



Historical Consciousness: Exploring a Third-Order Concept. German Experiences and General Observations

by *Wolfgang Hasberg*

This paper is based on previous studies that investigate the applicability of empirical findings (from different disciplines) to history didactics. The existing dilemma is not that there are too few empirical studies dealing with teaching and learning history, but that they are very diverse in terms of their disciplinary origins, their methods of collection and evaluation, and the nature of their findings. In German discourse since the 1970s, historical consciousness has risen in wide circles to become the central category of research. This context is presented and explained in selected phases of the German-language discourse. In so doing, it becomes apparent that historical consciousness is a third-order category that could be useful to focus the international discourse as well.

Keywords: Empirical Research, History Teaching and Learning, Historical Consciousness, Historical Culture, History Lessons.

Introduction

When Peter Seixas and Andreas Körber disputed core concepts in the German and the Anglophone discourse on history didactics at a conference in Basel in 2015, the Canadian scholar stated in the end: the German discussion is strong in theory but less so in empirical research¹. This statement is clearly wrong and depends on the fact that Seixas did not and could not take into account the abundance of empirical studies

¹ Slightly diminished in the written versions. P. Seixas, *Translation and its Discontents. Key Concepts in English and German History Education*, in *Forschungswerkstatt Geschichtsdidaktik* 15, hrsg. v. M. Waldis - B. Ziegler, Hep, Bern 2017, pp. 20-35, here p. 33.

concerning historical consciousness and historical learning, probably because nearly all of them are published in German.

The problem is not that there are too few efforts in the empirical field. The problem is the application of the diffuse results of empirical studies to the practice of history education in different fields (including the theoretical one) – as it was already emphasized in 2001 and 2007, when extensive inventories of empirical studies published in German language were delivered². The attempt to undertake an equivalent inventory today would be doomed to failure because of the large number of – mostly qualitative – investigations that are often performed as doctoral theses.

Empirical efforts in German history didactics

It has to be emphasized that empirical studies on different aspects of historical thinking, learning and teaching in the German speaking scientific community were conducted since the last third of the 19th century. Indeed, the investigations at that time relied on a simple methodology. They would, for example, ask for (historical) knowledge or for the most favoured (school) subject, and, until the 1970s, the last-mentioned approach revealed that history lessons, in the opinion of pupils, were the most favoured. In this early stage of empirical research, the scientists who undertook such enquiries were not historians but psychologists (psychology indeed was still a very young discipline), pedagogues or proto-sociologists (a science which did not yet really exist at that time). The efforts grew, while psychology asserted itself as a science (cf. the studies by Wilhelm Stern).

It was not earlier than 1911, when a first scholar, Johannes Dück came up with the idea of asking for the reasons why subjects like History were favoured by pupils. His pioneering empirical survey showed that students preferred history lessons because they were told exciting stories about wars and they would have to do nothing more than listen³. In other words: while the teacher was narrating, the pupils could rest. From today's point of view, this was a disappointing insight, but not from

² W. Hasberg, *Empirische Forschung in der Geschichtsdidaktik – Nutzen und Nachteil für den Geschichtsunterricht*, Ars Una, Neuried 2001 (Bayerische Studien zur Geschichtsdidaktik, Bd. 3,1 u. 3,2) and W. Hasberg, *Im Schatten von Theorie und Praxis – Methodologische Aspekte empirischer Forschung in der Geschichtsdidaktik*, in "Zeitschrift für Geschichtsdidaktik", 5, 2007, pp. 9-40.

³ J. Dück, *Das historische Interesse der Schüler*, in "Zeitschrift für Pädagogische Psychologie und experimentelle Pädagogik", 12, 1911, pp. 483-6.

the perspective of the time when the aim of history teaching was primarily to impart knowledge about the past.

About two decades later, Herbert Freudenthal tried to explore the circumstances of learning and especially the methods of teaching history, but without measuring the effects⁴. At almost the same time, in 1932, Kurt Sonntag was the first who investigated the historical consciousness of pupils by asking them in interviews and analyzing written essays⁵.

This approach was also taken up by the psychologist Heinrich Roth who, about 30 years later, interviewed pupils again⁶. In his well-known book, simply entitled *Child and History*, which was published in five editions and became very influential, he was not simply content with reporting the testimonies of his test persons, but used the data obtained through the interviews to create a sequence of stages that contributed to form what we might call Historical Thinking, which became very influential. Furthermore, from this theory, which was based, at best, indirectly on his empirical findings, he deduced consequences for history teaching that, in the end, were hardly in touch with his empirical findings. According to Roth, the natural form of teaching history is to tell stories. Obviously, this is, at most, a theoretical insight, an axiom of historical theory, not an empirical result, which could be proven by his investigation⁷.

It was an unfortunate coincidence that Waltraud Küppers researched the content preferences of pupils at nearly the same time and found that they dislike dealing with political or economical structures, e.g. diagrams of the Greek democracy and similar topics⁸. For the debate on history didactics, the unfortunate result of this unfortunate coincidence had a bearing on the debate concerning history didactics, because for about 20 years – approximately from 1953 to 1973 – there was a general con-

⁴ H. Freudenthal, *Kind und Geschichte. Über Methoden zur Erfassung des geschichtlichen Bewusstseins*, in "Zeitschrift für pädagogische Psychologie und Jugendkunde", 34, 1933, pp. 10-29.

⁵ K. Sonntag, *Das geschichtliche Bewußtsein des Schülers. Ein Beitrag zur Bildungspsychologie*, Stenger, Erfurt 1932 (Veröffentlichungen der Akademie gemeinnütziger Wissenschaften, Abt. für Erziehungswissenschaft u. Jugendkunde Nr. 32).

⁶ H. Roth, *Kind und Geschichte*, Kösel Verlag, München 1968⁵ (1955¹, 1958², 1963³, 1965⁴) (Psychologie der Unterrichtsfächer der Volksschule).

⁷ Cf. in detail the criticism of Hasberg, *Empirische Forschung*, vol. 1, cit., pp. 363-84.

⁸ W. Küppers, *Zur Psychologie des Geschichtsunterrichts*, Huber, Bern/Stuttgart 1961 (1966²). (Abhandlungen zur pädagogischen Psychologie, vol. 3).

sensus on the fact that history had to be narrated by the teacher so that the pupils only had to listen to the stories and memorise their content. The sequence of a lesson was predetermined as follows: (1) Presentation and (2) Consideration.

This classification is ultimately based on the *Formalstufentheorie* (formal stage theory) of Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) which was very influential especially in the lower education sector. The classification by Roth was taken over by Hans Ebeling and became so integrated into the history-didactics discussion that it could no longer be overlooked, because of the influence of this author, who was also a very successful textbook writer⁹.

Fig. 1. Formal stage theory according to Johann Friedrich Herbart

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|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Vertiefung: Klarheit, Assoziation | 1. Deepening: Clarity, Association |
| 2. Besinnung: System, Methode | 2. Reflection: System, Method |

This period in the debate on history didactics between 1953-1973 is a good (or ironically: bad or fatal) example of how empirical results can have a sustainable influence on the scientific discourse if empirical studies are not perceived in a critical manner. On a closer examination, Roth's study did not meet the standards of empirical research as they were established at that time. He simply combined the data concerning pupils' interviews that Sonntag had previously collected, with the information acquired from his own enquiries in such a way that it is impossible for the user to separate the statements of students from the 1930s from those made during the 1950s. One cannot distinguish between them because they are not exactly separated from each other. Delving

⁹ The book by H. Ebeling, *Methodik des Geschichtsunterrichts*, Schroedel, Hannover 1955 was published in six editions (between 1955-1970), the seventh was published postum under the title: *Didaktik und Methodik des Geschichtsunterrichts*, Schroedel, Hannover 1973⁹. On the importance of the person and the work, see E. Ebeling - K. Ebeling, *Erinnerungen an Hans Ebeling 1906-1967*, Privat, Brunswick 1997; W Birkenfeld, *Hans Ebeling (1906-1967)*, in *Deutsche Geschichtsdidaktiker des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. S. Quandt, Paderborn et al., Schöningh 1978, pp. 365-80; A. Michler, *Geschichtsdidaktische Überlegungen des Unterrichtspraktikers Hans Ebeling*, in *Modernisierung im Umbruch. Geschichtsdidaktik und Geschichtsunterricht nach 1945*, eds. W. Hasberg - M. Seidenfuß, Lit-Verlag, Berlin 2008 (Geschichtsdidaktik in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, Bd. 6), pp. 377-91 and U. Mayer, *Nur ein „herausragender Praktiker“? Ein neuer Zugang zur Geschichtsmethodik Hans Ebelings*, in *Geschichtslernen, Innovationen und Reflexionen (Festschrift B. v. Borries)*, eds. J. Patrick, J. Meyer-Hamme, A. Körber, Centaurus Verlag, Herbolzheim 2008, pp. 477-97.

into the methodological deficits of this study will go beyond the limits of this paper, suffice to say that Roth's research dominated the debate over a long period of time.

There is yet another difficulty that needs to be pointed out in combination with empirical results. The study by Roth is divided into two parts: the first one consists of the statements of his test persons and his conclusions, which are derived from them. In the second part of the book, a teaching instruction is developed, which explains that in a history lesson a given content has first to be delivered by the instructor in a narrative form, before it can be considered by the pupils. It has to be emphasized that this teaching methodology cannot be drawn up from the empirical results¹⁰. This is also true of empirical descriptions, which are called “*naturalistischer Fehlschluss*” in German and that may be translated in English as “naturalistic fallacy”. This philosophical insight means that one cannot conclude what shall be by describing the reality (e.g., by empirical findings)¹¹.

As already mentioned, the study by Roth received strong support from the study of Küppers, who stated that pupils had little interest in Ancient or Medieval History as well as political and structural history. But nearly nobody noticed at that time – that this kind of investigation was replicated only a few years later by E. Schröter and even today the close similarities between the two have not been noted. Schröter conducted his research in a different town and interviewed students from a different type of school, known in Germany as gymnasium. The results he achieved were almost antithetical to the ones Küppers had presented. Unfortunately, Schröter's results were analysed in his doctoral thesis, which was not published and for this reason did not produce any resonance¹². This case is mentioned because it illustrates, on the one hand, that empirical results are determined by several factors, depending on what kind of sample data are taken into account or the circumstances in which tests take place. On the other hand, their validity is not constant over time. One of the reasons for this is that there are neither representative studies on historical

¹⁰ Cf. note 7.

¹¹ The “naturalistic fallacy” goes back to the discourse of philosophy of science, at least to Wilhelm Dilthey, cf. H. Jobach, *Tatsachen, Normen und Werte in Diltheys Theorie der Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*, in *Dilthey als Wissenschaftsphilosoph*, hrsg. v. C. Damböck - H.U. Lessing, Verlag Karl Alber, München 2016, pp. 11-40, esp. p. 27f.

¹² E. Schröter, *Jugendalter und Geschichte. Eine empirische Untersuchung über das Verhältnis der Mittel- und Oberstufenschüler eines Gymnasiums zur Geschichte*, PhD thesis Kiel University 1964.

thinking, nor on the ways in which teaching and learning can induce it on the part of students. The only study produced in any language, which delves on historical thinking is the one by Bodo von Borries and it dates back to 1995. In his research Borries investigated historical consciousness among the youth in Germany¹³. The well-known large-scale study “Youth and History” is not one¹⁴, even though this survey included almost 32.000 students and more than 1.250 teachers from 27 countries including Italy, does not meet the criteria that establish representativeness. This does not mean that the findings are not valid, but that they are not directly transferable to the population of young people aged 15 across Europe¹⁵. Indeed, significant differences in historical awareness of young people belonging to the participating countries could be identified. It was striking that those differences (1) correlated strongly with the various degrees of economic prosperity of the countries in which enquiries had been conducted, insofar as this is reflected in the gross domestic product. On the other hand, at the individual level, it was noticeable that (2) historical consciousness correlates strongly with the religious attitudes of the students who had been interviewed. However, these are only two particularly significant factors that influence historical consciousness. The importance of this study – even if it is not representative – lies in the fact that it shows how different the historical consciousness of young people is across Europe. This seems to depend not least on the forms of history teaching at school and the (didactic) training of history teachers¹⁶.

¹³ B. v. Borries, *Das Geschichtsbewusstsein Jugendlicher. Erste repräsentative Untersuchung über Vergangenheitsdeutung und Zukunftserwartung von Schülerinnen und Schülern in Ost- und Westdeutschland*, Juventa Verlag, Weinheim und München 1995.

¹⁴ M. Angvik - B. v. Borries (eds.), *Youth and History. A Comparative European Survey on Historical Consciousness and Political Attitudes among Adolescents*, 2 vols., Körber-Stiftung, Hamburg 1997.

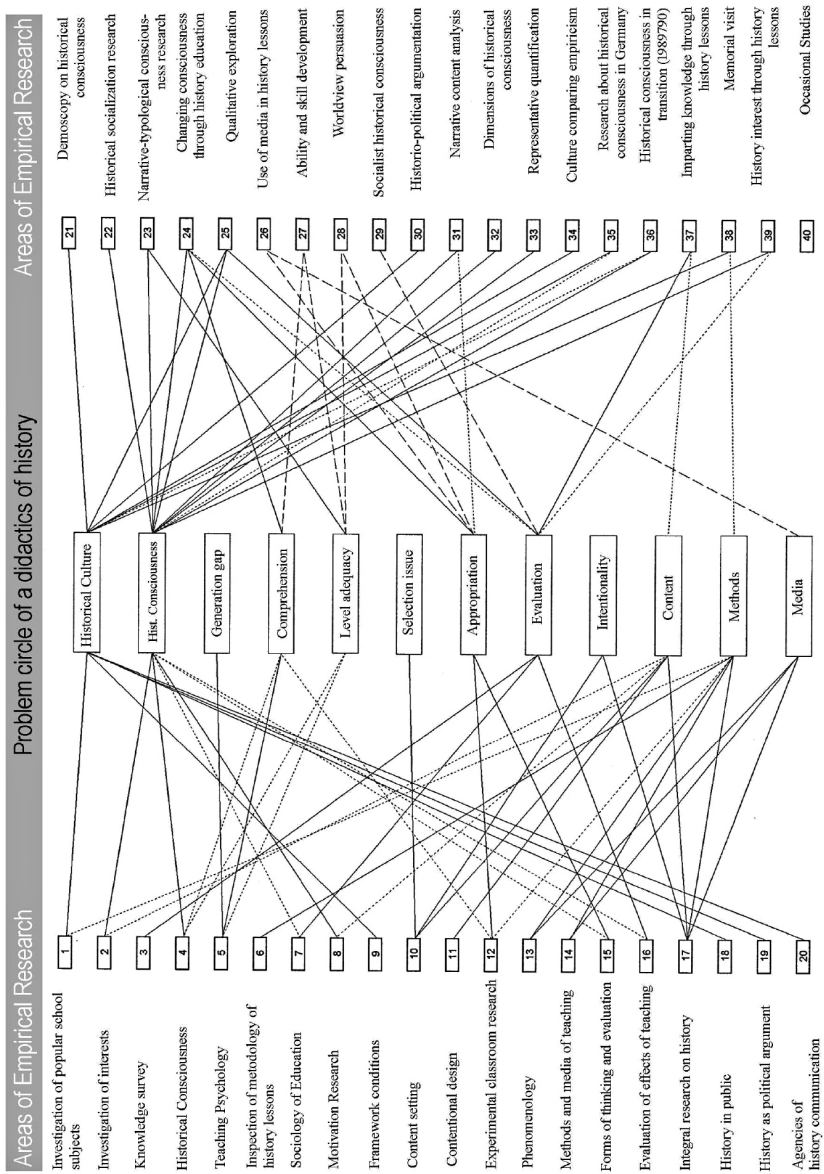
¹⁵ For this reason, among others, the data was also evaluated on a country-specific basis, cf. for example B. v. Borries, *Jugend und Geschichte. Ein europäischer Kulturvergleich aus deutscher Sicht*, Leske + Buderich, Opladen 1999 (Schule und Gesellschaft 21), as well as for Italy L. Cajani, *Biographie und Weltgeschichte zwischen Fortschritt und Niedergang, in Jugend – Politik – Geschichte. Ergebnisse des europäischen Kulturvergleichs “Youth and History”*, Körber-Stiftung, Hamburg 1997, pp. 79-87 and L. Cajani, *Gli studenti italiani nella ricerca Youth and History: un primo sguardo analitico*, in *Jugend und Geschichte / I giovani e la storia. Eine Studie zum Geschichtsbewusstsein / Un'indagine sulla coscienza storica*, ed. F. Lanthaler, Pädagogisches Institut / Istituto Pedagogico / Istituto Pedagogico, Bolzano 1997, pp. 229-50.

¹⁶ Cf. E. Erdmann - W. Hasberg (eds.), *Bridging Diversity. Towards a European Discourse on History Education*, in *Facing – Mapping – Bridging Diversity*, Wochenschau Verlag, Schwalbach/Ts 2011, vol. 2, pp. 345-79.

The entire scope of empirical research in the German speaking academic world, which involves the ways in which historical thinking is fostered through teaching and learning, cannot be comprehensively discussed in this paper. However, it is possible to take at least a focusing look at its development up to 2000. For this purpose, two, at first confusing, diagrams are used. Since they may be somewhat unclear at the first glance, they will be carefully explained (fig. 2-4). They are presented in this paper for the following reasons: (1) to give a first impression of the long tradition of empirical work on historical thinking, learning, and teaching in Germany, and (2) to point out a first listing of difficulties which are linked to empirical research.

This first diagram is so complex that, at first sight, it looks like a pattern for cutting dresses. It represents all empirical research efforts and tries to cluster them. But this proves to be largely impossible. For this reason, the German diagram is not translated in its entirety, but reduced to a few areas in a second picture, although they can only partially shed light on the broadness of this field of research in Germany. In figure 3, studies that deal with history lessons and the teaching of history are listed on the left, while, on the right, there are studies that explore more general aspects of historical thinking.

Fig. 2. Fields of Empirical Research in German speaking discourse (1968-1989/90)¹⁷.



¹⁷ The scheme, taken from Hasberg, *Empirische Forschung*, vol. 2, cit., p. 256, attempts to combine at least forty different empirical research fields, from 1968 through 1990, with the elements of a theory of history lessons (middle pillar).

Fig. 3. Fields of Empirical Research in German language discourse (1968-1989/90)¹⁸.

- Knowledge survey
- Psychological aspects of history lessons (e.g., K. Sonntag, W. Küppers)
- Experimental studies on historical learning and teaching (N. Seel)
- Research on students' interest in history and their motivation
- Research on historical thinking in teaching context (K. Fina)
- Analyses of narrative argumentation (e.g., J. Rüsen et al.)
- Development of skills and abilities (e.g., E. Wermes)
- Historical and political argumentation (e.g., W. Jaide)
- National consciousness (e.g., W. Weidenfeld et al.)
- Cross-cultural studies (e.g., B. v. Borries)

The connection lines (that appear in fig. 2) show the coherence between a framework of historical consciousness and a theory of history lessons¹⁹. This can be illustrated by just one example: if one takes up the problem of appropriation, i.e. the question of how students can and should be engaged with historical learning in history lessons, one can fall back on experimental teaching research in which different teaching methods are tested (No. 12), or on psychological studies on historical thinking (No. 15). The latter is related to historical appropriation processes in general, the former to the ways history classes are planned. Furthermore, there are studies on changes in historical consciousness (No. 24), on the formative power of ideological convictions (No. 28), or on the reception of narrative offerings by students (No. 31). Further references are also possible. The crucial point is that the teacher, as a user of empirical findings, must make all these connections. Due to the abundance of findings, this is a difficult task which he or she will hardly be able to accomplish without the help of science.

¹⁸ At this point, it is not possible to list in detail all the publications that have been published within the framework of these total of 40 research areas. Therefore, we refer to the chronologically arranged bibliography in Hasberg, *Empirische Forschung*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 466-75, where only empirical research on historical thinking, learning, and teaching during this period is reported. Cf. also the notes 6, 8 and 13 above.

¹⁹ For a theory of history lessons, there are currently only few rudiments in the German discourse, see Hasberg, *Empirische Forschung*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 333-57, where prolegomena are developed, which are continued in Id., *Analytische Wege zu besserem Geschichtsunterricht. Historisches Denken im Handlungszusammenhang Geschichtsunterricht*, in *Was heißt guter Geschichtsunterricht? Perspektiven im Vergleich*, eds. J. Meyer-Hamme, M. Kerstin-Zülsdorf, H. Thünemann, Wochenschau Verlag, Schwalbach/Ts. 2012 (*Geschichtsunterricht erforschen*, Bd. 2), pp. 137-60. Cf. also S. Bracke et al., *Theorie des Geschichtsunterrichts*, Wochenschau Verlag, Schwalbach/Ts. 2018.

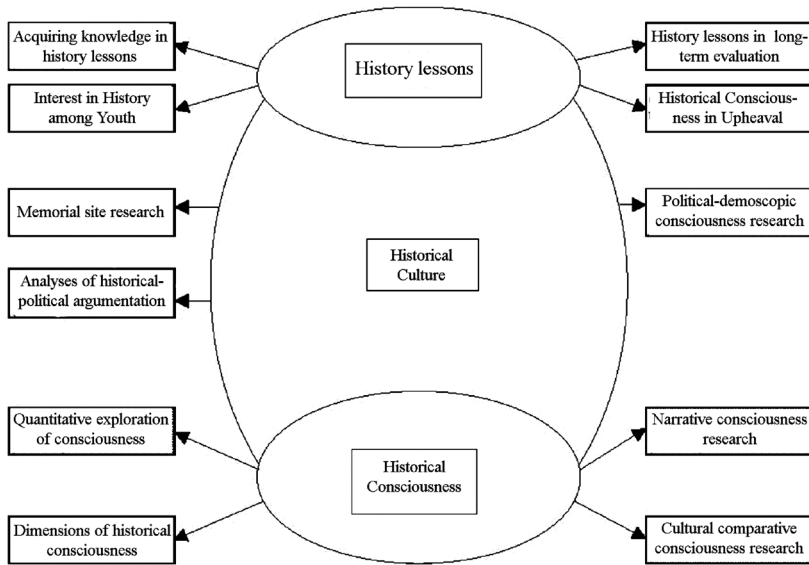
Indeed, it is not obvious which field of the discourse can be addressed by empirical research. On the contrary, scholars who are interested in theory formation, or practitioners, who intend to optimize history lessons by using empirical results, are referred to several fields of research and even to different research disciplines which undertake empirical investigations on historical thinking, learning and teaching. Therefore, the orientation in this array of fields is difficult for scholars and it is especially so for teachers. This is why the problem of the possible adaptation of empirical results to diverse fields of research ought to be tackled without hesitation, in order to provide an orientation and to single out the criteria for a diligent selection of those results which have been achieved through scientific and reliable methodology.

A second scheme (fig. 4) appears to be not as complicated as the first one. It presents the efforts made in the decade between 1989/90 and 2000, hence a period that is shorter than the first one. Consequently, it is not surprising that the output is smaller even if, during this period, more scientists were conducting empirical research. Indeed, the efforts and the output of empirical studies in this decade were not reduced as compared to the preceding period. They are more concentrated and more focused on coherent research fields. Two factors may be responsible for this observation and correspond to one another: firstly, the scientific discourse acquired a more stringent form, which seems to be a consequence of the establishment of history didactics as a scientific discipline in the universities, a change that was combined with the academic profiling of teacher education since the end of the 1960s²⁰. A second effect was that increasingly more empirical research was being done by members of this hardly new scientific community. Both factors explain the stronger concentration of empirical efforts and results. From this observation we may deduce that it would be necessary to have a heuristic framework to guide us through the empirical efforts in order to apply the results to theoretical formation (e.g. a theory of historical consciousness) or to history education in the

²⁰ This period was often worked on by different scholars in Germany. An overview of the efforts, not all of which can be mentioned here: W. Hasberg, *Von Mythen und Ursprüngen der Geschichtsdidaktik. Grenz- und Wiedergänger in der Geschichtsdidaktik. Epistemologische Erwägungen zur Disziplinengeschichte*, in *Geschichte im interdisziplinären Diskurs. Grenzziehungen, Grenzüberschreitungen, Grenzverschiebungen*, hrsg. v. M. Sauer et al., V&R unipress, Göttingen 2016 (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für Geschichtsdidaktik, vol. 13), pp. 219-41. C. Heuer, W. Hasberg, M. Seidenfuß, *Der lange Sommer der Geschichtsdidaktik. Aufriss einer reflexiven Disziplinengeschichte*, in "Zeitschrift für Geschichtsdidaktik", 19, 2020, pp. 73-89, offer an embedding with a reference to the latest literature.

broad sense (not only confined to history lessons). This path will be further explored in the third paragraph but, before doing so, a short global overview of the state of empirical research on historical thinking, learning and teaching will be given in order to better classify the German efforts and to better evaluate the resulting consequences.

Fig. 4. Fields of Empirical Research during 1989/90-2000 in German language discourse.



A Short Global Review

Just as the empirical efforts in Germany could not be presented comprehensively, a complete overview of worldwide empirical research in historical thinking, learning and teaching cannot be given. Such an undertaking would be hopeless and presumptuous.

The following review is based on a survey initiated and conducted by some German scientists, who won over scholars from all over the world to describe and explain the tradition and research in history didactics in their own country or the scientific community they belonged to²¹. The book was

²¹ M. Köster, H. Thünemann, M. Zülsdorf-Kersting (eds.), *Researching History Education. International Perspectives and Disciplinary Traditions*, Wochenschau Verlag, Schwalbach/Ts. 2019² (Geschichtsunterricht erforschen). Reviewed by M. Barricelli

published in English, but it can be assumed that it is not very well known outside the German scholarly community, in spite of the fact that the book offers valuable insights into the different scientific cultures of Canada, Finland, France, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, the United Kingdom, Latin America and the United States as well as those of Germany, Austria and Switzerland. I will now briefly introduce the main achievements of the survey without paying much attention to the German speaking communities.

First, it is interesting to observe how the discipline is defined. Except for two contributors who describe “history didactics” as “history didactics”, most authors describe the core of the discipline as “history education” – precisely as the book was entitled.

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|---|---|
| History Education | Austria, Germany, Canada, Finland, Netherlands, Switzerland |
| History Didactics | France, Poland |
| Historical Learning | Spain/Latin America |
| Historical Learning and Teaching | Germany |
| Historical Understanding | USA |

Up to this point in time there was much talk about research on historical thinking, learning and teaching. In Germany one can find different definitions of what history didactics is. In former times it was a kind of hybrid science between pedagogy and history (J. Rohlfes)²² or rather, the science of history lessons²³. In more recent times it has been defined as a «science of reception and mediation in history»²⁴ or as a «science of historical consciousness in society»²⁵. What is the core subject of history didactics? This

in “H-Soz-Kult”, 27.07.2020 (www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/reb-29694). The 1st edition (Wochenschau Verlag, Schwalbach/Ts. 2014) was reviewed by W. Hasberg, in “H-Soz-u-Kult”, 26.01.2017 (www.hsozkult.de/publicationreview/id/rezbuecher-26067). Regarding to historical-didactic discourses in Europe cf. *Facing – Mapping – Bridging Diversity*, 2 vols., cit., which focuses on Europe.

²² J. Rohlfes, *Geschichte und ihre Didaktik*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 2005⁵, pp. 20-1, 191-2.

²³ E. Weniger, *Die Grundlagen des Geschichtsunterrichts. Untersuchungen zur geisteswissenschaftlichen Didaktik*, B.G. Teubner, Leipzig, Berlin 1926.

²⁴ W. Schreiber, *Geschichte vermitteln – Geschichte rezipieren. Das Forschungsfeld der Geschichtsdidaktik*, Kastner, Eichstätt 2001. Cf. Id. - W. Hasberg, *Geschichtsdidaktik*, in *Lernen im Fach und über das Fach hinaus*, eds. M. Rothgangel et al., Waxmann, Münster 2021² (Fachdidaktische Forschungen, vol. 12), pp. 155-81.

²⁵ K.-E. Jeismann, *Didaktik der Geschichte. Die Wissenschaft von Zustand, Funktion und Veränderung geschichtlicher Vorstellungen im Selbstverständnis der Gegenwart*, in

question seems easier to answer than it actually is – in Germany as well as in the global community, but it is urgent to answer it – or at least first to initiate a dialogue about it. So, what is the subject of History Didactics in different scientific communities?

According to Karl Popper (1902-1994), science is what scientists do²⁶. The insight that methods inform sciences and their results, is an integral part of the theory and epistemology of science²⁷. According to this, in addition to the (c) methods, the (a) research interest and the (b) subject matter, as well as the (d) forms of systematization of results emerge from the disciplinary self-understanding, or paradigm, and have an effect on it²⁸. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to methodology in order to strengthen the international discourse on history didactics, given that in the whole world scientific cultures are different from one another. Limits of space do not allow us to give a detailed account of the aforementioned anthology. We will limit ourselves to summarizing the most important observations arising from reading the book and having in mind the scientific-theoretical aspects that have been described above.

1. Nearly none of the authors reflects on a special approach to the methodology of research on history didactics or explains why empirical methods are useful and vital to the research on subjects like historical education or historical understanding. Perhaps, because it seems obvious or lies at hand.
2. Even M. Carretero does not explain the epistemological background of his well-known large-scale studies in Spain and Latin America²⁹.

Geschichtswissenschaft. Didaktik – Forschung – Theorie, ed. E. Kosthorst, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1977, pp. 9-33.

²⁶ K. Popper, *Logik der Forschung. Zur Erkenntnistheorie der modernen Naturwissenschaft*, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 2005¹¹ (1935¹).

²⁷ Especially T.S. Kuhn, *Die Struktur wissenschaftlicher Revolutionen* (1962), Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1977², Id., *Die Entstehung des Neuen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1978, who is however based on L. Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1999⁴ (1935¹). Besides the methods, the interest is above all what influences scientific work, see J. Habermans, *Erkenntnis und Interesse*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1991¹⁰ (1968).

²⁸ A. Holtmann, *Wissenschaftstheorien*, in W.W. Miekeled, *Handlexikon zur Politikwissenschaft*, Landeszentrale für politische Bildung, Bonn 1986, pp. 570-5.

²⁹ M. Carretero - E. Perez-Manjarrez, *Historical Narratives and the Tensions between National Identities, Colonialism and Citizenship*, in *Researching History education*, eds. Köster, Thünemann, Zülsdorf-Kersting, cit., pp. 71-88.

3. The article by the Finnish authors³⁰ gives evidence of the fact that this scientific community changed its research methods as soon as they began to publish in English³¹. Indeed, many studies produced in English-speaking countries on historical thinking, learning, and teaching possess a definite qualitative imprint and make a very limited use of test persons. This kind of empirical research – which has been steadily growing in other countries as well – will never achieve representativeness and therefore cannot pretend to impose general allegations that have the authority of scientific statements.
4. Comparable methods are used in the Netherlands where “historical reasoning” is one of the core concepts. “Historical reasoning”, in that intellectual milieu, is defined as «constructing or evaluating a description of processes of change and continuity, an explanation of a historical phenomenon, or a comparison of historical phenomena or periods by asking historical questions, contextualising, using substantive historical concepts, using meta-concepts for history, and finally putting forward claims supported by arguments»³². The concept of “historical reasoning” is not very different from the concept of “historical argumentation” which, according to Carla van Boxtel, is in close connection to the theory of “historical narration”. This theory has the advantage of evolving from an analytical philosophy of history, which means that it was developed thanks to an analysis of the formal structure of historical statements that take the shape of narrative sentences³³. By the same token, the theory of “historical narration” – extending its influence upon wide circles of scholars engaged in the didactics of history in Germany – came to include argumentation and reasoning, in the sense that historical reasoning and argumentation always take the shape of narration when events need to be sequenced in time.
5. At the end of the anthology, Sam Wineburg and Avishag Reismann speak of a “zigzagged path” between the more influential trends of psychology and the less influential alleys of historical science³⁴.

³⁰ E. Nikander - A. Virta, *History Education in Finland. Currents in Research*, in *Researching History Education*, eds. Köster, Thünemann, Zülzdorf-Kersting, cit., pp. 226-50.

³¹ This observation was already made by Erdmann - Hasberg, *Bridging Diversity Towards a European Discourse*, cit., pp. 345-79, here pp. 355-60.

³² C. v. Boxtel, *Insights from Dutch Research on History Education. Historical Reasoning and a Chronological frame of reference*, in *Researching History education*, eds. Köster, Thünemann, Zülzdorf-Kersting, cit., pp. 271-99, here p. 276.

³³ A. Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1965.

³⁴ S. Wineburg - A. Reismann, *Research on Historical understanding. A Brief Glimpse from*

In particular, the dominance of behaviourism has interrupted the tradition of investigating historical thinking and testing historical knowledge. They state – not without sophistication – that the cognitive-psychological turn of the 1960s is highlighted as a liberating blow that has led to a return of empirical exploration of categories of historical thinking. Thinking and understanding historically – as shown by a contemporary example provided by Wineburg and Reismann³⁵ – enables citizens to develop the competencies that are needed in everyday political and social life, thereby allowing them to participate in it in a critical manner. Indeed, thinking and understanding historically should also be intended as a means of understanding others and of otherness³⁶. This function of historical thinking – with which one can easily agree – is certainly not a new discovery. Understanding otherness, if it is intended as a function of historical thinking, not only construes an understanding of temporal otherness but can also establish a (reflexive) relationship with otherness in the present. Even if this relationship cannot be thought of in a simplistic way, it clearly shows that history education has its own objectives and that they do not correspond to the aims of historical scholarship³⁷. Nonetheless, it has to be emphasized if we want to show that history education is connected with aims that do not correspond with the aims of historical science at all, but follow its own goals. When Erich Weniger (1894-1961) explored the circumstances in which history lessons were held in the beginning of the 20th century, he put forward the thesis of the “autonomy of history education”, by which he meant that history education would not be pursued for the same reason as historical research, but is determined by the expectations of the “Bildungsmächte”, that is the educational powers such

American Shoes, in *Researching History Education*, eds. Köster, Thünemann, Zülsdorf-Kersting, cit., pp. 342-61.

³⁵ Ivi, pp. 342-3. The authors are using a simple example from the political debate. During the presidential election in 2008, internet media reported that Barack Obama's stepmother had been present at his birth. Since the stepmother had never left Kenya, the presidential candidate would have been born in Kenya. This would have excluded him from the presidential election. The authors show how, using the skills of historical thinking, the dubious news can be resolved and they concluded: «The episode, and similar conspiracy theories travelling on the Internet, show the tight connection between how historians think and how citizens employ (or fail to employ) these basic moves when examining contemporary social issues».

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Cf. W. Hasberg, *History – Civic Education by Detours*, in “International Journal for history and social sciences education”, forthcoming.

as the state, the church, and so forth³⁸. This point should be stressed in order to demonstrate that the empirical exploration of historical learning in history lessons must be distinguished from the kind of exploration deployed in historical culture in general. Incidentally, this requires a theory of history teaching, just as all empirical research – as already mentioned – requires theoretical perspectives.

Difficulties of Empiricism or the Necessity of Theory

It was more than 10 years ago when the risks of empirical research for historical reflections on historical thinking, learning and teaching were firstly taken into account³⁹. Nevertheless, the call for empirical research on historical thinking, learning and teaching has not ceased but has even intensified. This seems to be a fortunate development – so long as sufficient criticism is applied to the reception of the empirical findings. The core risks of empirical research in relation to its reception have already been mentioned above and only need to be recalled briefly here yet not without a certain emphasis. We have seen from the German debate between 1953-1973 how empirical results – whether they are reliable and valid or not – can have a lasting impact on the discourse. This risk increases (1) when the research is conducted by scholars, e.g., psychologists or educators who are not experts in the field of history or when it is conducted by historians who are not familiar with empirical research methods. A second danger which also became visible in the German debate, consists in the assumption that empirical studies are accepted uncritically because history didacticians or history teachers do not know or do not observe the standards of empirical methodology. In the meantime, this danger seems to have diminished, although it has not yet vanished, but is rather always latently present. It increases when, due to the nature of the empirical research field on historical thinking, learning and teaching, numerous actors from different research fields with different research interests are involved. The extremely broad field of empirical research on historical thinking, learning, and teaching is characterized – as it was also shown in the

³⁸ Weniger, *Die Grundlagen des Geschichtsunterrichts*, cit. Cf. B. Mütter, *Historische Zunft und historische Bildung. Beiträge zur geisteswissenschaftlichen Geschichtsdidaktik*, dsv, Weinheim 1995 (Schriften zur Geschichtsdidaktik, vol. 2) and Id., *Die Entstehung der Geschichtsdidaktik als Wissenschaftsdisziplin in der Epoche der Weltkriege*, BIS-Verlag, Oldenbourg 2013 (Oldenburger Schriften zur Geschichtswissenschaft, vol. 14).

³⁹ W. Hasberg, *Risks and Perspectives regarding empirical research for historical Learning*, in “Yearbook of the International Society of History Didactics”, 32, 2010, pp. 195-214.

overview of German developments in this area between 1968-2000 – by three features: 1. Incoherence of research interests, 2. Disparity of research methods, 3. Diffusion of results⁴⁰.

The first feature is originally caused by the circumstance that scientists of various disciplines explored different aspects of historical thinking, learning and teaching. This situation has not been overcome today, because there are psychologists, pedagogues, and historians or history didacticians who carry out such studies. And, of course, they use different methods depending on the scientific community they belong to.

The era of big empirical large-scale assessments (e.g. from B. v. Borries) seems to be over. HiTCH (Historical Thinking Competencies in History), a very large-scale collaborative project between empirical educational researchers and history didacticians seems to have stalled; at least the results have not been eventually published (and the survey instrument has not yet been made public)⁴¹.

Large-scale quantitative studies have been replaced by small-scale qualitative studies, which have always been dominant in the Anglophone-speaking world. Their procedures are quite similar to the hermeneutical methods of historians. This is the reason why they are so often used, especially in graduate work. Admittedly, they have the disadvantage of not being able to generate general statements which, however, are not always given the sufficient and necessary attention in the reception – whether for theory building or practice.

Finally, experimental methods, which are frequently used in psychology, are rarely used in German-language research on historical thinking, learning, and teaching, and if they are indeed used, it is mostly by non-historians. At present, their use – as far as my observation goes – is declining more and more.

These are the conditions which produce a wide diffusion of the results. This diffusion is responsible for the confusion which arises when a theorist or a practitioner are searching for empirically based reference points.

For the above-mentioned reasons, in order to overcome these difficulties, a framework is needed which can (1.) guide and bundle research interests and (2.) through which different methodological designs can be coordinated, (3.) so that the diffusion of the results can be embanked.

⁴⁰ Cf. Hasberg, *Empirische Forschung*, vol. 2, cit., pp. 232-5.

⁴¹ U. Trautwein et al., *Kompetenzen historischen Denkens Erfassen. Konzeption, Operationalisierung und Befunde des Projekts "Historical Thinking – Competencies in History" (HiTCH)*, Waxmann, Münster 2017. A publication including the results is still pending.

In addition to this comprehensive framework, a theoretically based framework has been taken as the basis, onto which the application of empirical data to theoretical approaches as well as for the orientation of pragmatics (e.g. a theory of history lessons) and practice can take place. Such a framework is lacking in Germany and in many other countries too.

Historical Consciousness: a Third-Order Concept as Framework

Even before the social awakening and protest broke out in Germany in 1967-68, as it happened elsewhere, a meta- or re-analysis of studies on the historical consciousness of young people was produced by sociologists as well as social philosophers belonging to the circles of the *Frankfurt School* around Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Theodor W. Adorno (1903-1969). One of the protagonists was the young Jürgen Habermas, who himself made an empirical study of student's political engagement⁴².

The re-analysis or secondary analysis undertaken by Ludwig von Friedeburg and Peter Hübner found that young people did not feel that they were a part of society that could influence political and social life, due to a static historical consciousness. Rather, the historical consciousness of young people found in the empirical studies of the 1950s and 1960s was a personalizing historical consciousness that was characterized by: overpowering subjects, personalization of collectives, use of stereotypical schemes for social classification, use of anthropomorphic categories for the description of collective actors in the past⁴³.

This finding shows a static historical consciousness, which is not in motion and therefore not changeable. Thus, it projects an image of history that differs from historical consciousness as it was later introduced and understood in that it is not dynamic, i.e., it does not relate to a process of historical thinking but is something like a snapshot of the result of historical thinking. Nevertheless, through their re-analysis, L. v. Friedeburg and P. Hübner were able to identify the features of historical consciousness that prevented the present from being seen as changeable. A static image of the past, which is shaped by factors over which one has no influence, conveys a feeling of powerlessness, and consequently prevents citizens from feeling a desire for social and political change.

⁴² J. Habermas, L. v. Friedeburg, C. Oehler, *Student und Politik. Eine soziologische Untersuchung zum politischen Bewußtsein Frankfurter Studenten*, Luchterhand, Neuwied 1961.

⁴³ L. v. Friedeburg - P. Hübner, *Das Geschichtsbild der Jugend*, Juventa Verlag, Munich 1964 (Überblick zur wissenschaftlichen Jugendkunde, vol. 7). Summarized and put into context by Hasberg, *Empirische Forschung*, cit., pp. 417-20.

One of the consequences was the development of a theory of “historical consciousness in society”. It was first sketched by Rolf Schörken, who wanted to include the pre- or extra-scientific parts of historical thinking⁴⁴. In the meanwhile, Karl-Ernst Jeismann, who initially started with “historical power of judgment” (historische Urteilskraft), was the first to elaborate the theory in the form in which it has been adopted by wide circles of German-language history didactics⁴⁵. Jörn Rüsen, in particular, has backed up this approach in historical theory, although he himself usually speaks of historical thinking and historical learning⁴⁶. He understands both the concepts as synonymous with historical consciousness, which reveals that this is a process that can also be described accordingly⁴⁷.

Sometimes, this theoretically grounded and comprehensive concept of historical consciousness has been incorrectly translated in the English-speaking discourse as historical awareness. Historical awareness may be an additional aspect so long as one has to be aware of or pay attention to phenomena of historical culture for starting historical thinking, but this awareness may not be conscious. On the contrary, historical consciousness, in the German scholarly discourse, means the consciousness of the dimensions in time (past, present, future) which assumes historical thinking, albeit initially at a low, non-elaborated level. The second characteristic of historical consciousness, which has to be emphasized, is that it is a process which never comes to an end. To mention just one more basic feature: historical consciousness is an asset of every individual. That is why historical consciousness differs from person to person, even if there are also great intersections among people who live in the same collective, be it a nation, a city or any other group⁴⁸. This is the reason why the research subject in wide circles of the German-speaking history didactics investigate “historical consciousness in society” (K.-E. Jeismann). This insight goes back to the pioneering research by Maurice

⁴⁴ R. Schörken, *Geschichte und Geschichtsbewußtsein*, in “Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht”, 23, 1972, pp. 81-9. Cf. note 52 above.

⁴⁵ Great influence on the discourse had especially the essays of Jeismann, *Didaktik der Geschichte*, cit., and Id., *Geschichtsbewußtsein. Überlegungen zur zentralen Kategorie eines neuen Ansatzes der Geschichtsdidaktik*, in *Geschichtsdidaktische Positionen*, ed. H. Süßmuth, Paderborn et al., Schöningh 1980, pp. 179-222.

⁴⁶ J. Rüsen, *Historische Orientierung*, Wochenschau-Verlag, Schwalbach/Ts. new-ed. 2008 and Id., *Historisches Lernen*, Wochenschau-Verlag, Schwalbach/Ts. new-ed. 2008.

⁴⁷ W. Hasberg - A. Körber, *Geschichtsbewusstsein dynamisch*, in *Geschichte – Leben – Lernen. Festschrift für Boro von Borries*, hrsg. v. A. Körber, Wochenschau Verlag, Schwalbach/Ts. 2003, pp. 177-200.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*

Halbwachs (1877-1945)⁴⁹, but has been re-emphasized in the discourse on history didactics, especially since historical learning takes place not only in society but also for society, insofar as it is the society that has established and sustains history education⁵⁰.

As it may have already become clear from this short listing of the most important characteristics of the theory of historical consciousness in Germany, it is a highly complex, extremely elaborated notion but a largely accepted one. Nevertheless, this has not been sufficiently discussed in the international scientific community of history didactics, although there have been attempts to initiate such a discussion⁵¹.

Historical consciousness, in the sense of the German discourse, is not a second, but a *third order concept*, because, on the one hand, it is a content category as far as the historical consciousness of people in the past can be explored by methods of historical research. On the other hand, it is a mental category as it is the instance wherein the process of historical thinking takes place, in the past as well as in the present. Consequently, it is a construct with the help of which historical thinking is described as a process⁵².

As the central research category of German-language history didactics, historical consciousness is defined as the process of historical thinking in which *reference objects in the past* (as contents) are integrated with *categories of order*, which in the English-language discourse are often regarded as “second order concepts”⁵³, whereby *principles of historical thinking* are

⁴⁹ M. Halbwachs, *Das kollektive Gedächtnis*, Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt a. M. 1985 and Id., *Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 2019⁶.

⁵⁰ Cf. Weniger, *Die Grundlagen*, cit.

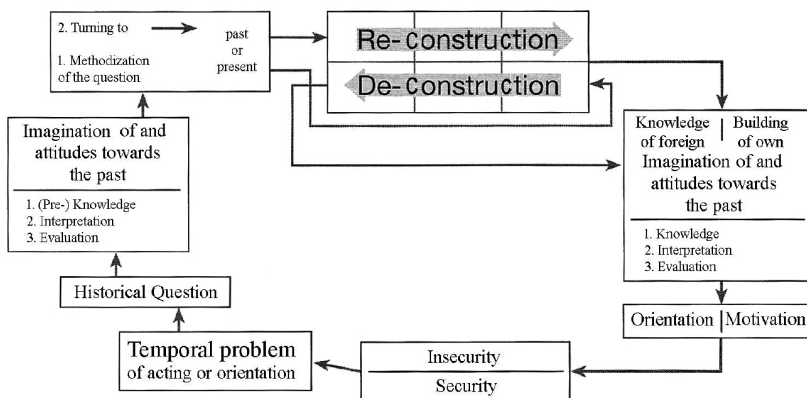
⁵¹ See especially P. Seixas (ed.), *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, Buffalo, London 2006 or S. Macdonald - K. Fausser, *Towards “European Historical Consciousness”. An introduction*, in *Approaches to European Historical Consciousness. Reflections and Provocations*, ed. S. Macdonald, edition Körber-Stiftung, Hamburg 2000 (Eustory series, vol. 1), pp. 9-30, especially 10-2. Already in the 1980s there was a survey in “Information of the International Society for Historical Didactics”, 8, 1987 and 9, 1988 among scientists about their understanding of historical consciousness.

⁵² Already in 1967, F. Lucas, *Grundriß der Geschichtsdidaktik* (1967), in *Geschichte als engagierte Wissenschaft. Zur Theorie einer Geschichtsdidaktik*, Klett, Stuttgart 1985, pp. 150-81 moved historical consciousness to the centre of historical didactics and called historio-didactical thinking as second-order historical thinking.

⁵³ In English-language discourse, categories and principles are usually not neatly separated from each other. See e.g. P. Seixas - T. Morton, *The Big Six. Historical Thinking concepts*, Nelson Education Ltd., Toronto 2013: (1) “Historical Significance” and (2) “Evidence” seems to be criteria of the quality of historical statements, developed by historical thinking. The production of meaning and evidence, however, could also be seen as conditional features of historical statements, which have to be taken into account from the very beginning of the process of historical thinking. In this case, they would have to

brought to bear. In the course of the mental process (cf. Fig. 5), which is by no means conscious but mostly unconscious, cognitive, but also emotional and aesthetic, religious and moral aspects, categories and principles of historical thinking that are related to past persons and events are included. In this way, notions of the course of time emerge, which can also take the form of structures (namely, when the factor of time is immobilized). In the end, the task of every historically thinking person remains to relate himself to what ideas he has about the past. Only through this do historical ideas arise that are of importance for the individual. Thus, historical consciousness can be described as a spiral-shaped mental process in which, starting from temporal orientation problems, solutions come about (could it be otherwise?) by recourse to the past or history.

Fig. 5. Historical consciousness as dynamic process⁵⁴.



be formulated as principles of historical thinking (not as qualities of historical statements). This is also true of (5) perspectivity which has to be considered, while thinking historically, from the beginning on different levels (past, present, future). Then it is also a principle of historical thinking. (3) “Continuity and Change” and (4) “Cause and Consequence” are undoubtedly categories. Finally, the (6) “ethical dimension” is of course linked to historical thinking processes, insofar as judgments have to be made about the meaning of history(s). In the German tradition, this refers to historical judgment (historische Urteilskraft), which has long been native to the discourse of history didactics, in the distinction between judgment in matters (Sachurteil) and judgement of values (Werturteil) according to M. Weber, *Die “Objektivität” sozialwissenschaftlicher und sozialpolitischer Erkenntnis*, in M. Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*, ed. J. Winkelmann, Mohr Siebeck, Tübingen 1988⁷, pp. 146-214. As such, it is a partial act of historical thinking.

⁵⁴ The main features of the scheme go back to Hasberg - Körber, *Geschichtsbewusstsein dynamisch*, cit. Here it is presented in the fundamentally modified form of W. Hasberg, *Von PISA nach Berlin. Auf der Suche nach Kompetenzen und Standards historischen Lernens*, in “Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht”, 56, 2005, pp. 684-702.

From such an understanding of historical consciousness, the competencies that constitute historical thinking can then also be derived:

Competence of

1. Asking historical questions
2. (Re-) organizing historical imaginations and attitudes
3. re-constructing the past by making history using the critical method of history
4. de-constructing historiography by leading back to the past and recognize the rules of constructing narratives
5. orientating in time by history

(Meta) Competence of

6. reflecting on (the own and others) historical thinking

This competence is not immediately derived from the circular process of historical thinking but comes from becoming self-aware of what one is doing when thinking historically in order to remain critical (of oneself and others).

Consequently, historical consciousness is a mental category or a third-order concept because it is the instance wherein the process of historical thinking takes place. This applies both to the actors of the past, whose historical consciousness can be studied by historians, and to those in the present who are supposed to think historically or – like students – learn to think historically. Therefore, historical consciousness is the central category to be explored in wide circles of German history didactics. For only when it has been sufficiently explored how historical thinking works can measures be proposed and taken to differentiate historical consciousness ever further. As early as the 1970s the (1) structure, (2) genesis, and (3) functions of historical consciousness have been researched, because only sufficient knowledge of these dimensions can lay the foundation for the (4) pragmatics of historical learning in schools and outside of them⁵⁵.

Conclusion

In a time where there is a certain euphoria regarding empirical research on various aspects of historical thinking, learning, and teaching, both in Germany as in other parts of the world, it seemed appropriate to follow up on this in order to explore and present the limits of empirical research conducted by methods of empirical social research. While taking as its starting point some methodological issues, this paper intended to warn

⁵⁵ Cf. Jeismann, *Didaktik der Geschichte*, cit.

against the risk that an important function theory must assume to avoid that empirical research does take on such a life of its own that it ends up investigating all kinds of phenomena that are either irrelevant to theory and practice or cannot be brought to bear by the latter.

That the danger of becoming dependent on empirical currents is not irrelevant is demonstrated not only by the German example, but also by the US-American discourse, described by S. Wineburg and A. Reisman as a “zig-zagged path” between scientific fashion trends. The same might be true for other scientific communities.

Empirical research that is not integrated into an epistemological network runs the risk of becoming independent and possibly dominating theory and practice due to its elaborate expertise, which non-experts can hardly master. It is also possible that it remains unnoticed by theory and practice due to its high degree of elaboration, its methodological obscurity, and the resulting diffusion of its results.

This urgent need for an epistemological discourse for the self-understanding of history didactics was the reason why the integrative power of such a network was demonstrated here using the German example. Such a third-order concept is needed not only to keep empirical research in check, but primarily, as Thomas S. Kuhn has shown, to establish a scientific discipline in the first place. If history education wants to project itself internationally as a scientific community, it urgently needs such an epistemological scaffold, because «science is intercultural and international, or it is not»⁵⁶.

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⁵⁶ So B. v. Borries, *Erfahrungen mit der multi-, inter- und transkulturellen Dimension der Geschichtsdidaktik*, in *Begriffene Geschichte – Geschichte begreifen*, eds. H. Thünemann, J. Elvert, C. Gundermann, W. Hasberg, Peter Lang Verlag, Frankfurt a. M. 2016 (Geschichtsdidaktik diskursiv, vol. 3), pp. 175-99.

