

Libraries Designed for Kids

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Preface

Libraries Designed for Kids is a one-stop resource for both architects and librarians seeking to create new and exciting libraries for children. As such, it is intended to serve three critical purposes:

1. Guide to the planning process
2. Manual for planning a children's library
3. Reference book for specifications and details critical to effective library design

Years ago, we thought of children's libraries as merely scaled-down adult spaces. Today's younger generations are fortunate to instead have wonderfully conceived and built libraries planned exclusively for them, such as the following:

- The Experience Library in Cerritos, California, that emphasizes the tactical experience of using a library
- The San Francisco Exploratorium and the Queens Borough Public Library, New York, both of which seamlessly integrate hands-on exhibits into the fabric of a children's library
- The Family Place Library initiatives across the country that emphasize family use by welcoming parents and caregivers to share the library experience with their children
- The ImaginOn in Charlotte, North Carolina, that features creative experiences involving the five senses
- The Robin Hood school libraries in New York City that show how small budgets in the hands of innovative architects can make libraries exciting places by featuring the letters and words of students

These model libraries take vastly different approaches to serving the needs of our youngest users, yet each brilliantly meets the library mission.

Libraries Designed for Kids can be used by school and public librarians to design new or adapt existing spaces to better serve today's and tomorrow's generations of young learners. Architects will find interesting ideas as well as practical information to implement exciting new experiences.

Organization of This Book

The organization of this book parallels the planning and design phases of creating a new library space. We begin with conceptualization and evaluation. The Introduction establishes the need for library spaces to be designed especially for children. Chapter

1 describes major innovations in children's library design concepts that were incorporated into several specific library systems and discusses the special design considerations of school libraries. Chapters 2 and 3 outline steps in the evaluation and planning processes and show how to determine the size needs for delivering effective children's services in communities of different sizes.

Design details are addressed next. Chapters 4 and 5 emphasize important design features in general. Chapters 6 through 9 discuss the design concepts related to the functions of the different spaces within the children's area. This part of the book shows, for example, how the spaces for younger children should differ in design from the areas for older children and young adults, how multipurpose areas can be designed to accommodate diverse programming, how staff and storage areas can be effectively integrated, and how to select the appropriate furnishings and equipment for the different areas. Chapters 4 through 9 are structured both for general reading and for use as a ready-reference source for specifications.

Chapter 10 discusses "quick fixes," helpful when there are minimal resources available to address space problems and design mistakes.

The appendices will be useful from initial planning through moving in. Appendix A shows how children in focus groups talk about their own library needs. Appendices B and C present two case studies, one for renovation of a small library and one for designing a large, new space. The annotated readings listed in Appendix D provide the reader an opportunity to further explore the subject. Appendices E and F, which list suppliers and architects, respectively, are a handy reference to support the design and implementation stages.

The most important aspect of a children's library is the opportunity it provides librarians to motivate children to love books. The physical design of the space can support this by centering the design on the staff and on the beautiful books. As children learn to use the library on their own, a good design will make the process easy and interesting and therefore successful. These two elements—staff effectiveness and children's self-service—should be the guiding principles that shape the design.

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My wife Louise Blalock worked for many years as a children's librarian and was invaluable in the editing process. Children's librarians in Hartford, Simsbury, Avon, and Middletown, Connecticut; Queens, New York; Bath, Maine; and Hershey, Pennsylvania, and dozens of other libraries contributed to my knowledge of how children use libraries. Peter Gisolfi, Jeffrey Hoover, Elizabeth Martin, Tony Tappe, Stew Roberts, Rick Schoenhardt, Bill Connor, Kevin Hom, and Juergen Riehm, to name just a few of the architects with whom I have worked over the years, have helped to shape my thinking on design issues. The Harvard Graduate School of Design's Public Library Workshop has annually given me an opportunity to listen to the dialogue between architects and librarians.

My associate Mary Beth Mahler has been invaluable in going over the manuscript and suggesting changes as well as taking photographs.

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INTRODUCTION

Improving Service by Design

This book is intended to help children's librarians improve their services by improving their facilities. The overriding theme of *Libraries Designed for Kids* is the idea that children need to be encouraged to make their own choices about what to read in addition to being guided to appropriate books by knowledgeable librarians.

Last November, I heard an inspiring talk given by Cristina Garcia, author of *Dreaming in Cuban*. She said, "There is no more devoted a reader than a ten-year-old that has found a book they liked." *Libraries Designed for Kids* discusses how to create a place where this happens often, where the young reader and the book can be connected.

I have six grandchildren, and I am encouraged about how this generation relates to libraries and books. My grandchildren are all avid readers with very different reading tastes. The champion reader in the family is Olivia Barber, who has read every Harry Potter novel six times. She is so obsessed with books that when she gets off of her school bus to walk the two blocks home, the first thing she does is take a book out of her backpack to read so that she doesn't miss a moment of reading time. She idolizes her school librarian, Mrs. Rabino-witz, because she finds books that Olivia likes. Olivia's major complaint about libraries is that they don't make it easy for kids to find books because there are so many categories. Libraries that split up their collections into chapter books, science project books, picture books, tall books, and other categories that do not suggest the subject matter are often frustrating for children seeking to find a book on a particular subject or by a particular author.

Another granddaughter, Caitlin Lushington, was preparing a research paper on her favorite actress, Audrey Hepburn, so I went with her to her local public library in a small town. We arrived a little before closing time, and the librarian was busy reading at the reference desk when we walked in. When he finally looked up and noticed us, Caitlin asked him for material on Audrey Hepburn. He asked her, "Have you tried the Internet?" Caitlin explained that she had searched the Internet, but she thought the library might have some additional material. He suggested looking in the catalog. By this time I was both disappointed with and furious at his lack of interest. Caitlin and I walked over to the Performing Arts section in the 790 area where we found two books, the Biography section where we found an additional book, and the Reference section, where we found an article in *Current Biography*. All of this material enriched her paper, and she enjoyed the process of thinking through the array of subject areas where she might find materials.

This story illustrates how the opportunity for physical activity in libraries can enhance the library experience. Caitlin learned that a variety of research approaches can yield a greater richness than staring at a screen. Library facilities need to be designed with attractions and guides that encourage users to roam about in the rich library environment, hunting and gathering information from a variety of places in the library.

Not Just Information

People sometimes confuse information bytes with knowledge. The Internet provides access to data and information but seldom has the impact that comes from spending ten hours reading a book. Immersing oneself in a period of history, an extended journey to a foreign country, or a real or fictional life story makes the library experience more powerful than acquiring a byte of information. If every seat in a library was an Internet terminal that was in use the entire time the library was open, this use would amount to only one-tenth of the time users spend reading books they borrow from the library, acquiring knowledge, not just information.

Children differ from one another and change with lightning speed, so children's libraries need to be very different places from adult libraries. Children's libraries need to offer alternating environments that respond to children's varying needs. In addition to the internal flexibility afforded by mobile furnishings, children's libraries should offer exciting busy places as well as calming places of refuge.

The Value of Libraries for Children

Defining moments in the intellectual lives of children occur each time they select a book they want to read. Often these moments occur at a children's library. They may result from a librarian taking an interest in nurturing the natural curiosity of a child. A child's imagination may be captured by an intriguing display of the front cover of a picture book. The vital element of these moments is that the act of selecting the book involves the child (see Juan's Story).

Juan's Story

As they walked into the library Juan felt Grandma Louise squeeze his hand. He was amazed at all of the colorful books in brightly lighted bins. He stopped in front of a book that had a large cat on the cover with a very funny-looking tall hat. He lifted the book out and tucked it under his arm as Grandma led him to a cozy corner up a small ramp where they could snuggle into a large armchair. Grandma would turn the pages of the book as she read the story about the cat in the hat. Occasionally Juan would look up from the book and see other kids playing with the large toys, reading, or looking at computers.

When Grandma had finished the story, Juan climbed down from her lap to play with the other children. Grandma walked over to her friend Alicia, and they sipped coffee and shared the latest news. After a while, all of the children gathered around the librarian to hear a story.

Just before Juan and Louise left the library for lunch, Miss Perez helped Juan choose his very own book that he could take home to read. He chose a Spanish story, because his mother likes books in Spanish and she would be happy to read it with him when she came home from work that night.

Children using libraries frequently find out how they can make the organization of the library work to satisfy their own interests. They begin to understand that the library is arranged to bring together material on their favorite subject and even that the subject has a numerically sequenced Dewey Decimal code that assists them in finding what they want. Understanding library organization allows children to learn to control the library (see Johnny's Story).

Johnny's Story

Johnny could hardly wait for boring school to be over. He would hurry to the public library down the street where he could explore the books on space flight that he had just discovered.

He had been coming to the library for some time now, but the last time he came Miss Perez had shown him that the numbers on the spines of the books could lead him to other books on the same subject. Now he noticed the big numbers and their related subject names over the shelves. Miss Perez explained to him what the numbers meant and made sure that the book Johnny picked out was interesting and readable.

Johnny could also sit down at one of those new cool electronic workstations with the chairs on wheels that can go up or down to fit him perfectly. Johnny liked the book/electronic combo because the books told stories about all kinds of space flight adventures, while the computer helped him to understand some of the new words and to find more information on his special subjects. Miss Perez also showed him how to download magazines onto his iPod.

The magic in reading comes from inside the child. The connection between word and brain image creates a special relationship. Good children's library design results from librarians, planners, and architects working together to create a place that will nurture that imaginative special relationship (see Jim's Story, next page).

The International Federation of Library Associations (www.ifla.org) identifies the essential ingredients of a child's successful library experience:

Children of all ages should find the library an open, inviting, attractive, challenging and non-threatening place to visit. Ideally, a children's service needs its own library area, which must be easily recognisable (e.g., special furnishings, decorations and colours) and distinct from other parts of the library. Libraries offer a public space where children can meet each other or can meet others in cyber-space.

A variety of studies demonstrate the effectiveness of libraries in children's educational experiences. In her definitive and classic study *Summer Learning and the Effects of Schooling*, Barbara Heyns (1978) followed sixth- and seventh-graders in the Atlanta public schools through two school years and the intervening summer. Key findings of her research include the following:

- The number of books a child reads during the summer is consistently related to his or her academic gains. Regardless of level of family income, children who read six or more books over the summer gained more in reading achievement during the study period than did children who read less.
- Use of a public library during the summer is more predictive of vocabulary gains than attendance at summer school.

Jim's Story

Jim was a children's librarian who had worked in several libraries that were full of books and uncomfortable chairs, but this new library where he had come to work last week was very different. For the first time, he had his own work space where he could prepare his displays and story programs. The staff chairs were mobile and comfortable, and he could adjust the seat to the right height for his computer.

The customer service location had collaborative oversized electronic workstations where he could work with up to three children to do searches. Rather than having to work at a large service desk, staff wore Vocera speakers hanging from neck straps to communicate with other staff as they freely moved around the room helping people. Jim liked this, especially as a new librarian, because as he worked with children he could also talk with Miss Perez about some of the newer search techniques that the library was using.

Book stacks were low, providing staff with views everywhere in the room so that they could easily spot users who needed help. The stacks were also on wheels, so they could easily be reconfigured. Any materials not immediately available physically could be downloaded electronically.

Computers for staff and children were available both as stand-up units in the book stacks for easy lookups and in comfortable workstations. Next to each computer were some book displays that changed every week.

There were group study rooms for parents and caregivers and for students studying and working at computers together. The area for younger children had lots of book displays and room for children to move around. Parents and caregivers could relax nearby on comfortable chairs with low tables, drink coffee, and chat about their children.

The older children's area had group study zones and more books in low stacks interspersed with interactive exhibits. One exhibit showed the children how scientific principles worked by letting them generate electronic waves, and another one illustrated the relationships among the planets and stars.

The program rooms were fully equipped with overhead projectors and stackable chairs that could be stored out of the way. A special crafts room had folding tables, a counter with a sink, and ample storage space for craft materials. Impromptu storyhours could be easily held in a separate small story area. A computer learning lab was available both for training sessions and for additional workstations when classes were not being held.

- The major factors determining whether a child read over the summer were the following:
 - Whether the child used the public library
 - The child's sex (girls read more than boys but also watched more television)
 - Socioeconomic status
 - Distance between home and a library

According to Heyns (1978: 77):

More than any other public institution, including the schools, the public library contributed to the intellectual growth of children during the summer. Moreover, unlike summer school programs, the library was used by over half the sample and attracted children from diverse backgrounds.

Drs. Donna Celano and Susan Neuman (2001) describe the ways in which public libraries foster literacy skills through summer reading programs and preschool programs:

- Libraries continue to play a major role in fostering literacy, especially among those most needing assistance in developing literacy skills (e.g., preschool and elementary school children).

- Children who have been exposed to library preschool programs showed a greater number of emergent literacy behaviors and pre-reading skills than those in a control group.
- Children who participate in summer reading programs benefit from the many literacy-related activities offered, aiding significantly in literacy development.
- Public library preschool and summer reading programs encourage children to spend a significant amount of time with books.

Celano and Neuman (2001) studied four groups of children who had low reading scores and who came from low-income working families. Two of the groups attended summer reading programs, and the other two attended day camps. After a few weeks in the programs, the children in the summer reading program read significantly better than those who attended the day camp.

Stephen Krashen (1993) identified the following benefits of voluntary reading programs:

- Reading programs encouraged children to spend increased time with books.
- Public library reading programs played an important role in the reading achievement of children who lack access to books and other reading materials.
- Literacy-related activities and events enriched reading experiences, encouraging children to read themselves, listen to stories read aloud, and write about what they'd read.
- Public library programs encouraged parents to become involved in children's reading.
- Reading as a leisure activity is the best predictor of comprehension, vocabulary, and reading speed.
- Skill-based reading exercises (in two studies) did not help comprehension levels. Outstanding high school writers reported extensive summer reading.
- The positive relationship between free voluntary reading and literacy is extremely consistent, even when different tests, different methods of reading habits, and different definitions of free reading are used.
- If children read one million words a year, at least one thousand words will be added to their vocabulary. One study found that this could easily be accomplished by letting children and teens choose any format of reading material they wanted, including comics. Studies also showed that spelling improved with increased reading.

Krashen and Shin (2004) studied the differences in reading gains among children of families in different income brackets. They found that free voluntary reading resulted in improvement in the following areas:

- Reading comprehension
- Writing style
- Vocabulary
- Spelling
- Grammar usage

These improvements were in contrast to poor results from direct reading instruction! From my personal experience, I have seen that increasing access to books and reading through various summer library programs garners tremendous benefits, particularly for children of lower-income families.

As part of a larger reading initiative in Southern California, many public libraries together sponsored the Library Summer Reading Program in 2001. The program was designed to increase children's summer reading. The following results were reported (The Evaluation and Training Institute, 2001):

- Ninety-eight percent of the participating students reported that they liked the program.
- Ninety-nine percent reported that they liked going to the library.
- There was an 11 percent increase in the number of parents reading to their children more than 15 hours per week.
- Before the summer, 77 percent of parents reported that their child read 9 hours or less per week.
- The number of children reading 10–14 hours per week increased 9 percent, and the number of children reading 15 or more books per week rose 11 percent.
- Fifty-five percent of participants had a high enthusiasm for reading compared with less than 40 percent of nonparticipants.
- More participating than nonparticipating students performed at or above grade level in word recognition, reading vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Student perceptions concurred with teacher reports.

In summary:

- Research shows the public library summer reading program enhances student achievement—even when compared to direct instruction.
- Research studies and experiences with promoting summer reading have shown how essential are the partnerships between schools and public libraries.
- Because research strongly supports free voluntary reading, as practiced in most public library preschool programs, it is recommended that state and federal funds be used to support preschool programming in public libraries.

Two further studies are noteworthy. The Urban Libraries Council (2007) studied the relationship between public libraries and economic development. It concluded, “Early literacy initiatives promote reading, prepare young children for school and raise levels of education.” In 2005, a study commissioned by the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Office of Commonwealth Libraries (Griffiths, King, and Aerni, 2006) showed that libraries return almost five times their cost. Other findings include the following:

- People spend thousands of hours reading, listening, and viewing free library materials that would otherwise cost them millions.
- Early childhood educational development saves communities millions by avoiding the need for remedial educational programs.

- Public libraries engage teenagers and create communities of learning and enjoyment that avoid many teenage community problems.
- Homework helpers give valuable assistance with school projects.

Adopt-a-Library Literacy Program

I was asked to speak at the Nova Scotia Library Conference in 2007 and had the good fortune to be driven to the conference by Constable John Kennedy of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. In the course of the trip, he told me a story about how he became interested in the power of public libraries. He was patrolling in a small town in New Brunswick when he spotted some teenagers skateboarding in front of the library. He noticed that although they liked that spot for skateboarding, they never entered the library, so he stopped and asked them why they were never in the library. They answered that the library had no books. He was puzzled by their reply so he invited them to come into the library with him, and he then realized that what they meant was that there were no books in the library that interested teenagers.

John then went to the local school and asked the principal to let him work with the child who had the worst attendance record in the school. When John met and interviewed the boy, John found out that his ambition was to become a truck driver. John bought him a toy truck, placed it in the principal's office, and explained that the child would get the truck if he improved his attendance and started reading.

John then began a campaign to get vendors to contribute books to the library that teenagers would be more likely to enjoy, such as comic books and graphic novels. At the same time he came across statistics that showed that people in jail were overwhelmingly illiterate. He began thinking that a good way to reduce crime would be to encourage kids to use public libraries. He widened his campaign to get books.

John founded the Adopt-a-Library Literacy Program (www.fightingcrime.ca). He soon enlisted the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and the Pictou-Antigonish Regional Library (in Nova Scotia). Now, public libraries, police departments, and local businesses as well as organizations and private individuals work together to raise money for new books. The purpose is to provide community places and activities to discourage violence and drug use. John also started a reading contest, the Reading Challenge, on the Web site. Prizes are awarded to celebrate the world reading championship as a means to motivate local libraries to get their communities reading.

The Adopt-a-Library program promotes the concept of literacy and crime prevention and helps to communicate ideas and opportunities to members and sponsors. All members are free to develop their own strategies based on local needs and directions. A common strategy used by several police agencies and libraries involves the following steps:

1. Police contact local businesses to support literacy as a means of crime prevention.
2. Items donated to libraries are used as prizes to encourage children to read.
3. Donations support summer reading programs.
4. The number of children participating and the number of books they read are tracked as a way of measuring the local impact.

What Draws Children to Public Libraries?

On January 22, 2008, an article in *USA TODAY* quoted a Harris Interactive (2007) online survey of 1,262 youth ages 8–18 conducted June 13–21, 2007 (margin of error 3 percent):

- Seventy-eight percent borrowed items for personal use.
- Sixty-seven percent borrowed items for schoolwork.
- Thirty-four percent read books in the library.
- Thirty-four percent used the Internet for research.
- Twenty-six percent studied.
- Twenty-five percent used computers for fun.
- Twenty percent attended events held at the library.

These results show that most children who visit the library do so to borrow items for personal use. Additionally, the survey shows that a large percentage of children also visit the library to gain access to computer-related services.

This rich mixture of books and computers is an essential element in the design of libraries. Successful children's library designs in the twenty-first century will do the following:

- Give children a choice when selecting their own materials to take home.
- Provide a comfortable place to use computers and do homework.
- Provide a variety of attractive programs.
- Support the work of talented and well-trained children's librarians.

People love stories told in all formats, from puppet shows to pantomimes, films, videos, DVDs, and large-format picture books. The importance of visual aids should not be overlooked when designing libraries for children.

One of the first children's public libraries was initiated by Caroline Hewins in Hartford, Connecticut, just before the turn of the twentieth century. Caroline was a remarkable pioneer in many areas of library service. She had a collection of dolls that she used with children, and she wrote a book about what children read in the 1850s when she grew up. She also worked with families in Hartford boarding houses. Like all great children's librarians, she understood that libraries are about stories. Her library encouraged families and children to see dolls as visual aids to storytelling.

The covers of picture books encourage children to read. The American Library Association (ALA) recognizes the importance of pictures by giving awards not only for books but also for the pictures that accompany them. The Caldecott Medal, named in honor of nineteenth-century English illustrator Randolph Caldecott, is awarded annually by the Association for Library Service to Children, a division of the ALA, to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children.

Encouraging children to use libraries by designing beautiful and nurturing places that welcome them, and their parents and caregivers, to a lifelong experience of the world of books and electronic resources is the most effective way of ensuring a future population of well-informed, intelligent, and productive citizens. The studies cited in

this introduction show the value of reading for children. Key findings are that voluntary reading is more useful than summer school and that public libraries foster learning in preschool children. Children's libraries at their best celebrate reading with displays of words and pictures.

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