The Child Meets the Written Language
An analysis based on Jerome Bruner’s Theories

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Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av filosofiska fakulteten vid Linköpings universitet för avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen kommer att offentligt försvaras på institutionen för beteendevetenskap, Eklundska salen, fredagen den 5 april, 2002, kl. 13.00.

Abstract

Researchers from many disciplines are engaged in searching for knowledge about what happens when an individual is becoming literate. Each researcher contributes with his or her little piece to this important process of building knowledge about one of the most complex activities a human being can be involved in. This thesis should be seen as another contribution to the huge research field dealing with literacy development.

The thesis describes a qualitative case study where some theories are used as tools in order to deepen the analysis of the data.

The thesis has two aims. The first is to investigate children’s conceptions of the written language, by letting 6-7 year olds talk about it, and perform some cognitive tasks, related to reading and writing. Thirty-one children were studied in pre-school and then followed up after a year in school. What the children said and what strategies they used in performing the tasks in pre-school exposed their different conceptions of written language.

The data from the pre-school study were categorised and demonstrated a great variation among children as to how they think about the written language. In the school study there was a focus on those 11 children who in pre-school had not yet got a grasp of the symbolic code system.

The second aim of this thesis is to choose some theories formulated by the American psychologist Jerome Bruner and use them as tools in analysing the data from the child study. The theories are, for example, the “Representation theory” and theories about concept formation.

Keywords: Pre-school children, emergent literacy, becoming literate, reading, writing, children’s conceptions, Bruner,

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ISRN LiU-IBV-STU--83--SE ISBN 91-7373-284-2 ISSN 1102-7517