My very first encounter with the theory of the information search process was when I started my education to become a librarian in 1997. One of the first lectures that I attended was performed by Louise Limberg. Today she´s professor emerita but at that point she was just about to present her doctoral thesis in library and information science. She had examined the relationship between the perception high school students held of information seeking and the quality of their papers as evalutated by teacher and librarian. In her lecture she introduced the research of Carol Kuhlthau. When I heard that there existed research where the feelings, thoughts and actions of teenagers were considered interesting and valuable stuff I was hooked. And not only that, but the reason why someone was interested in this was because it seemed like a good idea to find out more about the difficulties that teenagers experience when they are trying to achieve deep knowledge. I was baffled. It was the most pedagogical statement I had ever heard.

At this point I was a high school teacher drop out. I had dropped out of school a number of times and thought I would never go back again. But this made me change my mind. Someone more than me wanted school to be interesting, fun and real and thought that there could be valuable findings in texts by young adults.

My master thesis in library and information science was a survey conducted among a group of young adults examining their opinion of libraries with the starting point in the fire of the city library of Linköping. The public library had burnt down and I thought that it would be really interesting to find out what it was that had burnt down to a number of 15 year olds. Asking these kids a lot of open questions where they could formulate themselves in writing about among other things the fire as such, the value of a library in a society, their school libraries, libraries as rooms, reading, information seeking and their strategies after the fire gave me a very complex picture. Not a very good paper, no proper research question. I wanted to get the whole picture. A number of corner stones have stayed with me ever since 2000 when the paper was completed:

Libraries can hold an existential value for teenagers. They can care enormously about what the books represent, they care about if the room is beautiful and if the librarians are kind and understand teenagers that do not know how to ask “library questions”. They can formulate that libraries hold different values at different times in a person´s life: when they were kids, when they will be students, when they become parents and when they grow old.

I was very surprised.

 I had never liked libraries myself, boring places that never managed to invite me in and that seemed to have a qualifying system of which I never cracked the code.

I had loved to read since I was five but book stores were my places.

There were also students in my investigation that didn´t have a relationship to libraries at all. They didn´t like to read, they wrote. Libraries do not have anything for me, they wrote. But they also wanted to put forward that libraries can hold a value to others.

The way they - all 111 of them, no matter if they loved libraries or couldn´t care less - answered my questions –– made a great impact on me. A stranger asks them questions about libraries, but they answered and I heard honest voices. I decided that they shouldn´t have done that in vain. I decided to use what they had taught me when I started to work as a school librarian. Trying to give them beautiful rooms, trying to be kind, trying to find out as much as possible about their questions and ways of asking, or not asking. For those who do not have a relationship to libraries – will they allow me to get to know them? I didn´t know but was willing to try.

It was also apparent to me that to be able to create the best library ever to young adults it took adults to do it. Professional adults. I remembered my primary school teacher whom I thought of as an adult who didn´t need us. She was there for us no matter who we were, she knew what she was doing and you could trust her. I remember liking that.

In my background reading for my thesis I touched upon so many disciplines that seemed relevant that I was absolutely overwhelmed. The kids gave me such a multi-facetted picture of the potential of libraries that I thought that it could only be possible to achieve that in a cross disciplinary culture. A sociologist once described the wise meeting between professional grown-ups and young adults as a “practical art”. I couldn´t agree more. And the practice informed by a scientific approach, of course.

So, I headed back to school and came to Katedralskolan, where I still am, in 2000. A drop out high school teacher who didn´t like libraries was to become a school librarian. Part-time for many years and since 2011, full-time. I had Kuhlthau in my hand and heard the voices of my informants in my head.

Now, Katedralskolan is a highly prestigious, traditional high school so I knew that the odds for me of finding myself at home was truly low. A long journey started.

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Between 2000 and 2010 I told teachers and students about ISP. We tried in all kinds of ways to adapt what we learnt from it in our information seeking instructions, in our supervision and in the instructions that the teachers gave to the students. We were convinced that it should inform our practice. We made many mistakes. We thought we knew, over and over again. But since the students kept getting more or less impossible assignments and I knew that they wanted us to be kind and needed us to understand their “non-library” questions we learned and learned and learned.

In 2010 I got the chance to get to know Randi Schmidt. The story is long about how this meeting came about but it contains my story with ISP as you´ve read it above, people in Sweden whom I had found and networked with, coincidences when it came to financial possibilities and Randi´s and my conviction that ISP/GI really had it. I don´t know if Randi is known to you but my short version of her goes like this: When she found out about ISP she decided to create a program at her school ( Gill St. Bernhard, Gladstone, NJ ) that would fully implement the findings of the research – her practice should be based on research. And that she did. Ten years later I walked into that library. I came as prepared as I could and the ten days that I spent with her, her colleagues, students, teachers, researchers at CISSL and the colleagues that I travelled with from Sweden equipped me with a massive experience. It was just as holistic as the voices I heard from my informants only that the web was getting even more complicated. But there were connections, there were methods, there were forms to be filled in and reflection sheets, structured lessons and instructions and there were questions answered and I saw it all, it wasn´t just talk but also walk.

During my visit I asked myself: what am I going to do with this when I come home? I just thought it would be so sad if I would plant the seeds but then fail to make them grow and flourish. It would be so sad. I wanted so badly to be part of a listening and encouraging culture that would help both grownups and teenagers to create deep knowledge.

So I asked for advice and thought and read my own notes from the trip and the ISP/GI texts over and over again. I decided to trust conversation and discussion. I don´t think that we have that as a natural part of our culture in my school when the intention is to develop professional knowledge in the staff. And I decided to challenge that. I decided that it was the only way to go and that I knew that I had to be patient and firm. If I or the teachers assumed that we were getting nowhere, nothing was happening I had to remain in the position of a discussing, conversing person. If that didn´t work, nothing else would.

I started by talking to my principles and somehow they must have experienced that there was something – not clear what – of quality in my sayings and doings and a year later I had a full time job. Still unclear what I was doing or should be doing, but there it was. My vision was not to become a star school librarian but to teach the teachers and then work together with them. In 2013 I had evaluations from teachers, their voices and student voices from six projects, involving about 200 students and six teachers and I was invited to present as a practitioner at the CISSL Symposium celebrating the 30th anniversary of the dissertation of Carol Kuhlthau. I flew to the US to talk for 15 minutes. It´s kind of funny to think of it that way, but of course there was so much more to it. I was back at Gill with Randi, I met with new people, learned that my presentation and the result we had was worth something – we were on the right track – and that there was interesting stuff going on in Australia as well. So, going back home again, what next?

I went back and told my school and anyone else that was interested that those who know say that we´re on the right track. We don´t really know what we´re doing but people who know say: keep going. So we did.

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Now in the summer of 2016 I have a year of teacher training behind me. Ten teachers chose voluntarily to attend in service training in GI. I have re-read Guided Inquiry Design and have tried to put the teachers in the position of the students. I have tried to model, encourage and listen. We had some kind of a crises at explore – believe that most of them had the intention of start skipping class and blaming me and their fellow group members for the fact that we were not getting anywhere, neither individually nor as a group. But we hung in there and at share and evaluate our principle was attending – of course by coincidence, but what would we be without it? And I had “a sense of completion suited to the audience.” And also a sense of pride in the room.

I am at this point invited into a numbers of teams, in school and at other schools. The most important aspect for me right now is that I have stayed true to my vision and my method, what suited me and that it worked for us. We don´t know if and in that case how it will spread but we feel confident that something is achieved. We have taken care of the seeds and some of them are definitely thriving.

I have seen myself as a half. I believe I know certain things and the teachers believe they know certain things. When we meet we learn both about what we thought we knew but also about what the others thought they knew. The difficult part is to get the meeting. Me being the person that has taken every single initiative also tends to put me in the position of the one who is supposed to know. So to have the courage to back off from those expectations but keep the teachers in the conversation is an advanced assignment.

So far I have been the one telling stories. Like the one you´ve just read. The story of me and my journey with ISP/GI, the story of third space, the story of student voices from evaluations and now the voices of teachers’ evaluations from their journey this year. I would like to move on from there. And I believe I am. A couple of colleagues from another school were so inspired by my stories that they applied for and will attend the summer school at Rutgers this summer, my much younger colleague here at my school is involved in all the digital tools projects that exist here, a couple of teachers are in charge of a full day programme at an in service training for teachers in our region and another teacher is including GID material in an educational website that she´s creating for the Swedish National Board of Education. There will be a chapter about us in the book about the varieties of GI across the globe by Lee Fitzgerald Coming… sooner or later.

So, I thank you so much for having me on this blogg and if anyone would like to get in touch for asking questions of any kind, please do. I will probably not be active neither here nor at the Australian equivalent but I wish you all the strength, imagination and persistence to keep on giving young people the best education in the world.