
Measuring the results of the cooperation between public libraries and school - The Monitor the Library at School in the Netherlands

Ingrid Bon

Rijnbrink Groep, Senior Advisor for public libraries, Arnhem, Netherlands

Kees Broekhof

Sardes Educational Services, Utrecht, Netherlands



Copyright © 2014 by K. Broekhof and I. Bon. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

Abstract:

On a commission of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, a project team has developed a national internet-based monitoring instrument which charts the impact of the collaboration between elementary schools and libraries (in-school as well as out-of-school). The instrument consists of digital questionnaires to students, teachers and school librarians. The questionnaires are administered once per year. The second round of data collection has been completed and involved collecting data from approximately 30,000 students, 3,000 teachers and 300 reading consultants from all over the Netherlands. The main goal of the monitor is to help individual schools and libraries to optimize the impact of their collaboration. At each school, the teachers are given feedback from the monitor by the school librarian. The monitoring data makes it possible to pinpoint specific aspects of student classroom behavior, provides detailed information for discussions amongst teaching staff and to inform school policy. As the data is retained in a national database and has also been used for analysis at a national and provincial level.

Keywords: Internet-based monitoring system, schools, library, Netherlands

1. Introduction

The *Monitor the Library at School* in the Netherlands is a national digital tool on the internet which libraries use to examine and measure the effects of cooperation with primary schools. The tool consists of questionnaires for pupils (aged 8+), teachers and library staff (reading consultants). These respondents fill out a questionnaire once.

The questionnaire provides a snapshot of the:

- lending and reading behaviour of pupils;
- reading attitudes of pupils;
- promotion of reading by teachers;

- library environment that supports the cooperation (e.g. the size of the collection in the school or the opening hours of the Library); and
- the information literacy skills of the pupils and information literacy education practised by staff in the school (added in 2013).

The Monitor was tested for the first time in 2010. In 2011, 2012 and 2013 students contributing has grown from 5000 to 60,000 pupils. The last survey was done by over 60,000 pupils, 7,000 teachers and 700 reading consultants. The aim of the monitor is two-fold:

- first, to facilitate data-driven, one-to-one cooperation between schools and libraries; and
- second, to inform library policy regarding the educational role of libraries in the context of local policy making.

The Monitor is part of the concept *The Library at School* which is a large package that helps the Dutch library community to shape its educative role in primary schools. The Monitor was developed in 2010 by Sardes and Thomas van Dalen Consultancy, at the direction of the Dutch Ministry of Education, Science and Culture.

The Monitor provides data on six levels:

1. class/group (pupils and teachers);
2. school (total outcome of all groups);
3. municipality (all participating schools in the same municipality);
4. working area of the library (often more than one municipality);
5. provincial level (all participating schools in one province); and
6. national level (all participating schools in the Netherlands).

Policy makers can use the Monitor to develop policy, monitor that policy, to evaluate the policy and to justify the policy. This can be done on each of the six levels. In this paper discussion is limited to the description of the main function of the Monitor, and the one-to-one cooperative relationship between the library and the school.

2. Data collection

As described above, the monitor contains questionnaires for pupils, teachers and library staff (reading consultant). The following data is collected via the questionnaires.

Pupils:

- demographic data - year group, date of birth and gender;
- reading for pleasure;
- reading behaviour;
- home reading culture;
- perception of the public library; and
- information skills (2013).

Teachers:

- year group;
- reading aloud;
- book introductions;
- reading circles;
- use of book collections in factual subjects (e.g. history, geography); and
- information skills (2013).

Library staff (reading consultant):

- school demographic data;
- lending figures;
- school policy regarding reading promotion and information skills;
- school library (collection, opening hours);
- staffing (education, activities in school); and
- inclusion of information skills course (2013).

The questionnaires can be filled out on a yearly basis, from October 1 to January 31. The library invites the schools in their area to participate. The decision to participate is made by each school. Each library has a Monitor Coordinator who coordinates the data collection. The reading consultant from the library works with the Reading Coordinators (teachers) in the schools to ensure the questionnaires are filled in on time. The reading consultant is also responsible for library issues in each school.

3. Feedback to the school

The reading consultant and the Monitor Coordinator from the library conduct an analysis of the collected data each year and present this to the school. They can choose from two different reports:

1. standard report with the most important data; and
2. a tailored report detailing results from selected the issues, e.g. particular subjects that are a focus for the school.

The library presents and discusses the report at a school staff meeting. During this meeting they present results and findings from the data analysis, develop new goals (if needed) and make mutually agreed decisions on how the library and school will work on and measure the effectiveness of these goals.

4. Key data from the standard report

Reading motivation

The question for reading motivation is *How do you feel on reading a book?* Both the national, average data are shown in the report as well as the specific data from individual schools. So each school can see, per year group, how they differ from the national average. When presenting these results, the library explains that the national average is not a benchmark, but just a national average. In other words, even if the results from a school equal the national average, this does not necessarily mean the school can be satisfied with their results. In the graphs below we can see that the school demonstrates a better result than the national average, with both boys and girls scoring above the national average. If the school participates in the data collection annually, the results from previous years will also be provided. Comparing past results may indicate that while current scores are still above the national average, previous scores indicate a change in scores and a lowering of reading motivation. Therefore, obtaining a complete data set over a number of years is very important as it provides a much better explanation of what is happening at the school level.

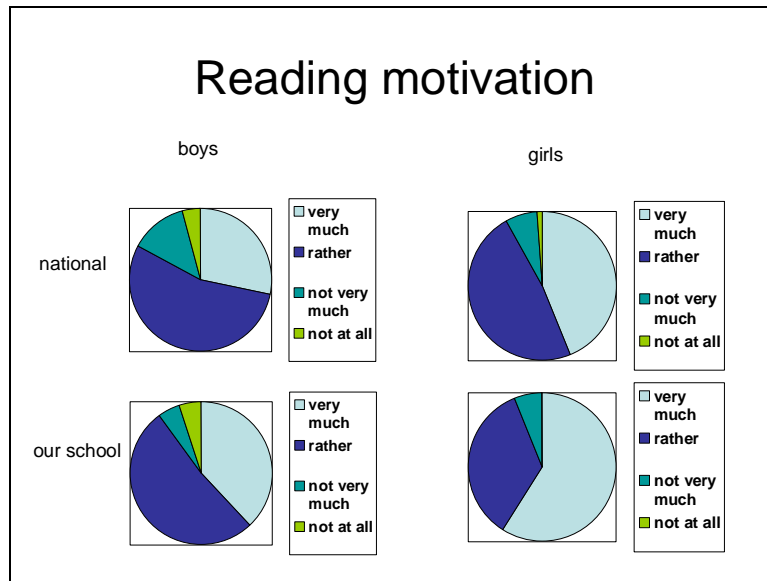


Diagram 1: Student behaviour, reading motivation, standard report

Reading frequency

Diagram 2 indicates that this school is scoring well on the level of reading frequency. For grades 5 - 8 there is a lower percentage of pupils who read on a daily base, but the percentage of pupils that states they never read is significantly smaller than the national average. Grades 4 and 8 show a very positive result. Grade 6 is below the national average with a pattern that is clearly different from the other grades, a fact that would be highlighted in the discussion with teachers. Is there anything special about this group of children? Does the teacher do things differently to the other teachers? It is quite possible that in this situation the teachers would decide on a new goal for reading frequency for Grade 6, ie. the reading frequency of Grade 6 needs to rise. Activities and approaches to meet the new goal would be agreed upon after the final analysis has been completed.

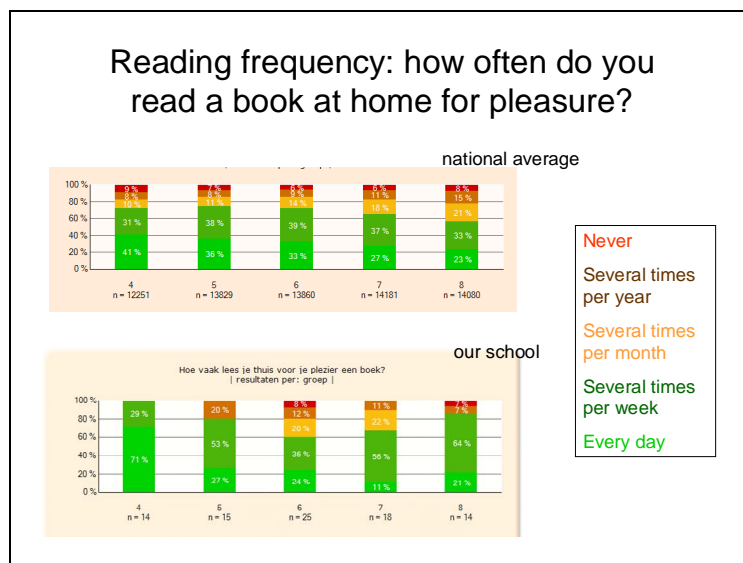


Diagram 2: Student behaviour, reading frequency, standard report

Borrowing behaviour

In the Standard Report, results for borrowing behaviour are also compared with the national data. In this example the pattern of borrowing differs very much from the national data. It is possible that the school and the library, recognising that reading motivation declines in the higher grades, invested a lot of time and effort in stimulating the borrowing of books in the higher grades. It seems that due to this extra attention to raising motivation in grades 7 and 8, the lower grades are falling behind. A new goal in this situation could be to increase the borrowing figures for grades 4, 5 and 6.

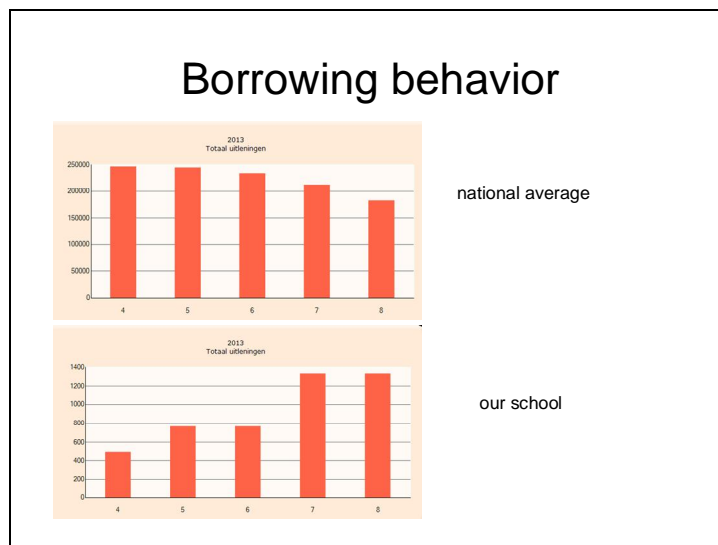


Diagram 3: Student behaviour, borrowing, standard report

Book circles

A book circle is an approach where all pupils discuss informally books and reading under guidance of the teacher. This approach is a good alternative to the traditional book talk presentation or it can be used as an additional activity. In the book circle only authentic, meaningful conversations are conducted in a format that is informal. The exchange of reading experiences and stimulating personal reading pleasure is a major focus of the club. The teacher does not control, but encourages the conversation and joins in the conversation including discussion about his/her own reading preferences and level of engagement with reading. Schools sometimes use the method espoused by the author Aidan Chambers. In diagram 4, teachers are not using the book circle with the same frequency. Three do not do book circles at all, two only a few times a year and three several times a month. By discussing these different approaches the teachers will become aware of the fact that the children across the school are not receiving the same program. Such discussion may lead to a new target for this item, ie. the introduction of book circles in all grades.

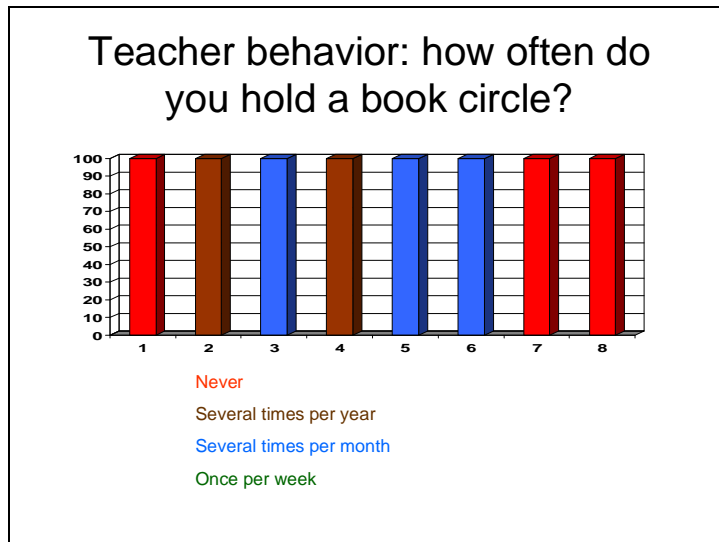


Diagram 4: Teacher behaviour, book circles, standard report

The use of books in factual subjects

Factual subjects like history or geography are useful for reading promotion. It is not difficult to find subjects from textbooks which connect with fiction and non-fiction books. However, the use of fiction and non-fiction, and the promotion of reading in factual subjects is not a common approach in Dutch primary schools. If this approach is done at all, it is informal and intermittent. Diagram 5 indicates that teachers from different grades do not have a consistent approach. The responses range from never to often. Such a result could lead to the development of a new goal, ie. in all grades we will use fiction and non-fiction books in factual subjects.

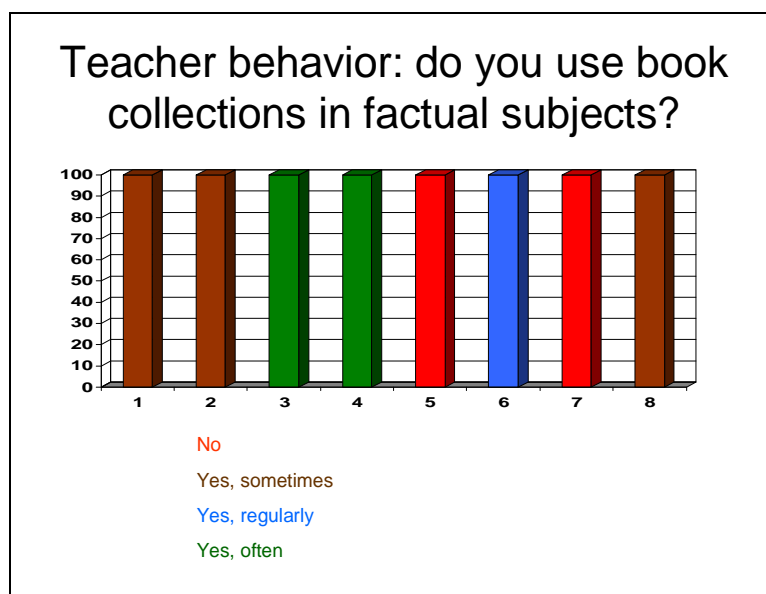


Diagram 5: Teacher behaviour, fiction and non-fiction in factual subjects, standard report

Tailored reports

When the school has special policy priorities, the library can prepare a special report, which focuses on these priorities. For example dealing with parent involvement (questions on the home reading environment), policy on reading by boys (tendency to score lower than girls in both reading frequency and language skills), or the use of the library. Since 2013 the library has also been able to prepare a tailored report on information literacy.

5. Data-driven cooperation with schools

Using data from The Monitor to demonstrate how one-on-one cooperation between the library and schools can be effective, has made it very clear how it is possible for the public library to offer real customized services to schools. The public library can deliver customised services for each school, single grades or a subgroup like the boys from Grade 7. This is a huge change when compared with the general product-oriented policies usually in place in Dutch public libraries. Using data in this way requires a new way of thinking and acting. Data-driven means that the data collected by The Monitor can lead to new policy measures and real change. Library personnel and school staff can examine the results (presented as graphics), reach conclusions and formulate new agreements based on cooperation.

Formulating new goals, as discussed in the previous section, however, is not the final step in the equation. After the goals have been set, agreements need to be reached on HOW to achieve these goals. In order to raise the borrowing of books in grade 4, 5 and 6 the school and library can agree on a two-weekly visit to the Library at School. The next step is that both partners DO what they agreed upon and fulfil their respective roles. Then after the next Monitor round of data collection, the school and the library can assess whether the desired changes have taken place. This can result in new goals and agreements or a commitment to ongoing monitoring. Working in this way demands a high level of analytic thinking and strategic behaviour from the library staff. This is a big change for public libraries and represents an ongoing process currently underway.

6. Conclusion

The huge amount of data collected by The Monitor also makes it possible to pinpoint national trends. These trends were published in 2013 for the first time in a separate brochure. With these reports and brochures school boards, library directors and city councils can make policy decisions based on solid data. The policy regarding cooperation between schools and libraries is often is part of a policy focused on educational disadvantages. The Monitor Library at School makes it possible to correct priorities based on real data and assessment of whether activities have been effective, ie. positive educational advances. For this reason The Monitor Library at School is a worthwhile and useful tool for all involved in policy making at all levels.