Playtime!
Creativity and Imagination in the Library

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Abstract
Modern family patterns, learning, Library 2.0 and co-creation are some of the ingredients in the development of the Danish children's library.

First of all, if we want to create a library that is combatable with urban family life today we need to work with the values of these families: togetherness, creativity and communication.

Second, when using cutting edge technology we need to change our mindset and not just our hardware – working with the concept of Library 2.0

And we need to do it together - to co-create with our citizens and library users and this way try to raise commitment and community in connection to the library.

Different projects from Denmark and particularly Aarhus Public Libraries will be presented to illustrate how we try to meet these new challenges.

1. Introduction
Traditionally libraries in Denmark have secured access and dissemination of information and later on also introduced new media to the public. In that way the library has played an important role in securing equality in our society and in supporting access to public debates.

Making information available and preserving it for future generations is still a part of the library portfolio, but services and demands are evolving. People in general are more capable of finding information themselves and more offers are made widely available through the Internet, TV and so on.

Furthermore our basic living circumstances have changed. We live in an individualized culture where personal goals, ambitions and values dominate and family life becomes a priority more then a necessity. Those kinds of change also affect the development of future library services,

This paper will try and highlight some of the projects and developments in particularly Aarhus that have experimented with new services and methods in an attempt to meet these changing conditions.

2. Framework
If we want to develop new library services that are aligned with both modern family life and new media we need to pay close attention to the changes in Society and technology in general.

In Aarhus we try to gain knowledge of these changes by creating different projects and engaging into diverse partnerships.

For the purpose of disseminating some of our different projects it seems in place to highlight a couple of the trends and values we keep in mind when developing new services or products.

2.1 The Family of Today
In Denmark our way of life has changed at lot over the last 50 years. The way we work, socialize and raise our children is dramatically different from the way our grandfathers did.

Why is this important in a lecture describing the development of the children's library in Denmark? Because when Society is changing so do the demands for the public library and our services.

Looking upon an average Danish family they spend a lot of time apart from each other – we work more than we used to, we have various interest and hobbies, we spend a lot of time maintaining our households.

But we also prioritize being together as a family both by eating our meals together and by engaging into common activities [12].

In short the average Danish family is a busy one! One of the ways we can se this, is that leisure time; time to oneself or time doing nothing is rapidly decreasing [12].

If you ask Danish adults about what is important to them research shows that work and family are by fare the two highest priorities today in Danish families [4].

Work plays an important role in creating our separate identities and self-images. Our individual needs for recognition and achievement are an important part of us and many of us achieve this through our work.

Another reason why work is an important factor in today's family life is to sustain our material standard. Doing so in Denmark requires two incomes and this makes the concept of the "double-fulltime-family" [4] the most common family pattern in Danish society today.

One of the consequences of this is that parents and children spend their days apart – Danish preschool children will be in day-care on average 7.5 hours a day [4].

So the concept of family in today's Denmark could be described as a "Team Family":

A family with a lot of room for the individual member to fulfil their own goals and; through work or other individual activities like education, sports etc. At the same time the family is held together by the family members will and desire to uphold a sense of community and togetherness in the family.

This balance is kept through a fine web of agreements, negotiations and discussions. In all you can say "Team family" is a very democratic family pattern where a constant weighing of individual needs versus the needs of the community is taking place [4}.

2.3 Team Family at the Library
What is the relation between the public library and the "Team family" who plan and negotiate there time so carefully?

Families with young children are an important target group when thinking public libraries and children's libraries in Denmark, because families (adults) are the most decisive factor of children's cultural activities,

education and use of libraries. The other way around children are also important "drivers" for adults coming to the library. When younger children come to the library they come in the company of their parents. There seems to be several reasons for this:

One is as indicated earlier that well educated parents have little time at home with their children. This contributes to their need to "do something" with their children, to be together around an activity with or for their children – for instance to visit the library. Research proves that second to taking home books, visiting with their children is the most frequent reason for adults coming to the library [6].

Figure 1: Parents and children in joint activity at the Aarhus Main Library

A small observational study in the children's section at the Main Library in Aarhus has also verified that children and families to a large extend use this area for recreational purposes and play amongst children (see figure 1).

Another reason is modern parent's anxiousness concerning their children.

An English study has shown that in a normal English family an eight year old boy is allowed to walk on his own down the street from were he lives and back again – about 300 yards. Compared to this his great grandfather was allowed to walk on to the nearest fishing pond 6 miles away and back again (Derbyshire). The same pattern seems to be the case in Denmark, so children today are very dependent on their parents when they want to go somewhere.

In all this makes the public library in Denmark a safe room for "Team family". They can be together in common activity or even be together but apart – be in the proximity of each other but doing separate activities and serving individual needs.

2.4 Social Media

The use of new social media has changed the way we communicate and how we obtain our information and news.

The Internet with its social networking, blogs, chat rooms etc. together with the prevalence of the Mobil phone has created a culture where we can communicate regardless of time and space [20].

In Denmark 85% of the population have internet access at home. 53% of the Danish youth (16-24 years) have experience in using chat rooms or other social forums online. 39% of children (7-15 years) use the Internet for chatting and surfing and 50% of all Danish children use the Internet every day or a couple of times a week [3]. So in all the Danish population in average have a high level of competence and use of the Internet and the following social media.

Danish children today are therefore often referred to as digital natives [5]. They have been raised with the use of computers and the Internet and it is vital for their learning, communication and leisure time.

2.4.1 Library 2.0

In Denmark public libraries therefore put great emphasis on digitalizing information and developing internet services supporting this way of communication. Working with these services is in popular terms referred to as *Library 2.0*.

Many public libraries in Denmark including Aarhus Public Libraries have been working with this concept. The term library 2.0 is a spin-off from the more familiar term Web 2.0 and is defined by some of the same characteristics or rather a line of thoughts revolving around the integration and the presentation of data and dialogue in a new way.

Library 2.0 is as much a cultural movement away from the traditional dissemination of the library's own resources towards an expanded service, which also comprises the integration and qualification of external resources and additionally provides an opportunity for the users to relate to various issues and to express their opinion [1].

This should not be restrained to the 'virtual library'. It is also a matter of rearranging the physical libraries – creating the same possibilities as we do online: making our services available by use of cutting edge technology, giving library users influence and the possibility to communicate their opinion and thereby blurring the line between creation and consumption as suggested done in the 'virtual library' [14].

At Aarhus Public Libraries the concept of Library 2.0 is therefore just as much about redefining the physical library as the virtual.

2.4.2 Mediaspace

The knowledge and experience that Aarhus Public Libraries create through our development projects and cross disciplinary partnerships we use as part of our preparation for building the new Main Library of Aarhus: Mediaspace(see figure 2). It should be a flexible and dynamic sanctuary for everyone in search of knowledge, inspiration and personal development, an open and accessible learning environment supporting democracy and unity, an attractive and interactive building that supports the users' desire to learn and to perceive through a diversity of media. It will also be a building that merges the digital and physical library [15].

Figure 2: MEDIASPACE will be located at the new harbour front in Aarhus, Denmark

2.5 So what are we dealing with?

Family patterns are changing – a modern family is a busy one and for this reason they prioritize their time carefully – both the time they spend individually and the time they spend together.

Experiences are important – going to the library has to be a experience and one way of doing this could be by inspiring the family to do things together.

When it comes to the dissemination of information libraries have been through a giant shift from physical to digital information and now another change is shaking our core, the change of our users from consumers to participants – user generated content which affects both the nature of information and the way it is distributed.

This trend of participation goes beyond the web and penetrates the physical space by pervasive computing, co-creation and networking.

In Aarhus Public Libraries we have done projects in different directions, trying out different strategies for handling and pushing these changes:

- Creating experiences by targeting audiences. For instances targeting families by focusing on play and playful learning

- Taking the virtual into the physical. For instance by making information seeking a collective and tangible experience

- Getting on terms with our library users. For instance using technology both virtual and in real-life to create a sense of togetherness.

All of these three strategies will be exemplified.

3. Playtime!
In a globalized economy like the Danish the ability to create new products and services has become an important business strategy – the innovation society.

This strategy is slowly influencing the way we think about education and learning in Denmark: creativity and imagination are commonly viewed as important abilities in order to give our children the best conditions for cooping in a work culture with more emphasis on empowerment, teamwork and creative processes [4].

Children's play and the nature of play in this perspective take on a whole new dimension. Play becomes an entry point for creativity and imagination.

If creativity is viewed as the process of putting established information and existing ideas together in an unseen way [11] play becomes an important parallel because play is about juggling the concept of playing by the rules and inventing and negotiating your own rules.

3.1 The meaning of play
But play is so much more than preparing our children for the future, it is a basic human characteristic! When we play it is not with the intent of learning or any other rational reason, it is because we want to play. So learning is actually a mean for playing – we need to learn, the rules of the game, we need to learn to work

a specific technology to play the game not the other way around [13].

So play is about negotiating rules and a level of participation, about having a foundation you can build upon, it is about instant feedback and has to contain a certain level of excitement and unpredictability [13].

3.1.1 Families at Play in the Library
Is an ongoing project in a project partnership consisting of three public libraries and two separate university and research centres with expertise concerning play and interaction design.

The project tries to gain knowledge and test what role play could have in the public library. Children's play has always existed in the public libraries, but more as a secondary activity next to taking out materials or using the computer. Maybe the library should play another role, to be a place that actually promotes play among children and parents and disseminates the culture and knowledge of play.

Figure 3: A glimpse of the storage room . Is currently in use at the lobby of the Main library in Aarhus, Denmark.

Right now the project is manifested in the lobby of the Main Library in Aarhus with the installation "Storage room" (see figure 3). The installation works as a small "living lab" where we observe and talk to families using the installation [7].

The concept of the installation is to promote play between children (age 5-8) and their parents by creating a link between the children's natural curiosity and desire to explore and the parents reminiscing about their own childhood. The installation is made up from old sorts of rubbish – old furniture, computers, toys, clothes mostly from the 70ties or 80ties and then added a lot of pillows and blankets for building caves and making yourself at home.

Observations so far have shown that the children love the room – they go right for it and start exploring, building, creating and the parents join them be telling stories of their own childhood. Especially the old computers really get the parents in a playful mood.

This "living lab" experiment is going to help us develop our next installation that is going to be a treasure hunt taking place both in the library and online. The "Storage room" is a relatively cheap exposure and gives us knowledge of the ways children and parents may or may not engage into common activity and play.

3.2 The Interactive Children's Library
Besides working with play in this context we have of course also done some projects concerning play as a motivation for learning.

The field of digital education has been of great importance in our former project the Interactive Children's Library. By saying digital education we refer to the skill of creating, interpreting and exchanging the complex web of words, pictures and sound that compromise modern ITC and social media [8].

The Children's Interactive Library was focusing on two major issues of children's libraries of the future: new designs of spaces and innovative ways of engaging and communicating. In this project we made six concepts – one of them was the Story Surfer [10]. It was an example of how you can combine digital material with physical space and make it relevant for users.

3.2.1 The Story Surfer
The Story Surfer was an "Inspirational browser" for children's literature placed in the lobby of the Main Library in Aarhus (see figure 4). Children could use their feet to step on the buttons on the large interactive floor and send their book choice to the table.

The Story Surfer was an installation enabling children to gather inspiration from library materials in an untraditional way. The Story Surfer was a way of discovering what the library can offer – a real eye-opener and it endorsed the use of multiple intelligences.

It encouraged the children to engage in collaborative search sessions by using their body – typically children across age and parents would engage together in order to master the installation.

By integrating pervasive computing, the searching of materials became detached from the traditional

keyboard and computer screen. Instead the Story Surfer offered physical objects as tools – objects, with which children could search, investigate and play [10].

Figure 4: StorySurfer in use at the lobby of the Main library in Aarhus, Denmark.

This way you take an individual or even introvert activity as information seeking and make it a joint effort that can bring a common experience to a family or among the children at the scene.

3.2.2 bib-phone (The library phone)
Another example of communication and the promotion of fiction for children was the bib-phone. We know comments, ratings and so on from the social media and why not use this in the physical library as well. The bib-phone allowed you to talk to books and hear what other people had told them! (see figure 5).

This was a new, funny and different way of reviewing, commenting or even hiding secret messages in books. The messages were inherited in the particular book allowing the next person access to hear it.

The bib-phone concept enabled children to annotate physical material with digital recordings; children were able to speak into the books by placing the bib-phone over a RFID tag on the book. By using the bib-phone as listening device previous recordings were revealed to the user. The concept originated from children's reluctance of performing written reviews, and the fact that more and more libraries are applying RFID technology to information materials. The bib-phone can be used for "treasure hunting" for messages in books [10].

Figure 5: bib-phone in use at the Main Library in Aarhus, Denmark

3.2.3 The interactive table

A final example of children and parents who learn and play side by side is the interactive table. It represents different ways of upgrading your knowledge about the local community.

Figure 6: A group of children making a journey by balloon over Aarhus city. In use in the children's section at the Main library in Aarhus, Denmark.

The interactive table is operated by using the small figurines on the table: the balloon, the little girl and the little boy (see figure 6). Via RFID tags on the figurines they can communicate with the table and activating different stories and movies from old Aarhus.

It is a great way to disseminate local history and heritage (one topic Danish children not necessarily care for). Also it has been the first conscious encounter we made with the magic that comes from children being challenged to play and parents to reminisce. This is the same knowledge that is at heart of the "Storage room": To encourage common activity you have to motivate on separate levels – one for the children and one for the adult. Adults often control children's behaviour in public places, so it is important to address their subconscious picture of behaviour in a

public library if you want the children to interact freely.

4. Getting together

Working in a children's library is very much about creating the possibility for children to connect with each other. This can be done physically, virtually or in a hybrid. It can be done formally and it can be done very informally.

But no matter which way communication is an important skill for children to practice at all times and the library represents a different kind of arena than at home or in the school. One important difference is, that today Danish children mainly relate to other children at their own age; in school, day-care or at sports they are often divided into groups correlating their age.

Therefore the library represents a possibility for children to communicate and play outside their own age group. A few generations back children would be roaming the streets of their local neighbourhood across age and gender, but today due to previously mentioned reasons this form of interaction is disappearing and so is the transfer of knowledge and skills from the older to the younger children. The library could represent such a forum [8].

4.1 Circle Computer Club

One example of this was the Circle Computer Club, which had the intention to make children at the age of 10-13 years familiar with recent computer technology through a training program. The children got the opportunity to express themselves in various ways using computer technology [3].

Figure 7: Creating LEGO robots and making friends in the Circle Computer Club at Viby branch library in Aarhus, Denmark.

The real agenda of the project focused on developing the children's social competence through co-operation across the local communities (see figure 7).

Through the introduction of new technology and common activities like robot building the children were committed on following the programme continuously and this laid the ground for friendship and a sense of community.

4.2 Transformation lab

The digital revolution questions the physical library: when everything is available online - why come to the library at all? Transformation Lab was a project that took on this challenge in order to create new images of the physical library of the future [19].

Experiments were carried out publicly in the foyer of the Main Library in Aarhus. Here ideas and tangible models were tested in close interaction with both employees and library users.

This project was not made in regards to children at all, but because children have a more explorative and straight forward way of approaching technology many of the initiatives of the project was especially fascinating to children.

Figure 8: The Gobelin Tapestry. In use at the Main Library in Aarhus, Denmark

One example is going to be mentioned here: the Gobelin Tapestry (see Figure 8) which consisted of a photo mosaic depicting the library's users. People could contribute to the installation with their own portrait via web cam, but the photo mosaic also responded simply to people's movements before it.

The force of this installation was the double feature; that you could both work it actively by contributing your portrait and passively by changing the patterns of the mosaic. A lot of the active users of this installation were teenagers and children alone or in company with a parent.

4.3 Spotmobile

Is an initiative made for teenagers. They separate themselves from smaller children by the fact, that they don't automatically come to the public library (unless their teachers makes them), because they no longer follow their parents around. So getting in touch with this target group requires a separate effort and spirit.

Figure 9: The spotmobile belongs to the Main Library of Aarhus. Here it is situated in downtown Aarhus, Denmark.

Teenagers have a great desire to be together or part of a community, but they want to be so on their own terms and in their own time.

Therefore our youth project Mindspot [16], have developed the Spotmobile, which is a mobile library that goes wherever young people go – for instance festivals, concert and schools (se figure 9). With the use of beanbags, computers and a Wii they have been in dialogue with hundreds of young people, who feel that their needs are being met.

5. What about the Net?

So fare we have touched upon some experiences with physical installations and installations bridging the physical and the virtual and how thise installations circle around the concepts of play, learning and communication. Now we will take a look at some of the virtual services for children.

The development of new social media has created a shift from dissimination of information to usergenerated content [20]. Libraries have to comply with this new mindset. One way is to use the different social software that already exists. This way you gain access to an allready established audience – who do not necessarily care for libraries. Another way is to copy/merge some of the features from these types of software into your own webservices. This way you have to target your initiatives to the libraryusers who would gain from such a service.

5.1 Mindspot

When it comes to using established social software our youth project Mindspot has done some important work [16].

By employing young people called Mindspotters in the project they have secured the project acces to these young peoples networks and friends on social softwareservices like Myspace (see figure 10) and YouTube. Furtermore by making these Mindspotters responsible for part of the marketingstrategy of the project they have received a truly credible layout keeping the target audience in mind.

The projects primary focus has been to create and facilitate dialogue between young people, and second to that dissiminate library services. So they have for instance started discussions on topics relevant to Danish youth and in their language and without direct relevance to library services.
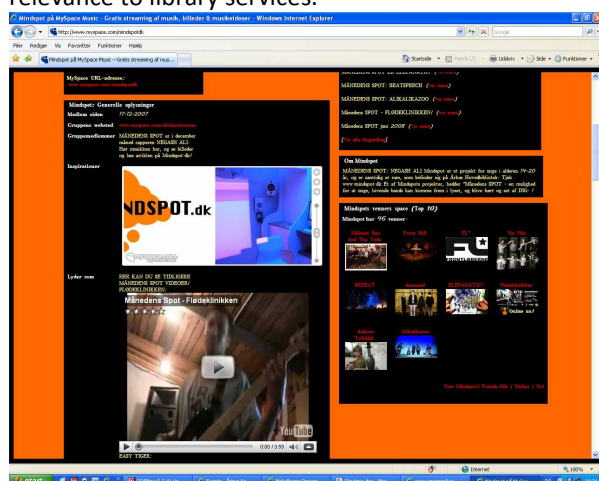

Figure 10: A screen-print of Mindspots profile on Myspace (http://www.myspace.com/mindspotdk).

Those two points are important if you want to succeed in using established social software: get in contact with the users of the software and meet them on their own terms – pushing information on your library and library services should come second.

The initiatives of Mindspot are also good examples on how to communicate with a specifik target audience by using representatives from the target group as communicators and also an exapmle of how libraries have to place themselves where potential users are – no matter virtual or physical if we want to extend the best public service possible.

5.2 Spørg Olivia (Ask Olivia)
Spørg Olivia (see figure 11) is a webservice for the tweens and smaller children. It is a website maintained in cooperation between more then 50

Danish libraries. The project was originally launched in 2001 in a partnership of four public libraries and the Danish media service "Danmarks Radio"(Danish Radio) [18].

On this webpage children can find inspiration on books to read, webpages to use and so forth. But most important they can talk to Olivia and ask her any question they like both by chatting with her online or by emailing her.

Figure 11: A screenprint of Spørg Olivia (http://www.spoergolivia.dk/).

Olivia is obviously a fictional girl and the questions are answered by librirans working together in the more then 50 participating libraries. Furthermore there is every month experts visiting the webpage to answar questions from the boys and girls using the webpage.

Spørg Olivia is a good example of how you can create a playfull website, where you as a first time users have to explore and discover the content by surfing around, but when you get to know the website it can function as an exitpoint for onlinesurfing and learning.

6. Co-creation
To make a library suitable to needs of the modern family requires co-creation. For no matter how much we study and read about our target audience we need to communicate with them to really understand their needs.

Users have different needs and often they have difficulties telling the library exactly what their needs are. Working with co-creation or user driven innovation is a way of approaching the unsaid needs and opinions of the library user [1].

If the library wants to be a space for creativity and imagination we also have to approach our own work

and tasks in and open and playful atmosphere. Co-creation is a way to open up and work professionally with the creation of new ideas and possibilities.

Furthermore it commits the participating citizens to the library – if you have been part in developing a service, a website or something you are more inclined to become a user and spread the word to friends and family.

6.1 Adjusting your visions: Cultural probes
Working with cultural probes is a very open and fun process for getting a different view on things – changing your vantage point in people's everyday experiences instead.

Cultural probes have been used several times at Aarhus Public Libraries. The first time was in regards to a EU project for teenagers Meeting YOUth [9] (see figure 12).

The probes where given to the young people participating in the project and contained several small tasks with instructions and a disposable camera.

The young people then created self-portraits, took photographs and wrote their experiences down so the library could gain insight on how young people today spend their time, meet their friends and see themselves in general.

Right now the Main Library in Aarhus is participating in a project – Mobile Probes that works on digitalizing the cultural probes method. Instead of getting written tasks, instructions and a disposable camera you will use your cell phone and take photographs with the phone, send text messages and so on [17].

The intention is to reach more people and reduce the costs associated with the traditional analogue method. A beta version will be tested this spring.

Whether analogue or digital the method is unique in obtaining knowledge about your users and their habits in the library and at home.

Figure 12: An analogue probe designed for the project Meeting YOUth, which was a project involving libraries from Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Poland.

Besides getting to know our users cultural probes are also a good way to make a connection between the library and people because you don't ask people, what they need from the library (which very few people are able to answer in depth, because it isn't something they spend a lot of time contemplating), but you ask them about their lives and use that as inspiration for the library of the future. In the process you engage these people in the development of the library [3].

6.2 Testing new services and products
When developing new services and products it can also be very useful to test their usability and catch flaws and imperfections as early as possible.

For instance by making a mock-up of the service or product you are currently working on. This can be done reasonably simple by the use of paper, cardboard, post-its or something alike (see figure 13). Then through verbal or written communication you guide your audience through the mock-up while you observe or interview them to watch their behaviour or listen to their opinion.

Figure 13: These bodystorms were done in the preliminary fases of the development of the Story Surfer

Besides getting your idea or product tested by the very people you are designing it for you also create an awareness of your development projects before they are launched.

Right now in the project families at Play in the Library we are planning on such a test of the storyline for the treasure hunt we are currently planning. So this sort of activity is slowly but securely manifesting itself as a basic tool for developing products and services at the Aarhus Public Libraries.

7. Lessons

Looking at Danish families today they are a main reason for young children visiting the library. When the family comes to the library they come to have a collective experience – a sense of being together as a family (but not necessarily doing the same thing).

Furthermore values like creativity, imagination and learning are important to children's both formal and informal education today.

In Aarhus Public Libraries we have transformed these trends into a vision of children's library that is welcoming to the whole family – both children and adults. To make a playful atmosphere that can endorse communication and that feeling of togetherness in the family.

It is important that we try to take our vantage point from the daily lives of our local citizens and not in our own perceptions of the children's library of the future.

In relation to this another point would be to target your audience – focus your work and make initiatives surrounding a particular audience and their needs and not so much about the "whole library" and its services.

Working with technology – and in particular cutting edged technology supporting the development of Library 2.0 has taught our organization some important points.

Technology is a great eye-opener because it plays with people's curiosity and imagination – the more spectacular the better! And in that sense complexity (to a certain degree) is a plus because it makes people talk and connect in pursuit of understanding.

On the other hand technology is not always the right solution - especially new technologies may have a lot of flaws and imprecision, this can backfire and create negative dialogue among your users.

Further more one should consider thoroughly the reason for using a certain technology – it is important that it has a purpose, something that needs to be told by means of exactly *that* technology and not another one.

Finally, when engaging into co-creation you must be willing to go all the way – if you ask people their opinion, if you demand their time, you commit yourself on acting upon it or else you are wasting people's time.

8. Future work

At the Main Library in Aarhus we are currently working on several new project concerning different topics like democracy, gaming and interaction design.

Also Aarhus Public Libraries are about to launch a wiki about the experience and knowledge gained for the Mediaspace. This will be open for comments and input from everyone who is interested in the library of the future. It will be available at www.multimediahouse.dk

On the 14-16th June 2009 there will be an un-conference in Aarhus: Next Library. At this conference we will invite everyone who is interested in developing the next library to come to Aarhus and participate in doing so. You can learn more and join at http://nextlibrary.net/

9. Conclusion

The children's projects at Aarhus Public Libraries and in Denmark in general seem to be shifting from being related to learning and education to being just as much about creating "the library experience" ; playing, being together, having a sense of unity in the family when visiting the library.

Especially the children's library has to be an experience on its own in order to be attractive to the modern family who prioritize their time so strictly in order to meet the needs of all its individuals. We are competing for people's time!

Skills like communication, creativity and imagination er necessary in our modern society and this way naturally becomes part of the library of the future. Working with technology can certainly support this. Pervasive technology requires you to use your whole body and mind and even to collaborate and stimulates playful learning.

The more expensive the technology, the more we need staff training to handle this technology, the more important becomes the point of co-creation – both to avoid mistakes and misjudgements, but also to create awareness of the work we are doing.

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For more information, videos and pictures find us on

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