

Eckert.Dossiers No. 1

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perspective of specialist didactics**

Körber, Andreas. „The Franco-German history textbook from the perspective of specialist didactics.“ In *Europe and the World*, hg. v. Corine Defrance, Reiner Marcowitz und Ulrich Pfeil. Eckert.Dossiers 1 (2009). <http://www.edumeres.net/urn/urn:nbn:de:0220-2009-0001-203>.

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The Franco-German history textbook from the perspective of specialist didactics

The fact that a textbook need not be judged only in terms of the 'correctness' of its portrayals is reflected by the separate appearance of specialist academic and specialist didactic commentaries in this Dossier; indeed, the suitability of the textbook for inspiring and supporting processes of thinking and learning is to be given equal consideration. This verdict is based on the assumption that learning about history is not a simply a matter of passing on knowledge or the socially accepted view of history to the pupils; rather, it is – or should be – an event that encourages pupils to develop the skills necessary in order to think about history independently. This requires consideration of the theoretical as well as of the more pragmatic aspects of teaching, which cannot each be explored here but are detailed primarily[1] in the criteria developed by Jörn Rüsen ('The Ideal Textbook')[2]; that is, a textbook's suitability for imparting three competencies: historical awareness, interpretation and orientation. Is the otherness of the past as compared to the present presented through multiple dimensions and perspectives, and to what extent? What is the nature of the narrative that has thus evolved; to what extent have academic standards been upheld and does the material make reference to the present? Is it orientated towards methods of historical thinking and towards enabling pupils to judge and recognise their own perspectives and thoughts, and if so, to what extent? In view of current debate in Germany, a textbook must allow for the procurement of an explicitly historical competency as well as be suited to intercultural learning. Is the traditional function of the textbook in producing an integrative and homogenising national view of history merely repeated here on a bilateral European level, or are plural perspectives, especially those of other cultures and those of immigrants, also given a voice? It is thus a question of implementing the principle of multiperspectivity on all levels.[3]

I.

Histoire/Geschichte is obviously a textbook and exercise book in combination that expects more of the pupils than merely the acceptance and repetition of its content; rather, it demands a variety of historical thought processes. A wealth of sources provide access to contemporary perspectives on the subject matter (alterity); for each example, an author text gives information on the background, explaining the context of the details within the text itself and within the materials (interpretation); exercises are intended to inspire pupils towards independent learning. Some also explicitly refer to the present. Pages addressing methodological issues focus on equipping pupils to carry out historical operations independently. Histoire/Geschichte continues this basic structure of a combined textbook and exercise book – as we in Germany primarily know from the first years of secondary school – into sixth-form level. Multidimensionality is, however, limited. Political history dominates, only notably expanded upon by aspects of social and economic history and cultural developments in Parts Two and Three. For the most part, 'new' topics are

lacking.[4] The aim to not only present the bilateral Franco-German history but also a bilateral view of history in general is indeed achieved to all intents and purposes. Perspectives that are not attributed to these two nations, however, are given too little weight in the author texts and materials. On the whole, *Histoire/Geschichte* fulfils the basic demands of a modern history textbook, through its external appearance as well as with the well-conceived structure of the individual chapters and sections, with its combination of author texts, materials and exercises, and methodological sections. Unlike the *European History Textbook* of 1992, it can proudly take its place in the bookshelf of the new generation of textbooks in Germany. This verdict requires further detail, however, and a more clarified differentiation. The book is consistently orientated towards problems and questions. The pupils are challenged to think independently. History is thus conceived as a 'thinking subject'. The more specific shape of this orientation towards problems and questions, however, restricts some of the very opportunities it opens up.

Problems, presented on an introductory double page, introduce each chapter. Each of the lessons they teach are complemented by further central questions. These questions – sometimes unlike the problems (Chapter 1, p. 10) – are decidedly formulated as interpretative questions in retrospect, often, however, in such a way as to not call upon the pupils to form their own interpretation, but rather to point them towards interpretations that already exist (an exception is to be found in Part One, Chapter 3, p. 44, Question 2.) Indeed, the problems presented are sometimes suitable for demanding an awareness of and reflection on the new temporal perspectives as well thought and argumentative strategies; in other words, an understanding of the 'other' from a diachronic point of view (alterity awareness). There is often, however a lack of exercises that require pupils to complete and draw conclusions from the logic of their arguments and implement this logic in their own thoughts and judgements (see below). Further, the contemporary presentation of the problem and the retrospective views do not fit together with the central questions that aim towards an interpretation. (cf. Part One, Chapter 1). Many of the central questions in the lessons envisage a restricted solution space. Ultimately, they aim towards playing back an interpretation that can primarily be considered correct and which is known to the textbook authors and teachers, and which is to be accepted by the pupils. This interpretation itself is not visible as such, or even as a construction.[5] In problems and central questions, the actual subsequent development often seems to be the only – somehow necessary – possibility.[6] They often already contain an implicit evaluation of the contemporary options; the options that history did not take (especially where they do not correspond to their own value system), are either left blank or presented in de-legitimising brackets.[7] Many of the central questions aim towards objective judgements, yet they base these uncritically on other objective judgements that should be reflected upon first. [8] The alterity of the problems of the time as compared to those we have today may well be thus addressed; however, the experience of weighing up several options from a contemporary perspective is not facilitated. This history textbook therefore also embodies the character of a '(bi)national autobiography' that legitimizes a development *ex post* and presents the socially recognised interpretation without, however, sufficiently calling for open

and independent thought.

The criterion of suitability for developing a historical awareness not only demands providing the pupils with as authentic material as possible from the relevant epoch; it also requires a presentation that is multiperspectival in the narrow sense, of relevant different perspectives on controversies of the time with which pupils may deal individually. This criterion is fulfilled highly irregularly. Relevant sources that indeed present temporally 'other' thoughts and judgements are often missing an adequate opposing position. At times there may well be controversial sources as required, their value, however, is restricted by the form of the exercise (see below)[9]. Equally obvious is the lack of controversial historiographical interpretations, whether in the form of different 'national' readings or with regards to varying interpretations of events and structures within the historical profession of a particular country. Plurality, that is, the acceptance of different interpretations and conclusions as well as judgements on the part of the pupils is hardly to be found, although this is often a result of the exercise format.

The demand sometimes raised by German history didactics to clearly label materials in school textbooks ('Q', 'D', 'T', 'K') is not implemented in *Histoire/Geschichte*. In my view, this makes sense, because it better allows pupils or the class to explore, assess and reflect upon the material, rather than relieving them of this task. Nevertheless, it does require clear and informative proof within the material itself. In this issue, *Histoire/Geschichte* follows a 'middle' and inconsistent path. The materials are – sensibly – numbered neutrally without using categorising letters; nevertheless, the source texts are highlighted yellow to distinguish them from the commentaries (blue) and the exercises (green) as well as the author texts (no colour). Reflection on the status of the materials given is thus rendered more difficult. The separation between the source texts and the introduction, references and notes is not always clear as the latter are displayed in yellow boxes. The fact that this supplementary information from the textbook authors often anticipates and thus forestalls significant aspects of the content matter, thus frequently devaluing the exercises, even those that only demand an 'account' of an event (A3) turns out to be much more problematic when using the materials (cf. p. 17, M3). This neither demands nor encourages independent thinking, and such activities as a critical review of a text or the production of further (perhaps even more recent) contexts on the part of the pupils via new questions is rendered more difficult if not impossible. The pupils are thus relieved of having to think.[10] There are, however, also examples where information is not forestalled and the pupils are required to conduct a more intensive investigation of the sources.[11] Occasionally, the introductory texts on the sources render their status less clear (cf. p. 27, M2), as do captions and commentaries on images. Some (sensibly) provide 'only' background information; others, however, appear to continue the author text, extending the context far beyond that of the image itself. These too often provide information demanded by the exercises (particularly striking on p. 17; A2 on M2). The use of the materials for other questions and in other contexts than those given by the book is thus rendered more difficult.

For the most part (although not absolutely consistently), the exercises merely demand of the pupils an understanding and reproduction of either explicit statements or implied suggestions contained in the author text and materials.

They often merely involve a closed 'solution space' and can therefore with only few exceptions be classified in accordance with the German 'Standard Requirements for Abitur Examination' (Einheitliche Prüfungsanforderungen in der Abiturprüfung, [EPA]) into Requirements Category I (Reproduction) and – at best – II (Transfer). Exercises that require independent thinking and critical observation, such as via judgements – both value-neutral and otherwise – on the part of the pupils, or via a comparison with or reference to the present, are exceptions to the rule. The textbook thus does not structurally fulfil the requirements of German tuition at sixth form level.

A further problem inherent in many exercises is the unclear or inconsistent use of operators. As a general rule, it is good that many exercises at least do not appear artificial, which would be a signal to the pupils that there is only one correct answer than should as far as possible be formulated in a certain way; rather, exercises are often formulated with the help of operators. They demand of the pupils a more complex exploration and explanation of the subject matter that can reflect its quality and be subjected to discussion and a differentiated assessment. This type of exercise, however, does not appear at all consistently.

This is almost always the case for exercises that begin with the word 'explain ...' Apart from the fact that such questions suggest a predefined solution capacity, these like many questions beginning with 'Why...!', 'Which...!' 'How...!' etc. generally do not provide guidelines as to the structure and amount of information to be given in the response. Theoretically, a response could involve a mere list. Such exercises also give no indication as to the depth of the expected response and thus have no value in assessing academic ability[12]. Some questions cannot be answered using the material available (e.g. p. 25, A1; p. 27, A1), and in some, the operator used does not correspond with the thought operations facilitated by the material (p. 27, A3). Some fundamentally useful exercises towards thought development and assessment in turn take for granted particular interpretations and value-statements regarding the subject matter (e.g. p. 21, A 6), or they steer the pupils' line of thought by using a particular 'setting' (p. 23, A. 4). Many of the exercises only possess an extremely narrow or even closed 'solution space', despite the operator function (p. 23, A1; A2); often, they are barely more than hidden demands to repeat information that is either explicitly or implicitly inherent in the author text or in the sources. (p. 25, A2). Other exercises, however, demand more independent action on the part of the pupils, such as the ability to imagine themselves in the past situation and to gain a contemporary perspective (p. 39, A5; p. 47, A2). This requires understanding for the 'other' and alterity awareness; in other words, an abstraction from one's own, contemporary basis of judgement. Unfortunately there is no indication as to the conditions under which such a demand may be regarded fulfilled. Such an exercise format is therefore less a clue to the suitability of the book for encouraging historical awareness and a (diachronic) understanding of the 'other';[13] rather, it indicates that teachers who use it should be equipped to also give consideration this dimension of historical competence.

The presence of method boxes or method pages reveals Histoire/Geschichte as a true member of the current generation of textbooks in the German tradition. This too demonstrates a fundamental orientation towards history teaching as a

'thinking subject', a notion slowly becoming established on the German textbook market. The quality of the individual method pages cannot be commented on in detail here; a few observations, however, should be noted: The methods are not presented in juxtaposition at the end of the book or in a specific section; rather, they are integrated into the individual chapters, spread across double pages. This has the advantage that they are not only used as reference tools. They are not only employed as an optional extra in isolation and without 'padding'; they are a solid component of the proposed curriculum, presented in a context that is already familiar to the pupils and which opens up a horizon of questions. The disadvantage is, however, that the method pages are no longer accessible to the pupils for reference purposes once the pupils have worked through the exercises and handed the respective volume back in to the school.[14]

In each case, the method is theoretically described on one page (not always the first page), and 'demonstrated' by means of an example on the opposite double page. Some examples lack exercises with which the pupils might gain practice[15]; equally, later exercises lack specific references to the pages introducing the particular method in question. Unfortunately, the book misses the opportunity to reveal the character of methodology as a path towards a certain level of knowledge acquisition and as a tool for gaining such insights, an opportunity presented in theory by the contextualised nature of the method pages. Mostly, the examples lack a problem for the pupils to solve. The 'method' thus to a great extent remains a mere 'technique' restricted to the 'probation field' (Pandel). Here, interpreting source texts means, for instance, reproducing – with as much sense as possible – the content and 'categorising' the information contained by the source; further, German sixth-form pupils[16] would also be required to expound the problems raised by the source. No further or deeper questioning on additional details or new sources is required, which in any case would not be possible in view of the inadequate problem-solving tasks. This is certainly not the orientation towards 'method' in the sense of encouraging historical competencies.

Alongside topics and materials adequately familiar on both banks of the Rhine, this bilateral textbook repeatedly reveals those which possess a more-or-less 'iconic' status within their respective tradition, yet which are missing in their 'own' outdated textbooks. In this respect, this textbook does seem suitable for familiarising pupils with the historical culture of the respective 'other' country. [17] Usually, this change of 'perspective' takes place as a change of topic on the level of the chapters and lessons. The aforementioned implicit suggestion of 'the right answer', inherent in many of the exercises and materials, also contributes to this structure. The book focuses on the comparative; not on the controversial. A true change of perspective would require a juxtaposing of contemporary as well as recent (historiographical) viewpoints (including those from older textbooks of both countries) of the respective 'other' history – the shared and the general histories. Greater weight could thus be lent to the concept of perspective as the approach towards historiography and historical culture.

II.

As a whole, Histoire/Geschichte can – warts and all – certainly occupy a strong position in a comparison with other teaching material. What is unacceptable

from a German point of view is simply the virtual neglect of the dimension of self-judgement (AFB III or 'orientation competencies'). It is primarily the teachers who are called upon to implement this neglected element; indeed, one would hope that they do not base their lessons on one book alone. Future editions should endeavour to separate the clues to interpreting the texts from the texts themselves: these are provided together too often. Any revisions must also reformulate the exercises and materials in such a way as to encourage independent thinking.

The comments on the first volume announced that its initiators had made agreements with all German education ministries in order to tailor the textbook to the sixth-form syllabi of all German federal states.[18] Politically speaking, this was certainly a great success, particularly in view of all the other attempts to reach agreements in matters of education policy. But is this really desirable? If such agreements aim towards a canon of topics to be addressed by *Histoire/Geschichte*, would they not hinder current efforts towards a greater pupils autonomy, where the same competencies would be taught using topics determined locally and orientated towards the pupils, rather rivalling – even in the bilateral sections – other, equally necessary, didactic innovation on the educational media market? This would not only be the case for exploring further sectors and topic areas of historical scholarship (gender, mentalities and environmental history), which indeed are hardly featured in this textbook; it would equally apply to similarly structured projects based on the concept of bilateral reconciliation and multiperspectivity as well as a broadening or narrowing of perspective (such as the German-Polish Textbook currently under production) and any new European educational material[19]. This would, however, bring about only few advantages; indeed, the losses could easily outweigh the positive aspects. It would make more sense to pursue guidelines that more openly demand an orientation towards competencies as well as – necessarily – an approach to several national histories, sectors and a contrast of multiple perspectives (and not only national viewpoints). This textbook would also occupy a seat within such a framework, along with other educational materials, ideally those of a bilateral as well as multilateral and multiperspectival nature.

[1] Problemorientierter Geschichtsunterricht? Schulbuchkritik und Schulbuchrevision, dargestellt am Beispiel der römischen Republik, Stuttgart 1980, p. 10–82, *passim*.

[2] Jörn Rüsen, 'Das ideale Schulbuch. Überlegungen zum Leitmedium des Geschichtsunterrichts', in: *Internationale Schulbuchforschung* 14 (1992), pp. 237–250.

[3] For sources with multiple perspectives, controversial interpretations and which encourage pupils to think in plural terms, cf. Bodo von BORRIES, 'Perspektivenwechsel und Sinnbildungsfiguren im Umgang mit der Geschichte', in: *IDEM Lebendiges Geschichtslernen. Bausteine zu Theorie und Pragmatik, Empirie und Normfrage*, Schwalbach/Ts. 2004, pp. 236–258, here, p. 245ff. If at all, the European History Textbook fulfilled all this extremely unsatisfactorily by to a certain extent only presenting pupils with a shared narrative as the lowest common denominator well beyond all differences of perspective or value and in the absence of any noteworthy exercises or ideas for further thought; cf. Frédéric Delouche, Jacques Aldebert, Johan Bender, *Das europäische Geschichtsbuch. Von den Anfängen bis heute*, Stuttgart 1998.

[4] Exceptions are provided by dossiers on 'The Development of the Role of the Woman in Society' and on 'Faith and The Church'.

[5] See, for instance, 'Welche entscheidenden Weichenstellungen für das 19. Jahrhundert wurden im Rahmen des Wiener Kongresses vorgenommen?' (Which significant measures that

paved the way for the 19th century were taken as a result of the Congress of Vienna?); 'In welcher Weise hat die konstitutionelle Monarchie die langfristige Etablierung eines parlamentarischen Repräsentativsystems in Frankreich vorbereitet?' (How had the constitutional monarchy prepared the long-term establishment of a parliamentary system of representatives in France?); 'Mit welchen Widerständen sah sich die deutsche National- und Freiheitsbewegung konfrontiert?' (Which forms of resistance confronted the German national and freedom movements?); (Histoire/Geschichte, p. 16).

[6] Cf. once again, 'Welche entscheidenden Weichenstellungen für das 19. Jahrhundert wurden im Rahmen des Wiener Kongresses vorgenommen?' (Which significant measures that paved the way for the 19th century were taken as a result of the Congress of Vienna?). Also see Lesson 1/1/3, the title of which is given a contemporary tone: 'Ist die Einheit in Freiheit möglich?' (Is there such a thing as unity in freedom?), then the central question is posed retrospectively: 'Mit welchen Widerständen sah sich die deutsche National- und Freiheitsbewegung konfrontiert?' (Which forms of resistance confronted the German national and freedom movements?) (Histoire/Geschichte, p. 16). A different presentation is given in L1/1/5, where the title and central question are posed retrospectively, albeit more openly in the 'solution space'.

[7] Cf. L1/1/3: 'Wie gelang es, die republikanische Staatsform trotz der schwierigen Situation nach der Niederlage 1870/71 zu etablieren?' (How was the successful establishment of the republican state achieved in spite of the difficult situation in the aftermath of the 1870/71 defeat?) It becomes apparent from the given sources that there was a movement towards restoring the monarchy, indeed with a majority vote. The central question nevertheless suggests via its brevity that the introduction of the Republic had been the general wish, which even today must be considered a success. There is no indication as to who might have been the 'successful' or the defeated party. Here, the pupils are silently and covertly presented – via the central question – with the perspective of a contemporary judgement that is connected to only one of the contemporary perspectives on the matter.

[8] Cf. L 1/1/2: 'In welcher Weise hat die konstitutionelle Monarchie die langfristige Etablierung eines parlamentarischen Repräsentativsystems in Frankreich vorbereitet?' (How had the constitutional monarchy prepared the long-term establishment of a parliamentary system of representatives in France?). Also cf. 'Inwieweit war das Streben nach nationaler Einheit und Unabhängigkeit ein gesamteuropäisches Phänomen?' (To what extent was the claim to national unity and independence a phenomenon relevant to Europe as a whole?) (p. 18) In the 'solution space', the question is more clearly orientated towards independent thinking on the part of the pupils: 'Inwieweit war das Streben nach dem Recht auf nationale Selbstbestimmung 1848 mit der Solidarität zwischen den Völkern vereinbar?' (To what extent was the claim to the right for national self-definition compatible with the solidarity between the peoples in 1848?) (p. 20); 'Weshalb gelang es 1848/49 nicht, die nationale Einheit Deutschlands dauerhaft zu verwirklichen?' (Why was the long-term national unity of Germany not achieved in 1848/49?) (L7; S. 26).

[9] This is the case, for example, for the way in which the topic of hatred towards a certain nation – towards the French, for instance – during the German Vormärz period is dealt with. Also cf. p. 17 M3 with A3, which asks the pupils to estimate a contemporary possibility, for which neither of the two sources provided can give any information.

[10] Cf. in the first chapter only, p. 17 (M1, M3), p. 19 (M2); p. 21 (M2, M3), p. 23 (M3, M4), p. 25 (M4).

[11] Cf. chapter 1: p. 19, M4; p. 21; M4; p. 25, M3; the dossier in chapter 2 (pp. 40f.).

[12] Cf., for instance, p. 19, A1 (Part Two), A3.

[13] Now cf. Brigitte Dehne, "Mit eigenen Augen sehen" oder "Mit den Augen des anderen sehen"? Eine kritische Auseinandersetzung mit den geschichtsdidaktischen Konzepten der Perspektivenübernahme und des Fremdverstehens, in: Jan-Patrick Bauer, Johannes Meyerhamme, Andreas Körper (eds), Geschichtslernen – Innovationen und Reflexionen. Geschichtsdidaktik im Spannungsfeld von theoretischen Zuspitzungen, empirischen Erkundungen, normativen Überlegungen und pragmatischen Wendungen – Festschrift für Bodo von Borries zum 65. Geburtstag, Kenzingen 2008, pp. 121–144.

[14] Cf. the solution in the last generation of Forum Geschichte, edited and published by Cornelsen.

[15] For example in the 'standard method' of source text interpretation (Histoire/Geschichte, pp. 28f.).

[16] P. 28 of Histoire/Geschichte claims: 'In the German Abitur the pupils are often further required to evaluate the main statements of the sources'. This sentence is misleading: The AFB III does not demand an evaluation of the statements of the sources; rather, it asks for the

pupils' own opinion and assessment of the contexts extracted from the sources: 'The exercise section III (AFB III) includes the reflective approach to new problems, the methods used and newly gained knowledge in order to gain independent justification, to reach conclusions, to achieve and to evaluate. (Reflection and Problem Solving)'; cf. Standardised Examination Requirements for the Abitur Examination in the Subject of History (EPA) 2005, p. 6 (http://www.kmk.org/doc/beschl/196-13_EPA-Geschichte-Endversion-formatiert.pdf).

[17] Its inherent innovative character rather derives, however, from a comparison of the generations of textbooks and thus the generation of pupils socialised by them, without focusing on individual persons.

[18] Florent Claret, 'Von der Utopie zur Realität. Wie das deutsch-französische Geschichtsbuch geboren wurde', in: *Dokumente* 62 (2006) 5, pp. 57–61, here pp. 59f.

[19] Cf. Thomas Strobel, 'Startschuss für ein gemeinsames deutsch-polnisches Geschichtsbuch', in: *ECKERT – Das Bulletin* 03 (2008), pp. 26–28; Verena Radkau, 'Geschichtsbücher als Sinnstifter eines neuen Europa?', in: *ECKERT – Das Bulletin*; 03 (2008), pp. 43f.; Joke van der Leeuw-Roord, 'A common textbook for Europe? Utopia or a Crucial Challenge?' in: Jan-Patrick Bauer, Johannes Meyer-Hamme, Andreas Körber (eds), *Geschichtslernen – Innovationen und Reflexionen. Geschichtsdidaktik im Spannungsfeld von theoretischen Zuspitzungen, empirischen Erkundungen, normativen Überlegungen und pragmatischen Wendungen – Festschrift für Bodo von Borries zum 65. Geburtstag*. Herbolzheim 2008, pp. 43–60.