

Symposium Language, Literacy and Learning

A Nordic LLL Network activity in collaboration with CCD@JU activity

10 October 2017, 09.30 – 12.00

Multilingual school starters: social semiotics perspectives on second language and literacy learning in education

Dr. Helle Pia Laursen

Department for Education and Pedagogy (DPU), Aarhus University, Denmark

The starting point for this paper is the still increasing role of literacy in educational settings. Often primary education is seen as almost being synonymous with learning to read and write and activities that include literacy play a pivotal role. At the same time, in the Nordic countries, there seems to be a growing tendency to use literacy skills to regulate education through outcome metrics and international comparisons of test scores. This implies a conceptualization of literacy as a set of measurable skills, which can be measured in a specific language. Thus, literacy is perceived as a more or less universal, mental and language-neutral phenomenon; however, it is implicitly linked to a given language that in turn is treated as an inherently natural phenomenon. In that way literacy acquisition seems to be reduced to a question of adding signs to a language the student is expected to know, thereby neglecting the fact that this is not the case for all children. Or this is seen as a deviation from the norm rather than a common condition for many children in this age of globalisation. Furthermore, this perception of literacy entails that the student's possible insights into other ways of adding signs to language than those we know from a specific version of the Latin alphabet, fall outside the interests of research and teaching. From this perspective and with a social semiotic view on language and literacy acquisition in multilingual settings, I will argue that a deconstruction of such ideological conceptualizations of language and literacy requires a separation of language and literacy in order to reconstruct the relationship in ways that reflect the complexity of the children's communicative repertoires and their engagement in language and literacy as meaning making.

Literacy practices as embodied navigation tools across space and time. Mapping the geography of epistemic spaces in higher education. *The case of the Pepper experiment*

Giulia Messina Dahlberg, University of Borås, Sweden

Taking both sociocultural and dialogical perspectives on languaging including the use of technology, the study reported in this paper addresses the ways in which students negotiate and frame time and space dimensions in communicative practice during their engagement in the setting up, preparation and running of an experiment within a research project in Human Robot Interaction (HRI). The study explores the role that language and embodiment (in terms of gestures and movements) and more specifically literacy practices play as navigation tools in epistemic spaces in higher education. This is done

through the analysis of interactional data created during students' discussions when dealing with the framing and running of the experiment. The investment in such an analytical focus, we argue, gives us a vantage point that will shed light on how complex communicative practices might result in educational activities where students make use of a range of tools and techniques in order to make sense (and navigate) the tasks at hand.

By using a range of representational technique to show the multimodal and embodied nature of human communication, the study makes visible the patterned actions that students make and orient towards when dealing with a range of tasks in order to come to an agreement or reach intersubjectivity. The analysis shows the role played by bodily movements and gestures in the organisation of the interaction i.e. in the ways in which participants "move on" (both discursively and physically) to the next task or topic as well as the role played by literacy practices in interaction (both analogue and digital) in the creation and navigation of what I contend, are complex, multisited and multilayered epistemic spaces.

Preschool literacy and second language learners

Dr. Lars Holm, Associate professor
Department for Education and Pedagogy (DPU), Aarhus University, Denmark

In order to understand literacy and language in education it is no longer enough to direct research attention to schools and universities. In the Nordic countries, preschools have become important arenas for numerous political initiatives intending to enhance children's language and literacy learning. The poor results of the PISA-measurement have in Denmark, Norway and Sweden drawn much attention to literacy and language in day-care centers and kindergartens and resulted in the development of a considerable number of social technologies (programs and concepts) intended to improve pre-school children's literacy and language skills. Seen in a knowledge-society perspective the development might be characterized as an expansion of a life-long-learning evidence-based strategy into early childhood.

The importance of development of early childhood literacy is discursively related to research in "precursors" to literacy and to a functional understanding of literacy. The research in precursors to literacy identifies teachable and generalised preconditions for being successful in regard to school literacy. The precursor-strategy makes it important to examine what happens when transnational and generalised assumptions about language and literacy learning meets linguistic diversity and second language learners. One central issue in relation to a linguistic diverse context is to investigate the distinctions and categorisations established in and around the different programmes. Another issue is to examine the impact of the programmes and concepts for institutional practices. How do children with diverse cultural and linguistic background learn about reading and writing, and what are the rules for socially interacting and sharing knowledge in the literacy events they meet in their day-care centers and kindergartens? Examining these social practices in pre-schools might illuminate the interplay between language and literacy and the learning processes of second language learners and contribute to the discussion about the need for re-conceptualizations of the relation between language and literacy.

Emerging multilingual practices of young people: learning language or literacy or both?

Dr. Anne Pitkänen-Huhta, Department of Language and Communication Sciences,
University of Jyväskylä, Finland

The development of literacy is often understood as the ability to function in the languages that are used in one's immediate environment, that is, when examining literacy practices a connection is made to one's first or second language, to use the traditional categorizations. In today's increasingly multilingual societies with mixed and meshed uses of various linguistic and multimodal resources, this view is limited and inadequate. Young people especially are savvy users of their limited language skills to create new kinds of multilingual literacy practices. Therefore, we should also examine what kind of literacy practices people have in languages that they are not fluent in. Approaching this kind of multilingual language use from the perspective of literacy practices – rather than language skills – enables one to look at beyond language to the social practices, to look beyond languages as separate entities and focus on language as resource. At the same time, this approach gives us a lens to examine the relationship between literacy practices and language learning.

In this paper, I will use two cases as examples of young people's emerging multilingual literacy practices. In both, the use of participatory methods was central. The first one focuses on Finnish teenagers' use of English in their various language and literacy practices. The second one explores primary school aged children's creative literacy practices in the context of endangered indigenous Sámi languages. With the participatory take on literacy practices in both cases, the researchers were able to bypass the fixed views of language, competence, proficiency and skills, and instead provide space for awareness raising and emancipation in creating emerging literacy practices in which the young people make use of all the linguistic and multimodal resources available to them.