Flipping the Third Space

By Robyn Markus-Sandgren

In March 2011 Australia's House of Representatives Committee on Education and Employment submitted a report on school libraries in Australia (Australia & Rishworth, 2011). The report consists of comments and recommendations about what school libraries in Australia could be like and what issues they face. In preparing to submit a statement to the committee, I engaged in conversation with my Head of School, Mr Peter Crawley, about our library. He understood that the bustling library that we had did not come about on its own. He spoke of the fact that both parents and students valued such a safe space that lay between home and school.

In the half decade that has followed since the report, supporting the curriculum has been the central tenet of our approach. There is plenty of work to do resourcing and supporting teaching and learning by being informed and responsive, IT-ready and having the skills to do so. Later I will attempt to show that this supportive role is also a transformative role when it occurs in a space called a Third Space. In this respect, Elmborg (2011) attempts a summary of Henri Lefebvre's work, 'The Production of Space', in which three ways of conceiving space are articulated: spatial practices, representations of space and representational spaces.

The first two will be addressed in the description of the spaces and practices of the new library. The third is about the ways in which people make use of space as they live in it: "Representational space is individual, perceptual, intuitive, and symbolic" (p. 343). Between represented and representative spaces, the theorist

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Bhabha describes a dynamic new kind of space called the Third Space, originally conceived as being created when two or more cultures converge to occupy represented or dominated space (Elmborg, 2011). The represented space of The Library converges with cultures associated with The Classroom, The Lounge, The Discussion Room, The Corridor . . . in the new library. While students, when not in subject classes, easily turned the old library into their own space for learning and interacting outside of school hours, the capacity of The Library to evolve and deliver to its potential had been constrained by both the existing library space as separate from the main concerns of teaching and learning and by how the library was seen in the mind's eye of many educators and administrators. Our vision was that The Library could be remade and be continually remade as a centre for learning, thinking and being as a Third Space.

A second arm of the work of the library is a co-curricular engagement with students and their reading and thinking. In particular, our book clubs have allowed the library staff to better know the students. As an example, an article about one of the clubs is available in the June 2016 QSLA Newsletter, called Book and Philosophy Club. Crucially, also, it has prompted me to consider more closely the library's role for student learning and how this sits with negotiating a place for student interests outside the curriculum. So the idea of the library as a Third Space gained even more life, as it has done elsewhere, though mainly in higher education and in public libraries (Ali, 2013). I became excited!

The idea begins to take shape

When it was announced that a 1980s teaching block for the senior students was to be renovated I saw a chance for the transformation of the library into what I felt, what the professionals were saying, it could be. I decided that the library could be part of the renovations, part of the thinking about what teaching and learning spaces could be like and part of a reconfiguration of the relationship between The Library and The Classroom.

I looked at the L-shaped block and thought and asked, could we make the two above ground floors rectangles and one of the rectangles, flanked by an L of classrooms, could this become the Library? What if the library came

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to classes and teachers rather than them coming to the library? What if the library became an everyday part of teaching and learning?

For my Head of School, a History teacher, the idea came alive immediately. We decided to test the idea. By knocking down a wall that divided two classrooms off from the old library and timetabling them as permanent rooms for the Humanities, these classrooms and the library became one. For the two years of the planning and building of the new Senior School teaching area, The Jennifer Reeves Building, we were able to test how the idea works and feels and to reflect on what the idea means for our library and for teaching and learning at St Hilda's. For those involved it was a resounding success and did much of the initial leg work needed to communicate the basis of the idea of the new library.

People not involved were surprised and some even shocked that I would give up the library space for something unknown. In response to their concerns, I sought to articulate the theory and vision I had for the new library.

Ideational reflections

Life's spheres are many and varied. In a modern education each sphere has developed sets of knowledge, skills and concepts that underpin and define expertise. Following an industrial model, this warehousing of specialty areas seemed to be required to meet the sheer volume and growth of specialised skills and knowledge. However, along with technology, teaching and learning have evolved, especially over the last decade or so. As the works of Rajala et al (2013) and Zipin (2009), for example, reveal, there are significant inter-dependencies and, now, significant movement between different spheres of learning in and beyond schooling. Established programs and practices are being challenged in the light of a vastly different world of work and further learning.

I claim that the specialist citadel style can be questioned because the evolution from a modern to a post-structural model of education is part of a more general evolution towards privileging relationships between knowledge, intentions and ideas from different spheres. This re-privileging is seen to empower young learners in a globally connected world. Yet to see oneself as part of this connected world and for others to see you as part of it too, remains problematic. The author proposes the view that the power and privileges of professional specialty seem to be threatened rather than informed in the process and "it is judged unsafe to stop pretending" (Strand, 2007, p.210).

I, personally, give testament to the legacies of a generous and insightful education, as well as thoughtful and literate, peopled spaces, especially at school and at university, for incubating the idea that the world is learnt about in particular but understood and engaged with as a whole, that connections that matter occur both within and between things.

As Rajala et al further explain, many different learning modalities play together and many different communities of practice interact in learning, across individual and group development and across time and space (2013). I looked for understanding that felt whole,

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first in my own learning, then in teaching and now in Library Management practice. I am driven to find ways of meaning and sense-making that are more connective, collaborative and inclusive and yet still go deep, to the undercurrent where the facts, or perhaps simply, the individual voice, resonate in the whole of experience.

The St Hilda's School Senior Library practice supports this quest. It is a reflective quest, which constantly references its resource provision, its processes and its space to the wider educational vision of individuals, schools and the communities. Beyond my single professional experience there is significant educational research and practice about connecting in and out of school learning spheres as well as intermittent drives to make cross-curricular connections part of pedagogy.

An example highlights the point. Most of our teachers are successful modernist specialists and the pushes to link learning across the subject areas are rarely greeted enthusiastically. The linking of Visual Arts, Science and Geography in the teaching about the environment is an example. In the individual subject areas, the

technicalities of using visual language in Art or Media, the teaching of scientific research and report writing in Science or of doing field work in Geography may subsume the seemingly obvious connections between the learning directions unless there is a commitment to knowledge and process sharing.

Despite the isolation in which many educational projects are designed, carried out and reported, each individual child and each sphere in which she sits is a site for multiple intersections, points of resistance and of opening, when learning occurs. Clearly, existing relationships between spheres can both hinder and/or promote learning and connection. When the traditional class has ended, when and where is the knowledge and thinking explored again? In the corridor, with friends and family, tutors, in the playground, in social media and on the internet in general, while doing paid work, playing sport or reading, while studying to pass tests, while undertaking a creative activity or while completing assignments, students' school learning is either left behind or used and remade? What is a space like that supports the individual child to integrate and to powerfully make 'their own' school-based learning?

The process

Once the main principles had been agreed upon, designs and funding were sought for the whole building: on the Ground Floor, a cafeteria, coffee shop, radio station, Year 12 space and small performance area; on the First Floor, the Senior School offices, six classrooms, recording spaces as well as informal seating, a print station and a self-catering space and on the Second Floor, the library, print station and seven classrooms. All these floors were to be linked via internal and external stairways and a lift. Each floor is multi-functional, yet integrated and this made the consultation process necessarily complicated.

For the library itself, though, there were three main focuses:

1. The specialist technology and furnishings that linked the security software to circulation tasks. How could we use this technology to free library staff for more supportive and less purely functional roles?
2. The shelving design and layout of the main floor and the more informal areas. What happens to Dewey when you break up the warehouse style in shelving design?
3. Supporting Third Space interactions. As the classrooms were opening up to the library, so the library would provide additional spaces for the classrooms. Would both be transformed in the process? How would this work?

1. Firstly, we installed Envisionware's RFID technology that allowed for three Self Check In/Out stations and two Returns points to be established. In addition, two Returns/Dump Trolleys were located strategically about the shelves and a locked Returns box was located outside the library. By way of explanation, we have three entrances and exits to facilitate the movement of up to ten classes at any given period change. These points serve to allow more time for staff to attend to student and teacher reading, borrowing and referencing requests. They also empower students to manage some aspects of their own borrowing. Staff Circulation and Help desks are located centrally, with seating for resource conferencing for up to four people per staff member.

Envisionware's Branch Manager software reports gate infringements to the Staff Circulation desks, detailing the title of the item/s being taken through the gates and the time of the infringement. As the use of the library has increased, this technology has proven increasingly important in tracking straying resources.

2. The main part of the library was to have curved shelving, on wheels, in the industrial style. They are aesthetically pleasing and offer flexibility. Navigating the curves for search and shelving functions is interesting. We are still considering what kind of signage will help as we work with a length of shelving that falls short of our needs as outlined in the original planning document. However, because the original concept is strong and because the space itself is beautiful, the many work-arounds that have had to be thought through have not impacted severely on the space.

Even though the new library was to be a sleek and modern, clean lined space, there was a sense that the mood of a library should not be lost. To this end, a space was created with bookshelves built in, creating an air of permanence, a space that invited relaxed lounging and, hopefully, slow thinking and reflecting. It has become a unique space in the whole of the three floors of the Jennifer Reeves Building. It is lower lit and not

part of the traffic of teaching and learning activities. At the same time it is not cut off from the rest, the easy transition symbolising the intention to relate to the past, present and future in one space. It is intended that this space will also be an overtly inviting space for our Indigenous students, though this is a tender and fraught vision. The shelving was designed, specifically, to create the space and is not the most practical when it comes to library shelving.

3. Finally, the space itself. The library has become an integral part of the everyday activities of the school and so has begun to be used more effectively. Also, importantly, the specialist expertise and educational roles of the library and its staff are being understood more widely, especially as it relates to the creation of more innovative and collaborative teaching and learning. We have created a space in which students feel the offer to become engaged in learning and connecting. Teachers are to be part of the invitation, not just as hosts, but as co-creators of the space.

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Glass classrooms, with nearly all walls fully opening, with no fixed teacher or screen positions and with little physical storage, means that each time a class and a teacher occupy a classroom, the space seems ripe to be made into something new and to live until the class ends, when, except for writing on the glass walls, all traces of the class retreats, either to the internet, network or cloud or with the students and teachers themselves. What is left, written on the glass – something of a cave painting? In this sense, the imperative to teach so that learning comes alive for the individual is profound.

There were many challenges in moving the library. Even though plans for the move were informed by best practice and specialist expertise and even though they underwent an approval process, wider context applications and changes in design and timing impacted on these plans. For example, Envisionware provided specs for the installation of our RFID security hardware, but some of the specs were not followed. It was Envisionware's expertise that enabled a successful work-around. One's relationship with the expert specialists is essential. Also, some necessary changes that were made to the entry points to the library were not communicated until work-arounds were necessary. My advice is to ensure that all changes and all installations, especially of library specialist equipment and technology, are communicated continually up and down the lines of responsibility.

Discussion

So, what is the outcome, a year on? I will focus on two aspects: firstly, the role of library services in supporting teaching and learning and, secondly, the role of the library in both the creation of a Third Space and in the 'flipping' of teaching and learning.

Library services

One of the great successes of the move to the new library is the increased interactions between the library assistants and the students and teaching staff across a range of library services. Library staff are no longer seen as simply there to tidy the shelves and unblock photocopier paper jams. All library staff now play an ongoing role in negotiating with teachers about resources, from books and video materials to internet and database search and retrieval. In addition, library staff provide hands on, as needed, referencing and assignment help, with at least one library staff member available from 7am to 8.30pm Monday to Thursday, till 5pm on Fridays and from 1.30 to 4.30pm on Sundays.

At any point during the day, in addition to numerous classes, there are now significant numbers of students on Spares and teachers and students visiting with requests or choosing to use the library for relaxation or study. Students and teachers enter and leave their classrooms to approach the library staff to access this support. Increased conversations have led to increased interactions beyond those conversations. Outreach, both digital and in real time, as a description for the kind of library services now offered, comes to mind, but library services are evolving.

In particular, opportunities for staff on the library floor to develop working relationships with both the teaching staff and with students could be considered as the most promising outcome of of the new library

space. Library staff are learning more about what teachers do and what they want and teaching staff are learning more about what the library has to offer them and their students.

The library, then, helps support the integration of near invisible – despite the glass – teaching and learning, firstly by its presence and secondly by its functions. Negotiating the power differentials and the different interpretations of the space continues to necessitate users to transcend and contest the boundaries of their conceptions for the space. In the process, a "more open, symbolic, playful and generative" (Elmborg, 2011, p. 345) space is being created. If this can be done as part of practice, every user of the library can cross the boundaries between subject classes, between what was and what might be, despite, or perhaps because, of a kind of supportive orderliness that the library offers. In this sense the library staff are companions in the world of the school. Gone is any trace of the shushing, fussy librarian and the high dusty bookshelves. Instead we are co-creating a mutual space, exactly at the points of connection in the lives of all who enter it.

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Flipping the Third Space

Technology, in particular mobile technology, promises to release teaching and learning from many spatial and temporal restrictions so that almost any space can be a learning space at almost any time (Kearney et al., 2012). Yet, despite the level of comfort or fashionable design features, it is the way in which spaces lend themselves to sociability and collaboration that mark out what students want in the spaces they occupy by choice (Crook, 2012).

There are thousands of documents, videos and websites related to flipping classroom teaching, mainly in the tertiary sector. Each one emphasises the value of increased time for social interaction embedded in pedagogy, for enhancing learning and for creating a sense of ownership and belonging – some say a sense of place – out of a space.

Flipping library (information literacy) instruction follows the same pattern. However, when it comes to flipping the library as a Third Space, this means a Third Space supporting flipped classrooms.

In flipped instruction, class time is more interactive, collaborative and exploration based. Higher order thinking and activities are central. Yet students do not necessarily do their flipped homework, study or research at home. Nor do they necessarily access classroom instruction from home. Depending on before and after school activities and family timetables, the library can be a site for any combination of all the modalities of the flipped and non-flipped classroom. Students and teachers have the opportunity to work flexibly with flipping. Missed class video and presentation modules can be watched 'just in time' and classroom higher order interactions can call on an extended range of spaces, resources and, as appropriate, professional library support.

From 5pm to 8.30pm Monday to Thursday, the library space is open for Boarders' (aged 12 to 18 years) Prep as well as Day Girls who are part of the 'Open for Learning' program. At this time, yet another convergence of cultures occurs. Just as the idea of breaking down the walls of the classroom and the library are central to this project, so is opening up the mood and the facilities to Boarders doing homework alongside Day Girls.

In providing such a space, some of the lock-step nature of year level, class, time, space and individual difference is loosened. Is there something helpful to an ethic of enquiry, study, co-operation and friendship, in being part of such an unlocking?

Conclusion

Last year, about this time, I wrote:

> **THE FIRST DAY**
> *The highlight of our first day was the overall positive response to a beautiful, if incomplete and not fully functioning, library. Classes desperately sought room to be there – even if it meant sitting on the floor or perched on a windowsill. We were asked to book three classes into the central part of the library – every class*

period if necessary. Despite there being next to no seating, they were there. The Lounge Room, even without any data or Wi-Fi connectivity was danced and sung in, as Vivaldi played. The old encyclopedias lend atmosphere and, well, weight, to the glass, the aluminum and even to the tasteful laminate prominent in the rest of the library. Importantly, the lack of group homework seating was bemoaned. This is part of an overall issue with our space, I propose. There is a lack of nooks and crannies in the whole. We will have to make those slick, sleek glass classrooms able to be transformed more easily into something the students will feel is different from still being in a classroom. We would like to, together, create and recreate private spaces in the whole as and when the teacher-centred time gives way to individual and/or group use of the space. We will have to, after all, clutter up the smooth sweep of carpet between shelves for small groups 'being and collaborating' together, by choice, here, in the library, out of school hours.

Happily, students have created, and daily re-create, those private spaces and the initial excitement of the students remains high, so that St Hilda's School Senior Library is a vibrant, useful and comfortable learning space that continues to evolve in connection with teaching and learning and in tune with our community. Importantly, the library staff have been empowered, along with the students and teachers, in making the space their own.

My claim, finally, is that, in opening our doors directly to other spaces and to sharing these spaces, we are also part of a transformation in education where the inclusive, creative and empowering natures of a wonderful education, are allowed to grow and support deep learning.

Editor's Note: A version of this article was first presented at the 2015 IASL Conference in Maastricht, The Netherlands.

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