In recent years, research on disciplinary literacies has been undertaken; however, there is little research on emerging disciplinary literacies in primary years. As Wright and Gotwals (2017) observe, although primary years learners are capable of disciplinary literacy, research traditionally claims that children need core literacy skills before they acquire disciplinary literacy (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). This study examines the Swedish context where studies have shown that the differences of disciplinary literacies and writing in different school subjects can be illustrated in many ways, such as differences in the presence of abstract/concrete wordings (af Geijerstam 2014), personal/impersonal voices (Liberg 2014) or through attitude towards content (Folkeryd 2006). However, there is yet to be in depth studies on the processes of early years emerging literacy practices in Swedish schools.

The research question asked by this study is, how do early years learners make meaning through writing, and how does it correspond to disciplinary literacy? Bakhtin’s theory of genre is drawn upon to explain how primary genres occur within a context, while secondary genres that comprise of novels, drama, occur in “complex…cultural communication” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 62). Importantly, the dialogic perspective of genres determines how learning writing and, thereby, genres evolve, particularly as the diachronic in genres assures text transformations. As Hyland (2007, p. 150) observes, examining genres and their application illustrates that writing and practices associated with writing are contextual, place, and time-bound and are integral to identity and group membership.

This study applies the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis, and the analytical tools of Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to 50 texts written by Grade 2 and Grade 3 students in Sweden. The analysis explains how texts are aspects of “social events…shaped by causal powers of social structures, social practices and social agents” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 37); within the social aspects of texts, genres, discourses and style provide meaning in texts. We demonstrate through SFL how field (Halliday, 1985) or genre (see Hasan, 1995) constitutes the semantic aspect and provides meaning in a given context. The analysis illustrates that genres are dynamic that construct as well as respond to situations. Genre combinations in this study demonstrate how early years writers undertake writing tasks. It shows how early years writers engage in text production and the processes that are at work in the generation of disciplinary literacies.