



## **Joint efforts to improve reading education: cooperative projects between public libraries and schools in the Norwegian School Library Program**

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### **Meeting:**

**118 — Friends or Foes – public and school libraries a force for change for creating smart communities — School Libraries and Resource Centers with Public Libraries**

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper discusses how schools in the Norwegian School Library Program collaborate with their local public libraries in order to support reading education. The program (2009-13) is intended to strengthen the school library as an educational tool. A survey of Norwegian school libraries completed in 2006-07 revealed deficiencies with regard to access to resources and competency levels, particularly in primary and lower secondary schools. Project funding was provided, and schools may apply for funding for practice-related projects in which the school library is actively integrated in reading education and the promotion of information literacy. At the close of the 2011-12 academic year, 125 schools have completed projects after having received program funding, and their project groups (principals, school librarians and teachers) have participated in continuing education courses under the auspices of the program. The paper also discusses the frameworks relevant for this type of collaboration between schools and public libraries in Norway, offering a few comments regarding how this is organized at the community and county levels. Thereafter a certain number of examples are given of actual cooperative projects taking place through the Norwegian School Library Program.*

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### **Introduction**

The Norwegian School Library Program emphasizes the achievement of collaboration between project schools and public libraries much. Many school libraries – including those in the project schools – have limited resources and lack qualified staff members. Public libraries

have staff members with library-related expertise, and they have larger and more updated physical and digital collections, the combination of which can provide a valuable resource for schools. Simultaneously, collaborating with schools is a method of bringing more users to public libraries: At the primary and lower secondary school levels they meet all the children between the ages of 6 and 16 and come into contact with the parents and teachers of these children as well. School is an important arena for dissemination, including groups who normally do not use library services.

Libraries and schools are natural cooperative partners: They have a joint social mission to contribute to knowledge acquisition and participation in democratic processes. In the Norwegian School Library Program, it is most notably reading education that is in the spotlight. Collaboration between project schools and public libraries is therefore first and foremost about strengthening the library as a resource for teaching. I shall present four examples of this kind of cooperative projects as well as say something about the guidelines in place for collaboration between schools and libraries in Norway. However, first I shall give a brief introduction to the Norwegian School Library Program.

### **Norwegian School Library Program**

The Norwegian School Library Program is a four-year (2009-13) national project to strengthen the school library as an educational tool. The aim of the program is that school libraries will play an active role in reading education and the promotion of information literacy. The University of Agder (UiA) administers the program upon the request of the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. The program is comprised of several prioritized areas: raising library skills through education, developing the website [www.skolebibliotek.uia.no](http://www.skolebibliotek.uia.no), and creating a digital bank of ideas and instructional resources to promote the acquisition of information skills among teachers, school librarians and students.

UiA's many years of commitment to education for school librarians formed the background for the decision to locate the Norwegian School Library Program at the university. Students are mostly teachers who take continuing education courses in school library science. In 2011 this study program was expanded into a Bachelor's Program in School Library Science of which introduction to library-related topics, children's and young people's literature, information literacy and reading development are central elements.

The program has set aside funding for school development projects. While project schools will initially receive funding for one year, they are allowed to apply for an additional year of funding. Schools awarded funding for two years are required to complete further development of their projects as well as become resource schools in the program.

Only primary and lower secondary schools can apply for project support; there are no funding resources available for upper secondary schools. This prioritization was made in accordance with findings from a comprehensive survey of Norwegian school libraries completed by Møre Research Centre in 2006-07, who in their report concluded that primary and lower secondary schools had the least amount of funding for their school libraries. Upper secondary schools

tended to have more qualified staff members and comprehensive time resources set aside for school librarians. There were also large differences among the school levels with regard to funding set aside for library facilities and development of collections (Barstad, Audunson, Hjortsæter & Østlie, 2007).

As regards primary and lower secondary schools that receive funding from the Norwegian School Library Program, there is therefore good reason to seek collaboration with public libraries located in their communities. These libraries have staff members with professional knowledge of libraries, more complete physical and digital media collections and are often connected with large, professional networks. Many project schools have received a good deal of support from public libraries to develop their projects.

However, the survey by Møre Research Centre showed no unambiguous connection between resources allocated to school libraries and the degree to which these libraries were used for educational purposes. The report concluded that the most important factors for having the school library integrated actively in schools were support from the school administration, planning of library usage and a school culture that allowed for including resources such as a library. Moreover, teachers' attitudes were decisive; in order for the school library to be used actively, the teachers had to include its usage in their teaching (ibid.). This is the reason why the Norwegian School Library Program requires the principal to be the project manager, and the entire project group – principal, school librarian and participating teachers – must take part in a continuing education course under the auspices of the program. These two-day courses are offered in both autumn and spring semesters and include topics such as educational use of the school library, development of information literacy in school and reading of various types of printed and digital texts. There is also a focus on collaboration between the school and public library, and examples of various forms of collaboration are shown.

### **Teachers and librarians working together**

Research on student learning dividends in the information search process supports the need for training in the use of the library and information sources in connection with teachers' instruction in individual subjects. Students acquire knowledge most easily when they search for the texts they use as an integral part of completing their academic assignments. This means that use of school library resources must be planned and assessed in collaboration between teacher and school librarian. In cooperative projects between school and public library, the public library needs to be involved in the planning process as well (cf., e.g., Limberg & Alexandersson, 2007; Montiel-Overall, 2007; Rafste & Sætre, 2008, Squires, 2009).

Reports from The Multiplicity Project (Multiplisitetssprosjektet, 2007-11) show that collaboration on reading stimulation between the local public library and school leads to students becoming more motivated readers. The project is an interdisciplinary research project in which researchers at Oslo University College and Buskerud University College have collaborated with two schools and Drammen Public Library. Over a four-year period

researchers, libraries and teachers have studied forms of collaboration and how such collaboration influences students' reading habits (Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus, 2012).

“Educating the Information Literate Teacher”, a collaborative project between Bergen University College, Hordaland County Library and practical training schools in the Bergen region have a goal of increasing information literacy among teacher students. These students are receiving instruction in information searches and use at the college library, and will teach their own students what they learn when they begin their student teaching. The practical training schools receive help from the county library to strengthen their school libraries in order that they will become a teaching resource. The Norwegian School Library Program has two project schools that are participating in the project, Fjell and Tranevågen Schools in Fjell Municipality (Høgskolen i Bergen, 2012).

In 2010-11 Buskerud University College and Buskerud County Library collaborated on a similar project, Interaction Creates Synergy (Samspill skaper synergi). Student teachers here were able to develop their knowledge of children's and young people's literature and the dissemination of literature. They also acquired more knowledge about the school library. Simultaneously, children's librarians learned more about children's and young people's various childhood backgrounds, including their reading habits (Buskerud fylkesbibliotek, 2012).

### **Collaboration Between Library and School**

The Norwegian Libraries Act from 1985 states that public libraries and schools are to collaborate in order to provide children and young people with the best possible library services (Lov om folkebibliotek, 1985). Moreover, at the county level formal collaboration between the library and school sectors is to be established. In March 2012 the Ministry of Culture introduced a proposal to alter existing library legislation so that this order would be removed. In the memorandum of consultation this is justified with the statement that it is not desirable to force community and county units to collaborate with one another (Kulturdepartementet, 2012). The manner in which communities and counties want to organize their internal collaboration is to be decided upon by locally elected officials and civil servants. Furthermore, the order has been exclusively inserted into the library legislation, as no comparable formulation in school legislation may be found. Through making the proposal for change, this imbalance will be corrected. In spite of the proposed changes, there remains reason to believe that the national government places great importance on collaboration between the library and school sectors taking place in the future as well, as, on the whole, coordination of scant resources at the municipality level can provide children and young people with better library services.

Guidelines have been drawn up for collaboration between the library and school sectors in which it is proposed that a contact committee be named in each participating community. These committees will ensure the best possible library services for children and young people, including searching for common solutions with regard to planning and operating the various types of libraries. 341 out of 429 municipalities in Norway report about organized

collaboration between their public libraries and schools. A certain number of municipalities have also employed a school librarian coordinator, whose role is to provide assistance to schools adding to their collections, arrange cooperation regarding electronic catalogues, give courses, initiate reading promotion activities as well as to run network collaboration.

Approximately one third of the public libraries in Norway are combined libraries, meaning that they function as both public and school libraries. Some of the school libraries in the Norwegian School Library Program belong to this category. During courses and consulting sessions in connection with the program, it is stressed that a combination library must function as an actual school library when it offers services to school. School libraries and public libraries have different objectives. According to library legislation, public libraries must provide services to all groups in society. On the contrary, school libraries have the same tasks and objectives as schools as stated in the Education Act and national curriculum (Opplæringslova, 1998, Knowledge Promotion 2006). One challenge for combined libraries is to move back and forth between these two different functions and satisfy all its target groups in a good manner.

### **Municipalities as school - and library owners**

As mentioned above, integration is decisive for achieving more conscious and systematic library use in teaching. In projects funded by the Norwegian School Library Program use must be integrated in school administration officials' planning and in schools' curricula. As project manager the principal has the overall responsibility for experiences from developmental work going to benefit their school after the project has been terminated.

Additionally, integration among the municipality as school owner is equally important as it is the school owners that submit project applications from schools to the program. The municipalities complete quality checks on and rank applications from schools before forwarding them. This two-step application process assures that both schools and communities reflect upon the role and tasks of the school library. Furthermore, the process includes an incitement to think of common solutions in the municipality among schools and between schools and public libraries. Schools and public libraries have the same owner, and there should therefore be a good basis for looking at them in connection with one another.

Through the application process, completion of school projects and reporting system, contact and collaboration between school and public library are encouraged. There are questions in the application form regarding any other projects in which the school is participating, and much emphasis is placed on how schools and municipalities will share their experiences from the project with others. The cooperative projects are an important link in exchanging experiences between the various types of libraries.

### **Project schools – examples of cooperative projects**

In the following section four development projects in the Norwegian School Library Program will be presented, all of which represent examples of collaboration between schools and public libraries. The descriptions are based on plans and reports from schools, notes and

surveys from public libraries and coordinators as well as assessment talks with principals/school librarians/coordinators/chief librarians.

**Telavåg Primary School** in Hordaland County has 75 students. Its project in the Norwegian School Library Program was entitled “A Taste of Digital Picture Books», the objective of which being to increase first to fourth form students’ reading pleasure and skills through using picture books. The school cooperates closely with **Sund Public Library**, and the project application was designed in a collaboration between the principal and chief librarian.

The project was about the digitalization of picture books. In consultation with the public library, the school built up a collection of picture books, emphasizing quality and variation. The public library, together with assistants working in Telavåg School, scanned a section of picture books and made them available for students and teachers in digital format (PowerPoint). The library also assumed all responsibility for handling contracts with authors and illustrators regarding the rights to use these books. The digital picture books were made available on the school library’s PCs and were in addition copied onto CDs that teachers could bring into their classrooms and show on their PC, projector or SmartBoard.

The school library acquired a large screen on which to show picture books and a reading corner was created for story hours. Given the fact that words and pictures are so closely interconnected in picture books, students get the most out of reading when they can study the pictures up close while listening to the text. By disseminating these picture books on the large screen, more students could participate in the story hour. Moreover, the advantage of digitalization was that these books could be used according to need; the problem of waiting lists was solved. The chief librarian in Sund gave presentations at events held in connection with the project, and she participated in classroom instruction telling students about non-fiction and fictional literature.

Emphasis was also placed on including assistants and staff members of after-school care programs (SFO) in the project. These assistants use all available time on reading education, and have been instructed in how to discuss the books with students with respect to pictures, symbols and texts, and this was done both during school hours and at the after-school care program. Additionally, the project stressed the importance of bringing in parents and grandparents as resources. The parent group was instructed in how to use picture books and present a text as well as how to create expectations in the reader about the text and talk about the pictures. The school’s homepage was actively used to keep participants updated on project activities.

The project led to a great increase in use of the school library, and library usage was inserted in the school’s annual planner. The advantage for the public library was that it was able to “get inside” schools. Teachers have now become familiar with the services provided by the public library and the library is consulted to a greater degree. The digital picture books were also made available for use during reading hours for daycare children and young school-age children in the public library. Sund Public Library and schools in the Sund Municipality had already established cooperation in several areas before the project was initiated. The public

library has depots in schools and daycare centres and administrates a joint community electronic cataloguing system. The library catalogues marks and categorizes the collections of all Sund schools. In the reports about the school library project, the collaboration – both before and during the project period – is highlighted as an important resource for reading instruction at Televåg School.

The library at **Bud Primary and Lower Secondary School** in Møre and Romsdal County is a combined library. In addition to functioning as a school library, it is a branch of **Fræna Public Library**. The school has 200 students. The school librarian's position is divided among the school, public library and role as the municipality's school library coordinator. In recent years Fræna has gradually increased its investments in its school libraries. All schools are now included in the library plan that collectively provides frameworks for each individual school library's content and organization of services. In large part the municipality's coordination and consultation with respect to school libraries are based on the programs developed at Bud School.

Bud's first development project in the Norwegian School Library Program concerned integrating library use in educational programs for forms 6, 7 and 8. In these programs students utilized printed and digital reference materials, assessed books and solved search tasks based on competence aims in all school subjects. The school succeeded in planning and completing the project. However, the school librarian and participating teachers observed that their students did not manage to use the library in a goal-oriented manner, associating this failure with the fact that these students lacked good learning strategies. These experiences created a basis for a new project period in which the development of learning strategies and information literacy became key objectives.

In its resource school project the school wanted to develop further the library as a learning arena as well as strengthen the collaboration between its school librarian and teachers. Further, it was hoped that more thorough planning would make this collaboration more binding and goal-oriented. The objective was, as stated in the project title: "A Learning School – A Living Library". The school assumes that students must master learning strategies in order to be able to use the library in a positive manner. During the project period a collection of ideas was gathered regarding information literacy in grades 1-10 using examples of reading and learning strategies. These ideas and strategies are associated with various subjects on each level.

The established collaboration between school and public library has helped create a basis for investing in the project. The school library coordinator is a connecting link between the public library and all the schools in the area, and the library plan determines the level of cooperation. This plan states that the school library is to be a resource for students across all ages and forms, as this will assure that all students receive access to new literature as well as a greater number and variety of sources. Furthermore, the library is to be equipped to support a creative and exploratory learning process actively, which in turn will help create adapted education.

The library plan also includes an intention that the school librarian must develop competency within the areas of administration and operation, information literacy and pedagogy.

In order to ensure professional development, a library network was established in the community. The public library belongs to this network along with the school libraries and is jointly responsible for arranging and announcing network meetings. The network is an important forum for discussion and knowledge sharing. As regards Fræna Municipality itself, the public library is also responsible for the part of The Cultural Rucksack (a national program for art and culture provided by professionals in Norwegian schools) that is transferred directly for use in each community. These funds are used on author visits to all 5th and 8th form classes each year. Cooperative activities are planned and assessed with regard to the library plan, as both the plan and the coordinator function are the driving forces in library collaboration and tools for strengthening children's and young people's learning.

**Sørvik Primary and Lower Secondary School** in Troms County has 120 students divided among ten form levels. The school collaborates with the **Harstad Library** and is also a mentor school for one of the other project schools in the Norwegian School Library Program, Kanebogen Primary School. The school library project at Sørvik was entitled "Systematic Use of the School Library as Inspiration for Reading and Learning". Through joining the project, the school wanted to ensure that efforts were made early on for promoting students' reading and learning through incorporating structured interdisciplinary work. Important objectives were to maintain students' interest in reading at the middle and lower secondary school levels, focusing especially on boys and raising skills in performing information searches for all lower secondary students.

The municipality of Harstad is committed to systematic reading instruction. The city's reading plan was adopted in 2010, and as a follow-up step, all elementary school classes have employed a part-time reading supervisor. In the case of Sørvik School, this resource comprises a 20% position. During the project period this resource created a basis for offering a reading workshop to students in forms two to four. The school library was an important element in this commitment to promoting reading, both as one of the locations for the reading workshop and for middle-level students to receive help when reading age-appropriate books. The school library was also a central element in the program directed towards middle-level boys. This program lasted from October to April and included guided and repeated reading, often of texts taken from science or social studies. The texts were chosen from topics these boys' classes were to study the following week. After completing pre-reading this course material in these groups, participants learned even more from it when it was later presented in class. These students also became more active and involved in class discussions about these topics. In this course model student ability is assessed both before and after the course takes place.

The school library project was well suited to this school's other prioritized areas, including Assessment of Learning and School Development (VSL) and Positive Behaviour, Supportive Learning Environment and School Cooperation (PALS). Being a mentor school, Sørvik

worked closely with Kanebogen School, holding regular meetings that included staff advisement and exchange of experiences. The schools also helped one another by designing and participating in each other's workshops.

The public library helped by contributing literature to the project. The library bus visits Sørvik School once a month, registering a large increase in book lending after the project had started. The school librarian at Sørvik is quite familiar with the public library's book collection and can use this as a resource for the school. One of the project's challenges was to find good books to purchase for the school library; in this case the public library's books served as a reference collection. Students at Sørvik also participated in an event focusing on new children's and young people's books at the public library, and later presented a selection of these books to their fellow students. Moreover, the public library and school use the same electronic cataloguing system, and the public library offers help if the school library has a problem with their system. The exchange of experiences - among others reading in all subjects and building up the book collection - was the topic of joint meetings between the school librarians and public library during the project period.

The collaboration between the school and public library supported the development project at Sørvik School. The school's own assessment of the project confirmed that it had led to increased learning as well as greater reading desire and pleasure among students. It had also contributed to improving parental cooperation regarding reading instruction, promoting a high level of staff involvement and implementing better structure in the school's reading plans and programs.

**Mørkved School** in Hedmark County is a primary school with 300 students. The school cooperates with **Ringsaker Library**. The development project in the Norwegian School Library Program was entitled "From Library to Learning Centre" and dealt with integrating the library as a permanent feature for reading instruction, initially in the lower forms, thereafter in the upper forms and as an element in advanced reading instruction. Mørkved runs its reading instruction program in accordance with the Early Years Literacy Program (EYLP). During the school library project emphasis was placed on students being given access to competent guidance when completing their individual work, projects or group assignments, and they were also to use the library in a goal-oriented manner when completing school work. During the project period forms 5-7 primarily used their library hours on guided reading in which the teacher librarian worked with small, often quite homogenous groups as an element of their station work. Moreover, the teacher librarian instructed students in library knowledge in accordance with her own plan designed for each level. This plan corresponded as much as possible with the coursework being completed by students at the time.

Throughout the project period Mørkved School was a coordinator for a Comenius project in which schools in Denmark, Germany, Slovenia and Romania also participated. One main objective of the project was "Improving Literacy", and the partner schools studied how the school library could contribute to this goal. The school was also used as a resource in a bilateral Comenius-Regio project in which Ringsaker Public Library was a partner institution.

In The Cultural Rucksack the school works with the public library and authors, illustrators and storytellers. These are annual projects lasting from one to two weeks, for example courses in creative writing or story illustration. Moelv Lower Secondary School in Ringsaker is a new project school in the Norwegian School Library Program and may thus ask Mørkved for advice. Moelv has also signed an agreement with the local public library to receive its help one hour each week.

The municipality of Ringsaker has prioritized school library development, and the project schools have received a good deal of support from school owners. The community is large both geographically and in population and has a decentralized school structure with 22 primary and lower secondary schools, the majority of which have rather limited resources set aside for school libraries. However, in 2010 the community created a full-time school library coordinator position, thereby forming a basis for supporting school libraries to a greater extent. The position was located within the public library staff. The chief librarian and principals in Ringsaker worked together to specify the tasks the library coordinator was to perform before filling the position.

The coordinator has taken over management of the «Contact Committee for Cooperation Between School and Public Library», and she is to help the network groups of school librarians. Through this consulting resource school librarians receive help to develop their library skills. The coordinator visits the schools regularly throughout the school year, giving book talks to students and teachers. She guides schools regarding purchasing and upgrading of their media collections and answer questions about cataloguing, organizing and designing library interiors. She also supports school libraries in their work to solidify the library in school planning and cooperative fora and offers advice regarding writing project applications. The school library coordinator also arranges courses and other means of literary dissemination, including working with the children's librarian at the public library. As a link in Ringsaker's prioritization of library services, a plan for library cooperation is being written. The public library will play an important role as a professional resource in this process.

## **Conclusion**

The Norwegian School Library Program encourages collaboration among project schools and public libraries. Several schools have completed cooperative projects, a certain number of which have been presented here. The idea behind the program is to utilize the school library as a resource in reading education and development of information literacy. Collaboration with public libraries is important because it gives project schools a more solid foundation for completing developmental work. Public libraries can contribute with library-related consulting, books and electronic resources. They are also good partners for schools arranging events and running reading promotional activities. Particularly municipalities that invest in permanent, organized collaboration, for example in establishing coordinator positions, create a good basis for library development.

Furthermore, schools and libraries have the same owners and common social missions, and are therefore natural cooperative partners. Norwegian authorities have also provided clear

guidelines for this collaboration. Project schools can thus enter into an established tradition when they develop projects based on collaboration. This is a good starting point for achieving lasting changes in schools. Use of the school library as an educational tool is dependent upon its integration in school. School administration officials and teachers' attitudes are decisive here, and its use must be specifically planned. When the project period is terminated, it is important that the school library has received a clear role in teaching. The school library's position is less vulnerable and person-dependent when it is part of a larger, formalized collaboration, including external participants.

One important criterion for awarding project funding from the Norwegian School Library Program is that the project has transference value. Other schools must be able to learn from the projects and use them as a source of inspiration for their own developmental work. The project schools have pledged to share their experiences, both in their own communities and through regional, national and even international networks. This includes sharing knowledge with public libraries. It is too early to conclude how the projects have affected participating students' learning. Reports and evaluations from project schools, however, indicate that these projects have supported reading education and that the collaboration with public libraries has helped strengthen the developmental work.

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