**MORE THAN BOOKS: LIBRARY AS CREATIVE CLASSROOM**

Ever since the founding of the Children’s Department of the Belgrade City Library in 1931, the first public library for children in the former Yugoslavia, themed activities and workshops for children and young adults have been continuously and systematically organized. This practice was introduced based on the model of work in European (and primarily Anglo-Saxon) libraries of that time thanks to the advocacy and vision of Dr. Marija Ilić Agapova, librarian and the first director of the Belgrade City Library.

To this day we continue these good practices through numerous free, educational and cultural programs and workshops, to provide much more than a book at Children's Department to our young patrons. With enthusiasm and dedication we are promoting reading, developing information literacy in children and young adults, strengthening their reading competencies and striving to make them experience the library as a place for creative work and lifelong learning.

We strive to meet the needs of teachers and students, to engage them in our activities, and act as an extension of the educational system. In order to successfully meet the set goals, we are guided by the IFLA Guidelines for Children's Library Services and the recommendations of the IFLA / UNESCO Public Library Manifesto. We regularly attend professional trainings for librarians, monitor the work of libraries in the region and world, while with the particular attention we are fostering cooperation and partnership with schools and school libraries. We also strive to provide support to parents and guardians in order to encourage children to read and develop reading habits. Through diverse programing activates that we create and implement we encourage creativity and imagination, expand horizons, supplement the school formal curriculum and meet the information and cultural needs of children and young adults, as well as their need for fun and entertainment.

We will highlight several programs that have transformed the library into a creative classroom and which are the result of quality and fruitful collaboration between public and school libraries.

**Slang Lang Workshops**

While acting as an extended arm of the education system we came up with the idea, in cooperation with high school native language teachers, that our library serves as a creative space in which we will work together in an informal manner to cover several literary works that are part of the school curriculum. For starters, we chose novels from different time periods that seemed especially interesting to us because they were written in slang, a language closer to younger generations. It was a great starting point for studying slang and comparative analysis of the transformation of informal and formal speech through the time. The talk about the origin, characteristics and usage of slang was spiced up with converting the standard language into jargon. Students showed extraordinary creativity in solving tasks, which is not surprising, because they were on their own turf.

**Really Surreal Workshops**

Since Surrealism as a literary and art movement is studied through high school curriculum as part of various subjects, repeatedly but uncoordinated, we made a plan with literature professor to organize a workshop dedicated to Surrealism in painting, literature and film. In this way, high school students got a comprehensive yet concise and informative overview of this exceptional art movement. Afterwards the students had the opportunity to participate in a surrealist experiment of making collective collage and the collaborative creation of automatic text, while the image of surrealism was completed with trailers from contemporary films influenced by this movement.

**"Literacy" Hanging Out**

Encouraging peer education, in our library we’ve organized the gathering of school librarians and spelling and language clubs from several primary schools. We gave students the opportunity to present to each other the work of their clubs, exchange valuable experience and create a joint project. Inspired by the book "365 jezičkih crtica" (*365 Notes on Language*) written by Violeta Babic, the students collected, wrote and dramatized the language rules and designed their own funny stories as an example of wrong and proper use of language.

**Book Clubbing**

The Children's Department of the Belgrade City Library, working as a multifunctional and creative space, "networked" with the members of the Reading Club "Network B.O.O.K", the part of the project of Belgrade Youth Organization for Promoting Activism (OPA). Club members (young people aged 13-19) regularly organized meetings in our library. In order to familiarize the users with the work of this club, we organized a gathering with patrons who’ve promoted reading among young adults, presented selected quality novels for older elementary and high school students and a catalog with reviews of 40 selected teenage novels. They also presented the way the club works and how one can become a member of such a club. All those interested had the opportunity to participate in an interesting discussion on reading experiences, school required reading lists, views of films based on books, and ways to develop love for reading.

**Celebrating International Mother Language Day**

Through collaboration with school librarians, we’ve organized an interesting, rich program in our library to mark International Mother Language Day in the best possible way. In addition to numerous interesting things that children could hear about different languages and ways of communication, different mother languages have also been heard! Children who participated in the program and whose mother language was other than Serbian (including Indonesian, Farsi, Swahili, Macedonian, German, Danish, Portuguese, English, etc.) recited beautiful songs in their native languages, giving their peers a unique opportunity to hear these languages live.

**Old Crafts for New Kids Workshops**

Based on the suggestion of teachers teaching the folk tradition and who wanted to take the children out of the classroom, we’ve organized a series of educational, entertaining and interactive workshops in the library called Old Crafts for New Kids. Students of the second, third, and fourth grade of elementary school had the opportunity to gain the knowledge on old crafts in an informal, "non-school" atmosphere through play and entertainment combining several school subjects.

The first workshop was about the blacksmith's trade. In “the native language class" we’ve told them the folk story "The Blacksmith and the Devil" and we’ve introduced the children to the motif of a blacksmith in folk literature. In "history class" we’ve studied the origin and development of the blacksmith's trade. Since the children adore mythological stories, we also introduced them to myths where blacksmiths are mentioned, such as the myth of Hephaestus, the Greek godfather of fire and forging, Vulcan, Cyclops, Hephaestus’ helpers, and to the Slavic god Elijah the Thunderer, protector of the blacksmiths, etc. In “computer class” we’ve browsed the Internet searching for interesting facts about blacksmiths, while during “art class” we’ve crafted forging tools and wrought iron objects using modelling clay and other materials. For the end of our gathering, we divided the children into two teams, "Devils" and "Blacksmiths". In an energetic, competitive atmosphere they participated in a quiz strengthening gained knowledge through play and entertainment.

Encouraged by the reaction of children and teachers after the workshop, we’ve continued this project and presented children other crafts (jewelry, weaving, pottery) based on the workshop on blacksmith's trade.

In this relaxed and informal atmosphere, by actively participating in these workshops, the children have acquired knowledge of very important, but almost forgotten old crafts. In addition, they’ve discovered reliable and quality sources in the library, explored encyclopedias, learned how to build a complete picture and improve their information competency.

**The Space for Makerspace**

Following the model of the most modern library concept - *makerspace*, within the project "Tehnoteka", we’ve transformed the library into a multifunctional, creative space equipped with various digital tools and teaching aids. Through practical work and play, multidisciplinary approach and research process, children acquire practical and useful knowledge and skills that are not provided within the classical education system. The project started in October 2016 with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Serbia and as a result of successful partnership between the public library and NGO EduLAB which deals with advanced learning techniques and education of students and educators in the use of LEGO Education didactic tools.

As part of the project “Tehnoteka” we are organizing 3D printing and LEGO programming workshops. LEGO Education WeDo 2.0 set is designed for younger elementary school students, while LEGO Education Mindstorms EV3 set is created for older elementary and high school students. Workshops are designed and conducted by educators-volunteers and librarians who have been trained to work with LEGO robots, in order to help children make the first steps into the world of programming.

Using the Lego Education program that incorporates the basics of engineering, programming and modern technology, we introduce children with the STEM concept and encourage their interest for science.

Through the organization of the described workshops we successfully perform our role of the extended arm of the education system, we actively participate in the mediation and realization of creative and educational activities and fulfill important tasks of the library as a place for lifelong learning, communication and joint activities. We are creating an environment where we read, explore, experiment, think, adopt and connect knowledge. Instead of the quiet library, we are presenting the users the library as a place of active searching for answers and conclusions.

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