

# **Access to information: a human right with implications for libraries in the digital age, especially for services to children**

Dr. Marian Koren  
Netherlands Public Library Association NBLC

## **Abstract**

Access to information is necessary for both human development and democratic participation of all human beings. The digital age offers challenges and threats as every new age does. What direction do libraries take? Whose side are they on? With regard to their users, are libraries prepared to offer new integrated services to all of them? Do young and old benefit from free access to information?

The new IFLA/UNESCO Guidelines for the development of public libraries (2001) outline the special responsibilities to meet the needs of children and young people. What are the implications for services in the digital age? What are good examples?

In a modern society, information plays an essential role, but has also become a commercial matter. Children grow up in this global context and are sensitive to new developments. How do they perceive the world. What are their interests and information needs? Many children seem to be quite familiar with new technology, but not all of them. On one hand they are encouraged to acquire knowledge and use new media, on the other hand access to information might be denied on various grounds or by technical means.

Children are protected, as all human beings by human rights. They do not have to deserve these rights, they are born with them. One of these rights is the right to information. This right relates to the question of human development and education: knowledge about human life, how to be a human being? In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, the right to information is mentioned in various ways, including that children should learn about their rights: human rights education. Libraries have to play their role in co-operation with schools and other organisations.

Media-education is another topic which librarians should take up, preparing users for the future. Technical training is only one part of it. The other party is learning to formulate questions, a search strategy and a critical mind about sources of information.

Some recommendations are made with regard to legislation, policy making, services, training and research to meet the ethical, legal and social implications of libraries in the digital age.

## **Challenges of the future**

Information is related to human development and the right to information demonstrates the importance and need for protection of human development. This process is not unique to children, but is valid for all human beings. Regardless of age a human can be considered as an information seeker. Therefore, access to all possible sources which could help to form a view of oneself and of the world one lives in is of utmost importance to every human being. These sources of information may vary from persons like one's parents, friends or educators, to books, media, databases maintained by public libraries or websites created by the government.

For many people information is the challenge of the future. Many are involved in the technological development of collecting and presenting data in new forms, making them accessible with new tools. Others are concerned with organising and managing information, according to new standards and models. Still many others are busy with questions of training and research, which is based on new information sources, requiring new skills. Yet another groups relates information to culture and considers problems of preservation for the future. These practices and reflections on information keep the science community busy. But what is it all about? Is information really the challenge of the future?

Has not information been central to human life in all ages? If we consider information as part of a longer range: data - information - knowledge - insight - wisdom, we may conclude that all cultures have dealt with and deal with information. It is inherent to human life.

In various cultures and traditions information was related to the challenge of life: how to live as a human being? Therefore, the tradition (in the literal sense of 'handing over' ) of information and knowledge was performed by highly qualified teachers and elderly in the community. Receiving information required maturity and responsibility to handle the information in a respectable way. At the same time, the teacher respected the pupil and had disciplined himself to respect the educational process within the other human being. The power related to information and knowledge was in this way restricted. In later times, when cultures crystallised so it happened to the teachings, often becoming indoctrination.

Information seems to be a challenge for the future because in our times information is available to all. No restrictions. There is little interest in asking: information about what? For whom? Where to? The only concern seems to be that information flows, yet controlled by a limited group, making as much money and political influence as possible on it. Information has become a commodity and an economic good. Is the challenge to get a part of the cake?

Libraries should at least be concerned with an equal distribution of information. They know that information is not accessible for all, for various reasons. Can libraries on one hand strive for equal access for all in the field of information services, and on the other hand be alert to the content and context of the information industry?

The heritage of the sixties and seventies of the twentieth century is the notion of democratisation. Old patterns of paternalism, colonialism, hierarchical orders have to give way for participation by those concerned: students, workers, audiences. The heritage of the eighties and nineties is the market and the perspective of the user: his demands and needs are the input for supply of services and quality control. The millennium shift marks the broad introduction of technology driven information supply.

The challenge for libraries is to bring these various developments into an integrated service of traditional and new sources, by valuable and effective methods to seek, gather and impart information. Ethical, legal and social problems have to be faced and cannot be solved by economic/technical solutions. A larger framework is needed. Solutions should be sought along two lines: the international professional standards for library services and their national and local applications and implementation; and the larger framework of international law and human rights, with its national realisation in legislation, policies and services.

In other words: IFLA-guidelines for library services based on the concept of access to information and the United Nations international human rights treaties and declarations including the right to information.

The case of children makes the implications of the digital age more visible and challenges our professionalism and frame of reference.

## **Children**

The real challenge for the future are the children of today. Not in the old sense as the proverb in Dutch and German says: He who has gained the young for his ideas, will gain the future. That is a form of indoctrination, which still goes on in marketing strategies: young children get a bank account, are introduced to trade marks, long before they can make use of them.

Children are the challenge: because what kind of future do we leave for them? Do we teach them knowledge they can use in the future? Do we create an environment in which they can live with absence of war and violence, sustainable development and healthy food. Will they have jobs and activities that satisfy their needs without exploiting others? Do they have access to information for their needs of today and tomorrow?

Children are the challenge for the future, because they seem already to live in the future. In fact, they could be called the adults in the digital age, whereas adults seems to be the children of that same age, learning by trial and error to master new skills. Children nowadays have no problems with using mobile phones, video recorders, computers and the mouse. They can understand and play new digital games much faster than adults. They can design their own school programmes and parties; they organise their activities, manage to live with divorced parents, keep up to date with new fashions, music and sports.

Children are the challenge because they live today. They might skip school, behave aggressively, show disinterested, or have no school to go to at all, have no family to rely on, have no one to talk to about their questions and what really concerns them.

Should they wait until later, 'until they are big enough?', until we have put all our answers in a database?

Children are the challenge, because not all information can be put in a database; it is there where human development begins. Human values are the challenge.

## Global Principles for Library Services

Principles and professional values fundamental to librarianship and library services reflect the library's respect for basic human values. They have been formulated in the various versions of the UNESCO Public Library Manifesto. The 1994 Manifesto is aimed at convincing local and national authorities of the fundamental values protected by public libraries and their important contribution to the community and democracy in general.

The Manifesto derives from 'the fundamental human values of freedom, prosperity, the development of society and individuals, and the need for well-informed citizens who are able to exercise their democratic rights and play an active role in society'. The public library is defined as the local gateway to knowledge, which provides a basic condition of lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development for the individual and social groups. Furthermore, the Manifesto is related to the Statute of UNESCO as it proclaims UNESCO's belief in the public library as a living force for education, culture and information, and as an essential agent for the fostering of peace and spiritual welfare through the minds of men and women.

Recently new guidelines for development have been published by IFLA regarding Public Libraries, based on the Public Library Manifesto. The Purposes of the Public Library are described as follows:

The primary purposes of the public library are to provide resources and services in a variety of media to meet the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including recreation and leisure. They have an important role in the development and maintenance of a democratic society by giving the individual access to a wide and varied range of knowledge, ideas and opinions.

Access to information is clearly the basic noun for services, regardless in what format sources of information are offered. In the long list of possible media new media and databases are mentioned. The Guidelines make clear that no discrimination on the basis of age (and other distinctions) is accepted.

When we think of all the types of information which could be useful: for study, education, for self-help, current debate and culture, then one understands that public information, government and community information are only a part of what is envisaged with 'access to information'. New technology may bring new sources of information closer to people, but is the information accessible for immigrants, non-native speakers, handicapped and housebound people. We know the legal framework and copyright are lagging behind, but to strike a balance between rightholders and information users, governments have to take their responsibility and guarantee the public domain, free and open access, before all kinds of information producers are closing their sources behind high walls of obligatory continuous payments. In the Netherlands we face difficulties in acquiring basic sources of information for digital access, even from government itself of state-funded agencies, as the products are outsourced to private publishers.

IFLA is active in the field of access to information and copyright through its FAIFE-office and committees, but that is not in these Guidelines.

The Guidelines make special reference to the responsibility for meeting the need of children and young people:

The public library should attempt to meet the needs of all groups in the community regardless of age and physical, economic or social circumstances. However, it has a special responsibility to meet the needs of children and young people. If children can be inspired by the excitement of knowledge and by works of the imagination at an early age, they are likely to benefit from these vital elements of personal development throughout their lives, both enriching them and enhancing their contribution to society. Children can also encourage parents and other adults to make use of the library. It is also important that young people who experience difficulty in learning to read should have access to a library to provide them with appropriate material.

In the description of services to children, the Guidelines state that

public libraries provide an opportunity for children to experience the enjoyment of reading and the excitement of discovering knowledge and works of the imagination. Children and their parents should be taught how to make the best use of a library and how to develop skills in the use of printed and electronic media.

Public libraries have a special responsibility to support the process of learning to read, and to promote books and other media for children. The library must provide special events for children like story telling and activities related to the library's services and resources. Children should be encouraged to use the library from an early age as this will make them more likely to remain users in future years. In multi-lingual countries books and audio-visual materials for children should be available in their mother tongue.

More details can be found in the *IFLA Guidelines for Children's Libraries*, which are under revision and will probably be published in 2002.

Examples are given of co-operation with health services for children to organise programmes for parents and their children while they are waiting for medical consultation. These are aimed at children from birth to three years old, to encourage parents to read aloud to their children and to visit the public library. Other libraries offer summer programmes, run by volunteers, aimed at children from eleven to fourteen whose parents are at work. Well known services are sessions for under fives, their parents and carers, storytelling, class visits, library orientation, reading groups, Internet training and homework clubs. Examples of using the Internet and World Wide Web to offer new library services to children are developing. Part of them are often web-sites for children to promote reading and the book in a multi-media environment.

In the Netherlands some libraries have received project money for setting up 'digital grassplots', easy access computers for those who have no PC at home or cannot use them. Children and young people get training. A special set of websites, the 'Spider' helps them to find information on subjects for home-work, papers, talks etc.

## Young people

Access to information is important for young people as well. The Guidelines pay also special attention to them and acknowledges their needs and special interests:

Materials, including access to electronic information resources, should be provided which reflect their interests and culture. In some cases this will mean acquiring materials, which represent youth culture, in a variety of media which are not traditionally part of a library's resources, for example, popular novels, book and television series, music, video tapes, teenage magazines, posters, computer games, graphic novels. To ensure it reflects their interests it is important to enlist the help of young people in selecting this material. In larger libraries this material with appropriate furniture can form a special section of the library. This will help them to feel the library is for them and help to overcome a feeling of alienation from the library, which is not unusual among this age group. Relevant programmes and talks to young adults should also be provided.

More details can be found in the *IFLA Guidelines for Library Services for Young Adults* which have been published a few years ago.

Examples are given of library practices where young people help to select and buy media stock for the young adults library. They select media reflecting their own cultural background and have organised and gained sponsorship for their own Internet café. In some libraries library staff has received specialist training in working with young adults. The training covers customer care, programming ideas and how to run teenage advisory groups and homework clubs. In conjunction with local teenagers many libraries have developed youth spaces.

In the Netherlands a project on access to government information included young people as a target group. In the Librarian's Handbook of media-education the set up of training them is focused on practical matters as housing, jobs, education, police and justice, drugs and health, travel. The national campaign included a competition on the website, with a lot of questions on which answers could be found on government and public information websites.

The Guidelines have a general purpose; they are not a How-to-do book, but give a general outline for policies and practices. The examples collected from all over the world show a variety of practices which may trigger one own ideas and activities.

On the whole, the Guidelines are aware of the differences in social, economic and cultural situations in the world, but do not go into detail on what is needed in a specific case. This offers the opportunity to use the Guidelines for national discussion and policy making, setting standards that are feasible for the coming years without losing the international 'checklist'. In fact, what counts are not the formulations, but our interpretations and aspirations for a good library service.

But will this professional claim be heard in the digital age?

It might be necessary to put the library and information services in a larger and stronger framework: access to information is not a charity or a commodity, but a right.

## **Access to information, a general human right**

The history of the right to information shows the following steps of development. In the former centuries it was the freedom of the press which made the first opening to non-interference from the state in communication processes. In the beginning of the 20th century the focus was on freedom of information, a right especially claimed by the mass media agencies to perform their work and to have the freedom to decide how and about what to communicate without dictatorship or censorship from the state. In fact, this was an increasing powerplay between mass media and government about their roles towards the general public. A further development rose with the internationalisation of journalism in an era of wars or state conflicts in the world. Journalists claimed their right of freedom to gather information, also in other countries and to have the right to impart this information to their home-country and even to other countries. The expansion of especially American media agencies called for a broader freedom. In the sixties the Third World Countries considered the way in which this freedom was used as Western imperialism. It also opened up the possibilities of propaganda, especially useful in the era of the Cold War. Sometimes this was defended by introducing the right to information as the general public's right to know.

A further step is to consider the right to information as the right of citizens to have access to information. Many national and international legal formulations contain such a phrase. Yet, this aspect is only half of the right to information. The other part is the right to educate oneself, an expression found in e.g. the German Constitution. It is this right which really refers to human beings as humans, self-reflective persons, seeking for meaning in life. The right of the child to information can be considered as an exponent of this right.

If we consider the important role of libraries in offering the general public access to information, we must acknowledge that in many countries children form a large part or up to half of the users. Therefore their right of access to information is important. Generally speaking about right to access and freedom of expression, these two rights are considered as being interrelated. The right to freedom of expression includes the right to have access to information. One can hardly form an opinion, discuss matters, write an article or make a news programme without sources of information. In fact, expressing one's views and opinions may create a new need for information or form a new source of information for another human being.

In the case of children, however, the right of access to information and the right to freedom of expression are not considered as having the same right-bearer, namely children, but are very often opposed to each other; the right to freedom of expression of adults and, because of the nature or effects of some of these expressions, children's limited right of access to information, as they also have the right to protection and should be protected from harmful information.

So, speaking about access and freedom of expression, we have to consider first of all the importance of freedom of expression of children themselves.

## **Human rights, children's rights**

Many people who are in favour of human rights and support them as a minimum moral standard for the relationship between the state and citizens and human beings among each other, hesitate when it comes to apply them to children. It seems as if children first have to prove that they are human beings, or that they deserve to have human rights. Nobody has to deserve human rights, everyone has them because s/he is born as a human being. The central concept is the respect for human dignity, which is regardless of age, competence, cultural background, the ability to speak for oneself etc. So there can be no doubt about children possessing human rights, and having the right to be respected as human beings. Some people think this is unnecessary: you can lie to children, you can spank them, you can talk about them, even while they are present. Some seem to think they come from another planet and speak to them and about them using a different language. Especially those who are formulating youth policies discuss and describe this special species which has to be directed, kept from the streets, disciplined, educated etc.

Mostly children are underestimated, their thoughts and feelings are not taken into account; their views not seen, their voices not heard. Yet, they do feel, they can think and create their own solutions. Sometimes one can even wonder who is educating who. Why are we so afraid of children, a professor of family law once exclaimed; a question to be answered by oneself. What are we doing by creating a special kind of species called children, and then struggling to find a way to approach them and to communicate with them. And is what we communicate to them the information children are seeking?

Janusz Korczak was one of the pioneers to formulate rights of children. Korczak, a Polish-Jewish doctor, pedagogue and author, was convinced that one can only educate a child when one communicates with him. However, the intentions of the educator are balanced with the rights of the child, to which belong the right of the child to respect and the right to live in the present. Both show Korczak's deep understanding of the child as a

human being, in stead of an object or projection of parents and adults. Childhood has a value in itself. Every pedagogy requires a precise diagnose which means to listen to what the child tells as his story of life. In the orphanage which Korczak set up in Warsaw he applied what he was convinced of: children could take care of themselves and each other with good guidance and good examples. A positive environment with clear rules, in which set up and maintenance the children were involved themselves created a new perspective for children and young people. It was Korczak's belief that everything a child wrote about was important. So he organised a weekly newspaper, in which the children and workers at the orphanage wrote about their experiences and exchanged messages. Later on, he managed to set up a newspaper with and for children, *Little Review*, which was distributed as a weekly supplement to the Polish National newspaper, *Our Review*. The children were reporters and regional correspondents and were encouraged to comment on their situation in daily life. Large numbers of responses poured into the editorial office. To the boy who reported being slapped by his mother and father for sliding on the carpet, Korczak wrote: "Parents hit when they have problems and they are short of patience. Tell them not to hit you immediately, but to warn you, that if you don't do as you are told, they will hit you in half an hour. That will give them time to calm down." This example shows Korczak serving as an early Ombudsman for children: Giving them a voice, explaining the rules of society, and advising them on how to solve daily injustices.

## **The Convention on the Rights of the Child**

It took a long time before people realised that children were included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and that they were bearers of human rights themselves. The UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) focussed on the protection of children, establishing their rights in ten principles. In the course of time a stronger legal instrument was considered necessary. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) added a more modern approach, recognising explicitly children as subjects of human rights, competent to exercise their rights, give their views and participate in society.

'Respect for the views of the child, as stated in article 12 of the Convention is a principle which affirms very strongly, the value of the child as a fully-fledged person having the right to access information and to freely express views in all matters affecting him or her, having those views respected and given due weight. It indicates the right of the child to access and participate in decision- making processes affecting his or her life and influence decisions taken on his or her behalf with-in the family, in the school or in the community. For this reason, this principle is often presented as a right of the child to participation,' Marta Santos Pais, the Portuguese lawyer explains. She was a member of the first international VN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Now she is Director for the Division of Evaluation, Policy and Planning of UNICEF and has helped to make a big step forward.

In the words of Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights:

UNICEF's adoption of the Convention as the basic reference for its work is a major step forward in converting the undertakings of international law into day-to-day reality for children.

The rights of every child must be analysed and a response provided. This helps direct the focus to those children who are too often invisible; the poor, those belonging to minorities or those living in neglected rural areas. The recognition that each child has an individual right to access to education, for example, is a significant shift in the debate over methods of delivery and must have an important impact on how resources are allocated. Further, the Convention requires that all the rights of the child be addressed in a holistic approach which recognises the child as a human being with growing capacity and responsibility in decisions affecting her or his life. The rights-based approach, which is being adopted by other United Nations programmes, means describing situations not in terms of human needs, or areas for development, but in terms of the obligation to respond to the rights of individuals. This empowers people to demand justice as a right, and not as charity.

The right to self-determination stating that children have the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and must be heard in any judicial and administrative proceeding affecting them (article 12, see Annex for full text) is crucial, as it contains a general principle characteristic of the underlying approach of the Convention: ' that children are not only objects but also subjects of rights, and that a determination of the child's best interests should be based not only on what adults think, but also on what the child thinks.' Evidence is given that in the field of children's rights there are not only obligations for the state, parents and other adults, but also possibilities, and opportunities for children to participate in daily life and at least have a say in their own lives. The right to respect, the right to participation and the right to information are closely related.

## **The right of the child to information**

In the Convention on the Rights of the Child, explicit formulations of the right to information are found in the child's right to freedom of expression (article 13) and the right of access to information (article 17). The latter refers to the role of the mass media in providing information and material from a variety of sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of the child's well-being. The mass media should disseminate information of social and cultural benefit to the child, supporting his/her human development. No child should be excluded from this development. Therefore, measures have to be taken to provide the child access to information in the required language and form. Whether children are handicapped, have arrived as refugees, live in institutions or belong to a minority group, they all have a right of access to information serving their development. It will be a question of policy based on human rights for these various groups to elaborate solutions for removing possible impediments to such access, and to ensure a plurality of sources, in order to avoid one-sided information.

As a consequence of the emphasis on good, quality products, article 17 stresses the necessity of guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his well-being. Such guidelines should, however, not forget that the child has the right to freedom of expression which includes the right to seek and receive information. Moreover, parents have - in relation to the state - the primary responsibility for the upbringing and the development of the child.

The double provision of article 17, to encourage the positive effects of information, and to protect the child from negative effects, points to the responsibility of all those working in the field of the mass media and providing information and material to children. These include of course, all concerned with the production and dissemination of children's books, as is explicitly mentioned in the Convention.

The various references in the Convention and the whole tradition of human rights make clear that access to information has especially to be provided in view of the educational potential and the understanding of human values protected in human rights.

According to the Convention, the responsibility for the upbringing and education of the child lies primarily with the parents. The best interest of the child will be their basic concern. Parents have to take into account the evolving capacities of the child. This means, their influence and decisive power should decrease when the child grows older and is more mature. The State has obligations to support and assist parents in their tasks. Not only parents but all who encounter children e.g. teachers, have the obligation to respect children and support them in exercising their rights. As for example, the child has a right to express views in all matters affecting the child, there is a clear obligation for all who are taking decisions, formulating policies or creating the child's environment, either in schools, in the street or elsewhere to organise the participation of children and provide them with access to appropriate information.

Those who have the societal task of providing access to information, therefore have the obligation to provide this for children as well. Almost all states in the world (and even the USA has at least signed the Convention) are parties to the Convention and have accepted its obligations; they are committed to implement the various articles and provisions of the Convention. The role and activities of schools and public libraries can be considered as part of this implementation of the Convention of making the right to have access to information and human rights education effective for the child. Therefore no state, school or public library can maintain that it has nothing to do with the Convention or with children's rights. In fact, nobody can refrain from being concerned with the human rights of children.

## **Implementation**

In the words of Marta Santos Pais: "The Convention indicates in an unequivocal manner that children's rights are human rights. They are not special rights: they are simply the fundamental rights inherent to the human dignity of every person. The rights of the child are indivisible and interrelated; all are important and essential to the harmonious development of the child. With the realisation of the rights of the child we are in fact promoting the advent of the world proclaimed by the Universal Declaration where everyone enjoys his or her economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights."

Most important is to implement and observe the new paradigm introduced by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). It not only means that children have rights and that the right to information, including literature is recognised, but most of all that the child is a human being with views of his or her own. This fact urges us to take a child perspective on the concepts and activities we are developing for the sake of children. A child perspective has a double sense. The first sense is that adults try to imagine how children perceive things and how they would appreciate the proposed programs or activities. The second sense of a child's perspective is to ask children themselves and ask their views. It is a possibility to have children participate in planning and programming from the very beginning.

What does this interpretation mean for the library field? It is common knowledge that rights on paper have little significance. They have to be realised in practice. The library field is no exception. Human rights in general and especially the right to information should have a central place in the aim and policy of the library. They form the framework of the profession and services, also in the digital age.

A number of activities and strategies have been mentioned elsewhere (See references) so they will only be mentioned shortly:

- Access to information for *all* children
- Dissemination of information, introducing new sources and formats
- Dissemination of children's books, especially in minority languages
- Provide information to prevent children from harm
- Dissemination on children's rights for children and adults
- Celebrating 20 November the International Day of the Rights of the Child
- Respecting the rights of the child in the library, privacy, right of complaint, participation.

A few general approaches can be mentioned which may create opportunities for libraries to co-operate with schools in educational programmes, or with local authorities in youth policy programmes, and with local youth agencies, care centres, cultural organisations on activities in co-operation with children and youth themselves.

## Human rights education

From the very beginning, as is stated in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, it has been considered necessary to teach people about human rights. Most programs have started with human rights education at university level, training scholars and students in the effects of human rights for international and national law. Gradually this knowledge will reach the general public, including adults and children.

The Convention makes human rights education a state's obligation. The UN has proclaimed a decade of human rights education. More institutions of both formal and non-formal education (like the library) are looking for useful materials. How can we teach and learn about human rights? In the new light of the CRC teaching cannot be limited to human rights in general, to the basic text or the obvious violation so of them we find daily in the newspapers. One thing children really need to know is that the need for basic human respect is of all ages and all cultures, including their own. One way of working with children (and adults) on this topic would be to use stories from various parts of the world, where this basic respect has been challenged. It might put traditional history in a different light; it can bring about a broader view on the background of all people living around oneself. Not only historic stories like Uncle Tom's cabin or the ghetto diary of Janusz Korczak are revealing, but certain types of fairy tales can have the same function. They often show how a human being on his journey of life has to learn to respect every living being he meets, and develop human qualities (honesty, courage, perseverance) in order to achieve his goal. These stories are a real treasure for human development and librarians and teachers should be encouraged to dig them up together with children of various ages. As our time is so void of stories which touch upon fundamental values, and at the same time so much in need of wise guidance in every day life, there is yet another task for library and literature professionals in this information age.

An example of practical human rights education is given by librarians in Haarlem Oost, in the Children's Information Centre or public library. They are very committed to the children and have set up a children's panel and new ways of communication. Children discuss proposals for acquisition, have set up a book quiz for school classes, recruit peers for activities etc. The older ones have set up a computer training course for the younger ones about: how do I make my paper on the computer? When the papers are presented and accepted in school, they are taken up in the library catalogue on loan. Children are proud and committed to their library. This is child participation in the sense the Convention recommended.

In Portugal some schools have been active in European projects: De Augusta Lessa School in Porto is one of them. They did a project on Children of all Colours which enabled children from various cultures to get to know each other and exchange letters, works, books and videos. Belmira Ferreira of the Escolha da Ilha, Valongo did a project on respect for the environment and quality of life, enhancing creativity and discussions on values, whereas Ana Vale Pereira from Porto introduced a 'Mother Earth' project. Marta Praia at the Escola Superior de Educação do Porto is one of the experts who has published some research in this respect.

Maria Edite Orange from the same school lectures and supports intercultural education, a rather new trend, also under development in the Netherlands. Recently librarians gathered for a national campaign and television programme called: 'Hallo Holland' which supports immigrants and inhabitants to better understand each other. Intercultural work, being aware of various and human rights, also in relation to collection management, staff management and serving various groups is a new challenge.



## Media education

With regard to children, much has been said about the dangers of new technology, especially the access to the Internet. As we can learn from history, it has never been a great success to forbid something, but a major help has been to show people how to deal with various aspects of life. The same is true for new media. Books have been forbidden for children. A new type of books has been created for them, allowing access to all types of knowledge and culture. The best help is to guide children in the use of media, in the same way as they learn how to deal with the various parts of a city and the risky traffic, in order that they know and learn to make choices themselves.

In using the internet, again, it is not so much necessary to teach about how to find the fun site, but children and young people often know very little about how to find good material for the homework, school subjects etc. They must be taught how to judge various sources: where do they come from, are they reliable? Another aspect will be to show how children can make use of these new tools and media to express themselves, to have a voice which can be heard and should be listened to. A new media course should take up materials both for formal education and of interest for children to develop themselves. Schools and libraries can co-operate in supporting media-education. In the Netherlands The Knowledge Net is a website especially for schools and other institutions, on which libraries are represented by a Library Square. Here, children can find useful tips and materials on how to use the Internet for their homework, school tasks, leisure time and practical questions, including rights.

## Philosophy with children

People who are living or working with children have often been surprised by their questioning and their self-invented responses. Children can think and reflect and they do. They try to construct a view of the world around them and of big questions of life. To quote Matthews, one of the pioneers in Philosophy with children: 'Adults discourage children from asking philosophical questions, first by being patronising to them and then by directing their inquiring minds towards more "useful" investigations. Most adults aren't themselves interested in philosophical questions. They may be threatened by some of them. Moreover, it doesn't occur to most adults that there are questions that a child can ask that they can't provide a definitive answer to and that aren't answered in a standard dictionary or encyclopaedia either.' We may add nowadays: 'and the Internet either.' Philosophy with children puts children and adults on an equal footing; they have to respect and take each other seriously. Although such programs mostly take place in schools, some philosophers prefer the library as the meeting has less the character of a lesson. Important is that children freely discuss and reflect on matters as fairness, lying, identity, language, living and non living beings/objects etc. Philosophy is different from moral education - as it lacks plain education and authority -, but can focus on similar topics including obligations and rights. The role of literature in these meetings and programs is very important. Very often stories are used to start a discussion or to introduce a figure or a theme. Figures in literature have sometimes the same reflections, doubts and dilemmas as actual children do. Therefore, a good knowledge of stories is indispensable for philosophy with children.

In international network consist of various schools which have integrated doing philosophy with children. One of them is the *Cooperativa A Torre* in Lisbon, where they recently have had a discussion on cloning: what is identity, can I be more than one person? etc. Drawings have been published in the international journal: '100', which has been set up, referring to the Children's Newspaper initiated by Janusz Korczak.

## Intergenerational programmes

A rather new series of programmes is developing in the field of intergenerational encounters. In western societies the extended family in which several generations live together is lost. Even the nuclear family is often very limited. The interpersonal exchange, the exchange of information and personal stories is therefore decreasing. Intergenerational programs have been set up in various western countries to create meetings for younger and older generations together. Young people and children can do something for the older generation, errands, fixing in the house, reading aloud, teaching the Internet; older adults, in turn, can assist in classrooms, in skills programs and history lessons, or make children acquainted with their (historic) neighbourhood. Information which is not always available in books, stories which need to be handed over from one generation to another can be told again as well. Sometimes young and old are engaged in writing their biographies and discuss them, opening up new worlds of wonder. Research shows how much self-esteem, better understanding of each other and cultural riches is developed through these programs. Again, stories play an important role. Literature is needed to support these enriching activities.

In the Netherlands a programme has been set up called: 50+ reads aloud. It is a training for seniors by a librarian or professional teacher about reading aloud in childcare centres, kindergarten, libraries and schools. The seniors

form teams supported by the library for selecting materials and knowing good and new titles. The enthusiasm of the seniors and of the children, who not all have a grandparent nearby is enormous. Another example are teenagers who form a support team for seniors in care centres where they can work on computers for surfing the web, sending e-mail to grandchildren etc. Yet another form, are children who can have a reading buddy, a senior person who helps them in better reading by offering extra hours of reading together.

The challenge of today and tomorrow are children. This means that our attitude towards children, the services we provide, the introductions we give them to life and society in the digital age, will reflect to what extent we really have understood and integrated the changes of paradigm. One change is the emancipation of children, the notion that children are human beings and should be respected in their own rights. The other change is the all-pervading power of information technology in the digital age.

## **Children's Jury**

One of the things libraries could do is to encourage children to form their own opinions and make their own choices, also in the field of books and media. In the Netherlands we introduced about ten years ago National Book Juries for Children and the Young in a co-operation of libraries, bookpromoters and television. They function as a counterpart for the many prizes awarded by adult juries by having children themselves award favourite books. Now children can decide for themselves! How does the Children's Jury work? During four months, all the children who want to participate read a selection of those books that were published in the previous year. The children are invited to take part in the voting process via TV, and through their local libraries, schools and bookshops. The term for The Children's Jury is 1st of February - 1st of May. They make their choice on a form that lists their 5 favourite books. These forms are collected and the votes are counted centrally. There is an award in each age category. The results are announced during a television special devoted entirely to the National Children's Jury. Some 60.000 children take part in the National Children's Jury. The way in which children participate differs: they sometimes read under the guidance of teachers or librarians, but ever so often they join as individual participants. In both cases, each child fills in her or his own individual form. Libraries set up programmes to encourage participation with promotional material like buttons, posters, stickers and personal booklets. The concept has also been introduced in Sweden and received interest in Germany. The Children's Juries are a concept for extending reading experiences and support children's self esteem. Their opinion really counts! They are treated with respect. That is why the Children's Jury was awarded the Janusz Korczak Award, which was received by the children's library in Arnhem. The Children's Jury is one of the ways for libraries for showing commitment with children and their right to information.

## **Recommendations**

- Base library policies on human rights framework and IFLA Guidelines;
- Introduce these basic principles in local youth policies and library services;
- Develop special education and training of librarians for services to children and young people;
- Discuss professionally what the impact of digitalisation and (re)organisation) of (library) services means to children;
- Set up training in children's rights and child participation;
- Show that libraries respect children's rights: set up a Children's Jury, create child participation in library policies and services;
- Develop training in media education for various targets groups;
- Co-operate with schools and teachers in human rights education, intercultural education, philosophy with children;
- Co-operate with child advocacy organisations, such as UNICEF, National Committee on the Rights of the Child etc., especially on the position of the child in having access to information and library services provided;
- Present libraries as a communication forum for children and get connected to children's groups;
- Show that libraries are supporting children's access to information;
- Start research on children's information needs, authentic and school questions and librarians' answers, services and skills.

## References

Bibliography of Janusz Korczak: [www.wiesenthal.com/bibliog/korczak.html](http://www.wiesenthal.com/bibliog/korczak.html)

Children's House in Cyberspace: <http://childhouse.uio.no>

Convention on the Rights of the Child: [www.unicef.org/crc/conven.htm](http://www.unicef.org/crc/conven.htm)

Doing Philosophy with children at the school: Cooperativo A Torre:

Rd Christovao Da Gama, 17, 1400 Lisboa, Portugal

T: 351 - 1 - 3011407, F: 351 - 1 - 3018452

And their Drawings about cloning: <http://www.kinderfilosofie.nl/engels/enumb8.html>

Ferreira, B., Environment and quality of life, in: Grässler, H., J. Pouwels (eds.), *'How to be a teacher in a Europe of Human Rights'*, Han Press, Nijmegen, Netherlands, 1998, p. 62-65.

Fonseca, V., Culture of peace, in: Grässler, H., J. Pouwels (eds.), *'How to be a teacher in a Europe of Human Rights'*, Han Press, Nijmegen, Netherlands, 1998, p. 118-122.

Fasick, A. (ed.), *IFLA Guidelines for Children's Libraries*, IFLA, The Hague, 1991 ( to be revised in 2002)

Gill, Ph. (et al.) , Ed. for the Section of Public Libraries, *The public library service: the IFLA/UNESCO guidelines for development*, Saur, München, 2001.

*IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto*, IFLA, The Hague, 1995.

IFLA Section for Libraries for Children and Young Adults, *Guidelines for Library Services for Young Adults*, IFLA, The Hague, 1999

Information on Children's Rights: [www.crin.org](http://www.crin.org).

Korczak, Janusz. *When I am little again* ; and, *The child's right to respect*. Lanham, University Press, 1992.

Koren, M., Children's Rights, Libraries potential and the information society, in: *IFLA journal*, FAIFE-special, 26 (2000), 4, p. 273-279.

Koren, M., *Tell me! The right of the child to information*, NBLC, The Hague, 1996.

Koren, M., The right of the child to information and its practical impact on children's libraries, in: *The New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship*, 4 (1998), p. 1-16.

Lifton, B., *The king of children. A biography of Janusz Korczak*. Schocken, New York, 1988.

Lipman, M. (ed.), *Thinking children and education*. Kendall, Dubuque Iowa. 1993.

Matthews, G., *Dialogues with Children*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1984.

Matthews, G., *Philosophy and the Young Child*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1980.

NBLC Netherlands Public Libraries Association: <http://www.nblc.nl/nblcweb/vereniging/english/index.html> including: Public Library Charter, Children's Rights in Libraries, Human Rights Education, Children's Jury, 50+ reading aloud.

Newman, Sally (et al.), *Intergenerational Programs. Past, present and Future*. Taylor & Francis, Washington, 1997.

Pereira, A. V., 'Mother Earth', in: Grässler, H., J. Pouwels (eds.), *'How to be a teacher in a Europe of Human Rights'*, Han Press, Nijmegen, Netherlands, 1998, p. 44-55.

Praia, M., Human Rights, Values and the European dimension: some notes about Portugal, in: Evans, D., H. Grässler, J. Pouwels (eds.), *Human rights and values education in Europe*. Research in educational law, curricula and textbooks, Fillibach Verlag, Freiburg im Breisgau, 1997, p. 211-219.

Santos Pais, M., *A Human Rights Conceptual Framework For UNICEF*, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, 1999.

Robinson, R., Forword, in: Santos Pais, M., *A Human Rights Conceptual Framework For UNICEF*, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, 1999.

## **Annex**

### **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989**

#### Article 12

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

#### Article 13

1. The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
2. The exercise of this right may be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:
  - (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others; or
  - (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

#### Article 17

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, States Parties shall:

- (a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29 (aim of education);
- (b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;
- (c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;
- (d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;
- (e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 (freedom of expression) and 18 (responsibilities of parents).