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Joint Project

Inclusive Living and Learning at School

Sectional Project

Opportunities in Historical Orientation

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OPPORTUNITIES IN HISTORICAL ORIENTATION: A THEORY ABOUT CHALLENGING PRIOR HISTORICAL ORIENTATION AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR LEARNING PROCESSES IN HETEROGENEOUS GROUPS

Benjamin Bräuer

Classifications and Aims

The conception of learning opportunities in history teaching must assume differences in the levels of knowledge, prior historical orientation and competences of the learners. The aims of inclusive didactics of history include the development of theoretical approaches that demonstrate flexible opportunities derived from subject-specific principles that capture these differences and initiate learning processes based on them.

Internationally, the core purpose of history is considered to be “historical orientation” and the development of the ability, skills and willingness to engage in historical orientation as a higher-level competence. In terms of learning theory, the areas of competence required are particularly fostered when historical orientation processes are applied and reflected upon in practice. The theoretical extension of the project ‘Opportunities in Historical Orientation’ aims to initiate such learning processes based on shared learning content in heterogeneous classes.

The focus is on the moment of ‘irritation’ when prior orientations are challenged. This means that established routines and prior orientations are questioned because subjects’ (supposed) certainties are challenged, leading to a need for reorientation.

The result of the theoretical extension should, in essence, explain two things:

1. Why do ‘irritations’ or challenges to historical orientation occur and how can they be used to develop history-related thinking and learning?
2. How can the potential of planned teaching and learning processes be increased so that pupils experience useful ‘irritations’ that support them in the (further) development of their historical competences and broaden their structuring and categorizing knowledge.

In order to create opportunities where ‚irritations‘ can be used to stimulate individual learning processes, the project includes the factors involved: the structure of the previously developed historical orientation (e.g. achieved levels of competence and state of knowledge), the structure of indicators for existing ‚irritation‘ or challenge potential in relevant teaching situations (e.g. introduction to a new subject, classroom discussions, teaching materials), the nature of potential ‚irritations‘ or challenges as a stimulus for learning, and their differentiation in different dimensions.

State of Current Research and Methodology

The hypothesis formation for the planned extension to theory is based on a transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary approach. One starting point is the ‚Philosophy of Orientation‘ (Werner Stegmaier). It suggests describing orientation as a meta-phenomenon that also pertains to the orientation processes of all disciplines. This approach seems particularly promising, as the concept of philosophical orientation includes the concept of challenge, which takes into account the previously developed structures which are then challenged as a result of orientation situations. The concept of ‚irritation‘ considers these challenges to be a stimulus for reorganizing the orientation that has been questioned. The second starting point is provided by research on historical theory, which takes a differentiated look at the structure of historical knowledge useful for orientation (Jörn Rüsen), as well as the process and areas of competence that generate this knowledge (FUER Group).

The results of the literature research were then analyzed to assess their potential for adaptability to the didactics of history.

Following this basic analysis, a productive and integrative theoretical extension was developed, which is related to the discipline of history didactics and can be applied in practice. It manages to formulate existing theoretical fundamentals and the required extensions and elaborations so precisely that the simplification necessary to enable its practical application is not inherently curtailed or diminished. Thus, practice-related research will be conducted, generating knowledge through methodological and theoretical rigour, which through theory-based simplification can be used to develop guidelines for practical use.

Ausgewählte Ergebnisse mit pragmatischer Absicht

A pragmatic way of applying the extended theory is to consciously take into account the learning potential associated with these so-called challenges in lesson planning, to recognize actual challenges to orientation taking place during lessons and to include these 'irritations' or challenges and their significance in reflection on learning processes. Since opportunities in historical orientation aim to use the varying potential of challenges as a productive stimulus for orientation processes based on shared learning content, it is possible to respond to the problems of formal, institutionalized learning processes. One such problem is, for instance, that it is often defined what topic is to be taught to which learning group when, perhaps as a result of having to keep to a curriculum of history lessons. This approach does not assume that pupils explicitly 'bring' subject-related orientation needs to learning situations, but rather explores possibilities for all pupils to be able to analyse their own orientation needs by means of the shared learning content.

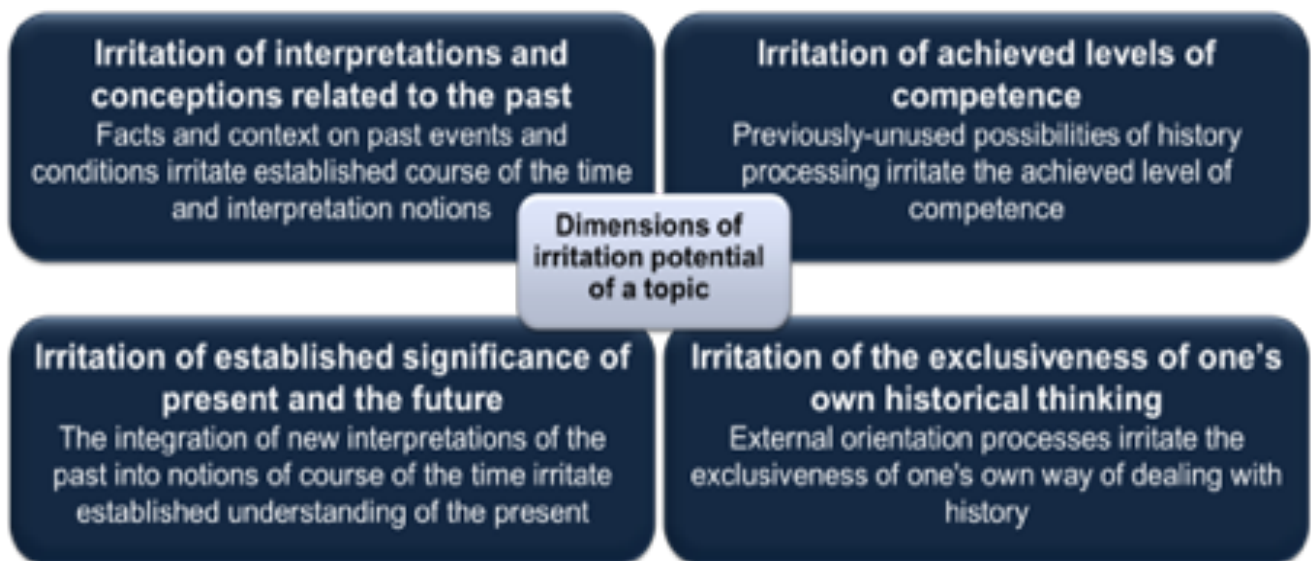


Figure 1: Dimensions of 'challenge potential' of a topic

On the basis of the extended and elaborated theory, principles were defined with regard to how orientation opportunities can generally be constructed so that they provide a high potential for challenges to historical orientation and for the learning processes that build upon prior orientation. As a starting point, it is advisable to categorically develop the potential of a (predefined) piece of learning content, for example, about superordinate basic human conflicts, to use it to clarify the learners' existing historical orientations. Particularly in the case of inclusive learning, it is important in a second planning stage to anticipate and take into account the potential ways (e.g. terms used for summarising, characteristics of process-related competences, opportunities to contextualise the content) in which the students could analyse the topics and the materials related to them.

The potential for challenge assumes that details within the situation refer to interconnections within the individual orientation as indicators that appear to be important for individual planning and action. It is precisely such indicators that need to be emphasized when addressing the content as well as the choice and design of materials. Finally, it is important to anticipate and 'place' productive challenges as opportunities for orientation, taking into account the previous analyses. If possible, the situation should be designed in such a way that, although the questions and materials refer to interconnections within the prior historical orientation, these interconnections are, however, (temporarily) suspended or become open to question, because it is only possible to a limited extent to find a fit between one's own structure and interconnections and the situations presented.

The potential for challenge can be increased by considering the varying amounts of challenge potential of different dimensions. Ways of influencing the distribution of such potential include, for example, the main content focus, relevant areas of competence or differences in level. Lesson planning should include classroom discussions that allow the emergence of challenges to orientation. The examination of 'foreign' perspectives of a subject or controversial interpretations of a piece of content can particularly challenge the unquestioned and assumed exclusivity attributed to one's own historical orientation and thereby release new learning potential. In addition, discussions between teachers and students are necessary in order to recognize that an orientation has been challenged in the first place and to enable the

challenge to be addressed before it is displaced or superficially resolved by excessively naive solutions within unconvincing theoretical frameworks. If it is possible to recognize and support the identification of challenges to orientation in a reflective way, the appropriate method for developing competence can be applied, ideally leading to an improved reorganization of historical orientation.

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