Linguistic ethnography as a resource in literacy teaching and teacher training

This poster presents work-in-progress from an ongoing case study of literacy teaching in a multilingual and socially complex Year 4 class in Aarhus, Denmark. The underlying assumption is that pupils’ understandings of and approach to literacy influence their participation in literacy learning and are reflected in their oral and written text productions.

The purpose of the case study is to develop insight in how the dialogue in literacy classrooms can scaffold pupils’ language and literacy learning and their understanding of text genres such as graphic novels and reader’s theater scripts. The data material consists of field notes and video observations from the literacy classroom combined with reflective interviews with the literacy teacher and analyses of pupils’ oral and written texts.

Taking a linguistic ethnographic approach, the case study investigates the interplay between teacher, pupil and text in the literacy classroom. A linguistic ethnographic analysis strives to look closely and locally at language as social action, but at the same time place these observations within broader relations of power dynamics in and outside the literacy classroom. We approach data with the rigorous eclecticism, openness and systematicity characteristic of a linguistic ethnographic analysis (Lefstein & Snell 2014, 185-86).

In the poster, we will focus on emergent data analysis. Our main points of interest are 1) the classroom dialogue between teacher and pupils and 2) the literacy teacher’s assessment of and feedback on pupils’ written and oral texts. Based on the analyses, we will discuss how linguistic ethnography can contribute to the development of literacy teaching at intermediate level in primary and lower secondary school and highlight the potentials and benefits of linguistic ethnography as a resource in current attempts to research-based teacher education.


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