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## **EuroConMi – “Historical Thinking” in an instructional concept on the subject of migration**

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In today's history lesson, autonomous learning and the responsible application of acquired abilities and skills take center stage. In addition, the associated approach to competence orientation has also sparked a discussion in the teaching of history. Basic domain principles are being newly reflected upon and professional as well as subject didactical models are on trial. At the center of the debate are the terms “historical consciousness” and “historical thinking”. In the following article, it will be shown what is understood by these terms under the current discussion and which particular approach can be achieved in the scope of the project, “Europe, a continent of migrants”.

### **1. Trainee teachers/Junior experts develop an instructional concept on the subject of migration**

Teaching history is particularly suited to meaningfully engage students in the subject of migration. Through this, they can gain central insights into the historical conditions of the phenomenon and thus better understand the impact on different social realms. This understanding addresses the problems observed in all European countries. As a result, many European citizens are actively or passively affected. They are faced with the question: How can we cohabitate on the basis of mutual understanding? Special attention is paid to the acquisition of intercultural competence with the goal of reflecting upon and developing integration possibilities.

The instructional concept therefore strives for the following considerations and objectives: tolerance, acceptance of others, insight into different lifestyles, understanding of foreign views and a willingness to promote living together.

At the center of the EuroConMi project are young history teachers in training (referred to in this article as trainee teachers or junior experts) and their instructors. Together the parties are developing instructional concepts that they will test, evaluate and publish.

### **2. What is historical thinking?**

“Historical thinking” makes up the key focus of “history as a subject of thought” approach. This instructional manner shifts the emphasis of the instructional objective from subject matter orientation to the independent thinking of students. In addition to the previously mentioned approach, the students are also able to independently and consciously perceive history and process it in a problem-oriented way. Considering all school subjects, this is only achieved through history instruction.

The mental process, processing the experience of time, which every individual does, is what history didactics calls historical consciousness. In addition to the consciousness is the individual's organization of his or her life memories as well as their orientation of the future. This is a vital operation for each person whether as an individual or as a citizen. For this reason, historical thinking has a place in the student's life. Discussion and the common, open reprocessing of history are called historical culture. In many cases, historical culture is about the researched and displayed facts of the science of history. In any case, historical science is the last authority whenever history is about recorded content or scientific method. There, the corresponding procedures and methods were the furthest developed through differentiation and elaboration. It is therefore reasonable that conventions and structural characteristics of historical perception are involved. Lastly, they provide the basis that permits the students an appropriate association with history, reflective and reflexive.



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The peculiarities of historical perception theories were always worked out by the researcher himself. Important to this, are historians of historicism, for example, Gustav Droysen, or didactic historians like Jörn Rüsen. The consensus is that history is regarded as a retrospectively established construct. This implies that history is not understood as a finished picture or as a sum of established perceptions. In contrast, at the center of historical perception is the reconstruction process according to the rules of the historical method, which contains elements of the past as well as the present and gives orientation for the future.

Historical perception is based on the following considerations:

- “The outcome of our historical research is... not the creation of the past, but rather a something whose elements... lie in our present.” (Droysen, Historic, 273)

With that, the focus turns to two elements: the subject of inquiry, with its present premises and interests, and occupation with the remnants of the past as the sole possibility to converge previous realities.

As a result, we have this series of ideally work procedures:

- the perception of historic situations and problems
- the formation of occupational questions
- Research
- the processing of the present material with subject specific method
- the interpretation of the meaning of the extracted material
- the synthesis of the discovered content meaning, the narrative
- Critique, reflection on the problematic

A glance at these historical perception operations will reveal that several of them are especially suitable for understanding the migration phenomenon, how to reflectively handle the phenomenon and reach the target objectives. Additionally, a series of presently produced structural characteristics produced by the subject, which create their own patterns of rationality regarding historical perception, shape the insight process. This is especially practical for attaining the instruction objectives.

## **Alterity**

By alterity, we understand the culturally historical distance between different historical epochs as well as the experience of foreignness between simultaneously existing cultures. Insight into this issue is obviously also a prerequisite for mutual acceptance.

## **Perspectivity - multiperspectivity**

Every remnant of the past, every source is evolved from a perspective. Questions from a certain perspective are further developed for interpretation. With these questions we construct history from particles of the past, and doing so, we must keep in mind the existence of multifaceted perspectivity. Everyone engaged learns that there is no valid truth. All issues must be seen from different perspectives. Besides historical knowledge, this is also an important insight into forwarding our objectives. This insight is easily conveyed to personal associations with people from other cultures. There is no distinct outcome on the level of reconstruction. Therefore, a third point, the possibility of controversial analyses, must also be considered. Sources are often made up of unmentioned intentions. In order to find out about intentions, interests, hidden objectives – background in general - , the process of deconstruction is applied.



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## **Selectivity**

The depicted history construct is limited to multiple extracts. This is based on the limitation of questions and a corresponding selection of sources. History cannot be all-encompassingly portrayed, but rather only selectively.

## **Retrospectivity**

The realization of the past always happens in retrospect. Facts are established in the process, binding the past, present and future.

## **Present Connection**

All historical depictions and reconstructions emanate from the inquirer's present.

The conscious use of historical thinking steps and the structural characteristics of historical knowledge particularly contribute to the promotion of intercultural competence.

These measures suggest not considering one's own position as the absolute truth, but requests assuming the other's perspective to look at the issues from different sides. Perceiving others takes place in a way where both sides are accepted and the foundation for similarities is laid.

### **3. Which objectives does instruction have?**

The following objectives are formulated within the scope of the present project:

#### **AIMS FOR TEACHING UNITS**

Trainee teachers should know how to facilitate and involve students in the following activities:

- recognizing different cultures and acknowledging "otherness"
- recognizing their own identities as a result of European migration (human mobility)
- understanding that migration in Europe is a continual, steady and never-ending process
- finding ways to cohabitate in a complex and pluralistic society
- discovering conflict sources which may arise from migration
- increasing the ability and responsibility to participate in discussions about viable solutions to problems connected with migration

### **4. The particular advantage of historical thinking regarding the project's goals**

#### **Perception and Forming Questions**

The students identify migration phenomenon as a historical process and develop a willingness to explore the subject using the methods of historical thinking. Since migration is perceived as a current societal problem, questions could be formulated from the students' present horizon. Lastly, it is conducive that the students identify with the process and reflectively deal with it. In so doing, they will simultaneously learn and implement the historical perception procedure.

#### **Interacting with Materials, Methods**



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Through the initial situation and in view of the basic perception problem that history yields, students reconstruct a past reality using historical sources. Along with it, teachers strive for a broadly diversified material base. On this subject, it is typical that no existing written remnants are available for a large sub-sector. To be able to unlock this problem area, unlocking other prospects is recommended. As it were fellow citizens whose situation was under examination, the decision was made to conduct interviews with them. For this reason, the oral history method that places humanity at the center of research has been used.

## Analyzing and Interpreting

The goal is to attribute significance to the established elements of the past (particles of the past). This takes place in the context of the entirety of the knowledge.

## Synthesizing, Narrating

The significant elements are causally and temporally linked. This is the fundamental sequence that the science of history calls narrative. Several historians plainly distinguish this as historically specific. The narration of the individual migrant and his or her family develops within the scope of instruction insight. This is complemented through the assessment of their position in the host country. The causes and the course of migration become visible in the process. To explain this, migration models developed by the history of science and sociology are applied. The prevalent model is presumably the "push and pull" model. At the same time, students shall learn to criticize it and incorporate sociological and psychological models into the explanation. Through direct contact with the migrants the students shall verify the assumptions of the model.

## Reflecting, Judging

This area is the test bed for the target outcome. The students should independently conduct evaluations, in which they demonstrate that they have acquired a differentiated understanding of the material. In the process, they are prepared to use their conclusions to argue against prejudices, and when applicable, to abandon said prejudices. Thus, they reach the goal of openness regarding migrants and have a hand in the effect, striving for or contributing to realistic solutions. Having knowledge about the causes of migration is a prerequisite for this. An intensification of involvement and reflection is reached within the laid out model in which students collect materials in part by themselves, as well as conduct peer interviews.

## 5. The external instruction structure

It was a central aim of the project that the trainees develop options that guide students towards independence and responsible work. It was revealed that the project instruction, among other things, was appropriate to reach this aim. In the present case, the outcome is the following outline:

### I. Initial Phase

- Presentation of the subject and the section themes
- Compilation of questions
- Previous knowledge
- First Briefing
- Specific: Current migration aspects, case studies, questions, analysis of base text



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## II. Planning Phase

Decision of case study objective  
Assignment of rolls within the group  
Decision regarding the form of presentation  
Division of work

## III. Development Phase

Processing the sub-section through:

- provided literature
- student-found literature, secondary literature, immigrant and expatriate letters
- peer interviews
- Internet research

Presentation of the group's partial results

## IV. Presentation Preparation and Execution

Visuals – posters, transparencies  
Division of the presentation

## 6. Conclusion

The instruction units developed by the trainee teachers (junior experts), contribute to an exchange within Europe about teaching history. Didactic and methodological strategies from other countries are learned and carried forward, which enriches all sides. The collaboration of the junior experts from four different European countries, which already took place, validates the greatest hopes. At the same time, an important building block for a European style of teaching of history emerges.

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