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Co-creating activities of reading animation with young people on the example of the Literary Escape Room in the Komorów's Communal Public Library named after Maria Dąbrowska

Abstract: The teenage period is the time to search for oneself and shaping one's own life path, often associated with rebellion and negation of what comes from adults. It is widely considered that teenagers are a group of students that is most difficult to reach with out-of-school educational activities. It is during this period that literature can help a lot in perceiving problems from a distance, finding solutions and forming one's own personality.
Trying to encourage contemporary netgeneration to relate with literary texts and to spend time in the library, librarians are increasingly expanding their offer associated with the latest technologies or multimedia workshops. The availability of such solutions depends on the financial and housing capabilities of the facility. Smaller public libraries need less costly solutions to increase the attendance of young people in cultural institutions.
The article presents the opportunities to work with young people in a public library by inviting them to co-create activities on the example of the completed project of the Maria Dąbrowska's Literary Room of Riddles in the Communal Public Library in Komorów.

Agnieszka Brzostowska

The successful inclusion of teenagers in activities has brought many benefits to volunteers, local students and the library itself. During the project, participants were encouraged to come to the library, as well as to get to know, with satisfaction, the works and biography of Maria Dąbrowska. Volunteers who create the described Escape Room also come to the library after the end of this project and plan their next activities.

Keywords: Literary Escape Room, readership animation, young people in Public Library, Cooperative creation with young people, the Komorów`s Communal Public Library named after Maria Dąbrowska

Issues of reading animation appeared in the environment of Polish librarians in the early 90s of the 20th in the magazines "Biblioteka w Szkole" ("Library at School") and "Poradnik Bibliotekarza" ("A Librarian's Guide"). At that time Joanna Papuzińska used the phrase Animation in the Library, leading the practices of socio-cultural animation to work with a book and reader. Today, more and more publications are being created about encouraging children, youth and adults to interact with literary texts. Readership animators face new challenges. They try to compete with the world offering light and mesmerizing entertainment through various types of applications and multimedia that only have a relaxing function and passively filled the time. function. Looking for inspiration, each librarian can use ready-made scenario of animation classes or create their own. The professional literature includes proposals for competitions, weeks with a book, school discussion clubs, fairy tale hours, reading out loud, actions like bookcrossing, creating a city game, storytelling or story-line (Jąder, 2010, pp. 44–45), building a school studio (Papuzińska, 1992, pp. 1–7), e-book programming (Boryczka, 2012, pp. 12–14), workshops of fanfiction stories, publishing newspapers with pupils, graffiti painting, leading a club of book lovers, fairy tales staging and more. Classes related to literary texts should be conducted in an interesting way, with particular emphasis on the principle of visibility and student activation. It is worth using immersive, even non-standard didactic methods, combining theory with practice and pleasure of learning (Lipińska, 2017, p. 78). In this process the latest technologies are also becoming increasingly involved. Keeping up with the present day, various forms of gamification of educational activities addressed to young people, such as city and field games or interactive lessons, museums and exhibitions, were started. Based on the assumptions of adventure pedagogy and neurodidactics, pedagogues suggest how to incorporate experiences and emotions into the learning process, turning the learning process into adventure. This type forms of work take place in various areas

[104]

– from a yacht crossing the sea to a closed room or internet space (Palamer-
-Kabacińska & Leśny (Eds.), 2012). The mission of the librarian's animation
classes is not only to attract the user to the library and to initiate a contact
with literary texts, but also to strengthen self-esteem, to bring tradition closer,
stimulate the imagination, to practice thinking skills and creative thinking, to
practice text comprehension and information search skills, integration of local
communities around books and libraries (Lipińska, 2017, p. 75). The anima-
tor, working with the reader, reaches into forms related to play, in which the
student participates voluntarily, is not evaluated and does not follow instruc-
tions, but works more creatively and freely. During such classes, the content
of the book is introduced to the world of the child's sensations and needs,
related to the surrounding world and actual experience (Lipińska, 2017, p. 77).
Particularly noteworthy are the two most recently published works: *Dziecko
w dialogu z tekstem literackim* (*A child in dialogue with a literary text*) by Danuta
Świerczyńska-Jelonek and Grażyna Walczewska-Klimczak (2015) and a col-
lective work *Rozumienie świata. O warsztatach pracy z książką i czytelnikami* (*Under-
standing the world. Practical classes on working with the book and readers*) published by
SBP (Kulik et al. (Eds.), 2017).

When Joanna Papuzińska mentions the animation of reading for the first
time in Poland, in Italy the first (existing to this day) "ludoteki" (enjoying li-
braries; from the ludu – fun) are being created, combining in its assumption
books with arousing curiosity of the surrounding world through various
senses, such as touch and hearing (Papuzińska, 1992, pp. 1–7). In the USA,
much earlier, because already in the first half of the 20th century, public ren-
tals for non-adults are being established, which are friendly through conve-
nient, prosocial arrangement of space. However, at the end of the previous
century, in the USA, the need to change the character of the library related to
the widespread use of new media was reflected (Zając, 2013, pp. 157–159). In
Poland, these technologies were just to begin to be available to every citizen.
Today, in the American library, it is possible to use (apart from a large collec-
tion of books, technological innovations) a variety of unusual activities such
as "read doggie" or yoga training (*Na randkę do biblioteki*, 2015). Currently in
Sweden, to meet modern users, special kitchens have been arranged in some
libraries to cook together, encouraging readers to use cookbooks or create
their own recipes. What is more, at TioTretton, preferences are analysed
among young people not only in terms of the scope of the book collection,
space arrangement, but also the competences of employees (Hoflin, 2015,
pp. 57–58). In this way, young users are allowed to have a real impact on the
character of the public library. In Poland, more and more attention is paid to
the user belonging to netgeneration, i.e. at the age of 6 to 19 years old, who

works efficiently with modern technologies and processes information more in a network than in linearly way (Zając, 2013, p. 169)[1]. In larger cities, including Wroclaw (*Vortal of the Media Library in Wrocław*, 2019) and Warsaw (*Vortal of the XXXI Multimedia Library…*, 2019), multimedia libraries with access to a cinema room, 3D printer, programming classes and *Lego Mindstorms* are already available. An example is also the newly established Media Library in Grodzisk Mazowiecki (*Vortal of the Media Library in Grodzisk Mazowiecki*, 2019), in which a special Youmedia room (MK, 2019) with augmented reality technologies was created to attract young people to use the library. The vision of library 2.0 (Zając, 2013, p. 164), and even 3.0 (Wojciechowski, 2014, p. 90) is getting closer to us.

Teens and young adults take up reading activities mostly on their own. At this age, the parental educational impact decreases towards influence by the peers. The time of primary school and high school education is associated with searching for oneself and shaping one's own life path and is often connected with teenage rebellion and negating everything what comes from adults. Therefore, it is widely believed that this is a group of pupils that is most difficult to reach with various types of educational activities. At the same time, it is one of the most sensitive periods in the pupil's life. Shaping one's own personality causes many problems, which for a teenager seem to be a drama affecting their whole lives. It is during this period of human life that literature can be an essential help in finding solutions, looking at problems from a distance and forming one's personality. What's more, engaging people growing up and reaching maturity (between 10 and 20 years of age) favors the creation of necessary communication competences and the development of receiving skills (Wojciechowski, 2000, p. 99).

However, often classes for netgeneration proposed by the librarian meet with less attendance than those organized for the youngest or much older participants. This makes the library believe that it is most difficult to reach teenage users who prefer spending time with their peers, rather than participating in activities with adults, such as a librarian or teacher. In my previous meetings with young people (when making a diagnosis of the local environment of the Warsaw commune of Solec around the Łazienkowska Youth Cultural Centre[2], carrying out activities during the construction of the Ochota Model for Civic Dialogue (*Ochocki Model…*, 2016), or conducting own re-

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[1] In 2013 Michał Zając uses the term "netgeneration" for users 6–13 years, thus 6 years later these users are already 19 years old.

[2] Diagnosis of the local environment carried out in 2011 as part of the university classes "Diagnosis and animation of local groups and environments" under the direction of Dr. Grażyna Walczewska-Klimczak.

search in the field of school libraries (Brzostowska, 2013), when asked about low attendance at cultural institutions, they mentioned the lack of an offer corresponding to the younger generation, in line with current trends and encouraging participation, where they could participate in the creation of activities. At the same time, they presented their own proposals for actions, which at least declaratively, they would gladly organize together with a teacher or librarian, and in which they would take part (as for example in an unusual-sounding "night at the library"). They also gave ideas on how to encourage others to come to the library or read books. Therefore, it would be a good solution to ask young people about the preferences of activities and enable their own organization of various projects by providing a room, materials and substantive care as well as assistance in promoting the event. It is possible that if the library offered more stimulating classes for a modern teenager, the number of underage participants would increase significantly. An additional advantage for the librarian may be the use of social networking and other new communication media. These suppositions worked well in the description below the project.

The exemplification of co-creation of reading animation activities with young people was discussed on the example of the implemented project of an escape room at the Maria Dąbrowska Communal Public Library located in Komorów[3] – a village in the Pruszków County near Warsaw, in the Michałowice commune. The library employs 6 people, including 3 librarians and a culture animator (*Vortal of the Maria Dąbrowska Communal Public Library in Komorów*, 2016). As a library in a rural commune, it has less housing and financial possibilities than multimedia libraries in larger cities, but it was in this library located in Komorów where the first in Poland, non-commercial, permanent (operating for a year) Literary Escape Room was created.

During the project, it was possible to encourage participants to come to the library, but also to get to know the satisfaction, the works and the life story of Maria Dąbrowska. What is more, after the completion of this project the volunteers who created the Escape Room also come to the library and plan their next activities.

According to a leading portal integrating Polish companies which deal in escape rooms:

> Escape room is a type of game in which players are locked in a room from which they must get out at a predetermined time after solving related puzzles or manual tasks; this game is watched by a game master who can be

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[3] Coverage of the escape room at the Maria Dąbrowska Communal Public Library is available on the World Wide Web (*Pokój zagadek Pani Marii*, 2017).

contacted for hints; sometimes, in addition to players, there are actors who interact with the players; each escape room has its own themes (e.g. crime, adventure, travel, etc.). Inside, you have to face the previously prepared puzzles which require logical thinking, perceptivity, creativity and a bit of cunning or physical fitness) (*Lockme vortal*) [All quotations have been translated into English by translators of this article].

This form of fun is extremely fashionable today among teenagers, but also among adults. Library employees "allow (...) to engage readers in activities around previously unknown content or knowledge. It is also simply a great opportunity to have fun together, but also to look at your workplace from a completely new, revealing perspective" (Mitzner).

The first escape room in Poland was established in 2013 in Wroclaw (Kowalik, 2015). Today there are already 978 commercial rooms in 359 locations (*Lockme vortal*). In addition to these rooms, there are other non-commercial ones (usually short-term – one-time) prepared by adults as an educational form, mainly for children. An example would be the Zalesie Dolne Library in Piaseczno, where in July 2019 meetings of "Poszukiwacze skarbów" ("Treasure Hunters") were organized. (*Vortal of the Danuta Orłowska Library in Piaseczno-Zalesie Dolne*, 2018). This year a permanent room was also created in the Bydgoszcz library under the name "Klub Enigma" ("Enigma Club") (*Vortal of the Pedagogical Provincial Library in Bydgoszcz*, 2019).

The idea of the venture in Komorów was created during a meeting of representatives of the Fund for Intercultural Education (Agnieszka Dziarmaga-Czajkowska and Małgorzata Chojecka) and the Maria Dąbrowska Communal Public Library in Komorów (Natalia Kremplak and Katarzyna Walichnowska), who together decided to involve young people in the life of the library[4]. The next step was to find institutions willing to participate in the project, both willing to provide space and to take care of volunteers (volunteer contracts, insurance) and finance activities[5]. In consultation with the Fund for Intercultural Education, Maria Dąbrowska Communal Public Li-

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[4] The idea of organizing activities for young people to participate in the life of the Communal Public Library in Komorów – Małgorzata Chojecka (Fund for Intercultural Education, Polish Section of IBBY, ABCXXI – All of Poland Reads to Kids Foundation). The idea of creating the Escape Room – Natalia Kremplak (volunteer coordinator, Communal Social Welfare Center of the Michałowice Commune, Communal Public Library in Komorów).

[5] Content-related supervision and financing [Fund for Intercultural Education (Agnieszka Dziarmaga-Czajkowska) / Maria Dąbrowska Communal Public Library (director Katarzyna Walichnowska)/ Communal Social Welfare Center of the Michałowice Commune (manager Iwona Radzimirska)].

brary in Komorów and Communal Social Welfare Center of the Michałowice Commune managed to inaugurate the work.

The first escape room created by young people in the library in the Michałowice commune began with gathering volunteers by disseminating information about the planned initiative on posters, which were placed in both virtual and physical space. The interest was greater than the limit of thirty places. Marta Matusiak, acting as the library director at that time, was the main animator and motive force of the undertaking, together with the volunteer coordinator – Natalia Kremplak. Both of them took care not only about the formal side of the project, but also about contracts with volunteers, budget management, obtaining funds from the municipality for implementation, providing space for meetings, running reports, placing information on the site, promoting the event, contacting volunteers, arranging meetings and organizing outings, but also for a good atmosphere in the group.

The introductory classes were to interest teenagers in the proposed activity, implement themes and familiarize volunteers with each other and with project animators. About 15 people came to the project kick-off meeting, for whom the so-called "teaser", or the one-time Literary Escape Room, was prepared. The theme of the game was Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*. Volunteers were divided into two teams which in parallel in separate library rooms solved puzzles to find the key and props necessary to leave the room. For some participants it was the first meeting with this type of entertainment. Then followed the integration and conversation about expectations as well as the preliminary development of the meeting schedule. On the board with the instruction to complete the sentence "I hope this project…" appeared, among others such expectations:

- "will give me a lot of memories",
- "will be fun",
- "will teach me something",
- "will be a good fun",
- "will be a super new thing",
- "will be a challenge",
- "will be interesting",
- "will let me meet new people",
- "will be successful",
- "will teach me a lot",
- "will let me overcome fear".

The received answers suggested interest and willingness to participate in the project. Next, having willing participants, expectations had to be met. Following the suggestion of volunteers, communication took place via the social networking site Facebook.

The next activities were primarily aimed at gathering experience by the participants. It was a visit to selected Warsaw escape rooms – getting out of a commercial room and a conversation with the owners about the creation and functioning of the room. Because the described Communal Library is located in a building where the patron of this place[6] used to live, it was decided that the scenario of the room would concern the life and work of the author of *Nights and Days*. That is why next week volunteers visited the Maria Dąbrowska Museum located in Warsaw. To gather inspiration for the story, apart from time spent on joint activities, they also learned about the available works of M. Dąbrowska, especially *Journals*.

Then the groups exchanged experiences and ideas for their own puzzle room. The next stationary meeting was a search for possible technologies and collecting ideas for puzzles. During the meeting with the expert Marcin Mitzner (a representative of Games Development, who outlined the necessary features of the script and ways of creating in detail), participants learned the paths of solving puzzles, creating a story line, possible ways of combining elements, which allowed to collect individual components into a whole and transform loose ideas into a real scenario game.

Once the idea was ready, the room was arranged and the props necessary for the game were provided. Each of the volunteers had the opportunity to present and use their passions, especially connected with technical skills, IT, photography and filming. The task of volunteers was to locate puzzles, but also to help in revitalizing the room, assembling equipment, furniture, walls, cameras, creating reports on the course of work and promoting the event. Young people quickly shared their responsibilities according to their own skills and interests. At this point, adult leaders only supervised the activities, interfering only slightly, providing more help or advice. All activities (planning and implementation) belonged to volunteers who from the beginning had a full impact on the scenario and appearance of the room. Various puzzle ideas were used, such as ultraviolet light, reed switches, and the screen with the removed polarizing film.

Project meetings were to take place every two weeks. However, it quickly turned out that the participants expressed the desire and need for more fre-

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[6] Earlier, in the place intended for the puzzle room there was an exhibition about Maria Dąbrowska.

quent visits to the library (in the last stages of construction they worked every day). From the 808 planned hours of activities, they spent a total of 983 hours grinding, painting, drilling, screwing, recording, editing. The ready escape room required testing, in which close friends of volunteers took part. After the last corrections, the grand opening of the room took place on the Library Night in June 2017. In the meantime, volunteers talked about the project, including on local radio, newspaper and cyberspace (mainly on social networks). During the official opening of the Maria Dąbrowska Escape Room, the creators received public thanks, including from the head of the Michałowice commune. By the end of the project, 17 actively participating volunteers (between 10 and 20 years old) remained.

The secret room in Komorów operated for a year (June 2017 – June 2018) every first Saturday of the month, always with a set of players[7], who later often borrowed books or signed up for other events. Enrolment took place by phone, in person or via Facebook. Each session had to be prepared and supervised by at least two volunteers who presented the story, gave hints, supervised the participants, controlled the time, and congratulated the winners. Each group was followed by preparation time for the next players. It required a lot of practice not to mistake the practice to arrange the puzzles properly or the selection of padlocks. Riddles and ciphers were related to Maria Dąbrowska's life: the codes marked important dates in her biography (as participants learned about it during the game), and the riddles concerned the writer's biography, including travels and published works. The theme of the game was to find the last chapters of unfinished history hidden in the room, the discovery of which could bring fame or money. The team had 60 minutes to find an unpublished work, and the reward for completing the game was an adventure, satisfaction with the win and receiving a real information about the unfinished book. During the activity time of the escape room, volunteers carried out evaluations every few months, streamlining and improving riddles.

The success of the entire project, measured by the audience's requests for taking part in the game and the interest of the media (not only local) meant that the people involved in the project do not intend to stop, but on the contrary, they have already planned further actions. Such a great success of one undertaking is conducive to the desire to create something next to feel the satisfaction of the project again. The effect is all the more valuable because most of participants were people who took part in volunteering for the first time, and today they are engaging in new challenges proposed by the library and other institutions. To this day, young people who were participating in

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[7] At least 4 teams of players entered the room in one day.

the project are often invited to talk about their success, e.g. at Commune Volunteer Days and conferences for volunteers, whereas the Maria Dąbrowska Library in Komorów became an important place for participants.

The most important project implications resulting from the involvement of young people in creating activities are direct advertising – individual participants disseminated information by talking to their friends or posting on social networks and using place tags or events (Zając, 2013, p. 175). Direct advertising has the greatest impact, so a high attendance can be expected.

Teenagers, having the feeling that they create something on their own, take more responsibility for it than just participating in an activity prepared by an adult. The feeling that it is their project, and not only adults one (teachers or librarians one), causes that participants less often give up during its duration and take care of their work. Youth co-creating the project is also a certain beneficiary of activities. Even if the attendance at the final action directed at a wider group turned out to be low, we can consider the project successful at least for peace-building volunteers. Especially when it comes to integration and creating a local community – team success or failure, brings people together the most. Other students of nearby schools are more eager to visit proposed places prepared by their peers, expecting something interesting, according to the tastes of young people.

The success of the created escape room also supported the implementation of those mentioned by Prof. J. Wojciechowski's important public library purposes for the modern user. First of all, employees of the Maria Dąbrowska Communal Public Library encouraged local volunteers to work, gaining their trust (Wojciechowski, 2000, p. 73; 2014, p. 212) thanks not only to getting to know their interests and preferences, but also developing in volunteers the habit of visiting the library in Komorów (Gęborska, 2017, p. 1). Through the implementation of the described project, the library was promoted among the local community as a modern place, friendly to young people (Wojciechowski, 2014, p. 119), meeting the expectations of today's fashion (Wojciechowski, 2014, pp. 187–188). In this way, the stereotypes of a librarian only offering a book or material for borrowing was broken (Wojciechowski, 2014, pp. 51–52). At the same time, the implementation of the described project brought teenagers closer to the history of the place and the biography of a well-known writer by creating, despite housing and financial constraints, an educational space conducive to creative thinking, offering entertainment that goes beyond a service and is extraordinary (Wojciechowski, 2014, pp. 49).

Based on the experience of creating the mentioned escape room, the author of the article has identified the most important principles and guidelines for the animator applicable when designing activities with young people that

increase the effectiveness of activities. The most important determinant of reaching young people with reading animation is to examine the preferences and to ask the beneficiaries what kind of actions would arouse their interest. Nowadays, pedagogues often speak pejoratively about the latest technologies, complaining that young people prefer using smartphones than other offered classes. To encourage young people to visit the library, you can create activities related to new technologies, such as creating applications, memes or e-books. It is worth looking for inspiration on the Internet for your activities and finding out what is currently "trendy" among teenagers. The group should be managed in accordance with modern habits of students: announcements, event promotion and communication with participants can be transferred to social media. When you co-create the project with young volunteers you should not impose your ideas on them and only negate the proposals they provide (of course as part of socially acceptable activities). Once the participants are introduced to the activity, the animator should only supervise the work and give more freedom to participants on the course of actions and their final realisation. In this way, a sense of responsibility for action will increase the involvement of participants.

To sum up the presented background and evaluation of the carried out project, it is worth noting that, contrary to the common opinion of librarians, young people willingly get involved in the initiatives and activities proposed by the library, as long as they are consistent with their current interests or fashion. The best way to create an action with young people is to support the ideas of teenagers and to allow them to be relatively independent in implementation, treating them more as partners who have influence on the course, communication and the final effect of the entire undertaking. This applies to both entertainment and educational projects. Even if the ideas proposed by young people at first seem to be too unusual for the library space, such actions can support the existence, especially of a small or medium library (Wojciechowski, 2014, pp. 51–52, 113).

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Agnieszka Brzostowska

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Agnieszka Brzostowska