

Training for teachers and librarians about sustainability through Picture Books and Comics. An example from the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF)

Emilie Bettega

CNLJ, BnF, Paris, France.

E-mail address: Emilie.bettega@bnf.fr



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Abstract:

How does a concept that is only a few decades old become embodied in a cultural institution that is several centuries old? How does sustainable development fit into the BnF, a major national cultural institution whose organisation reflects its history from yesterday to today? We will try to answer this question by looking at training courses for youth professionals. After evoking the historical context, we will compare two recent training courses on sustainable development and children's literature: one for teachers and the other for librarians. The aim of this presentation is to show how they complement each other and how they can perhaps bring their audiences closer together.

Keywords: Bibliothèque nationale de France, Sustainable Development, Comics, Picture books, Training for teachers and librarians

Introduction

The seventeen sustainable development goals of the UN's 2030 Agenda¹ give the concept a concrete yet extremely global dimension by integrating a societal perspective that goes beyond the ecological dimension with which sustainable development has long been associated. To such an extent, the sustainable development objectives also integrate human rights such as the right to education and the right of women. Sustainable development, as it is understood in the following lines, refocuses its definition on the ecological dimension of the concept in order to identify a more precise subject that corresponds to the declination of this notion at the BnF. The point of view adopted is that of the librarian who seeks to report on recent training actions by carefully reading the communication of his or her institution and by analysing training programmes in order to report on recent programmes while placing them in their context.

¹ See the institutional website for a presentation of the 2030 Agenda: <https://www.agenda-2030.fr/>

1 THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT INSIDE THE BNF:

1.1 Issue that emerged after the architectural project...

The BnF is a centuries-old cultural institution whose operations and missions were confirmed and renewed when a new site was opened on the left bank of the Seine in the mid-1990s. This library, now called the François Mitterrand Library, was conceived, designed and built before the issue of sustainable development emerged in public policy. In fact, this issue appeared a few years later, as the institution's institutional communication now reminds us: "As part of its efforts to preserve the environment, the BnF has been involved in an ambitious programme since the early 2000s. Several actions have been taken to reduce the institution's ecological footprint and to implement a proactive social policy, both internally, for staff and subcontractors, and for its readers and visitors." ²

Moreover, although the magnificence and the initial ambition of the architectural project were not precursors in terms of ecological architecture, far from it, one element of this architecture undoubtedly made it possible to enhance its green dimension: the library's interior garden, a veritable urban forest, which is today the object of sustainable management shared with the Museum of Natural History. Eco-pasturing, for example, by goats, naturally fights against the development of brambles, an invasive species, and promotes the diversity of species within the garden. This partnership with another cultural institution turns the garden into an observatory of urban flora and fauna. From the point of view of communication and information, the "BnF en son jardin" programme allows visitors to discover a space through a permanent presentation and educational activities for school classes. ³

1.2 But a renewal of the missions aimed at the greatest number of people, which has made it possible to integrate sustainable development as a transversal axis of the collections and, to a certain extent, of mediation and training.

These educational activities mentioned above are carried out by a service called EAC - the Art Cultural Education -. This service within the BnF is the direct contact for the world of education, from primary school to university, in order to help schoolchildren discover the BnF through visits to the library and also on the occasion of events organised for classes: exhibition visits coupled with workshops or eloquence or reading competitions for example.

Indeed, with the opening of this new site in the mid-1990s, a second mission was affirmed and developed in addition to the heritage mission of any national library: "to ensure that as many people as possible have access to the collections"⁴, a public service mission that made it possible to design a "library for all publics" as soon as the site was opened at the "top of the garden": a set of reading rooms and four specialised documentation centres opened in 2014, including the resource centre on sustainable development. It is indeed thanks to the conjunction between the democratisation of the national library's missions and a social issue that has become a public policy concept that sustainable development appears in the collections in a visible and identified manner. Physically, the collections relating to sustainable development

² <https://www.bnf.fr/fr/le-developpement-durable-la-bnf>.

³ <https://www.bnf.fr/fr/la-bnf-en-son-jardin>

⁴ <https://www.bnf.fr/fr/les-missions-de-la-bnf>

are housed in a reading room the documentation centre on sustainable development⁵. On-line, a documentation portal makes it possible to promote the collections and to publicise events and news on sustainable development: conferences, reports, international days.⁶

What about mediation and training?

Let us remember that "mediation" should be understood as the organised and reception of specific audiences, and especially of the school or family audience, as has existed for several decades in major museums, while the term "training" should be reserved for vocational training. However, if these two missions are very different, it is the same service that takes charge of them for reasons of proximity between the audiences of mediation and those of training. Indeed, the EAC - the Art Cultural Education-, composed largely of museum professionals, began by accompanying the cultural offer with an educational offer to schools before meeting the demand of education professionals in terms of training. And it is this service that is identified to offer "documentary research workshops" to the resource centre on sustainable development.

However, in terms of "mediation", the offer remains modest, because the workshops of the EAC are organized around four axes: the discovery of books and literature, the representation of the world, information education and the relationship to reading aloud. Sustainable development is simply included, as one of the dimensions of visits to the library in particular with the permanent exhibition "The BnF in its garden" and related workshops.

Teacher training programmes, on the other hand, follow a different logic. They are often à la carte programmes, organised and designed with the teacher training administration according to predefined training needs.

This year, an innovative programme was launched which, for the first time, enabled teachers to be trained in sustainable development through the prism of comics. This was not the first time that the EAC had included training in sustainable development in its programme, but it was undoubtedly the first time that education for sustainable development was approached through comic book fiction, both from the point of view of writing and reading.

2 "READ/WRITE THE FUTURE: SCIENCE AND EDD -EDUCATION AU DÉVELOPPEMENT DURABLE- EN BD": A JOINT TRAINING COURSE OF THE CENTRE NATIONAL DES ARTS ET MÉTIERS, THE BNF, THE CITÉ DES SCIENCES AND THE MAISON DE LA POÉSIE FROM 18 TO 25 APRIL 2022

2.1 The artistic and cultural education department of the Paris Rectorate at the initiative of a multidisciplinary and multiple approach: Comics and Dystopia

We had the opportunity to talk about the logical link from an organizational point of view between mediation and training at the BnF. This same link is found in the other cultural institutions whose various educational services (cultural, artistic) are in contact with the art and cultural education department of the rectorates. Thus, at the initiative of this service, the EAC responded favourably to the request of the Paris rectorate for a training involving three other cultural institutions. The underlying idea, through a multidisciplinary theme, was to design a program likely to interest teachers of literary or scientific disciplines. As for the integration of

⁵ <https://www.bnf.fr/fr/les-missions-de-la-bnf>

⁶ <https://bnf.libguides.com/developpementdurable>

comics within the school as an object of fiction and reflection within the different disciplines, it is indeed a challenge for national education in order to propose content that corresponds to the reading habits of the pupils.

In the minds of the course designers, the theme of the comic strip was undoubtedly supplemented by an important cultural event: the exhibition "Renaissances"⁷ at the Cité des Sciences, which was the offshoot of the book *Renaissances, six stories that reinvent the world*. Both the book and the exhibition aimed to think about the collapse of the world through fiction. And indeed, beyond the literary genre envisaged - science fiction novel or comic book - education for sustainable development can pass through a fictional experience: that of a dystopia that integrates today's issues to project them into tomorrow's situations. Spread out over 1300 m² along a route that took visitors on a journey through time - 2023, 2029 and 2045 - the exhibition presented scenarios of collapse that included global warming in particular.

2.2 The training days programme: a broad and unconventional approach where ESD – Education for Sustainable Development - appears intermittently

The anchoring of the training from a scientific and literary perspective implied that the training approached the comic in itself from the point of view of its reception, its creation but also the experience of their production.

Thus, the participants of the training course, received at the Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers - CNAM⁸ -, were able to listen to a conference by the physicist Roland Lehoucq entitled "Comics and space-time", which underlined how comics, because they spatialise time through each panel by creating a sequence, are a very interesting literary genre for scientific questions. At the Maison de la Poésie⁹, they were able to meet Damien Mac Donald, a Franco-Scottish author who is both an exhibition curator and a comic book writer and who recently published a graphic novel entitled *Notre Dame de Paris*, in which Victor Hugo's novel is also an opportunity to revisit the burning of the cathedral, in a narrative that integrates the long term and the existential question of the sustainability of monuments.

Coincidentally, the coronavirus epidemic, as a scenario unforeseen by the interactive accounts of the exhibition, postponed the training and did not allow the dates of the exhibition and the training to coincide. Although the participants were not able to experience the exhibition "Renaissances" at the Cité des Sciences, they were able to dream about the exhibition instead of visiting it thanks to the intervention of the exhibition curator around the following notion: "the exploration of the imaginaries of collapse."

Finally, it was the day planned at the BnF that allowed a sustainable development education *strictly sensu* through a presentation of the resources of sustainable development at the BnF. At the same time, the contents related to comics within Gallica, the digital library of the BnF, were presented and were the subject of a research workshop. In addition, the participants discovered and practised on the BnF's comic book creation application "which offers everyone the possibility to try their hand at comic books thanks to the corpus (...) from the BnF's heritage collections".¹⁰

⁷ <https://www.cite-sciences.fr/fr/ressources/expositions-passees/renaissances>

⁸ Training centre which also houses the Musée des Arts et Métiers "which houses the oldest technological and industrial collection in the world" <http://www.arts-et-metiers.net/>

⁹ <https://www.maisondelapoesieparis.com/>

¹⁰ <https://bdnf.bnf.fr/>

These training days spread over the week to match the teachers' time schedules have been very successful and should be repeated next year. However, while recognising the richness of the interventions, we can speak here of a first approach. Indeed, if we look at the programme, ESD and comics remained separate in the context of this training. The meeting between the two themes was not directly dealt with by the course, even though the title given to these days suggested this. The absence of a university speaker who took up the question can no doubt explain this.

While there is no shortage of editorial production to talk about ESD in comics and more broadly about youth ESD and documentaries, academic discourse may not yet have taken a direct interest in the issue. It is more the publishers and specialists in youth literature who analyse this trend and are likely to integrate it into training for book professionals.

3 TRAINING COURSES FOR LIBRARIANS ANALYSING ECOLOGICAL CHILDREN'S PUBLISHING: THE CNLJ TRAINING SERVICE AND THE REVUE DES LIVRES POUR ENFANTS

3.1 The CNLJ – Centre National de la Littérature de Jeunesse - one of BnF's newest departments: a publishing and training organisation

The CNLJ became a service of the BnF in 2008 and is part of the Art and Literature Department. It continues to carry out the same missions it has had since 1963, when the Centre had an associative status and was called "La Joie par les livres". In order to promote quality children's literature, the Revue des Livres pour Enfants -RLPE-, the CNLJ's publication, identifies the best of the editorial production by proposing critical notices. The CNLJ also offers training courses on children's literature to professionals and book mediators and promotes research in this field.

Thanks to its missions and its expertise on trends in children's publishing, the CNLJ team has the opportunity to offer training on children's literature themes and to write thematic articles in the RLPE: sustainable development - understood mainly in its ecological dimension - is one of them.

3.2 "Finding your way through the forest of green books: what criteria should you use to find your way through the "bibliodiversity" of ecological children's literature? An intervention of the CNLJ training service at the professional day of the 18^{ème} children's book fair: 26 and 27 March 2022 in Sucé-sur-Edre.

Between a conference and a talk, the intervention is based on past training and articles already written in the Revue des Livres pour Enfants. To situate the question, the speaker began by recalling the history: she dated the appearance of ecological sections in the children's collections of publishing houses in 1999. Previously, there were only isolated titles. She notes that there has been an increase in the number of titles on sustainable development since 2021, pointing out that "*What is new today is the massive nature of production in this field, and the diversity of the forms proposed: atlases, recipe books, documentary albums, biographies, documentary comics, activity books on recycling, etc.*". She then set out to decipher the different *modus operandi* of publishing houses. Indeed, is a book on sustainable development itself sustainable even though it is made of glue and paper?

Like any industry, the book industry is a polluter and seeks to reduce its environmental impact. This is an opportunity to talk about the labels set up to produce "greener" books.¹¹ But the challenges of sustainable development are also an opportunity to work differently, for example, by cooperating between a comic book publisher such as Dargaud and the publisher Delachaux et Niestlé to produce popular scientific comics. Co-publishing with ecological associations also allows for the pooling of know-how and gives visibility to sustainable development actors.

Conclusion

Whether it is a fashion or a real commitment, the editorial production in this field is a forest where one risks getting lost. The "specialist" discourse is not there to distribute good and bad points between books but to show trends in the discourse, to decipher the implicit and to highlight the ways of "making" books. Nevertheless, the children's book librarian is not himself a researcher, but he is likely to ask questions to the research. From this perspective, an interesting experiment was conducted in issue 322 of the *Revue des livres pour enfants*¹² : eight children's books - documentary albums and comics - were submitted to the assessment of a geographer and academic specialising in climate issues, Martine Tabéaud. The severity of the judgement can be read in the title of the article "Climate change without history or geography", a judgement that undoubtedly underlines the lack of contextualisation on sustainable development in children's books. However, the geographer's judgement must be cross-referenced with that of the children's book specialist and also with that of the pedagogue. Designing a joint training course for teachers and librarians in the form of a workshop on critical reading of comics and documentary albums given jointly by speakers representing different areas of knowledge would perhaps be an avenue to be explored for training courses on ESD and children's literature, training courses that are due to be continued at the BnF and elsewhere.

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<https://www.agenda-2030.fr/>

¹¹ <https://www.editionsdelamartiniere.fr/notre-label-eco-responsable-yliga/>

¹² The article will be available online from January 2024. To view the summary:
<https://fr.calameo.com/read/00556977939c291b86d17>

BnF

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