REVIEWS OF POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

History and Civics Lessons in Austria and Japan: An Intercultural, Comparative Approach of Classroom Observation in the Framework of Process-oriented History Didactics

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Introduction

This paper emerged as the outcome of the partnership between the Hiroshima University Educational Vision Research Institute (EVRI) and the Austrian Institutes of History Didactics of the Universities of Vienna and Graz and the Centre for Intercultural Research in History Didactics, Social Studies and Citizenship Education (CICR). In the context of an intensive transnational exchange between Japanese and Austrian research in teacher education of the CHE-subjects[1], a series of classroom observations in Vienna, Graz and Hiroshima was initiated.

Due to its descriptive character, classroom observation is a very valuable method in comparative and intercultural research in teacher education (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014, p. 104). It doesn't aim at evaluating or judging an existing system, but at finding significant differences which can be used to gain information and inspiration, and which can serve as the starting point for further research.[2]

The article focuses on the theoretical background of observations of history/civics classrooms by stressing the role of the observer(s), by pointing out the reasons for and/or the necessity of classroom observations, by presenting the 'observation matrix' as a tool for the observation of history/civics lessons and, finally, by giving examples of classroom observations of civics lessons in two schools in Hiroshima.

The History/Civics Class as a Social System

When talking about classroom observation, the term classroom, as the object of observation, should first of all be defined. In this paper, I follow the process-oriented approach of history didactics developed by Alois Ecker at the University of Vienna (Ecker, 2015, 2018b), which conceives of the 'classroom' as a social system based on the systems theory of Niklas Luhmann[3] and the communication theory of Paul Watzlawick.[4] The reason for using this approach is the fact that learning in a classroom means always learning in a group. The members of the group (learners and teachers) influence each other and consequently influence the process of learning.

The main form of operation of social systems is communication. Students learn (gain knowledge and competences) and teachers teach – both by asking, informing, discussing, arguing, justifying, evaluating,

comparing etc. All these are operations using language; they are operations of communication. This is complementary to the idea of the psychic systems, thus, individual learners whose main operation form is human consciousness based on imaginations, feelings, thinking, reflecting (Luhmann, 1984, p. 20ff; 2002). Both social systems and psychic systems have in common that they are grounded in sense-making processes (Luhmann, 2017, p. 44). This corresponds to the theory of history of Jörn Rüsen, who stresses that

a) historical sense making underlies historical learning and that

b) sense-making enables communication. (Rüsen, 2013, p. 35)

The example of a history class establishes that the 'sense-making-horizon' is history, and the main operation form is talking and negotiating about history. During classroom observations, we can observe these occurrences of communication (communication structure, interventions, interferences etc.) and we can draw conclusions about the historical learning process(es) of the observed learning group. On the contrary, it is not possible to observe the consciousness of psychic systems.

At least since the paradigmatic change in history didactics from the cognitive learning approach to the competence-oriented and process-oriented learning approach, the observation of communication structures in the classroom has become a valuable method for gaining knowledge about the learning process of historical/civic-oriented thinking. The main questions in this context are "how do students learn about history?" and "what happens during a history lesson at the communicative level that initiates and enhances or prevents and impedes historical learning?".

Coming back to the definition of the object of observation – which is in this case the history/civics class –, the following assumptions can be made:

- History/civics lessons at schools and history/civics courses at universities are social systems.
- Each history/civics class – whether at school or at university – is an individual social system and differs from another history/civics class.
- The social system includes the students and the teacher(s)/teacher trainer(s).
- The basic operation for learning about history/civics in the classroom is communication about history/civics.
- The main objective of communication in a history/civics class is historical/civics-oriented sense-making.

Classroom Observation and the Role of the Observer

"Classroom observation" is used in different contexts of research and evaluation. One of the most common practices is classroom observation as a method of assessment[5], that is, assessment of students as well as assessment of teachers. In this case, the main objective of classroom observation is to judge the student and the quality of learning or to judge the teacher and the quality of teaching. That goes so far as to have classroom observation used as a method to identify "good" and "bad" teachers, even if the reliability of classroom observation is limited due to the subjectivity of the observer.[6]

Classroom observation in intercultural, comparative research of didactics of history, social studies and citizenship education differs from the approach of teacher observation as described in the paragraph above. In particular, the main interest is to describe and to explore the procedure and the technique of learning about

history/civics and the process of historical thinking in different cultural perspectives. The emphasis is placed on observation of communication processes during history/civics lessons and their impact on historical learning or on historio-political learning.

Observing means to watch and to take notice of facts without analysing the situation. However, the historical-cultural background of the observer is nevertheless always present during the observation act, as, every perception is a construction depending on the subject (Unseld, 1997, p. 223ff). In this context, the role of the observer and her/his involvement in the observation process requires special consideration. We can state that every member of the system is also an observer of the system (= first order observation). That is, during history lessons, students observe teachers, teachers observe students, and students observe colleagues. To explain it in Niklas Luhman's words: "The social system observes psychic systems; the psychic systems observe psychic systems, the psychic systems can observe social systems." (Luhmann, 2017, p. 142) This means that all participants of the history lesson observe and are at the same time themselves observed. They observe as a psychic system and/or as part of the social system (Luhmann, 2002, p. 292f). It is evident that observers who are inside the system have blind spots. When they observe one thing, they can't observe another one. It follows, then, that an "external" observer can be invited to observe the social system, thus the history/civics class (= second order observation): "an observer observes the observer" (Luhmann, 2017, p. 150). However, both observers of first and of second order observations are never outside the system. They bring their own experiences into the system as they are psychic systems with emotions, personal reflections and pre-concepts. As a consequence, they can't ignore this fact when observing, judging and interpreting the observed situation by referring to their own subjective perception even if they make a concerted effort to be as objective as possible. During classroom observation, the perception may be holistic, but the observer cannot see the whole picture. Her/his observation is selective and in and of itself determined by the system. (Probst, 1985, p. 201) Observers of second observation influence the system simply by attending the history lesson. The observer of second observation is mostly a person who is usually not part of the system. Consequently, pupils and the teacher react in different ways to this intervention to the system.

First order observations serve to bring operations forward inside the system (e.g. historical sense making). Second order observations observe these operations (e.g. process of historical sense making) and are able to analyse, to consult, to make suggestions for corrections and changes. (Becker & Reinhardt-Becker, 2001, p. 68) They can reveal ruptures and barriers as well as uplifting or propulsive moments during the learning process.

Example: Lesson Studies in Japan

In Japan, a tradition of lesson studies (= Jugyou Kenkyuu) has existed since at least the late 19th century. Lesson studies are based on classroom observations aiming at improving practical teaching and teacher education. They are considered to be the most common form of teachers' professional development. (O'Leary, 2020, p. 26) "At a minimum, the colleagues of teachers at the same school and, in many cases, teachers from other schools and/or education board members, observe and analyse each other's classes." (NASEM (= National Association for the Study of Educational Methods), 2011, p. 15) These observation practices with perspectives of different social systems (different schools probably with different teaching traditions, educational board structure, etc.) show very clearly how to work on differences, how to share experiences and how to see schools

as learning organizations (classrooms as learning social systems) (Sarkar Arani, Shibata, & Matoba, 2007, p. 25). Starting with Japan, the method of lesson studies has recently become more widely practiced throughout the whole world, such as in the UK and the US (O'Leary, 2020, p. 27f).

Classroom Observations in the Framework of History/Civics Teacher Education Courses at Austrian Universities

Organisation of History/Civics Teacher Education Courses

The model of History Teacher Education in Austria links closely theoretical learning during university courses and its practical transfer to history classes at school.[7] Following the process-oriented approach, "observation", "feedback/evaluation" and "(self-)reflexion" are the keywords which serve as the vehicle for proceeding with the learning process of trainees.

During the first two lessons of the university course (lasting one semester, about 10-14 lessons), trainees deal with preparative issues which are crucial for the further development of the course:

a) Self-reflection on students' proper experience with history teaching:

As a first exercise, trainees have to reflect on their own experiences of history/civics lessons as students: best-practice-examples, bad experiences, boring lessons, exciting exercises, assessment methods, learning process, materials used during lessons, interactions between teacher and students as well as interactions between students, interventions of the teacher during the learning process, etc. As a second exercise, they have to define aspects which they consider important when teaching history/civics and define objectives which they want to achieve in the framework of their profession.

These exercises aim firstly to induce a change of perspective in the role of student and teacher. Trainees who are accustomed to the role of learners have to become properly aware of their new roles as teachers. Secondly, the exercises help to build up a certain distance from personal experiences and to transfer these experiences to a meta-level – a challenging task, but particularly necessary for classroom observation and teaching practice. Following the studies and investigations of Edward Conrad Wragg, observers often observe what they want to see and ignore what they don't wish to see (Wragg, 1999, p. vii). Self-criticism and evaluation of the observed actions prior to the communication situation in the observed system can be enhanced by raising self-awareness (Norman, 1976, p. 217), which leads to the effect that the subjectivity of the observers can at least be reduced, even if it may never be completely eliminated.

b) Defining thematic topics, theses and research questions:

History teacher education courses at Austrian universities link closely the subjects of the science of history, social studies and citizenship education with the didactics of the CHE-subjects. This is why students work thematically on a concrete topic before they start planning school lessons. In a first step, they deal with a topic at an academic level. In a second step, they work on links between the topic elaborated and didactical theories. Classroom observations are the starting point for obtaining a clear idea of the target group (addressees; history class). Based on these observations, they take decisions about the main issues in terms of the thematic level which they want to teach, and they connect them with first order concepts (substantive concepts) and

second order concepts (organizing concepts). In this way, they become aware of historical thinking strategies and they reflect on the analytical dimensions of historical understanding (Cercadillo, Chapman, & Lee, 2017, p. 530).

c) Team-building

Students of history teacher education courses work in groups during the whole semester. The groups are core elements of the course design and have positive effects at different levels:

- **Thematic level (subject history, social studies and citizenship education):** One topic can be worked on in depth by dealing with different research questions within the group. As group members have to produce common results (presentation, seminar paper), they work together, exchange and discuss research results, which leads to higher quality in terms of the level of thematic content.
- **Professional level (history/civics teacher education):** Team-teaching, project teams and working groups are more and more important in the Austrian school system. Specifically, team-teaching is very common in lower secondary schools ('Neue Mittelschule'), whilst subject teachers teach together with experts (e.g. history teachers work together with native speakers of foreign languages). Teachers of different subjects organise school projects. Working groups are installed by school management to guarantee quality standards at the educational institution. The organisation of the university course in teams (working groups of 3 to 5 trainees) is therefore useful training for the future work of teachers at school.
- **Communication level (group dynamics):** At the beginning of this article, 'communication' was described as the main form of operation of social systems. This is why trainees have to be trained in communication strategies and group dynamic theories. A lot of work remains to be done to integrate these aspects more systematically in teacher training courses. Nevertheless, team-building processes and group work exercises during the whole semester of the university courses contribute to a better understanding of communication processes in groups (systems) and between groups (systems).[8]

The following diagram (figure 1) indicates the two-part learning environment (university–school) of teacher training courses at Austrian universities. This means that history/civics teacher training courses are organised in an interdisciplinary way: historians, subject didacticians and schoolteachers collaborate with the aim of training teachers for their future professional careers (Ecker, 2018b, p. 10). The connecting element/ subject between university and school is the trainee herself/himself with her/his competence training (individual research and self-reflection).

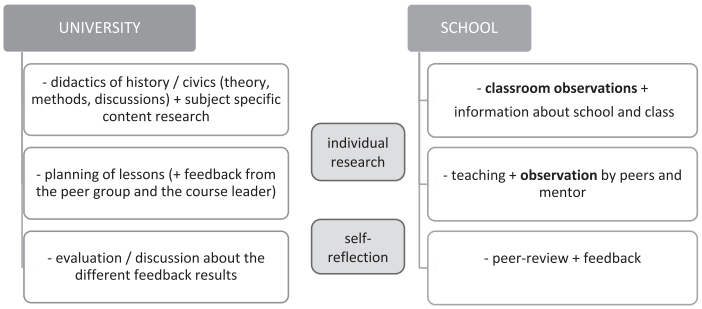

Figure 1: Organisation of history teacher education courses at Austrian universities; © Bettina Paireder

At university, trainees develop the chosen topic by presenting and discussing main theses, relevant literature and research results. They learn about theoretical models and concepts of didactics of history, social studies and citizenship education with the aim of linking content and didactical theories in such a way that can later be elaborated upon for lesson planning purposes. Additionally, the university offers space and time for reflection, evaluation, feedback, discussions by relating personal experiences and subjective perceptions with relevant theories. This means that there is a continuous array of exercises on self-reflection and several feedback-loops during the whole semester course.

At school, the focus is on classroom observation and teaching practice as developed during the university course and supported by a mentor who is a practising teacher, mostly history/civics teachers of the history/civics class where the trainees carry out their teaching practice.

Individual research and self-reflection: In addition to the university course and the school practice (observing, teaching, evaluating), trainees have to deal individually with the specific topic which they have chosen for group work. They have to do research (going to libraries and archives) and to prepare a presentation about their topic to be presented at the university course. They also have to write a paper about the topic and their specific research question. The whole learning process is accompanied by blog entries for reflecting regularly on the ongoing process of learning and professionalisation.

Classroom Observation in the Framework of Process-oriented History Didactics

Classroom observation supports the learning process of trainees during the whole semester, both theoretically and practically. Students meet on a weekly basis at university, where they prepare, evaluate and discuss classroom observation and teaching practise in a theory-based way.

Three times per semester, they actually go to school and work with one concrete history/civics class. That is, one classroom observation takes place at the beginning of the training course and one teaching practise unit and another classroom observation (= peer observation) both take place in the last third of the semester.

1st Classroom Observation:

The first classroom observation is carried out at the beginning of the course and aims at giving students information about the learning system in this specific history/civics class where they will practice as teachers some weeks later. Normally, there are groups of about four students who observe one or two lessons held by the regular history/civics teacher of the class. Each trainee of the team focusses on one specific observation question (see below, Subject Specific Observation Question(s)) which they have developed during the university course. They also observe the communication processes and the lesson structure of the history class, following the fields of the "Matrix of Observation of History Classes" (see below, The Observation Matrix). After the classroom observation, they describe what they have seen, analyse the classroom situations and the communication structures of the observed history/civics class, together with the teacher of the history/civics class who imparts her/his own observations. They are also invited to ask the teacher details about the pupils, their background, their knowledge, the learning environment etc. Finally, the trainees put together their research results and write an observation report. This requires communication about the observation which means that the perceptions of different persons respectively their different psychic systems are implicated in the observed social system. During the discussion, instances of consent and dissent are defined and discussed in a way which makes the

research results clear and connectable to a systematic approach of lesson planning for this concrete history/civics class.[9]

2nd Classroom Observation

a) Perspective of the teacher trainee and the learners (first order observation):

During the last month of the semester, the trainees practice at school as a history/civics teacher in a class which they have observed before. While they are teaching, they observe the learning process of the class, the teaching process compared to the planned lesson and the communication structures during the history/civics lesson. These observations have a close relationship to the personality and to the professional profile of the teacher's role of the trainee. It is indeed just as Niklas Luhmann puts it: "observation means nothing more than handling distinctions" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 36) in the sense that "the distinction is used to acquire information" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 440). Aiming at noticing differences and communicating these distinctions, the observer (in our case the trainee who acts as a teacher) needs to be aware of pre-concepts. She/he refers to her/his teaching/learning experiences, her/his historical consciousness and her/his expectations and her/his beliefs about the process of historical learning in the classroom. Observation is, thus, self-referential. In the next step, the trainee asks the pupils for feedback. Their observations are also self-referential and in addition, they observe in the role of the history class as a social system. In this way, the system observes itself (double self-referential observation).

b) Perspective of the peers and the mentor (second order observation):

At the same time, during the teaching performance of the trainee, peers and a mentor (who is usually the regular history/civics teacher of the class) observe the learning/teaching process of the history/civics class.

Subsequent to the history/civics lesson, the observation results of the trainee in the role of the teacher, of the pupils, of the peers and of the mentor are all put together and the learning/teaching process is then evaluated with the main objective of having improved knowledge and awareness about the processes of training historical/civics-oriented thinking, of building up historical/civics-oriented competences and of building historical consciousness and political understanding.

Method of Classroom Observation in the Framework of Process-oriented History Didactics

In accordance with the process-oriented approach, the method of classroom observation follows a two-step approach (see figure 2) which can be used both in teacher education courses and for research in the field of history/civics didactics.[10]

(1) Observation: What can be seen/noticed?

a) The history/civics lesson is observed systematically by completing the fields of the observation matrix.

b) Specific observation questions

- 1st classroom observation: Students concentrate specifically on one observation question which they have developed

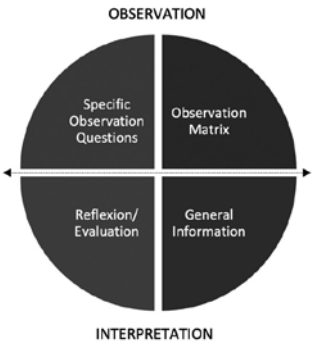

Figure 2: Method of classroom observation; © Bettina Paireder

during the university course and in coordination with their working group partners.

- 2nd classroom observation: Peers concentrate on general observation questions which are part of the observation matrix.

(2) Interpretation: What can be concluded?

a) Students ask the main teacher of the history/civics class about further information (background information, pre-concepts, details about the addressees, learning environment …)

b) The research results are put together and the group of first order observers and second order observers discusses, interprets and evaluates the perceptions (= reflection and evaluation).

The Observation Matrix

The 'Observation Matrix' is based on the 'Matrix for Designing History Courses/History Lessons' which was developed by Alois Ecker as a tool for supporting the planning of history lessons following the process-oriented approach of teaching history (Ecker, 2021). It exists in an analogue version (pdf file to be printed out; word file to be filled in) and in a digital version as an interactive tool (matrix.geschichtsdidaktik.eu).

Part 1

The very first part of the matrix indicates general information about the observed history lesson: date and duration of the observation, information about the school and the class, name of the teacher, number of the students, main topic, etc. The general information will be completed by the history/civics teacher of the class.

During their observation, the observers have to determine what the main objective(s) of the lesson are, as well as what didactical concepts (substantive and organizing/procedural concepts of historical thinking) and what historical/civics-oriented competencies are stressed during the observed lesson, and they have to note their considerations in the spaces provided in the matrix. The associations to the didactical approach as indicated by the observers are then compared to the plans of the history/civics teacher. The differences and similarities serve as the starting point for further evaluation of the observed history/civics lesson.

Part 2

The general, introductory part is followed by the actual matrix for designing the history/civics lesson or the teacher education course in detailed sequences (see figure 3).

2	Matrix for designing the course in detailed sequences

Organizational Structure Time, Function in learning process, settings	Aims Rationales Concept of Historical Thinking	Topics Sub-Themes Substantive Concept	Structure of Communication / Learning Organisation: Methods, Media	Analysis, Interpretation, Transfer Competence-building, Orientation	Back-Coupling Forms of Feedback Reference to Learning Group	Reflection In Group and Self-Reflection
Introduction to the topic						
Entering into the topic in detail / knowledge-building						

Figure 3: Sequences of the Observation Matrix; © Alois Ecker

Following the structure of the observation matrix, the observers concentrate on observation tasks which are significant for analysing the process of historical/civics-oriented learning. Consequently, the focus is subject specific and compatible with research in the field of history/civics didactics.

During their observation time in the classroom, they should only describe what they are able to perceive; they should not write down hypotheses or conjectures. As a result, some fields could eventually remain empty during the observation process. It is up to the evaluation discussion — which is carried out after the classroom observation — to analyse the reasons behind and the consequences resulting from the empty fields for the process of historical/civics-oriented learning.

- Organizational structure:

This section gives general information about the individual sequences of the lesson design/course design. That includes time/duration of the sequence and the function of the sequence in the learning process, such as opening the topic, ensuring intermediate results, presentations etc.

- Aims, rationales:

Each sequence is based on subject specific learning objectives. Observers describe the goals that are clearly transmitted, the competencies that are visibly developed, as well as what organizing/procedural concepts and what aspects of historical learning are addressed and trained in detail.

- Topics, sub-themes:

Here, the observers name the topic/theme which is covered by this sequence. What substantial concepts are in the focus? What thematic questions are addressed? To which historical/societal/political theories and categories does the teacher refer while addressing the topic?

- Structure of organisation:

This section deals with learning organisation, methods and media. The main attention focuses on the communication structure and the learning arrangement. The observers note which learning arrangement has been selected (hierarchical, team-oriented or process-oriented) and what method is applied within the selected arrangement. Additionally, the framework of the learning arrangement is likewise described (learning environment, utilized media and sources etc.).

- Analysis, interpretation, transfer:

What kind of transfer can be observed? In pursuit of moving the setting of reproductive learning forward, transfer and interpretation/analysis of the compiled content are key aspects in the historical learning process. The observers note whether and what kind of competence building, practical use, evaluation, establishing connections between space, time and facts that they notice during their observation act.

- Back-coupling:

Referring to the assumption that historical/civics oriented learning correlates to a stable communication structure, a deliberate reference to the learning group (= back-coupling) is evident.[11] On the one hand, observers take note of the strategies in the learning system of giving feedback and asking for feedback. In what ways is the relationship between cognitive and affective learning as well as between collective and individual learning ensured? Are questions posed that actually lead to an improvement in comprehension and further practice? What methods and forms of feedback are utilized? On the other hand, observers take note of situations of disfunction and misunderstandings during the learning

process.

- Reflection:

Reflection is a significant category for building historical consciousness and political understanding on the part of the learners. The observers describe activities which promote reflection and record time and space reserved for reflection activities during the learning process.

Part 3 and 4

Subsequent to the matrix reflection, questions for the teacher (= part 3) and generic observation questions for the observers (peers and mentor) (= part 4) are framed. They serve as a guideline to give a detailed observation report focusing on historical/civics-oriented learning:

- What parts of the lesson – due to the planning – seemed to run smoothly? What difficulties occurred during the history/civics lesson? (time management, method, choice of material, selected themes …) How did these difficulties manifest? What consequences could be observed?
- What could be observed with regards to communication structures and communication processes? How was communication initiated, blocked, interrupt, motivated, etc.? In what ways did the interventions of the teacher bring communication about history/civics forward? Did communication at the meta-level (communication about the learning process, not directly about the content) occur? In what cases was this essential and when was it counterproductive?
- What disorders could be observed during the history/civics lesson (interruptions, misunderstandings, disruption of communication, etc) and in what way did they influence the further teaching process? Who was responsible for the disorders? How could the situation be dissolved?
- What kinds of interactions (between teacher and learners as well as between learners) could be observed?
- What methods and interventions did the teacher use to proceed or to inhibit the historical/civics oriented learning process? What group-dynamic processes enhanced or hindered historical/civics oriented learning?

Subject Specific Observation Question(s)

Apart from the analytic part of the classroom observation, a subject specific observation question focuses on an individual observation objective. This gives the observer the possibility to place emphasis on a differentiated research question of history/civics didactics. To that extent, three parameters have to be defined before starting the observation process: research field – research question(s) – research method.

Example:

- Research field: methodology in the framework of the historical learning process
- Research questions: What different methods are used? How long does the teacher work with one specific method? How is the method integrated into the historical learning process (role of teachers and students; communication structure; trained skills/competences/concepts)? How is the method introduced and closed? How are transitions between different methods organized?
- Research method: table to be filled in during the observation of the history lesson (see figure 4)

	Name / Type	Time	Start / explanation	End / changing to another method	Problems / interventions	Role of the teacher	Role of the pupils	Communication structure	Aspects of historical learning
M1:									
M2:									
M3:									
MX:									

Figure 4: Example for a table to be used for classroom observation; © Bettina Paireder
M = "method"

Evaluation / Self-reflection

After the observation processes, the observers (peers, mentors, trainees, teacher) put together their observation results. This could be the entries in the observation matrix, the observations along the specific questions, outcome from the self-reflection of the teacher, feedback results from the pupils, etc. Together, they compare and interpret the observations. Normally this process is carried out at school, directly after the lesson observation.

In the next step, the observation results and the possibilities of interpretive approaches are brought to the university course, where they are evaluated and discussed against the background of didactical theories and relevant literature.

What follows is an intense phase of reflection. The history/civics lesson has been evaluated through the students' eyes, the mentor's eyes, the trainees' eyes and through the lens of theory/literature. In the perspective of history/civics teachers' training, trainees step into the phase of reflective practice. They learn from the observations, examine their practice reflectively, reorganise their experiences and beliefs and develop their professionalism as future history/civics teachers.[12] In the perspective of the field of history/civics didactics, knowledge will be gained, subject-specific approaches can be improved and new research questions can be formulated.

Intercultural Comparative Approach of Classroom Observation: Observation-report from Two Civics Classes in Hiroshima

In the framework of the partnership between the Educational Vision Research Institute (EVRI) of Hiroshima University and the Austrian Institutes of History Didactics of the Universities of Vienna and Graz and the Centre for Intercultural Research in History Didactics, Social Studies and Citizenship Education (CICR), two Austrian researchers (Univ.-Prof. Dr. Alois Ecker and Dr. Bettina Paireder) had the opportunity to be invited by Prof. Dr. Kazuhiro Kusahara and Ass.Prof. Dr. Hiromi Kawaguchi to observe two civics classes in Hiroshima, Japan (Sept. 2018).

- Itsukaichi Highschool, 12th grade, 50 min. (class A)
  Topic: concept of thinking economically
- Otsuka Junior High School, 9th grade, 50 min. (class B)
  Topic: concept of efficiency and fairness in the framework of contemporary society

Our research focused on communication processes in the classroom. To that end, we framed the

following observation questions:

1. How was communication organised in the civics classes?

2. What kind of didactical approach to civic education was at the centre of classroom communication?

The classroom observation was perfectly organised. We had all the necessary information about the learning environment. We had translated lesson plan handouts and a simultaneous translation was also provided. Subsequent to the classroom observation, we had a conversation with the civics teacher, the headmaster and our Japanese colleagues, who participated in the observation process as well.

In the following, I will summarize results of the classroom observations in Hiroshima.

How Was Communication Organised in the Observed Civics Classes?

The two classes followed two different communication structures of learning: hierarchical learning organisation (class A), team-oriented learning organisation (class B).[13]

a) hierarchical learning organisation

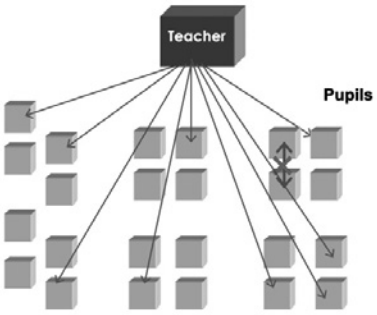

Figure 5: Model of hierarchical learning organisation; © Alois Ecker

Figure 6: Photo classroom observation (A); ©Bettina Paireder

As the model (figure 5) shows, the teacher's role in the hierarchical learning organisation is to lecture, and the pupils' role is to listen. An interaction between the pupils is not allowed or intended which is symbolised in the chart by a cross. As we could observe in class A (see figure 6), there were two very brief opportunities for the pupils to talk to a partner (about half a minute, timed by a clock at the blackboard). However, pupils did not actively communicate with the teacher. We don't have any information about the learning progress of the group (social system whose main operation form is communication) nor about the individual learners (psychic system whose main operation form is human consciousness). Neither feedback nor reflection was not envisioned during this lesson. The main aim of hierarchical learning organisations is to give information. There is no critical discussion intended.

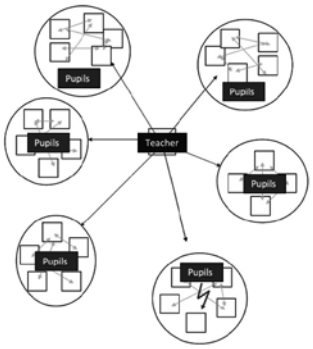

Figure 7: Model of team-oriented learning organisation; © Alois Ecker

Figure 8: Photo classroom observation (B); © Bettina Paireder

b) team-oriented learning organisation

The traditional form of team-oriented learning organisation is working in groups (figure7). The teacher is in the role of an organiser and advisor of the working process. She/He gives orders for the organisation of work, coordinates time-schedules, advises, supports the pupils while working, but she/he is not usually involved in the details of the content-related aspects of work for as long as the groups work. However, if there are questions, e.g. difficulties regarding either group organisation or content-based aspects, the teacher intervenes in such a way that helps the group to continue its working task (as indicated for one of the groups in figure 7). The teacher is no longer the only expert who has to give every detail of information. It is up to the pupils to acquire knowledge and to discuss a problem in a critical manner. The pupils organise their working process aiming at being able to present a result at the end of the group work. For the time that they work together, the groups themselves develop an individual working style /working culture which can be different from the working culture of another group in the classroom. During our classroom observation in class B (see figure 8), more than half of the time the communication structure of the lesson was organised in a team-oriented way. To give one example of demonstrating the idea of the history/civics class as a learning social system (including teacher(s) and learners), I want to cite the civics teacher who told us after the end of the lesson: "not only pupils learn, but also I learn from the pupils' work."

What Kind of Didactical Approach to Civic Education Was at the Centre of Classroom Communication?

Both lessons followed a conceptual approach. Class A worked on the concept of economical thinking, while class B worked on the concept of efficiency and fairness. However, the approach of political sense-making was different. In class A, reproduction (taking over given positions) was at the centre, while in class B, political maturity and personal responsibility were the focus. These different objectives corresponded to different communication models as demonstrated in the following table1:

Table1: Didactical approach of political sense making (comparison)

	Class A	Class B
What kind of learning organisation dominated the lesson?	hierarchical learning organisation	team-oriented learning organisation
How was the opening session (introduction to the topic) organised?	The teacher presented crucial questions related to the topic. (teacher driven)	Pupils were asked to reflect on their perception of a TV-comic personality. The teacher created a connection between the living reality of the pupils and the topic (pupil oriented).
What method was chosen for gaining knowledge?	The largest part of the lesson consisted of a differentiated input of the teacher with visualisation on the blackboard. Additionally, there were short question-answer sections and partner conversations.	Five steps approach: 1-Introduction of the question; 2-individual reflection; 3-group work; 4-presentations of the results of the group work; 5-self-assessment
What civic orientation competencies were developed?	Theoretic models/concepts are at the centre (traditional approach of sense-making*).	Practical issues are at the centre. The pupils link a given theoretic model to their personal concepts. Competency is linked to performance (exemplary approach of sense-making*).

* See schematic spiral of the levels of competency in historical learning by Jörn Rüsen. "Traditional formation of meaning does not just apply to a general theory of universal development of historical thinking. It also concerns the mental processes in which historical consciousness unfolds in the life of a human being. With growing cognitive competencies, we can reach and practice a (logically) higher level of forming historical meaning, an exemplary formation of meaning. To reach this level we need the development of the power of human judgement, or the development of cognitive competencies […]." (Rüsen, 2017, p. 198f)

Conclusion: Classroom Observation in the Framework of Intercultural, Comparative Research

To date, intercultural, comparative research in teacher education remains a rather small field in our global world. There are a lot of obstacles and challenges that have to be overcome:

- Differences in the theoretical framework of intercultural research
- Different theories/schools of the academic disciplines
- Lack of common methodological approaches of intercultural comparative research in teacher education
- Lack of awareness about historical, political, societal and cultural differences
- Sensitivity of cultural identity
- Political struggles of power
- Language barriers

The partnership between EVRI and CICR is a wonderful example of efforts at working for overcoming these difficulties and at doing research in a mutual exchange.

Classroom observation gives deep insight into the heart of history didactics. When visiting classes at

school, you enter into a polity, society and culture and it is evident that one benefits from this background for the research tasks of history/civics didactics. That is to say that the common reflection on the part of colleagues of Japan and Austria – both teachers and researchers – enables a culture-sensitive interpretation of the observation results. To that extent, it was a unique experience to discover both a big number of similarities and very inspiring differences between learning/teaching history, social studies and citizenship education in two classes of Hiroshima and in two regions of the world (Japan and Austria) that are far apart from each other.

One of the most important findings of the intercultural comparative approach of classroom observation described here is that process-oriented history didactics is valuable and appropriate as the theoretical basis of intercultural comparative research. Systems-theory can be said to be a theory which is applicable everywhere in the world. History/Civics classes are social systems constituted by communication processes and aiming at (historical/civics-oriented) sense-making. The communications are influenced by psychic systems, by other social systems (e.g. the school, other classes) and by the environment[14] of the social system. These parameters apply to all regions of the world. However, every system is different – within one region and beyond. This is that the environment of history/civics classes in Austria differs from the environment of history/civics classes in Japan, which has an influence on learning/teaching processes. Intercultural comparative research in history/civics teachers' education examines in what way communication processes affect historical sense-making and political understanding. The instruments (e.g. matrix for observing courses of teacher education of CHE-subjects and history/civics lessons) and methods (e.g. classroom observation) which were used for comparative classroom observation are developed in the framework of the process-oriented history didactics and proven to be valid and suitable.

Intercultural comparative research in history/civics didactics in an increasingly globalized world can serve to promote mutual learning, understanding and development of strategies for educating tolerant and respectful global citizens who know about their historicity and their responsibility for the future.

Notes

1. CHE (Civic and History Education Study) is a European comprehensive study, conducted by Alois Ecker, which describes and analyses the formation of school teachers of the historio-political subjects 'History', 'Civic/Citizenship Education', 'Politics', 'Social Studies' and 'Cultural Studies' – the so called "CHE-subjects" for the first time (Ecker, 2018a).
2. See Gregory Bateson "any difference which makes a difference" (Bateson, 1972, p. 381) or George Spencer-Brown "we cannot make an indication without drawing a distinction" (Spencer-Brown, 1969, p. 1) or Niklas Luhmann who defines observation as distinction and indication (Luhmann, 2017, p. 147).
3. See inter alia '*Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie*' (Luhmann, 1984) [English translation: '*Social Systems*' (Luhmann, 1995)] or „*Einführung in die Systemtheorie*' (Luhmann, 2017) [English translation: '*Introduction to systems theory*' (Luhmann, 2013)].
4. See "*Pragmatics of human communication*" (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967).
5. A summary of studies related to classroom observation as a method of assessment as well as an overview on methodological approaches to classroom observation in this context can be found in Matt O'Leary (2020).

6. "Events are inevitably filtered through the interpretive lens of the observer" (Foster, 1996, p. 14).
7. The development of the partnership model between university and secondary schools in Austria is described in the article of Alois Ecker, "Process-oriented subject didactics. The integrating project of subject didactics (pedagogy) at the University of Vienna, Austria", published in the International Journal of Curriculum Development and Praxis (Ecker, 2018b, p. 8f).
8. Gerhard Schwarz, Austrian philosopher and expert in communication and group dynamics, lists and describes main points of group dynamic competences of teachers and objectives of education for an understanding of pedagogy that emphasizes a future-oriented learning process of students/pupils ('direct pedagogy') (Cercadillo et al., 2017).
9. This procedure follows the methodological three steps as described by Helmut Willke: observing – describing – understanding (Willke, 1993, pp. 178-188).
10. Being adapted to subject-specific requirements of classroom observation, the basis of this methodological approach could be used for other school subjects than history and civics as well. The subject specific focus has to be differentiated in accordance with the needs and requirements of history/civics lessons by developing adequate observation questions and observation tools.
11. Niklas Luhmann underlines that "Understanding is an indispensable feature" for comprehensive and sense-making communication. "When one communicative action follows another, it tests whether the preceding communication was understood" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 143).
12. Gillie Bolton gives an overview about objectives and methods of reflective practice in his book "*Reflective Practice. Writing & Professional Development*" (Bolton, 2010).
13. Alois Ecker distinguishes three models of communication: the process-oriented system, the team-oriented system and the hierarchical system (Ecker, 2002).
14. In systems theory "environment" means everything that does not belong to the system. "It is simply everything else" (Luhmann, 1995, p. 181).

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