WRITING PRACTICES IN DANISH SECONDARY EDUCATION

WRAB 2, Washington, February 2011

Nikolaj F. Elf, Torben S. Christensen, Ellen Krogh
University of Southern Denmark
Writing to learn, learning to write

- **Phase I**
  Pilot study 2009-2010
  3 researchers, no external funding, focus grade 9, contacts with students.

- **Phase II**
  Full scale project 2010-2014
  10 researchers, external research grant, focus grades 10-12, expanded design.
Two connected presentations

1. Project aims, scope and design
2. Project status Feb. 2011
   - Methodological advances
   - Pilot study: preliminary findings
The national research context

- The Danish Council for Independent Research/Humanities, calling for applications based on researchers' own initiatives
- International review process
- ’Writing to learn, learning to write’, appr. USD 1,5 mill.
- A breakthrough of writing as a field of research in Denmark
- Contribution to Nordic tradition of writing research concerned with writing in educational contexts
- In dialogue with international resource group of researchers at annual seminars
WRITING TO LEARN, LEARNING TO WRITE

Literacy and disciplinarity
in Danish upper secondary education
Research questions

Basic assumptions – the new conditions for writing:

- ‘The new textual society’
- The discursive turn in disciplinary didactics

What do these new conditions mean for

- the position, function and nature of writing in teaching practice?
- students’ writing – and schools’ interpretation of students’ needs for experience, resources and skills in writing?
- the didactics and the disciplinarity of subjects?
Theoretical perspectives

- Socio cultural tradition (Vygotsky, 1986; Wertsch, 1998) 
  *mediational means*
- New literacy studies (Barton, 1994; Street, 1984) 
  *literacy events*
- Social semiotics (Kress, 1997; 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) 
  *multi modal notion of text and writing*
- Theory of writing and identity (Ivanič, 1998) 
  *writer biography, identity*
  *didactization*
- Functional theory of writing (Bakhtin, 1986, Berge 2005, Berge et al., 2007) 
  *utterance, act of writing, writing wheel*
Methodology

- Ethnographical data collection methods
- Analytical units
  - Constellations of literacy events
  - Discourse transformations
  - Chains of texts
- Shared data via open access to common electronic bank
Project design

- Longitudinal studies from a student perspective
  - 1+3 years, 7 students at 6 different schools
- Thematic studies from a subject perspective
  - Danish, foreign languages, social sciences, mathematics, biology and chemistry, religion, multi subject coursework
Project group

- Inter-disciplinary
  - researchers in text and writing
  - researchers in the didactics of social sciences, mathematics, biology, foreign languages, Danish
- Inter-institutional
  - University of Southern Denmark, University of Aarhus, Roskilde University
- 3 professors, 2 associate professors, 3 assistant professors, 2 PhD students
Pilot study

Content

- Methodology
  - Etnographical methodology
  - Methodological advances
  - Perspectives of analysis
- Preliminary findings
Ethnographical methodology

Data:

- Observations (inside and outside classrooms)
- Writing instructions
- Student texts
- Teacher responses
- Interviews (students and teachers)

Finding informants for the longitudinal study
Model for analyzing literacy events in school

Academic subjects and other disciplines

Subjects

literacy events

Youth Culture

School

Family, peers, leisure pursuits

Legislation, Ministry, Syllabus, Local school authorities etc.
Model for analyzing literacy events in school

Academic subjects and other disciplines

Subject-specific writing practices

School-institutional writing practice

Literacy events

Teachers’ subject-related writing cultures

Students’ writing cultures

Family, peers, leisure pursuits

Students’ writing practice

Legislation, Ministry, Syllabus, Local school authorities,

School-institutional writing culture

Youth Culture

School
Model for analyzing literacy events in school

Academic subjects and other disciplines

Subjects

Time ‘The toblerone’

Teachers’ subject-related writing cultures

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School-institutional writing practice

School-institutional writing culture

Youth Culture

Family, peers, leisure pursuits

Students’ writing culture

Legislation, Ministry, Syllabus, Local school authorities,
# Model for analyzing longitudinal studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic analytical unit</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
<th>Textual Chains of texts</th>
<th>Discoursal Transformations of discourses</th>
<th>Literacy Constellations of literacy events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing instruction</strong></td>
<td>…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student text</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher response</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student interview</strong></td>
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</table>
Preliminary findings in the pilot project

About:
- Testing the analytical framework
- Broad trends in grade 9 school settings

The three analytical perspectives
- Subject-specific writing cultures
- School writing cultures
- Student writing cultures
Subject-specific writing cultures (two schools analyzed)

- Dominance of same writing culture in all subjects
- Storing knowledge and in some cases structuring knowledge was the purpose of around half of the registered literacy events
- Dominance of reporting and reproducing writing. Argumentative writing was almost absent, and we found relatively little communicative writing.
- In problem-based coursework we found widespread use of various semiotic resources and a variation in writing purposes and forms of writing.
School writing cultures (two schools analyzed)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;East school&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Southwest school&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Domination of <em>strategic purposes</em> in writing (preparing exam).</td>
<td><em>Variation</em> in strategic, ritual and communicative purposes in assignments/writing instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Sharp boundaries</em> between writing in the disciplines</td>
<td><em>Soft boundaries</em> between writing in the disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danish (the mothertongue subject) has main responsibility for developing student literacy. Written work in other disciplines mainly supports oral activities</td>
<td><em>Teacher cooperation</em> having a dobble function,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not teacher cooperation in <em>reading</em> and <em>writing</em>.</td>
<td>a) aimed at development of written work in disciplines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) aimed towards educational counselling of students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A literacy-oriented school</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Students’ writing cultures

**Does your school take interest in your electronic media writing?** N= 215  (all nine graders at the three schools)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I don’t use electronic media</th>
<th>Girl</th>
<th>Boy</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0,0</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>0,7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No, it’s as if writing in and writing outside school belongs to quite different worlds</th>
<th>Girl</th>
<th>Boy</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50,0</td>
<td>56,8</td>
<td>53,3</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes, quite often teachers take an interest in my electronic media writing</th>
<th>Girl</th>
<th>Boy</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1,3</td>
<td>2,7</td>
<td>2,0</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Girl</th>
<th>Boy</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25,0</td>
<td>21,6</td>
<td>23,3</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
Thank you!

Please contact us if you are interested in our presentations and other material about the project.

E-mail: ekr@ifpr.sdu.dk
References I

References II