

European Studies in Didactics¹ of History

Background

The dynamic of global economic growth has its impact on society and culture. The social architecture of countries is being challenged and questioned from various sides; seemingly stable conventions have come under vigorous modification; and well-established norms and behavior may change rapidly.

In this process of "accelerated social and cultural change"² we observe, at both the individual and the collective level, a tendency for social cohesion to loosen. Attitudes of responsibility towards the underprivileged "other", whether they are disadvantaged on grounds of ethnicity, race, gender or socio-economic factors, are weakened.

International organisations and NGOs react to such undermining of social and cultural conventions by putting more emphasis on codices and charters of general values and beliefs. Democratic values, human rights, the rule of law, multicultural interaction and intercultural communication have been described as highly valued and in great demand in post-industrial societies.

'Accelerated cultural and social change' also has its reverberations in the educational systems. Teaching and educating for the 21st century means to transgress the established disciplinary borders and to contribute actively to the development of reflective competences as well as to competences of active and responsible citizenship.

To make sense of and function well in this globalised, diverse and interconnected world individuals need, for example, to master changing technologies and to make sense of large amounts of information. They also face collective challenges as societies – such as balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability, and prosperity with social equity. In these contexts, the competences that individuals need to meet their goals have become more complex, requiring more than the mastery of certain narrowly defined skills.³

Schools and universities are expected to react to these structural changes in society and culture with adequate and up-to date curricula. This also refers to history education and the wider field of history didactics: The role of the school-subject 'history', for example, has changed over the past decades. Beyond the continuing task of building an up-to-date national identity the subject has taken over new challenges and goals.

Historiography and history didactics today are no longer exclusively based on national narratives and its rationales. Historical discourses on transnational, European – but non-eurocentric – and global approaches to history get more and more attraction.

In addition, debates on history teaching in a globally oriented multicultural society stress the importance of implementing more systematically historiographic paradigms such as social, economic and/or cultural history into the curricula.

As concerns the methodology/didactics of history teaching, the emphasis on analytic, comparative and reflective forms of teaching has widely come under discussion⁴.

However, for the educational system, these discourses are still at their beginning. Educational cooperation on the European and the global level remain fragmented and contingent. The existing networks and

¹ The Euro-English term *didactics* of history is used throughout this proposal to denote concepts, theories, knowledge, understandings, traditions and practices connected with teaching and learning history. The term is used here synonymous with the German term "Geschichtsdidaktik", i.e. 'subject-specific teaching methodologies' and/or 'pedagogy of history' – As there is no cover term in the English-speaking countries for 'didactics of history' so far, the term 'didactics' is translated in various forms in the English speaking countries. Depending on the context, it could refer to 'theory and/or reflection upon teaching and learning history', to 'the concepts of teaching and learning history', to the methodology of teaching history, to the development and organisation of learning arrangements in subject 'history' and the reflection of such practices, or to 'the epistemological ground of teaching and learning 'history' as well. The relevance of such paradigmatic approach to the field of subject didactics is documented for the English speaking countries p.ex. in the 'Debates in Subject teaching Series', (edited by Susan Capel, Jon Davison, James Arthur and John Moss). Cf. for our topic: Davis, I. (Ed.) (2012) *Debates in History Teaching*, London, NY: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis; and Arthur, J. and Cremin, H. (Eds.) (2011) *Debates in Citizenship Education*, London, NY: Routledge/ Taylor & Francis.

² 2 Ecker, Alois (1994) Process-oriented methods in the teaching of history. New avenues in the initial training of history teachers at the University of Vienna, in: <http://www.geschichtsdidaktik.eu/index.php?id=57&L=1> (20. 1.2012)

³ 3 OECD (2005) *The Definition and Selection of Key-Competences. Executive Summary*, p.4, in: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf> (20.09. 2012)

⁴ See for example the last two yearbooks of the International Society for History Didactics on 'History teaching in the crossfire of political interests' (2008/09) and on 'Empirical research on history learning' (2010).

scientific communities need to be interrelated to each other, the scientific debate and comparison needs to be conceptualized and strengthened in a long term perspective.

The educational systems are based on national legacy and organization – and this will not be changed in the near future. Beyond the existing guidelines and recommendations history teachers and teacher trainers need to relay their daily work on systematic empirical research. In a comparative European and global perspective we have to ask, for example, how school subjects like ‘history’, which are expected to form the social and political education of the next generation of citizens, are conceptualized.

As concerns teacher education, future objectives formulated by international educational organisations such as OECD and UNESCO concur in that, alongside professional and didactic qualifications, competences such as the ability to work in a team, self-reflection, social, communicative, and organisational competences have to be strengthened in the education of students pursuing a teaching certification. These general professional qualifications (key qualifications) have to be continually refined and adapted to new demands.

As described above, the school subject ‘history’ has to compete with new demands on school education: School subjects such as ‘History’, ‘Civic education’ and ‘Citizenship Education’ are expected to form the socio-political identity of the future citizens of the society. As we found out in the European comparative survey on civic and history education⁵, not only one European country has decided to confide these important tasks to supplementary subjects such as “Politics”, “Social Studies” and/or “Cultural Studies”. However, public expectation for educating the next coming generation towards responsible citizenship in a European and global perspective in general are still connected to subject “History” or to combinations of subject “History” with the more recent subject of “Civic and/or Citizenship Education”⁶.

A comparative approach in the sense of historio-political education could for example take (knowledge of) ‘history’ as a reservoir of (political, social, economic ...) conflicts, which provides a plurality of strategies for conflict resolution to the societies at present. In this understanding, the exact analysis of failures of such strategies could be revealing too. Pupils and students can learn by such case studies the complex interplay between political, social and economic interests. To be able to do so, the school subject history needs to be oriented towards comparative and interdisciplinary concepts of history didactics.

History teachers are expected to develop the pupils’ skills and competences towards democratic citizenship, intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding, tolerance and social responsibility.

The next generation not only is in dire need of adequate subject knowledge, it is also in need of active skills to adopt such historical knowledge in interdisciplinary relation to their actual conditions of living. To develop such complex competences students need to develop sufficient social, communicative and political literacy as well as an up-to-date historical literacy.

The issue of history didactics is especially significant in connection with the training and further education of teachers, since teacher education – as well as the professional practice of teachers – requires a continuous reflection according to theoretical principles. Especially in times of rapid social and cultural change adequate theories are of major importance as they will serve as a meaningful and sustainable resource over a longer period of teachers’ professional lives. In future academic teacher education, the development of complex training and learning structures which facilitate the reflection of school learning processes in step with actual practice is essential.

Adequate theories in teaching and learning history, especially from the interdisciplinary field of political, social and cultural sciences, as well as innovative approaches to the complex tasks of initial education and continuous professional education of teachers, are highly requested. This also applies for history didactics: despite her principle basements in grounds of historical social sciences and despite her valuable critique vis

⁵ Draft report on the structures, standards and tenets of civic and history education in Europe, see: <http://www.che.itt-history.eu> (20.09. 2012)

⁶ Depending on the overall goals of the respective education system there exist various traditions on how to instruct and/or to educate the citizens of a given society: the emphasis is either given to knowledge of government with attention to the role, the rights and duties of citizens, or to promotion and development of the active, responsible (and critical) citizen. More recent concepts, like the Council of Europe’s concept of ‘Education for democratic citizenship’ aim, by equipping learners with knowledge, skills and understanding and by moulding their attitudes and behaviour, to empower them to exercise and defend their democratic rights and responsibilities in society, to value diversity and to play an active part in democratic life, with a view to the promotion and protection of democracy and the rule of law. Compare: [Recommendation CM/Rec\(2010\)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education](#) (20.09. 2012).

à vis the traditions of historicism, most of her activities are still related to the framework of national narratives. A transnational debate between the various communities of history didactics in Europe and in various parts of the world is pending.⁷

In secondary general and/or vocational schools the subjects “History”, “Political/Civic Education” and “Social/Cultural Studies” are partly taught as integrated subjects, partly as separate subjects. There has been little discussion about the theoretical and didactic concepts and the rationales that lie behind the decisions towards one or the other model of training.

During the last years we observe a growing interest in scientific research, systematic empiric investigation, international comparison as well as theoretical and methodological/didactic discussion on how to build the new curricula for ‘history’ and for ‘civic education’ – and how to educate teachers to think and to work in such inter- and transdisciplinary perspectives as described above. The scientific discussion on how to develop these skills and competences in a sustainable perspective is still young but has good chances to become a prosperous and dynamic new field in education.

History didactics can play an important role in this phase of accelerated cultural change. She can contribute to the elaboration of standards for curricula and textbooks or teaching material and she can act as a selective agency and interface in relation to educational institutions as concerns historical narratives described and developed by historiography. In addition she can work on theories and research methods which highlight the production, presentation and construction of specific historical narratives (p.ex. economic and social history, cultural history or global history and their impact on historical consciousness) in various didactic contexts.

The proposed scientific journal aims at enhancing the discussion on both the level of teaching history in the classroom and the level of educating teachers to be able to teach ‘history’, ‘civic education’ and similar subjects in Europe in its relation to global perspectives. Furthermore, it aims at establishing the scientific discourse on findings, empirical research, concepts and theoretical reflections on history didactics also in the context of media, museums, newspapers, film, internet, comics and computer games or similar forms of historical culture.

The series aims at fostering the discourse between experts in history didactics from various countries of Europe with experts on history didactics from all parts of the World. It therefore also aims at enhancing the perception from outside Europe on developments in didactics of history in Europe.

Special interest will be given to empirical research in history didactics in a comparative (European, and global) perspective. Discourses on historio-political education like the multilateral debates on textbooks, curricula and teacher education shall also be brought to scientific discussion.

Attention to discourses on history didactics in the above described perspectives is already being given in the most influential European networks on history teaching, like the Council of Europe’s History and Civic Education division, the European Association for History teachers (Euroclio) or the Civic and History Education Network (CHE). In a more global perspective the International Society for History Didactics (ISHD), the International Association for Research in History and Social Sciences Education (IARHSSE), the International NGO History Forum for Peace in East Asia, the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations and the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) have given interest to comparative studies and discourses on history didactics during the last years.

⁷ 7 In a first step the existing contacts between colleagues from the German speaking networks, the British networks, the Roman speaking networks and the Scandinavian networks of History Didactics could be linked for this envisaged scientific discourse. Colleagues of these networks are partly cooperating with colleagues in East and South East Europe - which promises to describe developments in didactics of history also from these countries.