

TRANSLATING THE WORD 'GESCHICHTSDIDAKTIK' INTO ENGLISH.

I find it very difficult to cope with the translation; 'the theory of teaching and learning History' it will do but it is not very elegant when it crops up frequently in a text. Also I suspect I am not the only one in the English-speaking world who finds the word 'didaktik' alien when discussing teaching children and their learning processes.

What the word means is well defined in Karl Pellens' chapter in 'Geschichtskultur - Geschichtsdidaktik', but still left this Didaktiker feeling uncomfortable and wondering whether it is this unease which led to the fact that there is no chapter in the book from the UK.

The processes of teaching and learning History are complex and I resist the need to define and compartmentalise. Perhaps it would do us good to do just that and get our educational house in order but as always, when we systematise something is lost on the way. If I were to call someone's teaching 'didactic' in English it would not be taken as a compliment; the undertones are of pedantic teaching which flows from the top downwards and somehow presumes that the learner does not play an important part. If good teaching were just a question of transmitting information, filling little pint pots to the brim with knowledge, there would be no problem. I just do not believe that the essential aims of teaching History can be achieved by providing sound, scientifically based knowledge contained in perfect textbooks. Of course I want the History teacher to be accurate and reasonably objective but to concentrate on that means losses elsewhere. The learner has an essential part to play, not just as a consumer but as a partner in the learning process. With able and highly motivated pupils it is quite easy to be didactic: neat chunks will be learnt and regurgitated in our examinations. However this procedure will leave large numbers dissatisfied, convinced that History is boring and useless and unfortunately they will take their concerns elsewhere. It is no accident that in the UK History is not

highly valued in the curriculum and under constant pressure from the more 'useful' subjects.

We must keep in touch with all our pupils; we can help the young to make some sense of the world around them and give them a sense of significance and belonging not just to a particular nation but the human race. It is more important to examine political statements intelligently than to be able to recite the clauses of the Treaty of Unkiar Skelessi or the names of the Archbishops under Elisabeth I.

My hesitation over the word 'didactics' is quite deep and 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.

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