Sammanlagt – olika praktiker?
En studie av literacy och meningsskapande i grundskolans tidiga ämnesundervisning

Monica Egelström

Akademisk avhandling
som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt förvar i Hörsal E, Humanisthuset, fredagen den 5 april, kl. 10:00.
Avhandlingen kommer att förvaras på svenska.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor, Anders Arnegård, Institutionen för pedagogiska studier, Karlstads Universitet/Avdelningen för rektorsutbildning, Uppsala Universitet.
This thesis focuses on school subjects as arenas for students’ literacy development and meaning making. How instructional practices are formed create different preconditions for students’ opportunities of literacy development and meaning making. The following questions have been explored: 1) How is instruction in mathematics and history organized and structured as preconditions for literacy practices?, 2) What instructional practices for literacy development and meaning making can be found in the school subjects mathematics and history?, and 3) How can existing instruction be used to formulate a zone of proximal development for educational practices in relation to students’ literacy development and meaning making?

Four teachers and their instruction in mathematics and history in 5th grade (students typically 11 years old) were followed. Classroom observations and teacher interviews were used as methods for data collection. Teacher interviews were carried out before, during, and after observational periods. The study draws on theories of literacy as situated practices (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 1984). For the analysis activity theory (Engeström, 2015; Leontiev, 1986) was used to create understandings of the two school subjects as human activity systems. To identify literacy practices within these systems autonomous and ideological models of literacy (Street, 1984) were used together with models of important resources (Freebody & Luke, 1990) and discourses (Ivanič, 2004) of literacy.

The results indicate that school subjects can be understood as different activity systems. Mathematics and history instruction were directed at different objects, in relation to content but also in how the object was perceived by the teachers as subjects. The activity system and its object had consequences for the role of the teacher subject in the system, but also for student roles. Different objects were also linked to differences in how the class was considered as community of work and how division of labor was formed in this community. Differences in the activity systems seemed to be related to differences in literacy practices. The activity systems were at least partly related to different models of literacy and which resources and discourses of literacy were presented to students. Different communities of work implied different opportunities to use joint work as a tool for meaning making. Likewise, actions seemed differently linked as chains of literacy events in the two activity systems. Important, though, in both subjects a tertiary contradiction could be identified, which indicate a zone of proximal development for both subjects in relation to students’ literacy development and meaning making.

Keywords
Subject area instruction, literacy practices, Mathematics, History, upper elementary grades, activity systems, zone of proximal development

Language Swedish
Number of pages 248