

## OTHER CONTRIBUTIONS

### Collective Memory-Work for Teacher Training

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#### Glossary

This text has been translated from German.  
Terms used in the English version:

Student: the prospective teachers who attend teacher training courses at Vienna University.

Pupil: children/teenagers attending secondary school.

Collective: to the working groups formed by students during the course on Collective Memory-Work.

Groups or working groups: other groups formed by students for tasks outside the range of the actual Collective Memory-Work application.

Memory-scene or story (stories): texts written by the students about a remembered experience (scene, situation) as a part of the course.

#### Learning Through Collective Memory-Work as a Part of Teacher Training

*“I really appreciated the fact that we discussed many topics in this seminar that aren’t normally subject to discussion in our university courses (such as disruptions during class or meetings with parents), even*

*though these are important and relevant topics for the teaching profession.” (Daniela)*

*“I felt the seminar was interesting and enriching particularly because the students didn’t have to engage with prescribed topics. Instead they could choose the topics they found the most interesting.” (Viktoria)*

*“Working in the team, I gained viewpoints and insights that would not have come to me if I had engaged with the topic on my own. In this respect the method of Collective Memory-Work pointed to many new possible courses of action that I look forward to employing in practice as a teacher.” (Jakob)*

*“Had I been on my own I could not have written the self-reflection at the end. The working group was a help and my colleagues motivated, supported and led me to the concluding piece of work. I would like to thank them most sincerely. I have never been a part of such a*

*pleasant, amicable and friendly working group, this is something I can appreciate after 13 years at various universities.” (Olga)*

These quotes were written by students at the end of the summer term 2019 as a part of the following task: “Self-reflection on the personal learning in the course.” It’s gratifying to read such passages, they offer me feedback about what was important to students, how they feel they have gained self-awareness, and also to what extent they have understood and reflected the methodical and didactic concept of the course.

The title of my course is “Collective Memory-Work on Learning at School.” The course centres on students’ own learning experiences. Here, “learning” is topically reflected as well as experienced as a process during the course. In my experience Collective Memory-Work is a method that makes self-determined and enjoyable learning possible in this context.

My own role as lecturer is that of a guide and facilitator. I create a clear framework and provide a reliable structure, which includes a methodological orientation and guidance for the collectives. The students determine the topical direction of their collective work, and the organisation of the work process themselves.

My students are prospective teachers. The topics they choose are supposed to be of interest to them as well as relevant for their future practise as teachers in school contexts. The aim is always for students to develop increased capacities to act in their chosen topical field.

By way of experiencing self-determined learning the students are meant

to gain new insights and ideas on how to methodically structure learning processes for their pupils as teachers in school. Reflecting on the methods students experienced and possible applications in their future practice are therefore essential elements of the course. I am convinced those who have experienced self-determined learning themselves are more likely to have the will and ability to offer this form of learning to their own pupils, as far as this is possible in a school environment.

### **My Experiences of Using Collective Memory-Work**

I discovered Collective Memory-Work 35 years ago as a student myself: Frigga Haug’s book “Female Sexualization” (Haug, 1983, 1987) inspired my dissertation (Witt, 1985) and encouraged me to experiment with the method in a study-group. In the group we were subjects and objects of our own research, researchers and researched at once (Witt, 1985). Together we wanted to gain a better understanding of our own societalisation as women. What had we experienced, perceived, given meaning to? And how did we fit it into the narratives of our lives? We produced self-generated memory-scenes and then analysed the language we had used which provided valuable insights into the dominant culture and ideologies that were reproduced in our texts.

Shortly afterwards I started my first teaching job in the field of women’s studies at the University of Vienna’s Department of Education, at the same time as my colleague Marion Breiter. We immediately decided to combine our courses and from then on we held our lectures together. This productive and creative collaboration was

also unusual in this form in university teaching. As lecturers we were able to demonstrate our non-hierarchical and mutually supportive team-work for the benefit of our students.

Over a period of 20 years Marion Breiter and I worked with (at the time exclusively) female students using Collective Memory-Work on the topics of “mother images,” “psychosexual socialisation” and “fear of success” (Breiter & Witt-Löw, 1991a, 1991b). We understood our courses to be empowering for the students, but also for ourselves. Together we wanted to conduct exciting and inspiring research on topics that were relevant to the young women and develop our thoughts in a university environment that was male dominated in terms of teaching staff as well as topics and content. Our aim for the students was always to increase their capacities to act.

The course was very popular with students. In 2001 we received an award for innovative teaching from Vienna University for our course concept. Nevertheless with the focus on women’s studies we remained at the margins in the Department of Education. Our course was an elective subject. As external lecturers we were not integrated in the Department. For years we held our course in the rooms of a women’s advice centre outside of the university.

Ten years ago we moved to the Centre for Teacher Education at Vienna University, being invited by Ilse Schrittmesser, Professor of School Research and Teacher Education who had participated in one of my seminars in professional teacher training where we used Collective Memory-Work to analyse school experiences. Today the course

“Collective Memory-Work on Learning at School” is part of the curriculum of teacher training. In recent years it was grouped into various topical sections such as “educational professionalism,” “educating and counselling” or “research methods.” Our approach remained the same throughout: starting with their own “school stories” the students delve into an educational topic. The aim is for the students to increase their capacity to act as future teachers and work out the possibilities to act within the institutional space of school.

By now my colleague Marion Breiter is retired and I am teaching the course on my own. In the following passages I refer to “we” when discussing the concept we developed together and our shared experiences.

### **Why Use Collective Memory-Work For Teacher Training?**

Students who graduate from the Centre for Teacher Training at Vienna University are qualified to work as teachers in secondary schools, which children attend from the fifth year of schooling onwards. Starting at the age of six all children in Austria attend primary school for four years. This school type is the same for all children. In years five to eight (Secondary 1) a stratification in two school types takes place: the “Neue Mittelschule” (NMS, New Middle School), and the “Allgemeine Höhere Schule” (AHS, General High School). The NMS ends with year eight. The AHS covers an additional four or five years of schooling and ends with a final certification that qualifies pupils to begin studying at the university. There is an alternative route to “Matura” also via Higher Vocational

Schools with a specific focus on particular fields of work (technical, business etc.).

Teacher training has been restructured only a few years ago. It now consists of a four year bachelor program; with the option to add a two year Masters program. Students pick two subjects as their prospective main teaching subjects. In their studies they gain a scientific knowledge of their chosen subjects and they are taught how to use subject specific didactics. In addition, the curriculum includes basics of educational science and empirical educational studies. However, these two areas are allocated far less time in the overall course framework. My course is part of the basics of educational science.

All students follow the same syllabus, irrespective of whether they will later teach at NMS or AHS. Yet, school environments at NMS and AHS are quite different. In some NMS, particularly in urban areas, a high percentage of students have a different mother tongue from German. Here the interpersonal and social competencies of teachers are especially important, in addition to a sound knowledge of their subject area.

Students in higher semesters who already work as teachers (often part-time in NMS) often report that they do not feel adequately prepared for the extended spectrum of social and interpersonal demands of their professional role.

Students in my course come from all different subject areas. Many chose to attend the course because it is organised in form of weekend seminars, which are easier to fit into their own time-tables. In recent years many participants in the course have already begun teaching at schools, particularly those in the Masters program.

Most of them are unfamiliar with Collective Memory-Work. Thus it is always important to explain why we do what we do, and how the various steps are connected with the aims of the course. The students want to be prepared for everyday practice in schools, “lofty theory” or anything that is not sufficiently related to school practice is met with resistance. This is where Collective Memory-Work comes into play.

Memory-Work helps us understand what we know and how we come to know it. Our views on school are influenced by our own experiences as pupils. Based on our experiences as pupils we know how schools are organised, what mechanisms of power are at work—but for the most part this is not reflected upon, everyday knowledge. Memory-Work brings students’ taken for granted ideas about school into focus, making their perception of school more conscious, reflective and thus also open for change. What is invisible comes to the fore, the familiar becomes strange—and students develop an openness for new interpretations.

All students have extensive experience in school contexts regarding relationships between teachers and pupils, institutional demands and norms, and the complex dynamics amongst pupils. Therefore the students in our course all write a “story” on the topic “Learning at School” from their memory, a scene that they themselves have experienced.

Each of the collectives that are formed by students in the course agrees on a specific aspect of the topic as a common theme for their stories, e.g., “motivation,” “injustice” or “fear of exams.”

Based on this common theme students write stories recounting a significant

memory. Particularly young teachers at NMS who are doing their Masters degree parallel to their teaching practice often write stories from their everyday experience in the schools, relating to topics like “disturbing lessons,” “helplessness” or “dealing with difficult pupils.”

The stories provide the material for a detailed analysis in the collectives. The steps for analysis follow the pattern described by Frigga Haug (1983, 1999). The collectives pick their topics and organise the research process. New questions arise, based on the stories and the themes under discussion e.g., about exam cultures, encouragement or bullying—many of these are topics that require interpersonal and social competence of teachers. Each collective extends their engagement with the common theme of their stories by drawing on educational theory and the results of educational research, in order to identify new possibilities for acting and intervening. Insights from these investigations are supposed to enrich the students’ (future) work as teachers. They are also meant to prevent these (future) teachers’ work at schools from being determined by their own unreflective experiences of school.

The collective plays an important role in working with students’ personal stories. Everyone is simultaneously a researcher and research subject, everyone makes a personal contribution with their stories. Not only do the collectives have to agree on a shared topic and a plan for their work, they also need to develop a common style of work. Students need to cooperate in an empathetic way, while recognizing that the personal memories are a construct and taking the memories as a starting point for new insights. Moreover, students are

required to produce tangible results in form of a joint presentation and a seminar paper. This addresses another point in the curriculum, namely the “social competency and understanding professionalism (Professionalitätsverständnis).” In their collectives the students take care of their social relationships and they experience a cooperative working format. Thus they acquire insights into dynamics in learning groups which they can transfer as a social competency into their future practice as teachers to foster group work. We encourage the students to continue the mostly positive experiences with the cooperative working format also in their further studies.

### **Practical Application of Collective Memory-Work in the Training Course**

The title of the course is “Collective Memory-Work on Learning at School.”

In the course the students are expected to: get to know the method of Collective Memory-Work in a practical application; extend the topic that emerges from their memory-scenes by independently researching relevant scientific literature; discuss and specify how the insights from their analysis of the memory-scenes, together with the suggestions from literature in educational science can be applied in their (future) practice as teachers.

The seminar structure and methods are clarified for students. We also discuss whether the methods experienced in the seminar can be transferred into lesson structuring at school, and if so how best to do this. In the remainder of this subsection I give a detailed account of the concept of the course as it was developed by Marion

Breiter and myself, and of its implementation.

The course starts with a short **introductory talk**, mainly to inform about the aims and formal requirements. For the subsequent course structure it is important to announce that students will be expected to write a story about a personal memory of a school experience at the first weekend seminar. Usually this announcement creates a certain tension for the students, but at the same time it triggers processes of remembering that are important as preparation for the following steps.

Shortly afterwards the **first weekend seminar** is scheduled. The aim for these two days is threefold; a) every participant should write a memory-scene, b) students should form functioning working groups, i.e., the “collectives” of the method, and c) students come to understand Collective Memory-Work well enough to allow the collectives to work independently on analysing their own stories.

In order for students to successfully establish collectives we offer diverse low-threshold interactive activities and tasks. We begin with a variation of “Bingo” as an ice-breaker to bring students into contact with each other. All students receive a sheet with boxes in which there are written some statements, like “I am looking for the colleague...who travelled the furthest to come here,” or...”who has already heard of Collective Memory-Work.” Everyone tries to find the respective person in the room who matches this description. Then they insert the name of the person in the respective box. Each name can only be inserted once. Whoever has filled all boxes first, calls out, “Bingo!” and reads out loud who they have found matching the different statements. The game also contains

questions that lead into the topic of the course. Many students mention this game in their seminar reflections after the course and report that it created an atmosphere of togetherness very fast, and could be useful for teaching at schools in the future.

The physical space in the room is structured by a circle of chairs. During the seminar we use the circle frequently for feedback and reflection rounds.

We first engage with the topic by setting a task for small groups of students. Groups of five are asked to make a poster describing “What makes a good teacher?” Here students’ prior knowledge is collected. This is the first step in our application of Collective Memory-Work. The students usually list subject specific knowledge and social competences, and in their entirety the descriptions on the posters always add up to an extremely ambitious professional profile. It reminds us of the descriptions of a “good mother” in our earlier courses in women’s studies. In those courses we had asked students, for the attributes of a “good mother” and we received unrealistic ideal images. Because it is so unattainable, the image of the “good mother,” wrapped into educational and psychological theories and ideologies, contributes to mothers’ feelings of inadequacy and to the disciplining of women in everyday life. Similar to the concept of the “good enough mother”—introduced in 1953 by the British paediatrician and psycho-analyst Donald Winnicott, which describes a mother who is essentially loving and responsible, and takes sufficiently care of the needs of babies, however inevitably does not fulfil all wishes of the child: as long as a baby feels generally sure to be loved the ensuing frustrations are in fact helpful and

necessary for the development of children—we believe it is important to reassure the prospective teachers in our course that there is also the “good enough teacher.” And we point to essential features of such “good enough teachers,” i.e., the establishment of a caring relationship to pupils, the ability to reflect, to develop personally and professionally and continue learning. We present results of John Hattie’s evidence-based research on “visible learning” (2009) that relates to our course.

We introduce the **method of Collective Memory-Work** in a Keynote lecture on the context of its development from within the feminist-socialist movement, and with an explanation of key terminology and concepts, e.g., “memory as a construction,” “detecting patterns of perception and action,” and “increased capacity to act”—always supported by examples from earlier courses. Then we introduce the analytic steps we will use to work with the texts of the memory-scenes and we apply them to a model story as an example.

This **model story** was written many years ago by a student on the topic of “Physical Changes.” It is about a girl realising while attending a concert how her changed breasts are suddenly visible for others. Feelings of embarrassment, the relationship to her mother and a lot of emotions are part of the story. We picked this story for an exemplary analysis because it allows us to explain all the analytical steps quite well. Moreover, as the story is not set in the context of school we can avoid setting students up for a particular topical orientation when they are writing their own stories.

We read the model story out loud. Then we collect **first reactions** by asking students what thoughts and feelings the story inspires. For some the story points towards well known feelings of shame, others find it hard to understand, for some the story is too intimate, some feel angry with the aunt or the mother described in the story. This first step already demonstrates the diversity of prior experiences, for example the different experiences of male and female students. In the students’ reactions there are however also clues towards the self-construction of the author that triggers these emotions in the reader (listener).

Next the students try out each of the **analytic steps** in small groups: structure of the story; detecting emotions, actions and motivations of the protagonists in the story; finding white spots, breaks, contradictions, clichés in the text; describing the self-construction of the author.

The groups present their results, we elaborate if necessary. The part of the analysis concerning emotions, actions and motivations of the protagonists becomes an especially important field of learning—often interpretations sneak in instead of a consistent reference to the text of the story.

Together we then identify **patterns**, e.g., the complete shift of motivation as a result of experiencing (self-inflicted) body shame: In the story from the moment of leaving the coat at the cloakroom the concert is no longer important, the protagonist’s sole interest is to hide her breasts. Or the pattern that body shame renders the protagonist speechless. The pattern that despite experiencing inner emotional turmoil the protagonist’s observable behaviour remains within the norm. Or the pattern that the emotions that

restrict the protagonist's ability to act culminate in her anger towards her mother—and thus the protagonist's capacity to act is reinstated.

The last step in working with the stories is **transferring our insights to everyday life in schools**. What does the story have to do with the role of teachers? We discuss body shame as an obstacle to learning, consider the visibility or invisibility of pupils' emotions that affect their ability to learn, and talk about toilets as a place of refuge in school contexts.

During these discussions the students discover the multifaceted aspects of such a short story, and are inspired to think more deeply about it.

At the end of the first day of the weekend seminar students form collectives: between three and five students come together and discuss a topic for their memory-scenes. In most cases forming collectives proves to be surprisingly uncomplicated. Throughout the day the students already had ample opportunity to get to know each other. Usually most of them already have one or a few more episodes in mind which they see fit to write as a memory-scene.

The **memory-scenes** are due the next day. We estimate two hours working time to complete the writing. At the end of day one there is great excitement: How will one's own story work out? Will I be able to do it until tomorrow?

We reassure students, so far it always worked out fine, students always submitted memory-scenes on time. Before parting we provide advice on the writing: The memory-scene should describe a situation that the students themselves experienced. Yet, the text is written in third person singular (s/he) to introduce a distancing

effect. The scene should be significant for the author, but it should not be so pressing as to impede self-distancing. For writing it is helpful to try and re-actualise the remembered situation sensually—the texts often start with sentences like “It was a nice day in spring,” or with the description of the smell of a classroom.

The second day starts with a reflection on the writing process. Before working with the actual texts we establish **rules for working in the collectives**: It is not a therapy group. We analyse the texts, not the person. Members of the group take care of each other (“Stop-Rule,” “Disruptions gain priority”). Working in the collective requires mutual trust. This is fostered by the fact that everyone is in the same situation, everyone brings in a personal story for collective analysis. Agreeing on confidentiality is another requirement, the personal stories are not to be discussed outside the context of the collective and are not to be passed on to third parties. Minutes will be taken by a member of the collective for each of their sessions. Digressions, topical excursions can be a useful part of the research process.

Then the collectives start their work by reading out their own stories to one another. As a first step in working with the texts they note their initial reactions. During this time we, the lecturers, read through all stories so as to determine their suitability for collective analysis. Normally there is no need to re-write a story, but in rare cases this is an option, too.

The collectives organise their schedule for the subsequent working process, and each collective arranges a date for a supervision session with us lecturers. Over the next three months the collectives work independently with their texts. If

questions arise they can contact us at all times.

During the **supervision session**, which we hold approximately half-way through the semester, we get an impression of the work in progress. We provide feedback on the first text analyses which are sent to us prior to the session by e-mail. We give further input on the stories, we engage with questions and we support the collective in finding a special topical focus that is connected to the stories and is of interest for the students. This is the second task for the collective after working with their memory-scenes: The students are required to engage theoretically with selected academic literature on their topic, and relate back to possibilities of transfer/s into concrete teaching practice.

In the past, students often chose topics such as “arrangements in exam situations,” “how to deal with bullying,” “closeness and distance” or “how to deal with cheating.”

During the **second weekend seminar** at the end of the semester the collectives present their results. Here stories are read out, too, but without identifying authors. In this way the richness of the stories becomes evident for everyone. Presentations are supposed to be 50 minutes long (similar to standard school lessons). For the presentations we suggest that the collectives attend to methodical and topical aspects, and that they look for a lively format in addressing their fellow students. This has a very positive effect: time and again we are surprised by the creativity and diversity of the presentations. An example is of a mobbing situation presented as a role play including alternative solutions, or exercises for increasing the volume of your voice (for the topic: noise in the

classroom). After each presentation the collectives get feedback from us lecturers. This happens away from the other students in a separate room.

At the end of the course we reflect on the following together: experiences with the method of Collective Memory-Work, and what elements thereof are transferable into one’s own teaching practice; general experiences with the course, and which of the methods applied in it can be used in one’s own teaching practice; what are individual learning results?

The time available for reflection during the course is limited. The students produce a written reflection of their own learning in the course as an assignment. This is the only assignment that is produced individually.

The collectives hand in the results of their work with the memory-scenes, and the theoretical engagement with their special topical focus. Together with the presentation they are the material that is considered for assessment. We mark the members of the collectives jointly. The marking scheme has been introduced already during the first weekend seminar.

### **Insights and Learning From Using Collective Memory-Work for Teacher Training**

In our experience the method has great potential. It can facilitate learning processes through independent thinking and collective research, through the joy of gaining new insights and through following one’s interests.

For these learning processes to take place in a course, it needs a **well-structured framework**. The structure of our course is based on the weekend seminars and the supervision session. The

students should know at all times why we do what we do and how this relates to the overall context of the course.

The steps in the analysis of the texts are an additional structural element for our course: The collectives can start immediately with their text-analyses, and if the students are diverted into an exciting new direction in their discussions they can always revert back to the default analysis at any point. Some collectives delve deep into analysis, others remain more on a surface level and concentrate on working more intensively with the academic literature. Some collectives meet regularly, others communicate electronically. All collectives develop their own dynamic during their joint work process. We support this autonomy and the resulting diversity. However we do provide topical feedback and input, as well as advice on the collective work process during the supervision sessions.

The way the members of the collective interact with each other, and the way they engage with the personal stories of their co-researchers is important for us. We model a respectful and appreciative interpersonal conduct for our students. We encourage cooperation and agree on rules for working together. Usually students report back how well their collective work went for them. Only rarely does a student leave the course and the collective work prior to completion—and if they do they inform the collective and us lecturers of their reasons.

Our students can benefit from these positive experiences in the collective work because as future teachers they, too, will organise group work for their pupils. We put a strong focus on discussing how the

experiences in the course can be transferred to teaching practice in schools.

We hold that the collective **reflection of personal experiences** in the school system is particularly important for prospective, and newly qualified teachers. By way of comparison between the different stories students can see their commonalities but also differences more clearly. This points to certain features of the school system, but also to conditions and reasons for differences. An example is of stories on “cheating” written from the perspective of Austrian pupils who describe the fundamental normality of cheating; they depict the pride of developing creative cheating methods, recount acts of resistance, but describe also anxiety about being found out, and fear of the teacher’s reaction. Written from the perspective of Austrian teachers the cheating stories describe the dilemma of administering the required consequences in cases where cheating is detected, and considering the individual situation of the respective pupil who has been caught—there is obviously a great variety in possible reactions here.

Stories written by students who come from other school systems provide different points of view: A student from Greece for instance recounts his anger with his fellow pupils who were cheating and thus avoided studying for the exam. In the Austrian stories the effects of cheating on fellow pupils are white spots, they are rarely mentioned at all, and if so solidarity with the cheaters is simply assumed. By reflecting on these different experiences together, the image of school forged by personal experience becomes more varied and norms that were not questioned become clearer.

During the course the students experience how the desire for theoretical engagement grows out of the personal experience once it is put to scrutiny via their stories. And in turn, how the theories are brought back to connect with the personal stories and provide suggestions for possibilities to act. Thus educational scientific knowledge is no longer abstract and lofty, a criticism students have often voiced in the preliminary discussions of our course. It is seen as relevant and enriching instead.

As mentioned above, the **students' reflections** on their personal learning is a part of the course assignments. We understand these reflections as feedback on what was important for students and in what areas they think they have learned something new. So far we have not done a systematic evaluation of the reflections, but students often mentioned the following: interesting topics that are chosen by the students in the collectives; new thoughts that are brought up in the presentations of the other collectives and the ensuing discussions; surprise at the range of insights as a result of working with the memory-scenes; self-organised work in the collectives that mostly works out surprisingly well; respectful interaction between students and the relaxed learning in the plenary meetings; good mentoring by us as course leaders.

### **Challenges and Fields of Tension**

In my position as facilitator of learning processes I can identify fields of tension that relate specifically to the use of Collective Memory-Work within a university setting.

**a) Institutionally prescribed assessment runs counter to the**

### **emancipatory, collective and self-organised practice of Collective Memory-Work**

Our course is part of the curriculum for prospective teachers. Hence the institutional requirements are mandatory. For the students this includes the procedures of registration, the obligatory attendance and fulfilling of all tasks for the successful completion of the course. As lecturers we are obliged to set targets and provide a transparent marking scheme. At the end of the course these and other features are regularly evaluated by students in form of a standardised electronic survey. The results of this survey are examined centrally in the university.

This system of marking and reciprocal assessment is contradictory to the openness of Collective Memory-Work, an openness that concerns both process and results.

The assessment framework can further create a field of tension within the collectives if the contributions of individual students to the shared work are seen as not equally balanced. In our course we give collective marks for the collective work, hence there is no distinction between individual contributions. On the other hand the overall success in their study program is measured individually. Some students need high marks for continued financial support through scholarships, an excellent result of the collective is particularly important to them.

I reduce the dilemma of marking by limiting the marking range as long as all formal and topical requirements are met by the students.

**b) Group dynamics of working in a collective—what about students who did not find a group?**

Students who come to my course know in advance that they are going to be part of a collective that will work together over the entire duration of the semester. As described above I take care on the first day of the first weekend seminar to include a variety of interactive activities and small group tasks so that the students get to know each other and find an initial orientation of who they might want to join in the collective later. Many students quickly form first collectives and are happy to work together. However, there are always some students who are reluctant, waiting and overburdened with the task to actively look for a collective to join. The challenge in this situation is for me as facilitator, to make sure that these students don't feel left behind, and that collectives that have found each other already are open to re-constitute so that eventually all students find their place in one of the collectives. Sometimes this can lead to collectives having to deal with a diversity that the initial members did not envisage. It is helpful that the first task then is to agree on a shared topic. It either fosters the togetherness of the collective, or also for someone who feels uncomfortable with the other members it offers a simple way out (and into another collective). It seems it is easier to leave a collective because one doesn't agree with a topic rather than referring to interpersonal problems.

The writing of the stories and their reading out to each other on the second day quickly leads to an intimate connection amongst the members of the collective. In the supervision session I can see, whether the collectives have bonded well. In rare cases I offer students the opportunity to hand in the theoretical part of the assignment in form of individually named

contributions, the analysis of the stories with Collective Memory-Work however is always a joint result.

**c) Collective Memory-Work is increasingly done in form of virtual communication—elements of direct verbal communication get lost**

The students have a tightly organised individual time-table to fulfil all requirements of their studies. Many of them work part-time. That makes scheduling within the collectives a real challenge. Furthermore the generation of young students is very much accustomed to communication via social media. More and more I realise that collectives work with the memory-scenes by Whatsapp, reacting to each other in turns, but no longer in direct communication. As a facilitator of learning processes who leaves it up to the collectives themselves to organise their working process I can only observe this development. I regret the loss of spontaneous inspiring discussion that goes along with it. Therefore I have introduced a second supervision session in a bid to intensify direct communication amongst students and with myself.

**The Context: School and What the Stories Tell Us About It**

Collective Memory-Work is not consciousness raising, even if it may result in many individual insights, and discussions take place about individual possibilities to act. We point this out in the course. Collective Memory-Work is based on the assumption that memories are constructions that are anchored in the social relations. These constructions lend specific meaning to the multiplicity of experiences. This applies to memories of school too. Therefore the accounts of personal

encounters and experiences also include collective patterns in which the traditional learning relations in the institution of school are expressed.

For the context of school then it is interesting to question: the topics that students chose for the memory-scenes, based on the assumption that they are significant and important; the way those topics are treated, what implicit premises are contained in them, what apparently self-evident connections are drawn; what new perspectives emerge for the students' (future) practice as teachers in secondary schools through Collective Memory-Work and the extending engagement with educational theory and educational science.

Since we have not carried out a systematic evaluation along the lines of such questioning, I want to simply mention some preliminary observations.

### Observations

The overall theme for the story-writing is "Learning at School." In their collectives the students agree on a shared topic about which they all feel able to write a story. A surprising number of stories, in fact the majority of those written from the perspective of pupils are about situations of **not-learning** and preventing learning. Every semester there is at least one collective working on the topic of "exam situations." The stories are often alike: students describe intense feelings of fear, despair, anger and shame. Students write about examination situations, where they should be able to give the right answers, but are not able to for whatever reason. Oral exams in front of the entire class are remembered particularly negatively. These are experienced as humiliating due to the acts or comments of the teacher. What

comes out clearly in these stories is that exam situations are an integral part of school life, but often serve disciplinary purposes by way of inciting fear, rather than checking the acquisition of knowledge.

For the students these stories are starting points for thinking about arrangements for exams, as far as exams are necessary at all. Moreover they are inspired to seek alternative forms of checking pupils' knowledge that are less likely to instil fear.

Sometimes students recall unexpected joy or pride in their stories. This can come from a teachers' acknowledgement or encouragement, or being trusted with a particular task. From the perspective of pupils in the stories their teachers' actions are immensely significant. It is important for students to reflect on this when considering their own practice as a teacher.

We also find it important to identify **acts of resistance** in the stories. This can be acts of solidarity in face of injustices, outright defiant behaviour, but also acts of silent resistance, not paying attention, laughing and daydreaming. It is interesting how these aspects are depicted from the perspective of (the novice) teachers. Here non-conforming and unexpected pupil behaviour is predominantly experienced as disturbing or even as an attack.

Whether an event is remembered seems to be linked to the **intensity of the emotions** connected to it. Hence the insight that their memory is a construction is important for students but they also come to realise that everyone else's memories of their time at school is tied to emotions and they base their opinions on school, education and teachers on their experiences.

Students do not question the school culture in their stories. This includes various aspects of school such as marking schemes for assessment, or teachers' position of power as assessors of pupils' performance—intense reactions only follow if there are incidents where teachers are seen as acting unjustly (see, e.g., Witt-Löw, 2018). In our course the students have the opportunity to reflect on this web of norms—even if soon afterwards they will be part of it again as teachers. The main issue of our course then is what options they have to act in and give shape to the school system.

### Outlook

A few years ago we started to collect our students' stories in anonymous form and with the authors' consent for the purpose of further research at Vienna University. We have collected over 200 stories already. These multifaceted texts tell stories about situations in school from the pupils' perspectives and in recent years also from the perspectives of novice teachers. This material is a valuable source of data and information, and can be analysed and interpreted in various ways in the future.

So far some of the collected stories have been used for a Diploma thesis on "The dilemma of the good female pupil." The stories analysed in the thesis cover the considerations and actions of good female pupils in their attempts to avoid the stigma of being considered a teachers' pets.

An evaluation of the stories of novice teachers would also be worthwhile.

It might provide material for specifically targeted support during the first years of teaching.

Novice teachers are assigned mentors in schools. Here the stories could be used

in the training of mentors in order to illustrate novice teachers' construction of experiences and to specify relevant support needs.

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