

School library year plans

A way of implementing school strategy and meeting curriculum requirements

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*In Denmark there is a growing trend of school libraries and school librarians taking the lead and making year plans for school library activities, which include all grades and takes into account the curriculum of the different grades.
In Hillerødsholmskolen the school librarians issue a catalogue of activities at the beginning of each school year. For the school year of 2008/2009 the catalogue consisted of 29 pages and included 23 different activities.*

Year plans, Lesson plans, School development

Supporting school strategy

When the school management decides on a new school strategy to be implemented in the school it is crucial that they include the school library in their plans. The school library is the one institution within the school, which can reach all pedagogical personnel as well as the students. But how can the school library use its competencies to support school development? And how can the school library support the classroom teachers in meeting the curriculum requirements? Of course there are many ways to approach this, but a very efficient method to make sure that all grade levels and teachers will be involved in a new strategy is for the school library to have its own year plan. By doing this the school library can both support the school management and the curriculum of the individual classes. And if the year plan is planned right, it can include other school library activities such as information literacy, and thereby fulfill the school libraries own curriculum in itself.

When using a year plan for the school library, classroom teachers can easily include school library activities in their own planning. By publishing the year plan as a catalogue well in advance of the teachers planning, the school library staff can prompt the teachers to work with subjects related to the school strategy in a way, which is easy and demands a minimum of work for the teachers. In the example below we will look at different activities, which require various levels of participation from school library staff and classroom teachers. The school in question has issued a catalogue every year for several years, and both the teachers and the school management are very satisfied with the results.

The Catalogue

Hillerødsholmskolen in Hillerød Municipality north of Copenhagen is a public school with around 850 students between the age of 5 and 16. The school library staff includes three

trained school librarians, one IT specialist and a couple of part time helpers shelving books and doing other tasks.

School library curriculum in the catalogue

Weekly library class: All classes between kindergarten and 5th grade are offered a weekly library time, where they can have a story read to them, browse for books or do a little bit of reading – all with guidance from the school librarians.

Information literacy: Information literacy and library knowledge is mandatory in 2nd, 4th and 6th grade. It is up to the classroom teacher to plan when he or she wants these lessons to take place. The teaching of these skills is based upon whatever the class is working on at the selected time.

Media Education: In 3rd, 5th and 7th grade the students receive Media Education. Each class gets a two day course in a selected week. The school library staff prepares a course, but the teachers can put forth requests, if they need specific skills or if the students have already gone through the planned activities. Before these courses, the school library staff carries out courses for the teachers. This way the teachers can assist the students in their learning process and the school library staff ensures, that the teachers also have the competencies the students are getting.

IT course: A specific course is also mandatory for all 3rd grades. It is a basic course with an introduction to file and folder structure and learning how to create, save, open and copy files in different drives, folders and subfolders. The course consists of 6-7 lessons.

Search Skills: In 8th grade the students receive a course on technique and search skills. This is done in connection with a major project, which all students must do in 8th, 9th and 10th grade, and the grade of which will appear on their final transcripts. This project must be written within a specific subject decided by the classroom teacher, and the course planned by the school library is design to help the students find information about the sub-subjects they are interested in as well as helping them getting started on their project.

Project management: For 9th grade students the school library also offers a course on their major project. Over a couple of hours the school library staff gives an introduction to the project and how to do research and manage your time. Furthermore the school library also offers an information class for the relevant teachers every year. On the school library website teachers and students can always get information and inspiration from previous years.

Different levels of school library participation

For each grade the school library offers a number of activities. All of them are planned and prepared by the school librarians, but how much the school librarians participate in carrying out the activities varies. For some activities the students are brought to the school library or the school librarians come to the classroom and the librarians take care of all teaching. In other cases the teachers themselves take care of the teaching after instructions from the school librarian, and sometimes the actual teaching is a joint project between classroom teacher and school librarian.

School library activity: All 2nd grade classes at the school are invited to participate in a “Star race” organized by the school library. In the “Star race” the students are divided into

groups of four or five and together they have to find their way around the school and solve different tasks. Each task is situated at a post, where the participants are met by one or more older students. The older student(s) present the task to the group of 2nd graders. The task is to guess a children's book or a fairytale from a clue given in the form of a picture, a paragraph read aloud or something similar.

Cooperation activity: "Graphic novels" is a project invented by the school librarians and it is carried out in cooperation between the school librarians and the classroom teachers. The project runs over four weeks and is offered as a voluntary activity to all 5th grade classes. At the beginning of the project, the school librarians give an introduction to the genre of graphic novels. Then each class spends about three weeks reading and working with a variety of graphic novels. While this work goes on, the school librarians introduce the students to the school intranet as a tool of communication. They create a blog, where teachers and students communicate about the novels and the work they do with them. At the end of week three, each student must choose a graphic novel to work with on the school intranet. Here the students work with different tasks such as questionnaires, multiple choice quizzes and making websites. At last the students must explore each other's work on the intranet, solve the tasks, take the quizzes and so on. The school library has over 40 graphic novels in at least four titles.

Class room activity: Each year a national competition of writing a newspaper is carried out. The school library at Hillerødsholmskolen has decided that this activity should be mandatory for all 7th graders. The school library works as a contact between the national planners and the classes. The class and the classroom teacher must however do all planning and teaching themselves, but the school librarians prepare both teachers and students for the project. The students are introduced to the layout program Publisher and the teachers are invited to a meeting where they are prepared for the project.

Activities related to other subjects

In Denmark school librarians generally have a passion for literature and a result of this you often find a large amount of activities related to the subject Danish. However, it is important to offer activities that either collaborate with other subjects or offer cross subject collaboration. The school library at Hillerødsholmskolen has made an effort to pay attention to make projects for other subjects, but there is still not many offers for the scientific subjects.

Art detectives: The school library and the arts and crafts department have invested in both a Danish and an European art collection together. Even though these are much used, they can be used even more, and therefore the school library offers "Art detectives" to 5th grades. Some students will get tasks associated with the pictures and other students will work with "tableau vivante". The project is not about the specific artist(s), but more a hunt for details and interpretation of the pictures. Before the project starts, the class will be visited by the school's art expert, who gives an introduction to working with art in general and the pictures in question

The murder of Johanne Jensen: A few years ago one of the Danish TV channels produces a very popular and EMMY awarded crime show about a traveling group of police investigators. In English it is called "Unit One". Based upon this show, the students in the 6th grade have to put themselves in the police's place. A murder has been committed at the school, and the students must document and reconstruct the murder. In smaller groups they

must make a movie no longer than ten minutes about the murder using Movie Maker to edit it. The movie must include some of the movie clips and photos the “police” has taken. When the movie is finished the students can submit it to a competition held at the school, where the school librarians find the best criminal movie of the year. Part of the honor of winning is that the movie will be used in the teaching of movie editing in 5th grade.

Photo competition: 7th grade students can work with photography in cooperation with the school library. The school library announces a competition for the best photo within a specific theme, and the school library staff offers an introduction to photography. The students must then go out to the “field” and take beautiful and edgy pictures and then edit them in Paint Shop Pro. When the competition ends, all photos are displayed in the school library. This activity uses the skills the students have gained in Media Education in the 7th grade.

Melved – The case: This activity is for 8th grades and puts the students in the position of police investigators and forensic scientists. The students must make probable who is the killer in a murder case, based upon the given evidence. All activities are closely related to actual police work – from practical work with fingerprints to source critical evaluations of witness testimonies. This project is an obvious chance to do cross subject collaboration. It could include Danish, social studies, biology, math or physics. The Danish department and the school library have invested in the materials for the project together, which also includes a very good teacher’s guide. Before the project starts, the school library offers guidance in the planning of how many teachers, important specialist teachers, locations, computers, time, preparation and other things. The school library also offers a introduction meeting, where all teachers involved in the project must be present.

Palestine Conflicts: 8th grade students must pose as journalists and write articles about the conflict between Israel and Palestine. They must see the conflict from both sides and move around the different areas. This game about the Palestine conflict is groundbreaking and realistic, and participants find themselves in actual geographical locations. The student is challenged to reflect upon his or her own role in a real conflict. The game also has a website and consists of six themes: Military raids, checkpoints, settlements, martyrs, Hamas and the role of the media. Everything is in English and is a very good activity for English and social studies.

The impact

Besides from this the catalogue contains a number of other activities related to Danish and/or IT. It also contains a list of magazines the school library subscribes to, a list of afternoon courses offered to the teachers, an introduction to the school library on the Intranet and other relevant information.

Before the school librarians began making a catalogue of activities not many teachers signed up for projects planned by the school library. Even though the school librarians made an effort to inform teachers of the activities well before the class year plans were made, it seemed that the classroom teachers forgot or thought it to be confusing. The school librarians also found, that the teachers thought it would be too time consuming to participate in a school library project.

The school librarians decided to focus on projects that were ready for the teachers to take on, regardless of the level of participation from the school library. All projects had to be

approachable and provide the teachers with all necessary information. The meetings between teachers and school library staff prior to almost all activities in the catalogue fulfill this need.

The school management and the school library have decided together that the school librarians have mandate to decide which activities should be mandatory for students and teachers. It is also due to a very high level of understanding between the school library and the school management that students at Hillerødsholmskolen receive a high number of lessons in Information Literacy and IT skills in various forms. As a result the school library now has the opportunity to impact which themes get extra attention throughout the school year. As you flick through the catalogue it is clear that Hillerødsholmskolen have a strong focus on reading and teaching the students good IT skills. The cooperation between school management and school library makes it very easy to implement goals like improved reading scores and ICT implementation in all subjects. Each year, when the school librarians make the catalogue, they can create or further develop activities that support the vision of the school management and thereby reach the teachers without the school necessarily having to draw up new rules or guidelines for the teaching.

Today the activities planned and/or carried out by the school library are very popular amongst teachers, students and school management. The level of participation for the voluntary activities has increased dramatically since the school library started publishing them in a catalogue every spring. The school library reuses a number of activities each year, which makes the planning and preparation easier for them, but they also add new projects to keep all teachers and students interested.

Another result of the increased participation in projects and activities all students spend more time in the school library and with the school library staff and they feel even more comfortable visiting the school library both in class and during breaks and after school. The school librarians know the students better and have greater insight into what goes on in each classroom, and therefore they can offer even more qualified guidance to the students and teachers.

By having activities for all classes, the school library also has an outstanding opportunity to help the teachers meet the curriculum requirements. Part of the curriculum can be implemented into projects coordinated by the school library. This, in connection with the fact that the teachers are offered projects for the students without having to do the planning and maybe even getting a school librarian to do part of the teaching, frees time for the teachers to do other planning or to help and guide students to a greater extent than they would normally have time for in the classroom.

Published year plans for the school library offers a great opportunity for teachers, students, school management and the school library to get better and more qualified education. The school library becomes a more active partner in the school and teachers do not only get more help, they also have better opportunities to get acquainted with the competencies of the school library.

References

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<http://www.hillerodsholm.skoleintra.dk>

Level 4 heading (Biographical Notes)

Maria Eriksen Britt has been employed with The Municipal Association of School Libraries in Denmark for four years. She is in daily contact with different professionals and officials from municipalities in Denmark. She is also co-editor of and writer for the journal "Børn & Bøger".

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