Memories, histories and narratives

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Berteke Waaldijk and Andrea Pető

Introduction

This working group works on the elaboration of the educational tool of foremother-research by groups of students in women's studies curricula. It can be seen as a continuation and expansion of work done in ATHENA I, when panel 1b2 advised that we elaborate forms of international co-teaching that would explicitly address differences among women. Reflection about the lives of individual foremothers, who may be biologically or metaphorically related to the students, provides an excellent teaching tool. It provides diverse groups the opportunity to discuss the core issues of writing women's history: the distinction between public and private lives, historiographical issues, and experiential differences that may be defined nationally, religiously, ethnically, or in terms of class. Women's studies programmes have a long tradition of teaching with the aid of personal narratives, and this was one of the reasons the 'Foremother Assignment' was introduced in several NOISE summer schools. Our experiment with the format in 1999 (Waaldijk, Pető, 2003) led to the organisation of Panel 1b4 in the Framework of ATHENA II, which incorporated Panel 1b3 as well, because of the similarity of the methodological approach.

The project aims to provide material for, digital support to and scholarly reflection on the possibilities of using the format of writing about 'foremothers' in different Women and Gender Studies curricula. Writing and talking about them in the context of European and world history is an outstanding educational tool. It can be most effectively used and improved in situations where students from different national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds learn together.

As an element in international programs, the assignment to search, find, share and reflect on information about women from the students' social, intellectual, political and personal past has a long and impressive tradition in the teaching of women's studies. Foremothers can be female family members of an earlier generation, professional predecessors or inspiring examples or political heroines. One of the aims of activity 1b4 is to train teachers in the use of this format. Thus, this project combines experiences with this feminist pedagogic tradition with the new possibilities of international and digitally supported learning and teaching.

Plans

The members of the working group are working for three results. We start with several pilot studies that describe and analyse the ways teaching women's history in different contexts makes use of foremother assignments. In this way, we will document past achievements in feminist teaching. Secondly, we will develop a teaching module that contains enough material, support and suggestions for assignments, reading material and ICT-tools to allow teachers in different contexts to teach about women's histories and memories. This teaching module will be tested and evaluated. Thirdly, the material thus collected and tested will be brought together in a permanent collection (possibly a book) that will be a useful tool for teachers in national and in international women's studies curricula. Special attention will be paid to the integration into different forms of teaching (bachelor and master programs, as well as community-teaching programs).

We want to start our work using existing modules of teaching as a point of departure. We are circulating existing modules and descriptions of teaching making promising use of ICT in teaching. We are collecting comments and descriptions of other teaching practices.

Evaluating Experiments

Beginning in 1993, the foremother assignment has been incorporated in several NOISE summer schools. The most recent experiment was undertaken in Antwerpen in the 2003 NOISE summer school. Here, students produced a collection of websites and as well as a more tangible exposition that visualised the histories and memories of their foremothers. Other experiments have been done. Berteke Waaldijk has been using foremother assignments in the Women's Studies program at Utrecht University since 1988. This has resulted in over 100 foremother stories of Dutch Women's Studies students. Andrea Petö is teaching a version of the assignment at the Central European University Budapest, Department of Gender Studies in the winter term of 2004. Technical conditions allowed for the course to be taught in a multimedia computer lab, so the students could use the Internet, chat rooms, and their PCs to complete the assignment. This was in concordance with the panel's aim to encourage tandem teaching in the framework of cooperation and enable Europe-wide comparisons.

Developing a Teaching Module

The participants in activity 1b4 will collect and develop material that can be used in different contexts to teach about foremothers. The wide range of national backgrounds will provide the group with expertise about the ways in which the assignment may be conceived of in different national educational traditions. When we claim that considering the histories of foremothers is a good starting point for discussing differences among women, it is clear that some of these differences may be benign and inspiring, while others will touch the most painful parts of the European past. How do we choose to address prosecution, racism and violence without losing

sight of solidarity, love, and friendship? The group hopes to develop sophisticated means and forms to address these educational challenges.

The final delivery of the panel will consist of a book with the proposed title: *Teaching with Memories*, which will include descriptions of several modules and short articles on good practice, as well as articles about research on women's memory and reflections on connecting research on women's memory with teaching in different educational contexts. We plan to edit a digital bibliography and other teaching resources.

Obligations

The members of Panel 1b4 are expected to comment on existing modules of teaching, to write about their own classroom experiences of teaching with women's memories, if any, either in pilots or in regular teaching, to contribute to the bibliography, and to write a chapter for the book.

Cooperation with other ATHENA Groups

We are hoping to cooperate with the ICT Group, not only to disseminate the results of the work, but also to gain insight into ways to use ICT in the teaching process. Also, the different formats of the foremother modules can be integrated in the work of the panel working on the European Women's Studies Curriculum.

References

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