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Teaching of Technical Practices in Instruction: What kinds of Language?

This paper proposes to study three aspects: language as scholastic accessory of technical practices for education; language as technical content; norms as specific, technical content.

The teaching of social practices in compulsory schooling and the organization of instruction are deeply marked by the classroom-workshop dilemma. The classroom should be neither a workroom nor a place for professional instruction. The legitimacy of practical instruction depends on their general instructional aims, which tend to conform instruction to scholastic norms. The "word about the deed" transforms young girls' needlework into a lesson on sewing. With the instructions from 1898, it is a brilliantly organized lesson which isolates five fundamental activities: marking, knitting, mending, sewing and crochet, for which a notebook is used to permanently stabilize instruction.

The evolution of new programs of technology is not a sign of the times. Technical graphics have above all a specifically technical meaning and can only be introduced into instruction if their meaning of functional model of systems or objects, which they represent, or of operational models of conducted actions can be retained. Research contributes to their introduction within this process of modelling which requires an empirical referent from which the modelling can function and have meaning as a process of technical thought.

Technical language is technique since technical thought is expressed fundamentally by graphics, modelling, simulations, images and norms. Research on this language is relatively rare in France and abroad. J. Doulin (1997) calls attention to the introduction of a multitude of graphics at the high school level where no particular caution nor rational learning is given to these polyvalent and polysemous expressions. Mr. Gahlouz (1994) draws attention to normalized language presented in professional training without giving its code, contrary to the training of superiors. The evolution of technical language and graphics opens up a vast field of educational exploration for defining the coherence of these contents which are inseparable from socio-technical practices of technical thought and technology.