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Political didactics (*Politikdidaktik*) in Germany has a special role, unlike that in other countries. In Germany, subject didactics (*Fachdidaktik*) is a separate area of expertise for a domain-specific subject. Each individual has the task of developing and empirically verifying a domain-specific theory of the teaching of politics, mathematics, and biology, etc. Subject didactics contributes to the specialized training that occurs in universities. In university teacher training, subject didactics is part of the subject specialism but not of the academic discipline of education (*Pädagogik*). The performance of political didactics departments in universities is now also measured against performance in the empirical study of domain-specific teaching and learning. Today, political didactics investigates teaching and learning processes, while the preparation of teaching materials is the responsibility of teachers in schools.

The path leading to a research-based discipline was introduced in the 1960s with the establishment of the first chairs of political didactics. In the last century, individual specialists in political didactics presented a series of ideas about the aims of the subject – ideas based on personal understandings. With the advent of a competency orientation in the twenty-first century, a more theoretical approach to the didactics of politics has been employed, providing an increasing amount of feedback based on systematic empirical research.

After World War II, a separate domain-specific school subject was gradually introduced in schools. The individual Federal *Länder* are responsible for the curriculum. Today, the subject of Politics is compulsory, and all pupils must attend a certain number of lessons per week. This arrangement is well-established and accepted. Politics is taught by professionally trained teachers with a specialization in this area. These teachers are university-trained in the theory of political didactics and in political science and have been subjected to 18 months of practical training under the supervision of expert teachers in teacher training colleges. Both university and practical trainings conclude with an examination, which *Länder* in different regions recognize on a reciprocal basis.

The following sections describe the development of political education and political didactics in schools showing a process of increasing professionalization as a result of engagements with various political influences.

In the next part, the beginnings of political didactics and Politics as a school subject are presented. The following part describes the professionalization phase of political didactics and teacher education, with the designation of chairs of political didactics in institutes of political science. The goals and normative ideas that individual political didactics specialists have developed for teaching politics are also discussed. For reasons of space, the previously mentioned parts and the subsequent synopses only partially cover the initial proposition. The fourth part traces the politicization and depoliticization of didactics and of the teaching of politics while the fifth part discusses practical problems that lead to a variety of new normative questions. The sixth part moves toward educational theory, in which the idea of radical constructivism is gaining ground and educationalists attempt to restructure Politics as a school subject with an emphasis on studying democracy by developing a democratic way of thinking. The seventh part is characterized by a new phenomenon, that is the start of theoretical development. The different theoretical considerations on the subject-specific competencies of teachers and pupils are discussed. In addition, the first systematically collected empirical findings on theoretically postulated dimensions of competency are presented.

Beginnings of political didactics

Political education in schools started after World War II, with the re-education policy of the allied powers. Unlike the British who attempted to influence the Germans using education through personal contact (the invisible hand principle) and the French who left the Germans to their own devices, the Americans aimed to reshape the school system by introducing a form of political education with democracy as its goal (Detjen, 2007: 106). The Soviet re-education policy was based on the ideology of the Communist Party. Educational approaches that did not meet the approval of the authorities in the Soviet zone were banned to prevent schools from being influenced by Nazi, militarist, racist, and other reactionary theories. The administration of schools in the Western zone, however, was left to German authorities. With the establishment of the Federal Republic on April 8, 1949, the three Western powers lost any opportunity to intervene.

Although the American re-education policy did not bring a structural reform to the German education system, the policy did succeed in teaching politics as a discrete subject in schools and political science in universities (Kuhn *et al.*, 1993: 115). In 1946, the teaching of politics was introduced in Berlin, Schleswig-Holstein, and Hesse, and then in Württemberg in 1949. The other Federal *Länder* gradually followed until the process was completed in the 1960s. However, no theoretical concept was developed during the postwar period that could guide teachers. Despite this situation, some cautious attempts were performed to address this task.

One of the initial attempts was to use law, history, and political science as the bases for a new subject. Educationalists wanted to prevent the teaching

of politics inside the classroom and to concentrate on the acquisition of social knowledge, social skills, and social attitudes. The teaching was designed to focus only on what concerns society (Kuhn *et al.*, 1993: 116). Teaching at that time included both apolitical social education and the transfer of knowledge of the political system.

Start of political didactics professionalization

From 1962 onwards, chairs of political didactics were gradually identified in various political science departments in universities. This action was a consequence of the newly founded political science field that considered political education as its mission. The professionalization of political didactics as an academic discipline in Germany began in this manner. Over time, the view that the teaching of politics necessitated a new theoretical foundation gradually gained acceptance. Thereafter, numerous normative outlines for the teaching of politics were developed. The beginning of the "didactic turn" in the 1960s stimulated an intense debate on how teachers could explain the organization of the state and its importance to pupils. The goal of the drafts produced by individual political didactics specialists was to reflect on the central political phenomena that comprise domination and dependence, war and peace, power and law, and liberty and equality in the context of thinking and hypothesizing among pupils. This first step toward professionalization helped lay the foundations for an independent academic discipline.

In the second phase of development, early theorists sought procedures by which the aims and contents of teaching politics may be selected and balanced. For them, the question was no longer about delivering a selected content to represent a canon, but more about criteria for the development and selection of content. For Hilligen (1955), the aim of political education was not only to deliver knowledge, but also to help pupils discover new insights and reasons to take action and, where appropriate, to encourage them to act in a political manner. In a sense, the contents of the teaching were about coping with life. Fischer (1970) emphasized the mental effort to be exerted collaboratively by pupils and teachers in achieving political insights. He encouraged the principle of utilizing case studies in political education and opposed the presentation of lectures in teaching. Daily events became the object of a comprehensive analysis. Backgrounds, comparisons, and conjunctions of meaning led to discoveries and insights. Giesecke (1968) regarded handling conflicting interests as the task of politics. In his view, political conflicts have a positive function and should be used and examined in political education. Situations involving conflicts challenge pupils to take sides and participate in political debates that involve logic. By using conflict analysis, Giesecke aimed to provide knowledge that could be used in the analysis of other conflicts.

The establishment of political didactics in universities was accompanied by the abandonment of apolitical social education and a new emphasis on political controversy. Passing on political knowledge was no longer the sole aim of political education, but rather raising awareness of contexts, perceptions, and insights. Pupils were to learn how to adopt a political position, make a stand, and argue a case. Subsequently, the Federal *Länder* clearly can no longer impose their interpretation of curricula on teachers. The new scientific basis of teacher education has provided teachers with the opportunity to forward alternative interpretations of their respective curricula, which are often more influential than the official curriculum.

Politicization and depoliticization phase

At the beginning of the 1970s, the student movement resulted in the spread of politicization in the West, which subsequently influenced political didactics. The contents of the teaching of politics presently now had to serve either the change or the stabilization of the system. Political controversies involving parties caused a split among educationalists who publicly intervened in these controversies over curricula and selected opposing positions. In the midst of the political divide, Social and Social Democratic-led governments formulated their guidelines that had a different orientation compared to those formulated by Christian Democrats. In the Social Democratic *Länder*, the guidelines followed emancipatory learning goals such as the "capacity and readiness to not accept unquestionable societal constraints and power relations" (Kultusminister des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 1973). By contrast, Christian Democratic-led governments based their education guidelines on the values indicated in the constitution, political rationality, the necessity for institutions to become part of the power structure, and the need for compromise. Associations of parents also made their positions public and strived to influence educational developments.

Educationalists in universities adjusted their normative propositions in terms of these lines of conflict. Schmiederer (1971) assigned to political education the task of contributing to the democratization of society by reducing unnecessary authority and strengthening the resistance of men and women. Critical theory and critique of ideology were additional central concepts of the approach by Schmiederer on political didactics. By contrast, Sutor (1971) proposed using the *Grundgesetz* (Basic Law) as the basis for legitimization and consensus. He stressed the pluralist order that should also be observed in education. To avoid a one-sided approach, the different political theories should be discussed and subjected to debates. Hilligen, Fischer, and Giesecke also declared their positions in this controversy and adopted their normative ideas accordingly.

The political argument among protagonists of political didactics finally ended in 1976 at a conference in the Württemberg Wine Resort of

Beutelsbach where a consensus was formally reached. The following three principles were formulated and comprised the so-called Beutelsbach Consensus.

1 *Prohibition against overwhelming the pupil.* Rendering pupils unprepared or less informed, by whatever means, in sharing desirable opinions and hindering them from "forming an independent judgment" are not permissible. A dividing line should be drawn between political education and indoctrination. Indoctrination is incompatible with the role of a teacher in a democratic society and with the universally accepted objective of increasing the capability of pupils to make an independent judgment (*Mündigkeit*).
2 *Treating controversial subjects as controversial.* Matters that are controversial in intellectual and political affairs must also be taught as controversial in teaching. In affirming this second basic principle, the personal standpoint of teachers, the intellectual and theoretical views they represent, and their political opinions clearly become relatively uninteresting. To repeat an example that has already been given, their understanding of democracy presents no problems because opinions contrary to theirs are also being considered.
3 *Giving weight to the personal interests of pupils.* Pupils must be allowed to analyze a political situation, assess how their own personal interests are affected, and seek means and ways to influence the political situation they have identified based on their personal interests.

(Landeszentrale für politische Bildung
Baden-Württemberg, 1976)

The Beutelsbach Consensus settled political disputes by recognizing all political viewpoints and treating them with parity in the teaching situation. The consensus, however, was aimed only at the practice of teaching. Political indoctrination or party bias in the classroom continued to be rejected by all sides. The mission of schools is then to convey information to pupils independently of party bias. Teachers must not award marks for political opinions. This situation clearly distinguished the teaching of politics from that which existed in the German Democratic Republic, where the teaching of politics was under the control of the ruling party and influenced by the Marxist-Leninist doctrine.

Academic research in political didactics, however, could not be constrained by the Beutelsbach Consensus. In terms of content, a consensus on different approaches or concepts has not been reached. Rival intellectual models in the field of political didactics still exist and these cannot be ignored in the interest of harmony despite the political consensus on the practice of teaching (Weisseno, 1996). Therefore, the development of political didactics remained controversial in the succeeding years, though politicized comments are rarely heard nowadays.

The development of a variety of normative ideas

A more pragmatic tone gradually became evident in the field of political didactics. In everyday teaching practice, the focus was increasingly geared toward the possible, the concrete. This phase is also identified as the pluralization phase in which the needs of the pupils, their interests, and desires (the subjective factor) are considered primary. From 1980 to 2000, in the efforts to create a distinction from the grand narratives of individual political didactics experts, new orientations were formulated, which include student, action, conflict, addressee, and science orientations. At certain times, there was talk of a crisis in political didactics (Massing, 2007: 296) as theory development ceased to make progress because of the concentration on concepts related to classroom instruction.

An empirical turn occurred in the field of research (Weisseno, 1991: 9). In the early 1990s, in parallel to the pragmatist approach, empirical qualitative research on teaching was being undertaken. In 1993, this was institutionalized with the formation of a working group on empirical teaching. Approximately 90 percent of all the dissertations completed since then have been empirical studies. The concern of the predominantly qualitative teaching research was and remains on the conditions that contribute to the success (and failure) in teaching politics and the effectiveness of methodological teaching decisions (Schelle, 2007: 378). Using case studies and lesson transcripts, teaching decisions, both in theory and in practice, can be analyzed. Case-based reconstructive evaluation procedures and open interviews are still implemented at present, and evaluation scales and interview questions are employed as instruments for analyzing a lesson. Teaching research marks a further step toward the professionalization of political didactics. Whereas theoretical development has stagnated, empirical research has continually expanded.

One approach adopted to empirical research consisted of documenting a lesson in video-books and analyzing it based on the different aspects of political didactics (Schelle, 2007: 382). Teachers at times work on individual lessons (Gagel *et al.*, 1992; Henkenborg and Kuhn, 1998; Kuhn and Massing, 1999; Richter, 2000). Results of the analysis indicated that an apolitical "politics" lesson frequently does not go beyond social learning. Attempts are still being made (in secret) to indoctrinate pupils. In most cases, the execution of the lesson does not correspond to the expectations of political didactics experts. Often, only non-committal discussions take place in the classroom because results are not visible and none of professional relevance is produced. The terms employed in the lesson were vague. Furthermore, gender patterns of failure in understanding were determined (Kroll, 2001). Attitudes toward teaching were studied using the responses of the pupils during the interviews (Weisseno, 1989; Weber-Blaser, 2011). By conducting interviews with teachers, their ideas on political didactics are gathered. Despite all efforts in this area, the quality of data analysis in many

studies is often simplistic and unconvincing because numerous validity criteria were not met.

A post-conceptualization phase has been characterized by the intelligent examination of the problems encountered during practice. These problems include the life–world problems of the pupils in the classroom. In the background are doubts about the significance of scientific explanations in coping with problems of everyday life. In many cases, the question of relevance to the individual student emerges. Lastly, conceptual work becomes a lesser priority than the creation of spatial and social proximity. Politics is sought and applied in the everyday life of pupils, which considerably restricts the number of possible topics. Self-reference is the forefront of the life–world orientation.

Advocates of action-orientation demand a high degree of self-activity from pupils. Experiences in simulated political situations are gathered. In a large-scale meta-study, Hattie (2012) showed that such methods have no effect without theoretical underpinning. The continual search for new teaching methods was considered a modern trend and it is still considered as such today among teachers.

Political didactics was quick to introduce concrete proposals incorporating every current political diagnosis of the age, such as globalization, technology assessment, influence of new media, and social inequality. Therefore critics reminded those concerned that the core of the subject is the teaching of politics. Many orientations had led to a diffused and indistinct idea of the subject among politicians and teachers. By the end of the century, the clearly delineated subject profile of the 1960s was thoroughly explored.

Returning to the academic discipline of education

At the turn of the millennium, there was a phase of returning to the ideas of educationalists. This trend took the normative discourse forward, though the ensuing controversies remained correspondingly vigorous. The issues involved questions of moral education, the study of democracy, and radical constructivism. Various strands of the discussion in both old and more recent educational studies were compared. As educational studies are normatively oriented, numerous starting points are distinguished.

The views of Lawrence Kohlberg (Detjen, 2000) on moral development started a controversy in the field of political didactics. Kohlberg assumed that people develop more complex moral structures of interpretation as their age increases. Thus conflicts can be solved more fairly between the self and others. Although moral stages are not empirically proven, they are regarded as substitutes for a theory of political didactics. Moral education connects with discourse on subject orientation. Kohlberg had preferred Socratic moral teaching based on an individual dilemma with no way out. Beyond this idea, he adopted the "just community" approach in schools.

The relation between moral education and the teaching of politics is not significantly close. Dilemmas faced by politicians cannot be handled in the same way as they can by private individuals. Moreover, political decisions consisting of only two alternatives are rare. Politics is about compromises; the correct choice is made to achieve a goal (Detjen, 2000: 321). Political questions are characterized by complexity, diverse interests, multiple goals, legal conditions, ideologies, and so on. Politics always has numerous possibilities for action.

The second controversy arose because of the proponents of education for democracy. The image of pupils who acted in a democratic manner was set against the failure of politics teaching. Pupils were to live in and experience democracy in a number of projects. They were to be active. Democracy educationalists aimed to build democratic thinking and to awaken the readiness to accept responsibility in school and in the local community. The idealistic image of the active citizen shaped the goals and formed a link in the 1960s. This situation continued with the image of self-directed learning in projects and of the radical rejection of an allegedly prevailing indoctrination culture. The unproven assumption was that experiences gained through action constituted a successful learning outcome.

Critics from the political didactics side reacted by stressing that experiences only become comprehensible with the aid of the technical terminology taught in the classroom. Thus knowledge is required. Those who in everyday life believe that they know what is good and attempt to put this into practice cannot yet think and act politically (Breit, 2005). Commitment alone does not make a democrat. Aside from knowledge, political action requires the ability to argue a case, assertiveness, the capacity for strategic and tactical action, and negotiating skills, among others. Educationalists are not trained political scientists. Therefore they do not arrive unaided at appropriate content and methods for the teaching of politics. The special character of political didactics in Germany is revealed with particular clarity in this conflict.

Radical constructivism is a trend that was adopted from educationalists by several specialists in political didactics and numerous teachers. Radical constructivism is based on the belief that the perception of a person is dependent on his/her individual construction and interpretation. Therefore the answer of a student should never be rated as either right or wrong. Reality (*Wirklichkeit*) only becomes authentic for the individual as the perception of reality of other people is the same as his/her perception (Reinmann-Rothmeier and Mandl, 2006: 626). Ultimately, this position indicates that the teacher must inform pupils definitively that everything is uncertain and that objectivity or truth does not exist. In the United States, this position was discussed a decade earlier: "Radical constructivism emphasizes discovery learning, learning in complex situations, and learning in social contexts, as well as the strongly distrusting systematic evaluation of educational outcomes" (Anderson *et al.*, 1998: 230). In this context,

radical constructivism offers a justification for the absence of knowledge. Admittedly, radical constructivism refuses to endorse instruction, but equally it attaches no definite goal or output to its image of self-directed learning. From a different perspective, a fresh discussion has arisen on the question of the "how" of learning. The didactics of indoctrination and the transmission of knowledge are contrasted to self-direction and a new learning culture that is discovery-based, cooperative, and problem-oriented.

In the didactics of politics, radical constructivism is currently being heavily criticized and compared with a theoretically and empirically based cognitive, epistemic constructivism. The epistemic constructivist understanding also considers learning as an active process of construction that goes beyond the processing of information and as embedded in a social context, and involves situated activity (Detjen *et al.*, 2012: 115). Based on this approach, learners construct actively and discover through research. A modified constructivist position such as this envisages alternation between a predominantly active and an occasionally receptive position on the part of the learner. The teacher supports, demonstrates, explains, or advises by turn. Learning is an active, self-directed, constructive, emotional, situated, and social process. Construction and instruction are not seen as antitheses, but as linked in terms of goals, preconditions, and difficulty.

Theoretical and empirical approach to political competence

In several resolutions in 2003 and 2004, the Conference of Education Ministers of the *Länder* had decided on an evaluation-oriented and standard-based control concept, which is now being implemented in subjects with sufficient research input. The school subject of politics is not yet among them. The aim was to standardize the federal education system by unifying the competence descriptions and national standards to be met by all 16 *Länder* curricula that must be reviewed every year. Subsequently, performance levels in the different *Länder* were compared, and the results were vigorously debated by educationalists, parents, and politicians. Individual federal states have based their respective curricula on the national standards.

The decisions made at that time surprised proponents of political didactics. The danger of being relegated to second-class status was observed. An intense debate then occurred on standards and competencies in both theory and practice for the school subject of politics. Since 2003, political didactics specialists have argued fiercely about the subject, expressing conflicting views on competencies and their respective dimensions. In addition, systematic quantitative studies has been conducted on the dimensions of competencies in order to catch up with other subjects.

With the new competency concept based on cognitive psychology underlying the national standards, attention is directed toward performance dispositions. Presently, performance dispositions are related to requirements for action in individual domains, including politics. For Klieme and Hartig

(2007: 3) competence is revealed "in the situational coping with demands (in the 'performance' of the action)". In current psychological models, competence is primarily focused on the capacity for handling (in this case political) systems of symbols in everyday contexts and then on concretization by testing (Klieme and Hartig, 2007). Based on these criteria, a student (or citizen) is politically competent if he or she is capable of successfully coping with situations that surround political demands. In the background of the political competence model are the cognitive and the political science perspectives. Competence creates the link among motivation/attitude, knowledge, and ability in the completion of the action.

   The pedagogical concepts of competence proposed by normative proponents of political didactics are diverse. The normative position of political didactics describes actions broadly as what should be or as a normative goal. To this end, representatives of political didactics have offered individual proposals. They always identify various structures, which they indicate as not theoretically provable and difficult to verify empirically. This pedagogical concept of competence, however, is inadequate from the perspective of cognitive psychology because subject specificity is determined exclusively by filtering normative goals. Therefore, subject specificity is imprecise. The concepts are more or less represented as hypotheses. Hence, they can neither be scientifically established by referring them to results nor verified by systematic empirical testing. The concepts express what is desired as a learning outcome. The required standards that pupils must be capable of attaining, however, cannot be established in concrete terms.

   A cognitive concept of competence is much more concrete. A cognitive concept describes the skills that a person can actually acquire. Political competence, as understood, refers to what is communicable and what is required for the completion of the tasks. If a student can complete specific tasks, then he/she possesses the competence that will later be expected of him/her as a citizen. The means that there can be an assessment of an individual's competence to complete and this can be done in a very concrete way. This idea has the advantage of being more realistic about what can be expected from classroom teaching. Therefore a cognitive-psychological understanding of competence is the best approach if a didactic theory is to be developed providing a view of teaching that consists of the theoretical propositions and methodologically validated data. Several specialists in political didactics have designed a model for this purpose, which, on account of its simultaneous cognitive and political science orientations, can remedy the theoretical deficit in political didactics.

   The model (Detjen *et al.*, 2012) distinguishes four dimensions of competence, namely specialized knowledge, political judgment, capacity for political action, and attitudes/motivations. The four dimensions are not isolated from one another but are reciprocally related. The structuring of these dimensions occurs by using competence facets, which are also theoretically developed. Competence facets form the theoretical and empirically verifiable
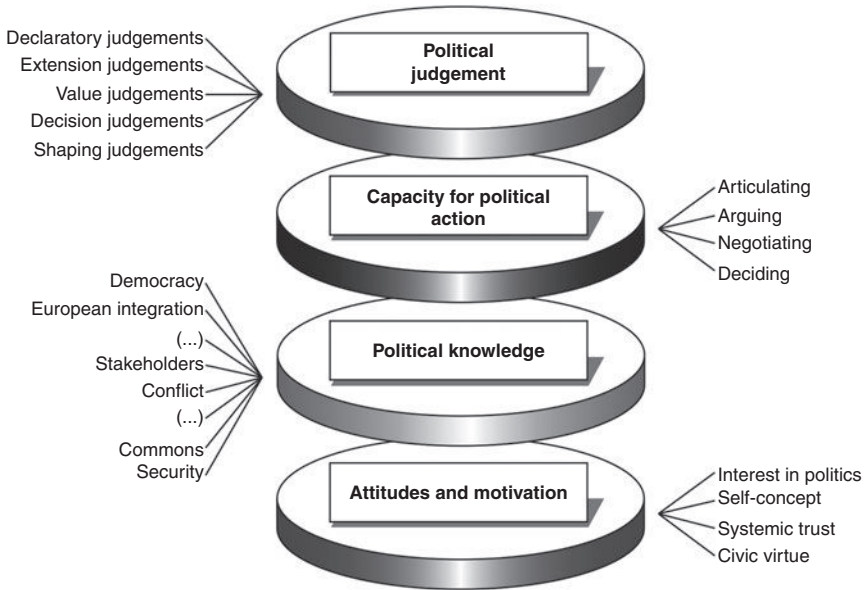
Declaratory judgements
Extension judgements
Value judgements
Decision judgements
Shaping judgements

Political judgement

Capacity for political action

Articulating
Arguing
Negotiating
Deciding

Democracy
European integration
(...)
Stakeholders
Conflict
(...)
Commons
Security

Political knowledge

Attitudes and motivation

Interest in politics
Self-concept
Systemic trust
Civic virtue

Figure 5.1 Political competence (Detjen et al 2015 p.15).

bases for learning tasks and testing. With the help of these tasks, teachers in the classroom can both support the competencies of learners and monitor the success of such support. Competence facets can be evaluated based on different levels of difficulty, if the relevant empirical results are available.

The "domain-specific knowledge" competence dimension is subdivided into 30 subject concepts that, in the course of a school career, represent the body of conceptual knowledge that should be established as a minimum (Weisseno *et al.*, 2010). These subject concepts include democracy, the market, the social state, European actors, conflict, power, parliament, government, liberty, and security, among others. Conceptual knowledge disregards concrete experiences and instead categorizes their features and characteristics. Moreover, conceptual knowledge is decontextualized at the highest level, which can be applied to demands made in various contexts. In principle, political phenomena can be understood only with the aid of such conceptual knowledge. In a Politics class, learners should introduce coherent cognitive structures that represent political reality in model form.

The acquisition of subject knowledge also includes fostering the development of political judgment (Detjen *et al.*, 2012). Judging is a process in which a student assigns a value on a judgment dimension to a particular judgment object. Five facets of judgment classify or subject the statement made in the

judgment on a scale. Declaratory judgments require description and categorization or classification. An extended judgment means setting two or more facts or sets of facts in relation to each other to determine commonalities and differences between them. Value judgments are the result of evaluative actions. Evaluation involves appraising and stating a view. Decision judgments are required when a decision must be made regardless of whether a particular action should or should not be carried out. Shaping judgments arise when factual problems require a solution in terms of content.

Action is marked by a series of cognitive processing patterns. Perceptions, thoughts, emotions, skills, and activities are applied in a coordinated fashion to achieve goals or to withdraw from unrewarding or unattainable goals. Competence facets include articulating, arguing, negotiating, and deciding.

Attitudes are individual peculiarities in the evaluation of concrete objects of perception or thinking. To motivate, the worthwhile result of an interaction between a person and a situation is clarified. Competence facets are interest, self-confidence, systemic trust, and civic virtue.

Since 2007 a number of empirical studies have been conducted that have undertaken systematic quantitative investigations on individual competence facets. Theoretically postulated facets are subjected to standardized tests. Manzel (2007) examined the competence dimension of judgment in two school classes. The level of knowledge was significantly higher after the implementation of a teaching intervention. Goetzmann (2008) illustrated the knowledge of children in primary school classes (from grades 1 to 4) on concepts such as *Öffentlichkeit* (public sphere) or *öffentliche Güter* (public goods/services). She found there were significant differences between class levels strong effect sizes. Richter (2009) was able to show in the case of primary school children that teaching using concept maps to explain the concept of power leads to slightly better learning outcomes than those from teaching without concept maps.

A study (Goll *et al.*, 2010) collected data on the political knowledge among schoolchildren at age 15. A random item response model was developed using the concepts of liberty, equality, human dignity, fundamental rights, elections, government, and democracy. In the knowledge test at individual and class levels, pupils with a migration background performed significantly worse than the other pupils. Students with Turkish or Italian as a first language performed worse than those with German as a first language. Using the individual effect as a control, the context effects are made visible at the class level. At the individual level, gender has no significant influence. The more books the parents possess, the better the pupils perform in the knowledge test. Interestingly, the pupils not only benefit from their own parents, but also from the composition of the class.

The TEESAEC study (Weisseno and Eck, 2012) investigated the increase in knowledge of the specialist concept of European actors. Gender has no significant influence on pre-test knowledge. In this study, the migration background generally had a weak but steady influence. The more books the

parents possessed at home, the higher is the acquired level of previous knowledge regarding the EU. The more self-confident and optimistic the student is toward the subject, the better is his/her test performance.

Oberle (2012) analyzed objective and subjective political knowledge and determined that objective knowledge has limited influence on subjective knowledge regarding the European Union and that this influence is subject to the systematic effects of various background variables. On average, however, upper-school pupils rate their own knowledge of the European Union no more highly than that of middle-school pupils, even though the study demonstrated it is actually better. At the same objective level of knowledge, they assess their knowledge of the European Union as more negative than that of lower-secondary-level pupils. Further, this study showed that boys knew more about the European Union than girls and subjectively rate their knowledge, on average, as higher than that of girls. As expected, migration background has a slightly negative effect on the objective knowledge of pupils on the European Union.

Concluding remarks

In normative discourse, assertions are hastily made when no empirical evidence can be found. The publication of more systematic research-based results on political didactics refuting the conclusions previously drawn from individual observations is an improvement. Further philosophical debates are proving to be superfluous from the theoretical and empirical points of view. A more realistic picture of the reality of teaching politics can only be developed by theory-driven research. For education studies in general, Anderson *et al.* (1998) identified a goal that could also be relevant to the didactics of politics:

> If progress is made to a more scientific approach, traditional educational philosophies will be found to be like the doctrines of folk medicine: They contain some elements of truth and some elements of misinformation. This is true of the radical constructivist approach. Only when science of education develops that sorts truth from fancy – as it is beginning to develop now – will dramatic improvements in educational practice be seen.
>
> (Anderson *et al.*, 1998: 255)

This path is also the path on which political didactics in Germany, with its theoretical work on the wide-ranging competence model and systematic empirical research, have determined for now.

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