

Dr. Ronald Schneider and Eva von Jordan-Bonin

Germany on its way: The School Library + Information Literacy - The perfect combination

Germany's public libraries as well as school libraries have enforced their commitment to the objective of media literacy and information literacy promotion in recent years. Also, more and more school teachers are considering media and information literacy skills as a goal of interdisciplinary learning in their teaching and project work - even more since the 2002 PISA study shocked the country by pointing out the shortcomings of the education system. By helping students to locate, comprehend and evaluate information for all classes the school library is obviously the perfect place to acquire and practice information literacy. With its media variety, the school library can also bridge the gap between educational goals and the more personal interests and preferences of children and young adults, given that the school library is well equipped, easily accessible and professionally managed.

So far this has been the problem of the German school library system: only 15% of German schools have school libraries that meet professional standards. There is neither a standardized vocational training for school librarians, nor advanced training courses or postgraduate studies for teachers in school library management.

However, since the publication of the PISA study, things have begun to change:

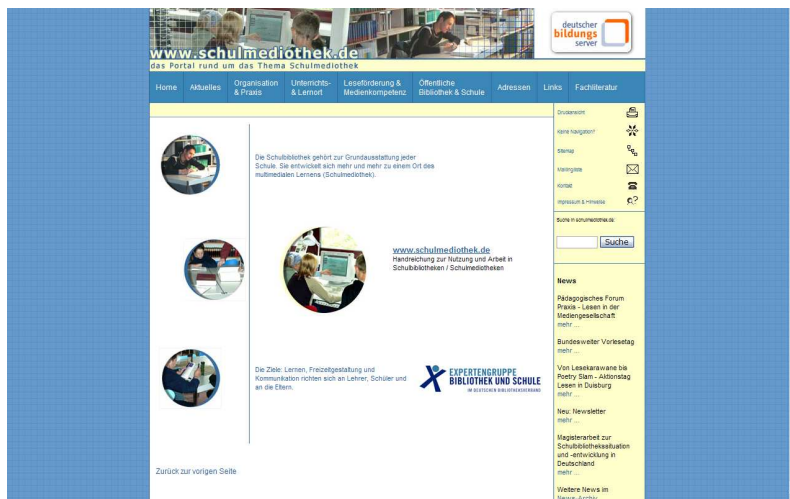
- German schools will gradually be turned into all-day schools, with different focal points set by the respective Federal States.
- Teachers have begun to rethink their roles and to see themselves as their students' study partners and learning counsellors rather than to continue the old ex-cathedra teaching method.
- Students will be taught and encouraged to practice independent and self-motivated study using all types of media from an early age on.



These goals, however, cannot be achieved without providing modern and well-equipped school libraries. Fortunately, this understanding is on the advance. To support and promote it, the Deutsche Bibliotheksverband (German Library Association) convened a panel of experts in 2003, which processes and manages developments concerning schools and libraries and communicate these issues to professional circles, in order to prevent the German school library system from stagnation and retrogression. The commission “Library & School” consists of teachers and librarians alike. Since its founding it has already tackled numerous tasks and completed some of them.

There is a great need for further training opportunities. For teachers as a target group they are essential because school libraries and their use are still not a part of the teacher’s training. That is why since 2004 the panel of experts has organized advanced training courses throughout Germany, each course lasting one to two days. The courses are primarily directed at teachers but also parents and other volunteers take part. The objective is to support and promote the further development of school libraries and the cooperation between public libraries and schools in Germany. The need for these courses has grown so quickly (the number of schools interested in library skills have risen enormously over the last years) that the commission can barely meet the demand, although they have already started to work with other partners.

To provide primary resources on a professional level and to assure access to a wide range of school library-related issues to a larger audience, using modern information technology was the obvious suggestion of the commission. In 2004 it launched www.schulmediothek.de, a heavily used web portal offering continuously updated recommendations and support for school library officials, answers to practical questions as well as teaching examples.



The web portal allows the library commission to communicate recent developments and professional standards throughout the country and to present the most promising solutions to everyone who is involved in school library work. The web portal contributes to the promotion of information literacy skills in two ways:

- The simple and appealing navigation provided assures accessibility also to school library officials who might still feel inhibited to use electronic media as a source of professional information

- The rich variety of day-to-day school library work experience presented online as well as examples of cooperation between schools and public libraries offer a wealth of examples illustrating the promotion of reading competence, information literacy and media usage skills.

“School library + Information literacy: The perfect combination” will continue to be the focal point of interest of the commission in the upcoming years. An exemplary school library curriculum is currently being created. This “spiral curriculum concept” will include numerous best practice case studies, and will further contribute to promote information literacy as an indispensable learning goal and also to underline the unique possibilities school libraries offer to achieve this goal.