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**Turning Crisis into Opportunity: The Power of Children's Libraries for the Future**

**Children's Libraries: Challenges and new Possibilities:  
Strategic Cooperation between Libraries and Local Communities to Promote  
Children's Reading in Denmark**

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**1. Introduction**

Today, the library is not a concept with one clear function: The library is both a physical building in the urban space/at school and a cultural institution in society. The libraries therefore have to find a new legitimacy and a more definite profile in relation to children. A report from 2008 (Future Library Services to Children) gives recommendations and suggestions for the libraries' services to children in Denmark. The goal is that the libraries can match children's actual everyday lives, media interest and various other cultural needs with focus on the position of play, social inclusion, cultural formation and good reading skills. In order to support children in areas relevant to both their everyday lives and their future, the libraries must combine the library act's three overall objectives about enlightenment, experience and education. The library still plays a special part when it comes to giving children reading experiences and reading skills. At the same time active partnerships between libraries and a broad range of local communities contain a number of potentials and assets. This paper will focus on how strategic cooperation between libraries and local communities can promote children's reading.

The paper begins with an outline of challenges and focus areas for children's reading and libraries (Chapter 2). In chapter 3 the paper describes Danish challenges according to illiteracy of young people. The following chapter (4) pins down the library's historic and current role in relation to children's reading. Chapter 5 outlines the characteristics of a new concept of general education and cultural formation. This concept provides an essential part of the background for the recommendations in the report on future library services to children ((Future Library Services to Children, 2008) which is presented in chapter 6. The Danish Joy of Reading campaign covers a broad variety of projects and experiences in relation to new forms of partnerships between libraries and local communities. Chapter 7 presents five different cases which illustrate how new partnerships can contribute to a stronger focus on children's reading in many of their everyday arenas. The various strategies of the five cases are condensed in chapter 8 which contains the ten specific recommendations from the committee behind the report on future library services to children (Future Library Services to Children, 2008).

Chapter 9 concludes that local ownership of projects, an early joint effort and dissemination of best practice on a national level are three decisive factors in relation to improving children's reading.

## **2. Future library services to children**

The classical tradition of mediation in the children's library is under pressure. Children's new media habits and a changed 'play culture' combine to challenge mediation practice in children's libraries. At the same time children are more and more perceived as individuals with personal opinions and their own way of expressing these. A change of approach in relation to mediation is therefore absolutely necessary, and generally speaking professional service must rely on dialogue with the children and the opportunities of the actual library space – and not on the collections. The facts speak for themselves: The number of children using the public library at least *once* a month has fallen from 51% in 1998 to 39% in 2004. (Future Library Services to Children, 2008, p. 109)

In 2006 the Danish minister for culture appointed a committee to consider future library services to children. On the basis of analyses and assessments, the committee should produce a number of recommendations and suggestions for new concepts and services in the children's library. The report (Future Library Services to Children, 2008)) with ten specific recommendations was published in February 2008, and the conclusion was quite clear: The library continues to be one of the most important cultural resources for children in the local communities – but radical changes are necessary if we want to make sure that the library upholds its status as a central cultural institution for children.

One of the most important focus areas in this change is the staff's ability to communicate with children and to support their cultural development and competences as well as their play culture. Library services in the future must provide broad media experiences across materials and genres. Mediation should be adapted to the children's need for participation, and they must be given exciting physical frames within which to expand. New partnerships with i.a. school libraries and more outreach activities are also areas open to change and innovation. (Future Library Services to Children, 2008, p. 17)

## **3. Illiteracy among youngsters**

Another highly relevant background for the report and the ten recommendations is functional illiteracy among youngsters. Today Denmark has a quite unacceptably large group of youngsters who cannot read when they leave school. This has major consequences for both the individual and society. Good reading and writing skills have become a social survival condition because all education and production are based on writing.

In all subjects at the public school, learning is based on pupils being able to read, and it is therefore disheartening to read the latest PISA-study from 2006 (Egelund, 2006). 57 countries have participated in the study which shows that the proportion of pupils without functional reading skills in Denmark is 16%. By way of comparison the figure is 5% in Finland, 15% in Sweden, 22% in Norway and 20% in Iceland.

The Danish results concerning functional reading skills do not differ significantly from the results in 2000 and 2003 and from the OECD-average. The proportion of very proficient readers is however lower in Denmark than in the other Nordic countries and the average for the OECD-countries. As in previous PISA-rounds, girls are markedly better at reading than boys. (Egelund, 2006, p. 11-12)

Together with Danish PISA-researchers and the Business College in Aarhus the Rockwool Foundation has examined reading skills for pupils in Denmark with Danish as their second language. A rather sombre picture emerged. 47% of these pupils are without functional reading skills when they leave the public school. Of pupils with non-western background and with Danish as their second language 53% are without functional reading skills (Egelund, and Tranæs, 2005).

About half the young pupils with Danish as their second language are thus not sufficiently skilled in reading to accomplish a youth education after the public school. Also the commercial and crafts training educations require good reading skills: to be able to decode and understand, also to be able to plan their studying, for example in connection with exams.

The Danish government is very aware of the serious social problem which functional illiteracy represents and has launched a national action plan for reading. It is particularly targeted at the educational area, but also includes support for joy of reading, i.e. stimulation of leisure-time reading that helps to turn children into good readers. (Rapport fra Udvalget til forberedelse af en national handlingsplan for læsning, 2005)

The report concerning future library services to children stresses the library's special possibilities for supporting children's reading experiences as well as reading skills. The library's initiatives and necessity in this area are more immediate than ever before.

#### **4. The libraries' role in relation to children's reading**

Libraries have always tried to support children's joy of reading. This is first of all based on the wish to give children literary experiences, but also on the knowledge that children who read a lot, become more confident readers. The library's role is therefore multi-stringed: The library must stimulate the joy of reading by offering children a multitude of media and a mediation that inspires the children to read. At the same time the library must support the work of turning children into proficient readers – i.a. by cooperating with day-care institutions in offering

language-stimulating activities and by initiating activities that underpin the school's reading instruction. (Future Library Services to Children, 2008, p. 57)

The children themselves also have a number of ideas as to how to become a good and avid reader. This appears from an study from Centre for Children's Literature (Hvad skaber en lystlæser?, 2007). The purpose of the study is to examine the participating children's reading habits and find out why the children themselves feel that they have become compulsive readers. It is characteristic for the reading-enthused children that they see the book as *one* of several media for primarily indoor use, and they perceive themselves as readers in an extrovert and social context. Like other children and young people they seek the fellowship and the unique event. The children maintain that they have become great readers because they have enjoyed exchanging book tips with their friends. According to the children, other important motivation factors are parents who enjoy reading, who recommend books, approachable staff in the library who treat the children with respect, and teachers who introduce various reading initiatives or let the class take part in a reading campaign.

It is vital that the adult mediators of books understand how to invite the children to a dialogue on equal terms about reading experiences, so that the child feels that it shares a common interest with the adult. Professional mediators such as teachers, pedagogues and libraries must therefore have read the books they seek to mediate, and they should include their own personal views in the dialogue with the children.

Dialogue with users, the feeling of sharing in connection with reading and reading initiatives across libraries and local institutions are therefore important elements in terms of turning children and young people into proficient readers.

### **5. A new 'Bildung' concept**

Children's reading skills must be seen in close connection with modern society's many demands on its citizens. A vital resource in the knowledge society is the population's ability to create, interpret and exchange all kinds of content in physical and digital media. These abilities are called multi-modal competences. Multi-modality means 'use of many modi'. Writing is one modus which can be used together with other modi like e.g. pictures in the same media. (Future Library Services to Children, 2008, p. 18)

Today children primarily exercise their media use in their leisure time where they acquire experiences, information and particularly communication via printed, audiovisual and digital media. However, most children need adult support over a longer period of time in order to develop their multi-modal competences. As a consequence, a new 'Bildung' concept can form the basis for new forms of library service to children. The concept includes both information, play and communication, both intellectual and emotional learning components and 'old' as well as 'new' media. Reading is still a key concept, as reading is the prerequisite for using all media. On the other hand, all media are suitable for stimulating the interest in and ability to read.

The new 'Bildung' concept forms the basis for the recommendations in the report on future library services to children, which will be presented in the following.

## **6. To be, to learn and to do in the library**

In order to support children in areas relevant to both their everyday lives and their future, the libraries must combine the library act's three overall objectives about *enlightenment*, *experience* and *education*.

*Enlightenment* is not just giving individual access to information via search engines, portals etc. Enlightenment is also application with insight. The library's task is therefore to contribute to developing children's ability to transform information into relevant insight.

*Experience* is not just mediating fiction in book form and creating frames for cultural events. Experience includes all cultural expressions – visual, auditive and multi-medial. The library's task is therefore to contribute to developing children's quality awareness in relation to all kinds of expressions and to encourage their interest in the curious, surprising and provoking content in all kinds of materials.

*Education* is not just the 'measurable' that takes place in the formal classroom. Education also happens in semi-formal rooms such as the library, and in informal rooms where learning is not the prime objective, when children e.g. learn the rules of role play in order to join the game.

It is the library's task to help create frames where children in the company of other children and adults can 'cultivate' themselves and develop competences. The library cannot and should not be a school. But the library can become a bridge builder between informal learning processes, individual networks and formalised educational institutions like school.

Summing up, one can describe the library as a place where children can be, learn and do. The library must continue to be a sanctuary where children can come without having to do anything in particular. At the same time it must provide an exciting framework that supports children's desire to do something, to learn, experience and play. No Danish children's libraries function exactly like the typologies described here, because libraries take into consideration the users' age and social background: The library as a 'place to be' is probably a more widespread model in relation to younger children, while the library as a 'place to do' is perhaps particularly suitable for older children. However, the three models indicate how the service to children can take various forms.

### **6.1 New competences engineer new activities in the library**

The committee behind the report on children's libraries recommends that library staff emphasize active mediation and facilitation of physical as well as virtual activities for children. The

objective is that service and personal dialogue must be focused, both in terms of the individual child and groups of children and families, and that the staff to a greater degree than at present concentrate on what children need in order to experience, know and learn. This requires a thorough knowledge of i.a. all relevant media and genres as well as the ability to mediate content enthusiastically via workshops, online service, games, literary mediation, editing of materials, design of rooms and user inclusion.

It is therefore recommended that educational institutions work more specifically with mediation competences and broader media knowledge in basic staff education.

In order to develop a library staff capable of embracing a broad spectre of children's cultural needs, the committee also recommends that the libraries consider employing staff with specific competences within the field of children and culture. For the purpose of signalling that several staff categories can easily be accommodated, the report does not use the designation 'children's librarian', but rather 'people employed in the library' and 'library staff'. ((Future Library Services to Children, 2008, p. 45)

## **6.2 The broad media experience**

The library has a long tradition of encouraging children's cultural development, particularly based on fiction and non-fiction literature. The library's mediation of literature and joyful reading experiences is still important considering the interests of the relatively large group who visits the library to borrow books or other material. In the 'gemming' of new media technologies it is easy to forget the book. It is often described as a traditional medium, but as opposed to other media the content mediates itself to a lesser extent, and a permanent need exists for reading, discussing and rendering the book visible on today's premises.

Children's media consumption has changed dramatically within the last decade. Today children collect stories, professional knowledge and experiences from many different sources other than books, e.g. via the internet, computer games, films and own-produced films. This shakes the classic concept of mediation of children's culture and the function of the library, among other things because part of the library service now takes place via the Internet. It is important for children to realise that their adults are interested in those media and genres which are part of children's every-day lives. The computer interactions in the library should be a social activity where the adult relates to the content on the screen and assists children in their searches and actively points out resources and useful links to entertainment, information and learning. (Future Library Services to Children, 2008, p. 50-53)

### **6.3 Play culture**

Another recommendation in the report deals with making play culture a central part of content and mediation in relation to children and their parents. The library can underpin children's play culture by looking at different media's positive contribution to the creation of play as well as supplying toys and games and mediate those actively.

The committee's assessment is that the library – as well as parents – lack sufficient knowledge of the possibilities and limitations in relation to toys and games – including the electronic ones. It is necessary to know how toys and games can enrich children's play culture and the friendship culture so vital for children today. This concentration on play means that staff has to be trained i.a. to assess the quality of toys and to be able to advise and inspire parents and children regarding all types of material and cultural products for children and to launch activities, where the staff is the driving force in creating games and social activities. (Future Library Services to Children, 2008, p. 56-58)

It is obvious that great demands are put on future employees in the children's library. In order for the staff to meet these, the recommendation of competence development is repeated again and again as an important Alpha among the various recommendations. No Alpha without an Omega – and in this connection it means the management's – the library's and the local authorities' – prioritisation of resources in terms of staff, money and time in order to renew and locally adapt the library's service to children.

The report on the future children's library has been presented on a number of road shows in different places in Denmark, and the reactions from the librarians are very positive, so far: They see the report as a tool to carry out strategic development of their service, and they are very open to solutions based on nationwide concepts which gives some clear advantages and possibilities to 'pump up the volume'. The Agency for Libraries and Media is now working to support the implementation of the recommendations and suggestions in the report.

### **7. Joy of Reading for Children and Young People – from campaign to local ownership and implementation**

The report on future library services to children is to a great extent based on the lessons learned in connection with the national campaign, 'Joy of Reading' launched by the Ministry of Culture in 2003. Later, both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Welfare joined the campaign to stress the importance of encouraging children's joy of reading all through childhood and across many sectors.

The campaign has had various focus point since its start, e.g. the good experience, the good book and the good reader. During the campaign's final year focus was concentrated on knowledge sharing, research and mediation as well as ownership and implementation of the good

experiences, so that municipalities and libraries are being motivated constantly and inspired in the work with literature, learning and culture.

A qualitative evaluation of 'Joy of Reading' shows that the campaign's effort to inspire children and young people to read has been successful, because appeal to desire and voluntariness established a positive bridge between children, young people and literature. A cultural-economical analysis (Damgaard and Sørensen, 2008) shows that the strategy of creating new collaborations across schools, day-care offers, libraries etc. has been extremely productive. Altogether the campaign has been a good example of how publicly financed projects do not necessarily have to be drowned in administration and bureaucracy. The means are primarily allocated directly to concrete activities of which the purpose is to encourage children and young people's joy of reading. (Damgaard and Sørensen, 2008, p. 18-20)

The campaign continues during the period 2008-2010 as a programme with an annual pool earmarked for various activities. The pool allocates grants to:

- Kindergarten libraries nationwide
- National reading campaigns for school children
- Literary activities for the young.

The Joy of Reading programme has provided fuel for new forms of collaboration and joint projects between the public libraries and public actors and institutions. In the following, five current examples are given on how the Danish public libraries cooperate with kindergartens, schools, municipalities and voluntary organisations to encourage and strengthen children's reading, language and learning.

### **7.1 Case 1: Kindergarten libraries**

One of the recommendations in the report on future library services to children states that the library must reach out to where the children actually spend their daily lives. The objective is for the library to define itself in relation to and interact with other partners, e.g. kindergartens, the home, schools and associations. The about 30 kindergarten libraries in Denmark are a good example. All Danish public libraries can in collaboration with day-care offers apply for grants to establish kindergarten libraries, so that children and staff get extended daily access to books and reading, and children and parents get the opportunity to take out books and other materials. (Madsen and Poulsen, 2008)

The concept 'kindergarten library' covers everything ranging from a repository arrangement with loan of books and other materials to an actual satellite library in the kindergarten with librarians and cultural arrangements. Whichever model one chooses, the pivotal point in the kindergarten library is to give children access to daily experiences with books, and to encourage parents' interest in reading aloud and bringing the children into the library during an otherwise hectic day with many other choices. The kindergarten libraries contribute to the process of democratising

children and parents' access to books and other material, as they provide all children with equal access to books and reading. They also help to reduce social and cultural inequalities and can be instrumental in levelling geographical and time-factor barriers for visiting the library.

The offer also gives pedagogues and libraries the possibility to develop new dimensions in their interaction with children and give pre-school children experiences with books that support their linguistic and personal development and their interest in learning to read. Thus the kindergarten libraries help to strengthen the day-care institutions' work with the national pedagogical learning plans concerning language and culture.

The researcher, Kjeld Kjertmann sees kindergarten libraries as part of a necessary reform in relation to children's reading and writing: "If written language and books are not incorporated as a natural part of our being together with the children, we are bound to lag behind, because the school alone will be responsible for teaching children to read and write. In my mind it seems completely absurd that in a 100 percent developed writing society we keep the written language away from children on the assumption that it does not belong at this or that age. Kindergarten libraries are therefore a kind of brainwave to the extent that they are part of a strategy to ensure that fewer people encounter reading problems in the future, that more develop a zest for reading and begin to read and write, and that more will not have problems about embarking on the educations offered to young people when they leave school". (Cranfield and Enemark, 2007)

The model of making available an alternating selection of library books to children, parents and professionals like pedagogues and teachers can be transferred to other places in children's daily environment, possibly supplemented with activities like reading cafés for beginners, book clubs and lectures for parents. This satellite model can be used in after-school centres, clubs, sports centres, civic centres and cultural centres. The overriding premise is that the library seeks out children in their familiar environments and moves its materials and offers outside the classical library space.

## **7.2. Case 2: The reading quiz 'Ready - steady – answer' for school children**

Competitions and events contain particularly catching elements that sharpen children's interest in participating. Among these elements is the possibility to gain the audience's recognition of one's knowledge or capabilities and the chance to gain a position as role model for children in the class who do not read a lot or in the daily group of friends. Events like competitions and quizzes also have a considerable entertainment aspect which can motivate learning that takes place outside school, e.g. in connection with camps or visits to museums.

The quiz Ready-steady-answer is based on the competitive aspect and on modern children's need to be visible in the media picture. By employing these elements of fascination the quiz makes children aware of the fact that there are other ways of qualifying for a place in the limelight than popular song- and X-Factor contests on television. The quiz is run as a team competition for 7.

graders where each class produces a quiz team consisting of five pupils from the class accompanied by their classmates as audience.

The type of prize can be instrumental in underpinning the participating children's function as role models. If the children are competing for a prize which will benefit the whole class, the class will be interested in getting the most avid readers (and not necessarily the most popular) pupils into the team and back them all the way so that the class will get the best chance of winning. This turns readers into positive role models who can inspire others in the class to read more. The quiz also gives reading a social dimension; normally reading is a solitary process, but here becomes the pivotal point for a social process where you together with others will be using what you have learned on your own.

There are many types of questions in the quiz. The categories cover all aspects of reading: The broadly informed reader, the genre-fixated reader, books from childhood, songs, rhymes, reams, proverbs, the origin of words, films and books, recipes and user guides, nonfiction etc. Many libraries collaborate with the teachers on how to prepare the pupils for the quiz. Experience shows that the teacher's involvement is important in terms of motivating his pupils. The most successful pupils typically have a teacher who has been working hard on preparing them for the event.

This form of quizz and other strategic reader events is a good way for the children's library to profile itself in relation to the children. The role as organiser and facilitator engage the libraries in a new way as enthusiastic people with a love for the same literature as the children appreciate. This can motivate the children to visit the library. Moreover, the library knows the latest popular trends and has the competence to formulate questions within the field of children's literature.

The children's library can expand the event itself with preparatory games and activities, e.g. competitions in acquiring knowledge as quickly as possible via searching the Internet, which is also a central media competence. Librarians, teachers and school libraries can also establish leisure time offers for the children who are going to participate in the event, so that they can go to Ready-steady-answer reading club and practice the different genres. Quizzes like Ready-steady-answer, which are based on collaboration with local schools, are therefore obvious tools for libraries in their work with giving children reading experiences and reading skills. (Cranfield and Enemark, 2007, p. 36-40)

### **7.3. Case 3: Author school for the young**

The Joy of Reading project 'Author school for the young' is based on the assumption that reading and writing are closely associated. To many young people, there is an attractive aura about writing and creating in an artistic process, while the mere fact of reading can be perceived as a passive and less interesting activity. The author school for the young in Brønderslev in the northern part of Denmark is a hothouse for budding writers between 13 and 18 and is supported by Brønderslev municipality. The school's aim is to give the young people the possibility of

manifesting themselves as writers. They attend an intensive course for a week with professional authors as instructors and are also given the opportunity to create a network of other young people with the same great interest in writing whom they can use as sparring partners after the course.

The author school provides two annual courses during the summer vacations which are very popular. The school selects the participants based on their reasons for wanting to apply, and on the basis of the texts which they send in with their application. The many applicants means that professional interest and motivation among those who have been accepted is high. For all participants it is therefore a big and powerful experience to meet a network of people with the same interest, who are interested in each other's writing talents and wish to exchange thoughts and ideas, discuss writing processes etc.

After each course the pupils' stories are published in an anthology which is distributed to libraries nationwide. To see one's own text in print is an experience that enhances young people's self-understanding as writers and accelerates the development of an identity as a writer. The collection of stories can also encourage other young people's joy of reading and interest in writing, as many find it particularly interesting to learn how other young people express their feelings and thoughts.

Lecturer Peter Kaspersen from the University of Southern Denmark has evaluated the author school in Brønderlev. He sees a great potential in working with this form of instruction: "The writing exercises, the students do at the school, remind them of what many of them have done in the public school. The big difference is however, that at the Author school they are all dying to write, and nobody is frightened of being labelled 'teacher's pet' if they seem too keen. This creates a far greater enthusiasm and motivation. The instructors' function also differs from that of the Danish language teachers in the public school. Instead the authors act as advisers, helping the students through personal processes and putting forward subjective suggestions as to how they themselves would tackle the situation. By involving authors as instructors, the school's offers are being qualified and professionalised. I consider the Author school for the young and the other Joy of Reading projects to tend towards the building up of a halfway informal education system with a certain management framework, but a free development of content" (Cranfield and Enemark, 2007, p. 57) .

Public libraries can adopt this model and collaborate with professional authors and illustrators on arranging similar creative processes for children and young people. Obvious partners would be the local youth club or continuation school, just as libraries can join with high schools in planning creative writing workshops for pupils in connection with theme courses. The instruction can also contain elements such as recitation techniques and oral story telling.

#### 7.4 Case 4: Bookstart

The Danish Agency for Libraries and Media has in March 2009 launched a project with book gifts for children when they are 6, 12, 18 and 36 months old. The book gifts are followed by other offers and initiatives to encourage language stimulation. The programme runs initially for four years and for this period includes children from disadvantaged residential areas, as the programme is funded by government means earmarked for vulnerable citizens. In the longer term the aim is to extend the concept to reach all children in Denmark. The project is not part of the Joy of Reading-programme as such, but it is an important initiative in relation to children's reading.

The project stresses the perspectives of broadening the library's role in the local community: In disadvantaged residential areas the library can make a difference on a par with health visitors, job counselling and 'friend visitors'. The results from a number of projects in Denmark indicate that the library is a good frame when being introduced into the community, and by starting already when the children are only 6 months old the chances are that this will have a great effect on the child's access to knowledge and books.

The inspiration for Bookstart comes primarily from England, but also the Swedish Markaryd model has been a source of inspiration, as indeed has the Danish pilot project 'Language Portal'. The Language Portal mediates the libraries' offers and creates a contact to families with an ethnic background other than Danish. The aim is to improve children's language and turn them into good readers. Copenhagen Libraries have launched the project, which includes selected residential areas with many residents of a different ethnic background.

There are many obvious advantages in launching a Bookstart programme. Basically Bookstart is about mediation of children's literature, but at the same time it suggests that literature can be used actively as an instrument for early learning and social change. The project has many 'side effects' which each can be scaled down or emphasized according to the overall objectives. These might be concerned with breaking negative social heritage, supporting parents in taking responsibility for the children's learning, giving children early literacy competences to 'read' and decode text and pictures and understand a narrative sequence. It might also be a question of wanting to provide the child with rich literary and aesthetical experiences right from birth.

The message of Bookstart is that one does not need any special knowledge to motivate and stimulate small children to read books. The most important message the libraries can pass on is that when parents read with their children they must exude enthusiasm. The crucial thing is that the children are willing and ready to experience the books, touch them, chew them and examine them. It is the being together and having a good time that gives infant literature its strength and opens up an opportunity to use the language, to describe in words and to make noises. Another important point is that it does not matter very much which language you are speaking. Language stimulation is not about learning to speak *one* language only, but rather of using one's language, whether it be nonsense language, Danish, Arabic or Chinese.

When the programme finishes in 2012 about 20,000 children will have experienced Bookstart. Bookstart operates in 20 different residential areas in 15 municipalities spread across Denmark. (Enemark, 2009)

### **7.5 Case 5: Homework cafés**

Almost half the pupils in Denmark with Danish as their second language are not able to read well enough to complete a youth education when they leave the public school. Home work help cafés are to offer children and young people with another ethnic background than Danish a better chance to develop their Danish language and subsequently be able to complete a further education.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture are joining forces in establishing a total of 100 new voluntary homework help schemes in libraries as well as the development of existing homework help schemes with supporting activities. Like Bookstart the homework cafés are not part of the Joy of Reading programme, but the cafés play an important role in strengthening reading, learning and language specifically for children and young people with another ethnic background.

The library provides a good framework for a homework café. It is a neutral place, which is open to everybody, and has a staff who can advise the pupils on how to navigate in the almost unlimited access to knowledge in books and electronic media. Moreover, homework cafés in libraries can stay open at other times than those traditionally offered by the schools. Most children and parent with a different ethnic background also see the library as a refuge where girls too can come on their own. For some children with Danish as their second language the contact to the homework helper is the only relationship they have with ethnic Danes who are employed to and paid for looking after them. Homework helpers in the library are volunteers, who are not professional teachers, but who offer children help with their homework. Help, that for various reasons their parents are not able to provide. Finally, the library has good opportunities for letting homework cafés interact with other educational or cultural activities. (Lektiecaféer, 2007, p. 5-10)

There is, however, a barrier to running a homework café, because volunteers and library staff do not normally have a great knowledge of teaching methods and pedagogy. The library's homework café is also dependent on good cooperative relations with the children's teachers, if the homework helpers are to support the children fully in the areas where they have to improve, and if the offer is to support the actual subjects which the children are studying at school.

A typical homework café is open a couple of afternoons a week. In some cafés the children can just drop in, in others they must be registered. A homework café does not necessarily have to operate on the library's own premises. The library can easily organise homework help in the

local sports club, the housing association premises or in a club for older children. The important thing is that the offer is available right where young people come.

In order to attract more children and young people to the offer of homework help, the Agency for Libraries and Media together with the Ministry of Integration and the Ministry of Education received funding for establishing online homework help. In a pilot project with virtual homework cafés pupils and voluntary homework helpers can meet face to face via a web camera. Here they can chat with each other and exchange documents outside opening hours in schools and libraries.

### **8. Ten recommendations for future library services to children**

Kindergarten libraries, the reading quiz Ready-steady-answer, author school for the young, Bookstart and homework cafés illustrate in concrete terms the majority of the 10 recommendations which the committee behind the report on future library services to children has formulated (Future Library Services to Children, 2008, p. 18).

#### **1. New competences create new activities in the library**

A new media landscape, new cultural habits and different demands and expectations require the development of new competences in the library. Library staff must be more visible on the Internet, facilitate activities in the library and organise meetings and dialogue with users where they actually are.

#### **2. The library space must provide surprise and inspiration**

We need new concepts for the design of the physical library space. The library must be attractive for children to be, learn and play in.

#### **3. The libraries develop their Internet services**

The libraries create new frames and facilities i.a. by exploiting social technologies and using staff as hosts and resources in virtual networks for children.

#### **4. Children play – in the library**

The library can turn play and play culture into a central area of activity. The library can create space for play, make toys and games available and advise on games and toys.

#### **5. The library gives children reading experiences and reading skills**

The library continues the work on encouraging children's zest for reading, reading experiences and reading skills.

#### **6. Create assets in new forms of cooperation between school library and public library**

Schools and libraries can work more closely together and coordinate services to children. Exploit the various competences of the two library types by doing things together.

7. The library creates community feeling – also for those outside

The library adapts its services to children with special needs: Handicapped, socially vulnerable and children with ethnic background other than Danish.

8. The library supports learning and cultural development

The library supports formal and informal learning that enables children to grow and develop competences in coding, creating and exchanging text, sounds and images.

9. The library must reach out to children

The library reaches out to children and offer services where children actually move around: Kindergartens, day-care centres, schools and associations.

10. The library's management focuses on children

The libraries' management prioritizes staff, money and time – for continuously rethinking, innovating and locally adapting the library's services to children.

The Danish public libraries have embraced the ten recommendations, and there is a great desire to follow them, although in some ways they look rather like a shift of paradigm in library service to children. Some of the recommendations are supported strategically and financially by the Danish Agency for Libraries and Media.

One of the ways is the offer of further training for children's librarians. Another is the Agency's development pool for public and school libraries which allocates grants to the libraries so that they may try out the many good ideas and concepts recommended in the report. The Danish Agency for Library and Media has also in collaboration with the film company Copenhagen Bombay set about developing a new children's site which establishes a connection between the physical spaces in the individual libraries and the virtual library offers. If the site is to become a success, it is vital that the public libraries in the country acknowledge ownership of the site and support it with content. Apart from combining the universe from the site with figures and activities in the physical library space, the site must also interact with Radio Denmark's new television channel for children. The channel has entered into an agreement with one of the major Danish children's libraries about creating the framework for half an hour's daily children's TV to be broadcasted live.

The libraries and the Agency for Libraries and Media face the major task of implementing the ten recommendations and make sure that the common goal – better and more up-to-date library service to children – continues to be placed high on the agenda throughout the country's 98 municipalities.

## 9. Conclusion

Strengthening children's reading requires a major practical and strategic initiative in many areas. Traditionally the library is one of the most important culture resources for children in the local communities, but if this status is to be upheld and strengthened, it requires i.a. that the library becomes better at exploiting its external relations. Danish experiences show that the best results are gained by sectorial cooperation. When libraries, day-care offers and schools collaborate with housing associations, sports associations and other leisure organisations about joint joy of reading activities, ranging from competitions and games to writing exercises and methodical language stimulation, it does have a profound impact on children and young people. It is all-important that the activities are not seen as just one-off events, but continue to be visible and turned into more permanent offers.

If the library is to continue to appear a significant and relevant cultural arena, it has to create the space for children's cultural and children's cultural-political dialogue in its network. It is also necessary for the library to strengthen its formal and informal networks both locally and nationally, and both in relation to other public institutions and private actors. The library's action plans can help to put focus on the strengthening of external relations by containing strategies for external communication and cooperation functions.

Another important point is that proficient reading requires an early and joint effort. All children are born curious and with a desire for learning and developing. Already when they are infants the seed is sown for conceptual perception, communication and vocabulary. Together with local partners the library has a special responsibility to make sure that also the very young infants acquire a solid linguistic foundation and a desire to learn to read.

In solving this task it is essential that the library focuses on initiating and supporting a broad professional collaboration with other staff groups such as pedagogues, teachers, hearing and speech therapists, pedagogical consultants, consultant for infants with Danish as their second language, children's cultural advisers, authors and parent committees in day-care offers and schools. Local Joy of Reading projects can also act as a lever in relation to reaching the children's primary role models, namely their parents. Together with for example kindergarten libraries, the library can provide the parents with tools and inspiration to read to their children.

The common effort to encourage children's reading appears in many variants. There are various traditions for cross-sectorial collaboration about children and children's reading round about in Denmark. Some libraries have a strong relation to other local cultural institutions as well as schools, while others have a special tradition for collaborations with local volunteers or associations. This diversity of local positions of strength and cooperations contribute to the development of the combined library offer, including activities that further children's reading. A decisive factor is that knowledge sharing is going on, both between the municipalities and between the state and the municipalities.

The Danish Agency for Libraries and Media considers it a vital task to gather and mediate examples of best practice to all public and school libraries and motivate them to develop local variants. This can happen e.g. via inspiration material, project advising, theme meetings, national reading conferences and the financing of research projects. The Joy of Reading campaign has demonstrated that good results is achieved by spending the means on many different concrete activities and place the focus on significant 'beacon' projects which can inspire and spur the libraries in the collaboration with local players to develop and carry out activities in the service of the joy of reading.

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