

Historical-Consciousness-Based Empathy (HCBE) as an Approach to Promote Historical Orientation in Plural Democratic Societies

Development of the History Didactical Construct of HCBE and the Design and Exploration of a Learning Task

Overall Project

Relevance

Emotions are constitutive elements of historical culture (Grever & Adriaansen, 2017) and strongly shape how historical narratives are interpreted, morally evaluated and politically instrumentalised. This becomes particularly evident in emotionally charged and socially contested issues such as antisemitism, which is deeply rooted in history while simultaneously linked to current political and societal conflicts. Digital historical culture further intensifies these dynamics through emotionally condensed and polarising narratives that often blur the boundaries between historical interpretation, moral judgement and political positioning (Menke & Hagedoorn, 2023). As a result, learners increasingly encounter historical narratives that influence emotional orientations and democratic attitudes. International education research therefore emphasises the importance of empathy and reflective judgement as components of (historical) orientation within democratic societies (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Council of Europe, 2018a-c). In the context of antisemitism prevention, however, a lack of empathy towards contemporary Jewish perspectives is repeatedly being identified – a phenomenon that did not only emerge after the Hamas massacre on October 7, 2023, but had already been evident beforehand (Bernstein, 2020; Glöckner & Jikeli, 2025).

Overarching Research Question

How can history education contribute to fostering historical orientation in emotionalised historical cultures of democratic societies, particularly in dealing with antisemitic narratives?

Sub – Projects

Research Questions

Theoretical development of the HCBE-Construct

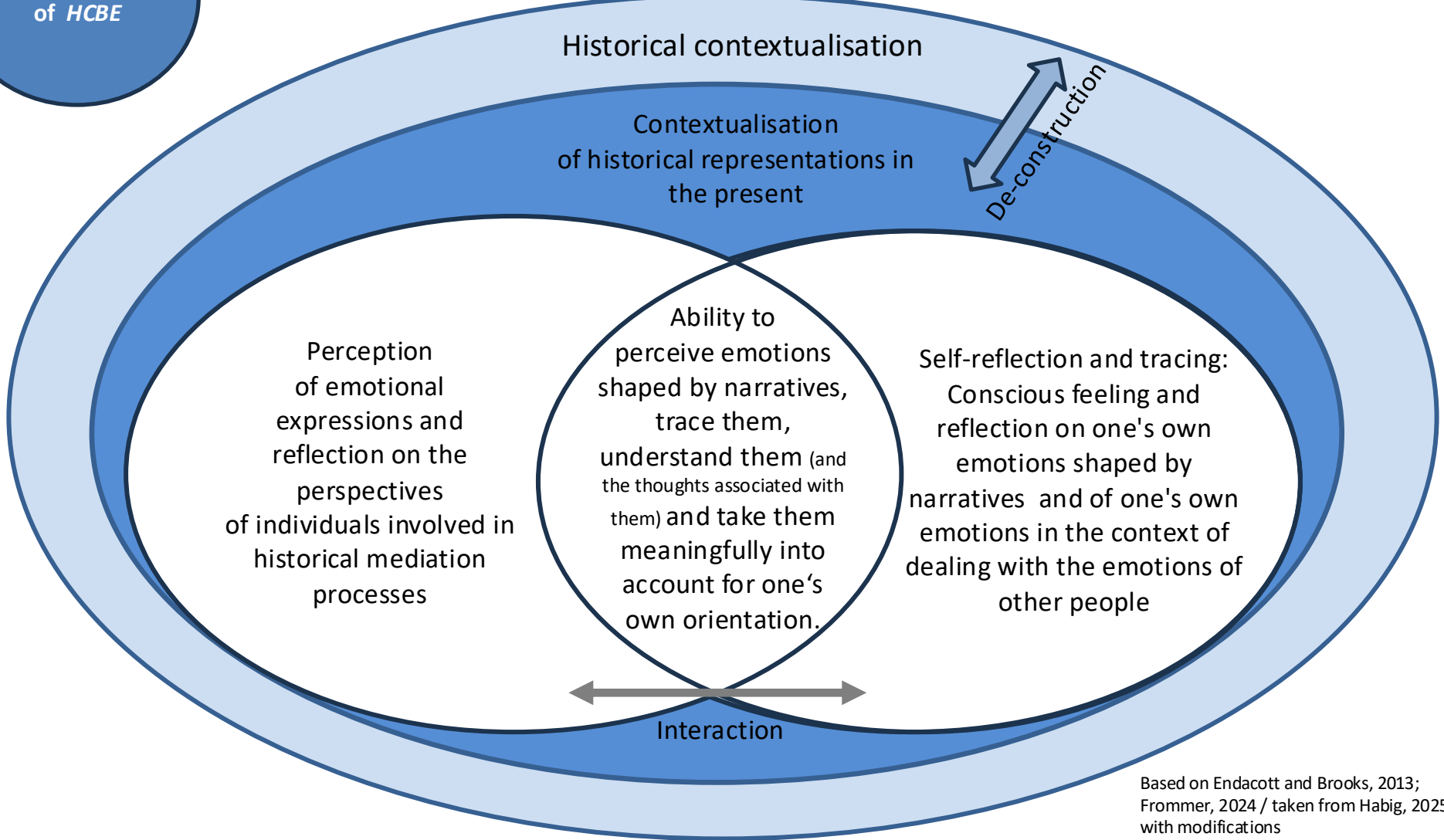
Empirical preliminary studies
Development of the learning task

Pilot studies

Main studie:
Embedded case studies

- Key References
- Barton, K. C., & Levstik, L. S. (2004). *Teaching History for the Common Good*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
 - Bernstein, J. (2020). *Antisemitismus an Schulen in Deutschland: Befunde – Analysen – Handlungsoptionen*. Beltz Juventa.
 - Brauer, J., & Lücke, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Emotionen, Geschichte und historisches Lernen. Geschichtsdidaktische und geschichtskulturelle Perspektiven*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.Council of Europe. (2018).
 - Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (Vols. 1–3). Council of Europe Publishing.
 - Endacott, J., & Brooks, S. (2013). *An Updated Theoretical and Practical Model for Promoting Historical Empathy. Social Studies Research and Practice*, 8, 41–58.
 - Feldman Barrett, L. (2017). *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Construct of HCBE



Historical-Consciousness-Based Empathy as a Competence
Interpretations of the past by oneself and others, as well as insights into the present experiences and future expectations associated with them, are consciously used to understand current emotions (emotions shaped by narratives) and to take these understandings into account for one's own orientation
→ Epistemic prerequisite for democratic action

- Emotions Shaped by Narratives
Emotions that arise, are triggered, or have an effect during and as a result of processes of communicating history (in the present)
- Basic Understanding of Empathy
- Empathy combines emotional and cognitive reactions and efforts
 - Value-literate, hermeneutic understanding of emotions: Distinction from pity, sympathy, or identification: Reflection and tracing in the 'as if' situation (Rogers, 2009 [1959]) - resonance-capable approximation to experiences
- Goals of HCBE
- Deepening Historical Understanding (Subject Goals): Enabling learners to understand historical narratives in their emotional dimensions and societal significance.
 - Orientation in Emotionalised Historical Cultures (Citizenship Goals): Enabling learners to reflexively integrate their own emotions shaped by narratives and those of others into historical judgments: Historical-consciousness-based empathic judgment
- HCBE is intended to enable students to reflect on emotions shaped by historical narratives in order to support democratic orientation in plural societies
- HCBE connects reflective historical understanding with democratic orientation

Preliminary Studies

Field Studies on the Development of a Learning Task



Pilot Studies

Method
2 case studies: 2 classes / 5 embedded groups each
Participants N ≈ 60 students (9th grade);
Gymnasium; Ruhr Area
Goal Refinement of the instruments
Data Data triangulation

Students' -Task

The Holocaust as a meme:
Development of a reflective FAQ guide for dealing with representations of the Shoah on the internet.

- Irritation and discomfort? What do my emotions have to do with the past?
- "How did antisemitism develop and what consequences did it have (for Jews)?" On the trail of a millennia-old phenomenon
- "To what extent does the Holocaust continue to have an impact on our present—socially, culturally, and individually?" Plural experiences of the present in the context of the Holocaust
- "Ey Tone, if it was a death camp, then why were so many broads having babies?" Analysis of the portrayal of the Shoah in a post on Telegram
- The role of emotions in dealing with online representations of the Shoah: Reflections on the development of an FAQ Guide

Planned Main Study

An Exploratory Embedded Case Study on the Learning Opportunities of a Reflective Learning Task

Findings regarding the learning opportunities offered by a specific teaching initiative aimed at promoting HCBE in the areas of empathetic orientation and education for the prevention of antisemitism (Rajal 2020) in history education

Theoretical Framework

- Historical cultures as emotional communities (Lücke, 2013)
- Antisemitism as an emotional-cultural phenomenon: critical education on antisemitism (Rajal, 2021)
- Historical-Consciousness-Based Empathy (Habig, 2025)
- Task-Based History Learning (Körber et al., 2021)
- Learning Opportunities (de Leur et al., 2018)

Learning-Task

„The Holocaust as a Meme:
Development of a reflective FAQ guide for dealing with representations of the Shoah on the internet“

Aim of the Task

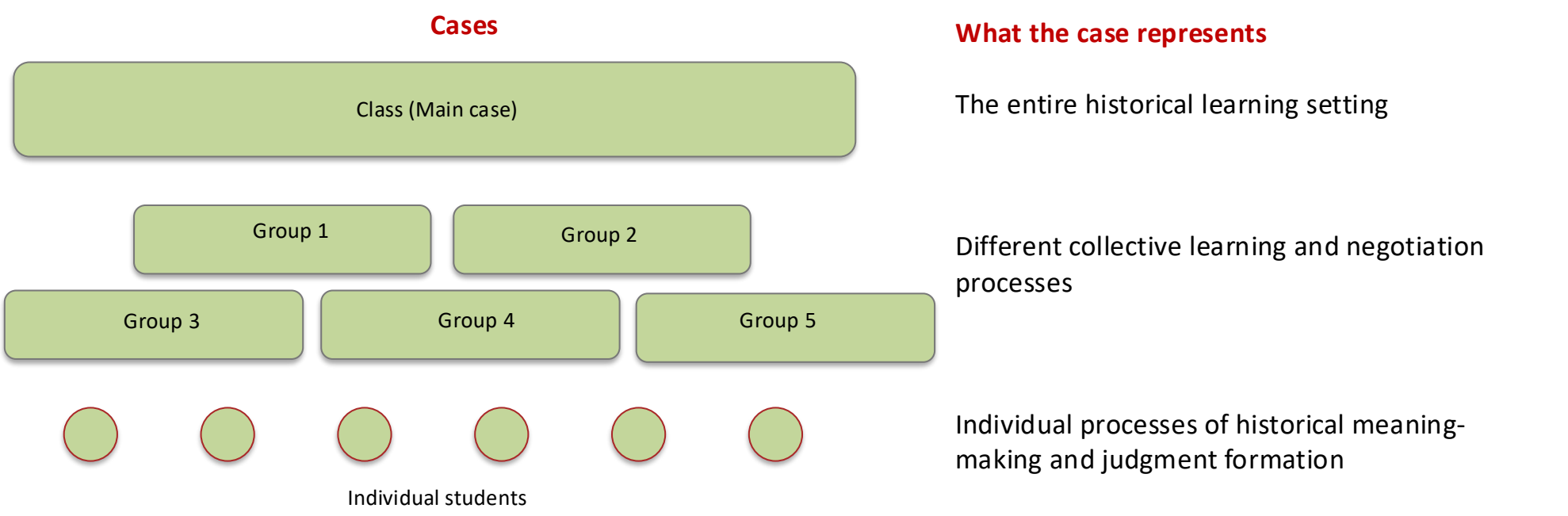
Students are able to deal with social media posts that trivialise or deny the Shoah in a historically conscious and empathic manner by analysing the representations, contextualising them in the present (regarding their intentions, functions, and consequences), and reflecting on plural present-day (including their own) experiences of affectedness.

Participants

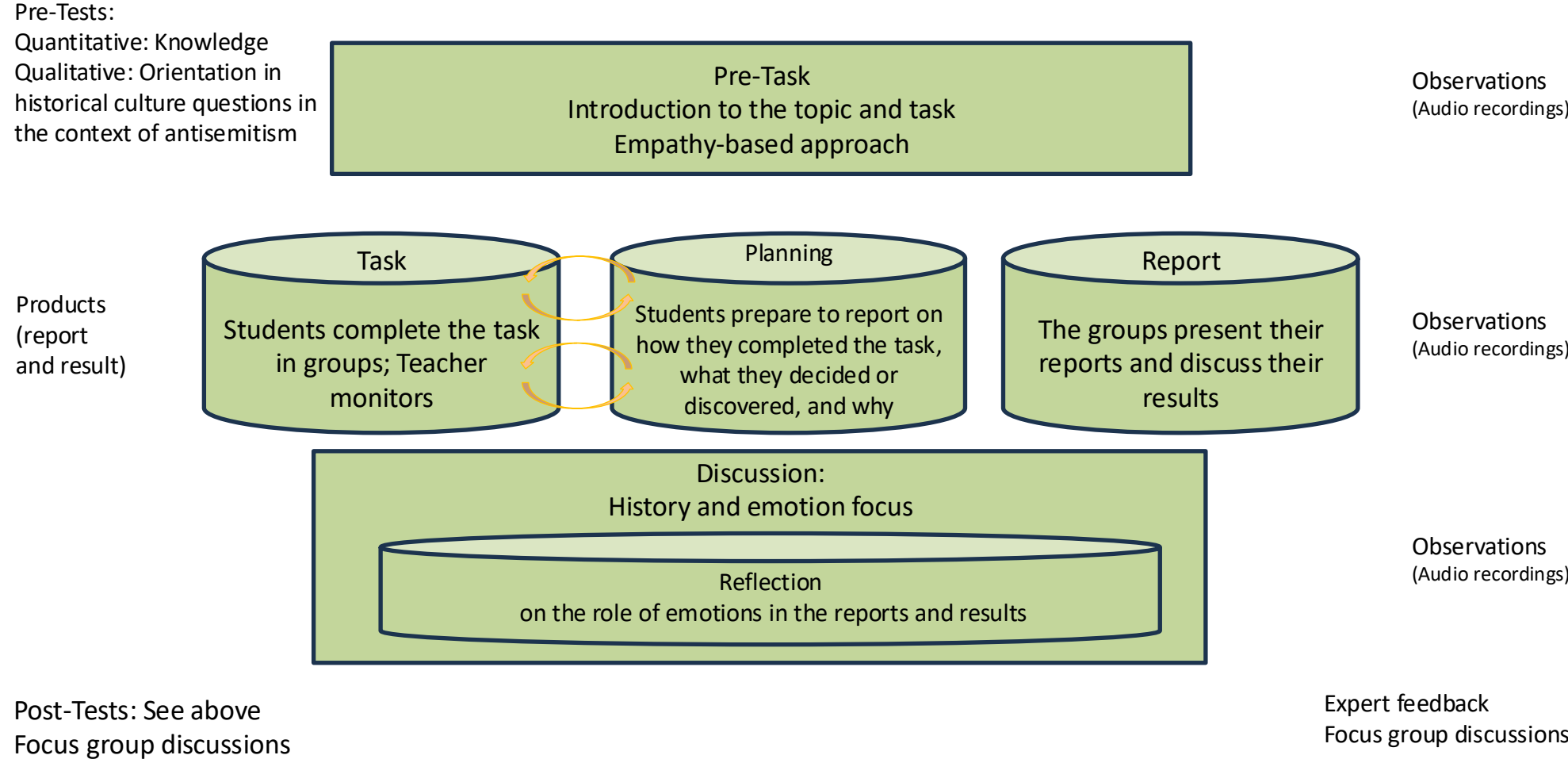
N ≈ 60 students (9th Grade); Gymnasium; Ruhr Area

Method

Embedded Case Design (Yin, 2009)



Data Collection during Task-Performance



Data Analysis

Exerpt from Shortened Codebook for observations of group discussions

SHORTENED CODEBOOK FOR OBSERVATIONS OF GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Dimensions of Historical-Consciousness-Based Empathy (HCBE)			
DIMENSION (HCBE)	FOCUS	INDICATORS IN GROUP DISCUSSIONS	LEVEL
1. EMOTIONAL AWARENESS Perceiving and naming emotions (self and others)	• Noticing emotions in oneself and others • Recognizing emotional reactions to the topic • Naming and describing feelings	• Students verbalize emotions (own or others') • Students respond to emotional cues • Emotional tone is addressed explicitly	Object level (Topic) Interaction level (Within the group)
2. EMOTIONAL SELF-DISCLOSURE Expressing one's own feelings in the discussion	• Sharing own emotions • Explaining why one feels this way • Linking feelings to experiences or values	• Students disclose their own feelings • Students give reasons for their feelings • References to situations (past/present) that explain these feelings	Object level (Topic) Interaction level (Within the group)
2.1 USING IDEAS OF THE PAST TO UNDERSTAND EMOTIONS Explaining feelings through ideas of the past	• Referring to historical knowledge/interpretations • Explaining (present) emotions through the past • Considering historical context, intentions, functions, consequences	• Students use interpretations of the past to make sense of emotions (own/others') • Connections between past events and present feelings are articulated • Historical explanations are used to understand emotional reactions	Object level (Topic) Interaction level (Within the group)

Field studies on the development of a learning task

Insights from the Preliminary Studies:

Translated transcript of a written statement by a 7th-grade student. Following our intervention, the student was asked to comment on Peter calling a classmate a Jew in the schoolyard (from Studienbericht Henoch, August 2025).

If a Jewish classmate hears about this insult, he or she may feel uncomfortable or anxious again. He or she may think about how Jews were treated in the past and wonder whether something like that could happen again. (...) That's why teachers at our school should explain that discrimination based on religion or other characteristics is not acceptable. (ILHT24POSTTEST)

Guessing the emotions of others
Explanation of emotions about possible interpretations of the past
Explanations of emotions: possible future expectations (contextualization in the present)
HCBE-Recommended action



Jana Habig
Ruhr-Universität Bochum
Department of History
Research Project: Historical-Consciousness-Based Empathy (HCBE)
Contact: jana.habig@rub.de
Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Nicola Brauch