

Successful Library Design Attitudes

By Anne Whisken

In previous Learning Landscapes articles (Whisken, 2011 - 2015b) I have explored the research and decisions being applied in the digital and physical landscapes of school libraries as they evolve, with particular application to my own situation, Carey Baptist Grammar School, where a new library is the hub of a \$30m Centre for Learning and Innovation. The guiding question has been: What are the forms (space designs and arrangements) that best suit the functions (particular types of learning with information, wide reading and study) to take place in the school library? It brings together two key influences: Lyn Hays' iCentre themes (2011a, 2011b, 2012) and Christine Bruce's *Informed Learning* (2008).

The question is used again in this article as the umbrella for examination of successful attitudes brought to the design process for new or remodelled library spaces in a variety of fields. Usually there are at least three key parties to the design relationship: the library staff, the architect and the organisation whose needs the library serves – be it a government, local council, university, corporation or school. The views of each party about what the library should look like can inspire or inhibit both architectural vision and the resultant library service. The most important outcome of the design process for most school library staff is likely to be a place where information literacy, study and wide reading habits are developed. However, libraries are increasingly seen by their communities as places for other functions. To ensure they are included in the design process, library staff must be adaptable in their views. How can they do this while providing traditional services? How can they ensure that others' great ideas about how the building should look do not compromise the learning that needs to take place?

A review of library literature in Australia over the past year related to design of new library spaces reveals emphasis on future-proofing libraries and their services by being flexible and involving more stakeholders in the process. There are many examples of library teams showing willingness to give up established notions about their spaces and services in order to provide the functions and forms that will accommodate changing community behaviours and expectations. Fast access to digital resources and mobile technologies are obvious examples of new expectations, as well as changing ideas about how libraries might host more creative activities than the usual focus on study and reading. But in the mix also are clear messages that libraries are still seen to be the locale of information and study, and that whatever form is chosen should provide for this as well as enabling service changes to accommodate new directions.

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Future Proofing

Many articles about library design discuss how to 'future-proof' library services and spaces. In 'Future libraries: what could they be?' (2015), Sherwin presents five key findings from research on the topic: be flexible, agile and adaptable; nourish learning; build partnerships; offer safe spaces; and promote the role of librarian as facilitator. Regarding flexibility, Sherwin says:

Library spaces, services, funding models and operations will need to be flexible and adaptable to futureproof libraries. With the fast pace of change and the rapid expansion of the digital environment, user expectations will change. Building agility into libraries will be crucial in sustaining and redefining their purpose (Sherwin, 2015, p. 14).

The place of libraries in providing for learning is seen as a clear function:

As libraries are quintessential places for learning, the spaces they inhabit and the services they offer will need to be transformed to meet future expectations. Seamless access to the physical and digital space will be critical to meet user needs, particularly as learning models evolve (Sherwin, 2015, p. 14).

Building partnerships has relevance to library space design, as close relationships with communities of users, possibly in co-design, can bring about a greater sense of ownership and usage, and thus loyalty to library service longevity. Safe spaces are also a function that can future-proof:

Libraries have a key role to place in community identify. They provide an egalitarian connection to resources, knowledge and services. . . . Libraries are community hubs, places to exchange ideas, to open minds and to provide shelter and companionship. New designs, functions and purposes for the physical space are inevitable, but the concept of equal access and opportunity remains a constant (Sherwin, 2015, p. 14).

INCITE November 2015 invited readers to examine their preconceptions about library spaces and what happens there in order to produce “designs that last”. Editor Rowena Morcom compared the challenges to bookshop staff as their spaces used coffee shops and lounge chairs to encourage engagement and purchases by customers, to the challenges faced by library staff as they engage with new practices to maintain and expand new generations of users.

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Libraries provide a service and it's about making people who use those services want to be in that space more often, to feel comfortable in it, and for it to be not only user-friendly, but also fully utilised. . . . Clever changes to spaces, and what those spaces are used for, can break down the walls of communication between libraries and users. It's like opening up the doors to let in fresh air (Morcom, 2015, p. 5).

Designing library forms that accommodate future changes in services was on the mind of ALIA President John Shipp as he took readers on a quick world tour to discover whether form or function was determining the design of new library spaces (2015). This was based on the premise that a focus on form over function was likely to produce a space into which library teams might have to compromise their functions to the determinants of the form. He referred to negotiating the delicate tensions between architect and client in order to bring about future-proofed buildings.

. . . architects and interior designers often present the greatest challenges to good library design. Their primary concern is the form of the building and its aesthetics. These considerations are sometimes at variance with the functional needs of the library service. Australia is fortunate in having a number of architects and designers who understand the need to balance form and function in library design . . . their buildings are likely to stand the test of time and the functional changes that will occur in the future (Shipp, 2015, p. 11).

Shipp pointed out that throughout the world there are library buildings which demonstrate emphasis of form over function.

They may look great, perhaps even impressive . . . Yet step inside and look past the lofty foyer, the multi-storey atrium, the trendy décor or the expansive marble trim. It is quickly apparent that these are spaces intended to promote the reputations of their designers rather than facilitate library services. Library activities continue to function in these monumental spaces but often they are like cuckoos in another bird's nest (Shipp, 2015, p. 11).

He sees that librarians must actively influence the design process in order to achieve a result where the balance required between the two has a bias towards function.

How well does our nation's pre-eminent library building stand in this analysis? Standing majestic on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin in Canberra, the National Library of Australia is an iconic building – can its form facilitate future functions? A report from Director of Reader Services, Aileen Weir (2015), about recent changes shows that our National Library's form is being successfully adapted to the changing functions required to serve the needs of its users. The original reading rooms and public spaces were designed for a time before the internet revolution, and the challenge was to “develop interiors that embrace the benefits of technology yet respect the heritage and grandeur of the original building” (Weir, 2015, p. 14).

This has released collections previously arranged by format to provide more easily accessible arrangements. Public spaces are larger, with more casual seating, provision of quiet and group zones, and fully wireless-

enabled work and meeting areas. Areas of high architectural significance have been repurposed to enable better appreciation and use.

The result is a revitalised National Library that offers a range of flexible and adaptable spaces that promote intellectual and creative endeavour, facilitate access to our general, special and digital collections, and are a pleasure to visit and use (Weir, 2015, p. 14).

Adaptability

The need for adaptability in attitudes brought by librarians to the process of design and management of spaces and collections to meet changing user needs has been addressed by Dr Alex Byrne, State Librarian and Chief Executive of the State Library of NSW ('A Labour of Love', 2015). He says the State Library of NSW:

... is fortunate to have extraordinarily passionate and expert staff. Like all old institutions it needed, however, to renew and cast off its inhibitions and become more nimble and creative, while at the same time deal with the financial pressures that are the lot of the Australian public sector ('A Labour of Love', 2015, p. 12).

This had been done by creating a culture that is "more open, enterprising and creative, both in our traditional roles and in today's digital spaces, and highly focused on the evidence and the interests of the communities we serve" ('A Labour of Love', 2015, p. 12).

Willingness to bend to the changes being demanded of libraries and their teams, and to bring an attitude that ensures inclusion in the process can be a great challenge to established views and ways of operating – especially when staff feel that what they are doing is successful. Why change? Staff at Curtin University Library in Perth spent three years working with architects and builders to refurbish their space. Lynne Vaultier, Associate Director reported on the process in an article 'That's Why You're an Architect and I'm a Librarian'. "The fact that it turned out as well as it has is a credit to library staff and a great team of architects, builders and contractors" (Vaultier, 2015, p. 16). She said that the title of the article referred to:

... the number of times we had to take a leap of faith and trust this group ('You really want to cut a hole in our ceiling and put in a bridge?'). It turned into a genuine partnership, in which library staff provided advice on client needs and how we operate and, in return, we benefitted from the expertise of the architects (Vaultier, 2015, p. 16).

This change of views about what works in libraries was experienced in a law library redevelopment in Canberra, where what was initially viewed as a convenient juxtaposition to a café developed into unanticipated styles of use. Rather than use the attractive lounge chairs to stay and read, busy law staff preferred to pop in frequently to stand and quickly browse before selecting items to take back to their offices for in-depth study. Proximity to entry and traffic flows led to the library being at the forefront of visitor tours, and rather than hoard items, staff felt the library was the best storage space as they could readily access what they needed (Jones and McDonagh, 2015).

Ensuring inclusion by being adaptable to change can be also seen at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Its Swanston Library faces a future of more seamless incorporation into a development that brings core student services together in redevelopment of the '60s and '70s Swanston Street buildings. (Anderson, 2016) In this model, where print books take up increasingly less space, collections will be located as ancillary to student study spaces, enabling 24/7 access to study facilities without collection management issues. Self-check loans and roving staff provide for a change in service model, with reference functions carried out at side-by-side desks.

Planning for adaptability was core to the design of the Norman Carson Library at Toorak College, Victoria. Davies (2015) writes that the learning commons model, with its emphasis on a creative learning environment that brings the digital and physical together is "the driver that shapes our services and our priorities as well as spaces we inhabit. It assumes change and makes room for it" (Davies, 2015, p. 11). Choices about spaces, furniture, shelving and their arrangements were based on providing agility for current and future functions, giving flexibility for easy response to different learning and teaching needs as they arise. Four years on from the original build, the library team uses a regular process of reviewing its operations for improved outcomes

and examining its space arrangements to see how they might better serve those new ideas – much in the style of the reflective processes of Hughes’ participatory designing (2015) referred to below.

Imagination, good research and flexibility can be seen too in new and remodelled libraries at other schools across Melbourne, with panel presentations at the School Library Association of Victoria August Conference in 2015 explaining different processes and results

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(Whisken, 2015b). At the Islamic College of Melbourne, a P-12 school, Haifa Atatreh showed how dynamic programs and exciting furnishings can turn a small place into a vibrant locale for successful library services. Barbara Roach at Caroline Chisholm Catholic College, a secondary school, explained the difference that can be made by inspired school leadership when a depleted library space and services need to be re-invigorated. Catherine James at Middle Kinglake Primary School told the inspirational story of a school literally rising from the ashes of a disastrous bushfire to produce a proud example of a library very much at the heart of both the school and the community.

Blending Traditional Services with New Expectations

Many city administrations have grand views about what a new library might say about their city - how it might be a sign of a dynamic place of innovation and creativity. In that view, the traditional functions of library can be just one of the many activities which will take place in a building in which significant investment is made. How do librarians ensure that they are part of the journey while still providing the services which they know are fundamental for their communities? Perth and Geelong are examples of how library leaders kept their services at the heart of their changing cities.

The new City of Perth Library is a major infrastructure project in the redevelopment of the city’s heritage precinct. The city administration’s purpose was to “encourage people to visit the library, not only for education, but also for entertainment and pleasure” (‘Letting in the Light’, 2015, p. 19). It has seven levels, providing for the traditional functions of children’s, young adult and history collections as well as multiple function spaces and a café. It brings digital technologies into the mix throughout the building, as well as focused areas such as a digital media wall and exhibition spaces.

In Geelong, an exciting ball-shaped building with panelled skin and a dissection revealing soaring pillars of glass has also brought library, heritage and digital interaction together in the middle of the city. This website description of its form serves also to list the functions for which the building was designed:

Overview of the new Geelong Library and Heritage Centre

Ground floor: Library with a mix of seating areas, news lounge for print and digital news media with lots of technology available for use. Also a mezzanine and book wall.

1st floor: A colourful, tactile children’s space with digital equipment and creative materials as well as a dedicated youth space with technology wall, digital equipment, study space and gaming equipment.

2nd floor: Quieter space with adult fiction, non-fiction, magazines, journals, e-resources and specialist collections such as a unique arts collection.

3rd floor: Will house the State’s largest regional archive of historical resources. Also state-of-the-art technology including smart tables and digital microfilm readers.

4th floor: Administration and GRLC head office.

5th floor: Flexible event space with stunning views and open timber deck (‘Geelong Library and Heritage Centre’, 2015).

Colouring, shelving and furniture, lighting and arrangements in each of these areas guide the user to the way the space is to be utilised – form and function working in tandem. Another important learning, which is part of the design, reflects its connectedness to local Aboriginal culture. Each of the public areas was named in

consultation with the Wadawurrung people and visitors are invited to engage with the meanings of those names as they approach (Barry, 2016).

Chief executive officer of Geelong Regional Libraries, Patti Manolis, said “the building ushered in a new era in terms of how the service operates” (Cuthbertson, 2015). High-end technologies are part of each area, providing the delighted Geelong population with access to fast connections and innovative facilities. For her leadership in developing the regional library services, Manolis was inducted onto the 2016 Victorian Honour Roll of Women, in celebration of International Women's Day.

Designing Change to Service Models

The well-researched input of library staff to the design process is fundamental to establish a presence that is authoritative as well as consultative – and that applies to design of new spaces as well as to design of new services in existing spaces. At the University of New South Wales Library, radical change to the traditional service desk model was based on “a study of new developments in client services across all service sectors – not just libraries” (O’Dwyer, 2015, p. 24). A review of transformation in service models at places such as Apple Stores, in banking and other retail areas, showed clear trends: “a strong emphasis on self-help technologies, co-production, knowledgeable staff providing assistance as required, and more imaginative use of space” (O’Dwyer, 2015, p. 24). The Library developed a HelpZone concept with three strategic goals: active welcome with staff approaching users to meet and greet; self-service rather than staff service; and use of library without staff presence. This brings an attitude of staff-user interface for the intention of user-enabling rather than for service. The user now finds a bright welcoming space with clear signage. There is no library desk barrier: rather, staff work side-by-side with users at a variety of access points; information kiosks like those in shopping centres enable self-direction to library areas; and users operate self-check loans and returns stations.

Clear understandings about what functions are required in new library spaces apply to both large and small undertakings. At Killester College in Victoria, teacher-librarian Faye Jamieson reported on the transformation

There is no library desk barrier: rather, staff work side-by-side with users at a variety of access points . . .

of her existing library into “a vibrant contemporary learning commons” (2015, p. 25), by careful research and wise budget decisions. Clearly showing in both title of the area as well as terminology for the spaces within, is the big vision that informed the changes. Each of the new spaces has a self-explanatory name which describes its learning function: Conferencing Space, Project Space, Instruction Space, Reading Room, Quietly Creative Space, Quietly Collaborative Space. These were created by re-purposing existing areas with new fittings and furniture, colours and flooring so that students are led by the physicality of the space to undertake those learning activities for which it was designed. “In a short space of time on a small budget, we have revitalised the library as a contemporary learning space catering to a wide variety of learning styles and activities” (Jamieson, 2015, p. 25).

Participatory Designing and Co-Design

Two particular processes promoted for effective library design have similar characteristics in that they both advocate inclusion of a broader group of stakeholders than the more usual small focus team. Hughes’ idea of participatory designing (2015) proposes a model of continuous reflective improvement of library functions and forms. It involves library teams and users who bring their particular experiences into the framework. She makes a distinction between ‘design’ – a finite form usually produced by an architect, and ‘designing’ – an ongoing creative process involving a broader group. “Design tends to favour form (what the library looks like), whereas designing tends to emphasise function (how the space is used)” (2015, p. 4). Drawing on the findings of earlier research, Hughes presents the key creative elements in seven new or refurbished libraries. The study identified four inter-connected continuous phases: imagining (the initial process); transitioning (creating and moving in); experiencing (discovering the new space’s actual and potential learning utility); and re-imagining (what next?).

A participatory approach supports continuous (re)designing. It ensures the creation of agile school libraries that can be refreshed and repurposed to meet changing educational trends and student interests. This is

because participatory designing values the 'voices of experience' of those who use the school library on a daily basis for the 'business' of learning and teaching (p. 4).

Hughes points to the importance of including the teacher-librarian in any design process. It adds an invaluable cross-curriculum voice, and provides for the teacher-librarian an important opportunity for advocacy of services and ideas and development of collegial relationships with other school stakeholders. The article provides prompts for creative thinking about new or remodelled spaces as well as a checklist for working through the four phases.

Similar to participatory designing is co-design, with a variety of models for inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups. Sometimes this is for changes to physical spaces, or services, and sometimes both. It might involve library users as well as staff. Salisbury (2015) explores co-design in an article where she compares this method with the idea of designing form for function. She finds:

. . . co-design to be a much more compelling process for designing fit-for-purpose spaces in libraries. Asking users about their needs contributes to improved library design, but even better is designing with the users . . . co-design has huge potential to link library space to institutional pedagogical frameworks from the outset, and it also promotes collaborative learning for all parties and ongoing improvement of space (p. 20).

Co-design was a feature of the process followed by the State Library of Victoria (SLV) when it reviewed its services to develop a Future Service Model. It brought large numbers of its staff into review, development and feedback. The process won the Best Overall in the category of Service Design in the annual Good Design Australia awards. An integrated project team worked over twelve weeks to firstly understand the SLV's current service then identify ways that might be innovatively improved. Concepts developed were taken to the broader staff after hours to walk through the prototypes for feedback before launch to the public. A more mobile style of service delivery has resulted in iPads for better staff communication, and self-guided welcome spaces at the entrance to entice users further into the Library's many inner zones and collections. Judges of the Award remarked:

This is a shining example of service design excellence at its very best. A brilliant case study on the positive impact of a design-led approach in an area that is undergoing significant transformation and disruption. . . . the outcome is not only a more enjoyable, user-friendly experience – it has also positioned the organisation for the future in terms of technology, efficiency, service delivery and overall staff engagement (Conyers, 2015, p. 21).

Creative Spaces

The 'makerspace' movement has been a popular trend in libraries for some time, with enthusiastic sharing of experiences at all levels – from National and State, to public and school libraries, such as Mill Park Public Library (Grace, 2014), Morris's work at MLC in Melbourne (2015) and Jensen's showcase of cost-effective ways to provide cutting edge technology to students (2016). It takes libraries some distance from their traditional roles, and challenges views about how many different functions can be accommodated. However, Boyle et al (2016) see an important role for creative spaces in future-proofing libraries, with benefits for practice including "changing perceptions of how libraries are responding to the community" (Boyle et al, 2016, p. 30). While the article is aimed at public libraries, arising as it does from a toolkit produced for a Public Libraries Victoria Network and State Library Victoria Shared Leadership project, there are key points relevant to school libraries, many of which face challenges to their continued existence.

The authors see such movements as being a natural and positive part of libraries' evolution as they keep pace with changes in the communities they serve, part of which is seeing libraries as their hub. They point out that it is a development reflective of the strategic flexibility required to identify and meet social trends amongst users to maintain relevance and consequent community support. One identified benefit is futureproofing and transliteracy:

It is not only the community who benefit from the sharing of skills and knowledge within a creative space: there is also a delightful overlap with library staff. Staff members who are up-skilled to respond to the needs of their patrons ensure that staff stay abreast of the latest technologies and creative trends while

simultaneously educating their community and in the process future proofing both the service and the staff (Boyle et al, 2016, p. 33).

Other identified benefits include: development of a lifelong learning culture; inter-generational community bonds and social connectedness; entrepreneurship and innovation; and a growing, more engaged library audience. A variety of possibilities for what these creative spaces might look like is canvassed as well as advice about setting them up. It is suggested that they fit well into the Australian library tradition of “providing affordable information and learning opportunities” (Boyle et al, 2016, p. 38).

Leadership

It is clear that leadership is required by each of the three main parties usually involved in library design: administration, architects, and library teams for a cohesive vision and process to produce best form for function – but what sort of leadership? Bonanno’s recent contribution about innovative leadership (2015) describes the characteristics of “thought leaders” that might help school librarians identify models which would work best for them in their roles in the design process. Thought leaders are described as “knowledgeable, authoritative sources of new ideas or intellectual trends, who are also the go-to people in their field of expertise” (Bonanno, 2015, p. 8). Bonanno says that it takes time to become a thought leader:

. . . to develop knowledge and expertise, pre-eminence, and a product, service or program that a community will talk about and want to engage in. . . . As a thought leader you have the ability to increase visibility and standing within your community. You can increase exposure to your ideas and have the power to persuade and to move things in a new direction to implement innovative ideas (p. 8).

The four profile types of thought leaders are: visionary/innovator; provocateur; collaborator; problem solver. Each has particular characteristics, which, while they empower, also bring their own challenges, and so need to be managed for best outcomes. It is possible that school librarians can take on being thought leaders about the evolution of library functions in their communities such that administrations and architects automatically include them in design of library spaces.

Successful Library Design Attitudes

Recent experience in the design process by this author supports the trends outlined in this article, with three key attitudes advocated:

- Clear research-based leadership: constantly monitor national and international trends via library literature and such aggregating tools as Scoop-it, as well as library visits and localised action research trials of ideas.
- Flexibility: be prepared to question and give up preconceptions about functions and forms and how spaces should look and work, with a focus on responses based on research about best practice.
- Participatory designing: ensure involvement of a broad set of stakeholders in a process of continuous reflective design and review.

If the library staff and key stakeholders are involved in the library design process, a sense of trust develops as a result of the experience of being consulted and listened to. The library team knows it can relax and let architectural expertise turn the vision about functions into beautiful, adaptable spaces.

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