



**Information literacy – step by step
Result of a partnership between the public library and
school libraries in Gävle, Sweden**

Gunilla Hagman
School Library, Gävle, Sweden

Brita Sjögren
School Library, Vasa Upper Secondary School, Gävle,
Sweden

and

Sara Gagge
School Library, Polhem Upper Secondary School, Gävle,
Sweden

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Abstract:

We had seen that in the Municipality of Gävle there were not any comprehensive views of how information literacy was taught to the students. Therefore we, a group of different professions, developed a plan of information literacy applying both for compulsory and upper secondary school. This document was formed with its base in the Swedish curricula and syllabuses and called Information literacy – step by step. In this paper we have shown that with this development plan as a base, and with cooperation between different professions in school, there will be a greater possibility to secure an education of information literacy amongst our students.

Introduction

We all know what a necessity it has become to master the ability to find information and be critical in the meeting with the massive numbers of web sites and other sources. This is also a question of democracy – all children must have the opportunity to obtain information literacy. We had noticed a tendency to overestimate the childrens' skills to look for information on the

Internet. Some of us surely experience a feeling of awe when coming across a child or teenager clattering ahead at a keyboard at the speed of a rattlesnake. To be sure, they often are our superiors at many things regarding computers – but being information literate does not necessarily correspond with these skills.

The ability to frame questions, to understand where to look for answers, and why; to select between sources, choosing some and discarding others, to reflect on what you find and read, to critically scrutinize texts and to transform the information to your very own, useful knowledge – all this we wanted to emphasize as vitally important skills.

We all want our children to learn and to find useful information when studying, and we do not want them to just google and cut and paste texts into their own documents, learning nothing or next to nothing. We do not want the looking for knowledge to be the actual knowledge.

This paper presents how we worked with what finally resulted in the document *Informationskompetens – steg för steg / Information literacy – step by step* (see enclosed document).

At first we present the background, then how different schools and libraries have worked, followed by the result, and finally we present our vision of the future.

Background

It all started in 2004, when a group was formed by order of the Chief Education Officer of Children and Youth Management and the Chief Librarian in Gävle Municipality, the idea being a collaboration between the public library and the municipal schools. Group members were representatives from the public library and different school libraries. The idea originated from similar sorts of collaboration between teachers of special subjects at compulsory and upper secondary schools. Gävle, with its population of 94 000 inhabitants, has 32 compulsory and 3 upper secondary schools, private schools not counted.

In most schools there was hardly any time set aside, and mostly no qualified responsible staff, for the development of the students' skills in information literacy. With that in mind we went to work with the purpose of visualizing continuity in information literacy skills throughout school. Our aim was that the result of our work was to be an easy-to-understand help to make information literacy more structured and possible to see as a progress of skill during the school years. It also was to be a great help in fulfilling our national school law and curricula. In the beginning we had some discussions about what information literacy actually is, and what is reasonable to teach children of different ages. When we had agreed on this issue, the discussion went further.

We found that obstacles to implement our ideas often were lack of time as well of lack of money, and that the principals of the schools seldom gave priority to their school libraries. In spite of this we decided to focus on the possibilities rather than the problems. Which methods could we use to show the potential of school libraries to be an important and essential resource in teaching the students information literacy? How could we enable schools and public and school libraries to collaborate in support of that development?

The idea emerged to present and arrange seminars for teachers and for teachers with responsibility for the school library (in Swedish and hereinafter referred to as *lärary bibliotekarier*). As the upper secondary school librarians already taught information literacy to their students, their methods came to be the basis for this.

The struggle ahead

We met regularly during the three following years trying to establish reasonable goals that would be possible to reach for our students at different levels. Most of our group members remained the same throughout the years: school library coordinator, also convener of our meetings, three or four teachers from intermediate and senior levels at compulsory school, a public librarian, the three upper secondary school librarians, and pedagogue working with IT instruction and didactic support (in Swedish and hereinafter referred to as *it-pedagog*). At some of our meetings representatives from both preschool and University of Gävle participated, and also chief librarians from the public library.

Our aim was to stress the pedagogical functions of the school libraries. Our basis was to find ways to secure the information literacy of our students and to find a way to start a continuous and continuing process in support of that. We planned to state clearly defined goals for what the students should be able to know at their leaving respectively year 3, 6, 9, and the last year at upper secondary school. We wanted the goals to be directly connected to the curriculum and to the relevant courses (see enclosed documents).

We also wanted to stress the importance of information literacy, placing it at the same level as the three r's: reading, writing, and arithmetic. Therefore the first name of the project was *Den fjärde baskunskapen / The fourth basic knowledge*.

In October 2007 and March 2008 the group arranged two, much appreciated, seminars for teachers, with participants both from Gävle and nearby municipalities. We presented our document, asked the participants if they considered the suggested goals possible to reach, and discussed various ways of working, emanating from actual examples from the upper secondary schools and a couple of compulsory schools. Views coming out of the seminars were that our document was an essential instrument, that joint goals are necessary and that the goals were reasonably set. Many teachers emphasized the importance of further education in information literacy for themselves and their colleagues. The problem with the various conditions for different schools was also discussed, and the lack of time for teachers to do library work came out as an important issue.

As an offspring, the librarians at the three upper secondary schools offered a seminar to all principals of the senior levels of the compulsory schools; our point being that due to our experience, these principals do not have enough knowledge about what a librarian-staffed library has to offer their pupils.

In the field

Compulsory school

At one of the schools the *lärarybibliotekarie* and the *it-pedagog* together started a project in 2005 for children at intermediate stage. They called it *The fourth basic knowledge: a project of development*. They found a way of teaching information literacy in direct connection with lessons. Their goals corresponded to the first two steps of the document: the goals for years 3 and 6. The responsibility was shared between *it-pedagog*, *lärarybibliotekarie*, and teacher. Their aim was to create a way of working where the children were to learn search strategies that also would lead to real knowledge in various subjects. They would often start with the childrens' own questions and gradually interweave the teaching of information literacy during

their work. This model trained and taught the children to ask questions, to search for information in different sources, and to collect the information in mind maps. Working from these maps the children then wrote in their own words, and in this way, avoiding the cutting and pasting, they had good practicing in formulating their texts. The children were encouraged to start from the easiest kind of sources, like one or two books in the school library, and then move on to the computers. At the computers they were only allowed to use a few sites that the teacher beforehand had chosen as suitable. They also learned to state and name their sources. They worked in pairs or larger groups and presented their results to the rest of the class.

This model worked out excellently. The teachers could use it without having to worry about practical computer problems, as the *it-pedagog* was part of the team, and the children were able to get support from grown-ups in the classroom, in the library, and at the computers.

The most important parts were:

- teachers, *it-pedagog* and *lärarybibliotekarie* worked together as a team
- the pupils were strictly guided by teachers when searching for information
- the pupils learned to ask relevant questions
- the pupils learned to work systematically and progressively

The document has also been used as a basic instrument for some of the other compulsory schools. The importance of integrating information literacy in the every-day work is considered great by many teachers. At some schools, comprehensive goals of the curriculum for information literacy are subdivided into subgoals for every school year. Regrettably, there are also examples where *lärarybibliotekarier* or other pedagogues have had sufficient time and support to do a great job at building up, maintain and develop their school library, but in times of downsizing their posts have been downsized. This has meant that the libraries have been left either without any staff at all or staffed with employees lacking sufficient education. In these cases the libraries have become mere premises, often locked up.

Upper secondary school

The three upper secondary schools have well-equipped libraries and full-time librarians. In their daily work they supervise the students individually, and give lessons teaching the students information literacy, using the document *Information literacy – step by step* as a model. In year one, the students get their library introduction, and their first lessons in the using of search engines, the link directories, and the databases. In the following years the librarians, in collaboration with teachers in subjects such as social sciences, history, religion, or biology, have lessons where they widen the teaching also to include criticism of sources, how to write correct bibliographies, and the basis of copyright. The cooperation with teachers is essential, and the librarians also offer training for teachers.

The libraries have compiled a guide of information literacy for upper secondary school classes, where all the basics of information literacy are assembled. This guide is a well-known tool for both students and teachers

(see: http://gymnasieskolan.gavle.se/gp/gp_sidauh.aspx?id=2527)

The integrated school libraries

The public library actively supported our work. The seven school libraries integrated with district public libraries were the first school libraries to decide to make *Information literacy – step by step* a part of their goals. The public library looks upon the library and the schools as having a joint commission, on the basis of the democracy aspects that everyone has the right to obtain and understand information. Their view is that we must counteract what they see as an impending growth of a gulf between people who know how to master the flow of information and those who do not. The public library and the schools are to endeavour to guide children in the profusion of information and stimulate them to seek knowledge.

The result

The document *Information literacy – step by step* was finished in 2007. It was formed as a “ladder” with a slow rise of difficulty for each step.

Examples:

- at the end of year 3, we stated that the children should know the alphabet and to know their way in the school library. They should also be able to use easy dictionaries and to log into a computer and be able to navigate through a web page’s different functions – with well defined instructions from the teacher
- -at the end of year 6 the children should be able to use a multivolume encyclopedia and, still with clear limits stated by the teacher, be able to use the Internet. Also, they should start to develop a critical awareness of sources and know that you always should state the sources used
- at the end of year 9, when leaving compulsory school, the students should be able to do simplified, relevant searches in search engines, be able to use more than one source, and know how to write a simplified bibliography
- at the end of upper secondary school, we found that the students should know the difference between search engines, link directories, and databases, and make use of the databases that their individual school subscribes to, to be able to know the basis of criticism of sources and why these should be specified, and to be able to write a correct bibliography referring to all kinds of sources

The future

Our aim is now to continue the implementation of *Information literacy – step by step*, and furthermore extend it to university level in co-operation with the local university.

The document is going to be presented for the Children and Youth Management of Gävle during the spring of 2010, and we also hope that in a near future the Education and Work Management of Gävle (under which the upper secondary schools belong) also will agree to implement its aims in their goals. As mentioned, the document is already taken as implemented goals at the Culture and Leisure Management, the municipal department to which the public libraries belong.

We have also continued to discuss an education agenda aimed for all teachers in the compulsory schools in our municipality. We can see that there is a great need for this, and the question has also been raised at the public libraries as an important task for the future. We can see the necessity for a more basic education of information literacy as well a possibility to obtain a deeper knowledge for teachers in need of it.

We also cherish a hope that the new school law, which takes effect later this year (2010), will have the result that schools, principals, and not least our politicians, are willing to reserve more funding, so that our schools for the youngest will not only have a room filled with books, but also educated staff, i.e. librarians, at least in the senior compulsory schools. The new law contains writings that mean more clearly stated positions for the school libraries than the present law does. With these conditions fulfilled, there is a possibility to implement a well planned education of information literacy for all pupils.

Notes:

As noted when first mentioned in the text, we have used the Swedish expressions *it-pedagog* for “pedagogue working with IT instruction and support” and *lärarybibliotekarie* for “teachers with responsibility for the school library”

Enclosed documents:

Information literacy – step by step

Extracts from:

Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school class and the leisure-time centre
Curriculum for the non-compulsory school

Compulsory school – Grundskolan

from Curriculum for the compulsory school system, the pre-school classes and the leisure-time centre, Lpo 94

from **2. Goals and guidelines: 2.2: Knowledge: Goals to strive towards:**

The school should strive to ensure that all pupils:

- learn to carry out research, learn and work independently and together with others*
- learn to critically examine and value statements and relationships*

from **2. Goals and guidelines: 2.2: Knowledge: Goals to attain in the compulsory school:**

The school is responsible for ensuring that all pupils completing compulsory school:

- can use information technology as a tool in their search for knowledge and to develop their learning as well*

2. Goals and guidelines: 2.8: Responsibility of the schoolhead

The schoolhead is responsible for the results of the school and thus within certain limits has specific responsibility for ensuring that:

- the working environment in the school is organized such that pupils have access to guidance, teaching material of good quality as well as other assistance in order to be able to independently search for and acquire knowledge by means of e.g. libraries, computers, and other learning aids*

Courses

from **The syllabus of Social studies**

Goals to aim for in social studies

The school in its teaching of social studies should aim to ensure that pupils

-develop their ability to use different sources of information and develop a critical attitude to these

Goals that pupils should have attained by the end of the fifth year in school

Pupils should

-be able to search for process and summarize information in order to explain or answer questions about Man and his activities.

Goals that pupils should have attained by the end of the ninth year in school

Pupils should

-be able from a societal perspective to search for information from different sources, work through, examine and value information as well as present their results and conclusions in different forms.

from **The syllabus of Swedish**

Aim of the subject and its role in education

The written word is of immense importance and society imposes demands on the ability to cope with, assimilate and evaluate texts. The development of information and communications technology creates opportunities for the development of language, and at the same time expectations that everyone will have such abilities.

Goals to aim for

The school in its teaching of Swedish should aim to ensure that pupils develop the ability to use different opportunities to obtain information, acquire knowledge of the language and functions of the media, as well as develop their ability to interpret, critically examine, and evaluate different sources and their contents

Goals which pupils at the minimum should have attained by the end of the third year in school

Pupils should concerning reading

-be able to read literary texts [...]

-be able to read factual texts [...]

Goals that pupils should have attained by the end of the fifth year in school

Pupils should

-[...] be able to use dictionaries.

If you want to read the curriculum at full length:

<http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=1070>

If you want to read the courses at full length:

Social science

<http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0910&infotyp=23&skolform=11&id=3882&extraId=2087>

Swedish

<http://www3.skolverket.se/ki/eng/comp.pdf>

Upper secondary school – Gymnasiet

from Curriculum for the non-compulsory school, Lpf 94

from **1. Fundamental values and tasks of the school: 1.2 Common tasks for the non-compulsory school system: The school's task:**

Pupils shall also be able to keep their bearings in a complex reality involving vast flows of information and a rapid rate of change. Their ability to find, acquire and use new knowledge thus becomes important. Pupils shall train themselves to think critically, to examine facts and their relationships and to see the consequences of different alternatives. In such ways students will come closer to scientific ways of thinking and working.

In their studies pupils shall acquire a foundation for life-long learning.

Changes in working life, new technology, internationalisation and the complexity of environmental issues impose new demands on people's knowledge and ways of working.

Pupils shall develop their ability to take initiatives and responsibility and to work and solve problems both independently and together with others.

from **1. Fundamental values and tasks of the school: 1.3 Special tasks and goals for different types of school: Goals:**

They shall receive a foundation for lifelong learning that prepares them for the adjustments that will be required when conditions in working life and society change.

from **2. Goals and guidelines: 2.1: Knowledge: Goals to strive towards:**

Where it concerns the upper secondary school and the municipal adult education [...]

can use their knowledge as a tool to:

– formulate and test assumptions as well as solve problems [...], critically examine and value statements and relationships

– overview large areas of knowledge and develop an analytical ability and thus come closer to an increasingly scientific way of working and thinking

– use knowledge as a tool to formulate and test hypotheses and solve problems

from **2. Goals and guidelines: 2.1: Knowledge: Goals to attain:**

Where it concerns pupils who have completed a national or specially designed programme [...]

– can use specialist literature, fiction and other forms of culture as a source of knowledge, insight and joy

– have the ability to critically examine and assess what they see, hear and read in order to be able to discuss and take a standpoint in different questions concerning life and values

from **2. Goals and guidelines: 2.6: Responsibility of the schoolhead:**

[...] The schoolhead is responsible for the school's results and thus has, within certain limits, special responsibility for ensuring that:

– the working environment in the school is designed so that pupils have access to guidance and teaching material of good quality as well as other assistance in order to be able to independently search for and acquire knowledge via inter alia libraries, computers, and other technical devices

Courses

SH1201 – Civics

Goals to aim for

The pupil should

-when working with various social issues, being able to use different sources of information and methods

SV1201 - Swedish

Goals to aim for

The school in its teaching of Swedish should aim to ensure that pupils:

-develop their ability to search, select and process information from verbal, as well as printed and digital sources,

-develop their ability to search, select and process information from verbal, as well as printed and digital sources,

EN1201 – English

Goals to aim for

The school in its teaching of English should aim to ensure that pupils:

-develop their ability to collect information from different sources as well as adapting and structuralizing the collected facts

PA1201 – Project work

General model for project work

Project work means that pupils solve a problem or take up a question within a central knowledge area in the programme or the study orientation they have chosen.

In project work of a more theoretical nature, emphasis is put on the ability to obtain, critically examine, use literature and other sources.

If you want to read the curriculum at full length:

<http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=1072>

If you want to read the courses at full length:

Civics

There is no English translation available at the moment

Swedish:

<http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0910&infotyp=5&skolform=21&id=3205&extraId=>

English:

<http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0910&infotyp=5&skolform=21&id=3199&extraId=>

Project work:

<http://www3.skolverket.se/ki03/front.aspx?sprak=EN&ar=0910&infotyp=5&skolform=21&id=3902&extraId=>