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Vrouwen verschillen in de volwasseneneducatie. Sekse, etniciteit en leeftijd in een ideologie-benadering van schooluitval.
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Summary

Women differ in adult education. Gender, ethnicity and age in an ideology-theoretical approach to drop-out.

The central issue of this research is: 'how are cultural differences between participants handled within adult education?'. Chapter 1 gives an outline of the interference of the Dutch women's movement in the seventies with educational matters. In order to fight the arrear of women within education, the women's movement not only pleads for changes in the current educational system, but also for new forms of education in order to provide those women who, apart from elementary school, have hardly received any schooling with a 'second chance'. More than regular education, adult education should apply itself to the stimulation of sex equality.

However, the objective of sex equality later meets with opposition within the women's movement, and within women's studies, where there is a growing tendency to accentuate the differences between women. The monolithic character of the current analyses of sex differentiation is increasingly criticized within women's studies. The ways in which women distinguish themselves from each other, through differences in their political, cultural and sexual loyalties on the one hand, and through differences in attitude towards matters of age and ethnicity on the other, cannot be analyzed within the prevailing theoretical models. A different perspective is asked for, both on the theoretical and the practical level, in which differences are not only located between the sexes, but also between women and men respectively.

Consequently, the question whether adult education has been successful in promoting sex equality is not a useful one in this context. The various categories of women might well have benefited from adult education in different degrees. An analysis of adult education primarily in terms of gender neglects the question to what extent differences between participants are genderized. It also leaves aside the question to what extent, and in what context, meanings involving gender interfere with those involving age and ethnicity.

The research consists of three parts. Part I contains an analysis of the ways in which the issue of gender in education has been dealt with in various studies. On the basis of English research, chapter 2 consists of a first exploration of the central themes in educational studies on sex inequality. In nearly all studies, gender is defined as an unambiguous, self-evident category. The assumption of one social construct of gender involves three problems: the differentiation within one sex is left undiscussed; the influence of the school as a social reality on sex differentiation is ignored; and it is taken for granted that, within school, the same meanings involving gender are prevalent as outside school.

Dutch studies also hardly pay attention to the problems involved in gender research (chapter 3). In the various studies, two approaches can be distinguished: an equality-approach, in which strategies are sought to neutralize sex inequality; and a differentiation-approach, in which the revaluation, and further development, of feminine qualities is the central issue. In both approaches, the feminine is situated within the women and girls themselves -sometimes as a problem or an arrear, sometimes as a promising possibility.

Consequently, questions such as 'what are the ways in which sex differentiation acquires form and meaning' are not relevant here. Women's studies have criticised the above studies by stressing the specificity of education with regard to the construction of sex inequality. To support this criticism, the concept of discourse analysis is used as a theoretical frame of reference.

In chapter 4, the premise of the studies under discussion, that is, the genderized nature of experiences, is discussed theoretically. Arguing from an ideology-theoretical point of view, the conclusion is reached that the meanings rendered to experiences determine whether the interpretation of these experiences is genderized. The production of meaning, however, not only takes place on a social level (i.e. the perspective of discourse analysis), but also on the level of the agent. From this, a number of things follow. Research on the position of women within education should first of all acknowledge the ideological context of the school(s) and school type(s) under discussion. The theoretical basis for this viewpoint lies in the assumption that the various ideologies produce various forms of subjectivity. Secondly, the meanings introduced by women into schools from their 'own' cultural setting should be made part of these studies. Neither women nor men identify themselves unequivocally and positively with the subject positions offered within school systems. We find the theoretical basis for this perspective in the view that women, on the basis of earlier acquired experiences and insights, 'read' the meanings concerning womanhood and schooling offered to them within school, and that they, through their activities, produce new meanings.

Part II describes the transition to adult education. Drop-out as a consequence of cultural differences is the central issue here. Chapter 5 first examines the ways in which the problem of drop-out is approached in various studies. From these studies, three models can be distilled. The major difference between the various models lies in their choice of unity of analysis: drop-out is considered form the perspective of the participant; from the perspective of the living conditions of this participant; and from the perspective of social inequality. The scope of the social inequality model is greatest. In this approach, drop-out is not an isolated phenomenon, but forms part of the much larger question of the reproduction of social inequality. The social inequality model, however, is problematic, because it takes the existence of social inequality as a fact: education functions as a serving-hatch for the inequalities created elsewhere. In their discussion of sex differentiation, the researchers implicitly use the terms 'femininity' and 'masculinity' as self-evident categories. The diversity within the sex categories is neither indicated nor made subject of investigation.

Since these researches were conducted, several changes have taken place within the target group and within the organization of adult education. Therefore, drop-out has been examined anew on a school for daytime education for adults (chapter 6). Empirical studies show that one out of four participants on the 'Joke Smit Scholengemeenschap' leaves school in the middle of the year. The chance of drop-out is related to the differences between the groups of participants. Earlier studies had already indicated that the elder participants, in particular, stood the biggest chance of completing their schooling with a certificate or a partial certificate. These studies, however, also signaled differences between men and women, and between black and white participants.

In chapter 7 an ideology-theoretical model is developed, in which drop-out within adult education is interpreted as a consequence of cultural differences. Cultural differences are conceptualized as ideologically articulated differences between people. Thus gender as a cultural difference means that, within the ideological frames of interpretation available within a certain context, the articulation of experiences is influenced by gender. Here, gender has become a meaningful category in the functioning of people. In the same way, ethnicity and age are understood as cultural differences. The ideology-theoretical model involves the analysis of the production of meaning, both on the social level and on the level of the agent.

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Part III examines the applicability of the ideology-theoretical model in research on cultural differences and drop-out in adult education. Chapter 8 contains an account of the design of the research. The subject positions that are offered in adult education in relation to the functioning of its participants are examined: in how far are these determined by gender, age, and ethnicity? These subject positions are confronted with the ideas the participants cherish about themselves as pupils. From the ideology-theoretical model, the assumption follows that cultural diferences and drop-out are connected with the interaction between the two levels of production of meaning.

In the studies on drop-out discussed in part II, however, the centrality of the school in the social environment of the participants comes forward as the most tenable explanation of drop-out. Chapter 9 provides a general picture of the problem of drop-out. In chapter 10 the centrality of school in the social environment of the participants is investigated as a rival hypothesis. Successively, attention is paid to: the primary socialization of the participants, the support and the obstructions experienced by the participants in their direct environment, and the transition from school to daily life. However, it does not appear in any way that school occupies a less central position in the social environment of the drop-outs than in the social environment of the participants. The differences found in the various aspects are not signifant. However, the research does indicate a number of significant differences between men and women, between black and white participants, and between the participants of various age groups.

In chapter 11 the ideology-theoretical model is employed to investigate sex differentiation and sex inequalities within adult education on the level of the participants, of the school's culture, and of the learning results. The assumption included in the model, namely that the relation between the subject-opinions which the participants of daytime education for adults have about themselves, and the subject-positions offered within daytime education for adults explains drop-out, is confirmed. The interaction between both levels of production of meaning appears to produce cultural differences between participants, resulting in either success or failure at school.

The 'Joke Smit Scholengemeenschap', having sprung from the emancipatory climate of the seventies, is primarily successful with respect to one specific category of women.

In the last chapter the results of the three parts are summarized as connected with the central theme. The research is rounded off with an exposition of the relevance of the research for the future policy of schools for adult education, and the possibilities for further investigation.