

Doing Research in Primary School: Information Activities in Project-Based Learning

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The overarching aim for this thesis is to describe and illustrate how information literacies are enacted, and what opportunities for learning that children encounter, in the information activities in Swedish primary schools in the beginning of the 21st century. A starting-point is that information literacies are enacted in different ways in different settings. To describe what information literacies might imply in primary school is therefore treated as an empirical question.

In this research, information literacies are approached through the study of information activities in relation to project-based teaching and learning methods in three Swedish primary schools. Such methods are widespread throughout the Swedish educational system and have been introduced concurrently with the computerisation of the Swedish compulsory school. These parallel processes entail new challenges, questions and requirements in relation to information activities for primary school pupils as well as educators.

The aim of this thesis is fulfilled by means of four ethnographical studies of information activities in three Swedish primary schools, where project-based teaching and learning methods are used. The first study focuses on primary school educators' descriptions of primary school children's use of new information and communication technologies (ICT). The second study concerns how primary school pupils formulate their questions when working with project-based methods, and discusses how question-formulations can be studied empirically. The third and fourth studies concern primary school children's information seeking and information use, with a special focus on how they seek and use pictures.

The studies exemplify how information activities can be understood, illustrated, and described within the research field of Information Needs, Seeking and Use (INSU) in Library and Information Science. The neo-Vygotskian sociocultural perspective employed in the thesis entails a methodological shift; the studies exemplify how conversations and interactions taking place in information activities, as well as artefacts used and produced within these activities, can be analysed.

On an overall level, the studies indicate that the introduction of project-based methods, together with the introduction of ICT in primary school, does not seem to be a frictionless process, as they seem to be in conflict with traditional teaching methods and traditional tools for communication still prevalent in primary school. Thus, the studies in this thesis suggest that in the information activities of project-based work in primary school, information literacies are enacted in relation to conflicting rationales.

Keywords: children; elementary education; ICT; information activities; information literacy; information needs; information practice; information seeking; information use; learning; multimodality; primary school pupils; question-negotiations