

Learning Landscapes: Teacher-librarians in the Design Process

By Anne Whisken

Learning to participate in a design process

In about two years we will move into a new 20 million dollar plus building which will contain a library over three lower levels and several floors of innovative learning areas above. In previous Learning Landscapes articles I have documented the input from our library team to the design process. Currently, we are finalising designs and by the end of the year the demolition of old buildings will commence to make way for the new. Fortunately, we are able to remain in our existing space until the new building is completed.

It has been an exciting journey, not only from the point of view of the learning involved to predict what is best for a library future but also to participate in a creative venture with gifted professionals who truly listen. I learned that we had a leader in our Principal who was determined to ensure that all stakeholders dreamed big and were given endless opportunities to say what they wanted in the design iterations. I also learned to trust that the architects understood the ideas we expressed at the many rounds of meetings and that they would come back with designs that turned those concepts into amazing structures. And even more impressive was their willingness to go away and do it all over again after garnering feedback.

Part of my personal professional learning was to learn to avoid attachment to particular concepts. What does that mean in practice? I found that I needed to be very clear about the general functions for which we wanted to provide but to avoid being too tied to fixed ideas about the forms of delivery. That is the job of the designers.

What functions will be met and how?

Lyn Hay's advice (2011) for design of libraries for the future is to determine functions then consider form: the spaces and staffing that will best service the function, and it has proven a sound guiding concept. We defined our functions in terms of 'mountain tops, watering holes, campfires, sandpits and caves' (Thornburg, 2004; Caves, Campfires and Watering Holes, n.d.) – and we will have them! They are in the design.

Mountain Top (a place for shouting out, for celebrating achievements)

- *Physical and digital archival displays* celebrating achievements and mementoes from the school's past students, stepped seating enabling presentations by today's students, *digital walls and panels* promoting events and reporting activities

Watering Hole (a place where all must come at some time, and in so doing, exchange information and ideas):

- An *Information Commons* in a main traffic concourse where people would go to have their information software, hardware and research needs triaged by front line experts who would address immediate needs then channel people to the expertise of those with deeper skills: reference librarians, eLearning designers, teacher-librarians, ICT technicians.
- Adjacent *expert service areas* for that deeper support to occur, with spaces for the reference librarians, eLearning designers, teacher-librarians, ICT technicians and of course assistance with location of resources, loans, printing, copying and the myriad of other constant needs of teachers and students.

- *Display and chat* lounges and benches for casual meetings, checking the latest national and school news and promotions, charging mobile devices.

Sandpit (where people play about and experiment)

- *Shop front display* and promotion area for new eLearning technologies with experts on hand to help staff and students try out the latest.

Campfires (where groups settle down to chew the fat together, fire off each-others' ideas, dream big dreams, coach each other):

- Class spaces for *research lessons* – some with traditional table and chairs mode to take whole formal classes, some providing for brief whole group instruction then dispersion to work in small groups amongst shelves of reference and non-fiction shelves.
- Large and small *conference* rooms for group learning – some to follow the Harkness model, others to provide for high demand from senior students to study cooperatively.
- Group tables and benches throughout the space for *group work* in study time, and the *group fun stuff* at break-times: chess, board and card games.

Caves (where individuals retreat to reflect, meditate, read, write, turn new information into their own knowledge, create new ideas):

- *Reflection and silent study spaces* – silent, immersed study is the powerhouse for knowledge creation and Carey's new library will give full support to this all-important aspect of learning with many spaces for quiet focused study, some with formal desks and chairs, others with lounges and cushions
- *Reading* – large spaces for whole classes to experience guided sustained immersion in narrative to support a key program goal of both library and English teachers, and many small 'caves' throughout the library among the fiction shelves for small group and individual reading

Preparing for new spaces

What do we do while we wait for the new library to be built? Collection development, data collection, exploration of changed use of spaces, and staff skill development are key programs which can happen in our existing building over the next two years. We expect that selection of furniture, equipment and shelving will occupy our time in 2015. Late in 2013 we conducted a staff professional development learning journey in which the whole library team visited major libraries in Melbourne to look at how they operated, and that process will be continued to ensure we have common reference points.

In preparation to move, a strenuous weeding program is underway, with the intention being that paper books are relevant and attractive and accessible in well-spaced shelves so that borrowers have more of a 'bookshop' experience.

As previously explored, we are building up our digital collections ([Whisken, 2012, 'iCentre's Virtual Dimension – One School Library's Use of Digital Spaces'](#)) and gathering data about their use ([Whisken, 2013, 'Learning Landscapes: Data gathering to inform'](#)). Part of our Action Research Data Collection this year is to examine impact of use as we undertake strategic interventions to incorporate the digital resources into class formative learning resource use and into assessment task research. A key addition to our digital collection is subscription to three eBook platforms: Wheelers, Bolinda and Overdrive. This has been driven by two factors: one is the changed usage patterns of users, who although they still clearly prefer the paper format are starting to show interest in accessing them on their mobile devices and we want to have a good selection available for them. The second is that it is no longer viable to expect students to use our audio book CD titles, so they need also to be provided via the platform download option. With major launch and promotion programs to take place throughout the year, usage patterns will also be closely monitored.

The Thornburg view is being pursued as we build up our digital spaces: we use the school's learning management system Blackboard as our library homepage – our 'watering hole'. This is backed up by Spydus

library system which indexes books, DVDs, Clickview and some of the eResources. Users are then directed to the 'campfires' of collegial discussion spaces for reading blogs, and the 'caves' of reference and non-fiction databases, eBook platforms, news databases and website directories. For our 'mountain top' space we use the school's intranet portal where we post announcements about library news and link to items in our own homepage. Professional development is undertaken to ensure that all library staff members are familiar with all our online resources so they can provide expert assistance to users, although it is the teacher-librarians who undertake in-depth reference and research support.

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Anne Whisken has been a teacher and teacher-librarian for 30 years, leading major secondary school libraries in Victoria and Queensland. Anne is a PhD student at Charles Sturt University. She chose action research to investigate ways to work with teachers to model and develop student learning of skills and dispositions for 21st century information literacy.

Email: anne.whisken@carey.com.au