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An international perspective: which actuality?

This communication emphasises the importance of the mother tongue to fight cultural inequalities between different types of teachers. It reports the results of a Norwegian study based on empirical findings from a survey carried out within the population of secondary school teachers working in the section of craft and industry in the Norwegian upper secondary school system. This study puts in evidence the place of the language dimension as an element of selection within the world of education and training of teachers.

The empirical study was carried out in 1987, with a sample of 607 upper secondary school teachers of craft and industry subjects (AI) and Norwegian (N), in Norway. The stratified random sample of 607 teachers that participated in the empirical study was selected from among 1173 answers to a questionnaire, within each of the following groups of teachers – 95 teachers of Norwegian and 512 teachers of craft and industry subjects. The group of teachers of craft and industry subjects were divided into 92 teachers of handicrafts (A), 220 teachers of mechanics (M), 100 teachers in electro-technical subjects (E), 26 teachers of graphic arts (G), and 74 teachers of construction (C). See Høstmark Tarrou 1995, 1997, 1999.

The survey identifies two categories of teachers: the teachers of craft and industry subjects and the teachers in mother tongue (Norwegian). They have significantly different opinions regarding:

- the students' problems with the Norwegian language and their utilisation of the mother tongue,
- the students' possibilities to succeed at school, and
- the students' possibilities to succeed in learning Norwegian at school.

The identified differences in opinions between the groups of teachers, about the pupils' problems with the Norwegian language at school in the section of craft and industry, might explain the existence of problems with Norwegian and with the mastering of mother tongue, for pupils in this section in the Norwegian upper secondary school. These problems can be of such amplitude that they might weaken the pupils' self esteem. This situation has not yet been studied in depth. These opinions might also in an indirect way shed light on differences in the education and training of mother tongue, offered to different groups of teachers. The differences can be of such character that they might reinforce the inequalities of the professional status between teachers.

By using the analytical categories of Bourdieu, the results first of all make evident the importance of mother tongue for the symbolic mastery of practice. The importance of the mastering of symbolic concepts and the development of concepts for describing this field and the relation between language and work, are underlined. The communication ends up by questioning whether this analysis also is valid for understanding the challenges to teacher education and training in other countries.