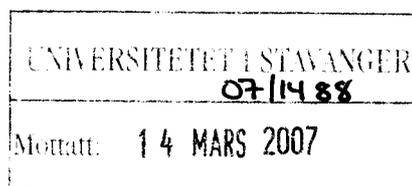


REPORT BY THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE – LITERACY STUDIES

THE FACULTY OF ARTS AND EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF STAVANGER



GENERAL COMMENTS

Delimitation of the field

The committee considers that the doctoral program in literacy studies could be an important contribution to doctoral studies in Norway. Comparable programs in the field of literacy studies or in *lesevitenskap* ('the science of writing') do not exist at any other Norwegian or Nordic university. The program has potentialities for making the University of Stavanger (UiS) an important research milieu for literacy studies in the Nordic countries, and indeed more widely.

However, the self-evaluation document raises a number of questions that need further definition. The most important issue is the delimitation of the field of study, which in the Norwegian document is referred to as *lesevitenskap*. The notions *literacy studies* and *lesevitenskap* have different scopes. What does UiS mean by the specific contribution of the narrower field *lesevitenskap* into the broader field of literacy studies? Does it narrow the field of literacy studies, or is it more or less identical with it. The committee suggests therefore that the definition of literacy studies should be more thoroughly discussed in the document. What is UiS' specific approach to this field? What does UiS want to develop as their specific profile within this field, and where is its greatest potential? What is and what could be done better at UiS than anywhere else?

Core areas – the overall view

The self-evaluation document has specified four core areas. The committee agrees that it is necessary for the research milieu in literacy studies to give priority to the fields of literacy studies in which UiS has unique and specific competence and research experience. The competence of the staff of the institution has been taken into account. Yet it is important that the relation between the four core areas is developed further so that they form a coherent whole. In the document both the historical and sociocultural background and context are presented in a thorough way, but it would be advisable to discuss the differences and the similarities in the four core areas as well. This would make the document more cohesive. Courses related to the core areas might be reduced and be more specifically geared towards the field of literacy studies. All individual course descriptions should be linked to the concept of literacy studies.

UiS' specific contribution

The societal need for this programme and the transferable skills obtained by studying in it should be flagged more strongly. An important point in the programme's standing among

scholars and doctoral students at other Nordic universities is how it relates and is able to cooperate with other research teams in the Nordic countries. What is the specific contribution of this programme in the Norwegian and Nordic environment? PhD students from other institutions should be able to come to Stavanger and learn something new, which they will not learn elsewhere. This goal implies that the document should be more specific in listing related research environments in Norway and in the Nordic countries. These environments include the Vestfold University College, the research team working on subject-oriented texts (*sakprosa*) at the University of Oslo, the centre for New Norwegian Written Culture in Volda, and the literacy research practised by medievalists, for instance the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of Bergen. One might discuss the possibility of research collaboration with such institutions, allowing for course-exchange. Networking is very important both on the national and the international level. One suggestion might be to develop a bibliography of literacy studies published by Nordic scholars, to the benefit of both research teams and students involved in this programme.

Another relationship not sufficiently presented in the self-evaluation document is the relation between the new programme and Lesesenteret (the Centre for the Study of Reading). In Norway this research centre has a strong reputation, not least because of its many research projects working to achieve knowledge of reading levels among Norwegian children, youngsters and grown-ups. Some important members of the staff at Lesesenteret are included in the self-evaluation document as potential contributors to the doctoral program. Still, it is unclear what their contribution might be. The doctoral program seems to be anchored in the humanistic tradition typical of the department of cultural and linguistic studies at UiS, and not in the tradition dominating at Lesesenteret. Their professors have, for the most part, a very different approach to the study of literacy and reading from what is advocated in the self-evaluation document. The committee find this relation unclear and think that the relation between the two research traditions in the study of reading could be further elaborated.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS ON THE FOUR CORE AREAS

- 1) The delimitation of the field of literacy seems sound and coherent in general. Some important traditions should be discussed more thoroughly, as mentioned above. How the four components work up towards UiS' definition of the area of literacy studies could be specified more carefully. Another important issue is how the four components are directly related to each other, linking the practical and theoretical; this should be elaborated in more detail. The discussion between the technological deterministic approach of Jack Goody and the culturalistic approach advocated by Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner should be mentioned as a constitutive trend in literacy studies.
- 2) Reading and interpretation. This field is coherent and well developed as well, but why is the field of fiction privileged – why not expand the field to the study of non-fictional text? The study of the field of non-fictional texts has been developed in different research communities, not least in the Nordic communities, through the Nordic project studying subject-oriented texts ('*sakprosa*'). These studies have problematised the difference between fiction and non-fiction and stated that the differences between these reading traditions are more important than the similarities. The relation between the field of reading and interpretation as presented in the document, and the field of reading science as it is practised at Lesesenteret, might also

be presented in this context. It would be an important task for the research milieu to develop a link between the cognitive approach to reading dominating the Lesesenter-tradition, and the hermeneutic approach presented in this core area.

- 3) Literacy from a developmental perspective is an important field, and Lesesenteret has a strong position on this area in Norway. The research programme could have the development of reading skills and reading competence as one of its foci, both at the individual and the group level. The development of reading skills and reading competence is relevant not only for school pupils, but also for grown-ups both at workplaces and in domestic life. It is also important to study the development of reading competences in a historical context. In this way, this core area is linked to the first core area of literacy, society and history. However, the difference between reading research and writing research is blurred in the document, especially in the Norwegian version where the title is *lese- og skriveutvikling* ('reading and writing development'). The ability to read and writing skills have research traditions of their own. They differ in their epistemological approaches, theories and methodologies. In the document writing research and reading research are presented as more or less the same. It is important that the differences and the similarities are elaborated further. The overall claim that reading and writing are more or less the same should be more explicitly discussed. In other research communities in the Nordic countries, writing research is practised without any explicit relation to reading research, and it is important that the document presents a clear line of argumentation for another position.
- 4) Writing systems. This core area is coherently presented and no further elaboration is needed.

NOKUT criteria

NOKUT 2-3 (1)

1: The regulations are acceptable.

2: The English name Literacy Studies is acceptable, but its relation to the Norwegian term needs further thought. In the English version the term *literacy studies* is used without any specific reference to the Norwegian notion *lesevitenskap* ('science of reading'). In the Norwegian version of the document, the field is presented as a more limited version of the field of literacy studies. It is vital that the Norwegian and the English versions cohere also with respect to the Norwegian concepts.

3: The plan is presented as a menu of four core areas, which is very useful. It is also very good that the topics of the different core areas are approached from different angles.

4: The planning team of the doctoral programme has developed a two-tier plan, i.e. an overall approach, divided into four different core areas. This has been done in an interesting way that should solve problems posed by an extremely multidisciplinary field. The team has the potential of developing into something genuinely new in the Norwegian and even in the Nordic context.

5: Interdisciplinary work is challenging, and the programme provides a platform for interdisciplinary co-operation. The notion of the common core with the four core areas makes it possible to enter the programme from different research traditions, which is an important strength.

6: The objectives of the programme are clearly stated, and the plans concerning student recruitment and accommodation into the research community are acceptable. The programme does not, however, elaborate on how the skills acquired in the programme are transferable to other fields of working life besides academia. The programme has a great potential in this respect, but it would be good to have the effects on employability of students more extensively outlined.

7: The plan is acceptable.

8: The programme could specify its potential for other Nordic and Norwegian PhD students more thoroughly. The planning team might choose to develop literacy studies in Stavanger as a core milieu for the country and the other Nordic countries, which would make the programme attractive to PhD students from other environments. The international network might also be developed further.

NOKUT 2-3 (2)

1: The expertise of the staff covers most of the core areas. The committee suggests that the staff is expanded with one professor with a relevant research background in mainstream humanistic, textually-oriented, anthropologically-minded literacy research. At present the staff have their competencies in different areas, some of which are only remotely related to literacy studies.

2: The committee finds the level of activity acceptable, but would like to emphasize the importance of ensuring a balance between teaching, supervising and research.

3: This challenge has been mentioned in point 1 above. Although both specialization and expertise are found within different areas of the programme, it is recommendable to recruit more senior staff for the core areas of literacy studies.

4: The committee finds the division of labour acceptable.

NOKUT 2-3 (3)

The Master's Programme in Literacy Studies can support doctoral studies, but at present some course descriptions have only vague reference to literacy studies.

NOKUT 2-3 (4)

Several research networks have already been created. The university is at an active phase in building up exchange programmes. The key to future research lies in networking and this should be elaborated in the document. It would be desirable to acquire information about other corresponding research environments in Norway and in the Nordic countries, as well as in UK. For instance, acquaintance with the important literacy research group at the University of Lancaster in UK would be desirable.

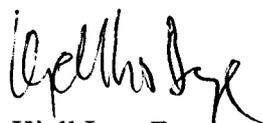
NOKUT 2-3 (5)

1. The committee finds it acceptable.
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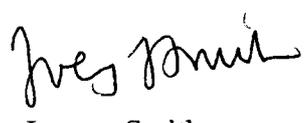
NOKUT 2-3- (6)

The committee finds it acceptable.

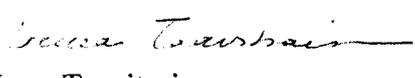
Oslo, Glasgow, Helsinki December 7, 2006



Kjell Lars Berge
Chair



Jeremy Smith



Irma Taavitsainen