# Creating the future : preserving, digitizing and accessing all forms of children's and young adults' cultural heritage

Libraries **play a key-role** for the transmission of cultural heritage. It is a core mission of the library.

**Every kind of library** has this goal (national libraries, public libraries, school libraries, community libraries…), each one working in specific ways according to its missions.

The transmission of cultural heritage implies **three basic actions**: to conserve what exists, to preserve it in good conditions and to give access to it to the most possible.

For these three actions, the **digital** has added to traditional supports, thus opening ways to extraordinary possibilities.


## 1 Conservation

Children and young adults' culture is naturally very **vast and exists in multiple forms**: nursery rhymes, oral storytelling and other forms of traditional literature ; information and knowledge in all areas ; creative literature and illustration ; games, music, art, films, theatre… and the first heritage, language.

All this exists in **multiple supports and media**, both **immaterial** (that you cannot touch) **and material**: voice, gestures, musical instruments' sounds, manuscripts, printed books and journals, material games, art objects, audio and video tapes, digital support - eBooks, videogames and other audio, visual and audiovisual files on CD, CD-roms, DVD and the Internet.

Children and young adults' culture **is produced by adults and also by young people** themselves.

**All forms** of young peoples' culture (not only books) **can be conserved at the library**, from all times, including **today's culture** which is a heritage for the future – including forms that are not considered "prestigious", as comics or videogames, and including what young people do: digital storytelling, discussions…

However, it is impossible to conserve all: every library must have a policy and decide of priorities**: the choice of what to conserve** is capital. This choice is related to history, politics and identity issues. According to their priorities and choices, libraries can build a plan for action and build an offer.

Libraries with a strong heritage mission will concentrate on local, regional or national culture according to their level (cf. local music in Uganda, diaries and maps by children in Northern Australia, printed material in the national libraries of Iran, Latvia, France)
Most other libraries will find a balance between the own cultures and the universal heritage : both are equally necessary (cf. the case of Palestinian Territories where it is difficult to get books from abroad

and the opposite case in African countries where most library collections for young people are mostly foreign, with few African books).

For every children's and young adults' library the priority is, of course, to conserve **children's books**. A particular effort must be made to conserve local, national and neighboring countries' books having a strong heritage value, in all languages spoken (cf. nursery rhymes books in Japan, oral literature books in Uganda, Thai picture books ; too few books exist in African, South American, aboriginal and other languages).

Besides, libraries must also conserve books chosen among the best of universal children's literature. Finally, cultural heritage of children whose families arrived from other countries must also be conserved (cf. books in parents' languages in Australia).

Children's literature heritage can also be conserved as an object of study for adult researchers, not only in national libraries but in others, like university libraries (cf. the collection of old books from a public library at the University of Michigan).

Manuscripts and original illustration must also be conserved, as does [The Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art](#) in the US or the le [Centre de l'Illustration](#) in Strasbourg Library in France.

Young peoples' heritage is partly oral. But very often oral forms of knowledge and art have been underestimated and marginalized and there is no material record of them.

Today, technology offers enormous possibilities at reasonable cost. The library can then **produce the material record: collect, capture or create the immaterial content and publish it in printed or digital forms**: books, audio, visual and audiovisual files.

It is important to choose the right technical support (cf. in Northern Australia iPad was the right choice since computers were intimidating) but, especially, to do this work with young people and their families - the intergenerational aspect and value are here.

(Cf. numerous examples: record of oral tradition by schools in Uganda, creation of content with Aboriginal families in Northern Australia, in forms of Community Stories database (collection of local historical information) and bilingual picture books for babies, collection with young people and publication of stories and songs by Tamer Institute in the Palestinian Territories, collection of nursery rhymes and songs in many languages by Burnaby Library in Canada, production of multilingual picture books, video and audio files in 13 languages that are mother tongue of children of foreign origin in Australia).

Libraries must conserve young people's productions: journals, school material, story writing and illustration, objects (cf. those made in "[Makerspaces](#)" for collaborative creation in American libraries), discussions… on whatever support they exist – including web sites and even some comments on facebook…

## 2 Preservation

The library must **preserve all its collections** (that are not just books): protect them, assure good stocking conditions, temperature and humidity control, good handling and necessary repair.

All libraries should also devise their emergency plans in case of natural disasters - fire, floods, earthquakes…

Audio and audiovisual tape collections must be reformatted, since we no longer have tape or audio cassettes players. Libraries need to have a plan on how to reformat this material. (Cf Prof. Besser's paper)

**Information Technology has opened infinite possibilities for preserving material heritage collections**. Today, libraries can digitize books, manuscripts, journals, audio and video tapes… Cooperation among libraries is important, to avoid duplication. (Cf shared digitization in France).

Some libraries train the public to help with preservation – Cf. the annual initiative in the US [Preservation Week @ your library](#).

But **digital content must be preserved too**! International researches during the past ten years have stated so, and recommendations are included in the [Vancouver Declaration](#).
Digital preservation includes refreshing (copying from one physical support that is not useful for a long time, like a floppy disk, to another one) and migrating (copying to a new file format, for example a Word document from Windows 95 to 98). (Cf. Besser). The library has to have a plan for preservation and someone in the library needs to know how to do the necessary.

Librarians must get involve early in the preservation process of eventual future collections, instead of later when someone dies and leaves their hard disk to the library, with old file formats, unorganized…
Some libraries train the public in digital preservation – Cf. in the US, [Personal Archiving](#) teaches how to organize and preserve personal digital material (photo, video, audio, email…), for instance for a library to understand it if it is donated.
The program [Archive-It](#) includes [K12 Web Archiving](#) for students - 3rd to 12th grade - to "curate" (select and save) websites for future generations.
In an age of blogs Facebook, and other social media, some subset of young people's comments and digital discussions should be preserved.
Since digital preservation on a big scale is expensive, libraries can share repositories (Cf. the French project [SPAR](#))

### 3  Access

If libraries conserve and preserve young people's heritage, it is to **give access to it to as many people as possible**.
In so doing, the library comes alive, either through the normal process of welcoming readers, or through special programs, often in partnership with other organizations or invited guests

The library gives **access to immaterial heritage** when inviting it into its facilities: oral tradition, storytelling, theatre or puppet shows, concerts, meetings, conferences and debates with holders of traditional knowledge, debates, conferences… "Heart-to-heart" transmission, performances are necessary (not only books and recordings).
Among these activities, intergenerational meetings and activities favor transmission, not only from

older people to young people, but also vice versa.

The library is the place *par excellence* to give **access to material heritage,** starting with **printed collections**.
Libraries do this in very diverse ways, on site and off site, with great creativity (Cf. the work done in Japan with nursery rhymes, the many activities presented by the colleagues from India and Uganda, the Bookstart project and TK Park programs in Thailand, "Meet the authors" in Sweden, programs in South Australia using Wilbur multilingual material…).
Besides books, libraries also give access to **other heritage objects**, that it does not necessarily conserve, in partnership with other organizations (museums, film libraries, other libraries), for example through exhibitions.

**Digitization is revolutionary for giving access to cultural heritage**, since digitized or originally digital documents can be accessible to many, with or without the Internet.
Without the Internet, supports like CDs, DVDs and others can be used (Cf. in Uganda, the National library lends a Digital Mobile to schools, heritage educational software is available in Iran, digital storytelling and in Reading and Communicating with Kids (RACK) in Northern Australia, with iPads…).

Access can be possible to many more when materials are on the Internet. The question of copyright is crucial: some documents have unlimited access and without cost. Others have limited and paying access since they are protected by copyright (cf Besser).

Libraries from big to small sizes, from national to community ones **put online digitized children's books** (visual and audiovisual files ; cf. the national libraries in the Netherlands, Russia, the UK, France, project in Iran, the National Digital Memory of Children & Youngsters). Other organizations than libraries do it too, like the Internet Archive Children's Library that offers high quality scanned, copyright free books belonging to different libraries, cf. Besser). These sites are used by adults.

Sometimes, access to digitized documents in an existing collection or to a specially-created collection is given through **websites for young people**, with activities and games (Cf. "Chile para niños" of Chile National Library, the Bibliothèque numérique des enfants of the Bibliothèque nationale de France or ICDL, International Children's Digital Library (cf. Besser) which also has a StoryKit application for iPhone or iPad. Also the sites in Latvia, Sweden, Uganda and Iran).

Other sites are designed for mediators, like BnF Classes, for instance, is meant for teachers and offers pedagogical activities using digitized books from the library collection. ICDL offers activities for teachers using the site.

Internet also allows us to put on line **material done locally** by the library (cf. the videos of nursery rhymes and songs collected by Burnaby Public Library (see above), storytelling sessions at numerous libraries and digital storytelling done by young people, cf. Stripling).

This way, libraries can give access to their collections to readers all over the world (Cf in Latvia, access

to a national heritage, to families that have left the country).
What's more, translations can give access to even more readers worldwide (Cf. recommendation for translations of material for young people, by Prof. Khunying Maenmas Chavalit, President of Thai Library Association).

Conversely, in offering readers access to the Internet, libraries open for them the doors to the world heritage. But for the moment, as it is the case for printed material, the cultures of young people from countries in Europe and North America is much more accessible than that of young people in other countries. Therefore **the importance of producing content locally** and giving access to it should be highly addressed.


## 4 Conclusions

Young people's culture is part of cultural heritage and needs to be conserved, preserved and accessed in the same way as adults'.
This is particularly important at a time when children are less exposed to their own cultural heritage. Culture in danger of extinction (including languages) are a priority. Mother tongues
Young people must be associated to the various library actions for transmitting cultural heritage.

A balance must be found between "heart to heart" transmission (oral tradition, story-telling, performances…), printed supports and digital (video or audio-recording of the performance). Each of these has its role!

**Partnerships** are very important for all three actions. The library can join hands with public and private partners: other libraries, governmental institutions, museums, theatre, schools, enterprises, donors, elder people… Each partner can take different responsibilities towards conserving, preserving and accessing cultural heritage.

Some of the **challenges** are that
- Many libraries in the world cannot afford the digital media. This is not only because of the financial issue, but also because of unavailable or poor electricity and Internet service, of lack of training in the use of digital media, of lack of awareness of the importance of technology for cultural heritage.
- Many libraries do not recognize the importance of transmitting immaterial culture (like performances) or do not know how to do it, nor
- Many libraries do not recognize the importance of transmitting works made by young people themselves

Syllabus for initial and ongoing **education for young people's librarians must include the many competences and skills necessary to transmit cultural heritage**. These are related to
- Creation of a library policy for transmission of past and present young people's cultural heritage
- the transmission of oral heritage which is particularly important where traditional cultures are very strong

- the creation of local content, in print, digital or other supports, with methods and technologies young people use and with intergenerational work
- digitization ;  building and using appropriate interfaces for young people
- the use of digital material with young people

Librarians that cannot get this training can self-train on the Internet, through numerous debates, sites and documents for training online.

At IFLA conference in Helsinki in 2012 Professor Helena Ranta, forensic dentist who has worked following several armed conflicts, gave an impressive opening speech reminding librarians their duty to defend and transmit cultural heritage, as it is a way to defend humanity.

*Imagine I was not here ...*
*How would you describe me?*
*What would you learn from me?*
*... how would you remember me?*
*Remember, remember, remember, remember ... How*
*many times do we say it?*
*But what do you want to remember? ... who? ...*
*where? ... how? ... why?*

Her short text gives its ultimate sense to the transmission of young people's cultural heritage.

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