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| Emotions in the teaching of history |

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## EMOTIONS IN THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

The history of teaching history in Europe shows that emotions are highly ambivalent here. One is reminded of forms of history instruction in which identification with the nation was at the center of education. The goal of the teaching of history was not to open it to an understanding of the otherness of other nations and cultures, but instead to seal it off from the foreign. We need to ask how a teaching of history that is open to the other and oriented toward multidimensionality and complexity can also encourage an emotional identification and contribute to the cultivation of a reflexive emotionality. Emotions in the teaching of history are also evaluative, i.e., they evaluate the events discussed and lead to an emotional assessment that is sometimes even independent of the arguments. This emotional evaluation of events or storylines of other people often takes place unconsciously or semiconsciously and is only accessible by consciousness in a limited manner. This evaluating aspect of emotions makes it possible to make distinctions and to understand the meaning of situations, storylines and contexts. Emotions thereby make an important contribution to the understanding of historical events and storylines. Their energetic side can even help the students to find interest and enjoyment in the discussion of historical events, structures and persons. With the aid of reflexive emotionality to the past, the past will gain a new presence and relevance for the future.

**Key words:** *Emotions, school education, teaching of History, alterity, performativity, mimetic processes, remembrance, reflexive emotionality.*

### Introduction

Although leading a happy life belongs to the highest goals of humankind, and although the school has a major part in emotional development, the handling of emotions by intentional design plays a subordinate role in school education. Although people spend a large part of their lives in school during the years in which they are particularly open to emotional influences and impressions, the question of the possibility of a happy and fulfilling school life only plays a role in reform and alternative schools. Instead, what is more often discussed today are the requirements that business has for school education, requirements that demand the education of people who will be useful and flexible on the job market. There are many parents who are ready today to sacrifice

### Роль эмоций в постижении истории

В статье рассматривается эмоциональная составляющая преподавания истории. Показывается амбивалентность эмоций и важность их в образовательном процессе. Автор задается вопросом: как преподавание истории, открытое другим культурам и нациям, ориентированное на многомерность и сложность, может способствовать развитию эмоциональной идентификации и рефлексивной эмоциональности? По мнению автора, эмоции в преподавании истории являются оценочными, и иногда даже не зависят от рациональных аргументов. Эта эмоциональная оценка событий и сюжетных линий Других зачастую происходит бессознательно или полусознательно, и лишь частично доступна сознанию. Этот аспект оценки эмоций позволяет делать различия и понимать смысл ситуации, сюжетные линии и контексты. Эмоции тем самым вносят важный вклад в понимание исторических событий и сюжетных линий. С помощью рефлексивной эмоциональности прошлое вновь рождается в настоящем и становится значимым для будущего.

**Ключевые слова:** *эмоции, образование, преподавание истории, уникальность, перформативность, миметические процессы, память, рефлексивная эмоциональность.*

to this goal their children's aesthetic and physical education (i.e., participation in sports). What is lost here is an understanding of the necessity of a general education that develops the whole person, which would doubtless be the best preparation of young people for the job market. It has long been known that a person developed in an unbalanced manner is in no way well prepared for a productive life in a democracy. What is in fact needed for this purpose is comprehensive development of all facets of the person.

When discussing emotional development in school, many think of ideas elaborated by Elias (1969) and Foucault (1975) regarding the disciplining of the body and emotions and the effects of societal power on children and adolescents. As applicable as this perspective may be, the process of emotional development in school is substan-



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tially more complex. In school education, a social education takes place that is extremely important for the present and future lives of the students. This social education gives children the ability to learn and live together with other children (*Delors 1996*). It allows children to learn to place their needs and wishes in social context, to modify and to live them. At any rate, the field of emotional development in school is of central importance for raising and educating children and adolescents and is in need of further research and development.

The history of teaching history in Europe shows that emotions are highly ambivalent here. One is reminded of forms of history instruction in which identification with the nation was at the center of education. In this context, emotions are encouraged that often lead to an unconditional identification with one's own nation and a belief in its superiority over other nations. What is needed for this are images of the enemy and stereotypes of other nations that allow the superiority of one's own nation to be "confirmed." Using stories, tableaux, songs and images and their interpretations, emotions are aroused that lead to an exaggerated identification with one's own nation and a rejection of other nations. The history of the first half of the twentieth century in Europe has many examples of this, like the "ancient enmity" between Germany and France and the images of the enemy that existed between the capitalist and socialist countries during the time of the Cold War.

In both cases, emotions served to prevent that which our project about the inclusion of images of the other in the teaching of history had as its objective. The goal of the teaching of history was not to open it to an understanding of the otherness of other nations and cultures, but instead to seal it off from the foreign. Splitting the world into "good" and "evil" allowed a reduction in the complexity of the understanding of history that heightened the possibilities of emotional identification with one's own nation. A Manichean division of the world into "light" and "dark," to the exclusion of all shades of grey, was the objective of a nationalistic or ideological teaching of history geared toward unambiguousness and the associated unambiguous emotions. From today's perspective, the emotions intentionally developed in nationalistic or ideological teaching of history were the result of targeted manipulation that was further reinforced by societal attitudes and values to which children were exposed outside of school.

New objectives become important with the focus on images of the other in the European teaching of history. The goal of teaching is no longer a nationalistic or ideological interpretation of history, but a multi-dimensional interpretation that reflexively includes the positions of others. A location-specific interpretation of history is completely compatible with this. It allows the teaching of history to continue to pursue its mission of making a contribution to the cultural and national identity of the coming generation. This goes along with attitudinal and emotional development that does not have the goal of exclusion, but rather inclusion of the other. When the other is included, the possibility exists of engaging in a fascination with the alterity of the foreign. It cannot be the objective of an up-to-date teaching of history that the emotional dimension is excluded in the process of excluding nationalistic and ideological emotions. More than this, we need to ask how a teaching of history that is open to the other and oriented toward multidimensionality and complexity can also encourage an emotional identification and contribute to the cultivation of a reflexive emotionality.

Before I take up this question again, I would first like to develop a few thoughts about what I consider to be emotions. A fundamental problem in this context is the relationship between "basic emotions" such as anger, shame and sadness and culturally-influenced differentiated emotions.

## What are emotions and how do we understand them?

### *Historical perspectives*

Those who live, feel; those who do not feel are dead. Not individual emotions, but having emotions at all is a *conditio humana*. We have emotions, but at the same time these emotions constitute us, so that we are the subject and object of our emotions. Emotions have us in their grasp. It is true that we can stimulate them, bring them forth or repress them artificially, or control our handling of them, but we cannot decide not to have any more emotions. There seem to be a limited number of basic emotions, but the nuances, mixtures and overlapping that can occur between these types are so multifarious that many emotions cannot be clearly identified. Emotions are always new, but at the same time familiar; we know them, but not well enough; much is said about them, but no language can capture them completely; they surprise us, refuse to be nailed down, change and defy control; and they even differ in our remembrance of them. Emotions have a free flowing nature that makes it difficult to make them into knowable objects; between their dynamic and the need for objective knowledge at arm's length, a tension exists that can hardly be resolved.

Up to now, most ideas about emotions have assumed that emotions are located in the "interior" of people, in the quasi spaceless location of the soul, but that they can be observed in the behavior of people. According to this interpretation, there is a difference between the material processes in the body and the immaterial processes of the soul, i.e., emotions and the human mind, both of which would admittedly not be viable without the materiality of the body. This division into a material exterior and an immaterial interior, which to this day defines much of the discourse about emotions, is a central epistemological problem. How do emotions "emerge" from the enclave of the 'soul' — if they admittedly originate and take place in it, but 'express' themselves bodily, are 'directed' at or 'transferred' to others or even can be 'projected' onto arbitrary objects? And how do emotions (feelings) arrive in the 'soul' — if they are acquired during a personal history, are learned in material and social situations, are programmed and fabricated in institutions and are nevertheless somehow 'introjected' and are to be transformed in the process from impressed forms into an individual feeling of the distinctive 'I?' (*Böhme 2010, 529*). It has been attempted again and again to address the gap between "outside" and "inside," which is articulated in terms such as introjection and projection, defense and expression. Using symbols that show the embodiment or somatization of mental processes, the attempt was made to bridge this gap. To date, this gap between the inside and outside continues to be a central problem of emotions research.

Increasingly, emotions are thought of as nonphysical. Like the soul, they are viewed as immaterial. The character of a breath or air, of a *pneuma*, is ascribed to emotions, accompanied by the spiritualization of the soul, which also has something to do with defending against death, to which the material body is exposed but which



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the immaterial and immortal soul overcomes. This understanding is made clear by many representations of the soul in which the soul, in the form of a small child, drifts up to heaven upon the death of a person, while the body passes away (*Kamper / Wulf 1989; Jüttemann / Sonntag / Wulf 2005; Wulf / Kamper 2002*).

This disembodiment and despecialization of emotions has also provoked counter movements. For example, Johann Gottfried Herder wrote against Descartes' cogito ergo sum: "I feel! I am" (*Herder 1960, 282*). Feeling is understood as something that guarantees "being," i.e., the human existence. For Herder, human beings experience themselves in feeling, in the immediate presence of sensing and touching. Here, feeling derived from the sense of touch is the sense that determines emotions. In the early nineteenth century, there are many philosophical and literary examples for the tactile serving as the model of feeling.

Since then, an important method for accessing the world of emotions has been to research how subjects physically sense their emotions and give information about them. This presupposes the concept of a modern subject and implies the assumption of a broad spectrum of individually divergent feelings. From an epistemological standpoint, the problem is that all individual perceptions are expressed in a language that is collectively owned and in which only limited options exist for individually specifying emotions. This perspective, the subject dimension, i.e., the articulation of the "I" perspective of emotions, does not mean that emotions can only be subjectively described. On the one hand, emotions differ greatly from person to person. On the other hand, they are similar to each other. This is because they are influenced by society and culture, i.e., they have been incorporated linguistically, medially and normatively and they are communicated. Many emotions are created and shared in interactions; they are a result of relationships to other people and to the world.

### Central characteristics and properties of emotions

In the following, five central characteristics will be outlined that distinguish emotions from a cultural and social science perspective: the flowing of emotions (1), their performativity and physicality (2) as well as emotions as cultural practices (3), emotions in the mimetic processes (4) and the relationship of emotions and memory (5). These characteristics play an important role in the teaching of history. They are associated with the reconstructive character of history and with the pedagogical quality of the teaching of history.

### The flowing of emotions

When interaction and communication between teachers and students and between the students themselves is successful, a flowing circulation of emotions is generated between the participants that is usually experienced as pleasant and enriching. In this flow, overlapping and "mixing" of different emotions occurs, so that it is not easy to determine which emotions are circulating. It is often the case that emotions overlap with ones that were previously experienced in similar situations, which makes the analysis of emotions circulating in the class even more difficult. In this process of cultivation of an emotional ensemble, imagination plays an important role; it contributes to the selection and updating of dispositions based on previous experiences and to the mixing of these dispositions with current emotions. Depending on what role the teaching of history

plays in the canon of subjects in school and how the teaching of history is shaped by teachers and students, there is often an emotional mood that spans across the entire class. This has an impact on how emotions arising in current interactions are "toned." If an aggressive atmosphere exists in a school, with a teacher or with fellow students, it is not easy to get excited about new topics, historical events or storylines.

Emotions in the teaching of history are also evaluative, i.e., they evaluate the events discussed and lead to an emotional assessment that is sometimes even independent of the arguments. This emotional evaluation of events or storylines of other people often takes place unconsciously or semiconsciously and is only accessible by consciousness in a limited manner. This evaluating aspect of emotions makes it possible to make distinctions and to understand the meaning of situations, storylines and contexts. Emotions thereby make an important contribution to the understanding of historical events and storylines. Their energetic side can even help the students to find interest and enjoyment in the discussion of historical events, structures and persons (*Le Breton 1998; Wulf / Kamper 2002; Wulff 2007; Greco / Stenner 2008; Harding / Pribram 2009*).

### Performativity and physicality

The imparting of history in school is not just a cognitive analytical process. In every history class, emotions of the teacher and the students play an important role in relation to the imparted historical contexts and the interactions in the classroom. Emotions are performative. Their performativity is not secondary in class, but a central element in the examination of historical events, structures and persons. With this emphasis, the focus of attention is shifted. Interest is directed not only at understanding emotions articulated in the teaching of history, but also at being attentive toward how students and teachers express, represent, modify and control their emotions. In this perspective, it is important, how students express and represent their emotions. This shift of attention implies that the process in which the students stage and perform their emotions in history class is important, because this process can be observed and studied. What the students experience is much less accessible from the external perspective. With the focus on the performativity of emotions, i.e., their staging and performance, forms of physical expression of emotions are at the center of attention. Physicality, dramaturgy and habitualization of emotions become important. Gestures and rituals of learning gain a special significance (*Fischer-Lichte / Wulf 2010; Wulf 2005; Wulf et al. 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010; Wulf / Zirfas 2007*).

### Emotions as cultural practices

Emotions in the teaching of history can be understood as cultural school practices, i. e., they are understood as actions and as part of a practical knowledge of the teachers and students, a knowledge with which they form their relationships in class. Emotions can be understood as a form of "passive" action that happens to students, insofar that they also have effects on the students and teachers. What these effects look like depends on the cultural values and norms applicable in the class as well as the language and action games (Wittgenstein). These perspectives lead to an understanding of the social actions of the students, an understanding in which these social actions are not just viewed as activities. It becomes clear that in many



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actions of the students in class, there are “passive” moments in which something happens to them that they did not intend and that they can only partially control. This overlapping of emotional, usually passive elements and active elements is characteristic for the understanding of the actions of students in classes in which the options for action on the part of students are restricted by institutional structures (Wulf 2006b; Köpping / Schnepel / Wulf 2010). An important example for such actions in which “passio” and “actio” overlap are mimetic actions (Gebauer / Wulf 1995, 1998, 2003).

**Emotional components in mimetic processes**

In mimetic actions directed at the reconstruction of the past, the emotional component is of central importance. In mimetic action, reference is made to historical events, contexts and persons with the intention of “bringing them to life” and depicting them. Through the mimetic reference to the historical events, the students are imbued with the facts, the impact of which then takes effect in the imagination of the students. In this process, an interweaving of passivity and activity takes place that is characteristic for the mimetic attention to historical events, facts and persons. In the teaching of history, there is yet another social component. The students behave mimetically toward the teacher and his or her handling of the historical facts. The mimetic reference is ultimately directed at fellow students, who are also dealing with past events, facts and persons. Hence the history teacher can become a model for how one deals with history in an active manner, from which the students can take an “impression.” The children and adolescents are also in a mimetic relationship with their fellow students, which stimulates interest and encourages cooperation. These mimetic components lead to an intensification of the social learning process that is characteristic for the teaching of history. In this process, not only historical facts find a place in the imagination of the students; they also have emotional experiences of being spoken to or of being bored as well. If the teaching of history is successful, then an intensification of the learning processes takes place through the circulation of emotions created as a result of the mimetic processes in the learning group. The mimetic learning outlined here is a basic form of cultural learning, the significance of which can hardly be overestimated (Wulf 2005; Gebauer / Wulf 1995).

**Remembrance**

The teaching of history is an institution of remembrance that is used by a society or culture to pass on its memories to the coming generation. This creates continuity of cultural identity. From an infinite past, every society and every culture selects that which it believes to be worth remembering and at the same time consigns to oblivion that which is not to be remembered. History, memory and cultural identity are entwined into an ensemble.

Within the framework of UNESCO there is also an appreciation of cultural heritage and its significance for the cultivation of cultural identity. The accent here is on the connection between cultural diversity and interest in the cultural heritage that is common to all of humankind, interest which has grown in the context of globalization. The World Heritage List with several hundred monuments and the program for the protection of the Immaterial Cultural Heritage are important examples of this. On the one hand, these programs have to do with the significance of remembrance of the cultural

heritage for the creation and maintenance of cultural identity; on the other hand, they have to do with the appreciation of various cultural goods and the associated possibilities of experiencing alterity. In both cases, memories and emotions are of central importance (Assmann / Hardt 1991).

Unlike animals, humans are able to use their autobiographical memory to consciously remember. Every remembrance is a reconstruction and an interpretation. Like emotions, memories are also not just individually created; they are formed in processes of social interaction. This gives them their societal and cultural character and a scope that extends beyond the individual (Halbwachs 1952; Dieckmann / Sting / Zirfas 1998). For historical events, factual contexts and historical persons to be memorable, the intensity of the emotions associated with them plays an important role (Hahn 2010; Wulf / Göhlich / Zirfas 2001; Wulf / Zirfas 2007).

Historical remembrances are reconstructions in which the facts of the past often overlap with the emotions of the present. An amalgam of emotion and memory is created that can hardly be broken down analytically. Many remembrances of historical facts that are accompanied by emotions, images and schemata are also accompanied by a feeling of self-remembrance. Even if the teaching of history has the objective of creating collective memories, these are not the same. Depending on the point in time, the place and the context, the memories of different people differ from each other. With the exception of traumas that contain unchanging, compulsive memory images, memories are dynamic, i.e., they are not the same, but only similar to each other. The reason for this lies in the dynamic character of the structure of memory, which changes or can change at any point in response to current experiences. Students who remember historical events relate to historical facts in a mimetic impulse and reconstruct memories on this basis. In the process, a dispositive is created that has an influence on how students perceive and experience social events of the present. These “displays,” which are in part unconscious, structure the emotional possibilities of experience. The teaching of history creates such “displays,” with which the students perceive and emotionally process the past, present and future. In this process, overlapping individual, institutional and collective elements play a central role (Wulf 2006b; Lüer 1997; Schacter 1996).

**Outlook**

The teaching of history has always been conducive to influencing the emotions of young people. Sometimes this occurs in a spirit of clear demarcation and hostility towards other countries and cultures. With the opening of the teaching of history to the images of the other, many reductions of complex issues to simple schemata and models are no longer possible. In such a teaching of history, the unambiguity of simplistic interpretations with easy emotional identification yields to a new ambiguity. Teaching of history that is open to the images of the foreign contributes to emotional development in the school. So that the examination of the past in the learning process has the desired effects and a coherent historical awareness can emerge, history must be emotionally anchored in the imagination of the students. For this to be successful, mimetic processes are needed that are oriented toward the past and its reconstruction. With the aid of mimetic references to the past, the past will gain a new presence and relevance for the future.



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