A Place to Learn or a Place for Leisure? Students' Use of the School Library in Norway

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The aim of this article is to present findings about how students in Norway use and value the school library as part of their daily practice in school, and who those users are. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and questionnaires in two case-study schools (16-18-year-old students) for six months. The findings indicate that students use and value the school library more as a social meeting place and a place for pleasure than as a place for education-related studies. The data are discussed within a theoretical frame of sociology and domain-specific socialization theories and describe the library as a porous space in the school.

Introduction and Purpose

Most studies on school libraries during the last 10 to 15 years have focused on seeking and using information for formal learning, and the theories employed have mostly been learning theories (Kuhlthau, 1993; Kühne, 1993; Limberg, 1998; Pitts, 1994). Few user studies have explored students' overall use of the school library as a room during their everyday life in school, and even fewer have considered students' perspectives of the use and value of this room in the school (Limberg, 2003; Rafste 2001). A few exceptions are the studies of Rudduck and Hopkins (1994) and Burke (1993). Rudduck and Hopkins examined students' perspectives and interviewed them to find out about their use of the school library. Burke conducted a descriptive study of students' library use based on a questionnaire. The main findings of these two studies are similar and point to the close connection between students' formal educational use of the library and teachers' organization of instruction. In Burke's study, only a few students used the school library regularly. The studies are interesting for the present study, although they have no theoretical perspective on the questions they study.

Schilling and Cousins (1990) take a theoretical perspective and focus on students' use of the school library from a new perspective: the school library as a space in school. They claim that earlier research on the school library failed to examine how the relationship between social factors and spatial dimensions can affect the capacity of libraries to be suitable places for learning. These are aspects that Dressman (1997) also stresses in his research on school libraries. He explores the room as a social system within the school and examines the interaction between students and between
students and school librarians. His findings indicate that the school library is different from other spaces in the school, and he makes an interesting contrast between the space in the school library and that in the classroom.

My research project, *A Case Study on Students' Use and Experiences of the School Library* (Rafste, 2001), explored how students use the school library as part of their daily practice in school and what this use means to them. Library use is not limited to formal educational activities; it is about students' daily activities in the school library. Analysis of students' use of the space was carried out using two main dimensions: (a) the most used locations; and (b) the character of the activity, whether education-related or leisure-related (see Table 1). The analysis of how students value the school library is crystallized in a typology of use (see Table 2). Furthermore, the study takes students' perspectives in an attempt to understand not only how the school library as a space is used, but also how students value using it. Thus the present study breaks with most earlier user studies.

The theoretical perspectives taken in the present project include theories from both sociology and psychology. In Giddens' (1984) structuration theory on the constitution of society, the essential point is the duality of the social structure and the agency of the agents, that is, the reciprocal interaction between individuals and society. This duality makes the structure of the social systems. The school library can be seen as a social system within the school as a supra-social system. Students as agents interact with these

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>School B: Academic and Vocational Classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Girl</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Activities related to instruction or leisure leisure per month</strong></td>
<td><strong>Instruction-related activities</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity at the working tables</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT activity</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity in silent reading hall</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource-based activities</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>565</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The matrix is shortened as the numbers of activities specified for months from January to June under each category of activity are omitted here.*
Table 2
Typology of Use on What the School Library Means to its Users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time/Space</th>
<th>Instruction-related time: collection code</th>
<th>Instruction-related time: integrated code</th>
<th>Leisure-related time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Resource centre for educational related information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space for school work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource centre for leisure related information</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social meeting place</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waiting room</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The categories of instruction-related time are related to Bernstein’s code theory. The categories on the space dimension are based on the most valuable use of the school library for the students.

social systems in time and space. Giddens’ theory contributes a new and broader perspective on the school library field in this study. His theory is, however, on a meta-level and does not help understanding of students as individuals in their use and valuing of the school library. I turned to socialization theories to cover how individuals construct their life pathways by acting and interacting with their surroundings. Students’ daily life in school constitutes part of their life space. To understand how they use and value the school library, we need to know who and what the socialization agents are with whom/which they interact. Bernstein’s (1971) code theory on socialization through the organization of instruction is one theory that contributes to this understanding.

The focus of this article is to describe and discuss what students used the school library for, what it meant to them, and who the users were, based on the theoretical frame outlined above.

Theoretical Perspectives

Students’ socialization processes—in school in general and in the school library in particular—are multifaceted and influenced by many socialization agents both within and outside the school. In this study, the organization of instruction is seen as a dominant agent. Bernstein (1971), in his code theory, developed the concepts classification and framing. In this study, classification refers to the extent to which the curriculum is divided into various subjects, and framing refers to the time given to a certain topic and the possibility for choice of content. Instruction can be organized according to a collective code or to an integrated code. The collective code is characterized by strong classification and framing. The teacher and the textbooks are the main learning aids for students. The integrated code is characterized by weak classification and framing. This code can be associ-
ated with project work and learning through experience and using learning arenas outside the classroom such as, for example, the school library.

Another domain-specific socialization theory of interest to this study is that of peer socialization. In Western countries, young people spend more and more time in school. This means that the school constitutes an important space for building social networks and making friends. Students act as informal socialization agents to each other. According to Frønes (1995), the significant other for most young people is another young person. Peer socialization may happen all over the school, including in the school library. Why the school library constitutes a different space from other spaces in school is discussed below.

The final domain-specific socialization theory relevant to this study is socialization through physical-material resources. The architecture and material of a room signal what is valued in a social system and by whom and can socialize the individual into particular ways of acting. Fuglestad (1993) explored how the physical-material frames of the school communicate with students. He divides the school at large into an outside arena and an inside arena. The school library has similarities to both these arenas. In this study, it is characterized as a grey zone and as a porous space, both signalling the idea that the school library is a space of both enablers and constraints depending on who the users are and how they communicate with the structure of the room.

These domain-specific socialization theories help to provide a deeper understanding of how students on an individual level are socialized into the use and value of the school library. Giddens’ (1984) structuration theory is used to develop concepts for understanding how the library in the school has come into being and how it has been maintained and developed through students’ production and reproduction of actions through time and space, the core dimensions in his theory. Students’ actions will always be contextual; they happen in time and space. However, space is never only a geographical area or physical space. Giddens uses the concept of locale to indicate his meaning of space. A locale is constituted by “the body, its media of mobility and communication, in relation to physical properties of the surrounding world” (p. 118). This definition of locale implies that the same physical area with the same physical material will constitute various locales depending on who the agents are and what they do.

The concept of locale is especially interesting in understanding students’ use of the school library when it is related to another important concept in Giddens’ (1984) theory: rules. Rules are of various kinds; they can be weak or strong, and they can be experienced by users as enablers or constraints. The school library, compared with the classroom, has weak rules with regard to sanctions and intensity. Dressman (1997) argues that the school library and the classroom, both social systems in the school as a supra-locale, as I call it, constitute different parameters.
The concepts of front regions and back regions define spaces of special interest in understanding students’ actions in the school library. Front regions are locales where most routines of our everyday life take place. For students, the classroom is a front region. It is characterized by transparent actions that apply to both teachers and students. Students are strongly controlled in regard to their body positions and their actions.

Front regions contrast with back regions. Back regions are spaces that open for autonomous actions free from the control of others. In school, back regions are locales where students can produce and manage their own lives. This requires rooms with fairly weak rules to be open for actions of this type. In school, the potential for back regions in both time and space is sparse and most often limited to breaks. Thus front regions and back regions can be related to formal or instruction-related actions on the one hand and informal or leisure-related activities on the other. The school library has the potential for being both a back region and a front region. It is a porous room.

Giddens’ (1984) use of the concepts of center and periphery also contributes to the understanding of students’ use and value of the school library. Their daily practices in school constitute what is produced and reproduced in the social systems in which they take part, in what the instructional organization makes center and periphery. For all students, the classroom is one of the centers. For those visiting the school library every day, this space will be another center; they become established users and occupy it. For irregular users, the library space will represent a periphery; they become outsiders. Giddens expresses the “established” in a center this way:

Those who occupy centres “establish” themselves as having control over resources which allow them to maintain differentiations between themselves and those in peripheral regions. The established may employ a variety of forms of social closure to sustain distance from others who are effectively treated as inferiors or outsiders. (p. 131)

In this study, the established constitutes various groups of students related to classes, year, and gender. They have in common the power to decide the agenda of which actions are acceptable or not. The established—the occupants or the in-group—are those who interact with the social structure of the school library. They both produce and reproduce the structure of the room.

Giddens’ (1984) final concepts to take into consideration as theoretical contributions to understanding students’ use and value of the school library also have to do with space: presence-availability and presence-distanciation. The first pair of concepts are about being together in the same room and available for face-to-face meetings. This is the traditional way of being together in school. But the presence-availability is frequently different in the school library than in the classroom: students are free to move around, decide where to sit, with whom, and to a certain extent choose what to do
or work on and at what pace. The difference derives from the rules of the two spaces and the back-region characteristics of the school library. However, the Internet has opened new ways of meeting here and now for an availability that Giddens (1984) calls presence-distanciation. There has been some discussion about whether the Internet and online information-seeking make the school library space superfluous, whether the school library becomes a mere function (Limberg, 2003). In my research work, I have come to see the presence-distanciation dimension as a positive extension of the school library, opening a variety of combinations in a physical and virtual porous room.

Methodology, Data Collection, and Analysis

A comparative multi-case study was conducted in two senior high schools (students aged 16-18) in two counties in Norway. Data were collected from the schools during the first five months of 1998, mainly in the school library, but also in the classrooms. The selection of schools was based on some similarities and dissimilarities. The schools were similar in offering both academic and vocational classes and in having a professional school librarian (a professional school librarian in Norway has completed a minimum of three years of library studies in college). The schools differed in number of students and location. School A was a medium-large school (600-800 students) in a suburban area. School B was a large (900-1,000 students) school in a medium-sized town (about 70,000 inhabitants). The school libraries differed in size (265 square meters vs. 123), in budget (180,000 Nkr vs. 140,000), in the number of computers per student (9 vs. 4), and in the school librarian’s time-resource per student.

Data were collected using a variety of methods: observations, interviews, documents, and questionnaires. Most of the data consisted of field notes derived from observations in the school library (25 observations in each school of 3-4 hours each). The data were collected from three selected locations in the school library: the work tables, the computer site, and the reading hall (quiet area). I moved regularly from site to site while observing. Students’ information-seeking activity was, however, specially registered throughout the field study as an observation unit of special interest in a school library. Observations also included many other activities: these can be visualized on a continuum with instruction-related activities (including formal information-seeking and use and work on textbooks) and leisure-related activities (including informal use of texts and social meetings) at its extremes.

Data also were collected through observations in one first-year academic class in each school (17 45-minute observations in each school). The class subjects during observation times included English, natural science, Norwegian, and economics and data. The observations in the two focus classes helped to establish how much correspondence there was between the mode of instruction in the classroom and the use of the school library.
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Data were collected from individual in-depth interviews with six boys and six girls in each school, including two boys and two girls from each of years 1, 2, and 3. In addition, two boys and two girls from the International Baccalaureate (IB) classes at the medium-large school were interviewed because they used the school library daily. These 16 interviews constituted the main data collected to gain students' perspectives and to learn how and why they valued the school library.

Four teachers from the selected first-year focus class in each school, plus the school librarian and the principals, were also interviewed in depth. These interviews provided data on their attitudes to the school library and how they valued it as an arena for learning in school. The interviews also provided data on how they perceived the instructional role of the school library in students' daily life in school and on what they knew about how students used the school library.

The questionnaire was administered to 60 students in each school from three classes: from one first-year-class, from one second-year class, and from the first-year focus academic class selected for observation. The questions asked when and for what students used the school library, what locations they used in the school library, what the school library meant to them in their school work, and what it meant to them in their free time at school.

Data collected from documents made up a small part of the data collection and consisted of class timetables and curricula, documents on the policies and rules of the schools, and documents on user education in the school library. It also included the products of a project completed by students in the first-year classes in each school. These documents provided information that helped me gain a deeper understanding of the schools as institutions, how instruction was organized, and the framework in which the participants worked.

The wide variety of data from the field work made it possible to write a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of how students used the school library, how they valued it, and who the users were. The locations most used by students during the observations were coded, and to this coding was added the character of the activity and the user's gender. In School A, whether or not the user was an IB student was also added; the activities of the IB students were coded and analyzed separately because their timetable had more space for self-study than did those of other students and thus more opportunities to use the school library. The activities and locations were ICT activities, activities at the work tables, activities in the quiet reading hall (both school libraries had separate rooms for silent reading/work), and resource-based or project-like activities. The analysis and interpretation were concentrated on these data. Numbers were used as indicators of what kind of activity students performed in the school library and whether the activities were instruction-related or leisure-related. The numbers were also linked to gender. The objective of using numbers was
to enable me to gain some statistical interpretations and inferences from the observation data.

Analysis of the data on what the school library meant to the users was crystallized into a typology of use, which was based on the in-depth interviews with the key informants and on the classroom and school library observations. The typology consists of two theoretical dimensions, space and time, and is related to the theoretical perspectives of the study. The categories in the space dimension are the capacities of the school library that students appreciated most: resource center for instruction-related information, space for school work, resource center for leisure-related information, social meeting place, and waiting room. The categories in the time dimension refer to when the school library meant a lot for them: when instruction-related and collection-code-related, when instruction-related and integrated-code-related, and when leisure-related.

For this article, the analysis of the empirical material was limited to a close scrutiny of the data from the student interviews and from the observation field notes on students' actions in the selected locations of the school library. The focus of the observations was students' activities. However, activities with the school librarian and students and with teachers and students were also systematically observed through all 50 observation units, each of three to four hours. Statements in this article about the actions of school librarians and teachers build on these observations, but first and foremost on the in-depth interviews with them and with their students.

Findings

General Findings
The high leisure-related use of the school library, and students' appreciation of the space for this use, was one of the main findings of the study. The school library as a social meeting place meant most to the regular users. Regular users, however, constituted only a small part of the students in the two schools. Furthermore, the study indicated that the school library as a resource center for information retrieval and use, and as an integrated part of the instruction, constituted a minor part of students' activities in the school library across the two schools. On the other hand, there was a general understanding among all students that every school must have a library and that it was useful to them when they needed information during the school day.

The overall instruction-related activities were doing homework from textbooks that students brought to the school library and doing ready-made tasks related to these books. Of course, there were exceptions: some students sought and used information in a clever and mature way, and others sought information for projects, but these were the minority. It was not the information that students appreciated: it was the space for self-acting and self-administering their own time. Generally, there were no differences between the academic
and vocational students in this respect. The daily users set the agenda for the activities performed; they were the trend-setters and formed the school library culture. It has been possible to document these findings through exploration of students’ overall activities in the school library.

The school library used and appreciated as a porous room

The term porous room alludes to a space where users can themselves influence and form the context. Although the school library in School A had physical-material resources that signaled a space for work, and the school library at School B signaled a space for borrowing books, the single most frequent and valued use of the two school libraries was as a social meeting place. Users interacted with the social structure of the room and produced new meanings; they filled the porous spaces with what meant most to them when they were in the library. This was possible for various reasons. One might be the weak rules and the few sanctions in the room. Another might be the invisibility of the school librarians and teachers. During the five months of observation, the school librarians worked most of the time in their offices, which were separate rooms, but still part of the libraries. Students who needed their help had to knock on the office door and ask for it. Mainly the regular library users did this.

Teachers seldom came to the library, and students seldom had projects or assignments that made seeking information necessary. All eight teachers interviewed believed that students needed a school library as a place to find information for their school work, but none saw it as necessary for students’ work in the subjects they taught. As one of the science teachers said, “the textbooks are more than enough for the students.”

Only two teachers had used the school library in their instruction in the focus classes this school year, used meaning recommended that students to go to the library on their own to search for information. Thus the library signified a space for the youths where no adults observed their activities: a back region. Students who formed the locales were attuned to each other, preferably to the set agenda, and there was a pleasant, conflict-free atmosphere among them.

The daily users went to the library to meet each other and talk, to see and be seen as in a café, and to take part in each other’s existential problems. The space as a back region opened for meetings between classes and groups, homogeneous and heterogeneous, as well as for individual locales. In school A, the regular users described the school library first and foremost as a precious space for these social meetings. Ranveig (18 years) considered it this way:

Socially it would have been sad not to have a place to meet my classmates and sit down to talk—or eat. And it is also important to keep in touch with your friends, just to be aware of what is happening to them, in their lives, like. You can’t do school work only.
The importance of the school library as a social meeting place had to do with what other comfortable spaces existed in the school. School A had no cafeteria as did School B, and this may explain why the library was so much valued as a meeting place in School A. Skantze (1989) found in her study that some students used the school library as a social meeting place and thus disturbed the instructional use of the room. When students were provided with a comfortable new room for their social meetings, the school library reverted to an instructional space. Some of the social meetings in School A would probably have been moved to a new cafeteria if there were one, but not the multi-users' activities that integrated social and informal activities in formal ones and visa versa.

Differences in use between the case study schools
The most striking difference between the two case-study schools was how the library was used. Whereas students in School A moved back and forth between the instruction-related activities and the leisure-related activities, the users at school B (the largest school) either used it for instructional-related activities or for leisure-related activities. In School A, the regular users moved between the various locations in the room, combining activities. They might, for example, work on an assignment, discuss it with one of their peers who might function as a critical friend, make an appointment for an after-school activity, and then continue to work on the assignment. In School A, the accessibility of a variety of material, technical equipment, and human resources was highly valued. The space opened for independent work and decisions about where to sit, what to do, and with whom. To quote Rudi (18 years), "I believe you work much more like you do in a real working-place. It is quite some 'give and take.'" The discourses taking place were more daring than those in the classroom, students said; the teacher was not there to control them. They were on a more equal level and all had something to contribute. Ragnar (17 years) compared the porous room with the classroom this way: "The classroom is probably slightly more severe. When you come to the school library it is more like, relaxed." The students quoted here were multi-users in School A and were mainly in IB. Their instruction was organized more according to the integrated code, which seemed to a large extent to explain their activity.

In School B, the regular users either went to the silent reading hall and studied individually for tests by reading their textbooks or did homework or they used the work tables and the computer site for chatting and reading newspapers. During the 25 observations (3-4 hours each), the quiet reading hall was the location of highest activity for the girls. It was still low, though, compared with the leisure-related activities at the work tables and the computer site that were the boys' domain. A regular user said he liked the work tables because there was space for many (up to 12 at one table) and they could read the newspaper and talk freely. The newspapers seemed to facilitate talk among the boys, and the site appeared to be a social meet-
ing place. The same applied to the computer site, but here the chatting was both virtual and face-to-face between two or three peers.

The differences between the use of the school library at School A and B may be attributable to the different criteria for the selection of the schools, for example, the area of the room or the number of computers (there were fewer computers in School B). The findings do indicate, however, that the differences were more related to who the daily users were, what agenda they set for the activities in the school library, and how the instruction was organized (i.e., a collective code or an integrated code).

The in-group's use and appreciation of the school library

Generally speaking, the in-group, or the occupants of the school library, were the daily users from the second and third (final) year, but not from the first year. The daily users held power and control over the activities in the space; they decided the agenda. Some characterized the library as their “home base.” There were occupants or daily users in both schools, but who they were and what they used and appreciated in the locales they occupied were quite different.

In School A, the occupants came from years 2 and 3 academic classes, including the IB classes, and they were both boys and girls. They formed locales for multi-use, a complex moving back and forth between social face-to-face chat, school work, and homework, always giving the impression of having instruction-related activities as their prime intention. They watched the computer sites to ensure that the computers were used for instructional purposes, and they appreciated having the freedom to act as their own administrators of time and space in the room. They came early in the morning, occupied preferred seats at the work tables, went to class, but kept the seats for the rest of the day (see also Rudduck & Hopkins, 1984).

In School B, the occupants come from the vocational classes, represented all three years, and were boys only. They formed locales where social chat—both as presence-availability, to use Giddens’ (1984) concepts, and as presence-distanciation—and reading newspapers, preferably as social facilitators, constituted use. They came regularly during breaks, especially the lunch break, and gave the impression of having nothing other than leisure activities in mind. They did not borrow books, did not bring school work to do, and did not seek information.

The occupants in both schools seemed to influence how new users were socialized into the school library and who felt comfortable in the context of the space. In both schools, the use of the computers illustrated the occupants’ influence. In School A, a year 1 student was chatting. Rudi (IB student, year 3, and one of the key participants) approached him and asked him to move as he had more important things to do, an essay to be handed in tomorrow. The other student moved. In the interview later, Rudi stated that he did not tolerate chatting and playing on the computers in the school library, and the newcomers seemed to adjust to this regime.
In School B, the occupants influenced the newcomers in quite the opposite way by overlooking the sign saying that instructional use of the computers had priority. Girls were observed coming to the computer site to do school work or to search for information. The girls seemed to find it difficult to do their tasks because of the group of boys occupying the computers with chat, and they would leave. This is a problem that the school librarian admitted in an interview was difficult to tackle.

Discussion and Conclusion
This investigation of how students in two case-study schools in Norway use and value the school library contributes to the research literature on user studies in the library and information science, as well as to the literature on pedagogical science by examining students’ perspectives on how they use the school library space and what this space means to them. Furthermore, it contributes to the literature by exploring students’ overall use and activity in the room, not only the formal and instruction-related activities, as has historically been the case. Investigating the total use of the space opens for analysis and understanding how the school library functions in school, based on a theoretical framework, and makes it possible to propose changes for practice.

*Integrating the School Library in Education: Theory and Practice*
According to the pedagogical intentions in the Norwegian national curriculum plans, school libraries today constitute a central space in education for reading and for research-based learning. “Instruction shall provide learners with the ability to acquire and attain new knowledge themselves, not only transmit learning,” to quote the *Core Curriculum* (1993, see also *Bruk av skolebiblioteket. Veiledning*, 1997; *Gi rom for lesing!* 2003).

My findings indicate a large gap between the general rhetoric on instruction and school library use and actual practice. According to the study, students seldom had assignments and other tasks to do at school or home that required more than their textbooks. They did have two or three projects during the school year that demanded seeking information, but the school library was not integrated into their regular instruction. It was not an instructional arena where teachers asked students to go to for their studies or encouraged them to use: rather the opposite. These findings can be explained by how instruction is organized in the case-study schools. In accordance with Bernstein’s (1971) code theory, both Schools A and B seem to have a strong culture based on the collective code. The curricula are divided into various subjects, and there is little room for students’ choices about how to learn and topics to study. The teachers and the textbooks convey the content that students learn to reproduce. These findings are in line with one of the evaluation reports of instruction in senior high schools in Norway (*Videregående opplæring ved en skilleveg?* 1999). The school library does not serve as an alternative
resource center for learning to the classroom, and it is not even assessed in the evaluation reports as a place for learning.

The School Library and the Classroom: Two Traditions in Conflict? According to Dressman (1997), the school library and the classroom occupy different parameters in the institution of the school. His findings are in accordance with my own. According to Giddens' (1984) structuration theory, institutions are strong social systems embedded in time and space. The school has a long tradition of educating students through strong rules and sanctions and with the teacher as the prominent leader (i.e., the collective code). The school library as an integrated part of the instruction has a short tradition of about 30 years in Norwegian curriculum plans for senior high schools. The school library in Norway has a long tradition, however, as a branch of the public library in schools for lending books to students and for stimulating reading outside school. The findings of the present study indicate that the school library tradition still has more of a public library culture than a school culture: it is a space for everyone in the school, the material is organized neatly for retrieval, the rules are weak, and the sanctions are few. The school librarian retreats to the office when the organization of the material and the technical equipment is complete. She or he does not interfere with how the printed and electronic material or the locations in the school library are used and does not offer help unless asked. The two traditions run parallel, with little collaboration between the school librarian and the teachers.

Many of the new students in the present study seemed to be confused when they came to the school library for the first time. Their experience was either of another classroom-like space or of a space where they were free to act differently than in the classroom. The group experiencing the library as classroom-like does not continue to use the school library, and this was by far the largest group in both case-study schools; the other (and very small) tries the place out. These students have discovered a new back region in the school, adding the school library to the schoolyard, the school hall, and the cafeteria. The school library as a back region has few formal guidelines, but many informal guidelines provided by the older students. This means that the established students, the occupants, to a large extent act as the socialization agents for the new students: not the school librarian or the teachers as the novices have come to expect from their junior high school (age 13-15) experiences. According to Østerberg (1998), an individual may perceive the physical-material resources as either enablers or constraints. For daily users, the school library as a back region signals enabling. Daily users rearrange the scenery in ways they appreciate, preferably as pleasant social meeting places, effective working places, or both.

There would be no need for conflict between the classroom and the school library if the instruction were organized more in accordance with the
integrated code in Bernstein’s (1971) code theory. Following the integrated code, the school library would act as an extended, but different classroom. To use it regularly would be the usual way of attending school, and students would be socialized into using the room in a variety of instruction-related ways more than leisure-related ways. They would do research individually and in collaboration with peers, discuss topics of current interest, and read for pleasure, as well as probe a subject more deeply. To a certain extent, the IB-students at School A may exemplify the seamlessness between the two arenas, as well as the seamlessness between the formal instructional use and the informal leisure-related use of the school library.

The opportunity for students to act in spaces representing different parameters, I argue, would lend zest to the school as an institution, a dynamic as an enabler to act in a variety of contexts both instruction-related and leisure-related. Moving back and forth between formal and informal activities as a back region opens appears to stimulate learning, according to Havnes’ (1997) studies of new students at the University of Oslo. This is also in line with students’ experiences in the present study. The challenge for the school is to find the fine balance between the classroom and the school library on the one hand and between instruction-related activities and leisure-related activities on the other hand.

Implications for Practice and Conclusions

The pedagogical intentions of having a library in the school are to allow students to use it actively as they explore the world, in developing their creative and critical senses when delving deeply into a topic, and to have aesthetic experiences through reading. The findings of the present study demonstrate, however, a quite different use and value of use. From the students’ perspectives, they most appreciate the school library space as a social meeting place, a place for relaxed talking with their peers. They do not have to use the library to complete their tasks in school, the teachers do not consider the use of the space as their responsibility, and the school librarian is invisible in the space of his or her responsibility. On the basis of the interpretations of the findings discussed above, there is reason to claim that the use of the school library needs to be an issue for discussion led by the principal and involving teachers, school librarians, and students. To expand the classroom and to try new ways of working in the school is still a daring pedagogical deed for most teachers (Alexandersson & Limberg, 2004). To break with the public library tradition and develop an identity toward the school culture is also risky for school librarians. But without these steps, the school library will continue to function as a social meeting place for the few. The findings of this study indicate that students will only use the school library for instructional purposes if the teachers appreciate this use when they evaluate their projects and assignments. For students to use the space effectively for instructional purposes, they need proper training and coaching by both teachers and school librarians. To develop students’ use and
appreciation of the school library in these ways requires changes in the training of both teachers and school librarians. For a start, teacher training colleges must include teaching about library use, and library and information schools must include pedagogy in their curriculum.

The school library represents a parameter other than that of the classroom. It is a porous room constituting another arena for developing both formal and informal knowledge, as well as providing a meeting place for social discourse between students, teachers, and the school librarian. From the findings of this study, it may be easy to conclude that the use of the school library must change; it must constitute a space for instructional activities only. My recommendation is not to move to extremes, but to be sensitive to students’ needs for and appreciation of locales for their own management as groups or as individuals. I would not alter the meaning of the space as a back region, but find the fine balance between the front regions and the back regions in the school library.

References


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