

Title Slide Landscaping your Library - Barbara Braxton - SLAQ 2008

Slide 2 Workers

In 1999, eminent management researcher, Peter Drucker predicted that in Information Age workforce of the 21st century the most successful person will be a *knowledge worker* – one who has had a strong formal education, is able to apply theory to a practical world, and can continually update their knowledge and upgrade their skills. They will be able to access, evaluate, interpret and use information and be committed to lifelong learning. Their greatest assets will be what is between their ears and their ability to continually learn.

Slide 3 Library

The library is the information center of the school and its staff are the information specialists. We know how to provide “[the] services that make specific suggestions about how to use the information, [how to] ask specific questions regarding the user's business and practices, and perhaps provide interactive consultation” that Drucker (2001) says are necessary for the knowledge worker to be able to make meaning from the information.

It is in the library, and through the programs and products that we offer, that the knowledge workers of the future will be nurtured.

Slide 4

But to be nurtured, they need to be in the library and so it needs to be a place that invites them in.

Slide 5 Hogwarts

Does your library look like the one ruled over by Madam Pince at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series - “tens of thousands of books, thousands of shelves, hundreds of narrow rows”?

Are those books standing shoulder-to-shoulder like soldiers in mufti, in strict alphabetical or numerical order, ranks only broken when some clever student breaks the code and finds what she is looking for? Is it quieter than troops being inspected by the general, a place only for reference and research, serious study, and no nonsense?

Slide 6 Bulletin Boards

Or is it a place that invites and excites?

Slide 7 Learning about Learning

As well as Drucker's research, research into learning tells us

- the brain functions at many levels simultaneously as thoughts, emotions, imagination, predispositions and physiology interact and exchange information with the environment
- the brain absorbs information both directly and indirectly, continually aware of what is beyond the immediate focus of attention, to the extent that 70% of what is learned is not directly taught.
- learning involves conscious and unconscious processes, including experience, emotion and sensory input, and that much of our learning occurs and is processed below the level of immediate awareness so that understanding may not happen until much later after there has been time for reflection and assimilation

- the brain is “plastic” because its structure is changed (or ‘rewired’) by exposure to new experiences so the more we use it, the better it gets.
- the brain is stimulated by challenge and inhibited by threat, so students in safe, secure environments, both mental and physical, can allow their cognitive brains to dominate their emotional brains and will explore, investigate, take risks and learn.
- that 30%-60% of the brain’s wiring comes from our genetic makeup (nature) and 40%-70% comes from environmental influences and impact (nurture)
- the two critical factors in learning are novelty and interactive specific feedback

Slide 8 Four Worlds

As well, John Holt talks to us about the four worlds of learning.

The first world is that intense, personal world of our thoughts, emotions, values, and preferences based on our experiences and how they have all merged to give us our perception of the world. It is a changing world, but the common core of beliefs strengthens as we age as we tend to take from experiences, that which confirms those beliefs.

The second world is that of memory of what we have actually seen and done. It is the world of direct experience, the things we have seen, felt, smelt, touched, heard, tasted by ourselves and with others. Our interactions with the world around us shape our World 1.

The third world is the world we know because we have learned that it exists. It is the world of books, television, movies, plays, pictures, the internet – it is the world of words and pictures that others create for us to learn about.

The fourth world is the world we don’t know about yet. It has no boundaries. It is a world of possibilities because we don’t know what is in it simply because we don’t know what we don’t know.

As we learn each world influences the other. Learning is how we integrate our experiences into our knowing.

Slide 9 Gateway

The library is the gateway to World 3. Through the world of words and pictures we can introduce our students to worlds that they don’t yet know, or explore the worlds they have visited via television, the movies or the internet.

Slide 10 Libraries

The library allows them to revisit their experiences in World 2, to shape their World 1 and have a peek into World 4.

The astute teacher-librarian will realize the impact these research findings can have on the services we offer and how we offer them.

With a little imagination, it is easy to compromise between the austerity of Hogwarts and the flamboyance of the bookstore that thinks it is a coffee shop. Your library can be a place where the students choose to be even when they don’t have to, as well as a must-see on the principal’s itinerary when prospective parents are shown through the school. And you know that the environment is built around sound pedagogical principles.

Giving your library the WOW factor does not mean having to change any of your core business practices. It just means examining *what* you do, and considering *how* you could do it with a bit more flair.

Slide 11 Place your Space

Whether you are planning a brand new library or renovating an established one it is important to go back to basics and identify

- what is the purpose of your school library
- who are its target users
- what are their interests, needs, abilities and priorities
- what essential services must be provided to meet those needs and priorities
- which parts of the library are best suited to providing those services
- what is the library's role in helping students develop an awareness for and appreciation of aesthetics

Answering those questions means you can develop a plan that organizes your space and provides you with a priority list of projects.

Slide 12 Place your space tips

Slide 13 Floor Plans

Create a scale floor plan of your space and mark in the fixed furniture and fittings, windows and power supplies.

Check your building or district fire safety regulations so you comply with their entry/exit requirements, what can be put on walls and hung from ceilings and any other constraints.

Using your priority list, place spaces that are dependent on those non-negotiables such as your quiet reading spot near the natural light and the computers near the power sources.

Top priority, however, must go to being able to see as much of the space as possible from the circulation desk or wherever it is that you spend the majority of your time. This may even mean having closed-circuit camera surveillance because the legalities of duty-of-care demand that such supervision is essential.

Duty of care requires "everything 'reasonably practicable' to be done to protect the health and safety of others at the workplace" and includes

- providing and maintaining a safe environment and equipment
- information and instruction about the use of equipment
- supervision of students to ensure safe work practices
- monitoring conditions at any workplace to ensure the highest safety standards are maintained

As well as duty of care, as educators we are also charged with being *in loco parentis* which means being "in place of the parent". Therefore we have extra responsibilities relating to student supervision so it is critical that we take all possible precautions.

Slide 14 Size and Space

Having taken those top-level priorities into account, you need you consider the unique aspects of being a child, especially if you are working with younger students. You need to bring the kids into the world of words before you can put the world of words into the world of kids.

What to us seems to be a regular space and regular proportions, especially if we are familiar with it because it is our daily environment, can be very overwhelming for a small child. So we need to consider bringing the space down to their size and make it as friendly as possible so they feel that this is a place for them and they are welcome in it.

High ceilings that seem to soar almost to heaven, can be "brought down" by hanging things like kites, or signs or swathes of fabric. Connect the floor and the ceiling with Jack and the Beanstalk or other displays, or build semi-permanent displays on top of shelves. All fool the eye into thinking that this is a manageable space to operate in.

Slide 15 Welcome

First impressions are critical so what happens at the front door is really important. Have the children create a Welcome sign and surround it with the word in all the languages spoken in your school. This display is a constant talking point even though it has been up for several years. Children traveling overseas often bring us a doll to add to the collection!

On either side of the front door there is a water feature offering some movement and sound (the library is a *talking* place) that was our contribution to the ISLD Growing the Future project that was initiated after September 11, 2001. The poem above is the students' version of John Marsden's *Prayer for the 21st Century*.

There is also an imposing RETURNS box. As well as making for easier administration, it serves as a constant reminder for those who are forgetful. This one is made from cardboard boxes and accessories from El Cheapos and it works for our little people but a more sophisticated one could easily be an opportunity for collaboration between you and the staff and students of the technology department.

Slide 16 Displays

If you can, create a large eye-catching display to catch the eye as people enter the library. This can be seasonal, topical, whimsical or fanciful. The best are big, bright, bold and beautiful and either incorporate the students' world or offer them something to interact with. Books, both fiction and non-fiction are displayed with the topic and these are able to be borrowed while the interest is piqued. It all helps to create the perception that the library is an exciting and interesting place to be, somewhere where it is worthwhile to spend their time because there are always new things to discover.

Slide 17

30 quirky quickies

Slide 18

Have a special story teller's chair

Slide 19 Rooms or Rows?

After making the space student-friendly, the most important consideration is access to the resources by the students. They need to be able to find either what they specifically want, or something that appeals to them, very quickly – that is the instant-gratification nature of the 21st century child. The days of reading reviews, browsing titles, reading blurbs, flicking through pages and looking at pictures have slipped away. Even using the OPAC for leisure reading selections comes second-place to an eye-catching display, a quirky title or a colorful cover.

Even though the need for orderly, organized access is imperative for staff and important for students, rows and rows of shelves can be daunting.

So think about how you can create or rearrange sections that make the popular titles easy to find by even the youngest patron or the most reluctant reader.

Put yourself in the shoes of the new entrant who can confidently and independently find the books about dinosaurs. How do you feel?

Put yourself in the shoes of the 6th grade student who would love to learn more about Tyrannosaurus Rex but does not want to publicize his ignorance about numbers by having to ask for help. How do you feel?

Investigate the sorts of books that your students, especially the reluctant readers, consistently borrow and then group these books together.

Slide 20 Fiction displays

Consider grouping favourite fiction titles, series, characters and authors together so

- the students can find all the works by their favourite authors quickly because they are all in one place
- all the books in a series are collected together
- shelves are not so tightly packed or left scattered and shattered after a class has been in
- shelving is easy and quick

Consider putting

- all the fairy tales (usually at 398.2) under the banner of Timeless Tales – experience shows that these are the first choice of the new students making the transition from pre-school and being able to find such familiar favourites gives them a feeling of confidence and independence
- all the perennial favourite characters such as Winnie-the-Pooh, Franklin, Spot, Arthur, and Elmer under the banner of Family Favourites – again, the children feel very grown up being able to find these for themselves and show their parents who often come in after to school to borrow together.
- all the series in their own tubs under the banner Select-a-Series –ice cream containers, lunch boxes and planter boxes are sturdy, cheap and easy to obtain
- all the works by popular and prolific authors together.

If you see a display stand in a shop, don't be shy about asking if you can have it when their display is over for your library. Often they will be grateful that they don't have to worry about disposing of it. Cover any unwanted advertising with colorful, self-adhesive paper, turn the header board inside out and create your own, and for the time it took you to collect it, you have a personalized yet professional stand.

Ask for the posters and any other paraphernalia that accompanies the display and then re-create the display in your library.

Even though it make take some time to arrange your collection like this, the increase in circulation and students' discussions and recommendations will make it more than worthwhile.

Slide 21 Listening In

Group your read-alongs together and create a listening station

Slide 22 Comfort Zones

By carefully considering how and where you will place these sections you can build a series of "rooms" or spaces that also help to make that barn-like space child-friendly. If you have space (and the time to hunt around second-hand shops) create some comfortable seating areas where reading can be done in comfort.

Slide 23 Uncover the covers

Let's return to one of those principles of learning that I spoke about at the beginning

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- the brain functions at many levels simultaneously as thoughts, emotions, imagination, predispositions and physiology interact and exchange information with the environment

Many researchers have proven that the key factor in book selection is the book's cover, so it makes sense to display as many books with their covers showing as you can. Think of some of the more successful bookstores that you have visited. Do you spend ages getting a crick in your neck because it is turned sideways to read titles on spines? Or are you attracted to those books whose covers you can see? Did you know that, just as in supermarkets, publishers pay bookstores for a book to be displayed with the cover facing out, because they know that the cover sells the product?

Like us, children don't choose books that look like they have "don't touch me" signs on them, that are lined up with just a sliver of spine bravely trying to sell themselves and packed so tightly that little fingers cannot prize them apart, creating a barrier rather than a gateway.

Make mini-displays wherever you can to give the students greater access. These can be about anything that takes your or the students' fancy, be as large or as small as space allows, and be as temporary or permanent as you want, but the aim is to get the covers of the books to catch the eye.

Slide 24 Read and Review

Encourage the children to have their say.

Slide 25 Facing Facts

In the 1870s, Melville Dewey spent a lot of time organizing subject areas to create a classification system that is now used in more than 200,000 libraries in 135 countries in more than 30 languages. According to the Online Library Computer Center (OCLC), the official owners of the Dewey system, 95 percent of all public and K-12 school libraries use the system.

While it is very important that our students know how to use this system to be able to find specific titles, and there is a strong argument that understanding how to locate a resource is a transferable lifelong skill, it is not much use to them if the students cannot and do not want to read. So, in the elementary system at least, there is an equally strong argument for manipulating the arrangement so that students are encouraged to choose to read. Time enough for them to learn the difference between 994.04 and 994.4.

The nature of non-fiction means that more-or-less adhering to the Dewey Decimal Classification system in this sector of the library makes sense. Even if you use a simpler adaptation to meet the needs of your students, staying within the basic concept encourages independence and helps them build lifelong skills.

Nevertheless, it is still possible to make certain subjects easier to access and circulate. Again, do some in-house investigations to identify the subjects most often borrowed by the students, particularly for leisure reading. Books about topics such as space, pets, dinosaurs and cars are usually borrowed before they are shelved, so consider giving these a space of their own in your non-fiction section.

Be very aware of what is being studied in classrooms, is on the news, or is topical with students and be pro-active by displaying resources about those subjects while they are of such interest.

Slide 26 Books in tubs

Consider putting

- all the picture puzzle books (usually at 793.73) under the banner Pick-a-Puzzle
- all the joke and riddle books (usually at 808.88) under the banner of Side-Splitters
- all the Horrible Histories, Horrible Science and their cousins on a stand
- all those skinny beginner information series in baskets or a stand so that even the kindergarten children can find something of interest
- all the books about your country together

Despite their not being in strict Dewey order, students very quickly learn to locate their favourite sections so they can make their selections independently.

Circulation data shows that non-fiction displayed in a similar way to fiction is much more likely to be borrowed, and that even if the reader is just looking at the pictures, there is a lot of information being absorbed, including the format and structure of this type of text.

Slide 27 Sign Up

Whether you landscape your library strictly according to the principles of the Dewey system, or whether you are more flexible, the key to unlocking the space for the user is signage. Everything must be clearly labeled so that even the very youngest student, or one with specific special needs, can find what they are looking for with a minimum of help. Being able to find what you want for yourself is very empowering and being able to show someone else, particularly a parent, is the icing on the cake.

Slide 28 Tips for Signage

Use large letters; back up words with pictures; generally, use large, dark lettering on light backgrounds and the opposite for special effects; use plain sans serif fonts and capitals for short captions only.

Somewhere near the non-fiction section display posters that summarize the DDC system and also a ready reference so that the student wanting a book about the moon can see at a glance that there will be something at 523.3. Use child-friendly language and illustrations to make it easier for them.

In your non-fiction section label the shelves so the student can see just which numbers are housed there, but make sure they know that 500-510 also includes the numbers in between. If you have space, list the main topic areas covered. Sub-divide the books into practical breaks using index blocks available from your library-supply store, or recycle plastic video boxes. Make it really easy for the very young by making mobiles from lightweight toys from El Cheapos strung together with fishing line for strength and invisibility. Hang these above the appropriate sections.

In your fiction section, label every "room", shelf, container and display, particularly if you have diverged from the standard DDC layout. Such clear signage means that students soon learn where to look for those out-of-order books and shelving them after they have been returned also becomes much easier, especially for student and parent volunteers.

Slide 29 Words Words Words

Returning to yet another principle of learning ...

- learning involves conscious and unconscious processes, including experience, emotion and sensory input, and that much of our learning occurs and is processed below the level of immediate awareness so that understanding may not happen until much later after there has been time for reflection and assimilation

we can do much to support our students' reading by ensuring displays have captions or even provocative questions that lead to further investigations. Bare walls can be covered with children's work samples or charts that support their learning. It will all be absorbed at an unconscious level.

Wherever you can have the students design and construct the charts. Charts can include behaviour guidelines, borrowing instructions, instructions for using the OPAC or caring for books. It gives them ownership of the space and is one more way to put the world of words into their world.

Slides 30 -35 Tricks of the trade

Retailers spend millions of dollars on market research to identify what entices customers to buy and what turns them off

So you don't have to be an interior designer (frustrated or otherwise) to landscape your library. Every time you go shopping, look at displays and how they are constructed and then take the ideas and elements and reproduce them.

Think of it as recycling – their research and its output into your environment – two displays for the cost of one!

There are many subtle ways that they get us to part with our money. Consider how you might employ some of these tempters in your library.

- Look at the colours that are used to attract the eye – the younger generation likes garish and bright, not moody and subtle
- Different levels of lighting literally create variations of light and shade, and thus, different levels of emotions. Although your reading corner should be near natural light, add a regular reading lamp to build atmosphere. Ensure workspaces are brightly lit but illuminate special displays with soft, gentle lighting to help draw attention to the space it helps define. Christmas lights can add sparkle to displays all year round.
- Music and sound effects can also add atmosphere to a display, but keep the volume low out of consideration for all users.
- Commercial bookstores have incorporated coffee bars because they know the invitation of the smell of hot coffee and home-cooking but this is probably not a practical option. Researchers have also looked at the role of smell in stimulating the brain and aromatherapy is now making its way into classrooms. But think of those with allergies - even a simple vase of fresh flowers can be a trigger.
- Use objects that the students can touch and investigate so the display becomes interactive.
- Place your returns box and checkout counter near the main exit but allow enough space for one class to be coming in while another is checking out.

- Have an enticing main display near the entrance to not only to attract visitors but also give those waiting in the checkout queue something to look at and maybe borrow. Books placed here can increase circulation exponentially.
- Be aware of traffic aisles, especially those to emergency exits. Watch where your students go as soon as they come in and make sure the pathway is wide enough. If you want to highlight a 'slow' section of your collection, make the display near this pathway.
- Hard floor surfaces are used where customers are moving from one section to another, but to encourage browsing, carpet is used. If you have a special area where you want the children to linger longer, add a rug on top of the carpet.
- Use short, low shelving to maintain the feel of openness and create extra area for signage and displays on the ends. In the elementary library, no shelf should be higher than the youngest child can reach. Stools and steps invite accidents but if you do have tall shelves, put these near walls. Consider using the top shelves for displays only.
- Although shelving by genre is an easier option for bookstores than libraries, research shows that this does increase circulation. Rather than reorganizing your whole library, use the sorts of sections already suggested and complement these with bookmarks that suggest other titles by the author, other titles in the genre, other titles on the subject and "If you like ... try ..."
- Include a "Recommended Reads" section near your circulation desk to temporarily house the students' current favorites, and slip a card in the cover saying who recommended it.

Slide 36

With just a little knowledge and lots of imagination you can make your library a model of the very best in student learning environments and know that you are putting the world of words into the world of kids.

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