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To assess and be assessed:
Upper secondary school students' narratives of credibility judgements

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study is to explore how students construct narratives of themselves as information seekers in a school context where their descriptions of their information activities are assessed and graded.

Design/methodology/approach: Blog posts on credibility judgements written by 28 students at a Swedish upper secondary school were analysed through a bottom-up coding process based in the sociocultural concept of narratives of selves.

Findings: Two tensions in the students' accounts are identified. The first tension is that between the description of the individual, independent student and the description of the good group member. The second tension is between describing oneself as an independent information seeker and at the same time as someone who seeks information in ways that are sanctioned within the school setting.

Research limitations/implications: The study focuses on a specific social practice and on situated activities, but also illustrates some aspects of information activities that pertain to educational contexts in general. It explores how social norms related to credibility judgements are expressed and negotiated in discursive interaction.

Practical implications: The study highlights that when information activities become objects of assessment, careful consideration of what aspects are meant to be assessed is necessary.

Originality/value: The study is based on the idea of information activities as socially and discursively shaped, and it illustrates some of the consequences when information activities become objects of teaching, learning, and grading.

1. Introduction

How can educational activities be organised in order to facilitate students' learning of and learning from information seeking and use? This constantly ongoing and relevant discussion is central to librarians and teachers, as well as to scholars in the field of information literacy and adjacent fields. In the research literature on information literacy, a common theme concerns how information seeking and information use can be turned into objects of teaching (Limberg and Alexandersson, 2010). In school settings, learning to participate in information activities is not tied to one particular subject. Thus, the learning from and of information seeking and use run the risk of being taken for granted and not taught explicitly, or, if made into an object of teaching, become decontextualised and separated from other school activities.

This study is an in-depth exploration of a case where a teacher and a librarian constructed an assignment where information seeking and the credibility of sources were explicitly made into objects of teaching within the subject of Swedish in an upper secondary school. The study is part of a project researching the teaching and learning of credibility judgements in Swedish upper secondary schools. The background for the project is changes taking place in the media and communication landscape, including the emergence of participatory or social media, which challenge traditional ways of teaching the evaluation of sources.

The assignment that is used as a case required students to work in groups to seek information about a controversial issue, to identify sources, including ones from participatory media, and to agree on a list of 12 sources of various types that they were to order from most to least credible. The empirical material analysed consists of blog posts written by the students where they describe their own and their group's information seeking and credibility assessments. Thus, in focus for our analysis is an assignment where students' descriptions of their information activities, and especially their credibility assessments, are regarded as central and are therefore also assessed and graded. The article explores how the students develop narratives of themselves as information seekers when working with their school assignment and how, in the process, they negotiate the nature of the assignment with their readers.

2. Information activities in school settings

In our empirical case, information activities, and particularly credibility judgements, are made into objects of teaching. As objects of *research*, credibility judgements have been studied and discussed for several decades, not least in terms of "relevance" in the fields of information retrieval and information behaviour (Rieh, 2010, p. 1338). In recent years, credibility assessments, and related notions such as trust, expertise, and authority, have gained increased attention, especially in relation to the Internet where traditional cues used for judging credibility, such as identifiable or well-known authors and publishers, become insuffi-

cient and sometimes even obsolete (e.g. Gasser *et al.*, 2012; Lankes, 2008; Rieh *et al.*, 2010; Sundin and Francke, 2009).

In this study, students' credibility judgements are understood as ongoing information activities, rather than specific instances; as interrelated with other information activities (see Rieh, 2010, p. 1342); and as something that can be learnt. We also regard information activities as situated in specific social practices, which means that credibility judgments, as any information activity, are shaped in relation to the situation where they are carried out.

The discursive and social construction of information activities in specific settings have been in focus for previous information practices studies. For instance, in one of her studies of maternity care settings, Pamela McKenzie (2004) applies positioning theory to explore how information activities are negotiated and ascribed meaning in interactions between pregnant women and midwifes. And in a study of heart surgery patients, Kimmo Tuominen (2004) discusses "how accounts of both information seeking and avoidance reflect compelling social norms and values" (Tuominen, 2004, no pagination). In his discourse analysis, Tuominen identifies two subject positions from which the patients and their relatives describe their information activities, and suggests that different patient positions produce quite different descriptions of information activities.

Similar analyses have been conducted in studies of professionals' information activities. In an article looking at nurses' accounts of relevance assessments, Jenny Johannisson and Olof Sundin (2007) discuss how different professional identities within the nursing profession imply different ways of describing and justifying one's information activities. Furthermore, Helena Heizmann (2012) identifies two competing discourses within the professional field of human resources and suggests how these discourses interact with different ways of describing the information activities of the profession.

These studies show how the understanding of information practices can be enhanced through the exploration of how social norms and values are negotiated in descriptions of information activities in specific settings. In this article we focus on contemporary educational settings, with their specific characteristics, norms, values, and practices. Previous studies conducted within the same research project have illustrated the complexities involved when students assess the credibility of Internet resources and participatory media in school, as well as the challenges teachers and librarians are facing in their teaching of the evaluation of sources when traditional ways of assessing credibility cannot be applied (e.g. Francke *et al.*, 2011; Sundin *et al.*, 2011). Some of these complexities and challenges have to do with the changing characteristics of the information sources that the students are to assess, but some of them are also tied to the characteristics of the school setting as such. For example, Helena Francke and Olof Sundin (2012) discuss the implications of the fact that the students' credibility judgements are assessed and graded as parts of school assignments.

Assessment and grading are two intrinsic and closely interrelated features of formal education (Limberg, 2007). In the research literature on assessment in educational settings, a distinction is made between formative and summative assessment. In their influential research review on classroom assessment, Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998) describe formative assessment as "all those activities undertaken by teachers, and/or by their students, which provide information to be used as feedback to modify the teaching and learning activities in which they are engaged" (pp. 7f). Summative assessment is more clearly delineated as grading, which is described as "the summative function of evaluation" (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p. 8). Thus, in broad terms, assessment in educational settings can be described as having two functions: on the one hand, to give students feedback on their learning processes in relation to a certain assignment and, on the other hand, to measure and express students' achievements and performance according to standardised scales in order to make comparisons between students possible (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p. 54).

These two functions of assessment can be difficult to separate, however, and as they often go hand in hand, educators' assessments can be described as double-edged swords. For example, assessments intended to help students forward might be understood as disapprovals (see Black and Wiliam, 1998, p. 19). The fact that assessment has two functions also implies that school activities always take place in relation to implicit and explicit expectations on how to solve different tasks, how to express different understandings of a topic, etc. (see Limberg, 2007).

Implicit and explicit expectations are also important for how information activities are conducted in school settings. For example, Mikael Alexandersson and Louise Limberg (2012) conclude in a synthesis of six large research projects on Swedish students' information seeking and learning in school that information seeking is treated by students as a set of procedures used for finding correct answers to complete their assignments, whereas the actual contents and the subject matter of the assignments are overlooked. The authors discuss the difficulties of introducing ways of working that involve independent information activities and the exploration of questions with unknown answers in school settings, since these settings traditionally build on the idea that the educators have the correct, pre-existing answers. Anna Lundh (2011) suggests that student-centred assignments in Swedish primary schools tend to leave students with contradictory expectations that they should be both independent and perform their information activities in desired ways.

Thus, given prevailing norms and expectations in school settings, questions can be raised about the implications of turning information activities, such as credibility judgements, into objects of teaching. In educational settings, information literacy is rarely seen as subject content in its own right; rather it is usually spread across the curricula for different subjects (e.g. Lupton, 2012). Hence, summative assessments of students' performance are not obvious

parts of information literacy instruction. How and what to assess in such activities, and the functions of the assessments, are therefore relevant questions to explore.

3. Theoretical points of departure

Our study of students' descriptions of their credibility judgements in a Swedish upper secondary school setting is informed by a neo-Vygotskian sociocultural perspective of learning, particularly the work by James Wertsch (Wertsch, 1998; 2000; Erstad and Wertsch, 2008) and Roger Säljö (2000; 2005). This theoretical perspective, which highlights social and discursive aspects of learning, is relevant as we are interested in how the group of students learns to participate in the social activity of working with an assignment, and also how they negotiate this activity when interacting through their blogs.

3.1 Mastery and appropriation of cultural tools
Characteristic of the sociocultural perspective of learning is the emphasis that is placed on the interaction between people and *cultural tools* in learning and development. Cultural tools may be material and/or intellectual and are used and developed by people to manipulate and understand the world around them. Learning, according to sociocultural theory, is a matter of *appropriating* and *mastering* – learning how to use – cultural tools in specific social practices (Wertsch, 1998, pp. 46-58; Säljö, 2005, pp. 119-125).

Appropriation is a concept used to describe how individuals, through their participation in social activities and practices, learn how to use cultural tools in purposeful ways. However, there are often forms of resistance or conflict involved in the process of appropriating a tool and Wertsch (1998) therefore makes a distinction between appropriating and mastering. The concept of appropriation refers to the process when an individual learns to use a tool and incorporates this tool as an accepted and given part of her/his actions. The process of mastering a cultural tool differs in that the individual, who is learning how to use a tool in ways that are purposeful in particular settings, does not 'make it his/her own' in the same way as in the process of appropriation. That is, the mastering of a tool can involve learning how to use the tool in ways that are acceptable in specific situations without accepting the legitimacy of the tool. The chances that resistance will arise may be particularly likely in institutional settings, such as schools.

The learning of information seeking and information use involves mastering or appropriating a range of cultural tools (see Sundin and Johannisson, 2005). Which tools these might be depend on the social and historical setting. In our empirical example the tools consist of, for instance, material tools such as books, search engines, and databases, but also intellectual tools, such as principles for source evaluation. Furthermore, in a school setting, the language for describing information activities can be seen as a tool that has to be appropriated, or at least mastered. For example, Johanna Rivano Eckerdal (2011, p. 24) highlights a "source crit-

icism vocabulary" which some students appropriate in upper secondary school and which allows them to describe their credibility judgements in certain ways.

In this study, we will especially focus on how the students seem to appropriate or master a language for describing their information activities. Given the type of material analysed, we are not able to determine whether the students have actually appropriated a specific vocabulary or if they have learnt to master it, but by making a distinction between the two concepts, we are able to highlight instances which seem to be characterised by resistance on the part of the students.

3.2 Narratives as cultural tools
In his writings, Wertsch (1998; 2000; Erstad and Wertsch, 2008) has focussed on the narrative as a linguistic tool employed in mediated action, such as speaking and writing. Narratives are used as ways of structuring descriptions of reality, or, as Erstad and Wertsch (2008) put it, narratives "are a part of our living, bridging the past, present and future" (p. 29). In his explorations of narratives as a concept that can be used for sociocultural analysis, Wertsch draws on dialogically oriented traditions, where the discursive and social processes and situations in which narratives are produced are emphasised. This includes the view that narratives "do not exist in isolation and do not serve as neutral interpretive instruments" (Wertsch, 2000, p. 516), but instead are tools that help shape and structure descriptions of reality in ways that appear logical, rational, and appropriate in specific situations and practices.

Wertsch (e.g. 1998; 2000) has turned his interest to 'grand narratives' such as historical narratives shared by a nation or an ethnic group, but the notion also encompasses the kind of narratives we use in our everyday lives, usually without reflecting on it, such as when someone asks us how our day has been. Narratives are cultural tools that people need to appropriate early in life; in order to participate competently in social interaction we need to be able to tell coherent stories, both about ourselves and about, for example, historical events. Often when we appropriate narratives, we tend to think about them as accurate and neutral representations of reality (Erstad and Wertsch, 2008, pp. 29f). In other cases, however, we learn to master certain narratives to consciously use in specific social settings, without appropriating them (Wertsch, 1998).

In school, students are often required to use narratives, orally, in writing, or by other means, in order to show that they have understood a certain issue or subject matter. For example, in *Mind as action* (1998), Wertsch discusses American students' understanding of national history in terms of how well they master conventional historical narratives. As a school subject, history entails narratives that serve as a "collective memory" (Erstad and Wertsch, p. 29) for a group or a nation. Students are expected to learn, memorise and be able to account

for the appropriate narratives. Not all school subjects and assignments, however, have this kind of predefined narratives to draw from.

In our study, the blogs offered the students the possibility of creating narratives of their information activities in ways that suited the criteria for their assignment. Thus, they were given "the possibility of redefining the self according to [their] own narrative" (Erstad and Wertsch, 2008, p. 34). In other words, they were able to structure narratives that made their actions and lines of reasoning appear logical and well thought-through. This took place in a genre that invites two-way communication and thereby creates space for negotiation. In the analysis, we will focus on how the students' narratives of themselves as information seekers are negotiated in their blog posts.

4. Aim and research questions

In this study, we are interested in some of the consequences when information activities, and particularly credibility assessments, become objects of teaching and learning in an upper secondary school setting. The aim of the study is to explore how students, through their blog posts, construct narratives of themselves as information seekers in a school context where their descriptions of their information activities are assessed and graded. Our analysis is guided by the following three questions:

1. How are the students' narratives of themselves as information seekers constructed in interaction with their readers?
2. How can these narratives be understood in terms of processes of mastery and appropriation?
3. How can these narratives be understood in relation to the formative and summative assessment of the students' information activities?

The empirical material consists of students' blog posts, written as part of an assignment where they evaluated sources dealing with a controversial issue. The first research question concerns who the writer is and how they position themselves in relation to their readers, that is, their teacher, their school librarian, and the researchers involved in the study. The second question leads to a focus on the students' use of language and information seeking vocabulary, and how their narratives of themselves as information seekers can be seen as expressions of a process of mastery and appropriation. The third question ties back to the issue of making information activities objects of teaching, learning, and assessment, where the students' blogs are viewed as an arena where this object is shaped in interaction between the students and the readers.

Our analysis is primarily concerned with how the students construct narratives of their credibility assessments on a collective level, rather than on an individual level. The intention is not to judge whether the students' assessments are valid or not. Our primary unit of analysis

is negotiations between students and readers through interaction in written text. It will become apparent that this interaction is characterised by an ongoing process of assessment of the students' performance. How this process was captured will be described in the next section.

5. Methods and empirical setting

The blog posts analysed in this study derive from a larger multi-method study of online and offline activities taking place during group work in two classes in two different Swedish upper secondary schools. Thus, our understanding of the blog posts, which will be described in detail below, was enhanced by an understanding of the context in which they were produced.

5.1 Material analysed

The material analysed here was selected for study as it shows the interaction taking place between students and educators around an assignment where information activities were articulated as objects of teaching and learning. The assignment comes from one of the classes studied and was formulated by a teacher of Swedish and a school librarian around the issue of whether or not European countries should expand or phase out their nuclear power plant projects. However, the written instructions for the assignment made it clear that "The subject – nuclear power – is not the most essential part. The important thing is how you look for information and how you evaluate the information found" (if not otherwise indicated, all quotes from the empirical material have been translated from Swedish to English by the authors).

The 28 students participating in the study were all in the same form, in year 11 out of 12 in the Swedish school system. The students, 4 boys and 24 girls, were 17 or 18 years old. The students worked with the assignment in nine self-selected groups over a period of seven weeks. At the end of the period the groups were required to orally and in writing present a list ranked according to level of credibility of 12 print and digital sources representing different positions on the future of European nuclear power plants. They had to explain how they had evaluated the credibly of the selected sources. Seven of the sources were predefined by the educators; they were either specific web sites or sources from specified genres. Five sources could be selected freely by the students themselves.

Each group had to agree on how to structure their list, and the discussions on credibility within the groups were an important part of the assignment. However, the students were graded individually, mainly based on their blog posts. The blogs were set up specifically for the assignment to allow the students to comment on and summarise their work. They were password protected and could only be read by the teacher, the librarian, and the researchers who followed the project. The blogs were included in the written assessment criteria, which stated that for the grade *Pass*, the blog had to give an account of the students' work pro-

cesses. For the grade *Pass with distinction* it also needed to include accounts of how credibly judgements were made, and in addition to this, for the grade *Pass with special distinction*, the students had to show how they individually developed and discussed their own information seeking, credibility judgements, and work process. Five students received the grade *Pass*, six students received *Pass with distinction*, and nine students received *Pass with special distinction*. Eight students did not finish their assignments.

Copies of the blogs were made after the students' assignments were finished and graded. The copies were saved as a MS Word file consisting of 212 A4 pages. The number of blog posts varied between students; the 20 students who were graded posted between three and 24 posts. Typically, the blogs included summaries of two introductory lectures given by the teacher and the school librarian; descriptions of the group work process; accounts of the students' information seeking processes and credibility judgements; presentations of the final list of the 12 sources; and evaluations of their own and the other groups' presentations. The blog's comment function was primarily used by the teacher, the librarian, and the researchers, but also by the students themselves to respond to the comments from the readers. Sometimes the students responded to the comments by writing a new blog post. The students did not have access to each other's blogs, and could therefore not comment on each other's posts.

The study adheres to the ethical guidelines formulated by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2002), which were the current guidelines when the field work of the study was conducted. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including their parents/guardians for the younger participants under 18. One student declined participation and has been excluded from the material analysed. Information that could reveal the identity of the participants has been masked, and in the presentation of the analysis below, all participants have been given aliases where the first letter of the alias indicates group membership.

5.2 Methods of analysis
The analysis entailed a qualitative two-step bottom-up coding process based in the concept of *narratives of selves*, with a focus on how narratives were constructed and negotiated through the communication between the students, the educators, and the researchers. Specifically, the analysis related to two dimensions: firstly, the relationships between the authors and the intended readers; and secondly, the ways in which the authors described themselves as information seekers.

In the first step of analysis, certain ways of positioning and describing oneself were noticed and formed the basis for the second step of the analysis, which was a structured coding process. In this process, the posts were coded in terms of 1) to whom the blog posts are aimed (the teacher, the librarian, the researchers, or someone else), 2) to whom the authors give

voice (themselves as individuals or the group), and 3) how the students describe themselves in their information seeking (as independent or as compliant). The analysis made evident that the students positioned and described themselves in several different ways during the time when they carried out the assignment.

In the following sections, examples of how the students positioned and described themselves will be used to discuss the first two research questions, which deal with the relationship between the students and their audience and how the descriptions of selves illustrate processes of mastery and appropriation. In these sections, the different positionings and descriptions will be exemplified with quotes from the blogs. The quotes chosen are typical and illustrate well themes, tensions, and contradictions that were identified in the analysis. Finally, in the last two sections of the article, we will return to the third research question of how the assignment was shaped through the students' blogs.

6. The construction of narratives

The blogs introduced a means for communication that had not been used by the class for previous assignments. To a large extent, the blogs contain accounts of communicative activities which have happened elsewhere: in classrooms, in libraries, and other places where the students had been working with the assignment. But spaces for communication and interaction were also created by the blogs. The work on the assignment took place, in part, through the interplay between the students' blog posts and the readers' comments. In this sense, one could say that the audience co-constructed the students' narratives. In the following, this interplay and co-construction will be analysed and described.

6.1 Interaction with implied and actual readers

As the blogs could only be read and commented on by the Swedish teacher, the school librarian, and two researchers, the narratives were shaped in dialogue with a well-defined audience. The students' blog posts addressed, directly or indirectly, this limited audience. For example, in the following quote, the blogger Michelle addresses a plural *you* (*ni* in Swedish) in a way that implies that the readers are familiar with the situation in which the assignment is given:

> I think this will go really well and I would be grateful if you could tell me if something is missing or if I have misunderstood something.

The quote is the final sentence in Michelle's first published blog post where she has been discussing the credibility of a Greenpeace web page. She addresses "you" – the readers – as people who are familiar with the assessment criteria for the assignment, and actually know it even better than the author; Michelle invites the readers to help her negotiate her interpretation of the assignment, in case her interpretation diverges from that of the addressed "you". Thus, underlying this sentence is an idea of a 'right way' to interpret and carry out the

assignment. Even though, at the beginning of the sentence, Michelle describes herself as someone who is confident in what she is doing, she positions the readers as 'the ones who know the right way'.

Michelle's post about the Greenpeace web site resulted in two comments, one from each researcher. Neither suggested any alternative ways of approaching the assignment, but they encouraged her, by asking her questions, to elaborate on her line of argument in her subsequent blog posts. In other cases, the comments, especially from the teacher and the librarian, seemed to be intended to steer the student in particular directions. Through their comments, the teacher, the librarian, and the researchers made their expectations visible; the teacher and the librarian usually focussed on the assignment and specific information sources, whereas the researchers most often concentrated on the more general discussions on credibility. In either case, the comments often included praise, sometimes a confirmation that the student had correctly understood the assignment, and questions that were aimed at helping the student move forward in a preferred way. Thus, the comments included formative feedback, as in the case of a comment made by the librarian on a post by Päivi where she describes her searches on Google and her scepticism towards web pages that contain school assignments made by other students:

> *Päivi, it is good that you write in such a detailed way. And you have understood the assignment correctly; you are supposed to find sources that are for and against nuclear power, respectively. You/you* [in Swedish, 'you' in singular and in plural] *may include a page with other students' work and, for example, place it low on the list when you rank the sources and then explain why you placed it that low.*
>
> *Have you used other ways than Google when you have been looking for information? You remember that the PowerPoint + the link list [your teacher] and I used are available on the school's intranet, don't you?!*
>
> *Keep up the good work.*
>
> *//[The Librarian]*

The librarian's comment starts and ends with assessments and she praises the student's writing. She also confirms that Päivi, who asked explicitly about this in the blog post, has understood the assignment correctly, and she suggests how Päivi may deal with the "page with other students' work" in the assignment. The next paragraph starts with a question, which implicitly entails an instruction to use other ways of searching than the ones that Päivi has described. Then, in the next sentence, the librarian steers Päivi towards search tools mentioned in the introductory lectures. Thus, the librarian makes her expectations on the students' information seeking visible, and, implicitly, she assesses the student's performance and suggests ways forward.

One type of comment differed significantly from the others, namely the final comment by the teacher in each blog, which included both formative and summative assessments of the assignment. One example is the following:

> *You are a good speaker and excel when you respond to questions from others. You do that splen-*
> *didly. I suggest that you keep that in mind when you write, too – imagine having a reader who is*
> *constantly asking the question "Why?". Then your writing – for example, this blog – might be-*
> *come more detailed, clearer and more argumentative. You don't show me here how you have*
> *been working or what you have been thinking, which is a shame as I think that there is much*
> *more than what is written here and than was expressed during the presentation.*
> *Pass +*

As the blogs were set up for individual authors, the comments were often addressed to individuals. This did not mean, however, that the writers always positioned themselves solely as individuals. In some instances, the authors spoke for the group rather than just themselves. In other cases, the author vacillates between the role as an individual and the role as a group member, as in the following quote from the introduction to Pia's blog post about one of the sources that the students were required to include in their lists:

> *Now I will tell you about what I (we) think about mfk* [Environmentalists for Nuclear Power]*.*

By putting "we" in brackets, the difference between the 'I' and the 'we' is erased in this introductory sentence; it is not clear whether Pia is expressing her own view, or if it is the view of the group. In some instances, the students are careful to acknowledge the group's opinions and at the same time express their individual view, which may diverge from that of the group. For example, in the following excerpt from a blog post on books found at a public library, Ritva describes how she will have to adjust to her group's opinion:

> *If I would have done this preparatory work myself, I would have put the book towards the end of*
> *the list since it can't be used for an assignment, but I still think it is a credible source. We'll have to*
> *see what the others think…*

The ambivalence between giving voice to the group versus speaking solely for oneself highlights an issue of accountability which the students have to manage. At the same time as they are assessed as individuals, they are also obliged to constructively participate in group work, which can be seen in the use of 'I' and 'we'. We will return to this contradiction in the concluding section.

6.2 Appropriation and mastery of a language for information activities
Another tension that can be identified in the blogs is that between the author as an independent agent and the implied expectations of the assignment, which the students have to adjust to. In the blogs, the students are expected to use written language and, to a limited extent, pictures, to demonstrate their understanding of the object of teaching and the as-

signment. The blogs show examples of how the students are involved in the process of mastering or appropriating a language for information actives which is appropriate in the school setting (see Rivano Eckerdal, 2011, p. 24).

One example of this process is when the students describe their information activities in terms that were used in the introductory lectures by the librarian and the teacher, as in the following excerpt, where Jasmine is using the expression of "the hidden web" that was mentioned in one of the lectures:

> *We divided the different tasks so that everyone can do it on their own a bit, and I got the examination of the hidden web and searching for articles. Sounds exciting!*

In this quote, the phenomenon of "the hidden web" is referred to not only in the general sense of content on the Internet that is not covered by major search engines, but also as something that can be evaluated within the narrow time limits available to the students, similar to how they evaluate individual sources. Thus, "the hidden web" is given its meaning in relation to the assignment and to a way of speaking of information seeking that is specific for this setting.

Another expression of the process of mastering or appropriating a language of information seeking which is suitable in the school context can be seen in a quote by another student, Petronella:

> *I start by using Google.se, simply out of habit. Whatever I'm looking for, I use Google.se. It is a bit conventional, but tonight I will allow myself to be boring and traditional. Fresher and more original search engines will come later, I promise :)*

This quote is addressed to someone who has certain expectations on Petronella's information seeking. Petronella displays an understanding of these expectations, which seem to include the use of several different search engines. However, the quote also demonstrates a temporary resistance towards this desired way of seeking information. Petronella instead describes how she, at the moment, turns to a tool she seems to have appropriated already, namely Google.

Other cases of resistance can also be found in the blogs. One notable example is from Jennifer's first few blog posts, where she uses irony and sarcasm when describing the assignment and the introductory lectures by the teacher and the librarian. In the following excerpt, the contents of the lectures, and the vocabulary used in them, are described as already well-known and generally accepted, in other words, no news to the author:

> *Anyhow, we were supposed to learn to always think before we believe in what we hear and oh boy! haven't [our teacher] and [the librarian] done just an awesome job?*

The language used here can be seen as slang which Jennifer actually comments on in one of the blog posts. She also describes the blog as a tool through which she can show the teacher that she is not "retarded"; thus, she uses irony to comment on the game that she is supposed to participate in. After the first few blog posts, however, Jennifer's style of writing changes, and the resistance towards the assignment and the expectations placed on her writing is toned down.

A quite different example to the quote from Jennifer is one by Pilar, who seems to carefully use a language of information seeking that is valued in the school setting. In this quote, which was originally written in English (spelling mistakes have been corrected for), the author is describing herself as someone who actively "discovers" and "learns" good ways of seeking information, that is, actively learns what she is supposed to learn, in the first part of the quote:

> *Last week's lesson was really interesting, I discovered new ways for how to search [for] information on the Internet. I knew that it makes a difference in what way you write your question when you 'google' but I didn't know that there is a site called MsFreckles, very well structured and helpful. I also learned how to manage Wikipedia and check whether the information is trustworthy or not. Even though anyone can change the text, I still believe that this site is quite useful for both school work and personal curiosities. Concerning school work of course it's smart to examine at least one more source and compare them. That is how I'm working all the time and not just when I use the controversial site Wikipedia, but also other websites. It's always important to search for different sources and see if they say the same thing or not.*

In the second part of the quote, however, when she is describing how she thinks that Wikipedia can be used, Pilar describes herself as someone who already knows how to make individual, independent judgements. This rather lengthy quote illustrates well one of the tensions present in the narratives of selves as information seekers, and the balancing act between the description of oneself as an individual and independent agent, and the explicit and implicit expectations created in the school setting.

7. The narratives of selves

Above, the students' texts have been analysed in terms of a process of mastering or appropriating a language valued in connection with information seeking and credibility assessment in Swedish upper secondary schools. In the blogs, the students were given the possibility of redefining their information activities, and their information seeking selves (see Erstad and Wertsch, 2008, p. 34), through a language that appears appropriate in relation to their assignment. A basic premise for narratives is the use of structures that link actions and events in logical order. By using the blogs, the students are encouraged to create coherent and rational accounts of their own and their groups' information activities in relation to how they understand the criteria for the assignment.

However, in the analysis of the narratives of how the students seek and assess information sources, two tensions in the students' accounts can be identified. These tensions, we suggest, can be understood in terms of how students negotiate and adjust to perceived expectations on their performance. The narratives that are used and constructed are shaped in relation to the assessment criteria for the task, which are made visible and negotiated while the task is carried out, both in formative and summative assessments of the students' descriptions of their performance.

The first tension identified is that between the description of the individual and independent student and the description of the good group member. The students' texts illustrate an intrinsic contradiction in the assignment, one which is not uncommon in educational settings: the students are supposed to work in teams, and to present their findings as a group, but they are graded individually based on an individual part of the assignment.

Connected to the individual-group tension, is the tension between describing oneself as an independent information seeker and at the same time as someone who seeks information in ways that are sanctioned within the school setting, a tension which is similar to that identified by Lundh (2011) in student-centred assignments in primary school. The analysis suggests that the critically aware information seeker, as described in the students' narratives, is someone who can demonstrate independent thinking and make independent and individual credibility judgements, but also someone who has understood the expectations on what the appropriate ways of seeking information are.

These two tensions can be described in terms of a conflict between originality and reproduction which has been present in Western societies to varying degrees since the Romantic period. The idea of the individual as creator of original expression is visible in Western culture's respect for the Author (Barthes, 1977) as well as in intellectual property rights legislation (Hemmungs Wirtén, 2004) and in the ban on copying from existing texts in educational settings (Volet, 1999). However, literary theorists have critiqued the focus placed on the individual as original creator because it downplays the role of convention (Frye, 1957). In Roland Barthes' post-structuralist approach, such originality is problematic because it ignores that texts form "a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes, 1977, p. 146). In an institutional setting, such as an upper secondary school regulated by curricula and traditions, the display of originality and creativity take place within certain boundaries. Reproducing the educational content is rarely enough for the higher grades. Rather, constructing the narrative of self as a critically aware information seeker in ways that will be valued in the school setting is a matter of transforming the taught action or narrative, of making it one's own, and in the process expressing it in a language which portrays it as new and original, but still within the limits of what is viewed as acceptable creativity in the educational setting.

Thus, the tensions in the narratives can be seen as a result of the contradictory cues (see Volet, 1999, pp. 631f) that are shaped in the interactions and negotiations between students and readers in the blogs. The study suggests that the students' descriptions of their information seeking and credibility judgements say as much about explicit and implicit requirements and the discourses in the school setting, as they say about the cognitive activity the students are carrying out while doing credibility judgements.

8. Information activities as objects of assessment

In this article, an analysis is conducted of the interaction taking place between students and educators when credibility judgements become an object of teaching, and moreover, an object of assessment. The analysis suggests that the students are facing a demanding task, not least since their assignment has been constructed so as not to have pre-defined and correct answers. As their work with the assignment is progressing, the students use the interactive function of the blog to get feedback on and negotiate the expectations placed on them.

The focus of the analysis has been on how the students employ linguistic tools to structure accounts of their use of both material tools and intellectual tools. One way to understand the students' narratives is that many of the students seem to have learned to describe their activities in a particular language; they have appropriated or mastered a vocabulary for information seeking that is suitable in the school setting, and in relation to the assessment criteria. However, this language use might not necessarily be a good indicator as to how the described information activities took place *in situ* or what the students might have learned through working with the assignment. This highlights the difficulties inherent in all assessment practices, namely the question of what aspects of the students' learning educators (and researchers) have access to when students are carrying out their work, and what aspects of their performance one can actually assess or study (see Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 55). Thus, what we want to highlight is that if descriptions of information activities, such as credibility judgements, are made into objects of assessment, careful consideration of what these descriptions represent is necessary.

However, the students should not be understood as passively adjusting to pre-existing norms on how to accomplish their assignments. At the same time as many of the students design their blog identity and their narratives to fit the situation and the requirements for the assignment, their personal style is often clearly present. There are indications in the posts that the use of a blog for this part of the assignment may also have invited a personal and informal style, which is associated more clearly with a blog genre than with a school assignment genre. This opens up for a discussion of what happens with a communicative genre when it is introduced in a school setting (see Gasser *et al*., 2012) and also how useful a school vocabulary for information seeking is outside school (see Rivano Eckerdal, 2011). These questions should, we suggest, be scrutinised more closely in future research.

With a basis in concepts developed in neo-Vygotskian sociocultural theory, the analysis has illustrated how norms and expectations relating to information activities are expressed and shaped in discursive interaction. Furthermore, it has been discussed how these norms and expectations might interact with how information activities are carried out in a particular setting. Especially, by concentrating on the role of the assessment, both formative and summative, we have explored some of the rationales underlying and shaping the students' credibility judgements when these judgements become an object of teaching and are carried out in an educational setting.

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