

# EMERGENT LITERARY LITERACY

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### Abstract

Research on early school writing has focused primarily on formal aspects of writing, such as spelling, punctuation and various aspects of text structure. Less attention has been given to what distinguishes the content of these early texts and how particular disciplinary content is developed and identified. This study endeavours to examine the subject specific content in early school writing of literary texts with the following research questions:

(1) What content is construed in narrative texts written by students in early school years (grades 2-3)?

(2) What linguistic resources are used to construe this content?

This study offers a model for addressing content aspects of early school writing, giving empirical example of analysis of early narrative writing in primary school. The data consists of two groups of narrative texts written by the same children in school years 2 and 3, in relation to two comparable tasks. Our analytical framework is inspired by Systemic Functional Linguistics and in particular the analytical tool set provided by cohesion and transitivity analyses. We conclude that narrative writing in primary school can mean both to explore a diverse textual world and a more uniform one. We further claim that signs of emerging literary literacy may be detected throughout the analysed data sets by using the text analytic method suggested.

Keywords: early school writing, primary school writing, disciplinary literacy, emergent disciplinary literacy, narrative writing, Systemic Functional Linguistics

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the past couple of decades there has been an increased interest in how content is communicated, understood and can be interpreted within different disciplines such as science, history or literature. Students within their education not only develop literacy but also specific disciplinary literacies as they learn to communicate and write within specific subjects. Research within the field of disciplinary literacy has revealed that disciplines differ greatly, for example in regard to fundamental purposes, specialized genres, and traditions of communication and use of language (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012:8). It has also been shown that students need to be explicitly taught these specialized ways to read, write and understand a discipline in order to grasp the differences (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014:637). However, there are few studies focusing on what can be distinguished as features of a developing disciplinary literacy in early school writing, or *emergent disciplinary* literacy, and even fewer within narrative reading and writing, or *emergent literary* literacy. Furthermore, research concerning early school writing has focused on formal aspects of writing, such as spelling and structures of texts, rather than on questions of what the written texts are about and what linguistic resources students can use to produce subject specific content, and in particular in L1-subjects. In order to develop a basis for disciplinary instruction for the development of reading, writing and subject knowledge, we need to know more about such aspects of emergent disciplinary literacy as well. The purpose of the study presented in this paper is therefore to examine the subject specific content in early school writing of literary texts. More specifically, the following research questions are addressed:

- 1) What content is construed in narrative texts written by students in early school years (grades 2-3)?
- 2) What linguistic resources are used to construe this content?

Results from the investigation of the research questions, and thereby aspects of emergent literary literacy contribute to the overall discussion of emergent disciplinary literacies. This sheds light on how students participate in disciplinary practices through writing, and not least on the gradual development of this participation. In addition, this paper contributes to how such aspects can be discussed, i.e. a meta-language is established.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The field of disciplinary literacy has been primarily focused on the writings of experts or adults rather than children within school. Knowledge of how to read, write and understand a discipline within the field of disciplinary literacy has a foundation of cognitive and linguistic research. This focuses on how disciplinary experts read and structure the texts within their specific discipline, often using functional linguistics to identify differences in the choice of linguistic resources employed by various disciplines (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

This study is in a similar way based on functional linguistics and a social semiotic understanding of language and language use where even single utterances are seen as contextually functional (Halliday, 2014:3), as well as ideologically charged (Vološinov, 1986:35ff). This motivates identifying and analysing single utterances used in the context of individual student texts, not least when analysing young student's texts. In order to identify and explore the nuances within emergent disciplinary texts, we employ analytical tools inspired by systemic functional linguistics, or SFL (Halliday, 2014; Holmberg & Karlsson, 2006). Within SFL research, emphasis is put on the potentiality of language—that language use is always preceded by a choice of a linguistic resource, functional to the situation (Christie, 2012; Halliday, 2014:32). It is through the system of language that thoughts, stories and opinions in this manner are formulated and by which relations to others are created and upheld. SFL is in other words a theory of human experience (Halliday, 2014:30) which considers the language user as both a participant, and an active co-creator of a number of linguistic practices through language use (*ibid.*). This simultaneity of participation and co-creation are actualized through *realization*, i.e. language and its context are both simultaneously construed and upheld by language use (Martin & Rose, 2008:10). SFL is based upon the assumption that language is foremost functional. This theory differentiates three metafunctions of language (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1989):

- The ideational (what is being talked or written about)
- The interpersonal (what relations are being created or upheld through language)
- The textual (what forms language is given in a certain situation)

These three metafunctions are thus all possible points of analyses of texts. Certain text analytical tools, e.g. transitivity analysis, cohesion analysis or appraisal analysis, are generally associated to analysis of a specific metafunction. This paper takes special interest in the ideational metafunction, or rather the ideational meanings of the text, i.e. what is written about, and employ transitivity analysis which is a commonly used analytical tool for this purpose (Halliday, 2014:334). However, in order to analyse what we distinguish as Topics in texts, the study also employs analytical tools inspired by cohesion analysis (Halliday & Hasan, 1989). By using cohesion analysis, which is generally associated with analysis of the textual metafunctions of texts, we extend its analytical applicability to also include aspects of ideational properties of texts. The combination of SFL based analyses enables a multifaceted approach to the examination of content, and provides results which can further serve as a foundation for discussions of what children write about and what linguistic resources are used to do so. This may in turn have implication for teachers' didactical choices in order to increase the writing repertoires of children in literary disciplinary literacy instruction.

### 3. EMERGENT LITERARY LITERACY

Although there is generally a growing interest in disciplinary literacy, studies on disciplinary literacy in early school years and the impact of disciplinary literacy on

younger students are limited (Håland, 2016). In fact, some researchers argue that teaching disciplinary literacy should only take place after basic literacy skills are mastered (Moje, 2008; Faggella-Luby, et al 2012). Such views are for example expressed by Heller (2010:272):

“The more effort that goes into teaching middle and high school students to read, write, and think like specialists, the less effort will go into teaching them to read, write, and think like broadly educated citizens”

Proponents of this view argue that a common set of strategies to read and write should be applied for all school subjects in early years of primary school. However, there are others that argue that it is possible to develop both general literacy skills and specialized disciplinary skills simultaneously (Fang & Coatoam, 2013) and that specialized instruction can have implications for elementary grades (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014: 637). Proponents of this view mean that “The nascent sense of discourse differences may be the precursor to disciplinary literacy” (Fang & Coatoam, 2013:628), speaking for the need for research examining whether or not features of disciplinary literacy can be detected even in early school writing (emergent disciplinary literacy).

Literacy clearly differs between disciplines of school subjects such as history, science and mathematics. Whereas historians for example treat historical accounts as formal arguments and seek to corroborate evidence across sources and scientists rely on the creation of new data through systematic observation and experimentation, literary reading is rather about the transformation of human experience through language and literary technique (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2014). Peskin (1998) has for example shown that when experts read literary texts they tend to look for meaning in binary oppositions, i.e. contradictions, juxtapositions or dialectics, thus distinguishing these meanings as features of literary literacy. Literary scholars McCormick (1994) and Rosenblatt (1995) further argue that reading allows us to explore new perspectives on the world, and McCormick (1994:69) means that these perspectives are both construed by the text and interpreted by the reader, suggesting that the texts must be interpreted as perspectives of the world. Furthermore, Langer (2005) has argued that literary experiences, e.g. reading or writing, allows the reader to reach toward a horizon of possibilities, making the literary experiences explorations of whatever is possible. Research has, in other words, distinguished specific features of content in literary texts, as well as ascribed literary reading and writing to specific purposes, such as to explore new perspectives and transform experiences. However, the concept of literary content is still quite illusive. Previous research shows that children from an early age can create social worlds, both in spoken and written narratives (Kamberelis, 1999), construing sad, dramatic and adventurous worlds about a diversity of topics (Dyson, 1989; Ivanic, 2004) with abilities to do this in a number of ways (Nordlund, 2016). These abilities of young writers, which are closely related to central features of literary literacy as outlined above, support the assumption that exposing and above all defining features of emergent literary

literacy is a relevant matter for teachers in early literacy instruction. In a Swedish context, research concerning early school writing has contributed to establishing a functional metalanguage about content aspects of early scientific and social scientific writing, and thereby further informing the discussion of said scientific disciplinary literacies (Folkeryd, 2014; Liberg, 2014). However, the type of investigation reported on in the present article, have not previously been performed on literary literacy in early school years.

As previously stated, analysis of transitivity is a commonly used text analytical method for analysing ideational meaning, i.e. what texts are about. The analysis aids us in focusing on how *processes* (comparable to verb processes in traditional grammar) engage certain types of primary or secondary *participants* (often nouns or pronouns, e.g. the one “doing” or being affected by the verb). Transitivity analysis has furthermore been previously employed in research on early school writing. Such studies show that texts written by children during the early years of primary school, mainly use relational and material processes while writing narrative texts (Kamler, 1993; Martin & Rose, 2012; af Geijerstam, 2014). Af Geijerstam (2014) has further shown and discussed how gender norms are reproduced through early school writing by showing an over representation of masculine pronouns as the more active, primary participants as opposed to feminine pronouns which had a more passive role. In addition, Kamler (1993) shows that girls and boys construe gender norms very differently through their texts, in that girls construe texts with the primary participant “I”, in what she calls mild and less physically demanding processes, while boys construe their “I” as primary participants in physically demanding and more destructive processes (Kamler, 1993:100). In sum, these studies have shown that transitivity analysis earns both applicability as well as important affordances for analysing early school writing.

#### 4. MATERIAL AND METHOD

The data of the study is here presented followed by a step by step account of the applied text analytical method.

##### 4.1 Data

The data consists of 38 texts written in response to two different writing assignments, one in grade 2 and one in grade 3. The same 19 students have responded to the two different assignments and texts are divided in two text groups (T1 and T2)<sup>1</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> The selection of the 38 texts were motivated by the premise that the texts had to be written in relation to comparable prompts.

accordingly. The data has been collected within the research project *Function, content and form in interaction. Students' text-making in early school years.*<sup>2</sup>

#### 4.2 *Writing situations, prompts and text genres*

The texts that are analysed were written during a normal school day, where the teacher presented the prompts and oversaw the writing as usual. The prompt of T1 (grade 2) was to write about "The future" and was presented with a few questions helping the children to get started ("What do you think the future looks like?"; "Are there any new inventions?"; "What are you doing in the future?"). The prompt to T2 (grade 3) was to tell about "A new world" and was presented after the class had been working on a theme about the oceans and explorers of the world. The teacher contextualized the prompts by saying that "There are still places that man hasn't discovered, and now you're going to write about such a place." The children were presented a few pictures depicting a new world with exotic plants, animals and two apparently body modified persons. After this presentation the children worked individually on their texts. From a genre perspective grounded in SFL (Martin & Rose, 2008; Holmberg, 2009) the children's texts could be described as narrative texts with mainly narrative and recounting features (Rose & Martin, 2012:32ff). Examples 1 and 2 show analysed texts in their entirety where Example 1 is written by a child in school year 2 and Example 2 is written by a child in school year 3<sup>3</sup>. Example 1 is a sort of imagined personal recount aligning with the prompt to write a text about "The future". The text starts off with an orientation, "When I am older", and thereafter a record of various things and activities that the future will enable are given, thus, however exiguous, sharing features of the personal recount (Martin & Rose 2008:60).

Example 1 from T1 about "The future":

The future

Wen I am older you can have a wond and flaying cars and. Luxuros house. And you cann do magics without wond. You have a pett. I wil work and sel wonds.

The second text, Example 2, is a text which exemplifies many of the key features of narrative texts: It is accordingly structured (orientation<sup>^</sup>complication(s)<sup>^</sup>resolution), departing with "once upon a time" and ending with the equilibratory return of the main character. It is also mainly written in past tense and seem to depict conflicts, e.g. "bat is very dangerus" and "I was caught in a trep in a rope", which are further signaled by the passing of time, which is, however, made implicit through ellipsis ("I was caught[...] instead of, for example, the more explicit "Suddenly, I was caught [...]"). (ibid. pp. 67ff).

<sup>2</sup> *Financed by the Swedish Research Council 2013–2016/18, led by Caroline Liberg and including Åsa af Geijerstam, Jenny Wiksten Folkeryd, Anna Nordlund, Elin Westlund and Oscar Björk.*

<sup>3</sup> *The texts are translated by the authors to English with comparable spelling mistakes.*

Example 2 from T2 about "A new world":

a new world

Once upon a time i went to a new world there there was an animal called geantusarus.  
it looked like a dinosar. It is strong. I went further into a jungel. There wos allot of trees.  
The flowers are very poisonus. Bat is very dangerus. I was caught in a trep in a rope. An  
hour later I got home the end.

The texts in both text groups vary in length and in the usage of spelling and grammar, but these aspects have not been analysed within the frames of this article (see footnote 5 for further reasoning about text length in relation to the analyses).<sup>4</sup>

##### 5. STEP 1. CONTENT AS TOPICS: COHESION ANALYSIS

In order to answer the question of what the analysed texts are about, the study employs an analysis of Topics, inspired by cohesion analysis (Halliday & Hasan, 1989:70-96). Cohesion is attributed to what Hasan calls the texture of a text, i.e. the semantic continuities that tie a text together, often referred to as semantic chains (ibid. p. 70). There are three distinguishable types of semantic chains, who ties together through cohesive encoding devices. These devices can be likened to the links tying the semantic chains together—i.e. words related to each other in three different ways—achieving cohesion in a text. They do so through co-referentiality, co-classification and co-extensive. Co-referential cohesive encoding devices are often pronouns, e.g. words that refer to the same thing, event, etc., as "Michael" and "him" refer to the same person in "Michael sat on a bench when someone greeted him", and thereby forming a cohesive tie, and thereby a Topic, through two encoding devices.

*Co-classifying* encoding devices are words, or instances, belonging to one identical *class* of things, as opposed to the co-referential devices which are referring to identical *things*. For example, both "bought a dog" and "so did" forms a cohesive tie in the text "I bought a dog and so did my neighbour", where the buying of a dog are two different instances of buying a dog, but instances of the identical class. A *co-extensive* tie between encoding devices are characterized as devices construing a relation by referring to something within the same general field of meaning. The encoding devices are not identical, neither by referring to the identical thing or class of things, but related by referring to things that resemble one another in certain ways. For example, both "apples" and "a meal" in the example "In the bowl laid apples, but I had already eaten a meal" form a co-extensive tie in that both refer to something edible, thus to something within the general field of meaning. Hasan (ibid. p. 80) means that these resemblances form cohesive ties through synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, meronymy and repetition.

The two latter categories of cohesion, co-classification and co-extensive ties, further form what Halliday & Hasan calls similarity chains, while the co-referential ties form identity chains. These two different types of chains will however not be subject

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<sup>4</sup> See also af Geijerstam (2014) and Nordlund (2016) for other analyses of the same data.

of detailed scrutiny in this paper, but rather meta-linguistically used to identify Topics and how they differ from one another in various ways (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The example in table 1 shows how a number of Topics found in the data ('Nature', 'Money', 'Fantasy', 'Animals' and 'Luxury') are visualised through the three different semantic continuities of cohesion.

Table 1. Example of topics through co-reference, co-classification and co-extension

Identity chain	Similarity chain	
Co-reference	Co-classification	Co-extension
Topic: 'Nature' "The <u>trees</u> had red leaves and thorns on <u>their</u> stems"	Topic: 'Money' "I will <u>have</u> a lot of <u>cash</u> and so will everyone else"	Topic: 'Fantasy' "In the future I'll have a <u>talking</u> cat and a <u>flying</u> car"
Topic: 'Money' "There is a lot of <u>money</u> and I will have a lot of <u>it</u> "	Topic: 'Animals' "There were <u>rhinos</u> and strange <u>dogs</u> around"	Topic: 'Luxury' "I will be <u>wealthy</u> and have an <u>expensive</u> car"

As made visible in Table 1, a *Topic* is defined by either similarity or identity chains, and words that share similarities through semantic kinship in up to three different ways. Every Topic has accordingly been defined in the context of the text, and of the data set it is a part of, i.e. T1 or T2. The analysis of Topics was meticulously carried out throughout every text in both data sets.

In the clause *The dog ate food*, labelling Topics are a simple task especially when there are salient Topics such as 'Food' and 'Animals'. However, when analysing such Topics as 'Fantasy' in T1 or Adventure in T2, we are delving deeper into a cultural classification of phenomena that might or might not be accepted as universal understandings of these Topics. We can define 'Fantasy' as a salient Topic in the cases where a participant deviates from reality, as when introducing an imaginary topic or action. Such cases are, for example, talking animals, humans with superpowers, flying cars, etcetera. The Topic of 'Adventure' is defined in a similar way, but deviant, not from reality, but from what we define as a norm, a general pace of everyday life. "*the volcanic island*" in the clause "*We walked to the hotel on the volcanic island*" is considered to construe such a deviance from everyday life—challenging it through introducing something else, while "*the hotel*" is considered to be less of a deviation and rather realizing the Topic of 'Vacation'.

## 6. STEP 2. CONTENT AS PROCESSES AND PARTICIPANTS: TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS

The transitivity analysis visualizes how content in texts is construed as processes. Processes being actions, experiences, beings and verbal or nonverbal communication. These texts illustrate how participants associate and engage with certain processes, naming actions, experiences, or states of being, and this offers nuances to the visualization of what content is representing in a text (see Table 2; Halliday



2014:98, 212).<sup>5</sup> Halliday differentiated six process types, as outlined below. The different process types are determined by the finite verbs, or process cores (in the examples below went, saw, have, am, live, and, shouted) (Halliday 2014:98, 212).

- Material process: She went home again—Content construed as happenings or actions.
- Mental process: I saw a beautiful flower—Content construed as sensations, thoughts, perceptions, etc.
- Attributive relational process: I have a huge house—Content construed as an attribute ascribed to something or someone.
- Identifying relational process: I am rich—Content construed as identifying someone or something.
- Existential process: The plants live—Content construed as existing.
- Verbal process: "Hurry up!, she shouted—Content construed as verbal or non-verbal communication.

Table 2. Process types and participants <sup>6</sup>

Process type	Primary participant	Process core	Secondary participant	Circumstance
Material process	actor <i>They</i>	material <i>drove</i>	goal <i>the car</i> range <i>on</i> recipient <i>them</i>	<i>to the boat</i>
Mental process	senser <i>They</i>	mental <i>saw</i>	phenomenon <i>strange animals</i>	
Attributive relational process	carrier <i>The elephant</i>	attributive <i>had</i>	attribute <i>a long trunk</i>	
Identifying relational process	identified <i>bat</i>	identifying <i>is</i>	value <i>very dangerous</i>	
Existential process	extistent <i>everyone</i>	existential <i>died</i>	-	
Verbal process	sayer <i>Saloma</i>	verbal <i>talked</i>	reciever <i>to her</i>	
(as above)	(as above)	verbal <i>said</i>	verbiage <i>"it looks ordinary here"</i>	
(as above)	(as above)	verbal <i>scolded</i>	target <i>him</i>	

<sup>5</sup> Beside process types, the transitivity analysis singles out "circumstances", comparable to adverbials of traditional grammar. These are, however, not analysed in this study since they aren't categorically comparable to the process types as linguistic resources.

<sup>6</sup> Table 2 show the 21 units of analysis (plus circumstance) used e.g. for calculation of the content-thematic space (see Content-thematic space).

Each process type thus construe content in text in different ways. This makes a distinction between content as part of the world of abstract relations (the two relational processes), the physical world (material processes) and the mentally experienced world (mental processes). The existential and the verbal process types are considered border line processes between, firstly the relational and material type, and secondly between the material and mental, since they share features from both sides but is distinguishable in the grammar as separate types.

Furthermore, the transitivity analysis differentiates two different participants within the same process type which is made visible in Table 2 with the names and branchings of all process types. From a general functional perspective, the primary and secondary participants differ from one another in that the primary participant can be considered the point of departure while the secondary participant is more commonly affected by the process or linked to the primary participant in some way (Holmberg & Karlsson, 2006:75f)<sup>7</sup>. These process types and their different participants are viewed as linguistic resources exemplified from the analysed data (Table 2).

#### 7. STEP 3. CONTENT AS CONTENT-THEMES: COMBINING TRANSITIVITY AND COHESION

The results of the two different types of analyses described above, provide insight into what the texts are about and how this content is construed. The analysis of Topics through cohesion shows how content is construed in a text by what the text is about, while the transitivity analysis shows how the text is construed through use of processes and participants. In order to fuse the results of these two analyses together into one synergetic entity that combines the answers to the *what?* and the *how?*, the study coins the term *content-theme* (a combination of research questions 1 and 2). This is done in order to gain further knowledge about how content is construed and to enable a visualization of content-thematic patterns throughout the data. In other words, a content-theme tells us whether a Topic is being construed as point of departure or as affected by or construed in relation to something, in any of the six process types, e.g. as engaging the physical world or being observed by something or someone. Table 3 shows an example of how the analyses are fused together into content-themes, through content-thematization.

Table 3. Example of content-thematization

Instantiated Topic	actor	material process core	goal	content-theme
(Animal) <i>The jaguar ate the bear</i>	The jaguar	ate	the bear	'Animal through actor'

<sup>7</sup> The terms "primary" and "secondary" participant is a distinctive term which are not always used, but here serves to differentiate the active primary participant from the passive secondary participant.

The example of the content-thematic analysis shows how every clause in the entirety of the data has been analysed. The first column shows the analysed clause with the instantiated Topic in italics, followed by the Topic in parenthesis (when one clause construes a number of Topics, it has been analysed correspondingly). The columns 2-4 shows the transitivity analysis with its units, that is, in this example, the Actor, the Material process core and the goal. Lastly, the content-theme is synthesized. The clause “*The jaguar ate the bear*” is an example of how the Topic ‘Animal’ is being construed as actor in a material process, that is, construed as an actor going about changing something in the physical world, “ate the bear”. The Content-theme is thus labelled ‘*Animal through actor*’. Both *jaguar* and *bear* construe the Topic “Animal”, but through two different linguistic resources, i.e. through actor and goal, construing the Topic as both the actor affecting something in the physical world, and as the goal being affected by something else. In other words, there is a notable semantic difference in these construals made salient by the content-thematization, where in the content-theme ‘Animal as actor’, *the jaguar*, is construed as actively doing something, while in ‘Animal as goal’ *the bear* is passively affected but something else. This shows how content is construed in two distinguishably different ways.

Analysing content-themes in texts will show *what* Topic is being construed within a clause and *how* this is done. We are able to use these content-themes to understand how a certain Topic can be construed similarly among different individuals in different classroom settings and in relation to different prompts. The analyses do not only hold to say something about how a certain Topic is being construed in the data. It also enables discussions about the content-thematic construals of texts and, further, about varying (content-thematic) text types.

## 8. TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

The described analysis was carried out by the research team. To establish trustworthiness in naturalistic research as this one, the conventionalist terms *internal validity*, *external validity*, *reliability* and *objectivity* were replaced by *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability* and *confirmability* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, these concepts were therefore adhered to accordingly. Credibility in the study is established through the use of a combination of multiple investigators, in a three-layered team design, and peer-debriefing (ibid. pp. 307-308). The three layers are (1) the ‘immediate team’, consisting of the authors continuously doing the analysis in close collaboration, (2) ‘the extended team’ including members of the authors’ research milieu, who have provided continuous feedback on the undertaken analyses via internal seminars, and (3) ‘the external team’ consisting on colleagues outside of the research milieu that in various ways provided feedback on the analyses e.g. via national and international conferences, research visits and directed inquiries to various experts. The three-layered team design includes the aspect of peer-debriefing for increased credibility by continuously attending to feedback provided from a variety of perspectives, primarily via the extended team.

In regard to transferability, considering there is not much information to provide regarding e.g. socio-economic backgrounds of the students, or location of the schools, we would like to stress the fact that regardless of such factors inherently influencing the data (see “Theoretical framework” for further expansion on contextual influence on text), the transferability of the study is ensured via the use of well-established methods of text analysis on the samples of early school writing, making the transferability a question of considered data and ultimately a question for future research (the analytical method of this study has also been used by Björk, 2020; Björk et al, 2020).

The dependability and confirmability of the study have been assured via the three-layered team design expanded on above, and in particular through continued transparency of the analytical process as well as of the results with regard to the data, findings, interpretations and recommendations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 p. 318). Furthermore, confirmability is given when all the above criteria are well-established, which can be assumed for this study. The three-layered team design, and the continuous discussions, critique, (re)evaluations of analyses and scrutiny of data and analytic methods, can therefore be seen as an operationalization of the audit concept expanded on by Lincoln & Guba (1985 p. 318).

## 9. RESULTS

First, the results of the analysis of Topics are presented, followed by the results of the transitivity analysis. This section ends with the results from the content-thematization.

### 9.1 Content as topic

Through the analysis of Topics, inspired by cohesion analysis, a number of partly shared and partly text group specific Topics emerged. The Topics in each text group are listed in tables 4 and 5 in ascending order according to the number of times every Topic is realized throughout the text groups.  $n$  specifies the total amount of instantiations of any Topic, and each Topic is accompanied by a percentage of  $n$ .

In T1 with texts about “The future” written by children in school year 2, the children wrote about everything between events they wanted to occur in the future, what would be available for them, to how many children and toys they would, or are hoping to have. There are 20 Topics in this text group. In T2 with texts about “A new world” written by children in school year 3, the Topics sum up to a total of 21. These texts are about what the new world looked like, events happening there, who the main character met, etcetera. They are about family vacations developed into adventures with lava spewing volcanoes as well as discoveries of talking plants and animals in mystical jungle environments. From a general perspective, both text groups realize a heterogenous palette of Topics ranging from Vacation to War.

Table 4. Topics in T1- The future (n=283)

Topic	Percentage
'Items'	17%
'Future and futurism'	11%
'Fantasy'	11%
'Play and games'	11%
'Luxury'	9%
'Animals'	7%
'Money'	5%
'Nature'	5%
'Family'	4%
'War'	4%
'Work'	3%
'Food'	3%
'Ice cream and candy'	3%
'Home'	2%
'School'	2%
'Friends and friendship'	1%
'Store'	<1%
'Fame'	<1%
'Success'	<1%
'Festivities'	<1%

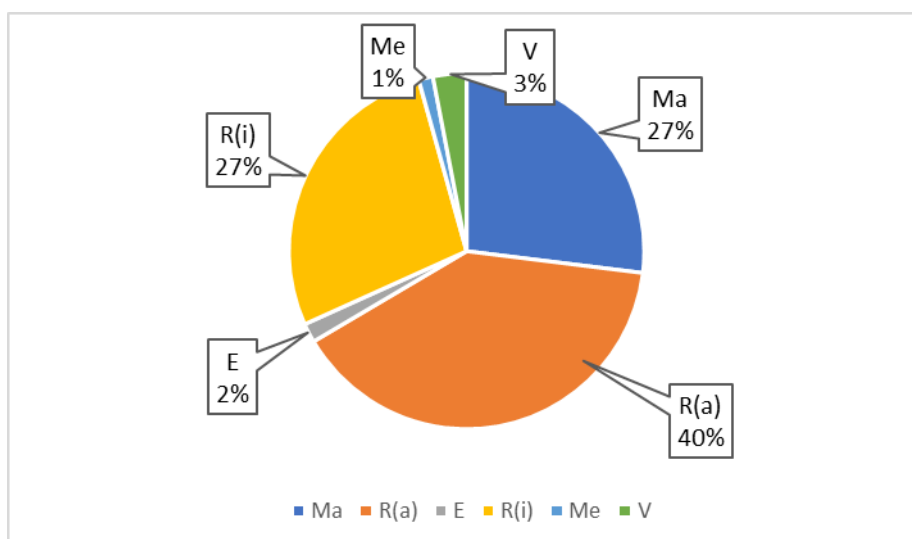
Table 5. Topics in T2- A new world (n=904)

Topic	Percentage
'Adventure'	27%
'Animals'	15%
'Nature'	14%
'Other People'	9%
'Fantasy'	7%
'Play and games'	5%
'Transports'	4%
'Items'	3%
'Buildings and constructions'	3%
'Vacation'	2%
'Family'	2%
'Friends and friendship'	2%
'Food'	2%
'Home'	2%
'Ice cream and candy'	1%
'Money'	1%
'Luxury'	1%
'Shops'	<1%
'Cleaning'	<1%
'War'	<1%
'Work'	<1%

## 9.2 Content as processes and participants

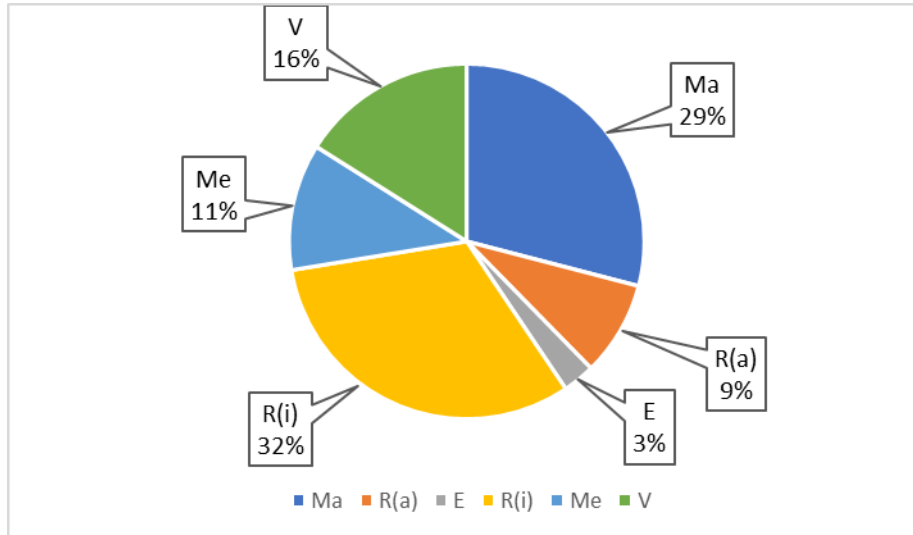
Figures 1 and 2 show the extent of what process types were used in the texts about “The future” ( $n = 230$ ) and “A new world” ( $n = 754$ ), where  $n$  indicates how often a process type (including process core and associated participants) was used. The relational process types, attributive (R[a]) and identifying (R[i]), are the most common process types in both text groups (67% in T1 and 41% in T2). This means that Topics are mostly realized in a transitive relation to each other in some way, for example how “the hat” is related to “he” in the example “he had a hat”, or “nice” to “The hat” in the example “The hat was nice”.

Figure 1. Process types in texts about “the future”



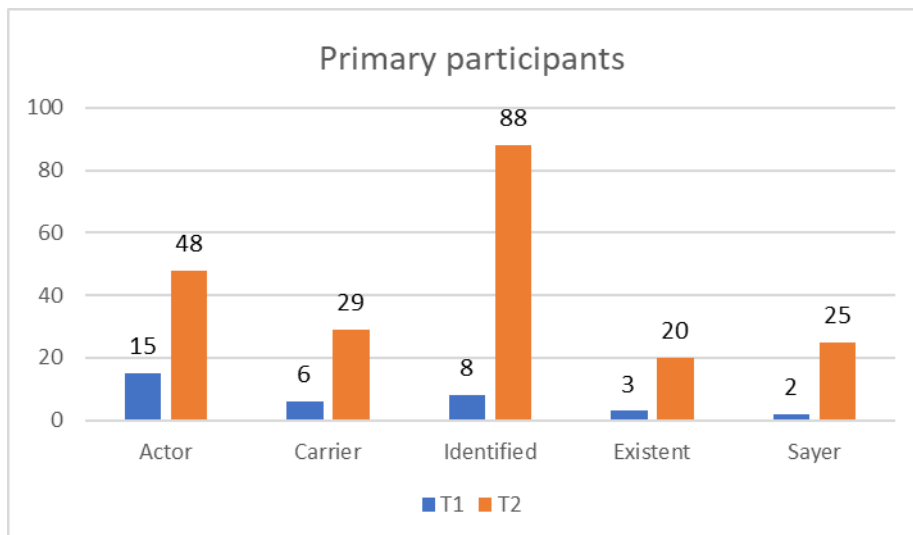
The most common relational process type however differs between the text groups T1 and T2. T1 mainly construes attributive relational processes (40%), followed by the identifying (27%), while T2 mainly construes identifying (32%), followed by attributive (9%). The relational processes are then followed by the material, Ma (27% in T1 and 29% in T2) meaning that Topics are realized as part of processes that affects the physical world in some way, for example “*He threw the hat away*”. Overall, figure 2 and 3 show that Topics are realized in a number of process types throughout the data, but that some process types are given prominence. Aside from the relational and material process types, figures 1 and 2 also show the use of Existential (E), Mental (Me) and Verbal (V) process types.

Figure 2. Process types in text about "a new world"



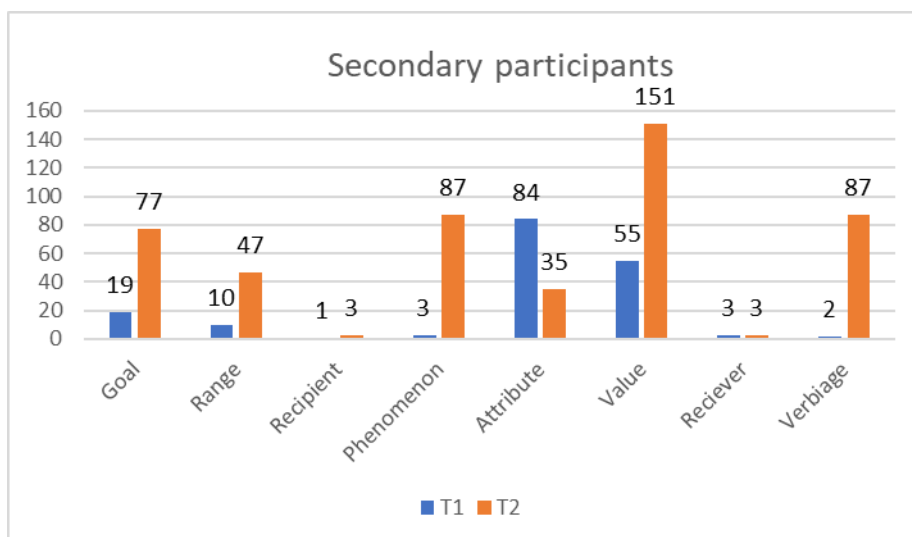
We now turn to how Topics are realized as primary or secondary participants, enabling us to see whether a Topic is realized in an active or passive role, and in which processes.

Figure 3. Primary participants in texts about "the future" (T1) and "a new world" (T2)



The primary and secondary participants in these processes are shown in figures 3 and 4 where T1 (texts about “The future”) is coded in blue and T2 (texts about “A new world”) is coded in orange. For both figure 3 and 4 the x-axis shows types of participants, while the y-axis shows how many times respective participant was used. Figure 3 shows that both actors and carriers are the most common primary participants in the texts about “The future”, while actors and Identified are the most common in the text about “A new world”. Salient from figure 3 is that the Topics realized as primary participants in the texts about “The future” mainly is something or someone doing something physical (ex. *The animal was running*), or something or someone having a value of some sort (ex. *I am rich*).

Figure 4. Secondary participants in texts about “the future” and “a new world”



In the texts about “A new world” we see that one of the main primary participants is still actor, but there is also an increase of the use of identified and sayers, i.e. primary participants ascribed with such secondary participants as value and verbiage. Figure 4 visualizes the most common secondary participants in T1 and T2, showing that Topics realized as secondary participants in the texts about “The future” are mainly attribute, i.e. something that something or someone has (ex. *I have a lot of money*). This secondary participant is particularly distinguishable in this text group (T1). In the texts about “A new world”, content is, to a higher extent, construed as the values that something or someone is ascribed, what is being said in a verbal process and lastly phenomena being sensed in the mentally perceived world of the texts.



### 9.3 Content-thematization

In this section the results from the analytic entries (Topics and transitivity) are combined into content-themes. The content-thematic analysis shows that Topics are generally realized as secondary participants in the texts, i.e. as the attributes, the goals, the perceived or said, and so on. Who is attributed, identified or talking, i.e. the primary participants, is by the most part not realizing any Topics by itself (even though there are contrasting evidence from T2 that we will return to). These primary participants are mostly an “I” or a generic “one” (*man*).

The Topics Items, Future and futurism, Fantasy, Play and games and Luxury are the most realized Topics in T1, construing narratives of some sort of materialistic success with “I” as the primary participant; the one that owns, carries and is carrying out this success in different ways. These Topics are mostly realized as attribute and value in the attributive and identifying relational processes, i.e. the attributes and values of certain primary participants. Examples 1 and 2 show an attributive and an identifying relational process, realizing materialistic success in different ways:

(example 1) I want a robot in the future

(example 2) *When I'm 20 I will be rich and famous*

In the first example the Topic Future and futurism is realized as attribute to something that the primary participant, “I”, wants. Note however that the attribute—(a) robot—realizes the Topic by itself and is in this way the sole linguistic resource used by the writer— independent of the primary participant. In the second example we can again see that the Topic, Success, is realized as the secondary participant. In the first example, the relational, however, is about someone’s ownership of something, “*a robot*”, while the relational in the second example is about defining someone as “*rich and famous*”. All together the main primary participant, the “I”, can be considered to be the children’s own self, or some sort of fictitious self that constitutes the focal point for the social world construed in T1.

The most realized Topics in T2 are Adventure, Animals, Nature and Other people. The Topics are also to a large extent construed through secondary participants, but in more process types and with a much larger variation compared to text group 1. For example, the Topic of Nature is construed as the verbiage being talked about in a verbal process, but also as the phenomena being sensed in a mental process and what’s being eaten in a material process. Animals, Nature and Humans are the most varyingly construed Topics, but this high variation goes for all Topics construed in T2. Three examples of how the Topic of Animals was construed are as follows:

(3) They saw a lot of strange animals

(4) Bat is poisonous

(5) Then the animals said it is a hotel for animals

In example 3, Animals was construed as phenomena, i.e. what is being sensed in a mental process, while example 4 displays how the Topic was construed as identified, and further as both sayer and verbiage in example 5.

As previously stated, the three most salient Topics in T2 are Adventure, Animals and Nature. Both Animals and Nature are also realized in T1, with the clear difference that in T2 they are equally realized as primary vis-à-vis secondary participants. This means that the primary participant, “I”, that plays a major role in T1, is to a greater extent altered to include animals and plants doing the conversing and exploring. Another Topic, Other people, are often realized in T2 while not at all in T1. This Topic is often realized in verbal communication between participants as exemplified in example 6.

(example 6) It looks different here I said. But Saloma said it looks ordinary here.

The primary participants, the sayers, in the clauses are *I* and *Saloma*. This realization with a variety of primary participants, exchanging views on the same phenomena, can be considered to be a shift of focalization in the text; a change of perspective enabling *here* to be defined as both *different* and *ordinary* at the same time. This is an example of binary opposition discussed by Peskin (1998:256) as a key feature sought after by expert readers of the literary texts. The fact that many Topics are realized as binaries to other Topics is viewed as an example of a child who in his or her writing is able to shift perspectives between who is defining, who is being defined and furthermore change the roles of the actively defining and passively defined. On the one hand, the Topic is realized as the thing or person that is saying, sensing and carrying, and on the other hand as the thing or person being talked about, being part of a sensed phenomenon and possible to define as something. This is a feature that is salient in T2 about “A new world” but hardly present in T1 about “The future”.

#### 9.4 Content-thematic space and group width

Altogether, the content-thematic construals of the texts in each text group can be discussed in terms of content-thematic space, *group width* and *text width* as per Table 6.

Table 6. Content-thematic space and group width

Text group	Topics	Possible content-thematic space	Construed content-themes	Group width
T1	20	420	83	19,8%
T2	21	441	149	33,8%

Column 1 and 2 specifies text group as well as how many Topics are realized in each group. The third column shows the number of possible content-themes in each text group based on the number of Topics and the 21 units of the transitivity analysis, as shown in table 2 (the primary participants, process cores and secondary participants

in every process type), calculated as follows: (number of Topics) x 21. The fourth column then shows how many of these possible content-themes are actually realized in each text group. The fifth column lastly specifies group width. Group width is to be understood as the extent to which a text group “explores” the possible content-thematic space and is calculated as follows: number of different content-themes in a text group (column 4) divided by the value of the possible content-thematic space (column 3). In T1 there are 83 different content-themes, making the group width 19,8% (83/420) and in T2 there are 149 different content-themes, making the group width 33,8% (149/441). There are a number of distinguishable features of the two text groups made salient from Table 4. The group widths of T1 (19,8%) and T2 (33,8%) differ, in that the texts about “The future” are more content-thematically consistent than the texts about “A new world” which are more diverse. However, while examining text widths in T1 and T2, it is apparent that there is a variety within each text group concerning the extent of how much of the possible content-thematic space each text explores. T1 showed a narrower text width ranging between 0,2% - 4,8% and, thus, less of a variety between the texts. T2 showed a greater variety with text width ranging between 1,1%-9,5%. Nevertheless, while T2 showed a broader exploration of the content-thematic space, it showed less consistency between texts.

A similar calculation to that of group-width is also possible to do on an individual text level to show the extent to which an individual text is exploring the possible content-thematic space. Text width is calculated through the number of different content-themes in a text divided by the value of the possible content-thematic space—which for T1 is 83 and T2 is 149. Tables 7 and 8 show the text widths of all texts in T1 and T2 respectively.

In general, two distinguishable text types are made salient: The monothematic and the polythematic. The monothematic texts realize fewer content-themes than the polythematic texts, which realize a wider variety. Altogether, the monothematic text is more common in T1 than in T2 and can be exemplified by Text A.

Text A (T1.17 in table 7)

The future.

Everyone drives around in flying cars.

When I turn 30 I want to be rich.

When I grow up I want to be a doctor.

When I grow up I want me to be king.

Then I will get a lot of money.

Text A, with a text width of 1,4% realizing a total of 6 different content-themes, is primarily construed by attributive and identifying relational processes and is about the Topics Future and futurism, Money, Luxury, Work and Success, realizing content-themes Money as attribute, Work as value and Luxury as value. This is a quite typical

text in T1, both in its monothematic character as well as in the recurrence of the almost rhetorical “When I grow up I want...”. Text B is an example of a polythematic text from T2 about “A new world”.

*Table 7. Text width in T1*

Text	Text width
T1.1	0,5%
T1.2	2,4%
T1.3	4,5%
T1.4	1,7%
T1.5	3,3%
T1.6	0,2%
T1.7	1,0%
T1.8	1,4%
T1.9	2,1%
T1.10	0,7%
T1.11	1,4%
T1.12	0,5%
T1.13	3,3%
T1.14	1,0%
T1.15	1,7%
T1.16	3,8%
T1.17	1,4%
T1.18	1,2%
T1.19	4,8%

*Table 8. Text width in T2*

Text	Text width
T2.1	5,9%
T2.2	9,5%
T2.3	1,1%
T2.4	3,6%
T2.5	3,2%
T2.6	9,1%
T2.7	4,5%
T2.8	6,1%
T2.9	3,6%
T2.10	2,3%
T2.11	6,3%
T2.12	5,7%
T2.13	2,7%
T2.14	5,2%
T2.15	4,5%
T2.16	4,5%
T2.17	8,2%
T2.18	8,8%
T2.19	1,1%

Text B (T2.7 in Table 8)

A new world.

I have found a pretty world.

It has strange plants and funny people and so many other fun things. I went on a boat far out at sea. But then I saw this pretty world. I thought I could explore the world. When I came up to the ground I immediately saw a village. I took a lot of photos of the village. I went inside the village and there were pretty houses and a lot of strange dishes. Then I knocked on a door and someone opened there were a strange person. I didn't know if it was a boy or a girl. I asked the person if it was a boy or a girl. She answered: Hi my name is Saloma and I'm a girl. Hi Saloma I replied. Come on in said Saloma. OK I said. It looks different here I said. But Saloma said it was quite ordinary here. I said that I come from another land. OK said Saloma. It is so fun to meet you. But what a lovely plant what kind of plant is it. It's a cactus which is really prickly so don't touch it. OK I said. Bye said Saloma. There now I've seen this world. I will miss everything I've seen.

Text B, with a text width of 4,5% realizing a total of 20 different content-themes, draws more to the polythematic as opposed to Text A. A large portion of the text is construed through verbal processes where the main character, the *I* of the story, and *Saloma* are realized as both sayers and receivers. Aside from this interplay there are a number of content-themes concerning values and attributes of 'Nature', 'Food', 'Home', 'Other people' and 'Adventure'. The majority of the texts about "A new world" draw, like Text B, toward the polythematic, meaning that these texts overall show a greater diversity of content.

The prompts asking the children to write literary texts, on two different themes, have in other words generated very different texts. These texts mainly differ in the extent of which they realize a varied view of the world in the text. Some texts, such as Text A, realize a quite narrow view of the world, and others, such as Text B, a wider and more varied.

## 10. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the subject specific content of early literary texts. These texts show how children made use of linguistic resources to construe content in literary writing, as an emergent disciplinary literacy. Based on linguistic features of advanced literary writing, this study further suggests that the usage of such linguistic resources in early school writing may be seen as seeds to a more advanced literary writing, i.e. as emergent literary literacy.

### 10.1 Early literacy writing

Exploring and analysing the texts from primary school has revealed both the young students' ability to create a diverse content-thematic world and a more uniform one from the same prompts. The study showed that this can be done through use of a variety of linguistic resources, thus shedding light on the diversity in resources of

writing children and also the potential for development of broader literary repertoires of children in early school years.

The prompts “The Future” and “A new world” yielded diverse social worlds by these young writers, which aligns with results of previous research pointing out the broad capabilities of young children in expressing themselves (Dyson, 1998; Ivanic, 2004). The content-thematization however enabled us to go further and closely examine the semantic fabrics of these worlds. Beginning with a closer look at the Topics realized in the data, we saw a distinguishable heterogeneity. But there are some apparent patterns in the text groups. In T1 about “The future”, for example, the Topics are seemingly depicting worlds of luxuries, futurism and well-being, while texts in T2 about “A new world” are more inclined to depicting worlds of adventure and exploration. The content-thematization thus showed salient patterns of common Topics in the text groups, and further enabled a focus on the variety of how these Topics are linguistically construed.

The material and relational process types are in general the most common in both text groups. This is a conclusion which aligns with findings of previous research (Kamler, 1993; Martin & Rose, 2012; af Geijerstam, 2014). Content, generally, was construed as happenings, actions, attributes and values, rather than as verbal or non-verbal communication or mentally experiences in some way. However, when closely analysing the patterns of participants used in all of the processes, such a general conclusion regarding the most common process types is unsatisfactory. Such a conclusion fails to acknowledge other, more precise patterns of linguistic resource use. Through taking in consideration how Topics are realized as part of processes, in particular as primary and secondary participants, this study found that it is not only through material or relational processes content was construed in these early school narratives. Rather it was construed through an ever-changing interplay of Topics and processes—between actively engaging actors, passively acted on goals, defining Values or ascribed Attributes. We were able to see that “Money as attribute” and “Success as value” are two of the most common content-themes in T1, and that “Nature as verbiage” and “Animals as actor” are equally common in T2. This underlines the intricacy of the social worlds realized in early school writing.

### *10.2 Emergent literary literacy in early writing*

We found, through close examination of the linguistic construals of early literary texts, features in the data similar to what distinguishes more advanced literary writing. The interplay between passive and active Topics in a variety of processes in the students’ texts can, in light of Langer’s theories of literary exploration, be understood as students exploring new and possible horizons through their writing. Texts showing such features, such explorations, are thus here discussed as showing signs of emergent literary literacy. To write and to learn how to write literary texts’, is to explore. And this exploration, however subtle, may be exposed via close attention to what and how linguistic resources are at work. This is however not saying that semantically

diverse texts per se mean that the text is exploring these perspectives, but rather that content-thematic diversity can hint toward the explorative possibilities of a text. Therefore, we suggest that content-thematization of literary texts may aid analysts to see “the width of the horizons” in early school writing of literary texts. Furthermore, contradicting, juxtaposing or dialectically opposing Topics, by e.g. construing them both as primary and secondary participants, have been shown as key linguistic features sought after by expert readers of literary texts. (Peskin 1998:156) Combining Peskins findings with Langers theories, strengthens the didactic potential of content-thematically based literary literacy instruction. As Nussbaum (1997), Rosenblatt (1995) and McCormick (1994) have shown, the ability to read and write texts that explore new perspectives on certain things or event, taking the perspectives of others, showing what has been called a narrative imagination, is a key feature of what it means to be a proficient reader and writer of literary texts. Such changes in perspectives are salient in the results of this study, especially in T2 with texts about “A new world”, where variation of the active primary and passive secondary participants in content-themes enables explorations of certain things or events (see example 6). This is yet again interpreted as an embryo of the narrative imagination characterizing literary literacy.

To talk about the content-thematic construals in texts enables a focus on what content is being construed in a text that goes beyond talking about text length, text structure, grammatical correctness or the dramaturgy of the generic narrative. It rather puts emphasis on what the children are actually doing—showing what resources they make use of in their writing. Furthermore, the content-thematic space, group width and text width can be seen as a terminological suggestion of how a teacher or researcher may map the writing repertoire of one or many children.

Both the monothematic and polythematic text types also works as ways to talk about how different prompts encourages certain kinds of writing, both concerning the variety in use of linguistic resources and what Topics they are realizing. We argue that the analysis used and presented in this study thus enables a perspicuous yet detailed view of the diversities of content construed, and the linguistic resources used to construe it, in the children’s texts. The results of the study further serve as a foundation for discussions of what constitutes a “good” text and by extension investigations of what norms are being upheld through instruction and assessments of early writing.

As a closing remark, the results show that aspects of literary literacy can be made visible in content of texts written by 7- and 8-year-old children. Building on the arguments of Fang & Coatoam (2013) and Shanahan & Shanahan (2014), this suggests that there is reason to regard content oriented disciplinary literacy scaffolding and teaching as important for emergence of disciplinary literacies. However, how or what should be focused in such practices is a question for further inquiries.

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