Teacher Students’ Digital Daily Lives: Information Literacy at a Pre-school Teacher Education – A Summary

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Digitalisation is a transformative force affecting all parts of contemporary society since the ways in which we communicate and use information are becoming increasingly mediated by various digital tools (cf. Castells, 2010). While this notion holds true for educational settings, there are also tendencies to exaggerate the promise of digital tools for learning and teaching. In relation to teacher education, the value of digital tools are often taken for granted and the education of teachers is considered to be a key component in realising the promise of digital tools (eg. Cuban, 2001; Gouseti, 2013; Player-Koro, 2013; Selwyn, Gorard & Williams, 2001). Consequently, teacher education is often identified as the main obstacle for the realisation of these promises (Hallsén, 2013). Previous research (Nivala, 2009; Player-Koro, 2013) draws our attention to the need for critical analysis of the technological determinism, and an economic perspective that underpins an

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unrealistic description of the value of digital tools for pedagogical purposes. This dissertation is a contribution to this critical analysis. It investigates the complexity of how information activities are mediated by digital tools, negotiated and given meaning in the context of Swedish pre-school teacher education.

A starting point for the dissertation is the study of the meeting between teacher education and new forms of literacies connected to use of digital tools. The overarching aim is thus to create a deeper understanding of how students’ information literacies are enacted when digital tools are used and appropriated in the daily life at a pre-school teacher education, in relation to conceptions of the digitalisation of teacher education in national policy. Three main research questions have underpinned this investigation:

- How are information activities carried out when teacher students use and appropriate digital tools during teacher education?
- In what ways do appropriation, information activities and identity interact when teacher students use digital tools during teacher education?
- How is the digitalisation of teacher education constructed and understood on a policy level?

In the first three articles of the dissertation (Hanell, 2014, 2016, 2017), I use netnography – an ethnographic approach for doing research online (Kozinets, 2010, 2015). The three articles report results from a netnographical study at a pre-school teacher education conducted between 2012 and 2015. The study generated online material, mainly from a Facebook Group used by students and teachers, but also field notes from participant observations, transcribed interviews and a field diary. Applying a socio-cultural perspective on information literacy (see eg. Limberg, Sundin & Talja, 2012), I analysed the netnographical material using the concepts appropriation (Wertsch, 1998) and identity (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995).
The first article analyses how a Facebook Group used by 200 students and two teachers was appropriated as a tool for learning and how information literacies were enacted in the process. In the negotiations of how the Facebook Group is to be understood and used, two different ways of appropriating the Group have been identified: as a relation-building tool and as a collaborative problem-solving tool. When the Facebook Group is appropriated as a relation-building tool, humour and irony are important components of information activities and open discussions are highly valued. Students who appropriate the Group as a collaborative problem-solving tool tend to expect and share concrete information directly related to teacher education.

In the second article, information activities are explored as teacher students appropriate digital tools for group-based learning. Information activities during digital, group-based learning are found to be performed in four phases: setting the stage, negotiating the topic, gathering material and presenting the assignment (cf. Kuhlthau, 1991). Three aspects of how the learning environment constrains and enables use of digital tools can be related to information literacy: flexibility, lack of participation and transparency.

The third article analyses how students position identity when they share information on Facebook. Three different identity positions can be connected to different ways of sharing information: discussion-oriented student, goal-oriented student and customer-oriented student. In chapter six...
of the dissertation, I revisit the netnographical material and discuss how identity and different views on learning enable students to identify certain affordances that the digital tools and the learning environment present. The idea of co-learning is found to be an important reason behind how and why digital tools are used and appropriated in the daily life at the pre-school teacher education.

In the fourth article (Hanell, 2018), the discursive construction of digitalisation is investigated through an analysis of four national policy documents with demands for increased digital competence in teacher education. The policy analysis is conducted using Carol Bacchi’s ‘what’s the problem represented to be?’ approach (Bacchi, 2009; 2012). The policy analysis shows how a global policy discourse with an economic and competitive perspective underpins demands for increased digital competence in teacher education and how the value of digital tools for learning and teaching is taken for granted. Unsatisfactory results in international comparisons of use of digital tools in schools are considered to be caused by shortcomings in teacher education.

The findings show how views on learning and identity interact with the materiality of the digital tools and the enabling and constraining properties of the local learning environment when information literacies are enacted. The identity position discussion-oriented student is connected to how the Facebook Group is appropriated as a relation-building tool and a relational information literacy. This type of information literacy entails a view on learning as co-learning, rooted in the historical development of pre-school teacher education, and a non-hierarchical understanding of teacher and student roles. Typical information activities include sharing of information which builds relations and initiates open discussions. The identity positions goal-oriented student and customer-oriented student are connected to how the Facebook Group is appropriated as a collaborative problem-solving tool and a pragmatic information literacy. This form of information literacy reflects instrumental and neoliberal views on learning and a traditional understanding of teacher and student roles. Typical information activities include sharing and requesting information considered to be relevant and correct.

The idea of co-learning, that is found to be influential but not fully accepted at the studied pre-school teacher education, is difficult to combine with an economic perspective emphasising measurability and quantification. The economic perspective is partly compatible with a pragmatic information literacy. The findings of the dissertation thus shed light on the gap between what is described as important in policy documents and what teacher students and teachers describe as important when digital tools are used in teacher education. This gap illustrates the need for a better dialogue between the discursive level and the practical level. Policy makers are advised to consider that a focus on measurability, quantification and competition might constrain the development of creative and critical aspects of information literacies.
References


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