

Library Alive! – a new look for the future...

Whether you are designing, renovating or revitalizing your School Library Information Centre, there are a number of key considerations and steps to follow that will guide you along the way. If you are moving to another library or if you are a new teacher-librarian, the same considerations will assist you in creating a space that reflects your program, your philosophy and that of your school community.

Before getting into the functional components of the library (re) design, consideration should be given to the program plan and to identify and set program priorities to be reflected in the physical space. Discuss the focus of the library program with staff and students and reflect the input in your development of the plan and determine how they can best be reflected in the space. Does an inviting entrance focussing on a reading program take priority over a bank of computers? Or is the program heavily focussed on new technologies? What impact does the focus on teaching and learning styles and multiple intelligences have on the space utilization? How can the design of the space contribute to truly making it the learning and information hub of the school?

The physical layout will determine how many students, small groups or whole classes can be accommodated and what learning activities can be provided and supported. The general traffic flow and organization will determine how efficiently and effectively resources will be used. A well designed library information centre will have space for individual, small group learning and whole class instruction, research, reading, listening, viewing and producing multimedia or dramatic presentations. Students will become actively engaged in their learning in the School Library Information Centre when they are able to:

- Research, read and use technology individually (or in a group)
- Collaborate in small groups
- Learn as participants in full class instruction
- Access a variety of leisure reading materials – books and periodicals
- Produce final products that are professional in appearance and content
- Present their culminating work through multimedia, drama and other modes of communication

The key considerations for facility planning for the exemplary learning environment can be divided into six areas:

- Create an inviting and welcoming entrance
- Consider learning areas – for teaching, learning and production
- Build in flexibility
- Plan the traffic flow
- Think about spatial relationships, clear sight lines
- Integrate technology considering connectivity and access

An inviting and welcoming entrance:

- Sets the tone and defines the program – does the entrance stimulate interest in the program? i.e. are there reading promotional displays, multicultural posters, newsletters, new technologies showcased? What are the promises that entice students in?
- Is colourful, bright and interesting – are there attractive bulletin boards, display cases, colourful banners and posters? Are activities highlighted and easily accessed? Are the colours and textures attractive?
- Exhibits student art work – are the displays current and renewed on a regular basis? Is it a Gallery of student work in the Visual Arts, Computer graphics, and Design and Technology?
- Promotes user friendly access to reading and information – does it highlight programs like Silver Birch and red Maple? Are the new books up front, inviting and changed on a regular basis? Are curricular materials well displayed and current?
- Provides direction through coordinated and well placed signage – are there brochures and signage with clear location of resources? Is each area- reference, production, reading well defined and signed? Are the resources neat and well organized with appropriate display and format shelving.

Learning Areas– teaching, learning and production areas

- Full class teaching area –with whiteboard, overhead projector, and data projector with computer workstation.
- Work areas for small groups – conferencing areas, seminar rooms, furniture appropriate size and configuration.
- Production areas – media and publishing with scanner, digital still and video cameras, video-editing equipment, colour printer, photocopier, binding machine and laminator.
- Presentation areas – screens, equipment in place and easily accessed – data projector and high-end computer workstations, video – conferencing and broadcasting area and small dramatic production facility.
- Listening/Viewing areas – TV/VCR units for previewing. Audi equipment with earphones.

- Individual area for leisure reading and study – carrels with data ports for quiet student work, Comfortable seating and attractive shelving and spinners and display racks for books and periodicals.
- Reference section – for quick access even if other classes are in the library. Atlas stands, dictionary stand, display and storage for periodicals.
- Archives- safe, clean appropriate storage area. Attractive display area with temperature and lighting controls.
- Storytelling (primary) – reading circle and primary instruction area. Small drama area, costume storage, picture books shelved and displayed at appropriate heights.
- Computer pods or labs well integrated – located and integrated with other learning areas with data drops inconspicuous but accessible. Ergonomic furniture with cables well covered in channels.
- Work spaces and office area easily identified and visible – large windows with good viewing capabilities. Locked storage, processing area with telephone, fax and data lines available. High-end computer technology. Controls for student computers – power sources etc., Collaborative teacher planning and meeting space.

Build in flexibility:

- Perimeter shelving provides more space for teaching areas – adjustable and specialized shelving for materials in a variety of formats with room for expansion.
- Mobile freestanding shelving – adjustable and easily moved, sturdy and specially designed for weight of larger format- reference and art books.
- Adjustable/moveable furnishings – modular units that are pleasing in design when combined. Appropriate for the type of resource for display, organization and storage i.e. picture book, CD racks.
- Consider future expansion – what happens if more computers or additional multimedia technology arrives? How can it be easily and aesthetically and functionally integrated? Can items be moved to ensure traffic flow is not interrupted?

- Data/power connections in grids or many locations throughout especially perimeter – include false floors, raceways, data ports and wireless.

Plan the traffic flow:

- Ensure all areas can be accessed and utilized without interfering with one another – Internet, databases, periodicals, fiction and nonfiction, and videos can all be equally well accessed. This may be a signage or instructional checklist issue or a location issue.
- Track the flow of traffic and determine the patterns to ensure efficient access and movement – assign a separate colour to each major functional area such as technology, instruction, reference, fiction; draw lines connecting like- coloured areas (i.e. research could include reference, non-fiction) and determine if there are any crossovers or conflicts that impede the traffic flow or efficiency of access.
- Work areas for processing, storage, and meeting for collaborative planning easily accessed. There should be locked storage shelves for supplies, shelves for new materials and comfortable teacher planning and meeting area.
- Circulation area that is modular, low enough for young students and wheelchair access. Often this area needs to be reconfigured to accommodate new circulation computers and OPACS.
- Self check out and security placed for ease of use and movement – the check out area should not constrain traffic of access to materials and security need to be close to exit without allowing materials to be passed around.
- Search stations centrally located – search capabilities through a web browser should be available on all computers in the school.

Spatial relationships, clear sight lines:

- Office windows, pillars and shelving positioned to allow view of entire library for ease of supervision – computer workstations can be positioned around pillars to take advantage of a circular configuration. The height of shelving, positioning of tables and other furniture should be such that all areas can be supervised from the circulation desk.

- Lighting positioned for most effective use near computers and working areas – should be centrally controlled with dimmers and low voltage switches where appropriate.
- Task lighting and natural lighting to allow for various functions without glare or shadows – quality and quantity of light is an important consideration. Window and skylight treatments must allow for room darkening.

Integrate technology considering connectivity and access

- Computer workstations should enhance the productivity and allow for work without disturbance to others – create pods and sound buffers to separate from quiet work or instructional areas.
- Connectivity to data and power should include a variety of locations – grid in floor, conduit in columns, inserts in floor or portable columns from ceilings. Include surge protectors and grounded wiring.
- Presentation areas should provide ease of use and compatibility to maximize effective use – ceiling mounted data projectors with wireless remote make for effective teaching tools. Creative placement in respect to other areas maximizes potential use of media equipment.
- Access and security for technology must be considered –locking mechanisms should be built in and maintained.

Each facility, each school community, each teacher-librarian will have a different way of working with the considerations outlined in this article. Beginning with a program plan is the first step; consulting with the staff and students is another important step. Using the six key considerations, develop a template and give it to staff and students for input. Ask them to identify “*what they think is a key consideration under each heading*”. This is a quick way to get some feedback and ideas.

Use the considerations above, develop a checklist and walk around your library with a clipboard and a big marker. Check off things that immediately stand out and prioritize. Once you do this, you’ll be immediately seized by the “housecleaning bug” and you won’t stop until you’ve cajoled your principal, your custodian and even your family to help bring your library back to new life.