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The School Library as a Space for Learning

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The aim of this article is to present findings about the meaning of the school library as a space for learning as experienced by students. This complex aim implies a theoretical framework that consists of a sociocultural perspective on learning and a phenomenological perspective of space. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and questionnaires in seven schools (8- to 19-year-old students) during one year. Among the various meanings of the school library emerging from the data analysis are a warehouse for books, a place of leisure and refuge, a place of strict order and quiet, and a service area. The school library also appears as an opaque information system. Conclusions are that the library has potential to support an alternative discursive practice in a school provided that the predominant meaning of the school library as a warehouse for books is challenged by other meanings such as a space for free discourse and intellectual activity, as well as a space for collective rather than individual action.

Introduction and Purpose

Few studies have explored what meanings students construct through school library use, and the difficulty of identifying and describing what and how students learn through the school library has been observed in earlier research. Streatfield and Markless (1994) acknowledged the problem for researchers in the title of their report. *Invisible Learning*. Their research interest was not to map school library use, but to discern its effect on student learning. Their findings indicated that learning through the school library was influenced by a variety of interacting factors (resources, organizational structures, pedagogical ideas) and by actors such as teachers, administrators, librarians, and students, that is, the "school culture" in which the library is set. Williams and Wavell (2001) found that enhanced student learning through the school library was particularly evident in relation to life skills such as taking initiative, accepting responsibility for one's task, being independent in the use of time, and using one's freedom to explore topics of personal interest.

Our research project. *Learning through the school library (LearnLib)*, aimed at exploring what meanings students construct through the school library and *how* these meanings are constructed. According to Scanlon, Issroff, and Murphy (1999) and to Alexandersson (2002), meaning in school contexts is constructed gradually, which involves continual change while work proceeds. Construction of meaning is a social process and may be understood as an

interaction in which the students' thoughts and communicative actions take shape and where the students in various ways coordinate their actions. This interpretation is about intersubjectivity, which is connected to students' actions, both their verbal communication and the operations that they perform when they search for information through the library.

The LearnLib project concentrated on *how* students use the library and other information paths and sources in order to seek and use information for their assignments. Our research interest was thus directed toward the library as a means of acquiring information for learning tasks. We view information seeking and use as a process that can be discerned, but cannot be isolated from other dimensions of an assignment such as subject matter, forms of presentation, and other frameworks for the completion of a task such as described by Kuhlthau (1993). In our study, we interpret the school library as part of such frameworks. The focus of this article is on students' construction of meaning of the *school library as a space for learning* including its various artifacts such as computers, books, pictures, and so on.

Special Characteristics of School Libraries

According to Ely (1992, cited in Thomas, 1999), a consequence of online information seeking and Internet connections is that the school library is no longer a room, but a function. However, in our study, we see school libraries simultaneously as local/physical and global/virtual places and spaces for learning of various possible content. Earlier school library research emphasizes differences between the school library room and other rooms in a school, especially classrooms. These differences concern, for example, the layout of the facilities—more free space, often soft furniture, bookshelves carrying a large variety of media, and a number of computer work-stations. Metaphors used to describe school libraries include "a business reception area," "a space with personality," and "a safe haven for students" (Streatfield & Markless, 1994, pp. 102-103). These metaphors suggest a space of safety, of something special, and of friendliness. Dressman (1997) underlines that the school library is characterized by a structure not present in any other school room; this structure is represented by the classification system, which offers a different organization of knowledge about the world than the predominant school organization of knowledge linked to teaching subjects and the school years. Moreover, the school library is a public space, open for everybody in a school and at the same time permitting anonymity, which in turn offers potential for independence (Dressman, 1997). Rafste's (2001) ethnographic study focused on senior high school students' use of their library in two schools. According to her findings, the school library is a "porous" room with the potential of shifting meanings dependent on resources and rules and according to the view of knowledge and learning prevalent in the school.

Skantze (1989) explored how the physical environment and architecture appear from a student perspective in three school buildings. She found that

young students (ages 7-11) relate to the physical environment through their senses. Older students (ages 12-15) think consciously about the details and forms. They conceive and interpret the physical environment in relation to existential questions and to themes such as being sociable, getting through school, being independent, taking responsibility, gaining freedom, and taking control over their actions and surroundings. Skantze found that, in all three schools, classrooms were often associated with monotony and lack of autonomy, whereas libraries seemed to offer possibilities for discovery and excitement as well as peace and quiet.

The research findings referring to the special characteristics of school libraries as compared with other school facilities gave rise to the question about what meanings are constituted through the interaction between students and the school library room in specific learning situations.

Complementary Theoretical Perspectives

To understand both learning through the school library and students' construction of meaning of the school library as a space, two theoretical perspectives were used. First, a sociocultural perspective, as described by Saljo (1999), was the basis for the questions on students' learning and on their activities and social interaction in the library. From a sociocultural perspective on learning, we considered students' contact with artifacts and people—in and through the school library—as participation in a socialization exercise where the school library can be understood as a "cultural tool" with a communicative function. The activities that take place in or through the school library are social and communicative. They are part of a cultural context and can vary from school to school, but they can also have a great deal in common.

Second, a phenomenological perspective is used to understand the school library as space or as a room. In using the term *phenomenological*, we refer to the existential tradition, and we refer to a way of knowing that seeks to describe the underlying, essential qualities of human experience and the world in which that experience happens. Many philosophers in the field of phenomenology, such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, have made theoretical and systematic investigations about the meaning of place and space in human life (van Manen, 1990). Central to the phenomenological approach is the assumption that people and world are intimately related such that each makes and reflects the other. People do not act on the world as subjects in relation to an object, but rather are experiencing beings whose actions, behaviors, and understandings always presuppose and unfold in a world that is, in turn, supported by and a reflection of these actions, behaviors, and understandings. From a phenomenological perspective, place and space are never disconnected from people: they are related to people's position in the room and use of the room and also to

people's intent. Place and space are of great existential significance for people. They give the person his or her identity.

In the research of architecture, Otto Friedrich Bollnow (1963) developed a theoretical foundation of "the experienced room." Bollnow means that the expression "man is in the room" indicates that a man is understood as an object—like an item in a container—in space. However, a man is not an item among other items, but a subject relating to its world in different ways. In phenomenology, the concept of the experienced room is often referred to, implying that the room is both experienced and substantial. The meaning of the experienced room should be realized as a room always being in relation to a physical subject. When a person occupies the room, it is being shaped in different ways. Consequently, the room embraces several dimensions. One dimension is linked to a person's will, intention, and aims—a *room of actions* assigned to the active body. Another dimension is linked to how we experience the room through our senses. We can call it a *visual room*, a *hearing room*, a *taste room*, or a *feeling room* based on the senses we use in the experience. The spirit of the room adds a further dimension—an *atmosphere* room in relation to a living person. Every room or space is affected by a special atmosphere that penetrates every part of it. The various tasks that are carried out in the actual room will exert an influence on the atmosphere.

In the study presented here, we were looking at how both the space and the dominant patterns in the students' use of the library form rules for how learning can legitimately emerge in them (Beach, 1995; Giddens, 1984).

Methodology, Data Collection, and Analysis

Data were collected at seven schools in four municipalities in Sweden during the period 2001-2002, and roughly 90 school visits were carried out. The schools were participating in a two-year development project to strengthen the pedagogical role of their school libraries. The catchment areas of the schools were mixed as regards socioeconomic conditions with no dominant profile connected to any one of them. The seven schools were representative of Swedish schools in general and included city schools, as well as rural schools and schools on all educational levels from elementary to senior high school.

Data were collected from 260 students from 11 grades (8-year-olds to 19-year-olds). In the schools observed, students were grouped by age (7-year-olds in grade 1, 8-year-olds in grade 2, etc.). Data collection also included 18 teachers, seven principals, and nine library staff. The greater part of the data collection consisted of field notes derived from 72 observation sessions, including interviews and conversations with students, teachers, principals, and library staff. Because the overall aim of the research project was to explore what meanings students construct through the school library, we focused on the students' perspective by using ethnographical methods. Conversations with teachers, librarians, and principals were used for contex-

tual understanding of students' learning situations. All field notes were generated from concrete learning situations related to tasks carried out by students. The researchers followed students' learning processes, from introduction through conclusion, during students' work with assignments requiring independent information seeking and use in the library as well as via other channels. Thus it is important to note that our study did not include all school library use, but was restricted to school library use related to study assignments requiring independent information seeking and use by the students. Other kinds of school library use such as reading for pleasure were not observed for this study.

We also administered a questionnaire to all 260 students and received 245 responses. Questions were similar to those used in the interviews with the students. The questions concerned what students thought about the purpose of their task; what they wished to find out through information seeking; how they went about finding their sources; if and how they used the school library; how they used their sources in order to prepare presentations; how they interacted with fellow students, teacher, and librarian during their work; and finally, what they learned through the task.

For this article, analysis of the empirical material is directed toward identifying the meanings of the school library as a space for learning as experienced by the students. To achieve this, all the field notes were closely scrutinized to identify material relating to students' experiences of the school library room. The data used derive either from the researchers' observations of students' behavior in the library or from how students talked about how they used the library either in direct conversation with the researcher or through communication with fellow students, their teacher, or the librarian. Data from the questionnaires regarding questions on students' use of the school library were also used in the analysis. Among the 11 grades observed in our study, four never visited the library for purposes related to the assignments under observation. This means that students in Years 2 and 3 (younger than age 9) and students in special education classes are not included in the findings presented in this article.

Findings

The school library as a space is a local arena, a sphere supporting the development of student knowledge, which is reflected in the legislative rules of school. The creation and experience of the school library is embodied by the character of the physical room and by the use of the room according to the ability of the different actors, their desires, thoughts, and engagement. When, for example, students enter the school library to participate in what the library offers in a concrete way and in an *objective* sense, they also take part in what the library offers from the point of view of their experience of the room and what it contains and presents in a *subjective* way. In one sense, the students are present all at the same time in the library room, but, through a

variety of concrete experiences, each student is developing an individual relation to the room, a sort of room consciousness or room relationship.

In the seven school libraries, we observed empathy and engagement, professionalism and information seeking, communication and interaction. However, we also found mechanical and passive action and a great lack of collective cooperation between the various actors. The organization of the school library limited social life within it. In our study, it became obvious that the circulation desk formed a border between the students' space and the space belonging to the librarian. This space also excluded the teachers. Instead, the teachers shared the rest of the library space with the students. The arrangement of the bookshelves screened the floor space in several ways, and the passages between the shelves created small rooms within the larger room. The reading corner—and the "footpath" to it—also created a room within the room. The students learned early on to agree on how to make use of the floor space at their disposal, and conflicts seldom arose about the use of the space.

Various meanings of the school library emerged from our data. These may be seen as various dimensions of the meaning of the school library as a whole.

Warehouse for Books and Facts

The most obvious meaning of the library was as a warehouse for books, that is, the meaning of the library is to provide physical material for project work, mainly books. Higher-grade students—Years 5 to 12 (11-18-year-olds)—visit the library themselves to search, retrieve, and check out books. This implies that for students at the secondary level, the library as a physical space is obvious. For "research" assignments in the lower grades. Years 2 to 4 (8-10-year-olds) or in special education classes, the teachers would often check out the media, mainly books, which were then used in the classroom. This means that the school library as a *physical space* related to learning tasks may be less evident for younger students. It is replaced by physical books provided by the teacher to be used for learning in the classroom.

One meaning of the library as a physical space is that of a *workplace*. Especially in one school where two classes (15-year-olds) worked on an assignment for four months, most students spent most of their working time in the library and stated in the questionnaire that the library contributed much to their learning for this task.

The aim of searching for or borrowing a book or browsing any print source was often the motive for students to visit the library. A student who had been searching the Web in the classroom said, "Maybe we should have a book too. Let's go to the library" (Peter, 18 years). A girl in Year 8 who used two books and some printouts from the Web explained, "This time we had to visit the library. Normally I would search the Net" (Emma, 15 years). This

implies that her two books were the outcome of an imposed visit to the library.

The students had an understanding of library use as finding facts. They and their teachers would normally use the term *facts*, hardly ever *information* or *literature* or any other word. The following is the answer to an interview question put to a junior high school student about her information search process and illustrates the focus on facts:

Anne: I am searching for facts [on *Titanic*].

Interviewer: What facts?

Anne: Well, when it was built, who built it and what might have happened if they had noticed in time.

Interviewer: Noticed what?

Anne: If they had seen the iceberg earlier. (Anne, 15 years)

The next illustrates the use of facts in a different sense:

I started by searching on the Net, I found loads, look ... (points to some 50 pages of printouts), then I asked the librarian. I think this is all right, I haven't read it yet, I am going to now ... Anyway, I have enough facts now ... I'm going to look through the books a bit first. (Olof, 15 years)

We interpret this use of the term in at least two ways: (a) *facts* may mean discrete pieces of information, right answers to questions; (b) *facts* may also mean the content of information in a wider sense, closely related to the content knowledge or the subject matter of an assignment topic. However, an understanding of information seeking as finding factual information or ready answers may be detrimental to a view of learning as deeper understanding of some content. Limberg (1999) found that senior high school students' understanding of information seeking as fact-finding interacted with a poor learning outcome on the subject matter. The conclusion was that an understanding of information seeking as fact-finding was inappropriate for a complex learning assignment. In an earlier article on outcomes from the *LearnLib* project (Alexandersson & Limberg, 2002), we noted that the understanding of information seeking as fact-finding was connected to information use as "transport and transformation of text" and that this view was rarely challenged by teachers or librarians. A theoretical explanation of this is that according to the school's discursive practice, learning takes place through copying and memorizing text.

Opaque Information System

It is evident from our field notes that most students had blurred understandings of the information systems of the library, both as regards systems for shelving and systems for cataloguing or classification. When the researcher asked students how they would go about finding a specific item, they were rarely able to give an adequate explanation. The field notes show that more often than not students asked the librarian for help in finding a book or an

article. In spite of this, the questionnaires indicated that most students found it easy to retrieve material in the library. This may imply that one meaning of the library would be that of an opaque or incomprehensible information system where you need assistance in accessing a document. An alternative understanding would be that the library is a place where it is easy to find information. This latter view may lead to frustration or disappointment if or when searchers fail to retrieve relevant information.

Students' limited understanding of library systems also applies to Web-based information systems. Even if teachers and librarians recommended the use of Web catalogues organized by various information professionals, hardly any student would use electronic libraries such as the Link Library. The Link Library is part of the Swedish School Net set up by the Swedish National Agency for Education; it is targeted for school children 10-15 years old and includes over 3,700 quality-assured educational links [<http://www.skolverket.se/skolnet/english/index.html>]. Most students did not know the difference between a Web catalogue organized by subject area (e.g., Yahoo) and a search engine. They seemed to prefer to use search engines such as Altavista or Google and often used them primitively, without appearing to know about basic tools or operators for narrowing, specifying, or broadening their searches.

Sometimes, with the advice of a librarian, a student would be more successful searching a database. The quote below illustrates one such example of a girl who was working on the events of September 11 (under the main project theme of "Terrorism"):

Bin Laden was not an index word. It is difficult to search, maybe this is because it is not really facts ... as it seems ... from newspapers and similar sources. Now I knew the date and used that for my query. The whole file is full of articles on our topic. (Anita, 18 years)

Students' understandings of information seeking on the Web was generally focused on finding any source on the topic of their assignment. They rarely seemed to consider issues of relevance criteria or the credibility of sources.

Leisure—Refuge

Other meanings emerging from our data are those of the school library as a place of leisure and a place of refuge. There are connections between these two views, because students who wanted to get away from the classroom during lessons would use the library as a refuge. The need to search for a book on a project topic would legitimize an escape from the classroom and give students their desired free space, sometimes allowing them to use the space for games, chatting, or other relaxation. It appears that in many cases students' intentions in using the library during class periods were to achieve freedom from the classroom.

The notion of the library as a refuge may also include the library as a place for quiet, concentrated reading. There are examples in our material of stu-

dents of various ages who used library visits for finding and reading a book of their personal choice. Similarly, our material indicates that students willingly used soft furniture not only during leisure time, but also while working with study assignments.

Strict Order and Quiet

The library as a place of strict rules and order emerges in our material. In some schools, students needed a pass or a special permission for visiting or working in the library. Other examples of strict order concern rules for checking out books or permission to use the photocopier. If the computer for the circulation system was down, students accepted waiting or came back later for their books. Students seemed to be tolerant and developed an understanding of the library as a place of rigid rules and strict order. The communicative interaction between adults and students in the library often encouraged this interpretation. More often than not, librarians were observed arranging books on the shelves, hushing for quiet, and insisting on the application of rules for checkout or photocopying. The structural order of the classification system characterizing the library emphasized the meaning of a special order in the library room. While instructing students on information seeking, it seemed quite common for librarians to suggest that students follow a certain order according to types of documents to be consulted, that is, (a) encyclopedias, (b) books, (c) periodicals, (d) databases, and so on (compare "a pathfinder approach," Kuhlthau, 1993, p. 11). It is worth observing that the specific structural order of the library is not only restrictive, but may also offer potential freedom, because it is an alternative to the predominant school order of knowledge about the world (compare Dressman, 1997).

Place for Computer Use—The Virtual Room

As regards the school library as a place for computer use, our data give a somewhat mixed picture. There were obvious variations between schools depending on the number and distribution of computers between various locations in the schools. In school libraries with many computers, students used them for information seeking on the Web. In schools where computers are placed in classrooms or other areas outside the library, the school library was used mainly for print material. One questionnaire from a school with many library computers revealed that 70% of the students viewed the computers in the library as very important for their information seeking. Nevertheless, few students referred to computer use as the prime motive for visiting the library. The students would use computers for information seeking regardless of where they found them—in the library, in the classroom, in the computer lab, or at home.

Thus it appears that the school library implies a physical space rather than a virtual space for these students. Although they emphasized their preferences for Web-based information seeking and conducted many searches on library computers, students seemed to associate searching the Web

with computers as tools rather than with the library as a tool. The virtual space accessible via computers appeared attractive and prestigious to the students. Expressions of enthusiasm and sometimes of the joy of discovery are to be found in part of our data about the Web. At the same time, findings from our observations indicate that students have great difficulties navigating on the Web as regards searching, using various operators, and evaluating the authority or credibility of sources found (compare *Opaque Information System*). The virtual dimensions of computers emerge, but they are not obviously connected to the school library for students in our project.

A Service Area

The library as a service area emerges from our observations of students' behavior in the library and the interaction between students and adults there. Students repeatedly asked for technical assistance in the library and expected to get help, and adults appeared to respond to those expectations by providing such services. Adults in the library, both teachers and library staff, acted as service personnel for students in the library: fixing broken connections or failing networks, providing technical assistance for photocopying or other machines in the library, as well as finding books on the shelves. It is interesting to reflect on the consequences of adults adopting a service role to the students as regards technical hitches. This may be in conflict with their other roles in supporting students in their construction of meaning of various concepts and content knowledge. In an earlier article on findings from the *LearnLib* project (Alexandersson & Limberg, 2002), we reported that the interaction between teachers and students in the library mainly focused on the procedural or technical dimensions of the task, such as writing the right keyword in the search engine, finding the right site, or browsing the texts or pictures correctly. Students' seeking meaning was grounded in these procedures. These findings were confirmed and strengthened through these new observations on students' actions and expectations of service in the library.

Discussion and Conclusions

The presentation of the various meanings of the school library resulting from the *LearnLib* project is different from the general rhetoric on the role of school libraries in research-based learning. According to the rhetorical discourse, school libraries are virtual, global spaces as digital information collections. Our findings indicate that meanings of school libraries experienced by students concern the physical rather than the virtual space and physical objects such as books rather than any other artifact. The meanings of school libraries experienced by students also imply individual rather than collective action and understanding. An appropriate question arising from our data concerns the reasons for this gap between rhetoric and practice. In this section, we use the theoretical framework of our study to shed light on some possible reasons. Our data also provide examples that are more consistent with the rhetoric. So it seems important to scrutinize such examples in order to find

out how and why they differ from the general observations. Such scrutiny will be the object of the final analysis of our data, but may also be an important issue for future research.

As we see it, our findings give rise to some concern. The dominant meaning of the school library as a warehouse for books, closely linked to the notion of the library as a depot of right answers to be retrieved, seems too narrow and may hamper creative learning in and through the library. Moreover, the experience of the library as an opaque information system is likely to create obstacles for student learning. We see a need for students to develop a broader repertoire of meanings of the school library, with stronger links to intellectual interaction in the pursuit of understanding the world. The school library as a refuge may help students survive in schools, but may not be adapted to support organized research-based learning. Our findings clearly indicate that to inspire alternative meanings of the school library, teachers and librarians are the key actors and need to interact differently with students.

When the students are acting in the library—reading, borrowing books, or searching for information—they are experiencing a certain *atmosphere* in the room (quietness, peace, friendliness). Dancing, howling for joy, or aggressive outbursts are not usually to be expected. Through the *visual room*, the student experiences pictures, texts, and symbols, and through the *hearing room*, the characteristic quietness of a library. Further, it should be added here that the intent of a school library is to act as a *social room* or space for the actors existing in the room, with the limitation that it is not a room for social life with unrestricted movement and sound. For example, *borrowing books in a library* forms a certain relation between the staff in the room and between the borrower and what is offered (to borrow or to read books). The experienced atmosphere is connected to how to deal with the actual task. Committed and competent students, together with a committed and competent librarian, bring a certain atmosphere to the room.

Communicative Interaction in the Library

The sociocultural perspective implies a view of the school library as a cultural tool with a communicative function. The various meanings presented above are thus communicated to the students through their interaction with the library and with the people and artifacts in the school library. It is evident in our material that the adults—teachers and librarians—have a strong influence on students' construction of meaning of the library. But the picture has to be completed with the school library as a space. For example, the architecture and the interior design of the library provide teachers and librarians with the possibility of creating and exploiting spaces as a resource for particular kinds of library interaction.

It is obvious that the teachers, the librarians, and the space encourage the students' understanding of the library as a warehouse for books. In several

schools, the librarian would strongly emphasize books as information sources and neglect online information seeking, even though there were plenty of computers in the library. If the librarian insists on books or if teachers mainly use the library to check out books to bring to the classroom, it is likely that students will think of the library as a place for books and will not form an understanding of the library as a place for online information seeking or for intellectual interaction.

Students' view of the library as a quiet place or as a place of strict rules and order may be based on both teachers and librarians insisting on such rules. Students seemed to accept and shape their understandings accordingly. This means that, based on our data, teachers and librarians established a formula for the library. When, as in Rafste's (2001) two cases, the library was used mainly for leisure-related activities, students were able to establish the norm and set the limits for library use in the school. This was possible because teachers did not interfere and did not actively direct the students to use the school library for learning assignments.

Our data provide few traces of adults explicitly or implicitly encouraging an understanding of the library as a place for learning or for intellectual activity. However, we have examples of students actively engaged in their assignments and seriously using available tools in the library to explore a topic. These examples are characterized by individual students' genuine curiosity to investigate a problem generated from a personal interest, for example, "Why am I so tall?" (boy, 15 years). Students' various approaches to the task are influenced by their personal interest or involvement with the topic or problem (the content) of the assignment that will in turn influence what meaning students construct of the library room.

The Library as a Cultural Tool in the School's Discursive Practice

Although our observations focused on formal learning situations, we identified a meaning of the school library as a refuge and as a space for leisure and pleasure for students. The library seems to have ambiguous meanings implying a dichotomy between work and leisure or between control and freedom. Dressman (1997) characterizes classrooms as "spaces devoted to literacy as work," and libraries as "spaces devoted to literacy as the pursuit of personal desire" (p. 161). However, he does not claim an antagonistic relationship between the two. We would argue that this implies a potential for the school library to challenge the school's discursive practice of learning as finding and reproducing the right answer. In our study, and in Rafste's study (2001), it seems that this potential is scarcely utilized.

The use of space in the school library is a central pillar in the creation of a meaningful discourse on education. Spatial practices help constitute subjectively objectified meanings and consolidate social and power relations. For example, if the settings in the school library are designed for certain purposes, the school library will be experienced in accordance with the settings;

the students will handle content in a certain way due to how they experience the space where the content is presented. The organization of the school libraries in this study evidently conveys to students that school library invites individual rather than collective work. There were possibilities for joined discussions and cooperation in libraries, but they seldom occurred during our data collection. This type of individualism on the student's part is connected to individualism from the perspective of the librarian. Consultation between librarian and students would be based on individual interaction between them. What seem to be at work here are attempts to exert what Bernstein (1990) defines as symbolic control over the nature of teaching and learning. That is, on the basis of intent and time-space particularities, certain groups and individuals will dominate other groups or individuals through a significant discursive code, because of their specialization in it. An intriguing question, maybe worth further research, is whether individual consultation with students is a manifestation of librarians' use of symbolic control in order to preserve their professional territory as information experts.

Implications for Practice

The potential meaning of the school library as a space for students to explore topics in order to develop conceptual knowledge about the world calls for alternative approaches to the school library than those found in our study. In order to utilize the library's potential for challenging the school's discursive practice, the view of learning as reproduction and of information seeking as finding the right answer must be seriously questioned and profoundly reconsidered by teachers and librarians. To implement learning processes based on students' systematic research is a risky endeavor that teachers and librarians need to undertake together. This is a matter of breaking centuries of school tradition and thus a demanding task.

This further means that also the library's discursive practice needs to be challenged, questioning the historic library tradition of freedom of choice and suggesting a stronger focus on organized student learning. The students need to encounter organized learning contexts through their interaction with various artifacts, as well as with teachers and librarians in the library. Consequently, librarians would have to direct their interest and activities more to student learning and less to library resources, as well as to increased collective action as opposed to the prevalent pattern of individual communicative interaction in the library. Clearly, such redirection of interests should have consequences for the library as a space, and librarians might ask themselves how the layout of the library needs to be changed to support such redirection.

Conclusions

From our study, we may conclude that an education arena such as the school library offers spatial and material resources to be used in the constitution of messages when forcing values and views of reality on learners. Students'

experiences of how school libraries are structured have significant effects on what can reasonably go on there: for example, what sort of learning activity will actually take place and what will be the result of this activity. School libraries could be designed to enhance the learning process by nurturing mind, body, and spirit. They could embody curricular themes, and they could be appointed so as to encourage peripheral learning. This indicates the importance of reflecting on the school library as a space for learning. From the data, we found that there were differences in how students interacted socially in the library while interacting with the artifacts in the library (texts and pictures through documents, articles, books, ICT, etc.). Similar differences occurred among the teachers when they used the library for teaching as well as among the librarians working regularly in the school library. The students, the teachers, and the librarians created and used spatial resources in the enactment of their understandings of good school library practices. Their understandings were linked to legitimizing how the school library could be interpreted as a physical space for learning.

The varying meanings of the school library create a notion of a complex space with various dimensions, as described above. We conclude that the potential of the library to contribute to an alternative discursive practice in a school seems to be connected to the possibility of combining dimensions of pleasure and freedom with learning as work. The predominant meaning of the school library as a warehouse for books needs to be challenged to give more room to other meanings such as a space for free discourse and intellectual and creative activity. The dual meanings of freedom and organized knowledge, as well as individual and collective action in the school library, need to be strengthened for contributing to enhanced student learning.

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