

LAG - The Regional German School Library Association of Hesse: a success story?

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Abstract

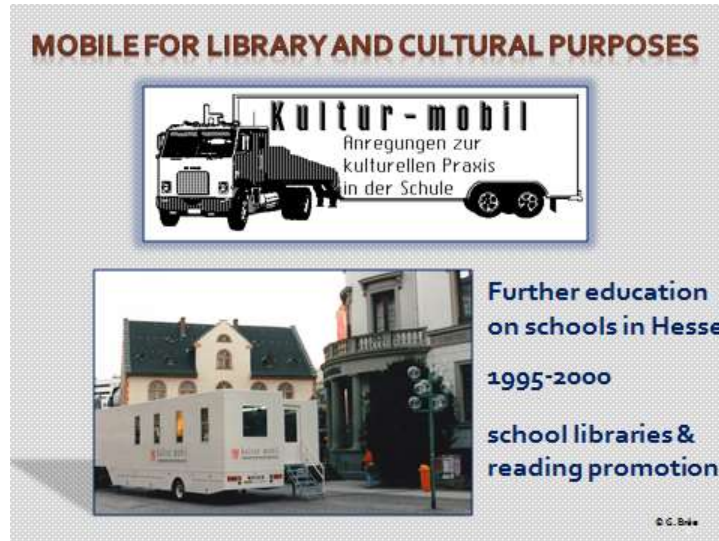
A report on successful projects and the humble chance to establish a school library system in a German state.

Keywords: School library, Germany, Hessen, school library association

“A country without a library would be like a garden without plants, a meadow without flowers ...” wrote Umberto Eco in his novel “The Name of the Rose”, and in the course of a School Library Seminar the participants collected statements, which were just as striking, such as “A school without a library is like a journey, which takes you nowhere” or “A school without a library is like a desert without an oasis”. These metaphors emphatically express the absolute necessity for school libraries. When in 1987 approximately 30 persons from 16 school libraries in Hesse first came to an informal regional meeting, which we later called the first Hessen School Library Day, we were in agreement that we need school libraries, and that in all schools in Hesse.

Because, long before the so called PISA-shock, we all realized, that to work on the pupils’ problems extracting information from texts, we need well equipped libraries. This was the idea, but we had no concrete concepts about how the library should look.

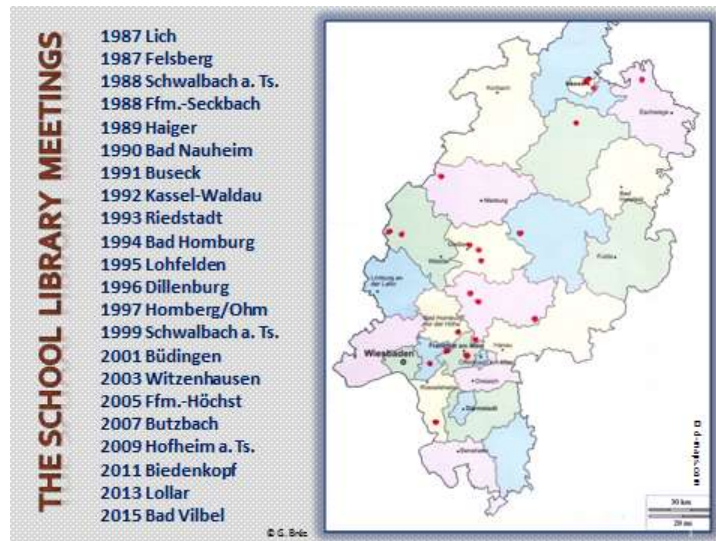
A travelling library, which goes to its customers, was partly put into practice in 1995 with the “mobile for library and cultural purposes”. The suggestion was made by the LAG and it was really put into practice. When, at the beginning of the 90s our high-flying plans for regional headquarters came to nothing, only the proposal for a traveling advice center remained. Under the control of our honorary chairman Guenter K. Schlamp, the Ministry of Education developed this mobile education unit, a truck with a draw-out extension for cultural purposes. However, because of the structures of the cultural practice, library advice could only be offered in a very restricted way.



Slide 1 Mobile education unit

After that the Project Office for School Libraries was developed - a more suitable structure. The Project Office, under the Ministry of Education is responsible for conceptual work in the areas of remedial reading, media and library education, and advises schools in the development of and the work in the library. There is also one teacher responsible for North Hesse, and one for South Hesse working at the Hesse Department for Public Libraries, that belongs to the Ministry of Science and the Arts.

In 2015 we met for the 22nd time at the biannual School Library Conference, and more than 250 participants have come, and like all the years before is this day THE Hesse further education course and consequently the crystallization point of a lively Hesse School Library Association - with 30 seminars on remedial reading, media education, library education, and organizational matters. Guests, who take part regularly, are doing a round trip of the Hesse school libraries, because each time one of our member schools hosts the conference.



Slide 2 Hessian School Library Day

The map of Hesse is not suffering from measles; the spots show the 22 places, where the Hessian School Library meetings have already taken place - at 13 comprehensive schools, 6 grammar schools and 2 vocational schools ... and today at a private school. 170 speakers carried out the workshops or introduced the different emphasis or motti. There were 13 authors among the speakers, which definitely shows, that the main emphasis of school library meetings is remedial reading.

The range of the themes of the different school library meetings is reflected in today's program with workshops on the topics of remedial reading, media education, digital media, library education, teaching in the library, building up a library, organization, IT and data protection; important issues for all school forms, in primary and secondary education.

The mother of all school library meetings - for years the Hessian School Library Meeting was unique in Germany - now has imitators. We are happy that there are now school library meetings in several states, like North Rhine-Westphalia, Berlin/Brandenburg, Bavaria, Saxony-Anhalt and in Schleswig-Holstein.

There is also international response to the Hessian School Library Meeting. Following the visit of Prof. James Henry of Melbourne, a former President of the International Association of School Librarianship ISAL, to the 19th School Library Meeting, this year again we could welcome Ms. Lourense Das from the Netherlands, the representative of European Network for School Libraries and Information Literacy ENSIL.

At the beginning of the nineties the change of the informal working group for school libraries into an association under German law was requested. The founding of LAG Schulbibliotheken in Hessen e. V. enabled teachers to become active and work on school library topics outside the official channels. The Hessian Ministry of Education was open-minded from the beginning and so a close cooperation, which has lasted until today, came into existence - the LAG became an non-governmental organization, whose verdict was highly valued.

Up until the central Hessian Teacher Education Organization was closed down, 25 one-week-courses on school library topics were held. In this way we reached more than 400 teachers, librarians and parents who helped to run school libraries.

There was also a course in working with the thematical book case “Die Bibliothek in der Kiste” - library in a box -, a reading project. The participants could spend a week reading and planning, how to use the book case in teaching.

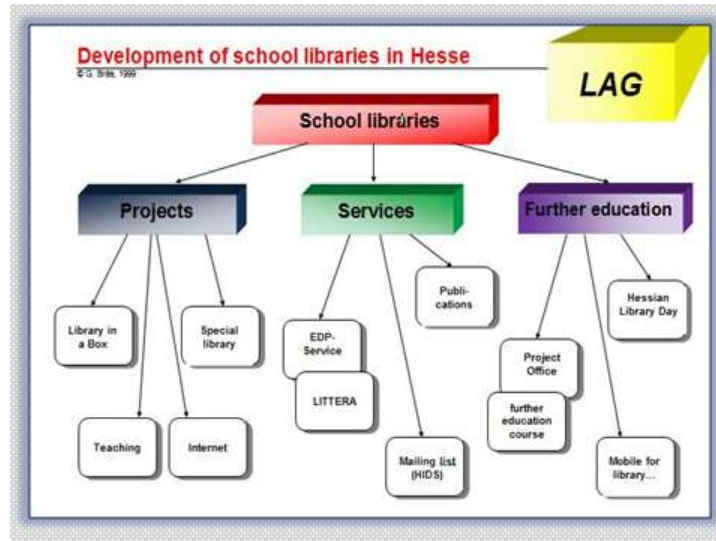


The very successful project “Die Bibliothek in der Kiste”, initiated by the LAG and financed by the Ministry of Education, was started in the founding year of the LAG and has reached 60,000 pupils up until the project’s end after 20 years. The list of 30 to 40 books and other media for one topic - in German a Handapparat - was often used by some schools to help build up their own library. Other schools without a library could use the thematical book cases for 8 weeks - free of charge!

1992 was an eventful year for the school libraries: It was not only the start of the reading project, it also saw the introduction of the Austrian library program LITTERA in our school libraries in a version which met all the users’ needs in Hesse.

Supported by the “Servicestelle EDV in Schulbibliotheken”, a special institution to help work with LITTERA in schools, the program became available to schools, for their libraries and their text book stock as well, and to institute and seminar libraries for a moderate fee. In the meantime the program is used by approximately two thirds of all schools in Hesse. Their catalogues can be networked through a common web.OPAC, the hessen.OPAC.

There is an organigram from 1999, which sums up, what was already mentioned and which also shows further initiatives and perspectives.



Slide 3 Modules of a school library system

In 1996 the Ministry of Education was prepared to help finance a project suggested by the LAG. This project “Internetnutzung in Schulbibliotheken”, a project to improve the use of the internet in school libraries, was submitted to the Federal Commission for Education and Research. Unfortunately, experts from the Federal Ministry of Science rejected to finance the project, with the extraordinary argument, all these things were already available in public libraries!

The LAG also uses the internet for their own communication. After waiting in vain for a national platform, in 1979 the LAG went online with a homepage and a mailing list. A digital newsletter took its place several years ago. And our honorary chairman writes about topics concerning school, the school library and pedagogics in his weblog “Basedow1764”.

The documentation of teaching, using the library, in order to publish best practice examples, can be difficult; on the one hand the copyright is a problem, on the other hand colleagues cannot be expected to take the time, to document these examples, because of their already high workload.

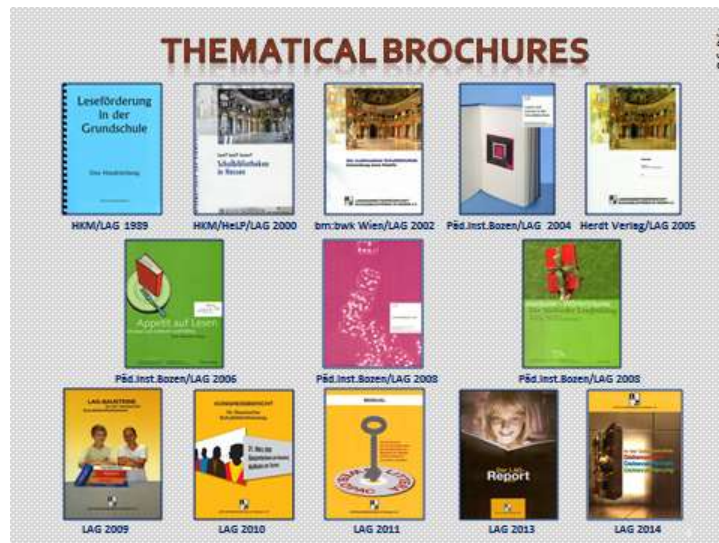
Nevertheless the LAG in their latest project has attempted to persuade colleagues to send in reports about their work in the library for publication. For, how often is the work that goes on in the library, invisible, even for the colleagues and the headmaster in their own school. Reports about literary events or special teaching projects should be placed on the school homepage or published in the local papers. This would increase awareness about the work done in the library, using the library.

School libraries need support. The projects show examples of, and ways to successful work. Additional ways to enhance awareness of colleagues about the work done in the library are the prizes the LAG has offered: The prize “The Little Hessian Bookcase” honored special and attractive reading activities in the library. Later the “School Libraries of the Year” were awarded a prize. To become school library of the year, you had to document extensive school library activities and the presentation of the school library on the school homepage.

Then came the prize “The School Librarian / the School Library Team of the Year”, which invited Heads of School to acknowledge the achievements of those responsible for the library.

Further vocational education widens your horizon and promotes the personal competence of those responsible for the school library. In 1995 the LAG pursued the concept of “teacher librarian” by suggesting a further education course for colleagues to promote the pedagogical use of school libraries. The concept was not realized. In view of the further vocational training courses for teachers, as successfully practiced in a number of our European neighboring countries, this concept should not be forgotten. The concept, which is important for the development of school libraries in Hesse, must be revised because of digital media, without which a school library is no longer functional; as a modular element for a new concept of further training, it certainly is suitable.

The publications of the LAG are a service of a special kind, particularly the thematical brochures, which deal with central issues of the daily running of a school library.

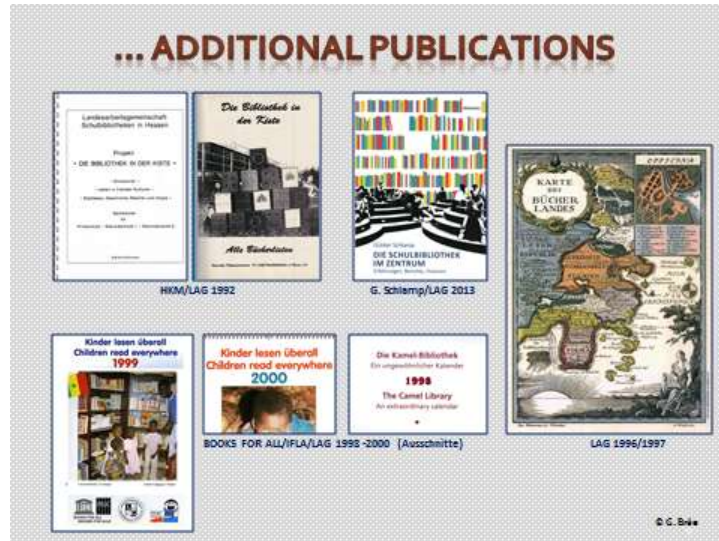


Slide 4 LAG-Publications

Some of the brochures reflect the friendly cooperation with the colleagues in Austria and Southern Tyrol.

Topics are remedial reading, the multi-media library, building up and organizing the school library, research, encouragement to read and learn, use of LITTERA, and data protection.

Not only the brochures, but also the calendars and the “Map of Bookland” are annual gifts for our members, whose number has increased to almost 300 - of those, 200 are schools, an equivalent of roughly 10 per cent of all Hessian schools.



Slide 5 Additional publications

The fact, that there are quite a number of working school libraries and multi-medial information centers in over two thirds of all Hessian schools, is mostly due to a concept of the LAG, that can be described with three maxims:

The first maxim is “Begin here and now” and do not wait until a local or federal institution presents a library to the school for free. This is the trademark of the LAG, the narrow path to a library, created by your own initiative and hard work, using all available school resources.

The second maxim: The school library is an essential component of the school’s concept of remedial reading, media education and library pedagogics.

And the third maxim: The school library has to be closely integrated into teaching and the organisation of the school. The library must be stocked in cooperation with the school departments and in accordance with the school program.

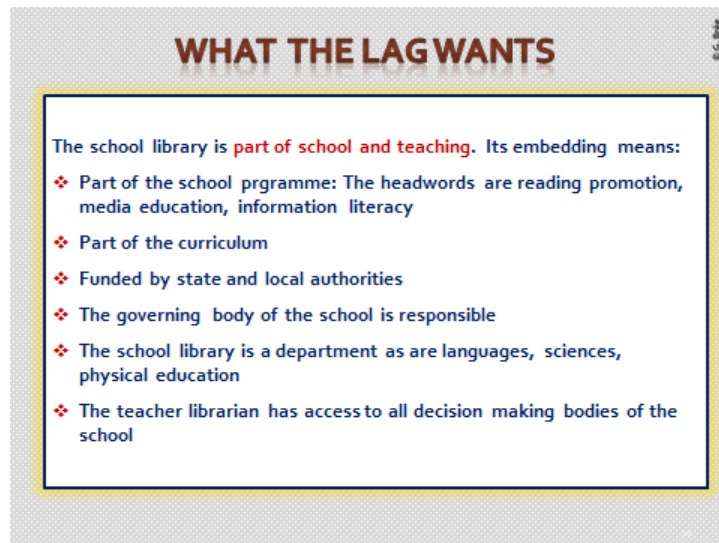
All that creates an active school library, which does not wait for the users, but is visible in everyday life in school and a central issue in all governing bodies of the school. It is part of the school, integrated into the school program, a place of learning and is regularly evaluated. The latter was proposed to the authorities by us.

The LAG sees its concept proved true by American studies - let me mention the studies carried out in Ohio and Colorado - which, after the evaluation of thousands of school libraries, confirm that students, using good school libraries achieve better results in school tests. It depends on the competence and commitment of the teacher librarians, whether students and colleagues see their library as a place of learning, yes, even as an alternative to the classroom.

It is hard to judge, if the concept of the “Library From Below” can create permanent structures; however, one can realize, that in schools, where the project “school library” has been running for ten years or even much longer, certain habits have emerged, not only in

teachers, who have direct access at any time to the media of a central multi-media library, but also in students, who can read and learn and work in various social forms in rooms equipped to a very high standard.

In its manifesto "What the LAG wants" the LAG has set down its views on integrating the school library into the daily life at school, aspects, which can advance the Hessian school library concept in a sustainable way.



Slide 6 LAG-basics

The institutions supporting the schools and the county have to take on responsibility. Last but not least, it's about equal opportunities for all students in Hesse, independent of where they live or what status their parents have. Part of modern education policy is the promotion of multi-medial and multi-functional school libraries. For modern multi-media libraries enhance the quality of schools.

The Hessian school libraries from below, mostly run by volunteers, depending on donations, supported by the self-help organisation LAG, are a success story. Absolutely no reason to stop here. The LAG will continue to work actively for what it stands for in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the Forum Schulbibliotheken, a board of the public libraries concerned with school libraries.

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<http://www.schulbibliotheken.de>

School library weblog of the LAG. <http://basedow1764.wordpress.com>

Johann Sebastian Basedow was a school reformer. He called in 1764 a library in every school in the state of Prussia, The goal was reached at the end of the Weimar Republic. Prussia no longer exists. Now there are school libraries in every other school, but usually in the basement or under the eaves, organized by parents and idealistic teachers. Only a small number meet modern standards.

A school library wiki. <http://schulbibliothek.wikispaces.com>