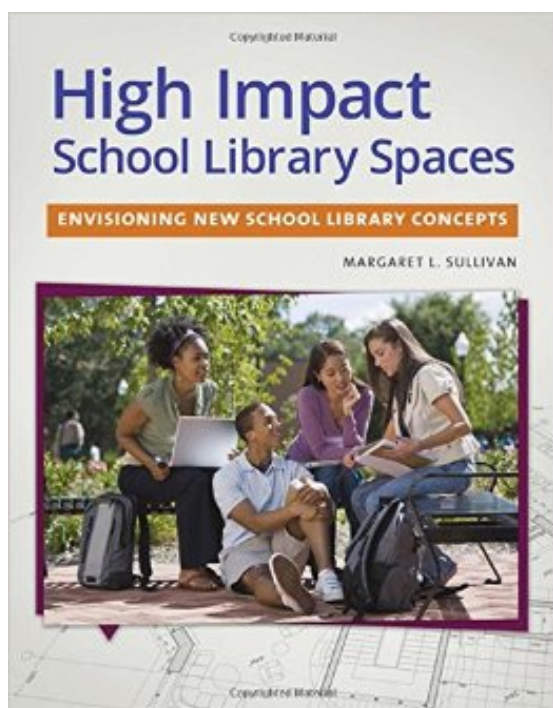# Reviews

High Impact School Library Spaces: Envisioning New School Library Concepts

Sullivan, Margaret L. (2015)
Santa Barbara, CA, Libraries Unlimited
125 pages
ISBN: 9781610698153

For the practising manager of a library space, review of a new publication about such spaces can provide a lens for examination of current practice. This can be as invigorating as a visit to a different library space. Which of these ideas do I already follow? Why would I adopt or reject this one or that one for my space? Which of these are standard 'rules' that should apply to all library learning spaces, and which are ideas that might work in some but not in others? Might it be that these are useful for adapting existing spaces to new paradigms – but not so prescriptive that they constrict thinking for new designs? And are these ideas fine for well-funded new constructions but pretty much impossible for teacher-librarians operating in straitened circumstances?

Margaret L. Sullivan's *High Impact School Library Spaces: Envisioning New School Library Concepts* is all of these and some of these! That is, while providing coverage of the principles that should be canvased in this area, the book also can be used as an ideas bag to prompt thinking in new ways. Its seven chapter headings provide key new thinking terminology: 'durable mutation', 'adaptability and technology', 'hub for new pedagogy', 'multimodal design elements', 'mobile learner', 'impact learning', and, of course, the idea that 'a high impact school library cannot be shy'. The book is well organised, with descriptive content page sub-headings, index and illustrations of key points. The text effectively combines relevant theories with practice-based commentary to explore in clear language how to re-imagine the ways that library design can evolve to not only meet new challenges but also to lead the way in use of learning spaces to

enhance learning with information and literature. Sullivan's current work and background as a principal consultant in space planning for school libraries, and before that some 30 years in merchandising and marketing, brings a very practical focus to this text. This book expands upon ideas about planning presented in her previous *Library Spaces for 21st-Century Learners: A Planning Guide for creating New School Library Concepts* (2013).

Sullivan's introduction explains that school library space planning needs to be looked at from multiple perspectives. There is no one answer, no 'new normal' and this book achieves its purpose of showing that there is a broad range of options, presenting a 'threshold to possibilities', covering the many views that can be brought to the process.

> *Pedagogy is one, but there are also numerous components to consider when you focus on the users. There are learning styles, cognitive brain research, and personality types which can all influence design considerations. The library can nurture a student's senses or trigger lifelong memories either of which will improve the student's ability to learn today and in the future.*

I like that she has emphasised focus on the user. It accords with Lyn Hay's iCentre theme of 'form to suit function' in new library space design (*The What, Why, Who and How of Building an iCentre*, Parts 1 and 2, 2011; *What is an iCentre*, 2012). This keeps thinking firmly in the pedagogical domain so that we are constantly reminded of why we have a school library: it has an educational purpose. With that we are brought back from distracting grand notions of building spaces to impress, for the community to bond, to provide a central motif for all that is good about a community – important all, but if they dominate we must ask: do they provide better for these students' learning than other possible spaces?

As Bruce (2008) points out in *Informed Learning*: what do we want students to learn as they use information in this way, for this subject learning purpose, via this activity – and by extension, how can this library space add to the experience of learning with information that is to take place here? If our function is to enable students to better engage with quality literature and authoritative information sources, what space forms will we design? If our function is to engender the learning of explicit skills and understandings about ethical, safe, creative information use in both hard copy and digital formats, what spaces will best provide for that? And challengingly, if we apply an *Assessment for Learning* lens (2012): how will we know that our spaces have met the learning intentions for which we designed them?

While Sullivan's work is US-based, Australian teacher-librarians will be interested to see application of many concepts used here in library programs, although it might be new and interesting to see their use by Sullivan in her library space design-thinking. For me that is one of the real golden moments about this book: it makes visible the thinking that needs to occur on the part of library teams when they undertake their design work. Included in these are Guided Inquiry (Kuhlthau, Maniotes and Caspari, 2007), Gardner (1983) and Sousa (2011). A theme also familiar to Australian library professionals who have worked with Kevin Hannah (2007) is her use of retail and merchandising ideas in library design. Theories about social construction of meaning initiated by Vygotsky are picked up here also and extended into thinking about how library spaces can provide for the social learning opportunities afforded by digital technology and social networking. Allied to this is commentary about pedagogical changes which have moved from seeing learners as passive to their engagement as active learners and the design constructs required to afford such learning.

Following is a list of chapter headings and Margaret's associated question prompt for each – these work well for me, as in the best tradition of visible thinking they open up my mind for new possibilities. I am looking forward to making this book my close friend as we move from our old library to a wonderful new facility next year.

• Chapter One: 'Developing a Durable Mutation' asks: 'What should your new library include'?

• Chapter Two: Adaptability and Technology' asks: 'How do you plan a school library for the future?'

• Chapter Three: 'A Hub for New Pedagogy' asks: 'How do you prepare students to be successful twenty-first-century learners?

- Chapter Four: 'Multimodal Design Elements' asks: What kinds of spaces support multi-modal learning?'

- Chapter Five: 'Have Smart Phone Will Travel: The Mobile Learner' asks: How can your new library engage 24/7 digital learners?'

- Chapter Six: 'Spaces We Remember Impact Learning' asks 'Do you have a space that improves your day? How does it do that?'

- Chapter Seven: 'A High Impact School Library Cannot Be Shy': asks 'How do you merchandise a new library environment?'

References

Assessment for Learning (2012) Education Services Australia, Accessed 30 April 2015 at:http://www.assessmentforlearning.edu.au/default.asp

Bruce, C. (2008) *Informed Learning*, Chicago: CUP.

Gardner, H. E. (1983) *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York, NY, Basic Books.

Hennah, K. (2007) 'Library Layout and Display Essentials', *Incite*, Vol 28, Issue 11 pp 28-29, Accessed 16 August 2014 at: http://archive.alia.org.au/incite/2007/v28.11.pdf

Hay, L. (2011) *The What, Why, Who and How of Building an iCentre, Part 1*, Accessed 24 October 2012 at: http://www.slideshare.net/lhay/hay-build-anicentrept1june2011slides

Hay, L. (2011) *The What, Why, Who and How of Building an iCentre, Part 2*, Accessed 24 October 2012 at: http://www.slideshare.net/lhay/hay-buildanicentrept2aug2011

Hay, L. (2012) 'What Is an iCentre', *Student Learning Through School Libraries*, Accessed 6 October 2012 at: http://studentslearn.wordpress.com/about/about-icentres/

Kuhlthau, C., Maniotes, L. K., Caspari, A. K. (2007) *Guided Inquiry: Learning in the 21st Century*, Westport, Conn: Libraries Unlimited.

Sousa, D. A. (2011) *How the Brain Learns*, 4th ed, Thousand Oaks, CA, Corwin.

Sullivan, M. (2013) *Library Spaces for 21st-Century Learners: A Planning Guide for creating New School Library Concepts*, Chicago: American Association of School Librarians.

Reviewed by Anne Whisken
Head of Resources, Mellor Library
Carey Baptist Grammar School
Kew

SLA Survival Guide: Making it Through Your First Few Years as a School Librarian
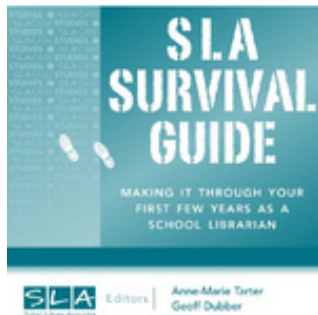
Starting a new job can be a daunting experience, particularly if you are entirely new to the profession as well. The *SLA Survival Guide: Making it Through Your First Few Years as a School Librarian* collects the hard-won wisdom of experienced school librarians, with the aim to allay fears and inspire confidence in new librarians. This guide provides an overview of the role of the school librarian, such as planning for improvement, collection management, building connections with students and staff, information literacy, cultivating a positive library culture and professional networking. The School Library Association is an organisation based in the United Kingdom, but the experiences of these librarians, all previous recipients of the SLA School Librarian of the Year Award, are equally applicable to the Australian library context.

Each librarian featured in this guide recounted their personal experiences of their first job. The librarians come from a diverse range of library settings, such as secondary and primary school libraries, schools for boys, a library on a remote island school and a library service for blind students. While each librarian faced challenges unique to their school, it was interesting to see how they approached their work in similar ways. A recurring theme discussed throughout the guide is the need to develop positive relationships with staff, students and senior management. This advice is particularly effective as this provides the school librarian with opportunities to visibly demonstrate their worth to the school learning environment.

Another valuable part of this guide is when the authors describe how they would manage the situation differently with the benefit of hindsight and more experience. This reflective process enriches their accounts with practical advice, and it also provides the reader with an opportunity to consider what they would have done in that situation. The writing style is conversational, making this collection engaging and easy to read. The overall tone is comforting and quite sweet, achieving the intended purpose of entertaining while reassuring nervous new librarians.

However, the informal nature of the guide, and its slim presence, shackle it to the realm of the superficial. The guide contains only a couple of templates in an appendix, as well as some in-text examples and suggested reading from each contributing author. There is no critical analysis, nor linking experience to theory, professional guidelines or procedural documents that would warrant a revisit to this guide past the initial reading. In fairness, the organisation did not intend for the *SLA Survival Guide* to be a consultative textbook, but with resources at their disposal it seems a shame to have wasted the opportunity to add meaningful weight to this volume. Furthermore, there are significant gaps in the representation of the complexity of the role. The guide is lacking in anecdotes regarding issues pertinent to the current state of school libraries, such as the changing research habits in students, changing reading habits and the implications of the pervasive use of technology by young people.

The *SLA Survival Guide* should be given to all new school librarians to calm their nerves before they start their first job, perhaps in a show bag with some lovely English breakfast tea and stem ginger shortbreads. Exploring your local school librarian association website would be useful to accompany reading this book, in order to support further reading and to connect with other librarians. The guide contains reassuring, common sense advice that is also relevant for school librarians starting in a new position. Most importantly this guide emphasises the value of people to the library, be it the trained librarian, students, other teaching staff or management. Books and resources are essential of course,

but without people, a library is just a fancy storeroom full of dusty books. It is a gentle reminder that a school librarian is never acting alone; there is always a generous soul willing to share a cup of tea, a biccy and some wisdom.

Reviewed by Julia Petricevic
Teacher-Librarian
Genazzano FCJ College
Kew

Picking a Winner: Taking Part in Regional and National Book Awards

Dring, Sally & Dubber, Geoff (Editor) (2014)
SLA Case Studies
Swindon: School Library Association
60 pages
Paperback. Price £13.50
ISBN 987-1-903446-83-6

For this publication, members of the Yorkshire and Humberside Branch of the School Library Association (SLA) have written a comprehensive collection of articles sharing their expertise and ideas about participating in, or running, nine well-known regional and national UK book awards.

The nine case studies discuss awards that I have some knowledge of but most were new to me. The contributors all wrote about programs for which the underlying philosophy was to promote reading for pleasure by young people and develop appraisal and reviewing skills. The examples differ, taking into account the particular requirements of local school authorities and public library networks but all demonstrate creativity and best practice.

Some of the programs had substantial funding from external bodies, while others operated with almost no budget. Some were large-scale or long-term while others were smaller, but each was very relevant to and worthwhile for their particular community. Publishers supplying books to be read and reviewed have supported some of the programs. Others have had increased support from authors, who have attended the awards ceremonies and taken part in some of the events. There are programs that focus on a single genre such as graphic novels and Manga as in case study 3. In case study 2, a smaller program is discussed, one where selected students take part in the reviewing of books. A national award is examined in case study 5. This award, initially begun in 1980, involves 'book testing' and can be voted on by young people only from the UK.

All of the examples involved the organisation of cooperative programs between both school and public libraries. The ultimate benefit of all the work done by those involved in the book awards programs is passed on to the readers. The programs all reported a steady growth in the participation rates for student involvement as well as in the number of schools participating.

The programs described in the case studies have become annual events, each with celebrations that offer young people the chance to engage with others while celebrating books and reading.

The case studies also describe how each program was developed and how procedures were adapted to create the final program that is discussed here. There are also links to further information and resources in some of the studies. Although this is not a long publication, it is one that offers a lot of useful and encouraging advice and tips about how anyone might approach running a book awards or reading program.

Reviewed by Rhonda Powling
Treasurer, SLAV
Head of Library Services
Whitefriars College
Donvale