

DET LÄSANDE BARNET
Minnen av läspraktiker, 1900–1940

Mats Dolatkhah

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This thesis is a study of the cultural history of children's reading. It is argued that it is important to apply a wider historical perspective to the contemporary debate on the rapid changes in children's and young people's reading habits, and that existing historical research rarely deals with reading as a practice, but rather with its institutional and textual conditions such as the school, the library system and children's literature. The thesis thus aims to explore the practice of reading and its relations to historical circumstances.

Through a close reading of 30 retrospective interviews conducted in the 1970's and 80's, the analysis deals with some of the experienced motives, interpretations, materialities and social dimensions of children's reading practices experienced in the first decades of the 20th century. It offers a discussion of these practices as related to wider historical contexts. Theoretically, the analysis is inspired by the conceptualizations of a 'history of reading' in the works of Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton and Jonathan Rose.

It is concluded that even if the informants in principle had access to different models, motives and genres for reading, the practice of reading often had to take on the character of improvisation in contexts where material resources and social sympathies for reading were lacking. Furthermore, in relation to the complex social tensions and dynamics surrounding reading, the practice may also be defined by its degree of legitimacy and/or autonomy in a given context.

These results imply that further research and debate is needed on the connections between the value attributed to reading in relation to changing concepts of work and "usefulness", on the collective historical experiences of cultural progression, and on issues of the identity of the modern children's library.

Keywords: Children, History of reading, Library and information science, Literacy, National movements, Oral history, Popular education, Popular reading, Reading habits, Reading practices, Sweden, User studies, Youth culture