

ABSTRACT

- Title: Deaf Children's Literacy Events
A study of early childhood literacy activities, in a signing setting
- Language: Swedish with an English summary
- Keywords: Deaf, sign language, literacy, early childhood, visual, bilingual, preschool
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The present study is an investigation of early childhood literacy events in a signing and bilingual setting from the child's perspective. The aim has been to study young children's literacy events in a preschool and during the first school year, how they interact and negotiate meaning through which literacy is constructed in everyday life. Deaf children's literacy learning is seen as a joint construction by the participants in literacy events. The study has a socialconstructivist theoretical base and an ethnographic approach.

The six children participating in the study were videotaped and observed during a period of two years. The children, three to six years of age, were the children in a signing class. During the study, four of them started primary school for deaf children. This means that observations during both preschool and primary school were collected.

The study reports three main results. Firstly, the print environment seems to be of a great importance as regards stimulating the occurrence of literacy events. The texts must be meaningful and the social interaction around them is crucial. Secondly, the results indicate that deaf children, like hearing children, develop literacy skills at an early age in much the same way. During the last year in preschool (5-6 years of age), most hearing children start to write, inventing their own spellings. The deaf children collect whole words, fingerspelling them, memorizing and using them in their writing. Thirdly, the results indicate that when children fail, it is often due to misunderstandings emanating from an educational setting where adults do not have a deep understanding of what it means to be only visual, non-auditory, and often underestimate the child.

The implications of the study are that teachers need to develop a greater understanding of what it means to be visual and to create a school environment that supports the child. It is also imperative that the teachers build upon the child's own experiences and the strategies they develop to understand the world of writing and writers.