**The Library at School, a Dutch reading promotion programme for Public Libraries and Primary Schools**

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**Introduction**

The Library at school for primary schools is part of The Art of Reading programme. Launched in 2008, the programme reached in 2017 nearly 860.000 children between the ages of 0-12 (over 50% of the total population in this age group). Other parts of The Art of Reading programme are BookStart (for 0-4 year-olds) and The Library at school secondary schools.

**The pillars of the Art of Reading**

The Art of Reading has defined four interconnected ‘pillars’ that are necessary to support successful reading promotion programmes. In the Dutch language the four initial letters of the pillars constitute the word LEES (READ):

Leesomgeving (the reading environment, including the quality of the collection)

Expertise

Evidentie (evidence)

Samenwerking (collaboration)

**Reading environment**

The proximity of books is a major determining factor of reading behaviour (Evans e.a. 2010; Nielen & Bus, 2015). A stimulating reading environment requires a strong focus on creating a sound collection which is attractively presented (both physically and digitally, through attractive bookcases and accessible websites and apps) and which meets the needs of the population in a child care centre or school. The reading environment also comprises time and space for reading (Chambers, 1991).

**Expertise**

The importance of a professional librarian in the school library has been evidenced by a range of research studies (see for example ‘school libraries impact studies’ on www.lrs.org). In the course of its existence, the Art of Reading programme has initiated the development of a wide range of training courses and workshops in order to professionalise library staff, child care professionals and teachers in the domains of reading promotion, didactic approaches and information skills teaching (separately financed by the National Library).

**Evidence**

Local, regional and national authorities increasingly call for evidence of the effects of reading promotion on children’s language development in order to justify their investments in structural reading promotion efforts. To meet these demands, the Reading Foundation has initiated two PhD research studies of the effects of BookStart and The Library at School.

**Collaboration (strategic)**

Libraries work together with healthcare centres, maternity care and day-care centres, schools and bookshops. Close collaboration with local government is also essential. Local authorities want the assurance that their policies and funding can be aligned with this library-run programme.

**The building blocks of the Library at School**

The Library at School programme is comprised of ten interconnected building blocks. Seven of the building blocks: Digital Portal, Network & Policy, Expertise, Collection, Reading and Media Plan, Activities and Data-Collecting Monitor (described below) are the joint responsibility of the school and the library. The remaining three blocks: Logistics, Operations and Marketing & Communication, are the responsibility of the library alone.

**The Library at School**

The impact of reading on language development has been extensively investigated (Clark & Rumbold, 2006; Mol & Bus, 2011). Research studies consistently show that frequent reading correlates with positive developments in various domains of language development, such as vocabulary, reading comprehension, decoding skills, spelling, grammatical knowledge and writing skills (Krashen, 2004; Mol & Bus 2001; Kortlever & Lemmens, 2012). This evidence constitutes the scientific rationale behind the Dutch ‘Library at School’ programme.

Launched in 2009, The Library at School is a national programme aiming to promote reading and to professionalise the approach to reading promotion in primary schools, by improving cooperation between schools and public libraries and by creating high quality libraries in schools. Libraries and schools work closely together to improve the language skills and media literacy of children aged 4-18 years. Of all 150 library organisations, 127 (84,6%) participate in this programme, involving over 2,800 primary schools, which means that over 42% of the 6.626 Dutch primary schools are participating.

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| *A note on school libraries in the Netherlands*School libraries in the Netherlands are generally not run by teacher-librarians, as in many other countries. They may be run by a librarian from the public library, by volunteers (parents), by pupils or by a school librarian (whose professional background is not necessarily school library work or teaching). Libraries of schools participating in the Library at School programme are on average open for 10 hours per week. |

**The Library at School in primary schools**

As part of the Library at School programme, the primary school and library sign a contract for several years in which they agree to work together on:

* developing a joint policy in relation to reading at school, in the

library and at home

* providing an up-to-date and attractive collection, to enrich reading education
* providing books and other materials that can be taken home
* displaying books with their covers fully visible on movable bookshelves
* providing a reading consultant attached to the library to assist the school’s reading coordinator (a teacher)
* setting annual targets based on monitored results
* specifying all the reading promotion activities in an annual reading and media plan
* providing a digital portal to: facilitate searching and registering materials; stimulate reading; keep track of children’s borrowing history; and help finding reliable information.

A research study on the results and effect of The Library at School has shown that the results in terms of promoting the development of reading skills are positive. All pupils in schools that participate in The Library at School attain higher language scores than pupils in schools that do not participate. The strongest positive effects are found among girls: not only do their language skills improve, but their motivation to read during their leisure time increases as well (Nielen & Bus, 2015).

**Building block *the Monitor* in focus**

As part of the above mentioned national Dutch Library at School programme, a digital monitor has been developed which collects data on pupils, teachers, schools and school libraries. Owned by the library sector, the monitor gives libraries a strong position in their local and regional networks.

**The Library at School Monitor – primary education**

This study covers five rounds of data collection:

2012-2013, 2013-2014, 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017

Participants in the 2016-2017 monitor:

* 1,600 primary schools (ca. 23% of all primary schools)
* 142,500 primary school pupils
* 15,000 primary school teachers
* 1,450 reading consultants (public library staff)

**Content of the Monitor**

The Library at School Monitor is a digital instrument on the internet that is used to collect annually data on pupils’ reading behaviour, teachers’ reading promotion behaviour, school reading promotion policies and school libraries (run in collaboration with public library staff). Libraries and schools can use this data to evaluate the results of their cooperative work and to make decisions about steps to take in order to enhance the effectiveness of their collaboration. To make this possible, the monitor collects information on the following topics:

Pupils

* reading motivation
* reading frequency
* visits to public and school libraries
* home reading culture
* perception of school library
* information skills

Teachers

* reading promotion behaviour in the classroom
* information skills
* information teaching skills
* perception of the school library

Library staff

* the school library (e.g., collection, opening hours, staffing)
* school reading promotion policy (including curriculum time for
* silent reading)
* school media education policy
* pupils’ book borrowing rates (school library and public library)
* library services offered to schools

**Data collection and feedback**

The library collects the data once per year, through digital questionnaires administered to pupils, teachers and library staff. Local public libraries recruit schools for participation in the Monitor as part of the standard Library at School ‘package’ for schools, which generally includes the creation or upgrading of the school library, in-school support by public library staff (ranging from one to several hours per week) and school participation in the Monitor. In addition to the standard package, the local libraries provide services tailored to the schools’ specific needs.

The libraries receive concise standardized reports on each of the schools participating in the Monitor. The reports are automatically generated by the database system and show graphs with the key data on pupil and teacher behaviours, set off against national average figures. Besides the standardized reports, it is possible to create tailored reports. Librarian working with the schools (the so-called ‘reading consultants’) have access to the database and can put together reports for individual schools, geared to the school’s own reading promotion policy priorities. The reading consultant presents the results to the teachers in a meeting, interprets the data with them and discusses what steps should be taken in the next period.

As stated above, the libraries receive concise standardized reports showing graphs with the key data on pupil and teacher behaviours, set off against national average figures.

*Figure 1: A page from the standard report for school X: reading behaviour per form, national averages (top) and for school X (‘our school’).*

**Data output levels**

Data in the Monitor can be viewed at six levels:

* national level
* provincial level
* municipal level
* library region level (does not always coincide with municipal borders)
* school level
* classroom level (also by gender)

These different levels of data make it possible for libraries to carry out analyses for different purposes. Most important are the analyses at the school and classroom level, as these are used to inform cooperation decisions at the individual school level. But libraries can also look at developments at the municipal level, with a view to reporting to the local authorities (who fund the local library); or at the provincial level, to inform provincial library policy making.

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**Websites:**

<https://www.leesmonitor.nu/en/promoting-reading>

<http://www.kunstvanlezen.nl/?page_id=4020>

**International library references**

* **IFLA** has a section on Literacy & Reading. Adriaan Langendonk is Chair of the standing committee. See for more information: <https://www.ifla.org/publications/74>.