

Coping with the Concept of 'Gender' – Reflections from the Perspective of Historical Didactics

Contemporary German discussion on historical didactics acknowledges that women's history should be an integral part in the teaching of history and many curricula and schoolbooks reflect this, as does practice. Teaching has seemingly followed a consensus that silently came into being. In keeping with the system developed e.g. by Bodo von Borries, the dominant mode of teaching and portraying issues concerning women's history can be described as additive. In general, such topics supplement an account of history that one can categorise as 'general' in so far as it does not explicitly incorporate the category of 'gender'.²³ With regard to the additive mode, two types can be identified: Firstly, references are made to particular women, who are seen as verifying the fact that women too (and not only men) are capable of achieving something that was noteworthy or extraordinary. Examples are often used from the spheres of science, the arts or politics (this includes political protest and resistance). In this case, the prevailing framework of historiography is that of biography and exemplary presentation connected with the pattern of 'advanced' civilisation. Secondly, topics are considered in teaching, which deal with various historical circumstances that women have lived through. In this case, women's history is often treated within a structure that makes room for discourse on social history and the history of people's mentalities through the ages, whereby this is all seen often as part of 'popular' history ('Alltagsgeschichte'). Apart from these two conceptionally heterogeneous forms, there are topics that investigate the history of the women's movement as an element in 'general' political history.

That consensus that has been achieved via experience is worth reflecting on for a number of reasons. One of them is e.g. the additive mode of the presentation itself. If aspects of women's history are treated as part of 'general' history, and this often in a quite unsystematical way, they tend to lead to oppositions such as 'general vs. female' and (implicitly), 'male vs. the other'. This is similar to a method which the women's movement has recognised and criticised as an ideological instrument, which has legitimised the exclusion of women in many areas of society. The additive mode categorises women's history as a supplementary or special topic in the 'mental map' of pupils' historical consciousness.

ness, comparable with regional or cultural 'projects' that may come up within history lessons.

Not all areas research are of use to history education. As is to be expected, this is especially the case with the following two examples. Feminist historiography that makes the universal conflict between matriarchy and patriarchy all-important and feminist epistemology that views the levels of realisation and possibilities of the two sexes as fundamentally opposing one another. The 'general' prevails in guidelines, textbooks and practice. This is the case in both in theory and in the way history is conceptualised but there is increasing effort to satisfy contemporary demands for equal rights on what is taught in the classroom.

The contribution presents results of analysis on coping with 'gender' and women's history with historical didactics in mind. They concern this area of historical research and education as it is often presented in guidelines, textbooks and notes for practice (1). The German 'Historikerinnen-Debate' is also discussed as it serves as a valuable example when looking at historical didactic questions (2). Finally, the conclusions that are of use to the sphere of historical pedagogy are set out (3). One of the most important of them concerns the competency of historical analysis and evaluation.

The requirements of historical thought and historical tuition, which aim to encourage reflective historical thought in the pupil are extremely high. This is so not only because the interaction of three temporal aspects have to be taken into consideration - analysing the past, present consciousness and future expectation. Moreover, historical circumstance and content also include always a high level of complexity. As has been clearly illustrated, women's history must not progress by attempting to reduce the complexities it contains, not least due to the fact that it has to differentiate the issues of biology and society contained in the terms 'male' and 'female'. When dealing with women's issues, it would further seem necessary to continuously talk about what it means to categorise people from the past by using 'gender' as a criterion and the implications that both generalising about each sex and neglecting other social categories have. Pupils should learn to question methodically if what they are talking about applies only to women, equally to all women in the population they are talking about, whether it applies to (particular?) women or to some women in a particular manner. It should become natural for them to analyse the differences between men and women and to correlate the category of 'gender' to broader historical and social categories. This will result in their getting a feel for the fact that gender-specific differences have not a independent social standing within a system, or that ideologies on gender are important as indicators of and factors in social history but that they are not to be confused with social reality. Thus, scholars will have become familiar with women's history both on a theoretical level and on one that has trained their historical competence. Over and above this, one

would hope that pupils will have acquired a skill that can help them to confront opinions that discriminate on the basis of gender and actions against women. Finally, as individuals, schoolchildren would perhaps be to find subjectively authentic and well-reflected personal standpoints within the confusing debate on gender and sex, which transcend conventional and therefore fragile opinions.

References

¹The category of ‚sex‘ defines the biologically given difference, the category of ‚gender‘ the historically changeable cultural interpretations of this difference.

See also: Susanne Popp, Der schwierige Umgang mit der Kategorie „gender“ – Geschichtsdi-
daktische Reflexionen zu einer „universalen“ Kategorie des Geschichtsunterrichts, p. 293 –
324.