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The Children's TPB – an open window for children with print impairments

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Meeting:	108 Libraries for the Blind
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Simultaneous Interpretation:	Yes
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Abstract:

As a government agency the Swedish Library of talking Books and Braille (TPB) has to act in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The right to information and possibility to influence questions that affect the child are among the basic rights of the child.

How should TPB act to reach this goal of information and influence from children who use our services? We do not have direct contact with the majority of them since they borrow their talking books from their local library.

As TPB received many more wishes and questions from adults regarding recordings and braille we needed to extend our contacts with children. In order to achieve this we created a new website in 2002 especially for children, Barnens TPB (The Children's TPB). The question was: how can we create a site that attracts and is usable for children with many different needs?

TPB (The Swedish Library of Talking Books and Braille) is a Government agency that, in collaboration with local libraries, provides people with a print handicap access to printed materials. TPB's mission is to produce and lend talking books and books in braille. TPB also provides advice and information on matters concerning talking books and braille.

In every Swedish public library there are talking books for print impaired children. For visually impaired children there are also braille books which primarily are interlibrary loans or bought from TPB. Most popular are the tactile picture books. Many libraries also have books with pictogram, bliss, videos in sign language and others types of adapted books.

Lending of talking books is an integrated part of public library service. Every child with a print impairment is entitled to borrow talking books. Besides having collections of their own a public library can borrow talking books from the county library or TPB. There are talking books in every subject, fiction as well as non-fiction. Today the entire collection of talking books for children at TPB consists of approximately 6.800 DAISY-titles and 5.500 titles on cassette. Many titles are available on both DAISY and cassette.

Children who read braille and their parents, have direct contact with TPB when they borrow or buy braille books, but for talking books they turn to their local library. The collection of braille books for children at TPB consists of around 4.300 titles.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

As a government body the TPB has to act in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The right to information and possibility to influence questions that affect the child are among the basic rights of the child. This is stated in the convention's article 12 and 13:

Article 12

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Article 13

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

A website for children

How should TPB act to reach this goal of information and influence from children who use our services? We do not have direct contact with the majority of them since they borrow their talking books from their local library.

As TPB received many more wishes and questions from adults regarding recordings and braille we needed to extend our contacts with children. In order to achieve this we created a new website in 2002 especially for children, Barnens TPB (The Children's TPB), http://www.tpb.se/barnens_tpb/ . The design had to be as attractive as possible in order to attract children. We wanted them to inform themselves about TPB's services, to find information about books and also a way to send in questions and wishes of literature.

Different needs among children with print impairments

TPB's target group is persons with different types of print impairments. It was therefore necessary to design the website so it would function not only for blind children but also for instance for children with dyslexia. Many children with dyslexia need pictures in order to orientate themselves. Pictures can also be a means to motivate these children to read. That is why we have tried to make the site as graphically attractive as possible, but we have also been anxious to write informative and amusing alternative texts to these pictures.

We also decided that the site should primarily be made to suite children up to 12 years of age.

It is almost impossible to attract for example an 8-year old and a teenager to the same site. Teenagers can get their information from TPB's regular website.

For children who are a mentally retarded we have created a special easy-to-read version of the pages. Besides orientation about TPB's services they get tips about what to read. For this group of children we have special kinds of talking books with sound illustrations, several narrators and music. This makes the book sound more pleasant and makes it easier to listen to. The text, which always comes from a short and easily read book, is read clearly and slowly.

We created a figure, named Topsy, as a special brand for these pages. Topsy is a mole who read both braille and talking books. The designer, who draws Topsy, has also designed many of our tactile picture books for children. She was therefore very qualified to create a figure which suited children with partial sight. TPB's entire website is possible to listen to; you don't need a speech synthesiser to do that. Not many dyslexic children in Sweden have a speech synthesiser.

The different parts of the site

"What is there in TPB?" (Vad finns på TPB?) is an orientation of TPB's different services. Here the children get simple explanations about e. g. what a talking book is and about the braille system.

Under the headline "Book tips" (Boktips) the children's librarian offers a new review each week. These reviews are later edited and put under different popular subject headlines, where you can search for different books. All titles are both in braille and audio. Children can also mail a review of their favourite book as a tip to others. The most frequent "tippers" are children who read braille.

"Ask Jenny" (Fråga Jenny) is a page where children are encouraged to ask questions and wishes of new books to the children's librarian. Besides getting the answer in an e-mail they also can get a letter in ink-print or in braille. In 2005 we got hundreds of questions from children and parents mostly concerning specific books. In Sweden we have a national children's library website, "The childrens library" (Barnens bibliotek) <http://www.barnensbibliotek.se/> . From their Ask a question-page there is a link to "Ask Jenny" http://www.eref.se/sef-barnens/vrl_entry.asp . This helps TPB to reach children who have not yet gotten in contact with talking books.

Under the heading “Search for Books” (Leta böcker) you find information of how to search for books in TPB’s OPAC. As many library catalogues the TPB’s OPAC is not very easy to use for children. Here we try to give them some short track to e. g. popular subjects.

Under “Borrow Books” (Låna böcker) we explain how the children can borrow talking books and braille.

The very last heading is “Games” (Spel). These games have been developed in a special project called Computer Games for Partially Sighted and Blind Children by researchers at the Universities of Gothenburg and Lund. TPB’s computer game project had the goal of providing partially sighted children with an introduction to computer games and makes the joy and pleasure of gaming available to them as to the same extent as fully sighted children.

The games are in Swedish. There are two categories of games:

Image-based games (Spel med bilder)

The image-based games demand that the player has some sight as the interface is picture based. They are all played by using the mouse.

Sound-based games (Spel med ljud)

All the sound-based games have sound interfaces and are designed primarily for children that are totally blind. The sound-based games are played via the computer keyboard.

There is a report of the game project available in English at TPB’s website.

http://www.tpb.se/english/computer_games/

The present situation and the future

The Children’s TPB is among the most visited pages at TPB’s website. Most popular is the pages containing the book topics and the games. The Children’s TPB has become a very important channel for TPB both as far as information of our lending services is concerned as our collections. Most of all we are happy to receive the children’s views on our services.

In the future we hope to be able to add short quotations in audio from talking books that we recommend. We also hope to make it possible for the children to send in audio files of their own recommendation of books.

We hope that our website will function as an open window, through which children can see what we have to offer them and they can tell us what they wish we had.