



# One Needs the Other. Competence Models and Empirical Research in the Didactics of Cultural Studies Subjects

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## Thesis

Specified and detailed empirical research on competences in the field of cultural studies cannot yield any useful results for culture-related didactics as long as there is no shared theoretical understanding of according competences within the community of researchers and practioners of cultural studies.

Talking shop is part of the trade, profiling is part of the academic field, and the multitude of different competence models is part of subject-specific didactics after the 'PISA shock wafe'. The situation in German-speaking history didactics, where a number of subject-specific competence models exist relatively side by side, is certainly not an isolated phenomenon. Certainly, the circumstances in other related subject didactics of cultural studies are all different in their own way, but despite some attempts to do so, a general and stable consensus on THE competence model for a subject has not been established anywhere. For example, the German Society for Political Didactics (GPJE) presented such a model back in 2004, but this model was immediately and continuously met with fundamental and prominent criticism. Without wanting to go through the list of subject didactics related to the cultural, it is clear that even in the didactics of philosophy, we are far from reaching a disciplinary consensus.

This heterogeneity and controversy are therefore not unusual in comparison and is undoubtedly to be welcomed from the point of view of scientific ethics. For how could criticism, which is

constitutive of all scientific endeavour, be possible if there were a subtle pressure towards consensus within a discipline, a sanctioned zone of normal thinking?

Nevertheless, this controversial plurality of models of historical competence also gives rise to considerable problems. In my view, there are two main problems:

a) Competence models are not intellectually isolated inventions, but are based on fundamental disciplinary assumptions and (this is the problematic aspect) lead to different socio-empirical research concepts. These are significantly different, primarily because of their different item constructions, etc., since the respective competence model necessarily manifests itself in practice as a matrix of empirical research design. However, this leads to limited comparability with data and interpretations from other studies based on different foundations. This would not actually be a fundamental problem, because competition between paradigms is scientifically beneficial in itself. However, the discipline of German-language history didactics is so small in numerical terms that serious research priorities with different matrices cannot develop purely on a quantitative basis. This leads to a landscape of scattered individual projects that is slowly becoming confusing and lacking in mutual connectivity.

b) The didactics of history, especially when it comes to the construction of competence models for history teaching,

is confronted with clear expectations from educational administrators and politicians as well as from teachers. References to the necessary and productive plurality of scientific opinion-forming generally fail to resonate with either group. I consider this to be a classic conflict of objectives within our discipline.

I believe that, even if there is no perfect solution to either problem, there is at least a pragmatic and inspired solution in each case.

If, as I believe, national history teaching research does not have the critical mass of human, institutional and financial resources, then it must expand in order to tap into this potential. The easiest way is to look at related subject didactics. Anyone who takes a closer look at their self-concepts and research projects will be surprised by the large theoretical, research methodological and heuristic overlaps that emerge. Systematic cooperation within the specialist group of cultural studies didactics would quickly and significantly alleviate the potential problem.

The same desirable effect would be achieved by shifting the disciplinary boundaries to the international and seeking conceptually compatible partners for research projects there. Potential minority positions in the national discourse could thus quickly find their way into lively and inspiring research and development contexts. It is surprising, for example, why the book by Mandell/Malone (2007) has received so little attention in e.g. the German-language debate on historical didactics. It was very

much to be hoped that the consistently bilingual design of the open access journal 'Public History Weekly', which has been launched in September 2014, could give impetus to the mutual perception of the separate disciplinary cultures. Alas, this hope was largely in vain.

Furthermore, and this would be my answer to the second problem, it should perhaps be possible to seek the lowest common denominator in the existing competence models, discuss corresponding outlines and then make them public. The controversial plurality of academic debate should not suffer if we are able to meet the more or less justified, but in any case, well-understood, expectations of the discipline to a reasonable extent. This would also prevent the voluntarism with which some education administrators draw on the heterogeneous discourse on history didactics in order to then transform country-specific conceptions of competence into applicable law in a cheerful mishmash. What seems necessary would be, first of all, a less formal meeting of all interested history teachers, within the framework of which such a process of reaching a framework consensus could be established.

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### Conflict of interest

No Conflict of interest.