TEXTBOOKS IN COMPETENCE-ORIENTATED TEACHING

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The idea of competence has especially and increasingly come into focus since the “PISA Shock”. This brings with it the demand for a greater “output orientation” which means that, alongside subject-specific knowledge and skills, pupils also acquire and develop interdisciplinary competences. On the federal level, educational standards have been implemented that prescribe subject-specific competences and are supposed to allow for analysis and assessment within the classroom via assignments on a variety of competence levels. Additionally, the majority of federal states, including Baden-Württemberg since its 2004 curriculum, have re-orientated their curricula towards key competences.

Despite these approaches, however, there is often great discrepancy between theory and practice, usually because the transfer of new curriculum content into everyday schooling is a slow process. This is where textbooks can play a key role as they are predominantly the space in which new curriculum standards are ideally met.

With a chronological and longitudinal analysis of geography textbooks from various publishers authorised for secondary school (Gymnasium) in Baden-Württemberg and for the curricula of 1979, 1984, 1994 and 2004, the study examines whether there is a shift reflecting the new curriculum of 2004, or whether texts, images or assignment are rather more geared towards traditional concepts from the time prior to competence orientation. The pages on the topic “Oasis” from the Class 7 textbook serve as an example of this. For the analysis of the assignments we use the official operators for the geography classroom of Baden-Württemberg and the standards set by the German Geographical Society (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geographie, DGfG) for the intermediate school certificate. Accordingly, assignments can be divided into three areas: I reproducing, II reorganisation and transfer and III evaluation and problem solving. This should provide us with insight as to whether a topic is treated more descriptively or with a view to problems and/or controversy. At the same time, the categorisation of the assignments into the structures developed by the German Geographical Society reveals which standards from the areas of subject-specific knowledge, spatial orientation, gathering information/methods, communication, evaluation and action are covered in the books.

For the image analysis, the study has recourse to a slightly altered version of the categorisation system developed by Janko and Knecht. The latter use four areas of analysis: I the various types of images, II the level of abstraction, III how the images are assigned titles or captions and IV the relationship between the main text and the images. For a finer analysis of the last point, the study will use the more sophisticated categorisation developed by Sochatzky, Schöner and Schreiber. The text contents are compared using Mayring’s qualitative content analysis.

In the context of the topic “Oasis”, the pupils are first and foremost provided with subject-specific knowledge. They acquire this via material analysis concentrating on certain areas, and subsequently communicate what they have learned. It
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is only rarely that assignments aim for spatial orientation or for evaluation, and the standard “action” only involves few exercises.

In the pages under analysis, the number of exercises in the textbooks decreased dramatically. Particularly noteworthy is the lack of operators in the category III in textbooks for the 2004 curriculum. Rather, the number of operators for category II increased, equally at the cost of category I. All textbook editions contain exercises that cannot be categorised due to their operators: Approximately every second verb used in the books is an operator that does not correspond with the official operators for geography teaching in Baden-Württemberg, but which can at least be attributed to one of the official operators.

Approximately half of all images are photographs. For the subject of geography, it is the characteristic maps (sketches), plans and drawings that fall into the category of unrealistic, abstract images. Particularly remarkable is the reduction in the number of images overall. In the pages analysed from textbook editions for the 2004 curriculum, fewer than half as many images were used as in the editions for the 1984 curriculum. Typical aspects of the topic “Oasis” are the various types of oasis, irrigation technology, oases in processes of change, their role as a place of trade, cultivation and use of the date palm, and other agricultural endeavours.

The specialist library at the Georg Eckert Institute not only holds the necessary textbooks of all publishers, federal states and editions, but also literature on the current state of research methodology. This focus on objects of research and on analytical methods was the reason behind my research visit. The quiet, concentrated working atmosphere in the research library is conducive to intensive thinking.

I found the colloquium held at the beginning of my research visit particularly helpful. As a result I was able to improve the design and the research methods for my study.

LITERATURE
Janko, Tomáš and Petr Knecht: “Visuals in Geography Textbooks: Categorization of Types and Assessment of Their Instructional Qualities” in Review of International Geographical Education Online, 3/1, 2013, pp. 93-110.
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