

The Relevance of Rhetoric to the Study of Power in Communication and Communicative Adequacy

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ABSTRACT: The central focus in this article is that how language is used can constitute the basis for power relations. In the first place, power functions through linguistic expressions in relationships of superiority and subordination (commands, reprimands etc.). Secondly, language acts can appear as representations of discourse, i.e. linguistic and cognitive conventions that contribute to squeezing out certain subjects and opinions as being inappropriate. Thirdly, the rhetorical effectiveness of propositions will depend on the linguistic perspectivizing in the propositions. This last-mentioned position can be teased out through rhetorical analysis of language use. The power perspective, however, seems only partly to have been brought into recent rhetorical analysis. In this article, I attempt to analyze how the way language is used can constitute the foundation for power relationships, and I take my point of departure in a case study of a Norwegian school. The focus is placed on communication between management and teachers. The central theoretical challenge is the question of what may be gained by evaluating the relevance of rhetoric as a heuristic in the understanding of communicative power. Further, I argue that rhetoric is relevant to the evaluation of what is a breach of communicative reasonableness. Rhetorical criticism can also be useful in itself for giving authority to the individual teacher.

1. Introduction

A classical understanding of the exercise of power is that power is a matter of being able to carry out plans in spite of resistance (Weber, 1968). Subordinate and subordinating positions, the possibility of sanctions, and the use of other means of force have, in keeping with this perspective, been central in power research (Dahl, 1957). These are the visible ways in which power manifests itself, and they have hardly lost any of their significance in society over time. However, the analysis of power has also included power relations which operate covertly, and which are more difficult to capture. The power to keep problematic issues out of the arenas of decision (Bachrach & Baratz, 1963), structural power (Lukes, 1974), and symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) are examples of this. The communicative aspect is integrated into virtually all exercising of power, but all communication does not, however, constitute exercising of power. If we believe that it does, then the concept of power loses its meaning. A theory that explains everything, explains nothing. What is it, then, that creates power in communication? In the course of the past decade, the understanding of power has inter alia been concerned with how the way in which language is used represents use of power (Blakar, 1974; Searle, 1995), power through ideological control (Anderson, 1991) and power through control over discourses (Anderson & Grinberg, 1998), to take some examples of frames in research. The switch of focus towards power in language also shows itself through "the rhetorical turn" in many of the human sciences (Nelson, Megill, & McCloskey, 1987; Simons, 1989, 1990). But the power perspective has often been only partly brought into rhetorical analysis. It is therefore a great academic challenge to link the analysis of the rhetorical use of language more closely to social theory. What can be gained if one looks at the principal concepts of rhetoric through the lenses of social science? This question is too extensive to be answerable in a definitive way within the scope of this article. I have no possibility of doing justice to all relevant perspectives but a few. The aim is not to arrive at final conclusions. It is far more important to me to raise these problematic issues for debate. The first central argument in this article is that understanding of the communicative power aspects in the school as a social arena can be enhanced if we make use of rhetorical analysis, and here I shall attempt to link the relevance of rhetoric to the field of educational administration. Insight from rhetoric can also be useful in school communication for other reasons than the enhancing of our understanding of power. In the first place this applies to reflection and debate on what communicative adequacy ought to be in the rhetoric of school management. What standards ought school manager rhetoric to live up to? What goes beyond communicative adequacy can be seen as a breach of norms of communicative reasonableness. For this purpose I shall use a body of case material from a school as a basis for criticism. The case material may contribute to shedding light on the thorny problem of what standards rhetorical use of language ought to satisfy in a school context, if we assess whether actual language acts represent a breach of norms of communicative reasonableness (cf. conversational maxims, Grice, 1967). Secondly, rhetorical criticism can be useful in itself for

giving authority to the individual teacher as a citizen in a liberal, democratic society in which the school is a subject in social conversation. One of the arguments in this article is that rhetoric may be exploited as a means for enlightened discussion. It may be an instrument of return to reason (Toulmin, 2001).

2. Theory of power and communication

As a starting point for discussing the relationship between power and communication, it will be useful to formulate two extreme positions. In the first place, power may be inherent in the language, in the communication process (Searle, 1969). An utterance contains a proposition that is to be interpreted by a recipient, at the same time as the utterance is also an intentional act that may produce an effect on the recipients. This was the point of departure for Austin's analysis of performative speech acts (Austin, 1962). Performative speech acts are understood on the basis of the "illocutionary force" they have, i.e. the way in which the utterances are put forward in a social context and their influence. Searle (1995) further develops Austin's theory into a theory of how social institutions are created and maintained. For Searle power through speech acts is a constituent element in social institutions. The social institution's power comes from the illocutionary force of the speech act that is supported by the institution and the sender's instituted position in the social order, i.e. the person's right to perform particular acts. In addition to the fact that the power is sited in the role that confers the right to perform specific acts, the skill of the particular person filling the role is of vital importance. The right to perform particular acts must be recognised as appropriate by those whom the communication includes. The force that lies in an utterance qua act creates the institution. The institution is in this sense a product of thought that exists because sufficiently many people have faith in the institution.

A distinctly different argument is to claim that the influence of utterances is derived solely from the positions of authority the sender and recipient have in the social field (Bourdieu, 1991:105-136). An actor may have what Bourdieu called symbolic power by influencing other people's wishes and beliefs. The preconditions surrounding the communicative message, i.e. relationships of superiority and subordination, thus enter into the de facto exercise of power. In Bourdieu's analysis communication and the exercise of power were inseparable in the sense that power is always exercised in communication through authority. Power functions through the linguistic expressions, but the message in itself – according to Bourdieu – has no independent illocutionary force, no power effects (loc. cit.). Use of language and symbols regulates access to public conversations and to decision processes by excluding some and including others. Bourdieu was concerned with the significance of hegemonic norms for the social order. Foucault (1972, 1984) placed greater weight on the power of categorisation of what is normal, the fundamental conditions for giving linguistic expression to opinions that inscribe themselves in institutions and that build linguistic and cognitive conventions over time (discourse). Language acts as representation of discourse appear as a central idea in this attempt to home in on power in communication. Discourse may appear as a means of power that serves to exclude particular subjects, opinions and conversation partners from social conversation in a school or in other forums as being inappropriate (Foucault, 1984). A discourse may have a hegemonic position in the social conversation (Gramsci, 1971), while other views about school that are not in harmony with the hegemonic discourse are banished to a discursive underground (Fine & Weiss, 1993). Beyond sporadic expressions of opinion in newspapers there is a striking silence about Norwegian teachers' views on development tendencies in the school. This is a discourse in the underground that only on rare occasions finds expression in the public sphere (NN). An example of a text that appears as representation of this discursive underground is a reader's letter from a teacher who "feels powerless in the face of the development in the schools: I am angry because it is the teachers and the school who are left holding the baby after having done their best to follow up the pedagogical fashions prevailing at any time" (the Norwegian national daily *Aftenposten* 25.5.2004).

This weariness of school reform may be connected with the properties of the system of educational bureaucracy. In the Norwegian educational system there are over 20 links between the minister of education and the individual teacher. All these links must legitimise their existence through striking "performance" that demonstrates to the world outside efficiency and the capacity to act. For policymakers the political rewards will first and foremost come from initiating and to a lesser degree from implementing (Elmore, 2003). Thus each link will have their attention directed at how the superior link views their efficiency and capacity to act, partly in documents that the policymakers themselves produce and partly in the way policy production is spoken of by others. When the links in an educational bureaucracy try to produce striking efficiency externally, a possible hypothesis is that their sensitivity to the social field that the educational bureaucracy shall serve – teachers and pupils in the classroom – becomes less. The means in the different links can then become an end in themselves (Wilson, 1980; Mitnick, 1980). The teachers' feeling of impotence may be connected with such structural features that are reinforced by increasing medialisation of the education sector.

Both these positions that have been explained here have something to be said for them and contribute in my opinion to an understanding of what power in communication is. But can scattered power relationships be added up into something that can be handled in a holistic manner? One aspect of power in communication that has hitherto not been touched upon is power by creating influence through persuasion. This is understood in what follows as rhetoric,

i.e. linguistic perspectivising of sets of facts with the intention of persuading.¹

Here I shall take my point of departure in concepts from Aristotelian rhetoric (Aristotle, 1991) and its basic elements of persuasion (“peitho”). For Aristotle rhetoric is a technique. Aristotle’s treatise *On Rhetoric* (336 BC) mentions three “means” of artistic persuasion: First (1) a linguistic utterance can be shaped to appeal to the recipient’s understanding (“logos”) through more or less stringent logical “proof” in the argumentation. The rational argumentation (the enthymemes) constitutes a parallel to the intentional aspect of power: the sender has a message that is put forward and that is intention-oriented in its effect. In Aristotle the enthymemes form the rhetorical syllogism, either a deductive form of argumentation (if ... then...) or inductive argumentation (analogy, exemplification). Often parts of the argumentation are omitted, so that the recipient must himself insert a premise in order to understand the meaning (Bitzer, 1959). This can be a rhetorically effective strategy because the enthymeme takes it for granted that the recipient shares implicit values in the argumentation e.g. “The school of the future”.

Second (2) the linguistic perspectivising of sets of facts may arouse feelings in the recipient (“pathos”) that have persuasive effect. In terms of social science conceptualisation the support the sender wishes to gain is a parallel to the causal relationship: an act influences another person’s view and creates an effect. Persuasion through the arousal of feelings (cause) corresponds to the result of the language act. Both the recipient’s preferences and beliefs can be influenced. In the first-mentioned cases a language act on the part of the sender awakens a yearning, a desire for an object. In the second case the recipient’s perceptions of reality are coloured by the sender’s message.

Third (3) the sender must appear as trustworthy (“ethos”). School managers’ ethos in communication with teachers appears as a precondition for school development that requires collective intentionality. How shall planned running of a school be able to function unless the institution as such is recognised by those who work in the school? A possible answer is that any management is dependent on a minimum measure of acceptance. The subordinates’ acceptance rests on a minimum measure of trustworthiness in the superiors. Searle uses the collapse of the former East Germany as an example (Searle, 1995). Even though this example concerns mistrust of a state that grows too large, there are similarities with the school as a system. What Aristotle called ethos is a prerequisite for the thought of collective intentionality in an organisation, and this corresponds to the relational aspect of power (Engelstad & Østerud, 2004).

Recent approaches to rhetoric include inter alia text-structuralist approaches (for example, Barthes, 1972, 1977; Eco, 1979) and philosophical perspectives on communication (among others Toulmin, 1958, 2001; Grice, 1967). Only to a limited degree do these mentioned and other unmentioned approaches (to which I cannot do justice here) entail links to social scientific theory. I have chosen Searle (1995) as a starting point for coupling between speech acts and exercise of power. Speech act theory may have the effect of advancing our understanding of how rhetoric can be used as a tool for communication with emphasis on persuading and convincing, but it is too narrow in the sense that communicative processes such as uttering threats, excluding subjects from the agenda and the like fall outside. There are similarities between the Aristotelian conceptualisation of means of persuasion and certain variants of the conceptualisation of power. The crucial question is whether our understanding of the communicative aspects of power can be enhanced by means of insights from rhetorical analysis. Have the concepts and inherent analytical perspectives of rhetorical analysis any heuristic value in social theory about communicative power in the school? This is an extensive problematic issue on which I have not arrived at a final conclusion. I want rather to attempt to explore implications of such a claim by analysing a body of case material from a Norwegian school.

3. Empirical material

At the end of the 1990s, there was a strong commitment in educational policy in Norway to reforming the teaching methods in the school (more project work and problem-based learning, less blackboard teaching) in combination with bold investments in ICT (process steering). This is a kind of process steering. The signal that was given in press reports and in numerous public management documents was: the pupils are to work more independently and in groups on problematic issues they have themselves developed, and the teacher shall to a greater degree than earlier be a supervisor rather than a lecturer. ICT was to bring out the necessity of the new teaching methods, it was said.² This commitment was followed up on lower levels in the educational bureaucracy, inter alia through the initiation and rewarding of pilot schemes in the schools.

3.1 *The computer as a crowbar for changed methods of work in a pilot school*

One of these pilot schemes concerns the particular school that constitutes the case material in this article. The history is that the owner of the school (a county in Norway) decided in 1998 to go in for the particular pilot school as a pioneer school.³ By means of ICT the school was to use forms of work such as problem-based learning and project work “to a greater degree”. The school was granted funding for portable PCs for a selection of the pupils in the pilot

scheme and full access to and use of the Internet, extensive use of ICT and transformation of the teaching methods in the school. It was these objectives that were central in the initial phase. ICT was to afford more learning. The vision was that “teacher and pupils shall be connected to one another, and the teacher can put out all his or her learning resources and conduct a more direct dialogue with the individual pupil”. A condition for this was, according to the principal, that “the teachers must ... dare to give control to the pupils”. “The PCs will pull the practice of teaching in the direction we wish: more independent, problem-solving work and more project work”.

To get the teachers on board, the reform was marketed internally. When the reform was to be started (January, 1999), some of the teachers at the school became enthusiastic about participating in the school reform, and they to a certain extent shared the management’s vision of creating a dynamic, progressive school right at the forefront. This section of the teaching body may be seen as the management’s power base for the bold investments. An important integrating factor in an organisation is the management’s culture-building behaviour to create a discourse fellowship (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Karst & Groutt, 1977). In the pilot school this building of culture manifested itself *inter alia* through visions of being involved in creating something completely new of great national significance: “the school of the future”. This building of culture constituted the school’s cultural policy (cf. Anderson, 1996).

Those of the teachers who played along with the principal’s ambition to transform the teaching practice of the school identified with the intention of the reform: “There was an enormous amount of enthusiasm that spread when all this started up. I noticed it in myself. After all, this was a real challenge ... because something new was happening”. But the great majority of the teachers were somewhat more hesitant about the intentions of the reform. The following example provides some indication of how the reform message appealed to this category of teacher: In one of the individual interviews I conducted with the teachers, I paraphrased Ann Brown’s description of the teacher’s role as a “model of active enquiry” and one where the teacher was to guide the pupils’ discovery process (Brown, 1992: Table 1). An enthusiastic response from a teacher was: “I want to have that role to a greater degree”. However, two minutes later the same teacher said: “It’ll be new to me if we’re simply to conduct a project throughout a whole year, even though that’s what I’m to do. I think I’m a bit stuck in the traditional teacher role”. My rhetorical involvement in reproducing Brown’s reasoning about the role of the teacher in the intentional learning community aroused her emotional conviction to declare herself in agreement with Brown’s description of the teacher as a guide, but her rational conclusions indicated afterwards that she did not want to give up what she called “the traditional teacher role”. For her this schism was connected with great unpleasantness: “X (the name of a member of the management) thinks I’m very negative, but I’m not at all, really I’m not. I’m so positive about trying anything under the sun. But we must get a grip on those things that all of us think are problematic”. She wanted to identify herself with a “modern” teacher role in keeping with the management’s vision of the school of the future at the same time as the logos appeals in the management’s message did not convince her.

A small minority of the teachers totally rejected the school reform: “Those of us who take the subject seriously and have a very clear mandate for being here obviously think that this is a lot of rubbish”. These teachers justified their scepticism by saying that “the pupils are to acquire a certain basic knowledge and to learn to apply it”. These teachers placed weight on the view that the organisation of learning must take place through a sequence of teacher-led instruction that proceeds from the simpler components to the more complex component that they compose, in other words characteristics corresponding to what the management had described as “traditional teaching methodology”, “old thinking”, “old practice”.

When I interviewed the teachers in March 2001, frustrations were expressed over the loss of operative control in the teaching situations. The previous week the principal had asked the teachers at a general meeting: “Is this providing more learning?” Nobody could say that this was providing more learning. This was the first visible sign that the management’s ethos was weakened among those teachers who were initially impartial or enthusiastic. The expression of frustration was further intensified in group interviews in which the teachers participated in June, 2001 (probably because the teachers became aware of how strong the discontent was). Some of the frustrations were connected with the fact that a considerable proportion of the pupils seized the opportunities the PCs offered them for non-academic activity (for example surfing for porn, watching Big Brother, chatting, hacking etc.). Pupils considered free use of a PC as vested right. This view was in part fuelled by the fact that the management went to the local newspaper with comments like “There’s not only a negative side to their (the pupils’) seeing computers as a toy”. The pupils had expectations of being able to use their PCs the whole time. “Then in comes the teacher and says that now we’re not going to use the PC today either. And they sit there like, after all they’ve turned it on, you’re on the Internet, you can do just what you feel like. We were threatened in the first class. Nobody did what the teacher asked us to”. “When they just make empty threats like that, we can’t be bothered to listen to them. Student 9: Then they (the teachers) don’t bother to say it any more (emphasis added). If a threat is not perceived as real, the threat does not have deterrent effect (Elstad, 2005). Teacher abdication from the role of the monarch of the class is then a tempting possibility: “I started to think afresh. I had to stop focusing on everything that was wrong and that irritated me. I have to stop being the classroom policeman. I had to give up having control of everything and everyone. From that day on I no longer focused on the pupils’ (mis-)use of the Internet and chatting. The pupils had to take responsibility for their

own learning. I could only be a guide". A somewhat more cynical variant of abdication is the following statement from a teacher: "You lose all control. And then, I don't give a damn. When I've been put in a system that it's impossible to operate in, I do what's best for me". Even in situations where the teacher observed that the pupils were engaged in non-academic activities, it was not uncommon for the teacher not to intervene: "Often everyone's on the Internet or playing Patience or something, and the teacher just stands there and stares, doesn't he?" (statement by a pupil). The teachers called for action from the management on "a much stricter attitude to misuse of the computers. ... There must be an end to mollycoddling". Joint rules are something "we've called for at meetings with the management, but the answer has been no, they don't want them". "Among the teachers there's been a large majority for having common guidelines on this (non-legitimate use of computers). But no, there are no restrictions". The call for common rules, coherent leadership behaviour in the classroom and effective means of putting a stop to non-academic activity became a recurrent theme in the communication between management and teachers over a number of years. This matter was rapidly brushed aside at meetings between the management and the teachers.

At the start many teachers enthused over the new possibilities that the PCs might provide, but in some subjects it was difficult to see the value of "extensive use of ICT in the learning process in all subjects". This experience also gave rise to frustrations: "Those who were the first to be very enthusiastic are now (March, 2001) starting to become considerably more diffident. So now there are very few left of the enthusiastic driving forces ... The mood is considerably more negative than it was a while ago. The most activist of the teachers are now saying 'I can't use it in my subjects'. Half a year ago it was fantastic". It was the management's vision of extensive use of PCs that provoked consternation. On this point too the trustworthiness of the management, the ethos, was weakened. Some statements by teachers that illustrate this run as follows: "I think it's unnatural in some subjects to have to use it all the time". "The PC is to be used all the time. The PC is a success, and it's the best piece of equipment, so we must adapt the teachers, we must adapt the discipline to the PC. And that I feel is a bit strange. In a way it's become the centre of the school instead of being an instrument that one is to use from time to time". "One can't use it (ICT) in all phases of learning. One can use it in some phases. The pendulum has swung right over to the other side now. It's first and foremost people here at the school who don't teach and who haven't used computers in teaching who go around saying such things. Those who work with computers have a much more nuanced view. But it's often like that. I suppose that's how it is. Those who express their views bombastically are no doubt those who don't know much about things".

Linguistic perspectivizing as use of power

How was the school's intended reform marketed and communicated internally among the teachers and also externally? And how did the management use linguistic perspectivising as a means of exercising power? The last-mentioned question may be seen here in connection with what in leadership research is called micropolitics, i.e. how the principal used power to protect himself and to influence the teachers (Blasé, 1991).

Use of language that represents use of power may also be linked to instituted power relationships. When the reform of the school was implemented in 1999, it was said that the objective was that the pupils "shall to a greater degree use forms of work such as problem-based learning and project work" and "(shall) to a greater degree use ICT as a pedagogical tool". The school was to use problem-based learning and project work as "fundamental pedagogical methods". At a press conference that the management of the school held at the start of the reform, a member of the management group stated: "This is the school of the future, the beginning of something new. It will spread. It has national value". In other words the management of the school had very bold hopes that the reform of the school should see the realisation of significantly different results in the pilot school compared with the remaining schools in the county. "The school of the future" is a rhetorically effective expression because the chosen concepts relate to their opposites (de Saussure, 1964; Greimas, 1966). The concepts relate inexorably to opposites "the school of the past (or the traditional school)".

It is interesting how gliding conceptual shifts have taken place in the determination of the objectives of the school reform. In 2004, the main objective of the reform of the schools has been changed to the following formulation: "to increase methodological variation and to take advantage of ICT-based methodology ... (and contribute to) more independent work on the part of the pupil". This formulation is in my interpretation more weakly designed in terms of boldness than the initial intention. Why is this change taking place? In 2003, an extensive investigation of quality aspects at all upper secondary schools in the county investigated the pilot school and other schools in the county when it came to the school's purported priority areas project work, co-operative learning and interdisciplinarity (Source: Project Quality <http://www.akershus.f.kommune.no>, downloaded 11. December 2003). There was no significant difference between the pilot school and all of the upper secondary schools in the county (one-tailed significance tests; significance level 5%) concerning none of the items:

Items	Pilot school	Schools in the county
Library and ICT are used actively in the teaching work	69	66
The teachers often have blackboard teaching	85	85
The pupils often do different forms of project work	58	60
The pupils often work in groups with other pupils	60	66
The pupils often work alone on assignments	75	74
The pupils often work interdisciplinarily	40	39
	N= 170	N=3235
	Response: 81%	Response: 82%

Table II: % of learners who say they “fully agree” or “partly agree” with the listed assertions.

The school management has an instituted position of power to redefine the main objective of the reform with a view to creating greater congruence between intentions and realities through linguistic perspectivism. I have not seen that this change of main objective has been noticed by others than teachers I have interviewed. The principal's instituted position provides a foundation for being able to define and sum up the experiences that the school has had. It is customary for the principal to be the person who is contacted when the press, for example, wants a comment in connection with press reports of the school's special investment in computers and changed teaching methods, and the principal has the power basis to state that “So far our experiences of the project have been overwhelmingly positive”. In a journal for teachers the principal of the pilot school was invited to describe the changes. Here the principal said:

“ The investment has in many ways represented a counter-culture to the traditional school, a sort of breaker of new cultural ground. It is not surprising that this can create a counter-culture to a heavily ICT-based school. As the principal I appreciate this: This is a type of antagonism and clash of interests that can create development and growth (my italics)”.

The principal expressed a humanistic attitude to resistant teachers: the tensions at the school are described as a positive force, and the internal discussions appear as harmonious and marked by reciprocal consent (compare Anderson, 1991:127). At this point there were teachers who did not experience the tensions as harmonious: “Any objection is the same as making rude noises in church”. In the same period as this was being written, the principal states in an e-mail message to teachers “expectations with respect to pedagogical practice, inter alia extensive use of ICT in the teaching of all subjects. It is expected that all teachers provide for use of ICT in their teaching, precisely to make clear the expectations the school has in respect of pedagogical practice”. This is perceived as an order: “We

shall do this". This type of statement can hardly be compatible with an assertion that the principal appreciates antagonism and clashes of interest.

There was a fear that free expressions of opinion in interviews could be detrimental to the person behind the utterance: "The management won't hear this? It won't leak out?" Any departure from the school's purported objective of extensive use of ICT was cracked down on. An example of a written reprimand is the following: "X dropped in on your class. In answer to his question whether the pupils had logged on to the platform to obtain instructions and information, he was told that they never use a PC, and most of them did not have one with them ... It would be very much appreciated if you could explain what may be at the root of the pupils' statements".

The formation of opinion about priorities in educational policy that the school is behind can easily become a discursive underground (cf. Fine & Weiss, 1993) if there is no room for free expression in objective discussion. An observation made was that teachers who might have very strong opinions when talking tête-à-tête remained strikingly silent in the public sphere. Some of my teacher informants experienced contrasts between the purported results of the school reform and the results in fact: "Two things are happening in this school. Officially, for the outside world this is a success. But inside there are masses of negative things. Bad results. The pupils are fed up to the back teeth with PCs. These are things that are not debated and discussed". Similar exclusion of subjects as inappropriate is also acknowledged in interviews with pupils: "When you read about it in the papers and all that, it seems that you have incredibly many possibilities, and it's such a good set-up. In theory it is of course, but it just doesn't work in many, many ways". This represents an aspect of the exercise of power: the power to exclude from the agenda certain problematic sides of the reform of the school.

Linguistic and cognitive conventions (discourse) may be a means of power that serves to exclude particular opinions from social conversation as being inappropriate. Power lies in pre-established exclusion of subjects and conversation partners. "The politicians have decided that computers are the future. Are you for or against the future? It's difficult to be reactionary then", said one of my teacher informants at the pilot school. To display scepticism of what have been purported objectives in the Norwegian school can give rise to a feeling of discomfort. It is not easy to look upon oneself as reactionary. In the pilot school a number of the teachers spoke of themselves in the following ways: "crotchety old pedagogues like us", "I'm so old-fashioned", "of course I'm typically reactionary". Behind this self-irony one gets a feeling of an acceptance of the picture the school management used, for example, to diagnose the sceptics when it came to the school reform: "It's old thinking and old practice that is left embedded in all the walls". It is my view that this type of statement is an example of bad leadership rhetoric that may contribute to marginalising and pathologising employees. The effectively designed rhetorical message about the old-fashioned in the school contra the modern – the school of the future – may appear to have invaded their conceptualisation process and become internalised by themselves. The subordinates adopt viewpoints that are held by people in positions of power. For anybody who looks upon himself as old, crotchety, reactionary, exit will appear as a tempting alternative.

3.2 The wind of change in school ideology in Norway: from process steering to product control

In 2002 a new government came to power in Norway, dominated by the Conservative Party. Details of this government's educational policy were clearly signalled to the public in 2003, and in 2004 the Norwegian national assembly, the Storting, adopted a new educational policy with the emphasis on result control (Ministry of Education, 2004). The average of the examination marks and public tests at every school is now to be made public. The current educational policy is to give the actors a sense of responsibility when it comes to the achievement of results and to have a lesser degree of focus on work processes in the school – as was previously the case. At the pilot school these new signals brought about changes in the actions of the school management: "The publishing of pupils' results is coming soon, and this school, which was conscientious when that was the fashion, can see that we shall come out with statistics showing that many pupils have no marks in one or more subjects. This is leading to a total ideological turn-about in order to come out better in the statistics. Without any explanation we teachers are told to adopt a new and stricter regime" (statement by a teacher). The principal is uncomfortable with this new orientation in educational policy: "If one is to judge from the prevailing marks-oriented thinking, I suppose I ought possibly to find myself another job". This change in the authorities' educational policy also had significance for the rhetorical practice in the school, and it has influenced the regulatory rules that the management of the school has signalled are to be enforced: "The school has been lenient when it comes to the use of PCs, when it comes to the following up of absence, and when it comes to getting people through school who ought to have failed. Suddenly absence is now to be followed up in a far tougher way, and pupils who are in danger of failing are now encouraged by counsellor to leave." In 2004, the school introduced rules that warn of a stricter regime for the use of PCs, three years after such rules were called for by teachers. It is now a matter of threats of sanctions and implementation of sanctions in respect of those pupils who break these new rules.⁵

The leadership rhetoric at the school has changed according to changing pedagogical fashions. In the initial phase of the school reform a repeated refrain in the management's marketing internally and externally was that there was "no

way back” to the old school that had been there in the beginning. “This is the school of the future,” and a characteristic of the school of the future was that, “The teacher must dare to give the control to the pupils”. Since the wind of change in school ideology in Norway, the principal now speaks of “a firm hand and clear teacher leadership” directed at “putting a stop to the greater part of the pupils’ chatting activity”. The teacher’s control of the pupils’ operations is to be resurrected. In the initial phase of the reform “extensive use of ICT” was an objective. Now we are told the objective is “methodological variation”. Earlier the management used to speak of “liberation from textbooks”. Now we are told that “traditional textbooks are still necessary”.

Linguistic perspectivising through performative speech acts and medialising adjustments

The phenomenon of leadership rhetoric cannot be assessed in isolation without seeing the school as a part of a larger public administrative system that gives instructions, grants money, issues rules and other clear communications, but also gives subtle signals to subordinate units in the sector. A school principal who has his attention directed at how the links above him view the school’s activity will invest energy in interpreting what is perceived as viable management of a school and what sort of performance is rewarded in the form of career development or other variants of incentive. For the manager of a school, rhetorical use of language within the school and in the dissemination of information externally will not be a simple matter, but will depend on individual skills. It is characteristic in some of its exposure to the press that the school presents itself as unique: “In terms of scope, the use of computers at this school makes it number 1 in Europe”, “This is the school of the future, the beginning of something new. It will spread. It has national value”.

The school management’s information activity consists of information exposure where the management has direct control of statements that are publicised (exposure on the school’s Web page, letters, presentation videos, lectures in external forums, etc.) and information work that is directed at how others choose to talk about the school (in for example mass communication such as newspapers, TV and the like). The pilot school has to a certain degree succeeded in influencing the beliefs about the school of those with an interest in it. The school has received a number of prestigious distinctions, inter alia from the Norwegian educational authorities, from the OECD (OECD, 1999), from a supplier of equipment, etc. The school has been made the subject of extensive media coverage in national newspapers, in the local press and in professional journals: “Several hundred visitors in the course of four years, good PR, a television programme and at times plenty of distinguished people in the corridors” (statement by the principal). The dissemination of information has been goal-oriented, at times with rhetorical force directed at politicians with the power to grant funding: The school had large deficits in the years 2001-2003 and therefore had to have political consent to be allowed to operate at a loss. In my estimation the school’s management has to a high degree succeeded in influencing the view of the school as unique among important parties when it comes to the commitment to PCs for all in combination with pupil-active forms of teaching. The evidence for such an evaluation is the extent of press coverage and what the press has chosen to write about the school. The handling of information supplied to the surrounding world may be said to have been professional.

The increased emphasis on information dissemination is a feature of the whole education sector in Norway. For example, both the Norwegian Ministry of Education and local units of the public education administration, as well as schools, publish their own information newspapers (direct advertising) that are distributed to the households. In brief, this reflects general tendencies towards increased medialisation and greater emphasis on performative speech acts.

4. Conclusions

The knowledge tradition of rhetoric is extensive. Its thinking does not belong to any specific science, but touches on many subjects (Aristotle, 1991, chapter 1.1). I have chosen to extract three central assertions about the relevance of rhetoric to the study of power in communication, exemplified in the relations between school management and teachers.

4.1 The relevance of rhetoric as an explanatory heuristic in the understanding of power in communication

On the basis of a classical understanding of power, two essential conditions for the exercise of power are that there must be asymmetry in the relationship between the actors, and that there must be a relationship of opposition when it comes to the actors’ interests, wishes and/or beliefs (Dahl, 1968). Both these analytical aspects showed themselves to be essential in the analysis of the case material, but not sufficient. The analysis of linguistic perspectivising also provided examples of the government of subordinates with their will (i.e. through rhetorical persuasion), as well as of the fact that teachers fell silent when matters that they perceived as relevant were excluded from the agenda as inappropriate subjects (i.e. silencing, Fine, 1987). This calls for an understanding of power that goes beyond the classical concept of power.

The concept of power is one of the most fascinating concepts in social science, but it is also one of the most difficult

concepts to apply in analysis. A concept like power in communication is a delimiting of “something” that we believe may be a homogeneous phenomenon and that separates a part of reality from other parts. But is it a homogeneous and delimited phenomenon we are confronted with here, in the way it is exemplified in the case material? Wise and Bozarth (1987) draw a distinction between analogy and homology as explanatory heuristics. What are spoken of in this article as forms of power in communication may be looked upon as analogies that have only superficial similarities – roughly like the similarity between the wings of birds and the wings of bats – without the forms of power in communication being unified by a common explanatory mechanism (i.e. homology). This problematic issue can be addressed through further concept differentiation of power in communication for scientific purposes. Even though ‘animals that can fly’ may be an adequate conceptualisation in many of life’s situations, a phenomenological delimitation of this kind is hardly fruitful for analytical understanding. In my view there lies a great challenge in teasing out analytical tools in order to gain a better understanding of the connection between linguistic perspectivising and power. The tradition of classical rhetoric can to some extent contribute to shedding light on such connections since there are features of likeness between the basic elements logos, ethos and pathos on the one hand, and the intentionality, relationship orientation and effect orientation of power on the other. Current rhetorical traditions (for example “new rhetoric”, Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, and “the rhetorical turn”, Simons, 1989, 1990, and other related directions) have contributed to an interest in innovative rhetorical features, but it is in my opinion a challenge for research in rhetoric and discourse studies that has become stuck in the text to address the interplay between language and reality. This must mean links to social theory (Fairclough, 2001). I have touched on the tendency in the education sector towards increased medialisation and thereby increased emphasis on performative speech acts (utterances which themselves constitute social states of affairs) that are supposed to mark visible power to act. Our understanding of power, communication and rhetoric should be enhanced for considerations of importance (Engelstad & Østerud, 2004).

4.2 The relevance of rhetoric for assessing what is a breach of norms of communicative reasonableness

Our presentation in the form of speech acts is never guiltless. Nor is this article’s account of events at the pilot school guiltless: Is what has been described correct and honest? This type of question concerns the individual language user’s ethical awareness (Gross, 1990). Rhetoric is relevant for how we as language users express ourselves in order to bring about good conversations. A variant of the same argument is that the person who writes or speaks must have ethical qualities. A position of superiority requires in my opinion a greater degree of caution than is the case in communication between peers: The sender’s position of superiority contributes in itself to reinforcing effects of linguistic perspectivising. This may happen through choice of rhetorically effective utterances or matters that are excluded from – in this case – the school’s agenda. The principal’s position of superiority is in itself no guarantee that the message is perceived as trustworthy. The statement by a teacher “It is simply dreadful with all the hollow phrases we keep hearing now”, is an example of this. This example illustrates what constraints the principal as a holder of power operates within, and rhetoric can to some extent help us to understand the complexity in fields of action where several actors exercise power.

The relevance of rhetoric must be seen in connection with conditions for communicative adequacy and ideals of enlightened discussion. Expressing criticism on a rhetorical foundation becomes in this perspective a matter of cultivating communication: rhetoric can be useful as a tool (Andersen, 1995; Vickers, 1988). If we maintain the idea of communicative reasonableness and adequacy (Grice, 1967), what is then a breach of norms of communicative reasonableness? Something that I view as being a clear breach of communicative reasonableness illustrates the point: David Franks has studied how victims (battered women) adopt and internalise the assailants’ perception of them (Franks, 1989). In the empirical material that has been reported on in this article, there are no comparable “victims” or “assailants”. Yet there are examples of groups of teachers who adopted the picture of themselves as “old-fashioned”, “reactionary”, “crotchety”. A possible way of problematising among actors who communicate in a school is to pose the question: Is this a symptom of a breach of communicative reasonableness? Reflections on practical acts may be appropriate for drawing conclusions about what we associate with communicative reasonableness.

4.3 The relevance of rhetoric as a tool that confers authority (empowerment)

Plato was the first to raise criticism of rhetoric as seduction, illusion or veiling (in Faidros and in his critique of the Sophists in Gorgias, Vickers, 1988). Aristotle defended the *raison d’être* of rhetoric: all people engage to a certain degree in testing the tenability of an argument, and all set about examining or supporting arguments or defending themselves (Aristotle, 1991, chapter 1.2). Therefore rhetoric constitutes a potential for conferring authority and is thus a useful tool for the strongest argument’s uncompelled compulsion in objective conversation (Habermas, 1981:231). In educational administration there are no exact truths either in the field of practice or in the field of academic activity. The productive task of rhetoric can in such situations be to bring out what lies in a matter, to weigh and balance good and bad arguments, and thereby to contribute to more enlightened discussion and common sense (Andersen, 1995; Toulmin, 2001). Whether the room for the argumentative, objective conversation has been squeezed back in schools in general is an empirical question for which I have only weak evidence to be able to draw any generalization, but

even in authoritarian societies in which expressions of opinion are forced into the sphere of the underground, there is room to keep the use of language under critical observation.

Acknowledgements

Since my own education is in both the arts and the social sciences, I have for many years been wondering about the connection between language and social reality. My interest in school rhetoric gained renewed force after I took part in a seminar ("The Relevance of Rhetoric") at the University of Oslo in June 2002. I have even borrowed the title from this seminar. I owe a special debt of gratitude to academic presentations at this seminar by Kjell Lars Berge, Christian Kock and Fredrik Engelstad. Further, I want to thank everyone at the pilot school (the principal, the teachers, and the students) for giving me access to themselves, their thoughts and the inner life at the school, and not least to T.H. Frolich and G.M. Vestby for generously making some of their empirical material (group interviews, June, 2001) from the pilot school available to me.

Endnotes

1. I understand the concept of rhetoric in conformity with a classical definition: "the faculty of discovering the possible means of persuasion in reference to any subject whatever" Aristotle 1991: 1355.
2. In Elstad manuscript I have provided detailed references to documents that support the account that is given here.
3. In the reproduction of linguistic utterances I use to a great extent quotations from interviews. The interviews were conducted in the period from March 2001 up to March 2003. For evaluation of the reform period prior to March, 2001, I made use of the interview material owned by The Research and Competence Network for ICT. On request I can provide documentary evidence of all the quotations I use. The fact that explicit references are lacking here is connected with a desire to protect my sources. In an early version of an article, I referred to the dates of the statements made during interviews, etc., which led to the fact that the principal of the pilot school was able to identify one of the informants.
4. In my communication with the principal, he claims that methodological variation has been the school's main objective the whole time.
5. On 22 March 2004 I forwarded to the principal an article I had written, and I asked the principal whether he could provide written grounds for what the school has done about non-academic activity. It took 4 hours from the moment the principal received my e-mail message until he sent out an announcement to all the school's teachers that "MSN chat shall be closed".

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