Research on information seeking and learning during 25 years: challenges, lessons and prospects

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Goals of lecture

- Present a synthesis of findings from 25 years’ research on information seeking and learning
- Discuss implications for LIS practice
- Summarise theoretical contributions
- Conclusions and prospects
Plan of presentation

- Introduction: UB and SSLIS
- My own background
- Research topics and approaches
- Research findings
- Discussion of implications
- Conclusions
- Looking ahead
SSLIS

Established in 1972

Programmes on
- bachelor, master and Ph.D. levels, on-site and distance
- LIS, web editor, professional development courses

Staff and students
- 600 students (20 Ph.D)
- 61 teaching staff on various levels
- 7 professors
My own background

- High school librarian 1970-1981
- Lecturer at SSLIS 1981-1993
- Ph. D. student (and lecturer) 1993-1998
- 1998 Ph. D.
- Senior lecturer 1999-2003
- Professor of LIS 2004-2009
- Senior Professor 2010-
Research on information seeking and learning

- Interaction between information seeking and use, and learning,
- set in contexts of formal education,
- framed in theories of learning and information behaviour,
- adopting various topical perspectives
- qualitative approaches,
- rich empirical material
Information seeking

- Constantly on-going human activity, carried out not only by experts, for various purposes, in various contexts
- Always mediated via tools – intellectual (language) or physical such as books or computers
- Difficult to distinguish from information use
Learning and information seeking

- Closely intertwined
- *Learning* observed in research, practice and everyday life
- *Information-seeking (and use)* invisible to people outside LIS
- Separated as disciplinary areas and professions
- Rich potential for close collaboration in research and professional practices
Relationship information seeking/learning

- Seeking information for learning purposes
- Learning information seeking and use
- Teaching information seeking and use
- Learning from information

Note how these dimensions are connected to INSU issues!

Technologies change the conditions for ISU and learning
Research questions

- What and how do students learn through information seeking and use?
- What is the relationship between qualities of information seeking and use and learning outcomes?
- What are some implications of this for teaching?
- What do libraries and ICT tools mean for student learning?

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Research projects

- Experiencing Information Seeking and Learning 1994-1998
- Learning via the School Library 2001-2003
- Information Seeking, Didactics and Learning 2001-2004
- The Contents and Tools of Learning 2005-2006
- EXpertise, Authority and Control on the interneT 2008-2011
Research approaches

**Phenomenography:**
- Exploring people’s experiences of phenomena in the world
- *Learning* as changing ways of understanding a phenomenon
- Focusing on patterns of *variation*

**Sociocultural theory:**
- Learning as communicative *interaction*
- *Tools* as mediating knowledge and world views
- Information activities embedded in *social practice*
Findings

Information seeking / Learning outcomes

- fact-finding
- poor learning outcome: fragmentary pieces of knowledge
Findings

Information seeking / Learning outcomes

- fact-finding
- analysing and scrutinizing

- poor learning outcome: fragmentary pieces of knowledge
- sophisticated outcome: coherence, problematizing, well grounded independent conclusions of an issue
Critical features – implications for practice

- What are the critical features that make a difference between poor and more qualified learning outcomes related to the collective activities in classrooms and libraries?
- What happens and how is information seeking and use, and learning approached when students accomplish highly qualified learning outcomes?
- What is needed to reshape the practice of schooling in order to achieve meaningful learning through information practices?
Critical features identified

1. Research(able) questions
2. Specific dimensions of ISU relevant for the task at hand
3. Interaction focused on knowledge content, and task requirements during learning process (instead of technical or procedural aspects)
4. Setting and negotiating learning goals
5. Meaningful feed-back to students throughout work with assignment, including assessment
Relevance and contributions of studies

- Exploring new conditions for learning shaped by contemporary and future environments for knowledge formation through the Internet vital for shaping good learning environments

- Contributing new theoretical understanding of the relationship between learning and the use of tools, not only digital, to seek, evaluate and use information in educational contexts

- A focus on variation as opposed to models representing general behaviour contributes in-depth understanding of a range of interactions between people, tools and situations shaping and shaped by various practices

- Implications for professional practice of education and librarianship, such as the didactics of information literacy and of research based learning, i.e. research/practice
Future prospects: change and continuity

- Change: New technological tools reshape conditions for information activities and learning
  - immediate and global access to information
  - focus on interaction and communication
  - from selection to production of information

- Continuity: Learning via information sources and tools concerns ways of reading, interpreting, assessing and constructing meaning from a variety of information sources, regardless of digital media or technologies

- Broader contexts of politics and society: e.g. education policy, sense of citizenship and democracy, and historic aspects of information seeking and learning
Thank you!

Questions?
References (selection)


