

# A librarian in the classroom: how does that affect student learning?

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## **Abstract**

*In Linköping there is an ongoing investment in staffed school libraries, so-called focus libraries. Focus libraries has three aims: to be an integrated part of the school, to promote reading and develop students' information literacy. At Hjulsbroskolan the librarian cooperates with teachers in the classroom to implement these aims. The work to develop student's information literacy starts in preschool class. The development continues the coming years in close collaboration with teachers. The librarian devotes most of her time in the classroom with the teachers to plan, implement and evaluate the area of work and assess the students' efforts. This way, there has been an increased student learning. This is shown in the results of the national tests, regarding the issues of source criticism. A dedicated and structured teaching in information retrieval and source evaluation, implemented by teacher and librarian in cooperation, leads to increased achievement for students.*

**Keywords:** School libraries, School librarians, Source criticism, Media and information literacy, Cooperation

## **Introduction**

As a school librarian I meet students every day, both in the library and in the classroom. Sometimes you hear the description "the school library as a place for learning". For me it is the function of the school library that is learning, not the place. It is particularly noticeable at Hjulsbroskolan. I spend most of my time in the classrooms, in cooperation with the teachers. This has been my ambition since I started working at Hjulsbroskolan. In the beginning it was because I did not want the library to be a parallel activity to other school activities. Now when the school library is fully integrated with school activities, I have begun to think about what students really benefit from a school library being integrated with teaching. In evaluations and surveys, I get proof of what the school library as a learning function does for student achievement. In this paper, I will describe what I do to increase student achievement, and what results I see.

## **School Libraries in Sweden**

Hjulsbroskolan is an F-6 school (preschool class – year six) with about 380 students. Since September 2010, the school had a staffed library. Linköping has an ongoing investment in school libraries, so-called focus libraries, more on that below. Unfortunately that is not the fact in all of Sweden. *The Education Act* of 2011 states that "students in elementary school, school for students with intellectual disabilities, special school, Sami school, secondary school and upper secondary school for students with learning disabilities should have access to school libraries." (*Skollag*, 2010, 36§)

The law says nothing about the staffing of school libraries, just the premises. Therefore, the school library situation around Sweden is not equivalent. Most schools have a school library, but no librarians. In Sweden, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate works to ensure that students in Sweden are getting a good and equal education. There are certain criteria they are looking at when to decide if the school actually has a school library:

- “1. Students have access to a school library in their own school unit's premises or at a reasonable distance from the school that makes it possible to continuously use the library as part of students' education in order to contribute to achieving the objectives of their education.
2. The library includes books, nonfiction and fiction, information technology and other media.
3. The library is adapted to the needs of the students in order to promote language development and stimulate reading.” (Skolinspektionen, 2013)

There are some municipalities that stand out: Lund, Växjö and Linköping. Municipalities where they have realized that staffed school libraries is an important part of student learning.

### **Focus libraries in Linköping**

In Linköping the municipality has chosen to make an investment in staffed school libraries. These are called focus libraries, to separate libraries with trained librarians from libraries without librarians. Right now there are 18 librarians in 20 schools. Schools may apply to have a focus library. Every year there are about four new focus libraries. The idea is that all school libraries in Linköping should be staffed in the future. When a school is granted a focus library they get a full-time librarian, additional funds for purchase of media and furniture. For two years the school receive money for this from the municipality. After two years, the school carries the costs gradually. This will free the money to invest in new focus libraries.

In the municipality of Linköping there is a plan for all types of libraries. This is what the plan says about school libraries:

"School libraries' main mission is to support students' learning through teaching and tutoring in information and source critical thinking and reading promotion work that contributes to the love of reading and good reading development."

"School libraries are available at all schools within the local primary school. Schools have received development funds to renew and strengthen the library's media collection. The principal have appointed an instruction librarian; an educator who has a part of their employment dedicated to working with the

school library. The instruction librarians have received training through a study circle. "

"With the libraries as an integrated part of school education it opens for exciting possibilities of digital learning. Learning resources on the internet and educational materials in digital form is a reality today and librarians' skills are important for building strategies and for the use of digital tools and partly for information management process. The school library can contribute to a school on the cutting edge with motivated students. These wordings goes hand in hand with a focus libraries mission." (*Biblioteksplan för Linköpings kommun 2014-2018*, n.d.)

### ***Focus libraries' mission***

Focus libraries have three aims:

- Be an integrated part of school activities
- Work to promote reading
- Develop students' information literacy

Each school has developed an action plan for how these three aims should to be realized. The action plan has been aligned to the school's own conditions and needs. It is important that all teachers at the school are involved in establishing the plan to realize the aims of it. The most important thing with the plan is that its contents are part of the school activities and does not consist of parallel activities. The action plan is revised every year and adapted to new conditions. The plan for the school library consists of two parts: reading promotion and information literacy.

In order to fulfill the goal of being an integrated part of school activities the librarian must cooperate with the teachers. The two other aims could be implemented without any connection to the school's regular teaching. But for them to have any effect on the students continued learning, they should be carried out in collaboration with the teacher. This is something that you need to make clear to the teachers from the beginning, when it is not obvious for them to have a librarian in the classroom. Now that teachers have received proof that there has been a development in goal achievement for the students they do not question my presence in the classroom. The teachers look upon it as a matter of course to work with me when they have an area of work involving the promotion of reading and information literacy.

### **Lgr 11**

2011, the Swedish school system got a new curriculum, *Lgr 11*. The curriculum consists of fundamental values and tasks of the school, overall goals and guidelines and syllabuses. In elementary school we read the following topics: art, English, home and consumer science, physical education and health, mathematics, modern languages, mother tongue tuitions, music, biology, physics, chemistry, geography, history, religious studies, civics, crafts, Swedish, Swedish as a second language , sign language for the hearing and technology.

The new curriculum opened up for greater cooperation between school librarians and teachers. The ability to critically analyze and evaluate sources is included in almost all syllabuses.

Education in Swedish schools "should promote the development and learning of all students, and a lifelong desire to learn." (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 9) The school's mission involves that the students "should be able to keep their bearings in a complex reality, where there is a vast flow of information and where the rate of change is rapid" (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 11), further, to develop "their ability to critically examine facts and relationships" (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 11). Students should learn to "use modern technology as a tool in the search for knowledge, communication, creativity and learning" (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 16). It's easy to find connections to the school library activities in these wordings. Even in the syllabuses there are many wordings that connects to the school library activities:

In the syllabus of civics it says that "teaching should give students the tools to manage information in daily life and studies, and knowledge about how to search for and assess information from different sources." (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 189) The teaching should give the students opportunity to search for information about society from the media, the Internet and other sources and assess its relevance and credibility. In year 1-3 the teaching should deal with "methods of searching for information from different sources: interviews, observations and measurements. How sources and information can be assessed and processed." (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 191) In year 4-6 the teaching should deal with "how to distinguish between messages, senders and purpose in different media with critical awareness of sources." (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 191)

In the syllabus for Swedish it says that "teaching should stimulate students' interest in reading and writing" (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 211) and that "teaching should also help students to develop their knowledge of how to search for and critically evaluate information from various sources." (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 211) Students should take part of and learn about literature from different parts of the world and from different eras. They should be given the chance to develop their ability to "read and analyze literature and other texts for different purposes" (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 211) and to "search for information from different sources, and evaluate these." (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 212) In year 1-3 students are supposed to know a few fictional children's book authors and illustrators, be able to search for information in books, magazines and websites for children, and to be able to view them critically. In year 4-6 students are supposed to know about reading strategies in order to "understand and interpret texts from various media, and to distinguish between explicit and implicit messages in texts." (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 213) Students need to be familiar with some literary significant child and young adult authors and their works. They have to be able to search for information in several different media and sources, and learn how to compare different sources and to determine its reliability with a discerning attitude.

### **Cooperation between teacher and librarian**

The research review *Students' knowledge work in the school library* by Jenny Henning Ingmarsson presents research on school libraries from the last ten years. Among other things it expresses that teachers and librarians must focus more on how students use the information they search for, as well as provide support to students through the entire process (Henning Ingmarsson, 2010, p. 9). Students are often left without guidance and it might be too great a responsibility. (Henning Ingmarsson, 2010, p. 12) When this happens, students focus too much on finding information rather than to process it. (Henning Ingmarsson, 2010, p.15) Common to all research is that the focus should be on guiding students through the

entire process, to help them to sort and evaluate the information. (Henning Ingmarsson, 2010, p. 15)

In Hjulsbroskolan we write pedagogical plans for each area of work. The plan clearly shows how the work area is linked to the content of the curriculum. When I plan a work area with the teacher, I am involved in writing the content of the pedagogical plan from the start. This makes it easier for me to support students in the classroom. I know what they are aiming for in that particular area and what should be assessed. When I collaborate with teachers in the classroom there is opportunity and time to provide students with the support in the information retrieval process as the research shows that they need to develop a source-critical ability. I am in the classroom throughout the implementation and I take part in the evaluation of the work area along with teachers and students. If there are student work to be assessed, I am also involved in assessing their performance. In that way I evaluate my contribution to education, and I can see improvement areas to consider for next time.

As early as in preschool class, which is the year between preschool and school, I start the work which will give students tools to become source critically conscious. I work from a lesson approach to arouse curiosity and awareness among the students. They will learn to reflect on the origin of the source, the reliability of different sources and what we can find on the Internet. They get tools for how to think when they search and review the information. This is implemented in a playful way. I call the setup *Source investigators* and the lesson setup are in brief, as follows:

#### Lesson 1:

I read a nonfiction book for the group, for example *Fiskögon, sopor och annat smaskens* (*Fish Eye, garbage and other goodies*) by Thérèse Bringholm, Inger Scharis and Lena Forsman. After reading, I ask the students how they think the author has done to find out all the facts. All proposals are written on the white board and the students tell how they themselves would have done, based on the proposals that have come up. The goal of this lesson is that students should think about how and where to find information.

#### Lesson 2:

I read a nonfiction book for the group, for example *Sov gott: upp och ner och under vattnet* (*Sleep well: upside down and underwater*) by Thérèse Bringholm, Inger Scharis and Lena Forsman. After reading, I write the word *source* on the board. Then I ask if anyone knows what the word means. It usually isn't anyone who knows what it means. Some students talk about the basement, which is similar to the term source in Swedish. Proposals as spring also tend to arrive, because it is the same word in Swedish. I show the book again and tell them that the book is a source. I show some more sources, such as a newspaper, a magazine. Then we look at the suggestions the group came up with at the first lesson and I tell them that it is all different types of sources. The goal of this lesson is that students should become familiar with the term source, and realize that there are many different types of sources you can use to search for information.

#### Lesson 3:

I read a nonfiction book for the group with facts about for example an animal, such as *Hönan heter Hulda* (*A hen named Hulda*) by Leif Schack-Nielsen, which is about how to take care of a hen. Before the reading begins, the students tell what they know about hens, and I write them on the board. After reading, we compare what was in the book with what we wrote on the board. Then I ask students if we can be sure about what is in the book is true. We discuss what we can do to make sure the facts are correct. Here, some groups may begin to suggest that it might be good to compare with another source or ask an adult. The goal of this lesson is to get students to start thinking about how we can determine if what we read is true, and that what we know beforehand can help us to determine that.

#### Lesson 4:

I read a fiction book for the group, for example *Småkrypsjakten* (*Bugs hunt*) Helena Bross and Christel Rönns, which is about a school class that go outside to look for bugs. After reading, I ask the group what we can learn, for example about ants, from the book. Since this is not a nonfiction book we discuss if what is written in the book is true. After that, I read a nonfiction text about ants and then we compare the books' content with each other. The goal of this lesson is to give the students a chance to practice how to compare the contents of two texts and see if it matches.

#### Lesson 5:

I read the book *Snabel@ upptäcker sin bokstav* (*@ discovers his letter*) by Linda Palm and Jessica Lindholm, which teaches us how a computer works and what you can do on the Internet. After reading, I ask students what they usually do on the computer or iPad, and if it differs from what adults usually do on the computer or iPad. I tell the group that there are a lot of facts to be found on the internet. I show the site *Länkskafferiet*, which is a link collection for children, and tell them that there are a lot of pages with facts for kids on the site. After that I let them surf on *Länkskafferiet* and see if they can find any interesting pages. The goal of this lesson is that students should think about what you could use a computer / iPad to and to get acquainted with a link collection.

#### Lesson 6 and 7:

In this lesson, I read some short factual texts about, for example, an animal. We help each other to bring out the essence of the text together. Using key words we write a factual text together. After that, we search for a picture on the internet that is authorized to use, and insert it into the text, or the students themselves draw a picture to illustrate the text. The goal of these lessons is to write a factual text together from multiple sources, and to get an introduction to copyright.

In the following grades we repeat and deepen the knowledge they get in preschool class, always connected to an ongoing area of work. In year one, it may be to write simple factual texts about for example animals, flowers or any other subjects that might interest the students. First we repeat the *Source investigators*. We work according to genre pedagogy to give students tools to build factual texts. Students should compare at least two texts, and based on a mind map, write their own text. They insert an image that they have found on the internet to the text that is authorized to use.

In year 2 we repeat what they learned in the first grade, and implements a similar work. This may involve, for example, space or dinosaurs. In the second grade, they must also refer to what sources they have used. Throughout all grades each school year we repeat and deepen the students' knowledge of source criticism. In year 5 and 6, we usually test their skills in a written test. Then we can easily see what they need to learn more. In year 6 students get grades for the first time. Knowledge requirement for source criticism that are to be assessed in year 6 is formulated as follows, in the syllabuses for civics:

“For grade E:

Students can search for information about society and use different sources in a basically functional way and apply simple reasoning to the usefulness of the information and sources.

For grade C:

Students can search for information about society and use different sources in a relatively well functioning way and apply developed reasoning to the usefulness of the information and sources.

For grade A:

Students can search for information about society and use different sources in a well-functioning way and apply well developed reasoning to the usefulness of the information and sources.” (*Lgr11*, 2011, p. 195-196)

### **National tests**

In Sweden students are tested in year 3, 6 and 9 and in some courses in secondary schools using national tests. Tests are carried out in different subjects and the purpose is to support equal and fair assessment and grading, as well as providing a basis for an analysis of the extent to which the knowledge requirements are met at the school, in the community and in Sweden. The tests are not an examination tests, but the basis for the teacher's assessment of the student's knowledge. (*Nationella prov*, n.d.) The tests are corrected by the teachers at the school. Last year I was asked if I wanted to take part and co-assess the question that concerned source criticism in the civics test, year 6. In classes where the tests were carried out, we had worked a great deal with source criticism, connected to the areas in which the teacher and I worked together. The students performed well on these questions. For the first time, I felt that the part I had played had an impact on student performance. The students were also very pleased that we had worked a lot with source criticism. The evaluation of the work areas where I had worked with their teachers got these answer to the following question: Do you think you have practiced your source-critical capability in a good way? Two of student responded:

“Well, I really think so! It was great that we worked with source criticism because there were several questions about it on the national tests!”

“Yes! I have not found it to be so difficult with source criticism before, but I got better and learned what things I needed to check to see if the source was reliable or not.”

I felt it would be an interesting comparison to see if there was any difference in student performance in schools with a focus library, and schools that lacked focus libraries. Together with the school libraries manager, I have therefore examined the results of the five questions



related to source criticism, at the nine schools that got to do the test in 2014. It turned out that the results differed significantly in schools with a focus librarian and in those without. In test A 75.9% of students who went to a school with a focus library got grade A and C, while 41.3% of students in schools without a focus library got grade A and C. In test B, where the questions were designed so that they required a bit more input from the students, 69.9% of students in schools with a focus library got grade A and C, while 25.3% of students in schools without focus library got grade A and C. A direct proof that the librarian effort in the classroom, with the teacher, makes a difference in student performance. Even the results of the test as a whole, where all abilities of civics were tested, were higher for schools with a focus library. Here 68.8% of the students got grades A, B and C, while only 16.7% of students without a focus library got grade A, B and C. This proves that staffed school libraries raises the compliance rate for students in general. A focused and structured teaching in information retrieval and source criticism, conducted by teacher and librarian in cooperation, raise student achievement.

## Conclusion

For the teaching of information retrieval and source criticism to lead to students developing a discerning attitude, it should be a regular feature in teaching. It is important that teaching information retrieval and source criticism becomes a part of the regular education for better achievement among the students. It is also important that it becomes a natural part of many different subjects, so that students can see that a source-critical capability is useful in all subjects, and even outside of school. It is also important to start teaching early, for it to be a natural approach.

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## Biographical note

Liselott Drejstam is 38 years old. She has worked as a school librarian since 2002. She has a master degree in library- and information science. She is currently working as a school librarian at Hjulsbroskolan, an F -6 (preschool class-year 6) school in Linköping. Previously,



she worked as a secondary school librarian for several years. At Hjulsbro skolan, she works closely with teachers to increase better achievement among the students and to stimulate reading and increase students' media and information literacy. She is very interested in the work of increase students' source-critical ability, which begins in the preschool class. She has lectured at several school library conferences around Sweden. She lives in Linköping with her husband and two children, 5 and 7 years old.