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Creating and Assessing Multimodal Texts

Negotiations at the Boundary

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Doctoral Dissertation

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ABSTRACT

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Digital technologies are becoming increasingly common in educational settings. The availability of such tools facilitates the creation of multimodal texts in which several kinds of expression are combined. In this thesis, the activities of creating and assessing multimodal texts in the subject of Swedish at upper secondary school level are analysed in order to illuminate how these activities relate to established practices of creating and assessing texts in educational settings. When the tools that the students work with, as well as the outcome of their activities are altered, the meaning of these altered activities in the educational setting needs to be negotiated. Encounters between new ways of working and educational environments require modification and appropriation of both the technologies and the educational settings.

Literacy and assessment are central concepts in this thesis. Spoken and written words have been central in conventional perceptions of the concept of literacy. However, as the communicational landscape has changed, there is a need to broaden this concept. Likewise, the necessity to broaden the concept of assessment has been discussed. When literacy and assessment are regarded as situated, the settings in which they occur have to be considered, because the concepts both affect and are affected by the environment. The aim of this thesis is to illuminate the relationship between technology, literacy and the educational setting by exploring the activities of creating and assessing multimodal texts.

The empirical foundation of the thesis comprises four articles, in which the empirical material has been analysed to answer questions of how the multimodal texts are created and assessed. The empirical material has been collected in an iterative research process in which classroom interactions and interviews with students have been video and audio recorded. The theoretical framework of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) has been utilized in the analysis, focusing on how the components of activity systems affect and constitute each other. Tensions and contradictions in and between the different components, as well as between different activity systems, may lead to transformations. By studying these tensions and contradictions, insights can be gained into what enables and constrains transformations.

The analyses show that it is mainly the spoken word that is negotiated and assessed in the multimodal texts. This mirrors conventional conceptions of the kinds of expressions that are regarded as valuable in language education. In the subject of Swedish, there is a hierarchy in the subject culture where the spoken and written words are regarded as primary in meaning making. Other kinds of expressions are largely overlooked when the multimodal texts are assessed. Thereby, the multimodal texts may reinforce the primacy of the written and spoken language in educational settings, instead of contributing to the evaluation and incorporation of different ways of expressing meaning in language classrooms.