing sight of social interaction in the virtual classroom and misinterpreting the classroom recording as technically objectifying. Thus, "seeing, observing and interpreting with the aim of preventing hurried judgements" (Schelle, 2015, p. 395) requires a reflective approach to research methodology in digital contexts.

In this way, digital materials are attributed differently (Brügger & Finnemann, 2013, p. 71) which might be relevant for the documentation of webinars: Ms. Huber uses "Jitsi", an open source and free video conferencing tool that allows web-based video calling with multiple persons. Participants can virtually raise their hands as well as use a chat that can be followed during the video conference. The

host of the conference can share the screen which Ms. Huber does to show her students cartoons and task sheets. Furthermore, she uses the collaborative task and learning management system "MeisterTask", a platform, that she shares via "Jitsi" to discuss tasks and the current topic.

She combines both tools from which different overlapping digital levels develop (chapter 5). The teacher links "asynchronous e-learning" ("MeisterTask") with "synchronous e-learning" (webinar) (Kolås et al., 2015, p. 79). During the webinar some students upload files in "MeisterTask", chat in "Jitsi", speak without virtually raising their hands or log in and out of the video conference. These multimodal online interactions are challenging for classroom researchers not only because there is little experience in recording webinars so far; classroom researchers cannot record all overlapping online interactions "on screen", because certain default settings of the user (i.e. chat on/off) influence the way the webinar is perceived. This is a task that interpretative classroom research needs to address in future projects and that requires further research – particularly in relation to corporeal practices (vanOostveen et al., 2018, 1868 ff; Yu & Tadic, 2018).

In addition to screen recordings, interactions of the webinar were observed ethnographically and a teaching protocol was drawn up to identify "blind spots" (Schelle, 2015, p. 395) considering the research questions (Torrau, 2020, p. 198ff.). The class was accompanied for three weeks, including three webinars. In addition, the teacher and student materials uploaded to "MeisterTask" were collected. A research diary should serve as a reflection tool for own perceptions and for the transcription of webinars.

In this sense, interpretative classroom research has to deal with transcriptions of webinars. For this lesson an attempt was made to translate digital multimodality into written form through combined transcripts that take both "on-screen" events and the dynamics of social action in chat and classroom conversation into account (loc. cit.; Yu &Tadic, 2018, p. 32).

4 On interpreting social studies webinars didactically

This paper presents an *explorative* case study to explore the implications for teaching and learning in social studies webinars (Fielding et al., 2017, p. 628ff.). "Case studies [...] can expand our understanding of our practice and connect it with the pedagogical theories that underpin it" (Vitta et al., 2019, p. 83). This case study *documents* excerpts of the lesson by providing a transcript and in *describing* the progress of the lesson. It aims to address the use of digital tools in current school practices: The purpose is to indicate didactical observations that may be an impetus for further research on webinars in social studies education.

The research interest is to reconstruct social interaction in webinars that constitute the topic. From a sociological perspective, social studies topics are constituted in social interaction between students and teachers – both in classrooms at school and virtually (vanOostveen et al., 2018, p. 1867ff.). In order to analyze knowledge processes in digital contexts didactically, the *Wissensdidaktische Hermeneutik* (didactic hermeneutics) can serve as a qualitative research method (Torrau, 2019). The method is hermeneutical, as it aims to understand and reconstruct social events from the participating students' and teachers' perspectives: How do students and teachers form social meaning in social interaction? The method centers didactical understanding because it focuses on the social actions of students and teachers that form the social studies topic in the classroom. On the one side, this method "adopt[s] an attitude of understanding which takes into account 'which forms of expressions and interpretations are created by the participants (themselves)'" (Schelle, 2015, p. 396; Doolittle & Hicks, 2003). Therefore, the *Wissensdidaktische Hermeneutik* has several evaluation steps (Torrau, 2020, p. 235ff.) and refers to case studies in order to analyze interactions in detail. On the other side it puts the emphasis on a didactical specification of knowledge by placing the model of knowledge forms at the center of its sequence analysis (Bruen & Grammes, 2016; Grammes, 2017).

The method focuses on differences of perspectives within the acquisition and transfer of knowledge and analyzes how learning processes are designed. In webinars, it makes a difference whether the media coverage of Corona is addressed as a *situation* experienced by the students in everyday life, as a political *case* like a retailer who is facing insolvency as a result of political decisions or as an extensive *problem* for democracies in balancing the protection of human life on the one hand and civil rights on the other. Thus, researchers can reconstruct didactically the processing of knowledge in the webinar by being able to reveal the various social actions regarding how teachers and students deal with the Corona virus – as a situation, case or problem. This also brings into focus how teachers use digital media from an educational perspective and with reference to the subjects in order to shape learning processes.

The next section of the text focuses on how students and Ms. Huber deal with the media coverage of Corona in this very first social studies webinar for a German 9th grade.

5 The explorative case study

After a first attempt failed due to technical problems, 9th grade tutor and social studies teacher Ms. Huber hosts a webinar on March 30th 2020. Ms. Huber also teaches German and supports the students with the class council. She is the tutor for 9th grade and responsible for all organizational matters for this class. For her first social studies webinar she chooses a topic that is not part of the curriculum. The webinar is designed as an *Aktuelle Stunde* (current events lesson) in which students and teachers discuss current political topics. On the agenda of Ms. Huber's webinar: the recent media coverage of Corona, how the 9th graders experienced the current situation in their everyday lives and how they can distinguish valid information from fake news.

At the beginning of the lesson, Ms. Huber discusses some organizational difficulties with her students that had arisen from remote schooling. After dealing with media coverages of the current situation, she switches back to the curricular content: the lesson continues with a historical topic about the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in 1914 as a key event which led to World War I. This article focuses on the part of the lesson that deals with the Corona virus (i.e. *Aktuelle Stunde*).

5.1 How Ms. Huber sets up the webinar

The synchronous webinar, where the social studies lesson is to take place at 2:30 pm, has already been used by other subject teachers earlier this day. The teachers have not taken the webinar offline in the time between the sessions but have taken turns in this virtual classroom. Thus, most students are already logged in when Ms. Huber "enters" the webinar. The teacher starts the lesson from the physical classroom in school and first checks whether all students are present. Teacher and students have agreed to turn off the cameras so that the Internet connection remains stable. At the beginning of the lesson, Ms. Huber turns on her camera once so that all of her 24 students can see her. The students were told to use a button for a digital hand gesture which signals the teacher and anyone in the chat, that a student would like to say something.

While she does roll call, Ms. Huber uses this part of the lesson to solve technical and organizational problems with individual students. Subsequently she addresses the whole class and shares her screen to explain the webinar's order of the day – which includes (i) "organizational matters", the (ii) "current events" (*Aktuelle Stunde*) part and (iii) "History: The Sarajevo assassination" (assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand).

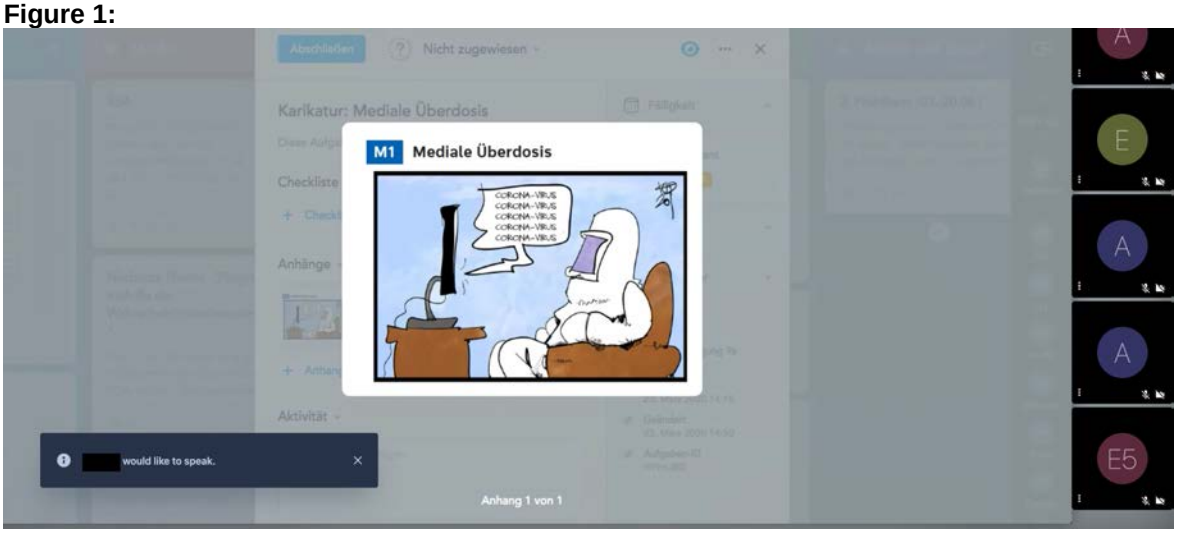
After initial technical problems, all students can see their teacher's screen. The teacher briefly presents the agenda whereupon organizational daily businesses of the class are discussed for eight minutes. Then, she starts with the media coverage of the Corona crisis by pointing to the task that should be done until today:

Ms. Huber: *[scrolls through the social studies column in "MeisterTask", stops on an uploaded photo]* Is there any trouble anywhere, should we wait? *[scrolls through the social studies column]* Nope, doesn't seem to be. Okay, so first of all *[scrolls to the task "Cartoon: Media Overdose"]* I'd like to thank you. Most of you have worked very hard and have also *[scrolls further] uploaded* their results in "MeisterTask" correctly. #00:15:22-4#

Eren: Ah, should we send this today? [...] Oh, then, I, I'll upload it in a second, because I have finished it, I forgot *[to upload, S.T.]* it. [...] #00:15:32-6#

Ms. Huber: Okay, you're welcome to do that. I would always do it like that when we *meet again*, so to speak, we *look* through the results together that you have worked out during the week and *conclude*. Uh, and then uh discuss the results for next week. Okay?! Hence, it's always good to upload your results *before* our next *meeting*. *[scrolls to the cartoon]* I'd like to start with the uh, the *cartoon* that you've taken a *look* at. Uh I'll open the cartoon *[clicks on the cartoon; cartoon is enlarged and highlighted, "MeisterTask" schedule grayed out in the background]* #00:16:14-3#

Figure 1:



Screenshot of the webinar (perspective of the author of this article) with the cartoon that reads "media overdose", "MeisterTask" task and schedule in the background, a digital hand gesture at bottom left and the list of webinar-participants on the right side of the screen.

Ms. Huber makes sure that all her students can see the shared screen ("Is there any trouble anywhere"). Acknowledging the efforts of most of her students ("thank you"; "worked very hard") she displays where the results have been "uploaded [...] correctly" in "MeisterTask". Without virtually raising her hand, Eren switches her microphone on and asks if she can upload her files during the webinar because she "forgot" to do so in advance. After a second student says that he will need to upload his files as well, Ms. Huber reminds her students that they need to upload their results beforehand, because in the webinar they "look through the results together that you have worked out during the week and conclude". Thus, Ms. Huber emphasizes that the "results" need to be uploaded "before our next meeting".

Ms. Huber *explains* to her students that social studies webinars progress differently. In contrast to teaching at school where homework usually does not have to be uploaded to a learning management system before lesson starts, Ms. Huber frames the social studies webinar as a learning venue to "look through the results" and to "conclude" the topic. Ms. Huber explains a mode of learning and teaching to her class that could refer to the concept of a Flipped Classroom in a certain extent: "In a Flipped Classroom teaching setting, the teaching content, [...] [is] provided online to the students in advance so that they get access and read through materials before attending the classroom.

Therefore, when they attend the actual classroom, they are entirely familiar with the content of the lesson." (Yousufi, 2019, p. 90)

The 9th graders are familiar with the content before attending the webinar and Ms. Huber explains this flipped teaching and learning situation explicitly. Accordingly, the webinar could have its own logic that may differ from teaching in school, even if Flipped Classroom can be realized in school, too, and even though conversation is still centered on the teacher (Lieser et al., 2018). Does this partly flipped situation have any particular impact on social studies lessons?

Ms. Huber talks *about* teaching and learning on a meta-level to illustrate this special situation that remote schooling places the class in. This might be an attempt to make sure that every student can follow the logic of the webinar and that Ms. Huber has insight into all of her student's results ex ante. In the webinar, therefore, not only organizational matters need to be clarified, but also the process of digital lessons. Thus, Ms. Huber mentors her students using the "MeisterTask" tool.

Shortly afterwards Ms. Huber "open[s] the cartoon" that the students "have taken a look at". By opening the file the shared screen now shows a cartoon (png-file) uploaded in the learning management system "MeisterTask" – which is visible in the grayed-out background – in general scope of the video conferencing tool "Jitsi". This arrangement of files and tools that combines different overlapping digital levels is the visual basis for the next 22 minutes approximately.

The title of the cartoon reads *"Mediale Überdosis"* ("media overdose"). Ms. Huber uses teaching material from the German educational publisher "Schroedel" that has recently been published throughout the Corona pandemic online. The leading question of the teaching material is: "Corona virus: How should the media report?" The cartoon is part of this material which is recommended for German and social studies lessons from 9th grade onwards (Schroedel, 2020). Ms. Huber does not adopt the suggested tasks of the educational publisher for the cartoon. Instead, she develops three tasks herself that the students should have worked on at home and finished until today. She uploaded these tasks in writing:

1) "Describe the cartoon!"
2) "Interpret the cartoon! Pay special attention to the media coverage of the Corona virus."
3) "Evaluate (German: "Bewerte") the cartoon!"

These tasks are the key points which will be worked on with the students over the course of the webinar. After a few students have described the cartoon, Ms. Huber proceeds to the second task.

5.2 Ms. Huber explains the term interpretation

Ms. Huber: Ok. Uh We will now interpret the cartoon *[digital hand gesture from Lea]*. Interpreting means, uh more or less uh, re- uh, state the meaning, right? So you might not always see at first glance what this cartoon sa-, uh tries to tell us. And when we interpret a cartoon, we think about its meaning. Lea, you want to start? (...) Lea? *[no answer, sound track of Lea is not audible for Ms. Huber]*
[...]
I think, Lea, we've had the problem before that somehow I couldn't hear you, maybe Kira *[Student: "I can't hear her either."]* could you translate, please? [...] Kira, you hear Lea, right? #00:19:25-5#
[...]

Kira: Okay. [...] So, Lea now asks if she should always read a sentence and I should just echo it? #00:19:36-1#

Ms. Huber: Yes, I think that's best. #00:19:36-8#

Kira: Yeah, okay. *[Lea reads out her results, Kira repeats them for those who can't hear Lea]* (8) *[laughing]* That was too fast for me. That's a lot. (8) The television with the Corona bubble ... (3) is probably supposed to represent the media ... (4) and

how much the Corona virus is talked about there. (3) The person in the cartoon … (2) represents the people (7) *[to Lea]* again please (3) … who are in deep panic due to the constant media consumption … (3) concerning the Corona virus. (5) People do panic buying … (2) and don't go out … (2), which is partly good … (3), but partly exaggerated. (3) There is a lot of fake news on the net … (3) and many people get into unnecessary panic. (5) The protective suit probably was an exaggerated portrayal … (6) to illustrate, *[to Lea]* wait what? … to illustrate how much some people … (3) exaggerate with their paranoia via the media. That's it.[2] #00:21:50-0#

Ms. Huber: Thank you, Lea. Thank you, Kira. […] Then I'd like you to tell me, *[digital hand gesture from Jan]* how uh how you handle things at home? Uh how do you get information about the current situation and uh *[digital hand gesture from Jacky]* how is it for you guys? Jacky, would you like to start? #00:22:22-4#

The teacher tells the 9th graders that "we will now interpret the cartoon".[3] Subsequently she reminds her students what "interpreting means", that it is "more or less state the meaning" resp. "think about its meaning". Again, technical problems occur which the teacher already knows about ("we've had the problem before"). As a result, Ms. Huber asks Kira to repeat Lea's interpretation of the cartoon so that all webinar-participants can follow. Lea's text is available as a handwritten and photographed picture file in "MeisterTask", too. As several students can hear Lea, the text blocks are read out twice for them. Other students and Ms. Huber cannot hear Lea, so only Kira can be listened to. In the latter case students and teacher perceive short breaks between Lea's inaudible reading and Kira's translations (see brackets with numbers in the transcript). Lea's text covers several aspects of the cartoon, including "represent[ations]" of "the media" and "the people", "panic due to the constant media consumption" what can result in "panic buying" and "fake news". The student also interprets the meaning of the protective suit ("how much some people exaggerate with their paranoia via the media").

At the beginning of this sequence, the teacher marks the switch from description to interpretation for her students ("will now interpret"). The intention to interpret may require a different perspective on the cartoon. Even if the students have already completed the task, the teacher *explains* in that moment what "interpreting means". According to Ms. Huber interpreting means to "state the meaning", because "you might not always see at first glance what this cartoon tries to tell us". By explaining the word "interpret", she again focuses on a meta-level of teaching and learning. She focuses on what is to be done with the term "interpret" in general. Interpreting as a reflexive approach (Feilke & Rezat, 2019, p. 9) to the cartoon is explained reflexively. Furthermore, Ms. Huber tries to foster "student peer support" (Lieser et al., 2018, p. 6) by involving Kira to solve the technical problem so that Lea's interpretation gets the attention of all students.

Lea grasps the cartoon as a *problem* that is relevant for society at large as the student generalizes ("person in the cartoon represents the people") and reflects on the overall impact of media coverage in times of Corona ("protective suit probably was an exaggerated portrayal to illustrate"). She does not refer to a political case or a situation she has experienced by herself. Subsequently, the teacher now gives a didactically relevant impulse, as she tries to guide her students' perspectives to their own everyday lives: "How [do] you handle things at home? How do you get information about the current situation and how is it for you guys?"

Does the shift to the student's own experiences help the participants of the webinar to better explore possible interpretations of the cartoon? What types of tasks are suitable for video conferencing to discuss in more detail? After some students have shared their experiences, the teacher turns the attention to the heading of the cartoon.

5.3 Explaining the heading of the cartoon

Ms. Huber: Okay uh *[clearing throat]* the cartoon uh we looked at is called media overdose. Uh Could someone perhaps explain this heading again? [...] #00:25:17-3#

Katy: Well, the title is media overdose and that's then-, it means that if you think too much about the news, too many news, that you're always following, that uh you don't think about anything else and that you get a little too much of it and then uh also get more and more scared and don't think about anything else but that you're afraid of the virus. #00:25:44-6#

Ms. Huber: Right, thank you. Uh Jacky and then uh you, Jakob. #00:25:51-0#

Jacky: Uh That maybe you then overreact because you can also get a lot of misinformation and you put yourself under too much stress and then you likely do, for example, panic buying and that's actually quite unnecessary. #00:26:06-1#
[...]

Ms. Huber: Exactly, overdose, that's something you actually, or rather the term is actually used in connection with drugs, right? So, if someone uh has taken an overdose of heroin for instance, uh we know that from this context. And I don't know how you feel, guys. I had the feeling that you are still a bit-, maybe you can distance yourselves a bit better. But personally, I have to say, I'm having a hard time drawing a line. I always read the daily "Tagesschau" news ticker and I partly feel [...] also like a little addict, because then I have to check every few minutes if there is any new information. And uh it's of course something, uh it's right, what was said, that you can easily uh let this, this flood of news put you into such a, such an inner turmoil or panic. So, I think it's very important to strike a bit of a healthy balance, right? To be, to be informed, on the one hand, of course, and to follow appropriate uh instructions, uh but then of course, maybe from time to time, uh let the Internet be the Internet and do something that has nothing to do with Corona, right? Uh I'd like to unpack the term fake news, I think Jacky, you used the term. We had been working on it last week and didn't get around to discuss it in detail. Who can uh define the term again? What is Fake-News? #00:28:01-0#

Ms. Huber circles back to the cartoon that is still visible for all of the students through the shared screen. She names the heading ("media overdose") and asks: "Could someone perhaps explain this heading again?" Katy, Jacky and Jakob raise their hands. Katy explains that the heading "means that if you think too much about the news, [...] that you don't think about anything else and that you get a little too much of it." As a result, people get "scared". Jacky adds, "that maybe you then overreact because you can also get a lot of misinformation and you put yourself under too much stress" which can result in "panic buying" what the student considers to be "quite unnecessary".

After Jakob withdraws his digital hand gesture, Ms. Huber *explains* the heading in her own words. She links the term "overdose" to a specific context: "The term is actually used in connection with drugs, right?" Then she relates this meaning to her own experiences in her everyday-life, telling about how she's "having a hard time drawing a line" and always has to read the "daily news ticker" of a popular German television news service. This leads her to "partly feel also like a little addict". The comments mentioned by the students are "right", this "flood of news" could put oneself into "such an inner turmoil or panic." Thus, the teacher says that "it's very important" to find the right ("healthy") "balance between "to be informed [...] and to follow appropriate instructions" and to "let the Internet be the Internet". After this, the teacher starts a new sequence by examining the term "fake news".

From a didactical perspective, two issues are noteworthy: First, the teacher uses advance organizers to frame every sequence of the webinar (e.g. "The cartoon we looked at"; "I'd like to unpack the term fake news"). To do so, she takes the students' comments into account (e.g. "Jacky,

you used the term") and consistently moderates the turn-taking: Throughout the entire webinar, each turn-taking involves the teacher. There is no direct verbal communication between the students themselves except for short notes in the public chat where some students addressed their peers directly. The organizers therefore could help to ensure that the webinar proceeds both in form and content, stringently led by the teacher. One reason might be "to bring the different modes of the interaction and the different participants together and keep them all in sync" (Yu & Tadic, 2018, p. 34). This issue also raises the question, how the webinar format could modify social communication in social studies – particularly in relation to the content.

Second, the teacher interlinks different contexts which develop from different perspectives on the topic: a social science perspective, which takes the effects on society at large ("media overdose") into account, is linked with the students' and teachers' experiences in their everyday-lives. The examination of the topic alternates between these contexts. This alternating motion of contexts could support *explaining* the effects of the media that can be observed during the Corona crisis both in society and in individual behavior, e.g. referring to the figure of speech "overdose" in these contexts. From these explanations – in which the students are involved –, Ms. Huber suggests guidelines to handle the current situation ("follow appropriate instructions"; "let the Internet be the Internet"). These guidelines do not address political decisions but rather the everyday lives of the students. The effects of the media could be explained together in order to enable the students to elucidate everyday media consumption.

After the students mention certain fake news regarding the Corona virus and the teacher comments on them, some students talk about fake news that they have been confronted with in their everyday lives, e.g. via WhatsApp. Ms. Huber asks her students, what one can do to make sure they are well-informed. Subsequently, the teacher stresses what the students should consider when gathering information in the current situation:

Ms. Huber: Well, if something is said, like uh "on good authority" without specifying it or something, right? Or like my friend's uncle, he has a sister or something, she works here and there and she knows this and that. Of course, such things are always to be treated uh with caution. Exactly right. So what matters is the source. After that it was said that we can make a little checklist in our minds. Earlier was said, not to believe everything, but to be skeptical in general. #00:36:50-3#

The teacher uses slightly amended examples from the students' everyday-lives ("my friend's uncle") to state that "what matters is the source." She picks up the students' comments and emphasizes "to make a little checklist in our minds" on the one hand and "to be skeptical in general" on the other.

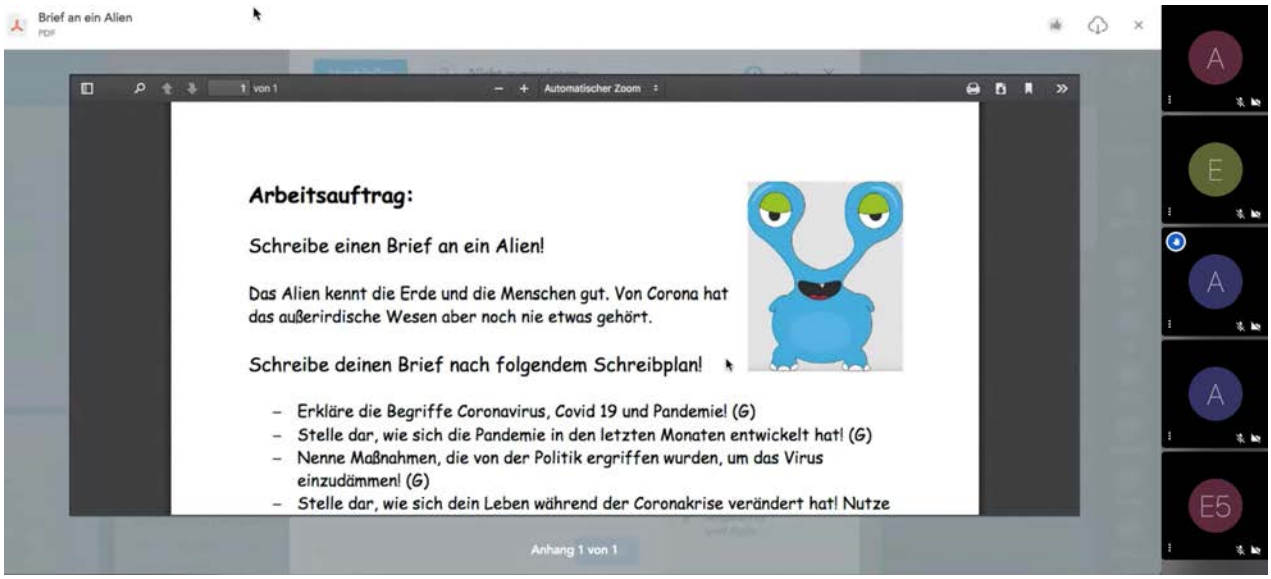
The webinar is not only a technological solution to ensure that social studies lessons can continue online. In this webinar, Ms. Huber addresses the current situation to focus on an important social studies learning objective, how to do research, how to identify fake news and how to handle and protect yourself from them ("be skeptical"). She designs the webinar as an *Aktuelle Stunde* (current events lesson) that is not part of the official curriculum. Thus, it might be possible that she can reach out to her students and tries to clarify current issues which the students could perceive more intensely due to the Corona crisis. The webinar could provide a learning environment in which Ms. Huber and the 9th graders can focus on *urging* social studies topics with an established social studies method which the students also know from their non-virtual classroom.

Explanation is an important part in this. At the end of the "current events" lesson, the students get the task to explain the corona crisis based on the content that was discussed in the webinar.

5.4 Explaining the Corona crises socially

To talk about the task, Ms. Huber opens a pdf-file in "MeisterTask" and asks a student to read aloud. While Jakob reads aloud, the teacher scrolls down the pdf-file:

Figure 2:



Screenshot of the webinar (perspective of the author of this article) with an opened pdf-file, "MeisterTask" in the background and the list of webinar-participants on the right side of the screen.

Jakob: *[reads aloud]* Task: Write a letter to an alien. The alien knows Earth and humans well. But the alien has never heard of Corona. Write your letter according to the following chart: Explain the terms *[Mrs. Huber scrolls down the pdf-file which she opened in "MeisterTask"]*, explain the terms Corona virus, Covid-19 and pandemic. Describe how the uh pandemic has spread in the last few months. Name political precautions that have been decided to contain the virus. Describe how your life has changed during the Corona crisis. Use personal experiences and examples. Outline how the corona crisis could increase social discrimination. Assess the psychological and emotional consequences that the idea of social distancing might have for people. Write about 180, standard level, or about 250, advanced level, words. #00:39:46-6#

Ms. Huber: Thank you, Jakob. Uh What to do? Who can repeat the task? *[digital hand gestures from Alan, Katy]* Alan. #00:40:00-2#

The task, which the 9th graders should accomplish by next week, contains several aspects of today's webinar. To "write a letter to an alien", the students should e.g. "explain" terms, "name political precautions" and "use personal experiences and examples". Up to this point the task is mandatory for all students. Students who want to reach the "advanced level" must also "outline how the corona crisis could increase social discrimination" and "the psychological and emotional consequences" of "social distancing".

Throughout the webinar Ms. Huber prepares her students to explain the Corona crisis *by themselves*. This leads to the challenging task to "write a letter" in which the students need to explain the coherences of the different contexts to an uninformed alien. Due to the task definition the 9th

graders should focus on political and social problems in the current situation. The task addresses media coverage of the Corona crisis only implicitly, e.g. within the subtask to describe personal experiences. How do the students deal with this challenging task? Is it necessary to use other digital tools (e.g. a collaborative real-time editor) to split the exercise sheet into separate tasks?

At the end of this sequence, Ms. Huber tries to make sure that everyone understands the task: "What to do? Who can repeat the task?" Moreover, she uses advance organizers, repeats comments in her own words and asks the students to explain single terms like "social distancing". The task should then be worked on alone at home.

6 Discussion

The documented sequences of this explorative case study showcase relevant aspects on how video conferencing can affect learning and teaching in social studies lessons. Besides the fact that there are further remarkable moments in this webinar that this article could not portray, it is necessary to consider: What didactically relevant follow-ups for social studies classroom research can be concluded from this? I would like to highlight three key observations among others for further research and discussion:

First, the documented webinar is neither a "stand-alone learning event" (de Rosa & Johnson, 2019, p. 341) nor a blended learning concept that integrates face-to-face classroom practices with digital learning and teaching. It is a temporary solution to ensure that social studies lessons can continue in times of enforced home schooling. Nevertheless, the webinar illustrates a didactic design that takes into account both the learning needs of the students (mentoring, addressing student questions, integration of "MeisterTask" as an organization tool) and an urging social studies topic which the teacher spontaneously chooses herself to supplement the curriculum. For this, the teacher designs the webinar as an *Aktuelle Stunde* (current events lesson), a common method in social studies, which the students know from lessons in school. This method is also maintained in the webinar but adjusted to a virtual classroom (e.g. Flipped Classroom). In this webinar, the teacher sticks to the method which is ritualized in class to talk about current events in society.

The teacher tries to create coherences by initiating an alternating motion of different contexts to *explain* the media effects in society and in individual behavior – although no leading question has been developed. Hence, an important task for further classroom research could be to "identify factors for effective learning through webinars" (Lieser et al., 2018, p. 3) with special regard to social studies – for example the use of social studies methods in webinars.

Second, in addition to this, the speech act "to explain" is important throughout this recorded webinar. The tasks referring to the cartoon that at first glance seem to be like "working through a list" were worked on and discussed in detail gradually. For this purpose, the social studies teacher sets cornerstones through her own explanations, that "everyone can, interactionally, stay on the same page" (Yu & Tadic, 2018, p. 35). Remarkable is the turn-taking during the webinar: Each turn-taking involves the teacher. Since the cameras are turned off during the lesson and students and teacher cannot see each other, it might be even more important for the teacher to organize the turn-taking explicitly. This could be further intensified by the fact that the visual focus is the teacher's shared screen. Due to the fact that the turn-taking causes iterations and sometimes technical delays occur, both seem to slow down the pace of the communication. Having said this, no time is needed to handle classroom disturbances, to switch from a classroom discussion to group work or to make sure that the students are not busy doing anything else. As a result, the lesson seems to be dense in content.

Furthermore, the teacher introduces elements of the Flipped Classroom, which she explains to students explicitly on a meta-level. The challenging task at the end of the webinar however raises the question how "to resolve pedagogical drawbacks to virtual learning" (Lieser et al., 2018, p. 3) e.g. that students are working on their own without individual advice by the teacher or how to ensure

student's activity during a webinar session. Follow-up studies could examine the importance of explaining to help "webinars be leveraged in the design of meaningful blended learning formats" (de Rosa & Johnson, 2019, p. 341) and analyze the importance of different speech acts or corporeal practices for dealing with contingency in virtual classrooms.

Third, the question of what "the animating principles" of social studies webinars are that "must be grasped by learners" (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 205-206) is an open research issue: "Perhaps the greatest challenge of the webinar format is the significant change in learning content and design that it brings about: shifting from preidentified and stable learning content to content that is flexible and co-created with users, which asks both instructors and learners to embrace a vision of learning that is collaborative and participative." (de Rosa & Johnson, 2019, p. 346) What are the implications of webinars for teaching and learning in social studies classrooms, for its social interaction and communication? Particularly for discussions and student-student-interactions that are important not only for social studies, the observed effects of the slower pace and greater content density could affect teaching and learning via webinars. For classroom research it is important to record further webinars and blended learning set-ups in order to better understand sequencing digital teaching and learning (Willis et al., 2018; Towndrow, 2005), to help develop good practice models and to advance research methodology. This could lead to a more detailed systematization of the use of webinars in social studies lessons.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Webinars (i.e. web seminars) can be defined in a broad sense as "live online meetings including active teachers and students" (Kolås et al. 2015, p. 79) which "allows simultaneous participation of students and instructors in real-time" (Lieser et al. 2018, p. 2).

[2] The numbers in brackets represent the seconds in which Lea reads aloud.

[3] Yu and Tadic (2018) have worked out that moderators „narrate the visual" on their screens, e.g. in order to initiate new sequences.