
Library Partnerships in the Netherlands

Lourense H. Das

LWSVO, Dutch Association of School Librarianship, Netherlands

Major changes in philosophy and organization of the Dutch educational system, coupled with the emergence of information technology, have strongly influenced the development of school libraries in the Netherlands. Public libraries and school libraries often work together to develop services and materials for schools, leading more recently to the establishment of joint services and facilities. This article provides an overview of developments in the last decade. Although experience demonstrates that there are advantages and disadvantages in the formation of school and public library partnerships, the specific role and requirements of school libraries needs to remain as the key focus in these partnerships.

Introduction

For decades, many public libraries in the Netherlands have shared their information resources, facilities, expertise, and personnel with schools. Most of the time, this cooperation has been based on the resources and facilities that the public libraries have had to offer rather than on the particular learning support needs of the school. Yet, as stated in the IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto (<http://www.iasl-slo.org>) for school libraries, "Where the school library shares facilities and/or resources with another type of library, such as a public library, the unique aims of the school library must be acknowledged and maintained."

Although this has not been the case in the past, the situation in relation to school libraries in the Netherlands is now changing and is doing so in response to a major overhaul of the school system in the country.

Educational Changes

Changes in the Dutch school system since the 1980s have been made in response to perceived problems of students' ability to continue further education successfully in universities and higher vocational courses: forums that require skills in independent learning and research. Consultation between the Ministry of Education and the universities led to a decision to update the education system in secondary schools, particularly given the emergence of information technology and its new place in the curriculum.

As a result, completely new programs of study were introduced.

1. The Basisvorming was introduced in 1991, the De Tweede Fase was introduced in 1996, finally followed by the Voorbereidend Middelbaar Beroeps Onderwijs (VMBO) in 2001. Dutch education now includes primary education (4-12 years of age), followed by three types of secondary education:

- a. junior general and prevocational secondary education (VMBO): four years;
- b. senior general secondary education, Hoger Algemeen Voorbereidend Onderwijs (HAVO): five years;
- c. pre-university education, Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs (VWO): six years.

Of interest in this new framework are the comprehensive options available to students and the gradual transition to independent learning integrated into the final stages of secondary education. In both HAVO and VWO, the last two to three years of the education framework sees students working the so-called Second Phase (Tweede Fase). In this period, students are expected to study independently, while the teachers take on the role of learning coaches. Students no longer attend regular class lessons, these having been changed to lectures, with several hours per week being reserved for self-tuition. Also in the course of the VMBO, students are generally working more and more independently at their own pace and learning level (Weeber & Ahlers, 1994).

The three new educational systems required much curriculum change and led to much discussion in schools. Although the government remains convinced of the advantages of the new system, teachers have not always been as comfortable with the changes for a variety of reasons. They have criticized the government for providing insufficient funds to implement the new systems successfully given the need to invest in new materials, curriculum methods, and facilities.

School Libraries in the New Educational Agenda

Nevertheless, one great advantage of the new education system was the incentive it gave for developing new school library services, recognizing the role they play in supporting the independent inquiry of autonomous learners and their acquisition of critical and metacognitive thinking skills. Prior to implementation of the new education systems, few secondary schools had their own library with professional staff. Most secondary schools placed no priority on the foundation of a professional school library. However, with the impetus of these educational changes, coupled with recognition of a need to integrate information and communications technology (ICT) into the learning experience of students, many secondary schools have taken the initiative of developing a completely new school [library] media center (schoolmediatheek).

Although the need for well-equipped school media centers was embraced, much work was involved. Yet there were no extra funds, no trained school library personnel (teacher librarians being practically unknown in the Netherlands), no standards, and no facilities.

An avenue for assistance in this crisis came when, for the first time, the ministerial responsibilities for education, science, and culture were amal-

gamated, and public libraries and schools became the responsibility of one ministry. The agenda for the development of cooperation and partnerships between public libraries and school media centers was now in place. While teachers were taking refresher courses in education, school buildings were rebuilt to create rooms for independent learning. At the same time, cabling and installation of computer and other digital facilities were carried out, and new school media centers with information resources, Internet access, and CD-ROMs were planned. Last but not least, professional school library staff had to be found. Schools needed as much help as possible at a time when public libraries were encouraged by the now combined Ministry for Education, Science, and Culture to develop materials and services for schools.

For example, in 1998, the Ministry provided the Association for Reading (<http://www.lezen.nl>) with a substantial amount of money to undertake the project School Libraries in the Year 2000. Teachers and school and public librarians were challenged in the project to develop materials and services suitable for school use to enhance literacy and learning. Indeed, some of these materials are still in regular use or under continual development and improvement.

Collaboration and Partnerships in Practice

Although these developments were of significant importance for the status of school library media centers, it was noted that professional understanding of the nature and place of school librarianship varied between school and public librarians and their professional associations.

Representatives from public libraries stated that managing a school media center was not the core business of the school. (Hoogenboezem, 1999a, 1999b). Some school librarians found themselves sidelined, finding that school administrators were consulting with the local public library without their knowledge. Similarly, plans for a combined school media center-public library might be developed without consultation with the school librarian. The emerging notion that a school library media center was a waste of energy and funds and that it was more economical to establish just one library to serve the two functions is understandable, particularly when many school library collections were out of date, with up to 90% of the collection considered unsuitable for use. Public librarians believed that they had the expertise required to develop school library collections.

Nevertheless, as the budgets for schools and public libraries are not growing, but merely under continual monitoring and review, the ongoing opportunities for successful cooperation and partnership remain. With a more student-centered approach to learning that focuses on independent research and lifelong learning, the change in the organization of schools, school buildings, and facilities demands a new attitude toward the availability of school library services.

As a result, school librarians and administrators sought some guidelines for forging successful partnerships between school library media centers and public libraries, which took note of the positive and negative considerations involved.

Guidelines for Partnership and Collaboration

The following points summarize the key considerations involved in partnership and collaboration in the Dutch experience.

Management and Development

1. The core business of a public library differs from the core business of a school library media center.
2. The school has its own special requirements for the collection of the school media center. This collection is different from the collection in a public library in that each collection is a reflection of the profile of the library users. Besides its educational function, the public library has an important recreational function, as opposed to the function of the school media center, which is a special library with a special group of users and a specialized collection. The school media center has a distinctive supporting role in education and is also an educational instrument in itself.
3. The identity and ethos of a school will be reflected in the contents of the library collection. Sometimes this can be incompatible with the function of the public library, for example, when a school is based on specific religious, philosophical, or social principles.

Quality of Services

1. In the Netherlands, there is a broad network of public libraries. These work for a specific village, region, or province. If a school library is to serve a regional function, this can cause problems for some pupils and the school because collections and services must be level across a broad group.
2. The collections in public libraries do not usually support the specific educational aims of the school.
3. The public library is often not committed enough to the school, particularly when it serves several schools in its working area. Each school has its own ideas and ways of working, making it difficult for the public library to serve the various school cultures and requirements.
4. The purpose and functioning of the school library media center is clear and accessible for students and readily associated with the teachers with whom they work daily. Similarly, school media center staff are able to take a close interest in the students and be a part of the educational activities of the school.

5. It can be difficult for schools to transfer their responsibility for a well-equipped school media center to a public library. During school hours, students are not permitted to leave the school premises.
6. It can be difficult for public library staff to support students with the specific tasks they have to complete and the skills they have to learn, as they have no teacher training and are not involved in teaching students.
7. In the broader context, public libraries are widely spread all over the country, with extensive collections and facilities. They represent an important source of information and a large pool of professional staff. Consideration should be given to drawing benefit from these resources appropriately, particularly special services and materials support for schools.

Administration

1. Cooperation or partnership between school and public libraries demands an enormous amount of collaborative effort on both sides. Time must be spent in meetings, recording procedure manuals, dividing funds, and dividing responsibility. Whatever the complexity, the final result must be to serve the needs of all members of the public and school community.
2. Complexities will arise in the cataloguing and indexing requirements of each partner. Careful planning and consideration of the learning needs of students must be taken into account.

Partnerships in Action

Examples of partnerships in action show that various approaches and solutions are possible and that each scenario has positive and negative aspects. The following cases, based on published articles and personal experience, demonstrate the range of possibilities for school libraries in the Netherlands.

Case 1

Public libraries in cities like Rotterdam and Eindhoven with a department of educational services can provide schools with professional librarians on a secondment basis. In Rotterdam, the school librarians are employed by the City Library, which has contracts with several schools in its working area. In these contracts, the status of the librarian, the responsibilities, and conditions of employment are determined by the City Library.

At one school in Eindhoven, the school itself employed a head school media specialist. For the various departments in the school and their school media centers, the public library provides the school with professional librarians who function under the responsibility of the head school media specialist, but are employed by the public library as established in the initial contract.

In Rotterdam, the public library is a city library, which means that the city council manages and is responsible for it. All employees of these libraries are civil servants. This is contrary to most situations in the Netherlands where the public library is managed by a foundation subsidized by the city council. Although this can be a useful way to solve staffing problems, there are disadvantages: (a) the librarian is less involved with the school; (b) the contracts are for a fixed period, which means that policy-making in the long run is not always easy; and (c) it is expensive for schools to pay for these agency services from the public library.

The latest development to address the issue of cost is that the provincial library organization in the western Netherlands (Probiblio <http://www.probiblio.nl>) has set up an agency department for all the libraries, schools, and other organizations in its region. Thus they can work more efficiently and cost-effectively.

Case 2

The project School Libraries in the Year 2000 has been of great importance to the Dutch Association for School Librarianship, the LWSVO (<http://www.digischool.nl/lwsvo>).

In 2000, a grant to the Association enabled the establishment of a policy office and a part-time policy officer. As part of this project, a digital office was set up for librarians, teachers, and school administrators where they can address all their questions about school libraries and school librarianship. For 24 hours a day, seven days a week, the questions can be posted on a special Internet site. Professionals aim to answer these questions within 24 hours.

At first, the Provincial Public Library Organization (PBC) ran this office. Although the LWSVO protested because they were passed over, it was determined that the PBC should run this office. After a year, the work was evaluated by the NBLC (Dutch National Association for Public Libraries), and the results were devastating: the questions were either not answered, incompletely answered, or badly answered. This evaluation was not surprising for the LWSVO. Because they knew that the digital office was not working well, their policy officer set up their own help desk.

In that same period, it became clear and was acknowledged that cooperation and partnership between the NBLC and the LWSVO is of vital importance for the development of school libraries in the Netherlands. Both organizations had new policy officers, and these two, not burdened by events of the past, decided to work together and set up a new digital office: Loket Schoolmediatheek. The NBLC has the funds, and the LWSVO has the expertise. In spring 2001, a contract was signed for one year (and extended for the year 2002) between the two organizations. The LWSVO closed their own help desk and now refer inquiries to the new facility. They handle the questions from school librarians; the NBLC handles the questions from

public libraries; and in some cases they work closely together to answer "brain-crackers." In 2001, 33 questions were handled by the LWSVO; by October 2002, 53 questions were handled. The questions ranged from "Where can I find information about wireless internet?" "Can you give advice about indexing children's literature by theme and level?" "Is it allowed to install remote-control software on the school media center computers to check pupils' activities?" to "Do you have addresses of institutes providing professional development to school media centre staff?"

The NBLC has started building what they call a virtual library (<http://www.bibliotheek.nl>). For the future, it has been determined that the digital office will find a place there, but meanwhile, the digital office can be found at <http://www.schoolmediatheek.nl>.

Besides their partnership in managing the digital office, other partnerships or cooperative projects are on the way. Both organizations will be present collectively at the Dutch National Education Fair 2003 (<http://www.not.nl>) to be held in January 2003 in Utrecht. The LWSVO has promised to contribute to the virtual library by placing material (such as lists of evaluated resources and children's literature for certain groups) at the disposal of the virtual library.

For the past few years, the LWSVO has contributed to seminars and workshops organized by the NBLC and contributes to the development of the workbook *School Media Centres in Secondary School* by writing and updating articles and materials. This workbook is published by Biblion (<http://www.biblion.nl>), a former department of NBLC, although it was privatized some years ago.

The relationship between the two organizations is maintained through regular meetings between the two policy officers, where they discuss all matters concerning school librarianship, professional development, developing materials, and cooperation between public libraries and school media centers in general.

Case 3

A public library and school library are combined in one building in Leek (Groningen) in the northern Netherlands.

In 2000, two separate schools, the Nienoord College and Waezenburg, built a new school together for 3,000 pupils. The building plans for the new school included a joint school library. The new school building was situated in a new part of town. Soon it turned out that the costs for a school library were too high. The local public library was interested in establishing a branch library in the suburb, and it was decided to investigate the possibility of a combined school and public library facility. The city council supported the idea as long as a permanent partnership was established.

As a result, the school library has become a part of the public library, with many benefits. Both schools merged into one combined school (Scholen-

gemeenschap), and the school computers have become part of the public library, called *Studiepunt Leek*.

As part of this large operation, the school has implemented some innovative solutions. The various sectors each have their own building, with their own fixed team of teachers (which is unusual in the Netherlands). In the building for HAVO and VWO, where this approach has been adopted, special places (study corners) for individual study and small-group work have been built. All buildings have a ratio of one computer to seven pupils.

When pupils are allowed to work individually, they can go to the school library (public library) to work and study in the *studiepunt*, where 24 computers are available. Some of the pupils come together with their teachers; some come individually to work and study. At the *studiepunt*, a help-desk officer is also available for the pupils. All the computers have access to the Internet and the school network. The pupils can be monitored with remote-control software from the circulation desk. A few computers with Internet access are available to visitors to the public library, and these are part of the public library inventory.

According to reviews of the library and the school, the partnership is valuable for both parties for the following reasons (Grin, 2000).

- extended opening hours have become possible for the public library;
- more staff are available;
- the public library is responsible for professional collection development;
- a help desk is available for pupils even after school hours;
- the *studiepunt* is managed by a professional school librarian;
- the staff can be consulted for information literacy instruction every day from 10.30-11.30 a.m.;
- promotion of reading and special activities are organized and are part of the package;
- pupils have access to an extended collection, and through the public library also have access to the collections of other libraries through Interlibrary Loan.

The partnership is based on a contract, with clear arrangements about responsibilities for the school and the public library. Nevertheless, some disadvantages have also been noted.

- Due to a lack of staffing, there is not enough time to help students and guide them. This highlights a major difference between public libraries and school libraries. In school libraries, staff with educational skills are needed to assist and guide the pupils. Although it is recognized that through the partnership overall staff numbers would be higher, the skills needed in school libraries are nevertheless different from those needed in public libraries.
- Other visitors to the public library, especially preschoolers and elderly people, find the presence of so many youngsters and teenagers annoying.

- Students need a specialist approach: when asking questions, they should be guided to the answer, not given the answer directly, so that they will “learn how to learn.” Public libraries are not accustomed to assisting their users in this way.
- Students can be noisy and leave rubbish behind.
- In the evenings and during school holidays, the system administrator is not available.

In fact, the guidelines for cooperation between the library and the school are under continual review and construction. As they worded it themselves, “a lot of things have to be ‘invented’ because there is no pilot to refer too” (Grin, 2000).

Case 4

In the Netherlands, every city with more than 32,000 inhabitants has its own public library. These libraries are in many cases managed by a foundation. The city where the public library is situated subsidizes the public library. As every city sets its own policy, the funds for public libraries can vary from city to city.

In villages and towns with fewer inhabitants, the public library is managed by a provincial public library organization called the Provinciale Bibliotheek Centrale (PBC). Every province has its own PBC. In one province in north and south Holland, they share one PBC after a merger a few years ago. Also, in some provinces, the PBC works in close cooperation with the capital’s public library as in Groningen and Zeeland.

Independent public libraries are restricted to their own city area. Outside this area the PBC is responsible for library services. The PBC is not allowed to work in cities with an independent public library without consultation and permission from this public library. In some cases, this makes it difficult to operate, especially after the many efforts to create combined schools (as described above). Some of these combined schools operate in different cities, and their working area crosses the boundaries of the PBC or local public libraries.

However, it is worth looking at one case where the local public library, the PBC, and a secondary school have overcome these obstacles and have been able to work closely together to support the needs of the school.

In 1999, the Principal of Groenewald Scholengemeenschap in Stein, a city in the south Netherlands, approached the local public library and asked for help and guidance in establishing a new school library. The combined school has two buildings in two cities—Beek and Stein—with 370 and 900 pupils. After some meetings with the local public library of Stein and Symbiose, the PBC of Limburg, a contract was signed where all agreements were laid down. A team was formed with representatives from the school including the school librarian, the public library, and Symbiose. This team started by drafting a job description and a profile for a professional school librarian.

This was found in the person of a professional librarian with 20 years of working experience in schools and public libraries. A collection profile was drawn, the collections of the public library and the school were refined, and a list for the basis of a collection was established.

It was decided that the school would use the same catalogue software as the public library so that the pupils would not have to use different systems. All pupils would also be able to use the facilities in the public library with their school library card. A policy paper provides guidelines for implementation by the public library as well as the school library. Information literacy lessons and reading promotion projects were also developed. All this work was undertaken in the space of one year.

The school librarian works 28 hours a week. A secretary assists her for 12 hours, and she also has eight volunteers. The library is open every weekday from 8:30 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. The new library is a success, but according to the librarian and her assistants, there is also a downside to the project due to lack of staffing. As a large number of pupils visit the library, the librarian spends all her time helping them. Consequently, there is little time left for administrative tasks, which may well affect the effectiveness of the library in the long term.

Further Directions

The cases described above provide a broad outline of the problems and solutions found in some partnerships in action. In the process, these partnerships have revealed some important issues for consideration in the context of provision of school library services in the Netherlands.

Being pragmatic, schools have not always wished to invest in a school library media center for the right economic and educational reasons. It is easy to forget that a school library media center is an indispensable educational provision, especially in the light of the new educational goals in VMBO, HAVO, and VWO. Schools also have a tendency not to invest in full-time professional school librarians. They like to leave the staffing to the public library, which in the long run is not likely to lead to the development of effective professional school libraries given their specialist education focus.

Pupils, and in many cases also the teachers, must be taught strategies in information literacy. They must learn to use information and become critical thinkers and information users. At the moment, there are still no standards or guidelines for school libraries and information literacy lessons in the Netherlands.

Librarians in public libraries have no pedagogic and didactic skills, and without standards and special training programs for librarians, it will be more and more difficult to make up for the growing shortage of school librarians. At the same time, it is a critical to meet the learning needs of students. In particular, many schools in the Netherlands are large combined

schools. In these large schools, and indeed in all schools, the sensitive task of meeting the range of learning needs and mentoring and modeling to the students cannot be left entirely to public libraries and librarians.

In Dutch school libraries, the librarians often complain about the lack of interest exhibited by the teachers. The pupils are sent to the library to work and learn, and as teacher-librarians are practically unknown in the Netherlands, many librarians face problems in guiding and teaching the pupils. The psychological and sometimes physical distance between schools and public libraries can intensify the lack of interest: teachers do not feel responsible for their pupils once they are out of the school or out of sight. A school library in the school (physically) and in the educational system (pedagogically) can reduce this effect.

Finally, we see that a partnership between schools and public libraries can contribute to the establishment of effective and efficient school libraries. Public libraries have much to offer, but schools must become clearer in identifying their own requirements. The school library is an essential part of the educational system, with its own demands, its own aims, and its own goals. These requirements should never be out of sight in a partnership for provision of library and information services.

References

- Grin, Gerda. (2000). Voor vergaande samenwerking tussen bibliotheek en school moet je naar Leek gaan! *Studiehuis*, 3(6), 356.
- Hoogenboezem, Iet. (1999a). De mediatheek, een onmisbaar middel. *Mediatheekreeks*, 6. Tilburg: MesoConsult.
- Hoogenboezem, Iet. (1999b) Samenwerking tussen mediatheken en lokale bibliotheken. *Mediatheekreeks*, 8. Tilburg: MesoConsult.
- Weeber, Frans, & Ahlers, Jos. (1994). *Going to school in the Netherlands* (Janey Tucker, Trans.). Den Haag: LDC.

Bibliography

- Aben, Jos. (2001). Welke problemen lossen we op voor het onderwijs? *Bibliotheekblad*, 5(17), 14.
- Bartels, Hans. (2000). De mediatheek in het studiehuis: Voorwaarden op een rij. *Bibliotheekblad Vakinformatie* (Rubriek), 4(7), 32.
- Bartels, Hans. (2000). De collectie in beeld: Collectiebeleid ten behoeve van de schoolmediatheek van het Agnieten College, Locatie Meander (ACIM). *Bibliotheekblad Vakinformatie*, (Rubriek), 4(2), 32.
- Digitaal Loket Schoolmediatheek. (2001). *Bibliotheekblad*, 5(14), 4.
- Eggink, Gonnje. (2000). Gezocht: Zelfstandige, flexibele, voortvarende schoolmediathecarissen. *Bibliotheekblad*, 4(25/26), 22.
- Eggink, Gonnje. (2000). Hans Klumpers: mediathecaris is scharnierpunt tussen docent en leerling. *Bibliotheekblad*, 4(25/26), 26.
- Hoogenboezem, Iet. (1998). Aanschaffen of uitbesteden? Het proces van collectievorming in het VO. *Mediatheekreeks*, 4. Tilburg: MesoConsult.
- Hoogenboezem, Iet. (1999). Personeel in de mediatheek. *Mediatheekreeks*, 5. Tilburg: MesoConsult.
- Hoogenboezem, Iet. (2002). De mediatheek in het nieuwe vmbo is een virtuele leeromgeving. *VMBO-reeks* 15. Tilburg: MesoConsult.

- Hoogenboezem, Iet, Velthuizen, Elly, & Zuylen, Jos. (1998). Mediatheekbeleid in de school. *Mediatheekreeks*, 2. Tilburg: MesoConsult.
- Juist, Niels. (2001a). Virtuele mediatheek moet samenwerking met scholen verbeteren. *Bibliotheekblad*, 5(20), 16.
- Juist, Niels. (2001b). Samenwerking met voortgezet onderwijs? *Bibliotheekblad*, 5(17), 17.
- Schipper, Anne. (2000). De mediatheek is letterlijk en figuurlijk het hart van het studiehuis: Interview met Chantal Boesveld. *Studiehuis*, 3(4), 220.
- Trots en twijfel op jubileum LWSVO. (2002). *Bibliotheekblad*, 5(9/10), 33.
- van der Zanden, Angeliek. (2001). Project "3 in 1": Cultuur- en media-educatie voor het voortgezet onderwijs. *Studiehuis*, 4(1), 6.
- van Tiggelen, Nicoline. (2002). Elly Cuijpers: "Scholen zien meer dan voorheen de voordelen van samenwerking." *Bibliotheekblad*, 6(2), 22.

Author Note

Lourense H. Das graduated in library sciences (BA) in 1976. Since then, she has worked in various school or educational libraries: higher vocational education, primary schools, university, and secondary schools. In 1998, she founded Meles Meles School Library Service, a private organization for school libraries and school librarians. Meles Meles has developed products for school libraries and school librarians, public libraries, and educational institutions. Meles Meles advises, guides, and coaches schools and librarians in the field of school librarianship. Lourense has been a part-time policy officer for the Dutch Organization for School Librarians (LWSVO) since October 2000.