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# In tow of the blue whale: Learning as interactional changes in topical orientation

Helen Melander ... Fritjof Sahlstr m

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## Abstract

This article aims at taking part in the development of conversation analysis approaches to studying learning in interaction. In focus is the learning of a small group of children doing child-initiated reading. We examine how a topic “the size of the blue whale” is constituted and developed over time in interaction, and how this development can be understood as learning. The analysis is based on a video recording of three 7-year-old children reading a picture book together, where the children explicitly orient to the topic of blue whales. The results of the analysis show that, when content is considered an intrinsic aspect of participation, there are changes over time in the organisation of participation in relation to, in this case, the topic of blue whales. In particular, this concerns how the children relate to the size of the blue whale. Thus, the results show that learning occurs, and how this learning is accomplished. This is made possible through the fine-grained participant perspective-based conversation analysis. The

reported work also demonstrates how issues of topic and content can be integrated into micro-analyses of learning.



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## Keywords

Learning; Interaction; Participation; Topic; Conversation analysis; Children

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**Helen Melander** is a Ph.D. student at the Department of Education, Uppsala University, Sweden. Her research interests are learning as an interactional achievement and cognition in a lived social and material world. Grounded in a Conversation Analysis perspective, her interest is how talk, embodied action, and material structure in the environment elaborate on each other and are used and oriented to in interaction.

**Fritjof Sahlström** is an associate professor at the Department of Education at Uppsala University. In his research, three main issues have been in focus: students' and children's learning in interaction; the constitution of social reproduction in educational settings; and the development of methods for conducting qualitative research on interaction in educational settings. Together with Ann-Carita Evaldsson and Cathrin Martin he is the co-leader of the Everyday Life research group at the Department of Education at Uppsala University

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