

Susanne Offen

## 'Places of Remembrance': Spaces for Historical and Political Literacy. A Lesson Report

- Fostering historical-political awareness on Fascism/ Nazism in Germany, the Holocaust, and post-war remembrance politics
- Presenting educational media for a diverse group of learners with very little prior knowledge.

**Purpose:** The article shows the use of specific educational media in social studies in vocational schools to foster a differentiated historical and political literacy.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Accordingly, the article examines a sequence of lessons taught by the author in a vocational classroom, fostering reflexive historical-political awareness of Germany's post-war coping with the fascist constitution 1933-1945 and specifically of contemporary legal proceedings concerning the persecution and subsequent murder of six million Jewish people during the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup>

**Findings:** Teaching techniques comprise explorative learning through guided city walks, document analysis and expert visits, in-class-discussions, the and individual student-teacher-conversations and, particularly, contact with exhibits employed as educational media, originating from an art exhibition in public space covering various unsettling steps of exclusion against Jewish citizens before 1942.

These materials turn out to bridge the gap from ignorance to learning by the acquisition of knowledge, demonstrating the use of artistic visual representations as educational media in the social studies classroom, especially while addressing students with little prior knowledge and understanding.

**Research limitations/implications:** As a lesson report, the article draws on classroom observations.

**Practical implications:** The approach presented includes various implications for classroom application.

### Keywords:

Social studies, citizenship education, historical literacy, political literacy, remembrance, National Socialism (NS)

### 1 Introduction

Social studies (particularly with regard to civic/citizenship education) hold a widely accepted place in German vocational<sup>2</sup> school curricula and are taught at virtually every level (Besand, 2014; Wucherer, 2014). While governed by administrative guidelines, teachers are free to focus on subject matters meaningful to their specific groups of learners in order to foster political literacy and various loosely standardized competencies (e.g. Nibis, 2015). Still, based on available textbooks and the general tendency in vocational schools to focus the general education like the vocational subjects on examples from workplace situations (Zedler, 2007), aspects of history and civics beyond the vocational context tend to be marginalized. It seems essential to seek approaches that promote these topics for social studies in vocational schools in order to foster a differentiated historical and political literacy<sup>3</sup>.

During the past decades, a complex culture of remembrance (e.g. marked by the Holocaust Memorial in

Berlin, the penal sanction of Holocaust denial or the inclusion of Holocaust Education at different levels of the curriculum) has emerged in Germany. However, recurring debates on the significance of remembrance for the civil texture of society persist (Fokus, 2017), narratives of remembrance (Köhr, 2012) and Holocaust Education as well as the pedagogy of memorial sites face challenges: a limited historical awareness, questions of adequate teaching approaches in a migration society (Messerschmidt, 2016), the impact of visualisation and media representations and/or overwriting (Kenkmann, 2013; Nuy, 2012; Paul & Schoßig, 2010; Stiglegger, 2015), or the quest to ensure the perceptibility of the victims' perspective while the contemporary witnesses are aging and dying (Kaiser, 2010; cf. Taubitz, 2016).

A lesson sequence on post-war and contemporary prosecution of Nazi-crimes with a diverse group of learners in a German vocational school is used for reconstruction and analysis of key teaching strategies, focussing on the attempt to impart historical and political knowledge to persons with little prior knowledge.

Classroom observations were made by the author during a 20-lessons-sequence in 2015 with students during their vocational training towards hotel and service specialists. The major challenge was posed by the variety of learning experiences, prior knowledge and skills and historical as well as political literacy in class.

The sequence dealt with the contemporary issue of one of the final trials against field personnel involved in the German Nazi State and the murder in the concentration and death camps. The trial in question brought to charge

*Dr. Susanne Offen* is Lecturer at the Leuphana Universität Lüneburg and teacher (Studienrätin) at the Vocational School Lüneburg (since 2016). Her main areas of research and teaching: civic education, didactics of social studies and elementary social and science education, reflexive teacher education and professionalization.

<http://www.leuphana.de/susanne-offen.html>

Email: [susanne.offen@uni.leuphana.de](mailto:susanne.offen@uni.leuphana.de)

a nonagenarian former Nazi-SS junior squad leader for accessory to murder in 300.000 cases during his deployment to the Auschwitz Death Camp, specifically from May to July 1944, when Jewish deportees from Hungary were killed (cf. Connolly, 2015).

Given the wide diversity within vocational classrooms, it is vital for teachers to seek valid starting points for any subject, enabling students to link personal experiences and to become intrigued. There is wide consensus that this especially applies to social studies and civic education<sup>4</sup>, as research covering Germany constantly shows a disturbing gap between formal mechanisms of democratic politics as well as policy-making and adolescent forms of participation to and engagement with politics (BR, 2017; FES, 2016). In addition, awareness of democratic institutions and knowledge of current political topics beyond everyday life experiences tend to be sparse among people with limited access to educational opportunities. This underlines the importance of vocational schools as access opportunities to socially significant spheres of discourse. They address a diverse population of young adults at the threshold of their professional life and so frequently provide the last possibility to reach out to them through formal education (Besand, 2014).

Considerable efforts have been made throughout recent years to study and develop didactically and methodologically adequate approaches for civic education with educationally disadvantaged persons (e.g. Calmbach & Kohl, 2011; Detjen, 2009; Hafenegger, 2015; Ellis, 2010). Some are focussing on establishing core concepts (Massing, 2012; Sander, 2009), some on defining basic competencies (Grotlüschen, 2016) for civic participation and literacy. Teaching strategies tend to aim at an increasing ability to apprehend complexity and to judge based on facts and a careful evaluation of arguments (Autorengruppe Fachdidaktik, 2015; GPJE, 2004, considerable differences within the academic discipline notwithstanding). Most civics teachers and didactical experts in German-speaking countries basically agree on some key references, including a competency model featuring at its core the idea of political maturity. Accordingly, teaching strategies are examined extensively. Some studies have discussed the use of explorative learning, others focused on determining meaningful subjects, the use of plain language, different teaching arrangements and effective classroom management (Dönges, 2015; Kirchner & McMichael, 2015; McKee, 2015) or evaluated the longterm impact of civic education (Balzter et al., 2017).

Determining impact evidently implies estimating students' results, for instance by measuring competencies against explicitly defined core elements of social studies (Common Core, 2017) or political maturity (Nibis 2015) or by assessing increasing levels of historical and political literacy<sup>5</sup> (e.g. Nokes, 2013; VanSledright, 2014; see also Weißeno, 2008 referring to civic literacy). However, more attention could be devoted to research covering adequate ways to impart the underlying expertise. This includes conveying historical facts, political

concepts and domain-specific knowledge to people with little basic historical and/or political literacy and skills, especially with regard to suitable educational media beyond the provision of textbook materials. How to do this while at the same time respecting the students' claim to inquire about and legitimately address relevant historical and political topics may be framed as a didactical question.<sup>6</sup> Useful didactical references have been established by focusing on students' inquiries, coaching them to verbalize their questions, enabling them to use domain-specific tools and concepts for their analysis and encouraging them to argue in reference to their findings. These are teaching strategies extensively covered in designs for inquiry-based-learning.

Inquiry-based learning (c.f. Oguz-Unver & Arabacioglu, 2014), though prone to be used along specific academic traditions (e.g. Llewellyn, 2013 in terms of science education or Downey & Long, 2016 linking inquiry to historical literacy), seems to be a suitable term in substantiating the approach to didactical decisions described here, especially as it may be closely linked to the concept of literacy. Even while inquiry-based-learning represents an important point of reference, didactical decisions in the lesson sequence described here draw chiefly on the fundamental orientation towards students' inquiries as the center of the learning process and to a lesser extent on adherence to strictly organized inquiry phases (e.g. described in Pedaste et al., 2015).

In this article, I will discuss possibilities to foster an inquiring attitude. The core of the article being classroom observations of students engagement with specific teaching materials, the text will reflect their knowledge-building and growing understanding during the process of critically engaging with the materials. Conclusions will be drawn on the interrelation of inquiry, factual knowledge development, and historical/ political literacy.

First, I'll introduce some basic facts on the trial in question, brought to court in the German town Lüneburg in 2015, to outline the circumstances triggering the lesson sequence (2.1). Subsequently, I'll describe the lesson sequence itself, focusing on the teaching material employed as educational media (2.2) and finish the subsection by reflecting the students' results (2.3). I'll contemplate the relevance of inquiry-based learning in order to foster an inquiring attitude in the following subsection while discussing the implications for the social studies classroom (3). In conclusion, I'll outline the conjunction between history and civic education as a productive sphere of tension, pending further classroom-based elaboration (4).

## **2. Questioning justice to foster historical and political literacy concerning contemporary and post-war pursuit of NS<sup>7</sup>-crimes – classroom observations from a German vocational school**

### **2.1 Auschwitz Trial Lüneburg 2015**

The trial against Oskar Gröning, former Nazi-SS junior squad leader and deployed to Auschwitz to serve as an accountant (where he mainly dealt with the victims looted property) and sometimes as guard at incoming

deportation trains from May-July 1944 (cf. Auschwitz Trial, 2015), was widely documented in German and international media (e.g. Smale, 2015), drew many co-plaintiffs, witnesses, lawyers, journalists, translators and spectators from several countries and touched upon the students in my class in a specific way. As all of them, during their three years of dual vocational training, were spending two days a week at school and three days at their apprenticing hotels, most of them encountered parties involved in the trial as hotel guests at work. Public opinion in Germany was ambivalent towards the trial. Arguments formed around two main lines: a) the defendant's age of 93 and his corresponding frailty, obviously countered by the co-plaintiffs' and witnesses' circumstances in biography and life, and b) the question „of whether people who were small cogs in the Nazi machinery, but did not actively participate in the killing of 6 million Jews during the Holocaust, were guilty of crimes“ (Connolly, 2015), a notion formerly denied by German courts.

As they became entangled with the presence of co-plaintiffs and witnesses attending the trial, some of the students perceived for the first time in their lives the reality of the Holocaust and became consequently bewildered by their lack of knowledge and their consequential inability to take a stand beyond the widely resonated notion of the trial happening very late. Some of the students brought their confusion and their lack of knowledge to the class. This led to the starting point for the sequence.

Aims and methods of the sequence were discussed in class and the students largely agreed upon the key questions:

- a) How exactly was the defendant part of the NS-system – in general, and specifically from May-July 1944?
- b) Why does this trial happen now (e.g. late in terms of the time gap from post-war to today) and not much earlier?
- c) Why does the trial draw so many people to court?

The class mutually agreed to leave the detailed planning to me due to their by their own definition negligible prior knowledge and to set some benchmarks for their own learning:

1. to be able to fully read and understand a ‚serious‘ newspaper article on the trial
2. to be able to understand and explain the basic outline of the trial and the surrounding media attention
3. to adopt a position on the question of justice concerning the trials' procedure, written, orally or by artistic expression at the end of the sequence.

## 2.2 Teaching Arrangements and Educational Media – ‚Places of Remembrance‘

The lessons were arranged as such: First, the class collected and tried to read or listen to some of the media coverage, documenting their questions visibly throughout the sequence on a flipchart.

Some basic information on the trial and the historical timeline was provided by the teacher (helping to meet most of benchmark 2).

The class met various experts throughout the sequence. A person involved in an oral history project in Lüneburg took the class around town, showing and discussing historical places of exclusion and deportation as well as the (now erased) site hosting the first post-war trial against Nazi field personnel (Belsen Trial in 1945, cf. Stiftung Niedersächsische Gedenkstätten, 2017). In addition, a lecturer working at the memorial site in Neuengamme (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme, 2017) visited the class to answer questions (answering essential parts of key questions a and b).

However, the main access to information was provided by materials from the exhibition „Memorial: Places of Remembrance: Bayerisches Viertel: Isolation and deprivation of rights, expulsion, deportation and murder of Berlin Jews in the years 1933 to 1945“.

In 1993, Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock mounted eighty pictorial/ textual signs in the streets around the Berlin quarter ‚Bayerisches Viertel‘, a neighborhood inhabited by many Jewish people in the 1930s. Most signs show a brightly rendered picture of a domestic object: a loaf of bread, a cake, a keyring, a house or some chalk. A short text is noted on the back of each sign: each a condensed version of one of the many decrees regulating the life of Jews in Berlin from the early 1930s, each one of them marking a step in the isolation and deprivation of rights of Jewish citizens and paving the way from political-legal discrimination, appropriation of Jewish assets, isolation and confinement to destruction (Hilberg 1961/ 2003) and murder.

### 2.2.1 „Places of Remembrance“ – the exhibition visually

The following pictures allow a tiny in situ impression – the photographs above have been taken on-site, the maps below with the miniature-sized-signs at the margins have been made by the artists themselves for travelling exhibitions at various places (cf. Stih & Schnock, 2016).







The inscription back reads (translated): „Jews are banned from choral societies. 16.8.1933“.  
(c) Stih & Schnock, Berlin / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn / ARS, NYC, Photo by Viktor Richardsson

„Signs and texts between them make emblematic - and not at all insignificantly represent the objective evidence of - the often seemingly petty legal and juridical processes by which the Jewish population was gradually deprived of all rights. It is indicative in this respect that the series opens, chronologically, not with a dramatic gesture but with one of the first regulations passed by the Nazi city authorities (“Costs of treatment by a Jewish doctor after April 1933 will not be reimbursed by the City of Berlin's public health insurance company. March 31, 1933”). The apparent minutiae of the issue tells one immediately that the emphasis is not on the events of the Holocaust per se as we now think of them (only a few of the signs refer to the removal of the Jews from Berlin and their subsequent murder) but rather on the daily humiliations and cruelties that prepared the way for the Jews as victims-to-be“ (Dilnot & Clive, 2014, p. 215).

While the exhibits were made for and shown in public space in Berlin 1993, the work is also preserved in print and thus available (Stih & Schnock, 1993 & 2009) beyond Berlin. Apart from this very many photos were taken in situ by visitors over time and circulate online.

### 2.2.2 „Places of Remembrance“ – the exhibition as teaching media

The apparent malice recognizable in the depicted, sometimes exceedingly petty decrees, the vivid details representing the everyday-life-precursors of the murder on trial in Lüneburg 2015 allowed the students to understand some aspects in particular:

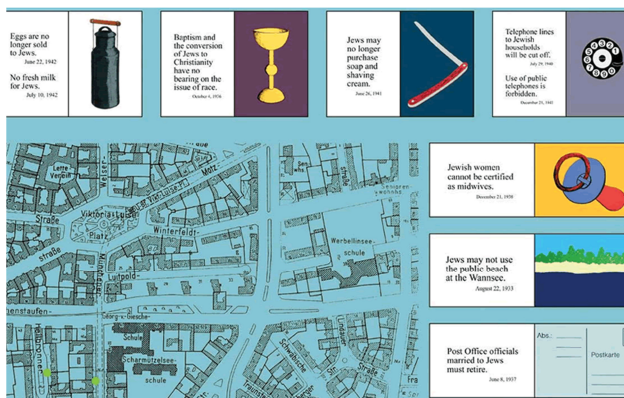
- a) the everyday meaning of deprivation for Jewish citizens
- b) the phrasing of exclusion and threat not „from the point of view of victims but from perpetrators“ (Stih in Johnson 2013)
- c) the visibility of exclusion and thus the apparent complicity of ordinary neighbors in the process.

To be accessible in class, the signs were first shown as photo slides to demonstrate their appearance in public space. Subsequently, the catalog was laid out for browsing and individuals pictures were taken from the catalog and given to the students to scrutinize.

The students were sorting through the materials, discussing the decrees, the emerging timeline towards deportation and murder displayed by the dates specified in the texts. The following assignment was used to organize this task:



(c) Stih & Schnock, Berlin / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn / ARS, NYC



(c) Stih & Schnock, Berlin / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn / ARS, NYC

<h3>Arbeitsauftrag</h3> <p>Schauen Sie sich als Kleingruppe jede einzelne Karte genau an.</p> <p>1) Tauschen Sie sich über jede Karte aus und ordnen Sie diese entlang des Zeitstrahls ein. War Ihnen diese Regelung, dieses Ereignis bekannt? Was hat diese Regelung, dieses Ereignis für die Betroffenen bedeutet? Notieren Sie Ihre Ergebnisse,</p> <p>Arbeiten Sie alleine: 2) Die Karten sind verkleinerte Abbildungen großrahmiger Tafeln, die 1993 im Rahmen einer Gedenkausstellung überall in einem Berliner Stadtteil ausgehängt waren. Die Ausstellungsmacher_innen Renata Stih and Frieder formulieren ihre Leitidee so: es geht um das „Sichtbarmachen von Sachverhalten, die in perfider Folgerichtigkeit Schritte zur Vernichtung der jüdischen Bewohner waren“.</p> <p>Wählen Sie in Einzelarbeit drei Karten aus, an denen dies aus Ihrer Sicht besonders deutlich wird. Nennen Sie in Einzelarbeit jeweils mindestens 2 Gründe, warum dies aus Ihrer Sicht an diesen Karten besonders deutlich wird.</p>	<h3>Zeitstrahl</h3> <p>versuchen Sie, in der Gruppe zu klären, worum es hier jeweils geht.</p> <p>Auf Wunsch liegt vorne ergänzendes Material bereit.</p> <p>Fragen Sie sonst nach; vor allen Dingen:</p> <p>Sammeln Sie Fragen im Fragenspeicher!</p>	<p>Januar 1933 „Machtergreifung“</p> <p>März 1933 „Ermächtigungsgesetz“</p> <p>Frühjahr 1933 Bau des ersten KZ (Dachau)</p> <p>September 1935 „Nürnberger Rassengesetze“</p> <p>9. November 1938 „Reichspogromnacht“</p> <p>September 1939 Deutschland überfällt Polen, Beginn des 2. Weltkriegs</p> <p>Mai 1940 Einmarsch in Frankreich, Frankreich kapituliert im Juni 1940</p> <p>Juni 1941 Einmarsch in die Sowjetunion</p> <p>Auftakt Massenvernichtung, zunächst Einsatzgruppen hinter der vorrückenden Wehrmacht, Ende 1941 Bau von Vernichtungslagern</p> <p>Januar 1942 Wannsee-Konferenz</p> <p>Januar 1943 Niederlage Stalingrad</p> <p>Februar 1944 Besetzung des ehemals verbündeten Ungarns</p> <p>Mai 1945 Bedingungslose Kapitulation Deutschlands</p>
<h3>Assignment</h3> <p>Analyze each sign in your study group:</p> <p>1) Place each sign along the timeline. Talk about each sign and take notes: Did you know about this regulation, this incident? Explain the impact on the persons affected.</p> <p>Work alone: 2) The signs are scaled down from an exhibition called „Memorial: Places of Remembrance: Bayrisches Viertel: Isolation and deprivation of rights, expulsion, deportation and murder of Berlin Jews in the years 1933 to 1945“. The artists Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock mounted eighty pictorial &amp; textual signs in the streets around the Berlin quarter, inhabited by many Jewish people in the 1930s. The exhibition makers declare their project as such: it is about „showing issues that were with perfidious consistency steps towards the murder of Jewish citizens“.</p> <p>Choose three signs especially illustrating this process from your point of view. Name at least two reasons for your choice. Take notes.</p>	<h3>Timeline</h3> <p>Try to analyze this timeline with your study group.</p> <p>Use the informational materials provided at the sideboard and on the bookshelves.</p> <p>Ask your teacher for advice.</p> <p>Save remaining questions at the Poster!</p>	<p>January 1933 „Seizure of Power“</p> <p>March 1933 „Enabling Act“</p> <p>Spring 1933 First Concentration Camp (Dachau)</p> <p>September 1935 „Nuremberg Laws“</p> <p>9. November 1938 „Reichspogromnacht“</p> <p>September 1939 Germany attacks Poland, start of the 2. World War</p> <p>May 1940 Invasion of France, France surrenders in June 1940</p> <p>Juni 1941 Invasion of the Soviet Union</p> <p>Beginning of Mass Murders, initially by Mobile Wehrmacht Killing Units, by the end of 1941 Building of Extermination Camps</p> <p>January 1942 Wannsee-Conference</p> <p>January 1943 German Defeat at Stalingrad</p> <p>February 1944 Occupation of formerly allied Hungary</p> <p>May 1945 Germany's Unconditional Surrender</p>

This time was also used by some students to reflect their growing discomfort with the historical events in many individual student-teacher-conversations.

Other aspects of education and learning happened incidentally. First of all, the students became engaged with the Jewish citizens affected by these decrees. While

this may sound trivial, it marks a huge change of perspective. The ability to empathize to a certain extent with the people targeted by these decrees, to reflect their situation, not as historical cardboard figures but to relate to them as persons, constitutes an important step

towards historical literacy and thus, in this context, to political literacy (cf. Borries, 2009).

In addition, the timeline provided insight into some aspects of the gradual process of exclusion towards destruction described by Hilberg and others and thus enabled the students to decipher various elements of the NS system and forms of complicity by the general public.

This factor was highlighted by the introduction of various examples of neighborly behaviour and their subsequent discussion and critical classification in class, focusing on the implication of perpetrators, collaborators, and bystanders for maintaining the NS. To visualize and discuss these examples, a simple diagram was used (English version below)

<p>←geringe Bedeutung für Ausgrenzung und Entrechtung/ Vertreibung, Deportation und Vernichtung</p>	<p>↑Mitläufer/in</p> <p>hohe Bedeutung für Ausgrenzung und Entrechtung/ Vertreibung, Deportation und Vernichtung</p>
	<p>↓überzeugte/r Täter/in</p>
<p>←minimal contribution for isolation and deprivation of rights, expulsion, deportation and murder</p>	<p>↑collaborator</p> <p>high contribution to isolation and deprivation of rights, expulsion, deportation and murder</p>
	<p>↓perpetrator acting from conviction</p>

Groups of students chose a place for the example of behaviour and placed it in the chart, subject to discussion and often subsequent relocation by the class. Drawing on different sources (cf. Dean, 2008; Dreßen, 1998), these examples encompassed the following:

- Helga P. acquires 1 closet, 1 coat and 1 sugar bowl made of silver formerly owned by the deported family G. from next door in a public sale organized by the local revenue office (1942)
- Working for the revenue office Heinrich T. types a list of movable items found in the flat of the deported family G. (1942)
- Hans V. enters the Waffen-SS (1941)
- Elisabeth A. doesn't buy in the Jewish bakery anymore (1939)
- Gustav F. fills a position as senior physician, shortly after the former job holder was banned from the profession as a Jew and dismissed (1938)
- Gernot H. gets a divorce from his Jewish wife (1938)
- Company KLMOP uses KZ-Prisoners to produce precast concrete parts (1944)

As questions of complicity mattered significantly throughout the lessons, these examples were discussed in class as various forms people perpetuated the NS and

participated in depriving Jewish people of rights and social protection.<sup>8</sup> Several questions were raised by the students, including participation of German citizens in the NS system, guilt and culpability, possibilities to resist, examples of protest, obstruction and genuine help and support for Jewish citizens.

During the students' engagement with the exhibits, a very important process happened „backstage“ to their learning process. Contact with the materials allowed to acquire basic knowledge without having to acknowledge the amount of former ignorance in class. As pictures and texts spell out how „everything was meant to exclude Jews from daily life, from social structures, and to threaten them“ (Stih in Johnson, 2013), students used the condensed versions of these regulations as starting points for their own individual research into social and legal structures enabling the NS. Supplementary materials were provided by the teacher, additional research was enabled by the lecturer from the memorial site and the oral history activist.

The basic knowledge of historical facts and social structures, the discussions about bystanders and perpetrators in terms of complicity in the NS system and the apparent and discursively reflected discomfort among the students laid the foundation for a deeper un-



derstanding of the trial in Lüneburg 2015. As we discussed various forms of complicity in context of maintenance for the NS system, the participation and culpability of Oskar Gröning emerged more clearly, though controversial, in class. The students consulted many interviews with co-plaintiffs and witnesses concerning their widely expressed arguments about the importance of the trial.

Why the trial happened so late at this specific juncture remained another topic of heated discussion in class. As this tells a lot about Germany's post-war society, attempts at suppression and continuities in the German society and authorities, but also illuminates changes in historical and legal perspectives, this question refers to the controversy a culture of remembrance has to face. Discussions in class could guide students through the arguments, some of them provided by our external visitors. Evidently, the exchange of arguments had to stay open-ended. Precisely by this, as civic education aims for, the students could take an individual, but not subjectivistic stance on the question of justice concerning contemporary and post-war pursuit of NS-crimes, argue and weigh arguments based on knowledge and a deeper understanding of the proceedings.

Resuming the guided tour the class took with the oral history project during the lesson sequence, these discussions were steered towards an individual exhibit made by each student in the final lessons. Each student worked out a plaque representing the individual perspective on the trial on one side and basic facts about the trial on the other side, suitable to be attached to the actual public hall the trial was held in. These plaques were made on paper and exhibited in class, merging knowledge-based aspects with reflexive critical discernment of proceedings and narrative in emerging historical and political literacy.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.3 Questioning Justice?

By the end of the lessons the students, formerly ignorant of even the most basic historical facts and very much biased against any form of prosecution of NS-crimes to the present day on a mainly preconceived notion were able to understand newspaper articles, to outline basic aspects of the trial and to argue based on historical facts and to consider various political implications of impunity vs. persecution, some could even relate to the broader arguments concerning democracy and coping with the past. Thus, every one of these young adults enhanced their reflexive ability to judge on contemporary political questions.

Asked to connect their learning process to the guided city walk with the history workshop at the beginning of the lesson sequence and to design a plaque to attach to the building the trial was held in, very individual designs emerged, each relating to the place in a specific, informed way. Some of the students were inspired by the signs ‚Places of Remembrance‘ and combined pictures

and text, others just draw or wrote, thus illustrating their increased historical and political literacy on the subject. Finally, they acknowledged the social and legal position of the victims.

As the court proceedings opened a space for the victims' narratives to be heard, the students were able to listen. The answer to the third key question about the huge attendance at the trial dawned gradually to the class – as they realized the longtime denial of legal processing and public recognition made evident by the reluctant persecution in post-war Germany, they began to gain understanding of the importance of bearing witness to the atrocities committed during the NS. Other than before some of the students read the victims' testimonies in court and thus acquired a deeper idea of the impact on the victims' biography. „The personal stories told by Holocaust survivors present the Jews as human beings and restore their identities (...)“, as Yad Vashem elucidates the importance of testimonies in the classroom (Magen, 2017).

Co-Plaintiffs and lawyers referred repeatedly to the immense importance to bear witness („Man weiß etwas, was sonst niemand wissen kann, der nicht dort gewesen ist.“ „You know something nobody who wasn't there can know“, Puztai-Fahidi, 2015, translation by the author) and some mentioned the necessity to assign personhood to victims and perpetrators: „I think this trial is important in two ways. It puts faces to the numbers tattooed on arms, faces to the survivors who had the super human task of rebuilding their lives after losing everything and in many cases everybody. Part of this trial's great value is to witness further the suffering of innocent people at the hands of the Nazi state. But perhaps more importantly, this trial puts a face to one of the perpetrators of the Final Solution. A policy is meaningless until it is enacted, and those who carry it out are individuals with names and faces as well. Too many perpetrators of the Final Solution have been allowed the privilege of anonymity. Putting a face such as Mr. Groening's to even one of them demonstrates that a policy of murder can only be carried out by individuals.“ (Kalman, 2015).

Especially because history tends to be told by narratives of – in their time successful – historical actors (Blutinger 2009) with influence and/ or power, it seems important, to show micro perspectives: of victims, bystanders, collaborators, and perpetrators.

### 3 Discussion

Ultimately, the students' interest was sparked by questioning the justification of the Lüneburg trial. This question was taken seriously by the teacher to establish common ground with the students and to initiate an inquiring attitude rather than a hasty judgement based on very little information and even less consideration. Beyond that, this question was taken as a verbalization of a political problem, made explicit. As the lesson sequence aimed more at allowing the students to weigh arguments based on knowledge, at enabling them to

search for complex answers and disaccords rather than quick resolutions, the purpose served by the lessons was predominantly an elaboration of the question and an assessment of necessary information. As the students placed the question at hand into a broader historical and political context, they grew more capable to articulate a critical appraisal – they had enhanced their historical and political literacy.

In this process they sharpened their skills and attitudes, focussing on decoding narratives and complexity, developing an inquiring attitude. Their relation to historical facts and interpretative patterns evolved, for some students up to a level of a constant inquisitiveness: with evidently improved competence they took this outlook to the following topics in class, displaying increased confidence in their own explorative skills and learning ability.

Obviously, students' content knowledge remained limited, and, based on the diversity in terms of prior knowledge, varied in depth and scope. As the sequence was taught in a vocational school, the schedule was very much restricted by curricular requirements. Accordingly, the students' understanding of the NS system realities remained incomplete. Still, even while some students may have ongoing difficulties in naming exact dates, places, and proceedings, each of them acquired enough basic factual and conceptual knowledge to locate the NS chronologically and in the German political context. Keeping in mind that this was not the case prior to the lesson sequence, the impartment of facts was necessary to anchor their expanding historical and civic literacy, but should not (and did not) outbalance the focus on literacy in a broader sense (Nokes, 2010a; Wineburg et al., 2011). Historical literacy refers, among other aspects, to the ability to „learn about the past by ‚working it out from sources‘“ (Nokes, 2010b, quoting Ashby, Lee & Shemilt, 2005) and to understand the „nature of historical inquiry“ (Nokes, 2010b). Similarly, political literacy can be regarded, including the ability to question political narratives and to locate political actors with different levels of power attached—while perceiving oneself as able and entitled to contribute questions and opinions to relevant political and historical topics. With this particular group of learners in the designated time frame, the lessons aimed above all at evoking curiosity and at consolidating it. Hence the emphasis on providing accessible teaching materials. Guided by this students found themselves inquiring and researching historical content and political narratives allowing them to construct their own—but not subjectivistic—conclusions. But, and this seems the central didactical decision, students were addressed as legitimate speakers from the beginning. In starting the lessons by their own questions and putting the exhibits as artistically rendered historical content and political intervention at the center stage, the students plunged straight into the narratives and content knowledge was built from there.

Numerous possibilities to expand on the subject present themselves compellingly, as each of the students, initiate questions could be taken further, should the educational setting allow for it.

Incidentally, contact to non-formal educators and activists served an additional purpose not premeditated: on one hand it allowed students to talk to extracurricular partners and thus to expand their outlook on the subject matter (this was planned), on the other hand students found out about the existence of people dedicated to the cause of remembrance, people who understand this task as a their political and sometimes deeply personal mandate. By this, democracy and the participation in its preservation as a civic obligation came, rather unexpected, vibrantly to life. As one student commented on this: „There exist real people who dedicate a big part of their life to battle these horrors – it puzzles me, but I find it rather impressive at the same time.“

#### 4 Conclusion

While many efforts have been made to preserve the impact of peoples' testimonies to bear witness (e.g. USC Shoah Foundation, 2017; Visual History Archive, 2017, cf. Taubitz, 2016), understanding relies on knowledge building. This will be even more challenging in the future, as contemporary witnesses will no longer be available and the temporal distance will increase. Correspondingly, suitable approaches will be very important.

Reconstructing the lesson sequence as a lesson report showed the usefulness of inspiring educational media, in this case more specifically contemporary art in public space with deliberately perturbing intentions, in the social studies classroom.

Key success factors for this sequence beyond the educational media comprise the personal relevance via workplace contact, a pedagogically reliable working alliance between students and teacher and thus an atmosphere of mutual trust, a carefully orchestrated lesson structure with multidimensional, inquiry-based approaches, options for differentiated, individually workable access points and an „error-friendly“, encouraging classroom atmosphere. Throughout the lessons, a student-centered classroom-management could be kept up.

Further research could be fruitful, especially employing phenomenographical approaches relating to students individual perceptions developed while interacting with the educational media presented above.

Finally, approaching the subject by detour of artistic intervention as presented above may foster a more amenable disposition to become engaged with the subject area in the first place, as it allows students various and maybe more accessible ways to subject themselves to the disturbing rupture of civilisation the NS represents, singular and simultaneously embedded as it is in the 20th century-history of violence. Looking at signs and researching their meaning and impact may provide at least some space for detachment and hesitancy needed to let oneself become involved.



There is much controversy about the appropriateness of learning about contemporary politics through history, especially in connection with Holocaust Education and Human Rights Education, Anti-Bias, promotion of Social Justice or prevention of antisemitism or racism (e.g. Zumpe, 2003).

In the classroom proceedings concerning the class specified above this nexus happened incidentally, when students spotted antisemitic slogans in public space during their leisure time and discussed possible interventions against this in class.

Still, looking at the hyphen in historical-political education (Rüsen, 1996), the conjunction between both domains should not be an equation but a productive sphere of tension. While political maturity tends to favor a – at least potentially existing – capacity to act, historical literacy enables maturity understood as finding a voice in terms of applying one's own mind and reasoning towards a reflexive historical understanding.

Linking these perspectives allows to extend the concept of agency, focusing on the independent examination of historical and political narratives (cf. KMK, 2014) and the ability to take part in their constant and contested rewriting.



The inscription back reads (translated): „Files covering anti-Jewish activities are to be destroyed. 16.02.1945  
(c) Stih & Schnock, Berlin / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn / ARS, NYC

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Online resources were last checked on 12.09.2017.

#### Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> While the lessons focused on Jewish people, researchers counting the victims of the NS System name an additional 11 million, including Soviet civilian deaths up to 17 million people (bpb 2017, Megargee 2009/2012, USHMM 2017, Yad Vashem 2017, cf. Lichtblau 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Vocational schools in Germany provide secondary and post-secondary education to more than 100.000 students (Statistisches Bundesamt 2017) compared to about 340.000 students in general schools from elementary to secondary level. Vocational schools teach students for non-academic professions, offering a dual training between company-based and school-based learning episodes. In dual training, students divide their time, e.g. being two days a week at school and three days at the company. Degrees are given out jointly by school and employers'

associations such as the chamber of crafts. Vocational schools comprise also full-time-schooling-opportunities, allowing students to graduate at several educational levels up to DQR/ EQR 6. Typically, the classes show a wide diversity of students, including variations in terms of gender, religion and residential status as well as entry school degrees, language proficiency, prior knowledge, cognitive skills and historical as well as political literacy levels.

<sup>3</sup> In this text historical and political literacy are employed as describing the capacity to understand, de-construct, analyze and critically reflect historical and contemporary actors, constellations and narratives (c.f. Bochel 2009 covering some aspects of the term political literacy, Körber 2015, also referring to historical consciousness and competencies, Seixas 2015 discussing historical thinking).

<sup>4</sup> The expression „civic education“ will be used from now on, as it seems the most common translation for „Politische Bildung and so might cover best the main lines taught under the German designation „Politikunterricht“ and seems the most translatable term - as a supporting notion cf. the translation of the federal institute „Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung“ as „Federal Agency for Civic Education“. Still, „citizenship education“ may describe more adequately the inherent critical core „Politische Bildung“ carries (Arthus/ Davies 2008), even political education may be an adequate term (Balzter et al. 2017) – which is why the term political literacy instead of civic literacy is used here.

<sup>5</sup> Even though correlations between literacy and competency models may be rather fruitfully discussed (e.g. Weber 2010), I will not proceed to do so in this article. Instead, I will be using literacy in the broad meaning of critical, reflexive understanding, including the critical use of domain-specific tools and critical discernment of narratives. A rather similar definition could be determined for competency. Still, the term tends to be used in educational policy to describe skills rather than literacy, this not being the term's fault, but to avoid this connotation I opted for literacy for the time being. In addition, I'll bypass debates on core concepts and curricula in this article, instead using literacy attached to a constructivist paradigm of teaching and learning as in a specific understanding of the German term „Bildung“, comprising the transformative potential of education (e.g. Koller 2012).

<sup>6</sup> To clarify the term didactics, bridging the gap between German-speaking and Anglo-Saxon educational traditions seems challenging. As Hamilton (1999: 135) noted some years earlier: „didactics has a negative valuation in the Anglo-American mind. It denotes formalist educational practices that combine 'dogma' with 'dullness'“. Drawing on the German-language tradition while writing this text, however, the term didactics as employed in this article should be understood as describing the process of reflecting on meaningful settings for learning and teaching. The basic didactical approach depicted is leaning towards a constructivist framework and implies careful choices of topics and teaching strategies beyond instruction, focusing on the active learner.

<sup>7</sup> National Socialism will be shortened to NS throughout the article.

<sup>8</sup> Comparatively less attention was devoted to forms of resistance and rescue. Regrettably, this couldn't be covered throughout the lessons, as it could have provided a broader view into different decisions, behavior, choices, and options observed by historians (cf. Facing History 2017) and added more depth to the analysis of the NS maintenance.

<sup>9</sup> As the sequence took place in real life schooling, being part of the everyday working life, options for data collection and even more data release were extremely limited. School boards and other educational authorities tend to be notoriously reluctant to authorize research in class, due to multiple data protection regulations. Hence the students' oral, written and artistic expressions at the end of the sequence are not to be published.