

Interplay of Texts in Different Modalities

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This special volume on The Interplay of Textual and Interactional Resources in Collective Literacy Practices in Nordic Classrooms discusses the interplay between instructional formats, communicative patterns and multiple text formats in classrooms, using data from different subject areas and age groups/grades from Finnish and Swedish classrooms.

All articles are based on the assumption that a key quality of literacy development involves the way in which students demonstrate learning through participating in a gradually more complex interplay with texts. These five articles are conceptually and theoretically founded on perspectives on language learning and social interaction that specifically emphasises the role of interaction between actors as well as between actors and artefacts in the development and distribution of text comprehension. Accordingly, literacy practices are recognized as heterogeneous, plural phenomena, situated in their social, cultural, and institutional settings. One article (Tanner, Olin-Scheller & Tengberg) explores, for example, the way in which written texts serve as resources for multiple meanings while they at the same time are the central tools for task completion and renegotiated order in the classroom. Another article (Hultin) discusses the contributions of literacy practices and texts to fostering democratic values and promoting plurality – for the latter however only partially. A third article (Tainio & Slotte) explores the many functions of ‘reading aloud’ in the classroom. These vary from fostering writing skills and providing motivation for reading, to promoting engagement with specific content areas and ideas, and to just being used for fun or as a ‘fill-in activity’. A fourth article (Schmidt & Skoog) discusses tensions inherent in interaction, focusing on the interplay between instructional format, meaning-making and language use across different curricula areas in sixth grade classrooms. Last – but not least – Hermansson’s article discusses the interplay between bodily involvement, ideas and the materiality of the text (e.g. eBooks) using preschool classrooms as her reference point.

All articles use video data when investigating interaction linked to literacy practices; two of the articles use Conversation Analysis (CA) methods, while the three others make use of ethnographic and affective/embodied approaches when analysing literacy interaction.

The key contribution of this volume is that the five articles: i) discuss literacy practices from an empirical point of view – from in-situ-classroom perspectives

across grades and school subjects; ii) point to the multiple functions and meanings of texts/artefacts and interaction in the classroom, varying from giving voice to students' shared meaning-making to 'classroom management' procedures and thus going beyond a dichotomised language when analyzing and understanding classroom practices; and iii) highlight the issue of 'seized opportunities' and also 'missed opportunities' and thus the role of the teacher in pedagogic interaction. Below we elaborate on these issues before we give a short overview of each of the different articles.

Using everyday classroom situations – such as writing activities, 'talking around a text' and reading aloud when analysing possible qualities and constraints in school literacies – is powerful and these are all habitual and relatively frequent activities in Nordic classrooms. They have, however, not been systematically analysed. Reading aloud, for example, is a seemingly trivial and frequently-occurring activity through which students encounter texts. By systematic, in-depth analyses of reading aloud as a 'pedagogical interaction' among ninth graders, Tainio and Slotte show the multiple meanings and functions of reading aloud, and thus shed light on the complexities of seemingly 'trivial practices' such as reading aloud (e.g. a shared reference point, multiple understandings, motivating students to engage with specific content and/or just to learn to enjoy a text). Their analyses further emphasise the critical role of the teacher as moderator, role model and facilitator when using reading aloud as pedagogical tool.

Analyses of 'talking around a text' and students' negotiating processes for the purpose of joint writing are likewise used to shed light on multiple meanings and democratic qualities of classroom interaction. In her paper on third-grade classrooms, Hultin shows how classroom conversations (e.g. turn-taking, shared meaning and ideas) could be used to promote democratic and deliberative fostering. Similarly – from talk around texts in sixth-grade classrooms – Schmidt and Skoog show how instructional formats and the scaffolding techniques of the teachers support, but also constrain, the qualities of classroom conversation.

Breaking away from dichotomised language when analysing classroom practices. All these articles point to how texts/artefacts and interaction have multiple functions and meanings in the classroom, varying from giving voices to shared meaning-making to task-completion and 'classroom management' procedures. Thus, they represent a breakaway from the dichotomised and polarised language so often used to analyse classroom practices. Traditionally, binary and polarised language is often used to describe teaching and learning. We tend to describe/interpret classroom teaching and learning as either pupil-centred or teacher-centred; as either authoritative or dialogic; as either talking or listening; in short, as either active or passive. These are, however, what Clarke (2006), Klette (2010) and others have called 'false dichotomies'. All articles included in this volume escape from such binary language by pointing to how texts and engagement with texts support both active engagement and passive listening task completion and student participation, classroom order and the joy of a text – and maybe most importantly – how student participation goes hand in hand with teacher authority and teacher scaffolding. Teacher authority and student

engagement are not separate, contradictory activities, but two aspects of productive classroom interaction.

Seized and missed pedagogic opportunities. All five articles address the issue of what is often described as “seized versus missed pedagogic opportunities” (Brophy & Good, 1986, Pianta et al. 2007) and how teachers are able to make the most of the situation and design in creating opportunities to learn. In terms of missed opportunities, Schmidt and Skoog show how the instructional format (e.g. teacher-led recitation format) and teachers’ lack of what they call ‘a dialogic teaching repertoire’ hinder students’ engagement with the content, as students are not actively using content-related concepts and words in their mutual classroom communication. Tanner, Olin-Scheller and Tengberg show how teachers could have intervened productively in the discussion/group discussion, and by doing so may have encouraged students to articulate and compare different readings of the text. Hultin, similarly, shows how her fifth-grade classrooms support shared meaning-making and multiple understandings. The full potential of these opportunities is, however, not exploited, she argues, since the students are not encouraged to discuss different views and standpoints, or to provide evidence for their arguments.

The articles further illustrate golden pedagogical moments – what we have entitled seized opportunities – and show how teachers use engagement with texts to model ways of reading and/or interacting with texts. Tainio and Slotte show how a teacher’s reading aloud serves as role model of the ways of reading a text, while simultaneously providing a safe and supportive environment that helps students to express themselves orally. From her observations of preschool classrooms, Hermansson similarly shows how a teacher creates warm, cozy and productive reading moments by nurturing bodily involvement with active listening, imitations and engagement when reading e-books.

Composition of the volume – brief overview of the articles

Below we summarise the focal points and key findings from the five articles in turn. Together these five contributions present a trustworthy, nuanced, and somewhat positive image of pedagogic literacy practices in Nordic classrooms.

Carina Hermansson’s article builds on studies of e-reading in three Swedish preschool classes. The author uses affect theory in her analysis to explore how sound recordings, bodily movements, reading instruction and digital tablets generate processes. The article studies how e-books serve as interactional resources for metacognitive as well as embodied strategies when six year-olds read digital narratives. Hermansson points to the fact that most children grow up with digital devices such as tablets and smart phones and her study shows that embodied and metacognitive strategies are vital components of creating and communicating understanding when six-year-olds read and/or listen to narratives. She finds that e-reading activities and their effects are characterized by unpredictability. The intended use of strategies is interrupted when students get involved in the activity. They change and transform the pre-planned use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies for better understanding. Examples of how particular passages of the narrative text create potential

for training sound-symbol correlation are given, and Hermansson indicates that the read-aloud voice has potential to transform and act. The author concludes that the intersection of the read-aloud voice and the embodied actions in young children's e-reading activities might contribute to redefining dominant cognitive and metacognitive discourses of reading comprehension.

The aim of Eva Hultin's study is to explore how democratic qualities are constituted during collective writing among Swedish third-grade students. She also tries out a set of deliberative criteria when studying classroom interaction. Six students and their teacher were observed, and two interactional sessions were analysed. Although the order of the activities in the lessons was strictly planned in terms of interaction, the students disrupted the plan by starting a dialogue through which the form and content of the story were negotiated. The analysis shows some deliberative qualities in classroom interaction: the students, for example constantly expressed their different views, and showed mutual respect during the joint creation and revision of text. On the other hand, the students seldom discussed their different suggestions, but instead went directly to voting when disagreements were put on the table, which is actually not in line with the deliberative tradition. In some situations, certain students were taken more seriously than others who had to struggle to be heard. However, two of those who struggled the most, got most of their suggestions accepted in the end. Due to the fact that these students continued to be active even after they met resistance, which in turn made this a democratic experience. Hultin argues for the importance of recognising democratic qualities and potential in schools, so that teachers get the opportunity to improve these practices.

Children can practice deliberative skills even when those skills are not formally taught, but if a deliberative education becomes too instrumental, there is a risk that the children are not positioned as already-competent participants. This in turn is shown to be an important prerequisite for realizing deliberative communication among equals in the classroom.

In their article, Catarina Schmidt and Marianne Skoog study interaction across the curriculum in relation to literacy learning in two sixth-grade classrooms in Sweden. Two areas are subject to the investigation of identified possibilities of interaction during 12 lessons on the themes of Law and Justice and World Religions. The analysis focuses on the register of interaction repertoires and the possibilities they create. The authors note that the teachers' approaches and the students' opportunities to talk are slightly different in the two classrooms: in Law and Justice, the teacher aims at making the subject content comprehensible and preparing students for their individual work, and learning talk is observed in combination with teacher's recitation. In World Religions, students start working individually rather quickly, and their own learning talk is made possible when they are working in groups. The authors emphasize the role played by interaction in students' literacy development through subject content, and argue for the necessity of considering students participants with their own resources, and of increasing their possibilities for actively taking part in all phases of a lesson, not only with the purpose of acquiring subject knowledge, but also for self-realisation, and future commitment as citizens. This requires a more dialogic

approach to teaching that affords possibilities for exchanging ideas and achieving common understanding. The authors conclude that active language use is crucial for all students' literacy development, and argue that it could help students to move from copying to a more functional and critical writing process.

Liisa Tainio and Anna Slotte examine Finnish students' and teachers' reading-aloud activities in sixth-grade, L1-classrooms. The analysis encompasses different read-aloud texts as regards genre, source and students' visual access/non-access to the text. The authors find that texts are used for several purposes, for example to create a shared reference point, to motivate student learning in a particular content, to foster writing skills, or just to enjoy the text. They find that the practice of oral reading includes a range of activities that all have a common pedagogic goal: to create a shared reference point. They show how interaction with the text is demonstrated by verbal practices and embodied interactional practices such as gaze and body posture, and how the teachers act as models for the students when interacting with texts. Further, they reflect on read-alouds as pedagogical tools for developing literacy skills in a classroom setting, and argue that they can be used in various ways. The authors also refer to the relation between positive classroom atmosphere and positive attitudes towards learning, and argue that reading aloud can offer a relaxed moment of being together with shared interactional and intellectual focus, while also emphasising the teacher's significant role when students read aloud. The teachers in this study acted with great empathy and modelled active listening and gave positive feedback on the text or the reading. The authors argue that read-alouds can be used to foster pedagogic interaction, using various kinds of texts, printed or digital, and that more studies like this should be carried out to offer research-based information for teachers and teaching students.

Marie Tanner, Christina Olin-Scheller and Michael Tengberg examine how argumentative texts are used as material objects in the interaction between teacher and students and between students in a Swedish ninth-grade classroom. They show how these texts contribute positively to interaction and the distribution of turns between participants. The study also reveals that the students tend to interpret the aim of the discussion as task work, and hence the authors emphasize the importance of teachers' awareness of how student discussions easily turn away from practising critical reading to solving the task at hand. The authors point towards possibilities and constraints from a dialogical point of view: while students refer to the text or make intertextual references as intended, the conversations eventually take other directions and focus on finishing the task. From the teacher's perspective, the challenge seems to be how to support dialogue in students' group discussions in relation to classroom practices which prioritize problem-solving. The authors suggest that teachers could intervene in group discussions in such a way so that all students are encouraged to articulate and compare different readings throughout. They also point to the fact that this requires teachers' awareness of deeper explorations of texts. During teacher-student discussions, teachers may model how to read texts critically and this in turn could lead to a more fruitful discussion that would support students' critical reading.

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