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Literacy

»Critical media literacy, multiliteracies
and digital arts can be a staging ground
for a new civic space.«

Allan Luke & Julian Sefton-Green

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*All articles are published in full text in Danish,
except Franker’s which is in Swedish*

SPRØGforum

Foreword

Almost ten years ago, Kjeld Kjertmann wrote an article in *Sprogforum* in which he discussed what literacy was to be called in Danish (Kjertmann 2009). Throughout his academic career he had experienced a paradigm shift from reading to literary, a shift that the Norwegian literary researcher Lise Kulbrandstad describes in her article in this issue. Kjertmann suggested that literary could be called *tekstsprogs kultur* (textual language culture) in Danish. That term has not gained much popularity, but – as is clear from Kulbrandstad’s article – the term is still a matter of discussion. Qarin Franker reveals that in Swedish academic circles literacy is referred to as *litteracitet*. In Danish, the word *literacy* is normally used. In Denmark, the National Centre for Reading defines literacy as follows: “Literacy is human competence at decoding, understanding and using signs, such as letters, numbers, diagrams, graphs, drawings and images.” We the editors of *Sprogforum* have also discussed what we should call this issue – we have ended up adopting the term that is most widespread in Denmark: literacy.

The many terms that have been suggested we view as a symptom of the fact that we are dealing with a concept that has a wide range of meanings throughout the educational world, and that via its history has become the subject of strong interests and controversial interpretations. The concept originates from the UNESCO campaigns of the 1960s for the spread of functional literacy in third-world countries as a skill that contributes to development, that of the individual as well as of society. The OECD programmes of the 1990s defined literacy as a key competence for individual educational success and for countries’ competitiveness, and thereby placed literacy at the top of the educational agenda in those countries (PISA). In Danish educational reforms since the turn of the millennium, awareness of the importance of literacy has left its clear mark, even though the term is not used. First of all in the Danish Folkeskole, with a strengthened focus on reading, but in the most recent reform, New Common Aims, with a broader focus on both reading and writing and their importance for subject-related learning. In the reforms of Danish upper second-

ary education (*gymnasieskolen*) the students' acquisition of writing competence is a key focal area. So literacy is a field where large-scale investments, political as well as pedagogical, are being made, and where there is a need of both critical discussion and pedagogical development.

A milestone in the discussion of literacy are Brian Street's anthropological studies in Iran in the 1980s, where he rejects the idea of literacy as being an "autonomous capacity" that could lead to development by itself. Here he argues in favour of literacy being considered instead as part of a social practice – social literacies – which in various societies and social groups assume various forms and functions (Street 1984). Another milestone is the New London Groups' concept of multiliteracies, first published in *Harvard Educational Review* in 1994. This group, which among others including Allan Luke and Gunther Kress, who are contributing to this issue of *Sprogforum*, broadened the understanding of literacy in the light of radical changes in society under 'new capitalism', partly the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity in a globalised world, partly the spread of new (multi-)media. In this issue we can read how, 20 years later, they now view risks and challenges that have not shown any decrease, particularly when it comes to digital literacy. In the other articles in this issue it is also obvious how these discussions have contributed to shaping the understanding of literacy in Nordic and Danish contexts.

No matter what 'the child' is called, it is vital to maintain that the concept of literacy creates obligations as regards our view of language, culture and learning. Key concepts that apply to literacy are the formation of meaning, signs, social and cultural aspects, social practices, semiotics, (multi-)modality, semiotic resources, the communication context, social communities, forms of representation and writing and writer identity, to name just some of those that feature in the articles of this issue. Some readers will perhaps miss a lack of more focus on biliteracy. It ought to be an objective to develop bilingual children, the biliteracy of young people and adults via education in the modern, multilingual society of Denmark. Various mother tongues ought not only be accepted to the extent that they provide a path to Danish but also as a legitimate aim and means of biliteracy.

Our intention with this issue is to shed light on the results of three decades of development in the view of reading and writing, from not simply being a decoding and encoding of the meaning of the written language to being able to use texts in social, cognitive,

critical and learning contexts. This paradigm shift has had radical practical consequences for both research and teaching. We hope that this issue will contribute to a development where language-communicative literacy practice will increasingly be able to replace traditional reading and writing instruction in all forms of education, and at all levels.

Have an enjoyable read!

The editors

Literature

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“It has nothing to do with Danish”: On the role of the expert in media representations of multiethnic youth style

[”Det har ikke noget med dansk at gøre” – lidt om ekspertens rolle i medieomtaler af multietnisk ungdomsstil]

Abstract

Public debates about language in Denmark often develop into discussions about what counts as Danish and what does not. This applies when the debate begins with a discussion of the influence of the English language on the Danish language, but it is also true – not surprisingly – when the subject is language styles that are associated with young people of minority background, ‘multiethnic youth style’. This feature article presents a brief outline of commonly reproduced representations of multiethnic youth styles in Danish media and the public language debates which result from them. Linguists and other ‘experts’ often feature in news media portrayals of multiethnic youth styles. In the journalistic setup, experts are included as a means of constructing authoritative backing. Some sociolinguists have argued that when researchers comment on a particular case, they also co-operate with the narrative that is conveyed. They are not objective commentators on the sidelines, but co-constructors of the meta-discourses associated with the topic. This, of course, raises the question whether researchers should refrain from participating in media coverage of multiethnic youth styles altogether. There is no easy answer to this question. Only that we can be sure that when the subject treated by the media consists of a cocktail of language change and immigrants, the risk of contributing to the (re)construction of unfortunate debates about ‘Danish-ness’ is imminent.

From reading to literacy: changing perspectives in teaching and research

[Fra lesing til literacy – et perspektivskifte i undervisning
og forskning]

Abstract

The point of departure in this article is the increased use of the term *literacy* in both research and teaching. In 2015, the *International Reading Association* changed its name to the *International Literacy Association*. A main argument was that most teachers identify themselves as more than reading teachers, cf. the dictionary definition of *literacy* as ‘the ability to read and write’. Two different sources of the increased use of the term are discussed in the article. While sociocultural theories of literacy emphasise that literacy practices are social practices in which reading, writing and talking around texts often occur simultaneously, OECD in the PISA-studies uses *literacy* in the sense of *competence* when trying to characterise students’ reading literacy as well as their mathematical and scientific literacy. Another challenge with the English term *literacy* is that it is hard to translate into Scandinavian languages. This is also a topic explored in the article.

Towards critical literacy in the teaching of Danish in grade

[På vej mod kritisk literacy i danskundervisningen i 4. klasse]

Abstract

The objective of literacy teaching is not only for pupils to learn to read and write; literacy teaching must also foster pupils' ability to engage in critical reflection on their own as well as the literacy practices of others. This article describes a series of literacy lessons conducted in a multilingual grade 4 class in a Danish primary school with the explicit aim of contributing to the pupils' development of critical literacy. Under the heading *How written language can sell*, the lesson series focused on real estate agents' descriptions of houses for sale, a specific text type characterized by careful and strategic positive representation of the house for sale, realized in the textual description as well as through the accompanying photos. These descriptions illustrate that written language is not a neutral medium; on the contrary, real estate agents can and will use written language strategically in order to sell. By exploring authentic descriptions of houses for sale and by producing their own positively coloured descriptions of rooms for rent, the pupils in grade 4 took important steps towards critical literacy.

The case for critical media literacy and digital ethics

[Til forsvar for kritisk medie-literacy og digital etik]

Abstract

This essay is a position paper that renews and reframes the case for a *critical* media literacy and digital ethics. Many school systems have begun to augment traditional print literacy with a focus on digital tools and “multiliteracies” in the curriculum. The result is often a focus on skills and capacities for learning and workplaces, incorporating digital media into conventional curricular goals and systems. Here the case is made for the teaching of critical media literacy as part of an urgent agenda for “problematicising” current political, technological and environmental issues and problems, with a strong focus on digital ethics.

Writer identity and writing practices from a student perspective

[Skriveridentitet og skrivepraktikker i elevperspektiv]

Abstract

This article offers insight into the learning of writing in the foreign language classroom from a student perspective. In line with the New Literacy Studies approach to writing, learning to write is seen as getting to know the writing practices (Barton 2007), including writing purposes, interactions between participants and use of media required in assignments and genres in the foreign language classroom. Opportunities for identification (Ivanic 1998) with writing assignments are seen as crucial to the learning of new writing practices. Building on ethnographic longitudinal studies of student writing development through upper secondary education in the Danish *gymnasium* (Krogh & Jakobsen 2016), a single student, Jens, and his experiences as a writer in the foreign languages English and German are introduced. Examples from Jens' texts and from interviews show that creative and collaborative writing practices and functional genres play a major role for Jens' identification and development as a writer in upper secondary school. It is suggested that foreign language pedagogy should pay more attention to students' identification and subjective writing experiences as a resource for learning.

Schreibidentität und Schreibpraktiken aus der Schülerperspektive

[Skriveridentitet og skrivepraktikker i elevperspektiv]

Abstract

In diesem Artikel werden Einsichten in das Schreibenlernen im Fremdsprachenunterricht aus der Schülerperspektive vermittelt. Schreiben lernen wird in Anlehnung an *New Literacy Studies* als lernen von Schreibpraktiken (Barton 2007) gesehen, einschließlich Schreibzwecken, Interaktionen zwischen Teilnehmern und Gebrauch von Medien, die in Aufgaben und Genres im Fremdsprachenunterricht erfordert werden. Es wird angenommen, dass für das Lernen von neuen Praktiken die Identifikation der Lernenden (Ivanic 1998) mit den Schreibaufgaben von entscheidender Bedeutung ist. Auf der Grundlage ethnographischer Längsstudien der Schreibentwicklung von Schülern im dänischen Gymnasium (Krogh & Jakobsen 2016) wird ein Schüler, Jens, und seine Erfahrungen als Schreiber in den Fremdsprachen Englisch und Deutsch vorgestellt. Anhand von Beispielen aus Jens' Texten und aus Interviews wird gezeigt, dass kreative und kollaborative Schreibpraktiken sowie funktionale Genres für Jens' Identifikation und Entwicklung als Schreiber im Gymnasium eine maßgebliche Rolle spielen. Für die Didaktik des Fremdsprachenunterrichts wird empfohlen, der Identifikation und den subjektiven Schreiberfahrungen der Schüler als Lernressource mehr Aufmerksamkeit zu widmen.

Children's semiotic experiences in relation to *Minecraft*

[Børns semiotiske erfaringer i relation til *Minecraft*]

Abstract

This article argues that it is interesting for teachers in lower secondary school who teach Danish and English to learn about children's semiotic experiences in relation to *Minecraft*. The article draws on a social semiotic understanding of literacy (Hasan 2011) giving opportunities for all students to engage critically and reflexively in meaning-making. The article also draws on the concept of literacy practices developed within the New Literacy Studies (Street 1995). The writers see potentials in developing children's multiple practices in school and out of school (Bulfin & Koutsogiannis 2012), including children's critical media literacy (Kellner & Share 2009). The article gives examples of students' meaning making in out-of-school gaming activities such as commentary tracks and gaming videos in relation to *Minecraft*. Based on the examples the writers point at pedagogical perspectives in the subjects Danish and English. In both subjects teachers can draw on e.g. the interpersonal and in particular emotional meaning making that students experience in relation to *Minecraft*.

Writing in English and German in the introductory period of upper secondary

[Skriftlighed i engelsk og tysk i gymnasiets grundforløb]

Abstract

In this article the challenges experienced by Danish students who move from lower to upper secondary school are explored, and means to overcome these challenges are suggested. In upper secondary school the written tasks students are required to complete are numerous and diverse. Exam regulations require competencies in a variety of academic genres with which the majority of students are initially unfamiliar. In lower secondary school many have primarily written texts based on personal experiences and attitudes, hence they experience the rigid tasks in upper secondary as alienating and difficult. Many feel their identity as writers reduced, and consequently their feeling of ownership and responsibility for their own writing development decreases. In foreign language classes it is often possible to integrate creative writing processes, and the article presents examples of narrative and normative tasks which combine the academic and the creative. The article claims that continued work on this type of activity can help bridge the gap between the two school systems and enhance the development in upper secondary education not only of writing but of writers.

Basic literacy education for adolescents and adults

[Grundläggande litteracitetsundervisning för ungdomar och vuxna]

Abstract

In this article a model for basic literacy education for newly arrived young students and adults without previous formal schooling skills is presented. The model is a further development of and a recontextualization of the Four Literacy Resources Model created by Freebody and Luke (1990; 1999). It comprises the meaning making, code breaking, text using and text critical practises, but here supplemented with the students' own resources in the center of the model, driving them all. This aims to emphasize a functional perspective on the students' development of the different dimensions of literacy, but also to more clearly demonstrate the way in which they are included in all the specific, often multi-modal, literacy events that constantly occur in everyday life, at work and in school. The overall purpose is to visualize the literacy practices and make them useful and graspable for both teachers and students in their daily literacy work.

Writing and reading in the contemporary world of multimodality and ‘social media’

[Skrivning og læsning i nutidens verden med multimodalitet og sociale medier]

Abstract

Within the over-arching question “What, actually, *is* writing *now*; how do we need to think about writing and reading?” two connected matters need to shape thinking about teaching and learning of writing and reading: one, social-cultural, the other technological. The former social world had emphasized *authority*, *social responsibility* and *community*; the neo-liberal world emphasizes *individual* and *choice*. Two crucial *social* aspects are deep linguistic/cultural *diversity*; and “*generation*”, the *social* differences of chronological age. All these have deep effects on *writing*. While the “social media” are most evident, social/political factors remain fundamental in understanding present characteristics of writing. The *platforms* of the social media bring distinct arrangements: socially, for interaction; and formally, in their *affordances* for producing texts. Both differ from those of former ‘*pages*’. In the contemporary communicational landscape, *writing* is no longer the dominant resource for making meaning. In many sites, *image* has taken the place formerly occupied by *writing*. *Writing* now has to be seen as one element in complex compositional arrangements for making meaning.

Children as sense-makers

[Børn som skabere af betydning og mening]

Abstract

One of the main issues of teaching English to young learners is whether language learning is different for young learners as opposed to adult learners. Researchers have adopted two different approaches to this question: one is a psychological developmental approach inspired by Piaget, the other a socio-cultural approach inspired by Vygotsky. Researchers within new childhood sociology contrast these two approaches and warn against confounding children's biological immaturity with childhood as a social institution. They claim that children create their own social lives.

In this article, we demonstrate how the two different approaches can interact with each other. Based on analyses of sound and video recordings from two different classrooms, we show how children make use of different emotional, social and cultural resources in the various learning spaces the lessons provide. We conclude that the development of language teaching for young learners must take into account children's own resources and at the same time be sensitive to and respect what children at different ages are able to cope with.

Listening comprehension and listening pedagogy

[Lytteforståelse og lytteundervisning]

Abstract

This article suggests a more structured, process-oriented and learner-involving approach to the teaching of listening than what we see in language classrooms today. Listening exercises often involve an unnecessary focus on specific details and the comprehension of all words, which is far from how language users actually listen in everyday situations. Listening comprehension is not just about recognizing words but involves interpreting, guessing and inferring meaning in different social situations based on individual knowledge and experiences. Making use of contemporary research, the article suggests that teachers facilitate learners' individual comprehension and limit the use of written text in listening exercises. The aim is to raise learners' awareness about what listening comprehension actually involves, and how individual experiences and strategies influence comprehension. A process listening model is introduced (Vandergrift & Goh 2012) as a tool for working with general as well as individual strategies.

Good News

Selected recent books about Literacy at AU Library, Campus

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