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# A Good School Library



The Finnish National Board of Education

The School Library Association in Finland

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## A Good School Library

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School libraries featured in photographs  
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# Better school libraries for Reading Finland

The aim of the Reading Finland project, one of the top projects of the education administration, is to improve the reading and writing skills of pupils in both basic and upper secondary education. An effective way of reaching that goal is to update school libraries and to improve collaboration between school libraries and the municipal library.

Of all the participating municipalities 50 have decided to begin developing their school libraries. The school library network is becoming the largest topic network of the Reading Finland project. It seems that now at the beginning of the 21st century schools and municipalities have understood the significance and function of the school libraries in supporting teaching and learning as well as in developing the information management and reading and writing skills of the pupils.

There have been some promising and inspiring school library solutions in individual schools already. Some of the most active municipalities have eagerly begun developing the information society's school libraries, media labs and information booths and centres... Bold and extensive municipal projects already exist at least in Espoo, Oulu and Kuopio. Hopefully, others will follow suit.

This joint publication by The School Library Association in Finland and The National Board of Education offers the municipalities and schools officially partaking in the project as well as others interested in the matter both a vision for development and practical description and instruction on what a well-functioning school library is like. The leaflet 'A Good School Library' draws mainly on the experiences gained by the people of Espoo during the building of model school libraries and the continuing training of teacher-information officer staff. With the aid of the publication 'A Good School Library' The Finnish National Board of Education hopes to create better school libraries for Reading Finland.

Reading week 2002

**Pirjo Sinko**

*Counsellor of Education*

*Finnish National Board of Education*



# Towards a Good School Library

## – Characteristics of a good school library

A school library is an organised collection of study and teaching material aimed at pupils, teachers and other staff alike. It also includes access to local, regional, national and international information databases. The facilities, material, equipment and staff of the school library as well as its operations are organised in such a way that they support learning within the pedagogic goals of the school. In support of the reforming of a school library the following is an inspection of the characteristics of a good school library.



### What's in a name?

We have many names for the things we love, as does the school library of today. The array of names may seem confusing, but the variety is best interpreted as reflecting new ways of doing things, different emphasis and aspiration towards reform in its entirety. What is more essential than the naming is what the school library is like and what happens there. In this publication the term 'school library' covers the whole

array. The illustration shows a few of the terms currently in use that all refer to a school library. A proper name may also be an apt choice.

### Winds of change?

The demand for developing school libraries come from various directions; the Basic Education Act and the General Upper Secondary Schools Act, the national information strategy, a

report by the Ministry of Education, the evaluation results of the current state of the school libraries and the recent Unesco School Library Manifesto, among others. In 1998 when Parliament decided on the current Basic Education Act and the General Upper Secondary Schools Act it also made several statements obligating in nature. One of the statements concerns school library and information services, i.e. the school library. The language of the Act is vague but the tone of the statement is obligating. The aforementioned statement has not received sufficient attention, even though it is still valid and independent of the changes in the composition of Parliament. The statement cannot be repealed by any other means than legislation. Thus the school library activity is statutory and cannot be called into question.

#### SECTION 47 § SUPPORTIVE ACTIVITIES

*Library, club and other activities closely relating to education may be arranged in conjunction with basic education.*

#### STATEMENT N:O 6 / IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE AFOREMENTIONED LEGISLATION

*Parliament stipulates that the Ministry of Education place emphasis on the development of school library and information services with sufficient breadth as part of the pedagogic development of teaching*

*The Information Strategy for Education and Research 1999–2004* published in 1999 by the Ministry of Education and Finland can read published in 2000 by the Literacy in Information Society workgroup set guidelines that envision the direction of the development of school libraries and also set concrete goals for this development.

**The assessments made of the state of school libraries in Finland** have never been flattering. With the growing amount of international connections we have come to realise that perhaps our school library culture to date would not stand a chance in international comparison. There is still a lack of comprehensive comparative material and existing material is not good either as is evident, for example, in an assessment carried out by the University of East Anglia on the curriculum reform (Norris 1996) and an assessment study related to the prerequisites for learning (Korkeakoski 2001) ordered in 2000 by the National Board of Education.

The former is amazed at the bad condition and age of the book collections and how the teaching methods are frozen to suit the books. The latter study reaches similar conclusions based on recent and extensive analyses on the current state of school libraries in lower basic education schools.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has approved the Unesco School Library Manifesto 1998, which takes a strong position on school libraries globally. The Finnish Unesco committee is responsible for the Manifesto having been translated into Finnish, its publication and distribution. It can be found in its entirety on the internet at the following website [www.minedu.fi/opm/unesco/sopimusluettelo.html](http://www.minedu.fi/opm/unesco/sopimusluettelo.html). Many of the school libraries that suffered during the depression of the early 90's would be severely reprimanded were they judged by the recommendations declared in the Manifesto (see overleaf).

## Look to the stars – Full steam ahead

Factors independent of the school itself, such as were mentioned before, create obligations for improving the state of school libraries. What is it, then, that guides the development within the functioning of the school and in which direction? Who benefits from this? Why is the school library so important?

**The recent changes in the learning culture** have connections with the school library reform.

- There has been fine tuning regarding the ideas of knowledge and learning.
  - The idea of the relationship between learning and teaching has deepened.
  - We know more about different learning strategies.
  - Methods and working habits have become more varied.
  - The idea of a learning environment and learning material has expanded.
  - Research has provided more information on effective learning and schooling.
  - The growing feeling of community creates a challenge for schools as well.
  - Internationality and multinationality are here to stay.
- *A good school library is the present and the future of the developing learning culture.*

## Extracts from the Unesco School Library Manifesto

### The Mission of the School Library

The school library offers learning services, books and resources that enable all members of the school community to become critical thinkers and effective users of information in all formats and media. School Libraries link to the wider library and information network in accord with the principles in the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto.

The library staff supports the use of books and other information sources, ranging from the fictional to the documentary, from print to electronic, both on-site and remote. The materials complement and enrich textbooks, teaching materials and methodologies

**As the responsibility of local, regional and national authorities,** the School Library must be supported by specific legislation and policies. School Libraries must have adequate and sustained funding for trained staff, materials, technologies and facilities. 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.

**The school library is integral to the educational process. The following are essential to the development of literacy, information literacy, teaching, learning and culture and are core school library services:**

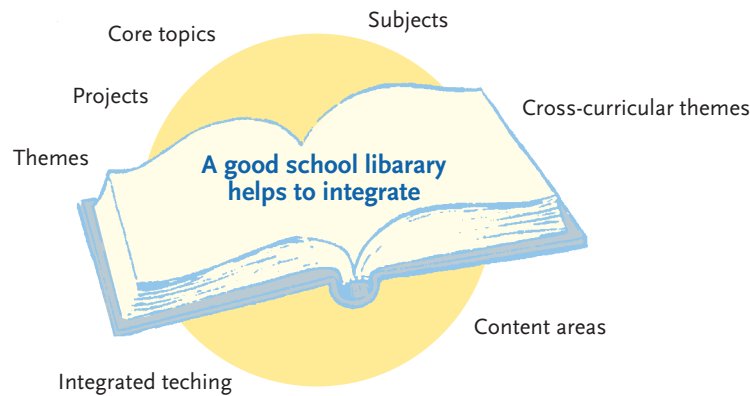
- supporting and enhancing educational goals as outlined in the school's mission and curriculum;
- developing and sustaining in children the habit and enjoyment of reading and learning, and the use of libraries throughout their lives;
- offering opportunities for experiences in creating and using information for knowledge, understanding, imagination and enjoyment;
- supporting all students in learning and practising skills for evaluating and using information, regardless of form, format or medium, including sensitivity to the modes of communication within the community;
- providing access to local, regional, national and global resources and opportunities that expose learners to diverse ideas, experiences and opinions;
- organizing activities that encourage cultural and social awareness and sensitivity;
- working with students, teachers, administrators and parents to achieve the mission of the school;
- proclaiming the concept that intellectual freedom and access to information are essential to effective and responsible citizenship and participation in a democracy;
- promoting reading and the resources and services of the school library to the whole school community and beyond.

**To ensure effective and accountable operations:**

- the policy on school library services must be formulated to define goals, priorities and services in relation to the school's curriculum;
- the school library must be organized and maintained according to professional standards;
- services must be accessible to all members of the school community and operate within the context of the local community;
- co-operation with teachers, senior school management, administrators, parents, other librarians and information professionals, and community groups must be encouraged.

**National curriculum reform** brings forth development targets that will benefit from the updated library and information services of the schools.

- Pupils' working methods have become an object of evaluation
  - Information management, co-operation and interaction skills are seen as skills of the future. Working methods characteristic of a school library is a continuum in the learning and work culture.
  - Integration and new cross-curricular themes require the availability of unconventional learning material, its management and the skills for using it.
  - At their own pace learning, individual study paths and personal study plans also require individualised choices regarding learning material.
  - The demand for knowledge about health, welfare and upbringing is growing; material in common use and collaborative working methods that activate pupils are in demand. Making a connection with parents in the company of up-to-date educational books on upbringing is wise.
  - The increased amount of teaching hours of mother tongue and literature, history and social studies as well as mathematics together with the reformed objectives are in line with the school library developing into a media centre conscious of its function as a sophisticating body
  - The share of teaching cultural views as a part of ethics teaching is on the increase. It is a common cause for the whole school to offer objective information about the multicultural world we live in. A well organised school library facilitates teaching arrangements
  - The new distribution of lesson hours offers less choice and brings with it different emphasis and optional studies that are more thought out. The school library can support in its own area the credibility of the school profile.
- *Do the working methods and the material of the school library support the basic function of the school or its profile? Does the school library meet the challenges posed by the new curriculum?*



**Schools have a growing number of special needs arising from their own activities; needs that a good school library will be able to answer.**

- Pupils with immigrant background need material that supports their cultural and linguistic background during the school day.
- Becoming more international increases teaching in foreign languages, which creates its own needs as regards material.
- Pre-primary education is arranged within schools more and more, and the younger school goes have their own special, delicate even, relationship with the language environment and literature. To cherish the budding reading and writing skills of young pupils the school library should be carefully equipped with children’s interests in mind.
- The needs of SEN (Special Educational Needs) pupils also show up as a need for different teaching and study materials. As the integrational solutions increase the teaching groups become more heterogenic. Well organised, diverse support material in common use facilitates differentiation.
- The school’s club activities as well as organising the afternoon clubs also benefit from a good school library

**What do the pupils benefit from a school library?**

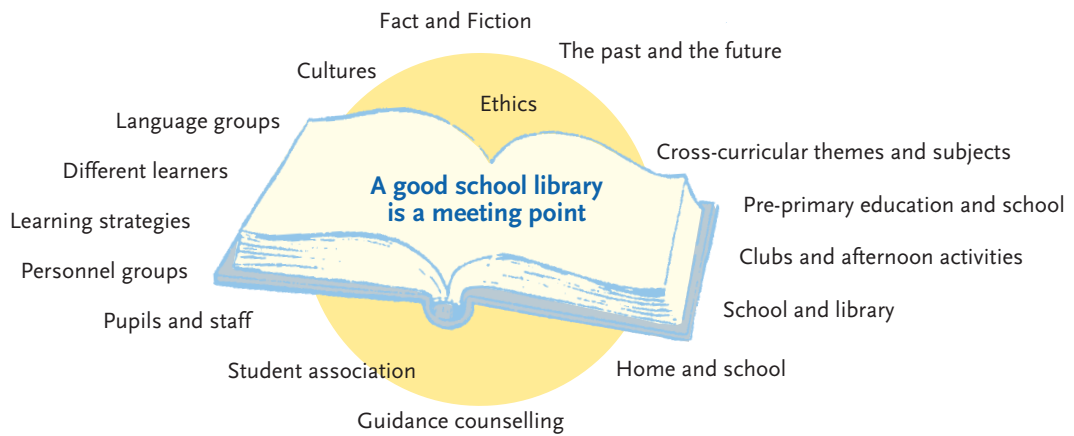
- They get acquainted with organised information.
- They get to know different information sources and learn to use these selectively.
- They find quality prose suitable for their age.
- They familiarise themselves with the possibilities different media offer.
- They will have access to databases and information networks outside of school.
- They have the possibility to concentrate on their own assignment in peace.

- They receive guidance when needed.
- They learn different forms of collaborative working methods.
- They learn to evaluate the reliability of information.
- They learn to use the common material in a responsible way.
- They can refresh themselves and relax in the school library.
- *In a good school library the pupil will grow to be a skillful user of the information services, who is also curious, selective, critical, shows initiative, is co-operative and responsible. A good school library strengthens good study habits.*

**What does the teacher benefit from the school library?**

- A natural forum for co-operation opens up to the teacher.
- Possibilities for new working methods become available to the teacher.
- The teacher may find new perspectives regarding the object of study.
- The teacher can find new information and also update previous knowledge.
- The teacher’s information management skills are developed.
- The teacher’s professionalism as a user of information services increases.
- The teacher learns to give pupils information retrieval tasks that are more meaningful for the pupils.
- The teacher can get acquainted with the pupils from a new perspective.
- The teacher can relax, refresh and recharge in a good school library, too.
- *A good school library supports the professional growth of teachers, their co-operation and knowledge of their pupils. At best, it can also add to work satisfaction and enjoyment.*

**A good school library is a meeting point for the whole community.**



**A school library has a special character that differs from that of other libraries.**

- The starting point for the activity is the curriculum – not the general sophisticating service of the municipality.
- A school library is a part of the school – not an independent unit.
- The location within the school building should be as central as possible – not at a distance.
- The target groups are the pupils and the teachers – not the whole population of the area.
- The library activity reaches the whole age group – not only the ones who voluntarily seek it.
- Working methods are pedagogically justified – not service oriented.

- The library is used by the whole class, as a group, independently – seldom optionally
- The material is specific and limited – not extensive and aiming at high rate of borrowing.
- In developing the school library and the school's information and communications technology we receive fringe benefits that all belong under the umbrella term shared information strategy.
- *The special nature of the school library needs to be acknowledged as a part of the pedagogic development of the school.*

# Who decides what?



## – doers and doing

In developing the school library many people have an important role to play both in the school and the groups affiliated with it. One person cannot change the learning culture of the school. For this reason it is important for the school library development work to have a multi-professional team that focuses on the task and represents the needs of the entire school.

### 1. Headmaster

- decides on the budget for the school library
- supports the development of the school library
- co-ordinates the further education of the staff
- keeps in touch with the board of the municipal educational administration
- guides the drawing up of the school curriculum

### 2. School librarian, library-teacher

- acquires and removes material
- organises the catalogueing, covering the books with plastic and other book maintenance work
- organises the borrowing
- arranges teaching in the school library (information retrieval, data management, enticing pupils to read)
- leads the school library team
- acts as a liaisons officer between the library and the school

### 3. ICT-teachers and ICT- contact persons (helpdesk)

- are part of the school library team
- help and guide pupils in using the computers, especially in the library
- participate in teaching how to retrieve information
- maintain the computers in the school library

### 4. Guidance councillor and upper secondary school guidance councillor

- guide pupils in study skills
- are part of the school library team
- teach information retrieval



#### 5. School library team

- headmaster, library teacher(s), guidance counsellor, ICT-teacher, representatives of different subjects
- together they plan the activity of the school library
- plans the division of labour within the team (especially if the school does not have a school librarian)
- draws up the school curriculum as it concerns the school library
- gathers a 'wish list' from the different user groups of the school library regarding the acquisition of material
- evaluates the activities and function of the school library
- defines the rules for the school library (borrowing, fees, opening times) and the library etiquette

#### 6. Trusted pupils

- act as contact persons between the pupils and the teacher-librarian
- participate partly in the activities of the school library team
- carry out assistant duties in the school library
- organise exhibitions of the pupils' work in the school library

#### 7. The board, the parents' association and the school committee

- support the development of the school library
- collect money for the school library
- arrange for visiting authors etc. to support the library activities
- participate in the planning of the school library activities
- do voluntary work in the school library

## The international school library day is celebrated annually on the 4th Monday in October.

IASL International Association of School Librarianship [www.iasl-slo.org/](http://www.iasl-slo.org/)

#### 8. The municipal education authorities

- are responsible for the centred development of school libraries in the municipality
- plan and organise the acquisition of the common library system and the cataloguing in the schools
- organise teachers' further education regarding school library matters and teaching information management skills
- issue guidelines regarding the organisation of acquisition of material (place of acquisition, system of acquisition)
- co-ordinate collaboration between the library administration and the education administration

#### 9. The municipal library authorities

- collaborate with the education administration (library system, catalogue information, common agreements concerning the the use of databases, etc.)
- name the liaisons officers for the school libraries and the public library
- perform educational collaboration with the educational administration

#### AN EXAMPLE FROM ESPOO:

##### *20 doors into learning – teacher-information officer training*

- a two-year training programme for teachers in Espoo, extent 20 study weeks
- training carried out in collaboration with the Turku Polytechnic
- teachers become competent in acting as school librarians and as teachers of information management skills

# The heart of the school

## – facilities, equipment and material of a school library



### The objectives of the school library activity

- to create an aesthetically pleasing as well as practical learning environment
- to provide access to sources of varied, current and useful information for both pupils and teachers
- to arrange the possibility to study information management skills, which forms a basis for lifelong learning
- to encourage reading for pleasure

### The school library is a flexible learning centre open for everyone working in the school

The school library needs to be in an architecturally central location in the school, in the heart of the school, where it is easy and pleasant for anyone to go. There should be facilities in conjunction with the school library that enable multiform learning:

- Computer classroom may open into the library.
- Teamwork area where pupils can have discussions without disturbing other people in the library; it could be sectioned off with glass.
- Teachers' work area where teachers can copy, prepare study material and at the same time see into the school library will enhance the versatility of the library.
- Storeroom for teaching aids could be located in the vicinity of the school library.
- There may also be an area where shows aimed at an audience may be performed, a space that transforms into a stage, a puppet show or a story time location.
- Facilities required for editing audio and visual recordings are located near the library (secondary education)
- Science classroom in primary education with all the microscopes and observation equipment can also be located near the library as they are both places for exploration.

It would be good if at least one teaching group fits to work in the school library at any one time. A good school library is flexible and welcoming. The needs vary over the course of the school year and terms.

If the shelves are moveable and the electric solutions for the space are planned properly the tables can be easily put together in different ways and the school library will be able to accommodate the changing needs of teaching without major renovations over the years.

### **Different learning strategies are taken into account in both the visual and the functional setting of the school library**

- Information is organised according to certain criteria to make locating it as easy as possible for the library user, e.g. PLC system i.e. the Finnish Public Libraries Classification System or UDC system i.e. the Universal Decimal Classification System.
- The pupils are taught the classification system used in the school library as well as how to use it at school.
- Classification done in conjunction with the compilation of the material catalogue may be different from the location marking (signum) i.e. the books may be placed in the shelves according to different criteria than what is used in the classification system, e.g. by themes (pedagogic starting point).
- The planning of acoustics, lighting and electricity, air conditioning and maintenance should be done properly.
- Different age groups taken into consideration when planning for furniture and classification system (the height of the shelves, chairs and tables, ergonometry).
- The areas emphasised by the school curriculum are taken into consideration.
- The school policy is reflected in the school library.
- Presentation of the material is tempting and clear (short rows of shelves are easier to perceive than long rows, space and light around the shelves)

### **AN EXAMPLE FROM A MODEL SCHOOL LIBRARY IN ESPOO**

- *In primary education school libraries the nonfiction books are classified and placed on the shelves according to the PLC, but on the side of the shelf there is the name of the class, which is replaced by concepts that children understand. The number classification is not necessarily even on show but there may be a colour code on the back of the book.*
- *In primary education prose is classified thematically on the shelves with stickers on the back of the book, e.g. fantasy (a dragon), horror (a skull), love (a heart).*
- *Secondary education school libraries follow the PLC system both on the shelves and in the catalogueing, the shelf classification on the edge of the shelf together with the PLC term.*

## **The three functional areas of the school library**

### **1. Managing the collection**

- school librarian's desk, cupboard, storeroom depository, reception of books
- library programme: catalogueing, borrowing
- working area, where one can maintain and handle books (repairing, covering books with plastic, catalogueing)

### **2. Information retrieval**

- reference resources (nonfiction books, magazines, cd-roms)
- computers equipped with internet connection for information retrieval
- access to e.g. material and article databases
- tables for working
- group work areas, where the group can work together and have discussions whilst working
- a quiet area for doing homework, or for listening for tapes and compact discs with headphones

### **3. Reading**

- new and interesting children's, youth and adult literature for all kinds of readers placed according to the library classification system
- areas where pupils of different age easily find reading to suit their purposes:
- pre-primary and primary education area has low shelves and the books clearly on show, e.g. the cover facing the viewer
- in the area aimed at the older readers the classification of books by themes, thematic shelves, e.g. fantasy, love and friendship, adventure, nature, comic books, etc.
- magazine rack where magazines targeted at different age groups (children, youth, adults) can be found (nature, animals, games, computers, youth, science, art, motors and engines, sports, music, cinema, culture, etc.) and at least one newspaper.
- comfortable seats for sitting, browsing and reading in comfort and with enjoyment
- a place for having story time sessions, book reviews to promote reading for pleasure, and telling stories
- in upper secondary schools also a newspaper room with tables for reading together

## Collection work and the management of the collection

The basis of the collection work in the school library is planning with an analysis of the school and the community as its starting point. The plan outlines the school library operations policy and general directives regarding the

- selection of material
- acquisition of material
- elimination of material
- evaluation of material



An analysis of the school community carried out with care enhances the school library collection's ability to cater for the varying needs of different users equally. The school library user group also includes minority groups of the community: ethnic groups, religious groups, different SEN pupil groups (e.g. dyslexia, visually impaired), different groups divided by emphasis, optional subject or a hobby. The community analysis for the collection work plan includes clarification of and limiting of the form of collaboration and areas of operations of **school libraries and the public library**.

Factors that influence this are for example the following

- distance between the school library and the public library
- facilities of the school library and the public library
- staff resources of the school library and the public library
- services offered to school by the public library (e.g. transferable collection mobile library)

It is especially important to have a well equipped and professionally maintained school library in schools that are relatively far from the nearest public library or whose pupil count is large in relation to the resources of the public library. The essential principle of the division of labour between the school library and the public library is avoiding overlapping material acquisition and activities. Public libraries aim at satisfying the needs and wishes of the whole municipality; the focus of the school library is on the needs of the members of the school community relating to the school curriculum and

plan of action. School libraries may concentrate on the classics and the fundamental works, whose time and capacity of use is great.

### The school library collection may contain for example

- nonfiction literature as well as study and work books suitable for reference library that vary in their level of difficulty
- selections of stories, tales, short stories and poetry suitable for different age groups; classics; changing selection of children's books and youth literature for pre-primary and primary education class rooms; and some of the new novels
- newspapers and magazines that prerequisite different reading and language skills
- brochures, reports, yearbooks and annuals
- good quality student work
- slides, compact disc video, micro films
- video tapes (right of use obtained e.g. Finnish Broadcasting Company's educational videos)
- dvd recordings
- compact discs , tape cassettes and audio book
- cd-roms, e-books
- floppy discs and computer programmes
- Internet and tv-channels
- pedagogic and psychological literature

In addition the school library may have special collections which may contain

- rare and unusual books
- historical books donated by parents and students
- archive material
- books by local authors or pupils of the school

### SELECTION AND ACQUISITION OF MATERIAL

The selection and acquisition of material for the school library are regulated by the school library purchasing plan and the school library budget. The school library purchasing plan determines how the budget is divided up and distributed for acquiring different material. Is it good to agree on a general level how much of the purchasing appropriation in the budget is reserved for

- nonfiction books of different fields (PLC/subject groups)
- prose (including audio books and e-books),
- audio and visual and multimedia material
- newspapers and magazines.

Occasionally when selecting material the purchases need to be prioritised according to urgency, and order of acquisition is obtained by **classifying** the selection criteria:

- *applicability criteria*: the purposefulness of the material for teaching and learning
- *content criteria*: reliability of material, relevance and topicality; what added value does the material bring to the collection; how interesting the material is from the user perspective; the level of quality of information provided by the material
- *school based criteria*: in what way does the material support and relate to the curriculum based goals of the school or the courses in the school; how does the material complement the school library collection in both content and quality
- *user criteria*: does the material take into account the age, level of mental and social development, level of knowledge needed and learning strategies of the user group
- *suitability criteria*: what is the reputation of the publisher, the author and the book like; how important is it to have the material available in the school library
- *price criteria*: the reason for acquiring the material, urgency, comparing prices and the availability of material all figure in choosing between items

The same selection criteria are used **at all times** when expanding the school library collection, including donations and student work.

The collection in the school library is built for a clear-cut and small community. The basis for purchases may also be the information gathered from the target audience, for example

- questionnaires
- letterbox for acquisition wishes
- mail box on the school library's web pages
- brainstorming of the multi-professional library team

If the school community feels that the school library is a common cause the responsibility for the school librarian's material acquisition work is divided between all the members of the school community. The same information sources used in the public libraries may well be used as the basis for material acquisition for the school library.

The library service and a few other publishers have published guide books and bibliographies to help with the acquisition of material for a school library. In addition to the printed material there is a lot of information available on the web pages of different libraries.

- **Nonfiction books**
- **Picture books and stories**
- **Children's books and youth literature:**
- **Collections of children's books and youth literature:**
- **Children's poetry**
- **Suspense and horror**
- **Fantasy and sci-fi**
- **Finnish adult literature:**
- **Foreign adult literature**
- **Collections of adult literature**
- **Poetry**

Multimedia, voice and picture recordings, educational programmes and games suitable for teaching purposes also belong to the school library. **Presentations and reviews of cd-rooms** aimed for children and youth are worth looking up on the web pages of the public libraries (e.g. Teuvo). These pages also have information on **music recordings** (e.g. Infoplaneetta).



## ELIMINATION OF MATERIAL

The acquisition of a good quality school library collection requires good and well thought out purchases, but also proper elimination. One has to dare to make eliminations even in a school library regularly and systematically. Elimination should concern material that is

- in bad condition
- dated due to either language or terminology
- contains dated information
- has an old fashioned layout

Some part of the dated material may have its own place and use in the school library's special collection. The majority of the eliminated material ends up in paper recycling unless, for example, the student association organise a venue for selling the eliminated books.

The selling time of a book in Finland is a couple of years, which leads to difficulties in trying to replace eliminated material in order to complement the collection with older material as it is no longer available in book shops. There are some tips on material which is no longer on sale in book shops on the web pages of public libraries that might be useful for a school library; one can also find information by using search engines such as Teuvo, Kakaravaara or Makupalat. For example the contact details of second-hand book shops and their web pages can be found under [www.kirjastot.fi/linkkikirjasto](http://www.kirjastot.fi/linkkikirjasto). You can find information on individual second-hand book shops' sales catalogues as well as price guides for older literature published in book form.

## EVALUATION OF MATERIAL

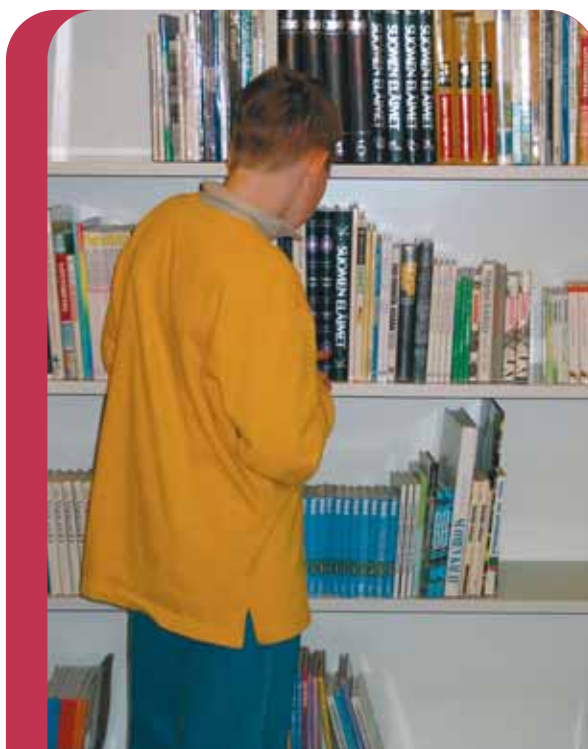
A rough idea of **how comprehensive the school library material should be** can be estimated based on the PLC system's main categories and the list of subjects found in the school curriculum.

- The younger the pupils the more important it is to have material suitable for the pupils' stage of development available in the school library
- Information in most fields can be found in a form suitable for children in selected prose literature that is
  - made keyword searchable
  - presented in the selection catalogue
  - made visible with suitable and appropriate classification.

- Many of the magazines also offer new and up-to-date information from various fields in a form suitable for children.
- Good quality student work by older pupils (e.g. essays, reports, interviews, group work) may be added to the collection following the general selection criteria and also made keyword searchable in the database.

Different criteria can be used in evaluating how extensive should the material be for it to be sufficiently so. The following may be considered

- is the collection sufficient enough to answer some of the questions and fulfil some of the wishes of the pupils
- is current and up-to-date material available in different fields
- is there sufficient amount of material in relation to the amount of users
- does the collection contain certain classics and sources, fundamental literary works
- does the material in the collection stimulate pupils enough to develop an interest in literature
- does the material offered by the collection meet the demands of different user groups and cater for their interests
- does the material in the collection represent different views and opinions, cultural and political points of view equally
- does the collection support the implementation of the courses and study modules offered in the school



For the needs of the staff the school library collection needs to offer sufficient material and services which facilitate keeping up with the development of teaching and the specialised fields, research and experiments. **When planning a school library it should be remembered that collection work requires**

- cabinet or storage space for newly acquired material, material under repair or in storage
- desk space for handling material (bar code stickers, classification marks, covering books with plastic and repairing them)
- computer based library system for cataloguing, locating and borrowing the material (in small schools a card index may be sufficient)
- printer, fax, telephone

## Information retrieval

**The most important function of the school library as defined in the school curriculum is information retrieval**

- Pupils learn to learn i.e. understand information structures, concepts and how knowledge can be shared or information retrieved, as well as how to assess the validity or necessity of information.
- Pupils are familiar with an area in the library where they can find nonfiction literature, magazines, CD-ROMs, recordings, videos and computers that can be used for seeking information
- Pupils learn the principles of information organisation used in the school library so that they will be able to use the classification system to their advantage and locate the information they need
- From the content and terminology of the material pupils learn which higher category contains what type of information and which things are related to each other and also what is relevant in the information.

**In the area reserved for information retrieval and modification**

- book shelves, organised logically in appropriate fields
- magazine racks
- electronic/digital study material
- computers, Internet access
- work tables
- CD player, television, VCR

In addition to information retrieval this space is used for reading, making notes and for modification previously gathered



information. Shelves may be used as space dividers to create separate “cells” with tables for group work or with individual work stations.

If the school library material is catalogued into a computer based database and made keyword searchable pupils can seek information in their own school library collection by using a word search. For older pupils the **Aleksi database** is a good way to gather latest information as it contains a number of references of magazines. Via **access to the Internet** every pupil has the opportunity to be a user of different kinds of information and of many different databases (e.g. the collection registers of municipal libraries); the organisation and assessment of these poses a big challenge for teaching. Once pupils learn the principles governing books and library activities they are in a much better position for learning to organise information obtained from the Internet.

It is the easiest and most meaningful way to learn how to retrieve information in the school library premises. Pupils will get familiar with the ladder of information with guidance from their teacher and the school librarian starting from the first grade in basic education. Weekly use of the school library, familiarising the material and the classification system together with practicing information retrieval in the library guide pupils to learn and find strategies suitable for them. Acquiring these skills requires systematic practise.

**Exhibitions of student work** can be held in the information retrieval area and it is possible to have **longer essays catalogued into the school library system for others to see**. Doing this teaches pupils to appreciate their work, understand the significance of knowledge and evaluate information for its reliability (source critique), and also to appreciate other people’s work (copying or using for reference). The school library is a study place that belongs to everyone equally. It is not meant for any one teacher or group of pupils but for everyone working in the school.

# STEPS OF INFORMATION RETRIEVAL

– how will I cope better with writing an essay?

# 1

**Define** the topic/problem of your essay

- What do I want to study?
- What do I already know about the topic?
- What kind of information do I need?



# 2

**Search** and name information sources

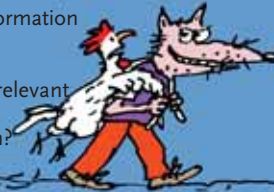
- How do I acquire information?  
(by reading, listening, watching...)
- Where do I retrieve information from?  
(books, articles, interviews, the internet...)
- What do I do with the information?



# 3

**Select** what you need out of the information

- How do I choose appropriate information?
- What is relevant and what is irrelevant with regard to my topic?
- How reliable is the information?



# 4

**Organise** information

- How do I organise the information?
- Which matters are related to each other?
- How can I make the information clearer by using charts or pictures?



# 5

**Present** the results

- How do I present the information clearly and the conclusions? (text, pictures, sounds)
- How do I mark the sources of information?
- What is my viewpoint on the matter?



# 6

**Evaluate** the process and your work

- How did the end result turn out in my opinion?
- How did I succeed in the different stages of the process?
- Which topics were difficult and why?



opetustoimen  
tieto- ja viestintä tekniikan  
kehittäminen



## Reading

Another important goal of the school library as defined in the school curriculum is tempting pupils to read and teaching them about literature.

In order to fulfil its task of inspiring pupils to read the school library needs to offer a collection that is tempting and inspiring, contains new novels as well as the classics studied in class and is suitable for the pupils' age.

There are many good ways to tempt pupils to read:

- Changing book exhibitions make the material familiar.
- It is easy for the reader to pick up a book from a book shelf for perusal and evaluation.
- The shelves do not need to be full.
- The books can be placed facing the viewer, which may tempt them to select that particular book
- Books look tempting: an old book, or a book in bad condition kills six new books around it
- The younger pupils in primary education find something to read easier if the books are appropriately thematically classified (historical novels, nature, fantasy, sci-fi, etc.)
- The shelves may be decorated with related student works – in this way the school library is actually a tempting book exhibition instead of merely being a storage for books.

The Finnish schools have not been keen to order newspapers or magazines for their libraries. However, the value of these as a source of information should not be underestimated. A



good school library has a selection of suitable magazines covering different topics and fields selected together with the pupils, and there should also be a proper cabinet for storing previous issues and previous years' subscriptions.

- Information regarding the selection of comics can be obtained e.g. on the net on Sivupolut home page: [www.sci.fi/~karielk](http://www.sci.fi/~karielk).
- Material on magazines is available on the home page of the Finnish Periodical Publishers' Association: [www.aikakaus.fi](http://www.aikakaus.fi).
- Information related to newspaper can be found here: [www.sanomalehdet.fi](http://www.sanomalehdet.fi).

Comfortable chairs and sofas invite one to sit down whilst browsing a book or a magazine to get a better idea of what they contain. The same is true for rugs, curtains and plants; they all add to the cosiness of the school library. In case there is no space for larger groups of pupils in the school library lessons and presentations may be arranged in an adjoining multi-purpose room. Plays, puppet shows, sketches or concerts intertwined with the everyday teaching increase the multi-sensory nature of teaching. Due to its purpose in supporting the implementation of the school curriculum the planning, development and acquisition of material is a part of the drawing up of the curriculum. The way of developing the school library collection is a reflection of the school values, its policy.



# The sky is the limit



## School curriculum

The national core curriculum is the basis for the goals of the school library activities. Among the things mentioned in the national core curriculum are interest in the surrounding world, curious information retrieval, independent work, creative problem solving, awakening one's own reading for pleasure and lifelong learning skills. The school's own curriculum further defines the school library activities making each school library unique. It is recommended that **the goals and activities of the school library** be written in the curriculum and possibly also the teaching requiring use of the school library especially (e.g. story time for 1st and 2nd grade pupils, material management course for the 3rd and 4th grade pupils, information retrieval course for the 5th and 6th grade pupils, an essay course for the 8th grade pupils, environmental protection course for upper secondary education students).

In planning the curriculum the following issues, among others, are related to the school library

- taking pupil groups of different type into consideration (age, language and culture, special needs education, club activities, afternoon club activities)
- development of teaching methods (cooperative learning, explorative learning methods, etc.)
- goals set for the use of the school library by individual subjects
- information management skills at different grades, cf. the school information strategy
- school library as a part of literature teaching
- visibility of the school's area of focus
- school library supporting the language programme of the school

## – school library, culture for all

- school library supporting individual learning or flexible teaching arrangements
- collaboration with parents, the public library or other groups affiliated with it

## School's action plan

The annual school action plan contains definitions of the school year's activities in more detail. Special **school library campaigns** can be included in the action plan (Reading Week, Day of the Book and the Rose, Nordic Library Week, International School Library Day, The Kalevala, Runeberg, Lö'gannrot, Agricola, Topelius, Aleksis Kivi, Favourite Book Day, etc.). A school may have a library club which organises events in the school library, or a literature club using the school library premises as their meeting place. Some years a particular theme may be emphasised, whose visibility in the school library is significant.

## School budget

Schools have a great deal of autonomy when it comes to deciding over their finances. **Maintaining and developing the school library requires an annual budget that is for the library only.** For this reason the role of the headmaster is especially important in developing the school library. The school library material is teaching material at its best and requires **cooperation** between all the pupils and teachers in order to

obtain a collection that meets the requirements of the school and to secure the renewal and topicality of it. When it comes to the school library appropriation it is worth bearing in mind that it is not taken from the funding of the teaching material but rather is a part of it. The size of the budget depends on various things but as a guideline **1–2 new books annually per pupil is a good target to aim for.**

## Culture centre

A school library is the heart of the school and is visible in the everyday functioning of the school. It is also a nest for culture and knowledge and thus forever changing. **The school's plan of action is visible in the school library.** The library is open, tolerant and cooperative. Thus presenting new information and new capabilities to the whole community is part of the school library's activities. It functions as an internal culture centre which acquires, conveys, stores and creates new information

## Opening times, accessibility

A school library should be open and accessible during a school day and preferably also after school. Very few schools in Finland have a full-time school librarian. This means that any activity normally happens when pupils use the library with their teacher. If all the teachers know the school library well and the people in the school have a **common agreement (the school library etiquette)** on how to use the library there should be no problems in using it. When pupils regularly familiarise themselves with the material available in their school library as well as information retrieval and the borrowing system they become responsible and independent school library users.

## Library collaboration

A school library lays the foundations for the future use of public and scientific libraries. **The school library can never function alone** but in collaboration with the public library. School library collection is always less extensive and smaller than that of the municipal library. For this reason it is important that the teachers and pupils keep in touch with the professionals in the public library nearby. **Cooperation with them may involve**

- develop the school library collection (acquisition and elimination of material)
- learn information retrieval (pupils and teachers)
- plan common themes
- get tips about books in organised meetings and learn how to give tips to others
- organise meetings with authors

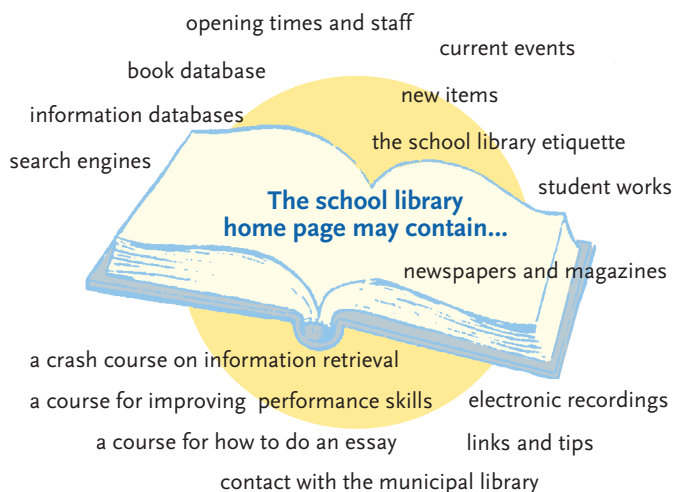
To achieve the best result in cooperation both school and the municipal library should have an appointed contact person to **maintain relations.** It might be a natural choice to name the school library teacher as the school's liaisons officer (school librarian) and the librarian in charge of the children's and youth literature as the municipal library's liaisons officer.

## Staff cooperation

In order to develop the school library material annually in line with the needs of education and teaching **teacher and staff cooperation** is needed. Each teacher has their own area of expertise which should be utilised in the functioning of the school library. After reaching this point no member of staff will doubt the necessity of the school library or its use. **Training the staff** to use the school library and teaching them information management skills is worth taking into consideration.

## Communications

A lot happens in the school library over the year. New material is acquired, literary events and different kinds of exhibitions are organised and pupils and staff have practised information retrieval processes. It would be good to inform pupils, teachers, parents, municipal library, even the heads of the municipal educational administration and the public at large about all these activities. **Good information channels are articles written in the school paper, information leaflets delivered to homes, the notice board in the school library and the school library home page on the Internet.** Who will take care of the external and internal (information) communications and how is an issue that should be considered in the planning the school library activities.



## Evaluation

The school library activities within the whole school community are worth evaluating on a regular basis. Is the material up-to-date? Has the school library functioning fulfilled the expectations? How is using the school library evident in the classrooms? How has the school library affected learning? What kinds of hopes and wishes do the teachers and pupils have regarding the school library? How can one find out about new material? What kind of literature is in demand in the school library and what type of literature stays on the shelves? The feedback can be used as a reference point in evaluating procedures and improving the library so that it can **continue as an even better school library**.

## School library around Finland

It is difficult to name just one model for developing a school library. In different parts of Finland and in different municipalities the situation varies greatly. The size of the school, its age, year or the vicinity of a public library all have an effect on how the school library will be developed.

The fact remains that even if the public library is within a walking distance from the school it cannot answer all the needs of the school. The school library has to function within the school in order to be accessible during everyday school work. In sparsely inhabited regions a good option is to look into the possibility of collaboration with the public library to see whether it would be possible to have the library operate at the school on a part-time basis, and possibly organise for transferable collections and teaching of information retrieval.

## Contact

### The Finnish National Board of Education

PO Box 380 (Hakaniemenkatu 2)

FIN-00531 HELSINKI, FINLAND

Tel +358 9 774 775

[www.oph.fi](http://www.oph.fi) (– English – Publications in English – A Good School Library)

Contact person in FNBE:

Mrs. Pirjo Sinko, counsellor of Education

[pirjo.sinko@oph.fi](mailto:pirjo.sinko@oph.fi)

### Reading Finland Project

Luku-Suomi was one of the priority projects at the Finnish National Board of Education in 2001–2004. The objective was to improve the reading and writing skills of the pupils in basic and general upper secondary education and to increase their knowledge of literature.

*The aim of the project in 2001–2004 was:*

- to raise the skills and knowledge of the “weakest quarter”
- to develop methodologies to get boys to read more
- to improve deductive reading skills
- to have pupils who read more at school and outside school
- *to have better school libraries*
- to increase cooperation and between schools and municipal libraries,
- to have all teachers working to improve reading comprehension and writing skills
- to improve the methodological skills of primary teachers
- to familiarise the teachers better with literature aimed at children and young people
- to strengthen the cooperation between homes and schools to support reading and writing skills

### School Library Association in Finland

Seija Salminen, president ([seija.salminen@espoo.fi](mailto:seija.salminen@espoo.fi))

Ulla Lappalainen, vice-president ([ulla.lappalainen@hameenlinna.fi](mailto:ulla.lappalainen@hameenlinna.fi))

[www.suomenkoulukirjastoyhdistys.fi](http://www.suomenkoulukirjastoyhdistys.fi)

*The School Library Association in Finland*

- offers teachers, teacher librarians, principals, parents and students the forum to change ideas and experiences about developing and improving school libraries and school librarianship
- *nominates the school librarian of the year*
- takes up the opportunities of school libraries to support the curriculum and to enrich learning and teaching
- provides information about local, national and international school library projects and developments
- arranges study trips to outstanding school libraries
- aspires to influence the national school legislation and school authorities to strengthen the status of school libraries in Finland
- participates in the activities of international school library organisations

## A Good School Library

- A school library is a matter that concerns the entire school. The headmaster, staff, pupils and their parents are all dedicated to its development
- It is useful to have a designated team for the development of the school library, which systematically gathers and compiles a list of forthcoming requirements and plans ahead on the basis of these requirements
- A school library needs to have a regular annual budget which provides funding for the material and development of the facilities.
- A school librarian is a prerequisite for a good school library. Their education and professionalism has a pedagogic significance in the functioning of the school.

