



17th IBBY Congress

**INTERNATIONAL BOARD
ON BOOKS FOR YOUNG
PEOPLE**

28. 9. - 3. 10. 1980

**PRAGUE
CZECHOSLOVAKIA**

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To awaken interest in reading and encourage the growth of an intelligent and appreciative readership is a project of great value that merits sympathetic attention and justifies the initiative so admirable outlined in Mrs Amy Kellman's paper. It is a totally rewarding experience to participate in a discussion on the interesting trends emerging of late in the form of pilot library schemes specially launched to meet the interests of children and young people.

Reading is a cultural habit that requires systematic promotion throughout man's life. The stimuli leading to good readership have to be sought at the earliest stage of the process attendant on the child's first encounter with books, prior to the acquisition of skills enabling the child to decode the meaning of a sequence of printed letters.

It is at school that man masters the skills of reading and comprehension. For this purpose he uses books and the moment he is able to decode the message communicated by other people is really his first reward for his efforts. This fact places us into a context highlighting the seminal importance of this cultural habit for man's development. What I have in mind is the close relationship between children's reading tastes and the school library.

This relationship entails a number of educational values that cannot be bypassed or ignored: on the contrary, to gain integrity, modern education should make optimal use of such values. The first requirement for a correct functioning of the school library calls for the library's participation in the school's educational programme in a way corresponding to all relevant contingencies. This, however, does not preclude the exceptional position children's literature should occupy in the library's basic bookstock.

Another requirement which I view as fundamental is that the school library should function as a facility specially adapted to serve cultural and educational purposes. This necessitates the provision of corresponding time reserves allowing for free access to the library during the school day. Coordination with educational objectives encourages children's interest in reading and creates a framework conducive to an education taking into due account pupils' natural interests and pursuits. This approach transforms the library into a living place accentuating the topical aspect of education.

Practical experience confirms that the role of reading encouraged by the school library presupposes the existence and recognition of the importance of the school librarian or the person in charge of the school library. They are the key figures whose extensive experience and educational competence offer a guarantee for the child's sound reading habits. This applies to any educational establishment. What is important is to encourage the child's spontaneous interest in books and reading.

The crucial question here is: should the job be entrusted to a professional librarian or to one of the teachers? A thorough knowledge of the child's needs requires corresponding training and experience derived from daily contact with the child. Professional qualifications, too, are important but far more significant than good library management is the acquisition of an adequate bookstock, putting the library on an operative footing. Apart from this, the

persons in charge should be able to guide the child reader. There is nothing more depressing than the sight of a hesitant child wandering in dismay round the shelves and yet unable to choose the right book from among the hundreds of titles. The guidance the child receives should be based on good knowledge of the child's mind and the adult should have a clear notion of the type of book he should recommend. He must read the books he recommends, follow the latest trends and interesting ventures in new children's publications. This requires the type of insight a teacher has. Only a teacher can thoroughly understand the level of reading the child has reached, know the child's failings in certain subjects and be familiar with the specificities of the child's development. The book offered to the child — no matter how interesting and well written — should never complicate the process of reading. On the contrary, books should stimulate interest in learning and reveal his natural interests or talent. This should make reading a pleasure as well as a stimulant for the development of the child's intellectual potential.

To accomplish this task efficiently, the teacher must be prepared to spend a good deal of time on such projects. This is a challenge considering the other duties the teacher is confronted with in the day-to-day classroom situation. The library should be his true domain and he should divide his time between his normal teaching load and other responsibilities, varying with the type of school in question.

This requires the following additional qualification: the real programme of the library will always be determined by the type of education characterizing the country. Abstract approaches ignoring this aspect lead nowhere. A thorough analysis of the actual situation should always precede the formulation of programmes launched to remedy the shortcomings besetting countries with an acute lack of school libraries. This approach provides ample scope for the utilization of experience relating to other countries; information of this kind can provide the preliminary basis for the search for realistic and conclusive strategies respecting the specific structure of the given educational system.

This is the vantage point I would like to apply in my reflections on possible modes of exchanging professional experience in the field. I would like to discuss specific aspects of the situation in school libraries in my country, and provide information on planned projects or projects in progress working towards a better functioning of libraries as the guiding force in children's reading interests.

Admittedly, this type of project is nothing new in Spain: we have a good deal of experience with school libraries. The E. G. B. authorities (schools — first cycle) monitor the functioning of school libraries. Books and other materials are provided by bodies of local administration which supply school libraries with their basic bookstock. But the actual situation prevailing in libraries operating under E.G.B. centres is problematic and far from satisfactory. Systematic support is lacking on the part of respective authorities, which neglect the educational potential of these libraries.

Another shortcoming emerges in the deficiencies afflicting the function of school librarians within the educational structure of E.G.B. programmes. The librarian is not accorded the legitimate status he deserves. The recently conducted survey of the Ministry of Culture — "Cultural Habits of the Child Population" — confirms the existence of these and related problems, including the insufficient number of public libraries for children, accounting for the fact that 40.8 percent of children do not read books, or only read fairy-tales of a dif-

ferent type from those read at school, and only 8.2 per cent of books read are actually from libraries.

Obviously this involves much more than the provision of wonderful rooms or free supplies of good books. The real improvement can only come from the work and personality of the librarian. Active involvement of the teaching staff as well as good standards of training of aspiring teachers at teacher training colleges and universities are required.

Our latest idea was to introduce "children's literature" as a compulsory subject in university courses of study. Children's literature should become one of the basic areas of endeavour in the training of future teachers who will encourage and guide children's interest in reading through the school library. The legitimacy of this project receives additional confirmation from experience relating to trainee teachers already following the syllabus and the positive reaction of pupils.

The training and extra courses launched for professional teachers and the material facilities available to school libraries (bookstock, rooms, etc.) come under the competence of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Culture is answerable for policies designed to broaden the scope and scale of reading. In cooperation with the Ministry of Education, this ministry drafted the first measures in support of this programme.

The first step was to seek out collaborators among the specialists (theoreticians, publishers, researchers, educators, writers, illustrators, booksellers) for participation in the 1st National Symposium of Children's Literature (El Paular, Madrid, December 1979). The agenda of the symposium covers different aspects of children's literature: the place of children's books in our society, problems of production and sale, children's libraries and school libraries, standards of writing and illustration, institutional measures for the support of children's literature.

The papers and reports based on the information provided by Mr Hauberg-Tychsen and Majonica concerning their own national projects served as a basis for the elaboration of the final document supplemented by directives for local bodies of administration. This proved indispensable for a correct orientation and implementation of policies guiding children's reading.

Some of these trends inspired activities sponsored by the 1st Regional Reading Programme for Children and Youth at Las Palmas in the Canary Islands. The programme was organized by the regional cultural delegation and local associations in cooperation with E.G.B. Technical Inspectorate. The programme included a conference and working session on "Children's Literature and Children's Libraries" and, finally, a special working session on awakening reader's interests. The international exhibition of children's books was an interesting fringe event organized during the conference.

The good results and lively response this project met with on the part of teachers and schools initiated similar schemes of a more ambitious nature in other provinces, including Madrid, where the project will take place throughout the school year 1980-81. The participating schools constitute a model functioning within the E.G.B. framework controlled by the state or by private agencies under different conditions. The project accentuates the importance of centre-based initiative in the process of programming activities that should encourage interest in reading in compliance with specific needs and possibilities. E.G.B. centres can draw on material backing, counselling services and remunerative policies, bibliographical and reference materials, audio-visual pro-

grammes and useful cooperation with specialists giving added attraction to reading.

The first stage of the programme is devoted to defining the relevant tasks of teaching staffs with regard to the promotion of reading habits in these centres; the course covers three basic fields: problems of children's books, the role of school libraries, and basic techniques for developing reading habits of children and youth.

Once the schemes reach completion, an analysis will be conducted to assess the viability and conclusiveness of the strategies adopted. This will provide the basis for the formulation of subsequent measures required for the implementation of other schemes.

To return to the point stressed in the opening section of my report, the promotion of interest in reading is a legitimate task requiring a concentrated effort. The results are not obtained overnight but require systematic and consistent activity drawing on all possible sources. Societal concern is an indispensable precondition of success here. It is the teacher who is in daily contact with the child that requires primary attention. The teacher should be encouraged to exert positive influence on the formation of children's reading habits. As Richard Bamberger fittingly describes this educational objective: teachers, who bring home the importance of daily reading to pupils, teachers who strive for the incorporation of "nascent reading habits" in the daily programme of leisure activities and individual study, teachers who will introduce the child to natural, unrestrictive forms of reading stand the best chance of accomplishing the ultimate objective -- to make reading a life long preoccupation and a matter of sustained interest.