

## WHAT IS HISTORY DIDACTICS?

In >>Communications<< 1985/2, p. 99/100, Charles Hannam told us that he felt uneasy about the term >>Geschichtsdidaktik<<. In English the word >>didactical<< has overtones it has not in German, Dutch or French. But his problem is not only a semantic one for he ends by saying : "I wish we could bridge the linguistic as well as the educational gaps caused by the different approach to the teaching and learning of history". What he wrote kept me occupied. I also should like to do something to 'get our educational house in order', to use Hannam's expression. Confusion about the most fundamental term of all in our discipline seemed a very bad thing to me. During the meeting of the Board of the Society, on the 28th

of August 1985 at Stuttgart, with our editor, Karl Pellens also present, I proposed to start an inquiry into this problem the results of which would be published in our periodical. My plan was accepted unanimously and I was charged with the execution of it. In September I consulted the members of the Editorial Board by letter and in response I got several useful suggestions. I then drew up a list of members who would, I hoped, take part in this inquiry. My definitive list contained 26 names (myself included). I hope nobody will feel offended that I did not ask him or her to take part too. Of course, I had to draw a line somewhere, and >>somewhere<<, inevitably, means >>somewhat arbitrarily<<. February 2nd I sent out 25 letters to as many members in fourteen countries asking them to answer the question 'What is history didactics?' in not more than fifteen lines. Only a few members sinned against this rule but not heavily. The languages to be used were German, French and English.

Not without the help of a friendly reminder I received 22 answers. Two members wrote to me that they were unable to take part, mainly for reasons of health. Three members did not answer at all. So, myself included, I finally had 21 answers. First of all, I thank all the members who took the trouble to write down their opinion for their contribution. The next thing I have to do is to print ~~these~~ answers here, in alphabetical order. After that I shall sum up the main points in them, and finally I shall propose the second round.

### ANSWERS

1. Matti Castrén, Helsinki University, SF : "History didactics is a combination of humanistic research and knowledge. It deals with the relationship between modern man and the past. Using the methods of

empirical and speculative research history didactics investigates the interests in and views of history of persons of various ages. It also investigates the nature of the historical knowledge and the social as well as individual educational impulses which are available in the past. On this basis the task of history didactics is to create a synthesis about the ways with which the impulses of the past are to be made available to contemporary problem-solving. Especially in a small country like Finland the task of history didactics is to indicate the historical ingredients of the national identity as well as the factors which in the past and in the present have located our people in their international connections."

2. Piet Fontaine, formerly of State University Utrecht, NL. : "History didactics is the discipline of the communication between history and people. With >>history<< is meant the >>res gestae<<, not, therefore, historiography or historical science. With >>people<< is meant everybody, including professional historians and didacticians of history. The main problem of this discipline is how history influences people, what they do with it and how they give it shape in their lives, individually and socially. It has a theoretical and a practical aspect. In its theoretical aspect it is a theory of communication and different, therefore, from the theory of history or the philosophy of history. In its practical aspect it is mainly educational and occupies itself with the problem how to organize historical communication in an rational and purposeful way - with special attention to the historical education of young people and the training of future history teachers."

3. Walter Fürnrohr, University of Nuremberg-Erlangen, D : "If didactics is the science of teaching and learning, history didactics is the science of teaching and learning history and the science of the psychological and material (e.g. institutional) presuppositions, circumstances and effects. In this context I understand >>teaching and learning<< in a rather wider sense which includes the communication and adoption of all (right and wrong) conceptions of historical phenomena and of history as a whole. I hereby refer to all age groups, i.e. to small children as well as to older people living in an elderly home. Thus history didactics tries to analyse the awareness of history of the individual, of groups and of the whole society on the basis of empirical research. It also tries to influence particularly (with the help of of curricula and international textbook revision) history as a subject in schools, which holds a central position

in the confrontation of all people with history so that >>teaching history<< is the central sector of history didactics. History didactics is an indispensable part of a current science of history and a necessary subject of a modern education of teachers of history for whom the conventional teacher training is not sufficient."

4. Richard Gross, Stanford University, Cal., USA : "Americans tend not to use the term >>didactic<<, just as the word >>pedagogy<< is infrequently employed. We would more likely say >>history teaching<<, referring to the theory and practice of historical instruction. Such historical learning includes two broad goals : gaining an understanding of how we and our world came to be where we are, as we are today; it also encompasses a grasp of the processes by which those pursuing historical knowledge come to their conclusions about the events they are examining."

5. Group for the Comparative Study of History and History Teaching, Tokyo, mainly worded by Goro Yoshida, Tokyo, J : "The purpose of historical didactics is to educate a mind to think of himself and others in history or their historical being. That is also the purpose of learning and studying of history. This historical mind can only be brought up by pupils themselves and not by teachers.

Teachers and historical books can merely give them impetus to stimulate and help them in thinking themselves. The historical >>self-education<< is not only an accumulation of historical knowledge and perceptions, but an infinite process of evolutionary reshaping of the framework of their historical cognitions and thinkings. The historical education should not be based on the academic objectivity but on the mind of the people of one nation - as a nation in the world - and of a subjective oneself, who is also a part of the nation."

6. Charles Hannam, Bristol University GB : "I see History as conversations between the young and old, the living and the dead. >>Didactics<<, even though I do not like word - I accept the concepts implied - lay down the ground rules for the exchange of ideas and the contact between people. Without some rules this interchange becomes a solipsist babble. This is the worst thing we can do when we teach : we talk and talk, our pupils sit there in a daze, unable or unwilling to fill their heads with our out-pourings. Teachers of History have obligations to their students : they must try to be honest, use evidence as well as they can and to convey the importance of what they discuss with conviction and enthusiasm. The needs of those we teach must be considered. For children, History can be an introduction to adult societies. We are

rarely certain that they really understand what we teach or that what they are given is thought to be relevant to their genuine inner needs. Certainly history teachers do not merely provide information. They should teach a number of skills : how to understand the meaning of past events, how to approach other cultures and civilisations and how to instil a sense of critical awareness. Healthy scepticism is an important gift to the young. Sometimes the >>didactician<< resembles the Cromwellian agitator : but if only content with that will become the lackey of Authority. A good teacher is one who guides the students towards the complexities of the human experience while understanding the needs and the capacities of the taught."

7. Jochen Huhn, Kassel University, D : "First of all it is a horrible term, causing misunderstandings, difficult to explain - but I don't know a better one. Then : History didactics is a sub-discipline of history concerned with two questions : What is the use of history? and : How to improve the use of history, i.e. how to introduce the wanted benefit of a methodically controlled approach to the past into other areas of life? In order to answer these questions there are three main fields of action : empirical research on the use of history in daily life and on the effects of history teaching and other >>didactical<< practice - both in past and present; theoretical research on the disciplinary and the daily life's approach to the past, their common elements and their differences, and - last but not least - promoting >>historical learning<< in the educational system, in museums, mass media, tourism, policy making etc., nota bene : not with the zeal of missionaries but with awareness of the conditions within these areas and the needs and ideas of people."

8. Karl-Ernst Jeismann, Münster University, D : "History didactics is the science of historical consciousness as prevails within a society. In a broader sense historical consciousness refers to the summing up of historical knowledge, images, concepts, assessments, and value judgments by which contemporary self-awareness links itself with the past and thus balances its prospects for the future by placing them under historical conditions. History didactics deals with historical consciousness on different levels inter-relating in regard of cognition and action : Empirically, history didactics investigates past and present state, content, and different forms of historical consciousness as well as conditions of its origin and change, and its functional meaning and

'intentional meaning. Normatively, history didactics view different forms of historical consciousness under the aspect of adequacy of method, control of values and impact on judgment and action. Pragmatically, history didactics shapes historical consciousness through discussing and substantiating aims and contents, and through developing methods, procedures, and communication patterns of historical learning. Empirically, normatively, and pragmatically, history teaching is an important field of history didactics, however, not its sole domain. Limiting history didactics to history as a school subject would mean a misappreciation of the full reality and impact of historical perceptions prevailing within a society, and would consequently dazzle the didactics of history teaching."

9. Sven Jensen, Danmarks Laererhøjskole, Copenhagen, DK : "The object of history didactics is the relations between objective history (the process of social change) and subjective history (the process of change as perceived by man) which reciprocally construct each other. Where history didactics is carried out for democratic purposes it aims at bringing history under the control of democratic processes of self-determination. Therefore, history didactics is critically analyzing developments which support or break down existing or attempted monopolization of the process of construction, whether they are based on economic, political or cultural power. A specific task is the analyzing of the different kinds of historical consciousness produced in and by the different social structures and institutions - of which the institution of academic history and the system of education are particular cases. In performing these tasks history didactics formulates such views, results and methods which can be employed in movements towards a democratization of the construction process of history."

10. Christer Karlegård, Lärarhögskolan Lunds University, Malmö, S : "History didactics is an effort to solve problems, created mainly by conventional history teaching in the post-war period. It tries to formulate better objectives than those dominating today, which often have been caused by an objectivistic, neutral and analytical approach. The student, not the subject (history), is the most important for a didactician. >>Why history?<< is the central question - not >>How history?<<. Central themes are the contribution of history to the development of identity, emancipation, critical thinking and time consciousness amongst students. History didactics is not only interested in the use of history in schools. Its task is also to study the role of history in society at large."

11. Marian Langenbach, Utrecht State University, NL : "We are trying to form history teachers. That means that we handle history as a subject, useful to educate youngsters to be grown-ups as similar as possible to our own adult, educated selves. We try to give the teachers the tools to make bricks out of some specific kind of clay, and we hope walls will be built. Walls that will protect against dangers, give shelter and opportunity for study and wisdom. We do not know whether walls are built with our bricks. We should look for existing walls, and ask how they were made, and with what? Was it the clay? The tools of the brick-maker? The mortar? The masonry? We should try to know what history means to grown-up people. And what it is that makes history meaningful to grown-ups. Then we can try to be professionals."

12. Christian Laville, Laval University, Québec, CDN : "At one extreme, there is the human being to be educated. At the other, there is the subject matter used to educate (history). Between the two, there is the operation of mediation which consists of transforming a subject matter, a field of knowledge, into a means of education, i.e. a field of learning : this mediation is the object of la didactique. La didactique, then, implies three careful considerations occurring all at the same time, in practice, but consecutively in terms of their logical order. The first deals with the nature and characteristics of the education desired, in the light of one's conscious personal and social preconceptions. The second is an investigation of the subject matter used for teaching; its nature, method and contents, in order to clarify its educational potential and its many implications, both hidden and known. And finally, the third is an investigation of the learner, aimed at discovering his particular needs, skills and abilities as well as his intellectual and affective inclinations. All together, these three considerations constitute la didactique. The result desired is the generation of a new or more exact knowledge of parameters and procedures for educating through the use of the subject matter."

13. Peter Lee, School of Education London University, GB : "The question 'What do you mean when you use the words >>history didactics?<< is hard to answer when in English we do not use the expression. And if 'there is not consensus' as to the meaning of Geschichtsdidaktik it is presumably pointless to argue about how best to translate it. A similar phrase (if an ugly one) in English is >>history education<<, so perhaps the best way for English speakers to proceed is to ask >What is central to >>history education<<? - or, more honestly, 'What ought to be central to

>>history education<<? A short (necessarily dogmatic) answer might include the following : 1. Analysis of history as a form of knowledge and its relation to other forms. 2. Investigation of the development of children's ideas about history, both substantive and second-order; investigation of children's thinking in history. 3. The application of 1. and 2 - and practical wisdom - to practical problems in the learning and teaching of history (e.g. syllabus construction, teaching methods, assessment); and, conversely, the examination of assumption about the nature of history and children's thought in history made by particular practices."

14. Czeslaw Majorek, Teacher Training Institute, Cracow, PL : "The Methodology of History Teaching emphasizes the concept of the technique of teaching and sometimes of learning. The objectives, contents, materials and general design are given, so it is enough to describe them and show the teacher >>how to do<< during the lesson. This traditional approach to the problems of history teaching and learning is extremely practical. It does not present some theoretical inclinations or ambitions. History Didactics, on the contrary, recognizes, first of all, reasons for studying history. In general there are philosophical, political, sociological and psychological reasons. Among them History Didactics evaluates the history as an everyone's >>world of life<< and urges to explain the origins of one's culture and patriotic interest in one's country's origin. Its role relies on presenting the ways of historical perception and thinking. It helps in making conjunctions between history as a social science - with some methodological rigors - and history as an art, i.e. as a realm of humanities."

15. Henri Moniot, Université Paris VII, F : "La didactique de l'histoire étudie les opérations qui se passent quand on apprend l'histoire, les problèmes qui se posent quand on enseigne l'histoire. Elle vise à la maîtrise de pratiques : organisation de la matière enseignée, conception d'objectifs et d'exercices, choix et usage des media, évaluation, niveau de langage ... La réflexion qui la nourrit embrasse les savoirs (constitution de l'histoire savante, historiographie, formes et prégnance de l'histoire incluse dans les discours et les imaginaires sociaux ..), les publics (représentation sociales, équipement cognitif des élèves, affectivités ...), la mise en scène de l'enseignement (philosophie éducative, institution scolaire ...). Enseigner est un métier, qui s'analyse. Mais tout ne s'y raisonne pas. Le didacticien n'est pas un expert : il ne peut pas penser à la place du professeur, ni celui-à la place de l'élève."

16. Gordon Mork, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind., USA :  
"When explaining Geschichtsdidaktik to my colleagues in the United States, I have written that it is easily misunderstood because in American usage >>didactic<< has a rather dogmatic connotation and is therefore often used in a pejorative sense. I came away from the 1985 conference in Stuttgart with the idea that Geschichtsdidaktik implies a conjunction of the philosophy of history, theories of history education, the ideological implications of history writing and teaching, and the relationship between popular and academic history. I fear we may have fallen victim to a trap of all linguists, the false cognate. English may be a >>lingua franca<<, but let Geschichtsdidaktik not be equated with >>History Didactics<<. Perhaps we should grasp at a wholly new English term for the concept : what about >>History Dynamics<<?"

17. Karl Pellens, Pädagogische Hochschule, Weingarten, D :  
"Didaktik der Geschichte ist eine Wissenschaft, die sich definiert von ihrem Objekt, ihren Methoden und ihrer Zielsetzung her. Gegenstand der Untersuchungen ist das Geschichtsbewusstsein in all seinen Formen und Veränderungen; Forschungsmethoden können empirische Erhebungen, Analyse mit Kritik und Interpretation, Vergleich und/oder theoretisch-philosophische Reflexion sein; Ziel der Arbeit ist eine zutreffende und gerechte Verständigung über Geschichte zwischen Personen und Gruppen, Schichten und Nationen - und damit ein Beitrag zum Frieden heute und morgen. Geschichtsbewusstsein lässt sich feststellen und Verständigung über Geschichte geschieht auf ganz unterschiedlichen Ebenen : auf der lokalen und der regionalen sowie der nationalen Ebene, innerhalb von Nationengruppen (EG, Europarat, Sozialistische Länder), innerhalb der verschiedenen Kontinente (>>Europa<<) sowie weltweit (>>UNESCO<<). Medien dieser Verständigung sind fachliche Symposien und Literatur, Gesprächskontakte jeder Art und Massenmedien, Aus- und Fortbildung für Geschichtsunterricht."

18. Peter Rogers, Queen's University of Belfast, GB : "History, like all disciplines, is concerned with a particular kind of true proposition, and is marked by distinctive procedures, refined over time by the conduct of historical enquiries as particularly appropriate for producing and testing that type of statement. In philosophical shorthand, History has a distinctive >>Know that<< and >>Know how<<. Any teaching which does not expose the children to both aspects of the discipline is an inadequate caricature. If, as often is the case >>Know how<< is neglected, the children gain no understanding of the grounds on which (factual) historical



'knowledge rests - that is, of the means by which it is established and tested. They then have, strictly, no >>right to be sure<< that what they believe they know is true and therefore, in a strict sense, cannot be said to know anything. If they do not have regular and substantial practice of engaging in actual historical enquiries (of course scaled-down) then, whatever they may learn, it is not History."

19. Frank Rosvoll, Trondheim University, N : "As an academic discipline history didactics is based on the assumption of mutual influence between the development of society and the development of historical consciousness. Out of interest both in the academic discipline of history and in the >>good<< society of the future, history didactics, within a multidisciplinary context, ought to study these problems : - What kind of historical consciousness do we find in society - why and what consequences? - What kind of history has been and ought to be in the communication between past, present and future, especially in history research and history teaching - why, to what purpose and with what consequences? - The problems of realizing the aims of history didactics in the cultural life, above all through relevant history research, adequate education of history teachers and the development of suitable school curricula and media of teaching and studying."

20. Jörn Rüsen, Ruhr University, Bochum, D : "History Didactics is a sub-discipline of historical studies, the subject matter of which is historical learning. Empirically it analyses those processes of the historical consciousness, within which the experiences of the past are interpreted and used as orientations of actual life and as means of forming historical identity. Normatively it reflects the intentions underlying the treatment of these processes of the human mind by which historical consciousness is constituting itself. Pragmatically it develops strategies of regulating the communications which form historical consciousness."

21. Joop Toebes, Catholic University, Nijmegen, NL : "History Didactics is concerned with problems regarding the transfer of historical knowledge and insights to a broad public, especially young people in schools. Among other things it deals with the >>why<<, the >>what<< and the >>how<< of the transfer. The >>why<< implies reflection on aims and objectives; the >>what<< has to do with the principles of selection of subject matter; the >>how<< reflects on the choice and use of media and teaching strategies (modes of instruction), using data from educational psychology,

History Didactics is an interdiscipline between history as a science, the theory and philosophy of history, anthropology and the theory of teaching (i.e. educational psychology, curriculum-theory, educational technology, etc.). One can also characterise History Didactics as applied historical science."

I have rendered all these texts faithfully, just like they were sent to me. I merely emendated some obvious errors. All underlinings are made by the authors themselves.

#### MAIN POINTS

1. There is an obvious semantic problem. With the exception of Rogers all Anglosaxons consider the term >>history didactics<< as unworkable. Lee and Mork replace it perforce by >>Geschichts-didaktik<<, Laville even introduces >>la didactique<< (a new opera star?) in his English text. This embarrassment about our basic term is important for non-Anglosaxons too, since it may be safely assumed that the greater part of the international discussion about >>history didactics<< will be conducted in English. Huhn warns us that the term is difficult to explain (Mork's opinion too) and causing misunderstandings.
2. There is confusion about the term >>history<< too. Do we mean with it the >>res gestae<< or rather the >>memoria rerum gestarum<<? If we mean the >>memoria<<, are we referring then to academic historiography (including history text books for schools) or (or perhaps : and also) to the popular (populist) way of handing down history? I believe I myself am the only one to state expressly that with >>history<< I mean the >>res gestae<< and not the academic discipline. This confusion is embarrassing because in a great many contributions it is said that history didactics is a means of transfer or communication between history and the public and/or pupils. Scientific historiography as well as popularized presentations are, however, means of transmission themselves.
3. There is considerable uncertainty about the status of history didactics as an academic discipline. Thirteen entries do not mention this aspect at all. Very outspoken, however, are Pellens (>>eine Wissenschaft<<) and Rosvoll (>>an academic discipline<<). Jeismann calls it a >>science of historical consciousness<<, Toebe an >>interdiscipline<< and Fürnrohr a >>science of teaching and learning history<<. Huhn and Rüsen both speak of a >>subdiscipline of history<<. Here again the question is justified what is meant with >>history<<.

4. There is much diversity in the entries with respect to the subject matter of history didactics. Trying to class the answers as well as I can I get the following picture : a. for several members this subject matter is closely related or even restricted to teaching. Langenbach calls it 'useful to educate youngsters', Laville speaks of 'transforming a field of knowledge into a means of education', Lee of 'investigation of children's ideas about history and practical problems in history teaching', Moniot of 'les opérations d'apprendre et les problèmes d'enseigner', Rogers of the 'know that and how how'. b. Three of the answers are somewhat akin to the theory of history : Karlegård asks 'Why history?', Huhn speaks of 'use of history and how to improve it' and Majorek of 'reasons for studying history'. c. More in the line of a general educational theory are the contributions of Gross with 'historical instruction' and Toebe with 'transfer of historical knowledge and insights to a broad public'. d. Other entries possess rather a psychological character. Fürnröhr mentions 'awareness of history', Jeismann 'historical consciousness', Pellens 'Geschichtsbewusstsein'. The Japanese group stipulates that the purpose is 'to educate a mind to think of himself ... as a historical being'. e. Finally, several others stress the communication aspect. Castrén speaks of the 'relationship between modern man and past', I myself of that 'between history and people', Hannam of 'conversations between the living and the dead', Jensen of that 'between objective and subjective history' and Rosvoll of that between 'the development of society and that of historical consciousness'.

The first and foremost question is, I think, whether history didactics is an educational discipline or something else.

5. The field of history didactics as an academic science (if it is one) is by no means sufficiently delimited. If Toebe dubs it an >>interdiscipline<< and Rosvoll speaks of a >>multidisciplinary context<<, then we must ask : which are the neighbouring sciences? The scientific character of history didactics is stressed by Castrén when he speaks of '>empirical and speculative research', Huhn 'empirical and theoretical research', Jensen 'critically analyzing', Jeismann and Rösen both using the terms 'empirically, normatively, pragmatically' and Pellens 'Forschungsmethoden, und Analyse mit Kritik und Interpretation' (all these terms contain at least the outline of a program). But it is only Majorek (philosophical, political, psychological, sociological reasons for studying history) and in particular Toebe ('an interdiscipline between history as a science, the theory and philosophy of history,

anthropology and the theory of teaching) who postulate this wider context for our own field. I believe that we must apply a part of our speculative/theoretical research to this question too.

6. School is never far away. Very many entries mention history as a school subject as well as the training of future history teachers. However, the word >>school<< and kindred terms do not occur in the lines of Castrén, Jensen, Majorek, Bellens and Rösen. My idea is that this means that we are slowly moving away from the outmoded equalization of history didactics with history teaching/teacher training. But the others who mention words like these show up a great diversity of emphasis ranging from those who are speaking of history as a school subject merely en passant to others who speak of nothing else. We still have to define the relations between history teaching and learning/teacher training on the one hand and the wider (often much wider) implications on the other.

7. In so far as history didactics is concerned with history as a school subject the difference between >>methodology<< and, say, >>didaxology<< is not always made clear. Here I mean, in shorthand, the difference between the >>how<< and the >>what<< and >>why<<. This difference appears very clearly in Majorek's contribution which, so it seems to me, excludes methodology from history didactics. Often, of course, aspects of both are indicated but most of the time rather obliquely, without sharp frontiers being drawn. Moniot, however, distinguishes 'maitrise de pratiques et la réflexion qui la nourrit'. Toebes is the most explicit of all when he describes the >>why<< as 'reflection on aims and objectives', the >>what<< as 'the principles of selection of subject matter' and the >>how<< as 'the choice of and use of media and teaching strategies'.

8. I could not detect any interest in the question of the relation of history as a school subject to the other school disciplines. Nevertheless, this seems to me a most fundamental problem. First and foremost this boils down to the question: what has history teaching to offer that other school subjects do not offer, and is that what history has to offer not only useful but also necessary for the education of our pupils? I suppose we all take this for granted but it is nowhere worked out.

9. A final point. When Karlegård speaks of 'the role of history at large' and Langenbach says that history must be >>meaningful for grown-ups<<, we find quite a few special, i.e. non-historic, answers to what this role or this meaning could be. Castrén says that 'the task of history didactics is to indicate the historical ingredients of the national identity'. He adds that this is particularly important for a small country (like Finland). But

Japan is not a small country, nevertheless, the Tokyo group says something more or less similar : 'historical education ... based on the mind of the people of one nation - as a nation in the world' (while rejecting >>academic objectivity<<). Jensen talks of the role of history didactics 'in movements towards a democratization of the construction process of the nation', Pellens of 'ein Beitrag zum Frieden heute und morgen' and Rosvoll of 'the >>good<< society of the future>. What is at stake is the relationship between history didactics and the society within which its functions.

#### THE SECOND ROUND

I have tried to be as objective as well as exhaustive as possible. The main result of our enquiry is a great number of points and problems that must be brought in discussion. So there has to be at least a second round the results of which will be published in >>Communications<<, 1987/1. What I intend to do is to ask several members - who need not be the same as in the first round - to express themselves in a more circumstantial way regarding some of these points. At the moment I can not yet say which points are to be selected. I want to discuss this first with the members of the Board of the Society and with those of the Editorial Board. But one thing is certain. No member of the Society may feel him- or herself excluded from this discussion because he or she is not personally invited to take part. This periodical is open to all members and everyone , therefore, is welcome when he or she wants to tune in.

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