
Cooperation Between School Libraries and Public Libraries to Promote Enjoyment of Reading: Experiences from Bærum, Norway

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To enjoy reading you must have good reading ability and have access to books. It is vital for children to have easy access to books. Parents, teachers, and librarians influence children's reading in different ways. By working together, these adults can stimulate children's reading activity even more. In the municipality of Bærum in Norway, the cooperation between the school library and the public library is well organized and may be one of the reasons why our children are much better readers than the Norwegian average. The Bærum children have easy access to books, and the school curriculum stimulates reading activities.

Literacy is the gateway to knowledge and pleasure, and reading ability is vital for everybody. It is important for children to become good readers to be able to master their education and their lives. It is not only the ability to read that parents and teachers want their children to master. They also want them to enjoy reading. If children enjoy reading they will probably read for leisure and in that way improve their reading ability.

How Do Children Become Skilled Readers?

The IEA Study of Reading Literacy (Elley, 1992) revealed the impact of the family's reading activities on the children's reading ability. If children have been read to from infancy, have books at home, and have parents who read themselves, they will probably be skilled readers. The foundation for reading ability is laid before the children enter school. Their understanding of words and knowledge helps them in learning to read, and they have a preknowledge of the enjoyment of reading. Children from reading homes seem to have an additional advantage because they have more voluntary reading during their childhood. They have had reading models in their homes and easy access to books. The correlation between voluntary reading activity and reading performance is significant.

Can Voluntary Reading be Forced by Law?

No law can make you a better reader, but laws can make favorable conditions for reading. By promoting public library service to children and school

libraries, the government and the municipal authority can make books easily accessible for children. In Norway we have a long tradition of library services to children. School libraries used to be legislated by the Library Act, but since 1985 they are legislated by the Act concerning primary and lower secondary education.

The School Act, #10, states: "The schools shall have a library and a person who is responsible for the library service. The school library shall have both a pedagogical and a general cultural function and must have permanently established cooperation with the public library in the municipality." The Library Act of 1985, #6, has a paragraph corresponding to that of the School Act about cooperation:

Cooperation with school libraries in the municipality shall be ensured by means of agreements, and by placing the professional expertise of the public library at the disposal of the school authorities in the municipality. The Ministry shall issue guidelines for such cooperation.

The Ministry has issued guidelines that were revised in 1995. The objectives are:

- to give children the best possible library service based on quality, variety, and current interest;
- to coordinate the optimal use of the municipal resources.

The guidelines for cooperation between public and school libraries are based on the requirements of law and the experience gained through different cooperation projects. They recommend a coordination committee with representatives from the schools and public libraries. This committee has the responsibility to:

- continuously analyze and evaluate the library service for children and young adults in the municipality;
- secure optimal library service to children and young adults;
- point out sectors for joint activities and make plans for these activities;
- coordinate resources, introduce practical exchange of information;
- draft a proposal for an agreement between the public and school libraries on their cooperation tasks.

The revision of the School and the Library Acts and the guidelines were made in a period when the economy in Norway was very strong. Now our economy is weaker and the library budgets are smaller. However, during these 10 years more than 200 municipal cooperation agreements have been made.

Cooperation in Bærum

Bærum is the municipality with the closest cooperation between school library and public library in Norway. This cooperation dates back to 1973, years before the cooperation paragraphs in the Library Act and the School Act were drafted.

Bærum is a neighboring municipality to our capital, Oslo. It is a high-income area with almost 93,000 inhabitants, and it has a public library and school system of high standard. The central library is located in the center of the community, and its four branches are staffed with trained children's librarians.

The school library system is one of the best in the country. Bærum is the only municipality with trained librarians at all 33 schools. Our first cooperation agreement was signed and approved by our politicians in 1992. It contained a detailed working plan for 1992-1994, and a new plan has been accepted for 1995-1997.

The local objectives are:

- all children in Bærum shall know their school library and their local library before they finish their primary school;
- The school librarians and the children's librarians shall provide the children and young adults with literature, other medias, etc., through their expertise in their field;
- through the cooperating library system, the children shall develop an understanding of reading and its enjoyment, develop their creative and information skills, and grow intellectually by reading for pleasure and knowledge;
- the public and school libraries shall not replace each other, but be a supplement to each other.

How Do the Libraries Cooperate?

The public library has a special department for service to the schools. The School Department is located at the central library. The librarian's salary is paid by the public library, and the clerk's by the school authorities, who also provide funding for the special book collection/stock.

The School Department is really a joint venture between the school and the public library. It buys class sets of fiction books and the schools borrow them whenever needed.

The School Department also has sets of nonfiction related to the curriculum. The local school library may have one or two copies of the books, but if they need more, they may order them from the School Department. This is an economical arrangement for the municipality, and the demand for book loans is constantly increasing (1994 35,000 loans). The audiovisual learning material is centralized in a special department in the school administration.

Teachers who wish to promote reading by having a classroom library can order such libraries from the School Department. The classroom libraries contain 30-40 titles suited for the different grades. It is impossible to meet the increasing demand for the classroom libraries, especially for the lower grades. Silent reading is becoming an important part of the teaching of reading.

When the schools have special projects, they can order materials from the School Department. If the School Department does not have enough suitable books, they borrow supplementary books from the public library and send them to the schools. The School Department mainly operates through the school librarians, but the teachers may also order direct.

The national curriculum gives directions for use of literature in the learning process and for reading for pleasure. In addition to the national curriculum, Bærum has local educational plans that emphasize the importance of fiction books and reading time during school hours. The school librarians participate actively in the educational program and cooperate closely with the teachers.

Local Cooperation

The school librarian also cooperates with the children's librarian at the local branch of the public library. The branches are responsible for the schools in their district, and the librarians working with children meet at least once a year to discuss joint projects and cooperative tasks, which may include reading projects, book weeks, author visits, and exhibitions.

If a class wishes to meet an author, the public library usually arranges the meeting at the library and pays half the cost. This is a popular cooperation that even includes theatrical performances at the library. On the other hand, when the schools have prepared a performance based on books, they may offer it to the library, who will invite an audience. The audience can be elderly people, other classes, or local nursery schools.

All grades 3 and 7 students are invited to the local branch of the public library for information sessions. They are introduced to the music department and to the local history department, and they have book talks. In this way all children in the municipality are introduced to the public library and get acquainted with the children's librarians.

When the schools have book weeks or reading projects, the local children's librarian is often asked to come to the school to give talks or discuss literature with the students. It is always stimulating to have people visiting the school; it makes a break in ordinary school life.

Two of the library branches have projects for children in kindergarten (6 years old) to improve their language ability before starting school. The objective is to prevent reading problems later. Cooperation between the school library and the public library in Bærum is not restricted to the cultural field. School libraries with computing facilities can be connected free of charge to the database at the public library.

Conclusion

The number of books borrowed by children in the municipality of Bærum is higher than the Norwegian average, 26.4 books versus 16.4 books per child. The impact of voluntary reading is probably reflected in the good reading

ability of the children of Bærum, which has been revealed in national reading tests. The cooperation between the school and the public library has made books more accessible to the children. We think that accessibility and stimulation are the main factors in promoting the enjoyment of reading.

Facts About Norway

Norway has 4 million citizens. The country is divided into 20 counties and 440 municipalities. The Library Act of 1947 stated that all municipalities should have a public library and all schools must have a school library.

Reference

Elley, W.B. (1992). *How in the world do students read? IEA study of reading literacy*. New York: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.