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ISSN: 1857- 8888
DOI: 10.20544/teacher.30.05

LIBRARY – KINDERGARTEN COLLABORATION IN FOSTERING EARLY READING HABITS

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"The soul is healed when you are with children." – Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky.

Abstract
Collaboration between libraries and kindergartens plays a vital role in fostering a love of reading during early childhood. These collaborations create an environment that supports early literacy by introducing children to books and promoting the development of reading habits from a young age. Interactive practices such as reading aloud, storytelling, and creative workshops not only spark curiosity and interest in literature but also contribute to children's emotional, social, and cognitive development. By working together, librarians and educators design programs and resources tailored to children's needs, ensuring continuous support in reading and learning. Through these integrated approaches, strong foundations are built for lifelong reading habits and the cultivation of future readers.

Keywords: *libraries, kindergartens, reading, fostering a love of reading, early childhood development, library programs for children.*

Introduction

The term literacy in the Macedonian language refers to the knowledge and skill of reading and writing. Reading represents an analytical-synthetic process, a cognitive activity that simultaneously unites several stages, leading the learner to master reading techniques properly and to develop the ability to comprehend what has been read. (Kitanova, 2016). There are various models of the reading process, which have been the subject of numerous scientific studies. Typically, the models are divided into three main categories: *bottom-up*, *top-down*, and interactive models. (Dascalova, 2010). Reading is a vital skill that enables individuals to develop, acquire, and share knowledge. Therefore, it is crucial to cultivate reading habits from an early age, fostering children's interest, desire, and curiosity for reading. The development of reading habits in children is best supported by parents engaging them in various book-related and reading activities. Later, when children become part of the community—especially in kindergartens—these preschool institutions, together with libraries, play a key role, alongside parents, in instilling a love of books in children. Libraries are responsible for adapting their resources to the needs of children, including adjusting the space, equipment, and library materials to suit children's age, needs, and potential intellectual development. In addition to library resources—such as space, equipment, and materials—libraries also need to implement new programs, projects, and activities aimed at children from an early age. This includes collaboration with preschool institutions through a range of initiatives—such as trainings, consultations, idea exchanges, and projects—designed to cultivate and strengthen children's abilities in reading, storytelling, empathy, and more. For this purpose, the education of librarians is very important, as they need to possess pedagogical and psychological competencies required for working with children and for designing new projects, activities, and programs that will contribute to the development of children, as well as to the growth of both educational institutions—libraries and kindergartens. Libraries worldwide develop a variety of programs for children, parents, educators, teachers, and other professionals working with children, to enhance reading skills and foster a lasting interest in and love for reading. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the numerous activities that libraries worldwide practice in their work with children.

Why Cooperation Between Libraries and Kindergartens is Important

Cooperation between libraries and kindergartens is important for several reasons. First and foremost, it fosters the early development of reading habits in children. Through collaboration between libraries and kindergartens, children can become familiar with books from an early age and develop an interest in reading, which forms the foundation for their future academic growth. Reading books and stories helps children develop language skills by expanding their vocabulary and enhancing text comprehension. Visits to libraries and workshops organized by libraries can inspire children to ask questions, explore new ideas, and develop creative thinking.

Activities such as group readings, storytelling aloud, or similar workshops teach children socialization skills, teamwork, cooperation, listening, and sharing ideas with their peers. Through collaborative programs, parents are engaged and motivated to read with their children, an important factor in cultivating family reading and learning practices. In their daily work with children, kindergarten staff have the opportunity to utilize library resources to plan or implement high-quality educational programs for the children. This means they can use library materials such as picture books, children's books, encyclopedias, and more to create themes for daily activities in kindergartens. Educators can utilize books containing ideas for educational games, puzzles, and activities designed to enhance children's cognitive skills. Libraries possess materials covering these aspects and can share them with educators. Libraries offer a variety of services and programs that provide children with access to information and education, which entails fulfilling the rights of children as outlined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, including:

- The child has the right to freedom of expression, including the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds;
- Ensuring children have access to a wide range of appropriate library materials in various media;
- Assisting children in developing information literacy skills when using digital media;
- Implementing cultural and recreational programs focused on reading and literacy;
- Organizing diverse activities for children, parents, and educators;
- Removing barriers that children face and advocating for their freedom and safety;
- Encouraging children to become confident and competent individuals and citizens;
- Facilitating partnerships within the local community to jointly offer programs and services for all children and their families, including marginalized groups and those in economically disadvantaged situations.

Cooperation of Libraries Worldwide with Other Educational Institutions

The development of the first libraries dedicated to children and young people emerged toward the end of the 19th century. The earliest notable examples were American children's libraries, followed by libraries in France, the most prominent being the Bibliothèque de l'Heure Joyeuse in Paris, established in 1924. In the 1930s, the children's library in London had 10,000 registered children and was known for its exceptional collaboration with local primary schools. During the 1920s, Stockholm had a network of 29 children's libraries. In the Soviet Union, the most well-known children's library was the Soviet National Library *Lenin*, established in 1942, which was renowned for its reading rooms for children and young people.

United States of America

- *International Children's Digital Library (ICDL)* – This project existed and operated for more than 20 years, aiming to provide children worldwide with access to digital resources, specifically books for children, in 61 languages. The project began in 2002 at the University of Maryland in the USA, in collaboration with the Internet Archive. In implementing the project, children aged 6–14 also

participated alongside experts. Involving children proved to be an excellent choice, as their input helped create a website tailored to children of different ages. The primary goal of the project was to enhance children's understanding of global diversity, promote basic human values, and offer literature for education and leisure." Through this project, children had the opportunity to connect with libraries and reading, especially those who could not physically visit a library, such as children with disabilities or children living in rural areas without nearby libraries. The Library of Congress invited all national libraries worldwide to participate in the project and contribute to the creation of the digital collection. Users could access the collection for free, using an interface suitable for children aged 3–13. Materials were classified according to cover color, favorite characters, and book length. Advanced search options were also provided, as the collection was intended not only for children but also for parents, educators, librarians, publishers, and anyone interested in children's literature. Unfortunately, due to a lack of funding, the project ceased operations in April 2021.

- *Storytime* – This is one of the most popular and widespread programs for children in libraries across the USA and the United Kingdom. Story-reading activities conducted by librarians for children often include songs, rhymes, games, and short thematic exercises. The program aims to develop early reading skills, improve attention, and foster an interest in books from an early age. Additionally, there are supplementary activities such as **"***Craft Time,"* where children create something based on the story that was read.

- *1,000 Books Before Kindergarten* – This program motivates parents or caregivers to read 1,000 books to their children before they start attending kindergarten or school. The goal of the program is to foster a love of books and enhance children's cognitive skills. The program operates in a way that libraries provide a wide selection of books, picture books, and digital applications to track reading progress. When a child reaches certain milestones, they receive books or certificates as a reward.

Italy

- *Born to Read – Nati per Leggere* is a program established in 1999 to encourage parents to read to their children from an early age. The program provides specially selected books and reading guidance for parents and caregivers. The initiative aims to encourage reading, foster a passion for books, and develop a strong connection between children and literature. This program is an initiative of several organizations, including the Italian Pediatric Association, the Association of Librarians, and the Center for Health Education. The program targets children aged 0–6 and includes a variety of activities, such as workshops and readings in libraries or bookstores organized by librarians, volunteers, and pediatricians. It also provides advice and instructions for parents, for example, information about the importance of reading. The core idea is that reading from an early age stimulates child development, enriches vocabulary, and enhances emotional and cognitive intelligence. The program also has a significant social aspect, as it helps children develop communication skills and connect with their parents through shared storytelling. *Nati per Leggere* is very successful and widely accepted across Italy, and its example has inspired similar initiatives in other countries.

Portugal

- *Bebeteca* is a program in Portugal aimed at promoting reading among very young children, including their families. he concept of a bebeteca, derived from 'baby' and 'library,' refers to dedicated library spaces designed for parents and children aged 0–3 to enjoy reading and listening to stories, tales, or fables together. The program encourages parents to start reading to their children from an early age. Activities are designed to strengthen the bond between parents and children through shared reading and play. The program also provides opportunities for children to engage with their peers, promoting the growth of social and communicative abilities. *Bebeteca* is an excellent example of how libraries can play a vital role in early childhood development, creating a positive environment for learning and enjoyment.

Republic of North Macedonia

Libraries in North Macedonia provide and implement a wide range of programs, projects, and activities aimed at young children, focusing on their development, introducing them to libraries, books, and reading, and fostering motivation and interest in reading. Among these activities are meetings with children's authors, book promotions targeted to their age group, educational lectures, and programs on children's rights in collaboration with other institutions such as kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, faculties, universities, municipalities, and more. Additionally, there are creative workshops, children's music and theater performances, creative writing workshops, literary readings, and many other activities designed for children. Each year, the first week of October is dedicated to children under the motto *Children's Week* or *Week of the Child*. The first day of this week is celebrated as *Universal Children's Day*. On this occasion, a large number of libraries in North Macedonia organize projects and activities that pay special attention to children and help introduce them to the world of books.

Conclusion

In recent years, an increasing number of scientific studies have focused on topics related to early literacy, the development of reading habits in preschool-aged children, and the role of libraries in promoting reading. Research has also examined forms of cooperation between libraries and kindergartens, parents, schools, universities, and other institutions. One study found that regular library membership and visits within families significantly contribute to raising awareness and establishing the habit of parents reading to their children. The study's results emphasize the importance of library services in encouraging and sustaining reading habits among children aged 6 to 18. In 2021, a study was conducted in a kindergarten in the Bronx, focusing on regular use of library services and shared reading activities. The results showed a significant improvement in the educational achievements of children who regularly participated in library reading activities. Therefore, cooperation between libraries and kindergartens, as well as with all other cultural and educational institutions, is extremely important. Such collaboration provides numerous benefits for preschool-aged children, their parents, their communities, and society as a whole, emphasizing the importance of each country taking special care of its future generations.

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