

## **The Educative Aspect of Public Libraries through Animation Services for Children**

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### **Abstract**

As a basic educational structure shaping the generations, the public library constitutes one of the most adequate places for the concentration of the forces which favour education. Based on recent observations which reveal with regret the children's, and especially teenagers', indifference towards or rejection of the act of reading, the present study proposes methods for raising the child-users' interest in reading, through a programme of creative training based on the interaction of numerous sources, texts, images, sounds, puppets, etc., in the toy library of the children's section, organized as an area for the training of future readers and for bringing children closer to spiritual values by means of books.

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Education is the origo from where all the paths of a society's life start: the relationship between people, responsible work, rigour, the good understanding of events, tolerance, and the necessary conditions of free expression for human personality; and one of the most suitable places for concentrating the forces which favour education is the library.

Not being institutions dedicated exclusively to children, public libraries are a basic educational structure shaping the generations through their organization and functioning. The role of animation is to make people feel they belong to a community dominated by values and to urge them to participate in events which are meaningful for human development.

Children's section is a very important unit of public libraries for here the future readers are trained. The primary cycle is the period when we can valorise the most precious traits of the young age: inventiveness, fresh imagination, unusual curiosity which must be directed towards reading, this being the main modelling factor of the personality.

The observations made in the recent years reveal with regret the children's, and especially teenagers', indifference towards or rejection of reading. Although it is a goal of the instructive-educative process and of extra-curricular activities to develop children's taste and their interest in reading, it appears that this is not enough. The strange power of the display and of the keyboard has come to bend spirits and to deform characters, mainly when exceedingly young children are caught in the web. It is often forgotten that essential and thorough education is achieved through reading, by assimilating and interpreting the written word.

Libraries can come to the aid of schools with other means and instruments through which children may discover that reading is, in fact, a journey towards one's own soul, towards knowledge, self-knowledge, towards fantastic discoveries, and the attraction of reading can be exercised here in a varied environment where numerous sources, texts, images, sounds, puppets, etc. interact. They can thus support schools in the educational process, not as an addition to them, but as a completion on another level and in another environment where children's personality can be affirmed, which would prepare them for social life and which would turn all those who step into a higher age group into permanent readers.

The present study suggests methods for raising the child-users' interest in reading, through activities of cultural animation based on the development of the traditional and reflexive form of intelligence, which loses much of its authority due to the excess of audio-visual messages. These messages distance young people from books and from the interiorized world of the text without which there can be no cultural modelling and spiritual progress.

Reading has a high potential to stimulate self-discovery and to induce reflection. The present day Romanian society could be evaluated and differentiated from other societies also by means of experiencing and covering the need for reading and the way of reading; existing, in University Professor Dr Ion Stoica's view, even a relationship between the quantity and quality of reading on a social scale and the general quality of life.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the training to read ought to be a general imperative of education, a wise way to go through all kinds of crises, for it is based on the traits of information, and information represents the most important power in society. All who wish for a society of free and creative people must encourage reading and must train readers. Similarly, American sociologist, Alvin Toffler – mentioned by Professor Dr Dumitru Bălăeț in his article, *Culture, Libraries and Development* – points out in his work *Culture Consumers* the existence of a direct relationship between culture and economic, social, political, and moral development. This development must start, mainly in the modern and contemporary age (and this even happens in some countries), from the direction of culture towards the other components of the social life.<sup>2</sup>

The proposed methods were put into practice in the toy library of the Oprești branch institution of the Teodor Murășanu Municipal Library in Turda with the aim of diversifying the offer of services, the animation types offered here differing from the similar services offered by libraries in the same category. Since it had been proposed that the branch library should focus on animation as a cultural and pedagogical instrument, a programme of creative training was devised in the toy library of the children's section, organized as an area meant to train the future readers and to bring children closer to spiritual values by means of books; as a place where pre-school and school children could be familiarized from the primary cycle with the practices of reading. The child-users have their own preferences, curiosities, and needs, often learning and playing in conditions unusual for adults. Thus, a tower, a toy train, a snake, a caterpillar, a space decorated with a lively coloured carpet and pillows with characters

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<sup>1</sup> Ion Stoica, "Spectatorul și cititorul" (The Spectator and the Reader), *Biblioteca* 11, (2005): 338.

<sup>2</sup> Dumitru Bălăeț, "Cultura, bibliotecile și dezvoltarea (II). Modelul american", *Biblioteca* 8/9, (2008): 247.

from fairytales are important design elements where children prefer to play and to read. This confers variety, utility, and encourages creativity.

In order to understand the functioning of a toy library better, we paid several visits to such institutions in France, in the towns of Angoulême and Cognac, in the period June 12–20, 2006 with the occasion of a training period at the Literary Salon of Cognac.

In the following, a few observations and conclusions drawn from the visits will be presented, since there is a difference in the way in which these toy libraries function.

### **1. The toy library of the Social and Cultural Centre from the Crouin district in the city of Cognac**

This centre connects the residents of the district with the institutions of the city. The main goal of the centre is to keep peace within the district and to help its residents integrate into society. The majority of the population is made up of immigrants. The Social and Cultural Centre has a toy library where educational group games are organised for the children. Parents can spend their time with games or various activities together with their children, or they can share their experiences regarding education with other parents and they can also receive advice from competent individuals working in the library. Children learn to evolve within a group and are thus prepared progressively to enter nursery school.

This toy library does not lend out toys, there are educators who intervene in the games, introducing little by little the rules of behaviour in society. Within this centre there is a Parents - Children House (Maison Parents Enfants), which organises numerous activities such as meetings, debates, exhibitions, literature workshops, theatre plays and video watching sessions.

### **2. La Maison du temps libre Cognac**

Part of the socio-cultural association ASERC, it has a library and a toy library. In the toy library children can play alone or in groups, or they can borrow the toys to take them home. The library provides home lending services to its users and offers animations based on tales and literature workshops to schools, recreational centres and to the district's residents. The institution's personnel also provides, in cooperation with parents and teachers, support for the children's school activity, adapted to each particular situation, in order to help them achieve personal success.

Through the toy library, the library and all the animations it organises, ASERC aims to prevent delinquency in the outlying districts of Cognac. The association also fights against illiteracy and social exclusion of the inhabitants.

### **3. The toy library from Saintes**

It is a space devoted entirely to play. There are two services: play sessions within the toy library and the lending of toys. The toy library's personnel helps children and adults (there is also a selection of games for adults) to use the resources of the institution. Users have the possibility to make suggestions regarding the purchase of toys and there is a special notebook at their disposal to express their wishes.

The toy library takes part in the local socio-cultural and educational activities, and it organises events that are specific to its role. Parents and grandparents are invited

here to play together with their children, but at the same time, the toy library is also a neutral space where users can come simply for the pleasure of playing.

#### **4. The “Rives de Charente” toy library from Angoulême**

It is organized in a similar way to the one in Saintes, it lends toys to adults and children. It organizes very many animations for preschool children, including children with various disabilities. Whole classes of children accompanied by teachers visit the toy library daily. I have assisted here to a special animation based on the theme of nature, carried out by a musician lady. Within an exhibition about nature the sounds of nature, rain, wind and noises made by different animals were improvised through play, singing little songs and playing various musical instruments.

During my visits I have gathered information about the Charta of public toy libraries in France, the description sheets of toys, the types of toys and games existing in toy libraries, user sheets, the classification markers of toys, the financial resources of a public toy library.

To establish precisely what the role of a toy library is, an analysis of the known functions of play is also necessary. According to Cristian Cheșuț, we can identify the following<sup>1</sup>:

##### **a.) The main functions of play:**

##### **1) Organisational**

Play allows the learning of good time and action management; it enables the development of a strategy which, through the imposed and learned rules, helps one to achieve his/her goals, that is, victory.

##### **2) Motivational**

Motivation can be moral (success, belonging to a certain club or team, having fun etc.) or material (prizes), and it is often known to players before the beginning of the play activity. Nothing is more efficient than success, the factor which forms, maintains and stimulates motivation the most, and play activities facilitate without a doubt the obtaining of success.

##### **3) Didactic**

Play enables the multilateral development of the playing individual, forms and develops certain age-specific skills, which in time and with a correct, intensive and well-channelled education can turn into virtues.

##### **4) Cognitive**

Through play one gathers, systematizes and synthesises more or less consciously new knowledge and experiences about the surrounding world. On the other hand, the one who plays demonstrates within the play and through the play certain individual qualities and personality traits (the ability to be leader of the game, the team or to be an opinion leader, team spirit, spirit of sacrifice, way of thinking, quick decision making etc.) which make him/her “superior” in the eyes of team members, redoubtable in the eyes of adversaries and an idol in the hearts of supporters.

##### **5) Educational**

Play leads to the formation of personal values and behavioural norms towards team members, adversaries and spectators. The behavioural principles contained in game

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<sup>1</sup> Cristian Cheșuț, *Ludeo, Ergo Sum. Păpuși, mingi, teorii* (Ludeo, Ergo Sum. Dolls, Balls, Theories) (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Limes, 2005), 24-26.

rules teach the participants how to behave in various circumstances during play, as well as in similar real life situations; they stimulate players to find optimal solutions and to apply them at the right moment. Being a form of instruction based on free choice, play generates during its progress diverse types of behaviour: positive (respecting game rules, adversaries and spectators, fair play, collegiality, solidarity, loyalty, generosity, accepting defeat with dignity etc.) or negative (individualism, self-lionizing, cheating, offending or mocking the adversary, lack of fair play, egoism, hypocrisy etc.)

**b) Secondary functions of play:**

1) Abates boredom caused by physical or mental inactivity, introduces elements missing from the player's surroundings, uses up part of the creative energies.

2) It is a form of leisure, a way to relax. Through liberating the individual from social constraints, implicitly, the constraints of work, it releases and channels new sources of energy. Studying the history of human civilization, one may notice that play and work are the two sides of human activity.

3) Play is a way of social manifestation; it is the foundation for later activities: it stimulates, promotes and maintains the social inclination of children and adults through specific manifestations: group games, socials, carnivals, reunions.

4) Offers satisfaction that does not depend on an actual final result. It is an activity with no other goal than to ensure its own appropriate progress.

5) Play is a means to pass on ideas, customs, myths, rituals, legends, traditional songs and dances, the whole spiritual thesaurus of an ethnic group or the people of a country.

6) Any ludic manifestation is ritual to an extent and vice versa, any ritual manifestation has a ludic character.

By analysing the functions of play presented above we can deduce that a toy library has the following roles:

- Placing play and toys in the centre of any project and any activity undertaken in the toy library;
- Promoting play and the pleasure of playing;
- Favouring and promoting free play (free choice of toys, games and playing partners);
- The toy library allows one to learn through play and social interaction with people not belonging to the "family" the elementary rules of property: "what is mine and what does not belong to me";
- Preparing the individual to anticipate and overcome difficulties in life;
- Guaranteeing that game rules are respected, guaranteeing that the rules of the institution are respected, teaching respect for playing partners;
- It helps users to acquire the basic rules of life in society through the particular relationship that enables play with others: children, participating parents, other adults;
- Developing responsibility, developing socially favourable behaviour;
- Developing through play visual and auditory sensitivity, attention, thinking, phonetic language, imagination, sensations, emotions, perception and representation, memory, skills, the ability to generalize and abstract, the ability to anticipate etc.;
- Encouraging spontaneity;

- It is a link between past and present because games and toys preserve the innate and cultural heritage of human civilization;
- Assuring access to material and cultural goods for children and families with low income or no income at all, thus favouring the normal development of such children and preventing the risks of social exclusion;
- Offering education for a better integration into society and preventing delinquency through creating habitual respect for rules and regulations, as well as respect towards playing partners;
- Through the agency of play, the toy library is a favourable space for adults to reach a ludic state, to relive some primary emotions, to remember ludic experiences from infancy and instances of happiness within their universe, and consequently, to relax and release tension and negative energies;
- In relationships between adults play helps to eliminate tendencies which are incompatible with social requirements;
- Valorising the ludic patrimony through creating a collection of toys from various eras and various cultures;
- Developing the critical sense of users through offering them the possibility to try out a multitude of games and toys.

In conclusion, the toy library favours:

- Experimentation
- Socialization
- Education
- Integration into the community
- Acquiring culture, play being the source of all cultural experiences
- Relaxation and the release of psychical tension.

One may ascertain that the toy library is first of all a welcoming, pleasurable place of recreation, where users can spend their free time in an agreeable way, and at the same time, it is a place that enables socialization and communication, prevents the transgression of social rules and helps integration into the community.

Although most frequently considered a frivolous activity, play has proved to be a wonderful tool: play is indispensable for the psychomotor development of children and it is essential for maintaining psychical balance in adolescence and even at a mature age, as it favours the development of imagination, creativity and the release of psychical tension.

On the basis of performed studies it was decided that within the branch library of the Opișani district the toy library should be part of the children's section and it should try to blend the offer of public libraries with educational games in order to bring children closer to books and raise their interest for them. This could induce children to take part in a multitude of activities and have a positive effect upon their personality. Consequently, in the toy library everything revolves around books and reading, with the development of a whole set of book-related activities that contribute to children's social inclusion and education. Harmonizing reading and play leads to an environment where children learn something in a pleasurable and effortless way without realising it, and by becoming used to such practices, they will display intellectual curiosity, will develop faster and more completely and they will not feel intimidated by the library anymore. Through playing, children interact, assume and switch roles; this makes them active on a cognitive and affective level and triggers their emotions. Depending on their reactions

during games, certain behaviours are encouraged or discouraged in order to shape their aesthetic and civic sense. Likewise, group activities with children are means of socialization, training and developing their personalities.

The cultural program was proposed to the kindergartens and schools from the neighbourhood, school age being a period of fantasy, imagination, daydreaming and play, and thus the most favourable time for shaping a child's personality through literature. In recent years there has been a noticeable loss of interest in reading in our town and not only here, the interest of children and even adults in reading a book being "stolen" by television, video games and the computer. From this point of view, some parents are not role models for their children anymore, because they themselves do not read; in some families reading a book, going to a library or a bookstore, establishing a private library is more and more rare or even an inexistent gesture.

According to studies carried out in 2005 and 2006 by the Centre for Studies and Research on Culture and Metro Media Transilvania, financed by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs and published as *The Barometer of Cultural Consumption*, literature, art films and quality music are not much sought after. The last study was carried out in the November – December 2006 period, with a representative sample of 1.485 people aged above 15 years and has a margin of error of +/- 2,9%.<sup>1</sup> According to this study, cultural consumption is more intense than in previous years, but it remains superficial, dominated by mediocre products and by television and radio, as one can observe a high rate of access to diverse information through the TV. More precisely, Romanians tend to watch comedies and TV series, listen to folk music and manele and read mostly mass literature (romance novels and action novels). The study also shows that 44% of Romanians do not watch cultural programmes at all.

One of the surprising results of the survey is that 15% of Romanians can't even name a single Romanian fiction writer, whereas 54,1% doesn't know the name of any foreign author. 11% doesn't spend any money on cultural activities and the average sum spent by families on cultural consumption is 45 RON.

35% of Romanians don't read fiction at all, literature being one of the most underrepresented areas of cultural consumption in our country. From among those who read, the majority prefers romance novels (15,6%), then action novels (15,4%), police novels (12,9%), Romanian classics (12,2%) and historical novels (11,7%). Classics of world literature are read only by 6,7% of the answerers, science fiction by 5,5%. Just like in the barometer from 2005, mass literature (romance, action or police novels) remains preponderant with a total of 43,9%.

14,5% of Romanians don't have any books in their home, 22,3% has 1 to 20 books, 20,16,3% has 21 to 50, 17,2% has 51 to 100, 17,4% has 101 to 500 and 6,3% claimed they have over 500 books at home.

Compared to the EU, the number of books and encyclopedias bought in our country is below the level of other countries. The only segment that can stand a comparison with EU countries, regarding the size of the personal library, is that of book collectors.

The most popular cultural activities in Romania differ substantially from the ones in the European Union. While going to the cinema, using libraries and visiting

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.culturamet.ro/>, (20 May 2009).

museums are predominant activities in the EU, in Romania public festivities and music shows are the most prevalent.

In the case of high school students (15-18 years old) the situation is alarming. The library is not among their preferences. From the 2300 students questioned by the Centre for Urban and Regional Sociology together with Centre for Media Studies and New Technologies of Communication from Bucharest, 46,6% spends his/her free time with outdoor recreation, 13 % does sports, 9,1% plays computer games and only 8,6% reads or learns; 6,9% watches TV and 4,9% listens to music. The interviewees mentioned only canonical authors studied at school as their favourite authors; 8,5% couldn't name a single Romanian author of literature. From the representative sample of 2300 students 44,7% doesn't read literature, while the others can only mention in minimal percentage (up to 7%) titles from the compulsory bibliography for the graduation exam; as regard poetry, 9,1% refuse to read lyrical texts, Mihai Eminescu being the only poet mentioned by 34,25% of the questioned students.

In such a situation phrases like "the crisis of reading" and "the death of the teenage reader" seem to be more or less justified, an using the PC in non-didactic purposes overtakes reading.

Of course, the virtual world offers a series of advantages as well, like developing technical and computer user skills, developing fantasy and curiosity, fast communication and direct, uninhibited expression, the level of knowledge about what goes on in the world. In addition to that, the world seen on the computer screen is a fascinating audio-visual reality that sends sensory messages to the child, shaping his/her knowledge.<sup>1</sup>

However, weighing the disadvantages of intense computer use from an early age leads to acknowledging the importance of the education that can be achieved in the library through reading and play. The above mentioned disadvantages refer to: loosing the traditional form of reflexive intelligence, due to which the child "glued to" the computer screen is no longer interested in the information preserved in books throughout time; an atrophied sense of orientation in time; communication reduced to an horizontal level at the expense of communication between generations; the lack of sentimental and emotional development, as the world on the computer screen is a cold reality; using a poor vocabulary and vulgar expressions; receiving unselected information; access to aggressive and pornographic messages.

Psychologists even talk about a "brainwashing phenomenon" and the atrophying of cerebral functions, calling the generation attached to the computer "generation @".<sup>2</sup>

Because 70 % of the knowledge necessary for a man is acquired before de age of 7, children raised in an unfavourable familial and social environment have problems at school which are hard to overcome and they evolve slowly. Failures discourage and marginalize them, and in their teenage years, when their psychological background is unstable, grudges and inferiority complexes can drive them to antisocial actions. For this reason, the library, as a cultural institution with an important role in the community's life, tries to contribute to the correction of this state by raising the children's interest for the fascinating world of books. The library can attract them and can offer them a

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<sup>1</sup> Horea Frunză, "Copilul și călătoria în lumea virtuală" (The Child and the Journey in the Virtual World), *Biblioteca Bucureștilor*, VI, nr.6, (2003): 29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibidem, 29.



positive way of evasion, an agreeable way to gain knowledge, because education requires less effort here from the children. It is adapted to their level and can help them to achieve formerly unknown satisfactions.<sup>1</sup>

The animation program takes place according to a schedule that includes nursery school groups and elementary school classes. The library established educational-cultural partnerships with local educational institutions in order to carry out these animation activities, but also other activities proposed by the library or the educational institutions.

The theme is chosen together with the accompanying teacher, and the way in which the activity unfolds depends on the level of the group/class and children's reactions. This program includes:

a. **Educational reading sessions and games**

There are animations which combine reading tales with playing games, the latter are always organised according to the tale that is to be read. Their aim, besides familiarizing the children with the library and the way it is organised, is intellectual education through understanding the texts that are read; forming critical opinions and personal judgements; embellishing oral communication; forming the habit of reading. To all this we can add civic education through respecting game rules and playing partners; understanding the common ownership and use of the toys and books in the library; respect towards common goods; understanding and respecting the library's rules (the books should be taken care of and returned in time).

The importance of reading in these animations is the result of a series of aspects it implies:

- the cognitive aspect, because reading enriches knowledge about the world, about reality;
- the educational aspect, because reading has an essential contribution to the ethical and aesthetical education of children;
- the formative aspect, because reading results in forming and consolidating the skills required for intellectual work, developing thinking, imagination and the capacity to communicate correctly and expressively.

The texts to be read are chosen together with the teaching personnel, depending on the age of the participants. The accessibility of the text is taken into account and special emphasis is put on choosing narratives with topics liked by children. The effect of such animations has to be the transformation of children from listeners into conscious and persistent readers.

Play was included in the library's animations because, in the opinion of psychologists, the child develops through play communication relationships and the capacity to observe and apply a series of social norms and rules, which is an important factor in socialization. Every game offers the opportunity to exercise psychical capacities, creativity, mobility, flexibility, comprehensive thinking, the capacity to come up with new solutions and apply the ones which have been memorised and have proved to be efficient.

The ludic activity is a fertile ground for emphasising, exercising and developing personality traits. The way in which a child adapts to and integrates into a game, if

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<sup>1</sup> Gheorghe Buluță, Sultana Craia and Victor Petrescu, *Biblioteca azi. Informare și comunicare* (Today's Library. Informing and Communication) (Târgoviște: Editura Bibliotheca, 2002), 58.

he/she respects the game rules and the other players or not, the degree to which he/she cooperates and fulfils the tasks of the game all reveal the level of moderation and good will, will power and perseverance, spirit of observation an attention, calmness, capacity to organize. Thus steps can be taken to correct negative behaviour and to encourage and develop the norms of moral behaviour and the spirit of justice.

Consequently, children's play can not be ignored, it has to be turned towards constructive goals in order to shape their budding personality positively.

For the ongoing year the following variants have been proposed, which can be organised anytime within the limits of the library's daily opening hours, depending on the preferences and the age of the participants:

### **1. Creating vocabulary games based on a fairy tale**

Target group: children aged 7 - 8 years.

Objective: enriching vocabulary.

Small cut out images representing aspects of a tale that was previously read for the group of children are glued next to crosswords. The children have to fill in the words corresponding to the images in the vertical and horizontal lines and have to find hidden words.

### **2. The tale with jigsaw puzzle**

Target group: children aged 4 - 7 years.

Objectives: developing their sense of observation,  
enhancing their memorising capacity.

Using jigsaw puzzle books and three-dimensional books from the toy library's stock; reading the tale and playing.

### **3. Let's play library!**

Target group: children aged above 7 years.

Objectives: discovering the variety of books,  
forming the habit of frequenting the library,  
understanding and learning the way to use the library.

The children are given explanations about the way the library is organised, the way the books are arranged, how to look for a book on the shelves, how to find a book in the catalogue, where the name of the author should be written, what an editor, an illustrator or a collection is, how a book gets from the book store to the library, what the difference between a book store and a library is. They are asked what books they would like there to be in the library. The children are then asked to identify on their own what has been discussed (author, illustrator etc.), to search for a book on the shelves, to search for a book in the catalogue.

### **4. The storytelling hour**

Target group: children aged 4 - 9 years.

Objectives: creating an atmosphere that stimulates their wish to read,  
discovering the various ways in which the story can be understood.

Educational but appealing and amusing stories are read for the children and are then discussed with them – their favourite character, attitudes, the behaviour of the characters, conclusions. No didactic questions are asked to which children should respond with standard phrases. This style is boring for children; it makes them aloof and does not mobilize their feelings. Instead, short unforced questions are asked, which mobilize them by making them think about the book that was read, and help them find the answers on their own. Then games can be made up based on a key sentence of the

story. The children can read the sentence one by one, in different ways: joking, furious, whining, scared, slow, fast etc.

**5. The day of the construction game**

Target group: children aged 4 - 9 years.

Objectives: developing thinking skills through solving problems in the game,  
increasing attention focus, cultivating persistence and will,  
forming skills and abilities.

It is combined with reading an adequate story. (For example, if animals are built, the tale will be about one of the animals.)

**6. The day of the didactic game**

Target group: children aged 7 - 10 years.

Objectives: facilitating the process of acquiring and consolidating knowledge,  
developing memory, attention, sense of observation, getting accustomed to intellectual work,  
balancing the learning process with play activities.

Depending on the types of games in the toy library's collection, the choice falls upon those that can be combined with reading a tale.

**7. The day of the logic game**

Target group: children aged 8 - 10 years.

Objectives: developing flexible thinking,  
developing the capacity for analysis and self-assessment, the capacity to think of solutions,  
teaching honesty and fair behaviour.

These games are combined with solving riddles.

**8. A text-image game**

Target group: children aged 5 - 9 years.

Objectives: developing imagination and logical thinking, understanding the connection between text and image.

An illustrated book is chosen and read to the children; afterwards every illustration is discussed with the children to see if the image and the text say the same thing.

The text of an illustrated book is covered, the children are only shown the illustrations one by one and they have to imagine a text for each of the images depending on what it suggests to them. In the end the original text is read and the contribution of the text to the image is explained.

The text and illustrations of a book are photocopied. They are separated and handed out to the children, some of whom receive text, others receive images. They each have to find the text corresponding to the image and in the end the parts of the story have to be arranged according to the original order of the pages and illustrations.

Participants didn't select activities number 7 and 8, considered to be harder and the time spent in the library (usually an hour) deemed too short for them. The most popular activities were "The story-telling hour" and "The tale with jigsaw puzzle". It was even suggested that the toy library should purchase large size puzzles and puzzles with more pieces. For the next school year a collaborating teacher has proposed the organization of a Scrabble Championship and a Puzzle Championship.

**Effects observed on participating children:**

- Children who generally do not communicate or express themselves well were able to retell something on their own from what had been read;

- They were happy to find that illustrations represented things known to them already and asked questions to gain deeper knowledge and satisfy their curiosity; keeping up their interest will make them wish to read themselves the books that give them answers to their questions;
- Some children gave precise answers to the questions asked and figured out a part of the answers on their own, therefore, reading teaches them to express their thoughts in a logical way, in well-formed sentences – reading is a powerful stimulus for the development of thinking and speaking;
- The reading materials which captivated them and their curiosity to know more contributed to turning their attention toward and deepening their focus on the subject of the book. This way they get used to listening attentively, to analyse things on their own level and to formulate certain answers;
- First and second grade children like riddles very much, they even compete in guessing the answers. They are likewise delighted by stories about the life of animals and funny stories which tell about small events from school life;
- During the discussions about characters, the children were able to notice the positive and negative traits of the characters, recognizing even some of their own bad habits; understanding that these traits need to be corrected (due to discussions related to the reading material) may help preventing or eliminating them;
- During the “Let’s play library!” activity, they were delighted to perform the small tasks given to them; repeating the activity will lead to familiarization with searching on the shelves and in the catalogue;
- Children like construction games. They strive to win the approval of the adult who guides them and whose opinion they keep asking for throughout the entire play session. They are very happy when they are encouraged and praised. Thus the instructive role of the game increases and moments of creation may occur during the ludic activity.

#### **b. Creative workshop**

The aim of this activity is to develop a taste for reading and the habit of handling books correctly, as well as to stimulate, develop and put forth the creative potential of the participants, to keep them motivated regarding creation, to encourage children’s inventivity and free expression. It takes place during the whole school year, starting with October, and for each month there were proposed two variants to choose from.

##### **1. Let’s invent a tale**

Time frame: October-November

Target group: children aged above 6 years

Objectives: delineating the invention of a tale,  
developing imagination

A very well-known tale is transformed with the aid of all the participating children. First, the tale is reread. Then, inventing a new version of the story is suggested to the children. For example: changing the location/scenery; transforming good characters into bad ones; replacing characters (ex. animal characters may be replaced with objects); a continuation of the tale may be imagined; two or more tales may be mixed.

##### **2. Let’s make a special book with an unusual form**

Time frame: October-November

Target group: children aged above 6 years

Objective: discovering other forms of books from other cultures and other historical periods

A “book” is made out of coloured paper in the shape of a fan, an accordion, a scroll, strips of paper glued together to form a sheaf etc. Before folding or cutting, the paper is written on and the “book” is illustrated with drawings or collages, according to everyone’s imagination. It is explained where these forms of books originally existed (ex. the accordion book existed in Asia and the text was read from the bottom upwards).

### **3. Thematic book exhibition**

Time frame: December

Target group: children aged above 7 years

Objectives: developing the desire to read,  
stimulating an “oriented” search for and choice of books,  
developing imagination and creativity

The children choose the theme of the exhibition and bring books to the library. The theme may be chosen based on various criteria: the contents of the books, the looks of the books (very big, small, three-dimensional), authors etc. The books from the library may be combined with personal books. Drawings may also be made to complete the exhibition. Book covers are drawn, inspired by the theme of the exhibition; these drawn “books” may be known or invented and they are given a title and an author (possibly the name of the drawer).

### **4. The word collection**

Time frame: February

Target group: children aged above 7 years

Objectives: enriching vocabulary,  
stimulating verbal creativity

The words preferred by the children during a number of reading sessions are collected in a basket or a jar. The words may then be used to create a funny story or character. The story or the character may be drawn.

### **5. Drawn impressions**

Time frame: February

Target group: children aged above 7 years

Objective: expressing the feelings evoked by a text

After a text with an emotional tinge is read, the children draw freely something related to the theme of the story, anything the story suggests to them. They can draw a moment of the narration when the character is very sad, scared, angry or happy. Emotions are expressed through colours and lines.

### **6. My favourite hero**

Time frame: March

Target group: children aged above 7 years

Objectives: learning the traits of a character,  
learning how to identify character traits and  
how to present them to others

The children put together the personal file of their favourite hero: name, surname, age, address, friends, favourite things, some character traits (good, bad, smart etc.). They make a sketch of their hero and the place of action (town, forest, house, castle, ship etc.).

### **7. Making a book from different materials**

Time frame: March

Target group: children aged above 7 years

Objective: creating a book as a personalized sensory object

Every pupil in the class brings a different material in order to make one or more books: textile materials (silk, velvet, cotton, carpet pieces), coloured paper, wrapping paper, napkins, special paper. They work in groups of three: the leaves are cut to the same size and glued together to form a book. Then they describe the sensations caused by touching each material. The book is decorated with cut out images, it is given a title – it is all left to the children's imagination.

### **8. Let's learn to respect books**

Time frame: May

Target group: children aged above 7 years

Objective: learning how to preserve and handle books

Bookmarkers are made out of coloured paper, with a few sentences written on them regarding the care for books. For example, My beautiful book, I always take care of you; I wash my hands before I read you; I leaf through you without tearing your pages; I don't eat while I read; I take you off the shelf with care etc. The children may be allowed to write their own exhortations about respect for books, especially library books, which have to be borrowed by many children. The bookmarkers may be decorated with drawings as well. They are exhibited at the library.

### **9. An album with the theme "Play in a variety of guises"**

Time frame: May

Target group: children aged 9-10 years

Objectives: marking the International Day of Play,

emphasizing the importance of play in the individual's development

Various materials with the theme "play" are cut out and collected from newspapers, magazines, leaflets, brochures, posters, reproductions of works of art, photos. Maxims, famous sayings, lines from children's poems, riddles with the same theme are also collected. All these materials are then stuck in an album, which is to be exhibited in the library with the occasion of the "International Day of Play". The names of the children who helped make the album are written on the first page. A maxim about play is written on each page of the album. For example, "The child laughs: My wisdom and my love is play" (Lucian Blaga); "It falls and it jumps right back up,/ As if it had legs./ Hits itself and does not cry. / What can it be? (The ball)

### **10. Origami workshop**

Time frame: at the request of nursery schools

Target group: children aged 4-7 years

Objective: forming the ability to reproduce a model

### **c. Stories brought to life by puppet shows**

This type of animation is the most beloved by children. It was created in 2006 at the children's section of the library in the town centre, but it is currently used in the Oprişani branch library as well at the request of schools and nursery schools, because taking the children to the centre would require means of transport. It is an activity that attracts adults as well, children being often accompanied not only by their educators, but also by their parents or grandparents.

Initially, this project was meant to attract preschool children to the library in order to turn them into library users, as this was an age group the institution had not given special attention to up to that point; later, it was extended to primary education, too. The objectives set by the project refer to forming reading skills at an early age, familiarizing children with the library, creating the habit of going to the public library, developing partnership with educational institutions, raising the number of users and daily attendance, diversifying the cultural offer of the library, developing children's imagination and creativity, intellectual, emotional and social development, and subsequently, when selecting the texts to be presented to the children, moral education was added to the aforementioned objectives.

The tales are carefully selected, they are "meaningful" stories which present positive examples to be followed, or on the contrary, negative examples to be avoided. These examples are discussed with the children after presenting the tale, thus they get used to respect each other and disapprove of ill will, aggression, violence, theft, intolerance. The aim is to educate children in the spirit of honour, courage of opinion, responsibility and work, encouraging their ability to assess their own good traits, as well as the bad ones.

The animation requires a rather long preparation process of approximately two months (during the summer holiday, but also during the school year), which includes the following: buying books for the children, drawing blocks, coloured pencils, cardboard and coloured paper; choosing the educational tale for the activity; adapting the text; recording it on CD with a musical background and various necessary sound effects in collaboration with the local radio post (Radio Transilvania).

When choosing the books, it has to be taken into consideration that, besides cultivating the pleasure for reading, the library has to develop children's taste for fundamental aesthetic categories and their respect for universal values (truth, goodness, beauty, justice, love and humanism), as well as respect and care for their environment. From a behavioural point of view, the effects of such texts appear in no time, especially because the little ones have the tendency to imitate the characters they come to know. Consequently, special attention is given to choosing educational tales from children's literature in order to promote the moral and ethical principles of living in society. The chosen books also have to contain captivating illustrations because a well presented and illustrated book becomes an object of aesthetic pleasure for the future reader and a means to enhance ties with the world. Through images, if they are harmonized within the right context, through characteristics of size, colour, movement, expression, the child infers, deciphers, understands and feels, judges and expresses himself/herself verbally, then acts and behaves.

After choosing the tale and analysing it carefully, the text is adapted to suit the library's possibilities for animation with puppets.

The internal component of the language of an animation with puppets is made up of three elements: text, characters and situations. They form a script, a scheme, based on which all the other elements are created. The longest part of the process is building the external component, namely the sets made of cardboard or linen painted with oil paint, the puppets made of textile materials and polystyrene and their costumes.

The puppet is the main element of the animated reading session; the characteristics of all the other elements of language from which the small show is created are established according to the puppet. It is a means of communication that helps to materialize the

characters and situations of the tale, which becomes thus more attractive to the children attending the animations.

Through presenting the stories this way, one creates characters with more power to generalize, essentialize and abstract; messages are conveyed through displaying actions, while the text emphasizes the puppet character's gestures and attitude.

The repertoire of the library includes up to this moment six stories animated with puppets. In order of creation, these are: *Katie Caterpillar* (based on a text by Steven Caldwell), *The Toy Who Told Lies* by Adriana Popescu (from the volume *Just a Flight Around the World*), *Andrea in the Land of Fairy Tales* by Gilbert Delahaye and Marcel Marlier, *The Legend of Santa Claus*, *The Fairies' Cook* by Shirley Barber and *The Tale of the Snowdrop* by Mircea Dem Rădulescu. At the moment, plans are being made to extend the animated reading sessions to secondary school level (5<sup>th</sup> grade) as well, an Indian style shadow puppet show entitled *The clever monkey* is in preparation.

The animation consists of the following stages: a short presentation of the tale that was prepared, listening to/watching the puppet show, followed by a discussion and explanation of the relevant positive and negative aspects, the demeanour of the characters, favourite characters, impressions. In case a group of children comes to the library for the first time, the institution and the ways to use it are presented first. Afterwards, the book on which the animated story was based is presented to them, the author is mentioned, the illustrations are shown and the children are then invited to leaf through the book. Another reading session follows, this time without animation, but with the same theme or a similar one, in order to anchor and clarify knowledge. The activity ends with the children drawing a chosen character from the tale, with the aim of forming the ability to express their own observations, ideas and impressions about the text through graphic arts. Older children are left to draw freely after they are given some general indications and help, if needed, while the little ones learn to draw the character following a simple model drawn line by line on a tablet placed in front of them by the librarian in charge of the activity. Through learning the "language" of graphic arts at the earliest age and through the encouraged freedom of expression children will be able to access the creative process in any field of human activity at a mature age and they will be more likely to believe in themselves.

In the end, everyone's work is appreciated, photos are taken, the puppets may be admired and the date of the next visit to the library is set.

The pleasant and appealing atmosphere, the beauty of the tales, puppets and sets drives many of the children to return in the next few days with a parent or grandparent to borrow books.

#### **Effects observed on participating children:**

- The children expressed themselves spontaneously through exclamations, a shining look in their eyes and gestures of admiration when the sets were changed, any new characters appeared and when the books on which the puppet shows had been based were presented; they are sensitive to aesthetical aspects and show an eager receptiveness for them; animated reading sessions develop their ability to perceive and feel the beauty of an artistic image; such an influence will expand later to the perception of beauty in other aspects of life as well;
- They like funny stories in which things are upside down and they specify the logic of things without being prompted;



- When it comes to complementary reading materials, which are meant to anchor the notions transmitted through the story animated with puppets, children prefer richly illustrated short texts (no longer than ten minutes) that are cheerful and amusing, creating an optimistic atmosphere;
- They expressed their sympathy or dislike for certain characters and their approval or disapproval for certain deeds; the moral educational effect of the stories appears after the text has been fully understood and discussed;
- The illustrations in books stimulate them very much, helping them to complete and clarify their knowledge, to systematize their ideas, to understand the content better; illustrations can contribute a lot to developing the love for books;
- Drawing characters is a well liked part of each animated reading session, children like to choose the character they will draw and the oldest (4<sup>th</sup> graders) compete in coming up with the most original representation. Thus they are thought to have initiative, use their imagination and release their spontaneous, expressive creativity;
- Animation with puppets had favourable effects especially on disadvantaged children coming from the Waldorf School (where there are even children without a stable home) and the Social Nursery School from the "Our Lady's Shelter" Care Centre. The majority of these children come from very poor families and have problems with intellectual development or communication and integration into the community. Some of these children managed to express themselves at the library through drawing a character from the tale they listened to, while at school they had never managed to draw a coherent picture.

The three types of activities mentioned let an intense socialization take place, co-operative relationships are established between the children based on sympathy and their participation in the ludic, creative and reading activities. Attention, thinking, imagination and will power are cultivated, the children learn to work together with their partners in order to reach a final goal.

As a result of carrying out the aforementioned animated activities, the library has achieved:

- Diversifying its own services with the addition of cultural animations through reading and games;
- The activities described have led to the involvement of 1.782 children throughout a period of only six month, which demonstrates how attractive and efficient these activities are;
- The expansion of the project from the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2009 to children with locomotor and neuromotor disabilities from the neighbouring town ("Carine" Recuperation Centre, Câmpia Turzii);
- Cultivating passions of a cultural and spiritual nature, regarding reading, from the earliest age through the animations performed with this aim;
- Transforming the branch library into a small cultural centre and a space for communication in the neighbourhood through deploying the cultural animation program.

**d. A possible expansion of the project**

The favourable results and differentiated work with these children might lead to an expansion of the animation to a form of education and therapy through reading, games and workshops, planned specially for disadvantaged children.

Thus, the “Teodor Murășanu” Municipal Library plans to develop its services in the Oprișani district through conceiving and implementing a bibliotherapy program in the near a future, which is intended for children aged 5-11 years and would take place in the children’s section. This program presumes first of all a very good co-operation between library, school, parents and psychotherapist. It will be aimed at children with emotional and behavioural disorders, as well as children who are shy, hyperactive, egocentric, aggressive, impulsive, have frequent changes of attitude and it will help the work of school counsellors. The main goal will be to modify the way these children communicate with others and help them learn to express their positive and negative feelings normally, to boost their self-respect and help them find alternative problem solving methods.

The objective of this bibliotherapy is to carry out educational work with children who lack a normal psycho-social development; such a work would involve all the services the library offers in order to raise their desire for reading, art and culture. The library has quite a lot of tools and resources to support parents, psychologists and teachers, but the librarian who will be in charge of this will have to know very well the psychological peculiarities and the specific development of children aged 5-11 years, the books that can be recommended to parents, the books that can be read to children at each particular age, various games and interactive activities, modelling and art activities.

The groups will be identified and formed with the help of the educators and psychologists and it will be taken into consideration if children come from a home life with alcoholic parents, aggressive, overprotective, anxious or hypochondriac parents, whose behaviour affects in turn the behaviour of their children. The therapeutic action has to be integral, meaning that one should work at the same time with the parents as well, and behaviour within the family has to be taken into account.

Bibliotherapy will be conceived as a pilot project in collaboration with a school and it will take place throughout a whole school year.

There are several types of proposed activities, which have a series of favourable psychological results. The basis is therapeutic storytelling or other reading activities carried out by the librarian. The stimulation of the brain and, implicitly, of the intellect is achieved through various methods: reading a text, listening to music, looking at an image, playing, taking part in a work process.

From a psychological point of view, tales can have a series of functions<sup>1</sup>:

1. *A tale functions as a mirror.* Association with a tale encourages the patient to talk about his/her conflicts and wishes; he/she may distance himself/herself from these and the tale becomes a mirror that reflects and can be reflected.
2. *A tale functions as a model.* Tales enable learning through a model, they reproduce conflicts and reveal possible solutions to them.
3. *A tale functions as a mediator.* The tale is the mediator between the therapist and the patient, it takes on the role of a filter, since the subject of discussion is

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<sup>1</sup> Nossrat Peseschkian, *Povești orientale ca instrumente de psihoterapie* (Oriental Tales as Instruments of Psychotherapy) (București: Editura Trei, 2005), 56-63.

the hero of the tale and not the patient. With the tale acting as a model, the patient can express himself/herself through a form of communication that is normally not at his/her disposal.

4. *A tale functions as a deposit.* Tales are easy to remember and put to use in other situations.
5. *A tale functions as a transmitter of tradition.* Tales can transmit any form of tradition (cultural, social, individual etc.). They contain behavioural models which form the basis of a unique tradition of neurotic behaviour and susceptibility for conflict.
6. *A tale functions as a transcultural transmitter.* Tales reflect the rules, concepts and norms of behaviour accepted in a certain culture. The contents suggest solutions acceptable in that particular culture.
7. *A tale functions as a counterconcept.* Tales represent an exceptional case of human communication, during which an interchange of concepts takes place as well. Through telling tales, the therapist does not present a fixed theory, but instead offers the patient a counterconcept which he/she can accept or deny. Counterconcepts are offered as prescriptions. The patient has to read a tale, has to think about it and talk about it or write about what he/she understood from it.
8. *A tale may induce a change of perspective.* Tales go beyond simple descriptions and contain a contrary experience, like the one of an optical illusion; the listener obtains a change of perspective.

The activities will be structured as follows:

1. Commentary on the book read at the children's section, narrating the therapeutic tale, putting on stage an educational tale, songs for children. The therapeutic tales are selected beforehand by the psychologist.
2. Commentary on a book borrowed from the library and read at home, therapeutic narration, putting on stage the therapeutic tale with the aid of puppets and commentaries.
3. Commentary on a book read at the children's section, riddles, therapeutic tales, recreational tales and games, drawing activity related to the subject of the therapeutic or recreational tale. The tales may be short, with a happy ending and well-known characters.

Taking into consideration that the library personnel already has three years of experience in organizing reading sessions animated with puppets, putting on stage the recreational or therapeutic tales and organizing the games will not be difficult to do. Putting on stage a tale in the form of a puppet show allows through the symbolic plot the expression of and communication about the conflicts in the family and school environment. This activity would be carried out with the children's involvement as the final stage of consolidating the therapy. The roles are distributed according to the skills and characteristics of each child, which will help them to gain trust in themselves within a collective artistic activity.

Using games will help in releasing the tension and maintaining discipline, it will also help develop socially favourable behaviour and, at the same time, identify negative behaviour (individualism, self-lionizing, cheating, offending or mocking the adversary, egoism, hypocrisy etc.) that needs to be corrected. To fight egoism, one can initiate games in which the winner has to do small favours for the defeated players and not the

other way around. In most of the cases a child's wish to be the winner of the game has its roots in an unwanted situation in the family, it may be a sign of the child's discontent with his/her family, which has to be relieved if it reveals injustice to the child (a family that is too closed off or too authoritarian, rivalry between siblings, the feeling of being subjected to incessant or contradictory dispositions).

The most difficult part of the project will be to convince certain types of parents (especially alcoholics, aggressive individuals, parents with a weakly organised family life) to participate – concurrently with the activities organised for their children – in a “school for parents” and to make them understand the meaning and the role of this activity. The school for parents will also take place in the library and has to include meetings, at least twice a month, where participatory techniques and listening to music will be applied. It will be organized by the school counsellor in collaboration with the librarian. The themes chosen will be the ones with the most powerful impact on the situation of each child. A complex program meant for parents would include:

- Meetings, interactive sessions with the parents and meetings where both the parents and their children participate;
- Bibliographies of sources recommended for parents
- Bibliographies of titles for children, categorised by age and theme.

Every meeting with the parents and children has to contain a reading activity. The parents will learn how to read out loud from a book correctly, where to put the accents, what intonations to use, how to comment on illustrations, how to ask their children questions in order to help them understand the text or the image.

The psychologist has to do a thorough analysis of the families and their educational methods, while the role of the activities is to facilitate communication between the child, the family and the therapist. Through these activities parents will learn about life alternatives and educational methods to raise their children. The librarian will inform the parents at these meetings about the behaviour and development of their children.

Besides the clinical amelioration brought on by the bibliotherapy, the children will enrol in the library and will be stimulated to read, which will favour their intellectual development, while the parents will be encouraged in their turn to join the library's users. The parents themselves have to perceive their presence at the library as a didactic and recreational alternative.

Besides the continuous enrichment of knowledge about the world, which is in the best interest of every human being, the education offered by libraries also promotes the right behaviour to obtain exact intellectual information. This leads to a rigorous behaviour in general and the capacity to synchronize one's own activities within the modern social and economic life. Contact with books helps the development of a pragmatic spirit, contributes to the development of critical sense and freedom of thought, as well as the capacity to choose the best solution from the available ones. Books offer you the power to correct yourself in life, offer you inner peace and a soaring spirit.

Breaking off the contact with books means gradual and irreversible de-alphabetization, even if there are various electronic means to gain information.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dumitru Bălăeș, “Educația prin biblioteci - o prioritate națională (III)” (Education Through Libraries – A National Priority), *Biblioteca*, 10, (2008): 288.