“Af-Soomaali!” – Somali teaching in a multilingual primary school in Denmark

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Multilingual children – like all children – move in and through a range of different sites for language and literacy learning in their everyday lives. In this presentation, such sites are conceptualized as ‘literacy spaces’. Danish teaching in school represents a privileged example of a literacy space; foreign language teaching in English, German or French other recognized literacy spaces. However, multilingual children move in and between a range of other literacy spaces in their everyday life. These include mother tongue or community language teaching in or out of school, Qu'ranic class and informal language teaching at home by parents, siblings or others; all of which largely unresearched in a Danish context.

The presentation is based on ongoing research exploring literacy spaces in a Danish multilingual primary school with an expanded language curriculum. The children in the Year 2 class in focus not only receive teaching in Danish, but also in English, and many children furthermore take Arabic, Dari, Pashto or Somali classes as part of the school curriculum. The research design is ethnographic (Blommaert & Rampton 2011, Palludan 2004), and the primary data source is participant observation, documented through field notes, video observation and collection of various artefacts, and supplemented by interviews.

Drawing on de Certeau's understanding of space as practiced place (de Certeau 1984), the presentation explores meaning making processes in one of the literacy spaces under investigation, namely the Somali literacy space. The presentation lays forward preliminary analysis of the Somali literacy space pointing to the fact that issues of language, linguistic practices and language didactics do not merely accompany the unfolding of everyday life in the literacy space; rather, they are inextricably bound to the construction of the Somali literacy spaces as a literacy space. The presentation thus illustrates how linguistic practices are placed in and must be understood in specific localities, but simultaneously create spaces.