

# **The pedagogically working school library**

## **A picture of the Danish school libraries**

*By Tom Jørgensen*

The Danish School libraries are undergoing rapid changes these years. In compliance with the new legislation of 1993 the object and identity of the school libraries have changed. Consequently the Danish Ministry of Education has published a number of thematic booklets and granted funds in support of experiments and developmental studies as a means of realising the intentions of the legislation.

In this article I shall first give a description of the development which the legislators are aiming for. Subsequently I shall give a brief account of the new learning principles that are gaining more and more ground in the Danish schools and school libraries. Finally I shall give concrete illustrations of the ways in which the new school libraries operate.

### **The pedagogically working school library**

The legislation concerning the Danish Folkeskolen stipulates that the school library has to function as a 'pedagogic service centre'. The use of that term is an indication of a wish to consolidate the pedagogical functions of the school library as a part of the general activities of the school. The interplay between the school and the school library must be reinforced and developed in such a way that the school library becomes an extension of the classroom. The Ministry of Education's booklet from 1996 "Skolebiblioteker og undervisningsmidler" [School libraries and teaching materials] talks about "the pedagogically working school library". Furthermore it stresses that "the school library is a major element in the planning of teaching, and part of the learning activities must be carried out in an interplay with the school library".

On a concrete level, this means that the operation of the school library must be adapted to working in projects, interdisciplinary teaching and the demand for differentiated education.

Evidently the co-operation between teachers and school librarians must be further intensified as it is outlined in the curricula for the different subjects. E.g. it says the following about the reading skills in Danish:

*The incentive for individual reading must not stop, because in that case many of the pupils drop out. During the whole school life, time must be allotted for visits at the library. The Danish teacher and the librarian have a common responsibility for keeping the pupils in the world of books and simultaneously be showing them new ways.*

### **New learning principles**

The new learning principles entail new ways of contemplating learning and teaching: There is a movement away from the notion of teaching as transmission of information from a teacher to some pupils. Today learning is seen as an active process: as a 'knowledge construction', in which both the pupils and the teacher are participants. Hence, learning is concerned with the pupils' playing, experimentation, thinking and communication, both in the learning activities taking place in the school library and in the lessons in class. E.g. the curriculum in Danish states the following about the linguistic subjects: The pupils' understanding of language must not be tied up in rules and timetables. Language should be exciting. Consequently the teaching has to build on the pupils'

experiments and playing with language in addition to their endeavour to develop a language of their own - and not least on discussions about language produced by themselves and others. This process of 'knowledge construction' may be planned in a relatively stringent and target-oriented manner, e.g. by letting the teacher pick a couple of short texts, in which the pupils first swap existing words with new ones, change the sentence construction etc. Subsequently they reflect on the impact the changes have had on the text.

Learning may also be less formal and less targeted. As stated by Dr. Ross Todd stated in his lecture at the IASL Conference in New Zealand, July 2001: Much learning takes place informally and incidentally: Activities beyond the classroom enrich formal learning experiences. In continuance of this Dr Todd suggests:

Create a physical environment that is an open invitation for mystery, intrigue, discovery - where accidental discovery is highly likely: i.e. an invitation to dance the "knowledge dance".

As I shall endeavour to show in the following, the school library may indeed constitute such an environment. Let me introduce two developmental cases from the sphere of the Danish school libraries.

### **Examples of "knowledge dance" in the school library**

The project "The living school library" is a local project that has only been implemented in a single local area. However, by means of distributing information material, it is the intention to make it possible for other school libraries in Denmark to copy the idea.

The theme of the project was "the good story", and its aim was for the pupils to experience a cultural unity and increase their fondness for reading. The method was to offer the pupils a number of experiences that stimulated their different senses and feelings by working with a wide-ranging assortment of media.

One of the activities from the project was "Horror and fear" in which pupils from the 9th form worked with the horror genre in a creative way. This entailed the fitting out of a 'Horror Corner' at the school library, in which rats, spiders and the like from the biology collection were put on display. The pupils from 4th form were invited to spend the night at the school library, where horror-stories accompanied by scary music were read aloud - probably boosting the pupils' desire to read more from the same genre.

Another activity was called "The horse in the mirror", where the novel by that name was read aloud at the library, while the pupils were creating pictures and poems etc. with a jumping-off point in the story. Thus, the story has served as a common starting point for the pupils' own experiments. The reflection, which has emerged in this connection, is precisely the spot, where the pupils have become more knowledgeable with regard to the text - and themselves.

The second project, I would like to introduce, covers the whole country and has been organised in a partnership between The Organisation of Danish School Libraries and the Danish Ministry of Education. In this case I have myself had the role of a sparring partner for the co-ordinating group behind the project.

The title "VOV" is an acronym for Viden, Oplevelse, Vækst [Knowledge, Experience, Growth]. A central goal for the project has been to develop creative and imaginative rooms for learning at the school libraries. The intention has been to give the pupils experiences and the possibility for personal growth - the goal was not the acquisition of any specific, pre-defined subject matter. Simultaneously, the intention was that the pupils - on their own - should learn more by using the range of offers from the school library.

The allotted space does only permit me to tell about two subsidiary projects.

The administrative area of Copenhagen has organised two projects with the title "Magic Caves". As the title indicates, the overall theme is "magic", and it is structured in the following way:

At the school library three tents are set up: The Reading Cave, The Sensory Cave and The Fantasy Cave. The reading cave is furnished with a lot of soft cushions where you may lie about and read. The light is dimmed, but small reading spots are scattered all over. There is a box with a wide-ranging selection of books: fairy-tales, novels, short stories, comic books, but also non-fiction dealing with subjects touching magic, witchcraft and uncanny goings-on. Furthermore there is a CD player in the cave so the kids can hear a variety of stories.

The Sensory Cave is equipped with objects that speak to the senses. Here you can see, feel, and smell strange things. E.g. there is a light-tunnel, a smell-panel, CD's with music and sounds, kaleidoscopes and books with stereograms - things that all tickle the imagination and stimulate the urge

for learning and experience.

The Fantasy Cave is the place where you may dress up as a magician, a witch or a wizard. Here you find capes, fancy dress, wigs, theatre make-up, glove puppets, magic wands and similar kinds of magic paraphernalia. In addition there must be various adventure board games with dragons, castles, princes and princesses, computer-games, and an adventure-film on video.

So the pupils are working with magic in various ways (reading, telling, listening, acting etc.), and in that process they are seeking information, reflecting and building new knowledge alone and in collaboration with others. They are increasing their skills - and simultaneously having a great time. That is why they also are developing a desire to learn more.

"Darkness" was the theme of the other subsidiary project

The school library is furnished with a sensory-room with sounds, pictures, books etc., where the pupils are going to work with the phenomenon of darkness from three different angles: A magic approach, a scientific one and an artistic one.

Old myths in which darkness play a particular part are read aloud to the pupils and they also read some myths themselves. Darkness is representative of chaos, danger, death, and grief - but simultaneously it carries the seeds of light and goodness. The pupils make enquiries about these aspects and subsequently work with the myths in various ways.

In the scientific part of the room the pupils gauge the light, make sprouting experiments with cress (in various degrees of darkness), learn about nocturnal animals, experiment with the senses in the dark and a lot more.

### **A visualisation of the future school library**

To me the VOV-project is a unique and exiting visualisation of how all the magnificent intentions may be implemented in a concrete manner: The project has shown how the school libraries in a direct way may take part in the process of learning, thus becoming more than just a collection of materials. They have shown how the teaching may be planned, so the pupils build up knowledge instead of just being subjected to transmission of information from a teacher, standing behind a desk. They have also shown how all the senses and 'intelligences' of the pupils may be explored to give the pupils a more challenging and engaging experience - not an unimportant starting point for learning.

The school library of the future is beginning to take shape.

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The Centre for Children's Literature ([www.cfb.dk](http://www.cfb.dk)) is a research centre situated on the campus of the Danish University of Education. The aims of the centre are to do research into children's literature and to disseminate the findings, to take charge of the library's collection of children's literature and to run a school for authors of children's literature.

### **References**

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