

Report of a Professional Tour of Libraries for Children and Youth in Berlin on 8-18.05.2012

By:

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Training Program:

The training program was organized especially for me by Ms. Katrin Seewald, Director of one of the Public Library Branch for Children and Youth in the Kreuzberg-Friedrich Quarter of Berlin. The population of this area includes many immigrants of low socio-economic status (mostly from Turkey, but also from Arab countries, Africa and Asia) along with a young bohemian population and local young families. Therefore, one of the main challenges facing libraries in Berlin is the dealing with the multiplicity of cultures and languages.

The purpose of the training was to learn about the types of programs and activities initiated by libraries to encourage reading, and literacy in general, by means of books and libraries.

The training included visits in various libraries and enrichment centers for different ages and populations: preschools, a high school, an enrichment center for preschool and school teachers, a center for advancement of reading, a children's bookstore, and observation and participation in various workshops, including those aimed at educators and parents.

Characteristics of the Libraries and their Activities:

1. Public libraries are located in walking distance from schools or preschools, enabling classes or groups to visit the library during school hours for continuous activity during the year, accompanied by preschool or school teachers.
2. Classes are very small and sometimes include various ages, for example, a preschool class can include children from age two to six, or a school class can include children from grades 1 to 3.
3. The activity is free and at the end of each session, every child chooses a book to borrow. The library's budget is based in part on the number of visitors and loans.
4. The activity is coordinated with the curriculum and the school's needs, but also with the needs of the population, the children's primary language and their age.
5. The activity is done in small groups, is usually short and focused on a book with a specific subject, illustrated by visual means. The emphasis is on language skills – reading, writing and speaking.

6. The activities are initiated and organized by leading professionals in various fields (librarianship, education, design, journalism), who cooperate to advance the common goal. The cooperation is institutional and system-wide – between libraries and educational institutions, educators and parents, between various cultural centers, publishers and bookstores, and between the various regions of Berlin, within and outside of Germany.

Summary:

From the perspective of the attitude and types of activities, it was rewarding to discover that we “speak the same language” and emphasize the same principles: concrete activities focused on the book and about the book whose purpose is to stimulate interest and pleasure while at the same time to teach and to enlighten, with emphasis and close attention paid to meeting the needs of children in a multi-cultural and multi-lingual society.

I hope to remain in contact with the hosting librarians and to keep up to date on innovations and international cooperative projects, and that I will also be able to host them in our library for a visit and to observe our activities.

I am grateful for being able to participate in this fascinating and enriching training, and for the opportunity to observe firsthand children’s libraries and colleagues, children and children’s literature in Berlin. I was most impressed by the efforts, investment and good will of the librarians, who work in difficult conditions with diverse populations, and who hosted me so graciously, participated, listened and answered every question, and even expressed curiosity and interest in Haifa and Israel.

Thank You

First, thank you to Andrea Belafi and Kirstin Malka-Winter from the Goethe Institute Library in Tel Aviv who selected the staff of the Children’s Library of University of Haifa to participate in this training and who financed it in cooperation with the Bibliothek & Information International (BII). Thank you especially to Ms. Katrin Seewald, who so warmly and graciously hosted me in Berlin, and who organized this enriching and varied program for me. Thank you also to the library of the University of Haifa that supported this trip and to the Buchsweiler Family whose generous donation financed it.