

ZONING IN ON

Children's Spaces

Early Literacy Space Planning

Kimberly Bolan Cullin & Angela Schoeneck, April 2012

Children's library spaces are multifunctional places serving a wide range of ages, academic levels, social skills, personal interests and physical needs. One way to successfully serve this diverse group is to zone your children's library collection, activities and overall space by age and function.

This piece focuses on early literacy service and space for birth to age four. This age group requires services that engage and inspire their young minds and corresponding interactive and flexible spaces that encourage literacy development on a variety of levels. Through engaging play, age-appropriate materials and access to dynamic programs, libraries can foster emergent literacy skills essential to school readiness.

The following checklist is a guide to help evaluate space for your youngest patrons and their families.

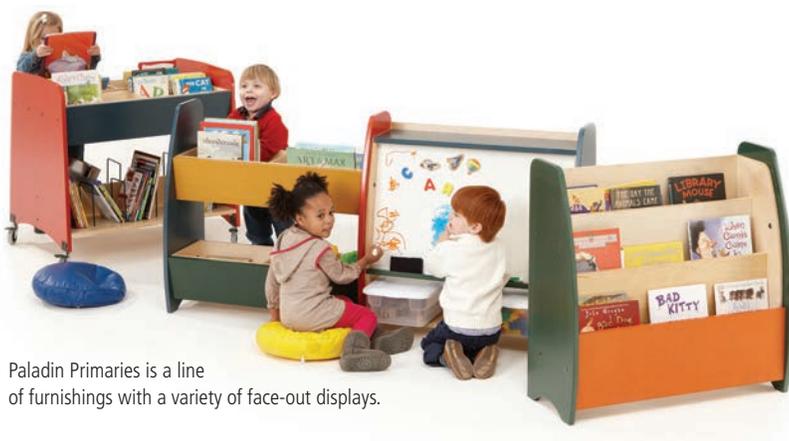
Decor & Furnishings Welcome and Comfort the Young

Decor

- Use a warm color scheme for your overall space. Be aware that color brightness and intensity are useful for attracting attention, but they may not be conducive to learning. Consider brighter colors for accents.
- Strategically place carpets for the safety of children who are crawling, learning to walk and actively interacting with the space.
- Include engaging posters, artwork and other visually appealing items in your space.
- Use pictorial signage and images to help young, nonreading patrons find their way through your collections and your space.



St. Michael Public Library, MN. Book browsers from DEMCO Interiors attract early readers.



Paladin Primaries is a line of furnishings with a variety of face-out displays.



Kidovation is a complete collection of furnishings designed to inspire learning and exploration.

Furnishings

- Include child-size furnishings for kids to sit on by themselves or to interact with one another.
- Incorporate floor cushions or other soft seating (10" H seats) for storytime and other programs.
- Display picture books and board books in floor-level, face-out, flip-through book browsers to actively engage your youngest users and increase your circulation.
- Use all available space to actively engage children. (For example, use end panels for interactive elements.)

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Interactive Spaces Encourage Imaginations and Development

Interactives

Provide a variety of interactive elements that encourage individual exploration as well as group play. For example:

- ❑ Make use of interactive end panels, learning walls and flannel boards.
- ❑ Give young kids natural gathering spots like play kitchens, train tables, general store sets and farm stands.
- ❑ Incorporate early literacy technology workstations for age 2 and up that include educational software programs and book preview kiosks that encourage children to explore the library's collections.
- ❑ Provide a place for kids to be creative through singing, inventing stories and/or acting out stories they've read. This could simply be an open area that encourages general activity, a puppet theater or a small "stage" with puppets and/or dress-up accessories.

Organization & Storage

- ❑ Encourage kids to clean up when they are finished playing. Stickers and stamps are simple ways to reward young helpers.
- ❑ Provide storage bins and/or shelving labeled with both words and pictures for easy organizing.



Peek-a-Book™ technology engages kids with compelling book previews.



Puppet theatres encourage kids to use their imaginations and express themselves through storytelling.



Adult-sized lounge seating with creature comforts make your library a favorite destination

Caregiver Spaces Create a Community Hub and Encourage Family Involvement

- ❑ Provide adult-size seating for caregivers to interact with their children (e.g., encouraging read-aloud) as well as other grown-ups.
- ❑ Arrange the space in a way that provides clear sightlines to play and collection spaces.
- ❑ Place relevant parenting resources and materials conveniently throughout the space. (For example, parenting books and magazines, storytime kits, etc.)
- ❑ Make your space technology-friendly for adults watching and/or waiting for their children. For example, provide access to computers or outlets for laptop plug-in; create adult work areas and social spaces for caregivers to talk.



Comfortable, casual spaces open minds for learning and exploration.

Inspirational Examples

Those who have adopted some or all of the approaches outlined here are developing user-centered, dynamic, inviting children's libraries and are finding children of all ages and their caregivers using the library more than ever. In particular, a few that are forging ahead and provide inspiration to others include:

Arlington Heights Memorial Library, Arlington Heights, IL

Kids' World renovation opened in 2010

<http://ahml.info/kids/>

Hopkins Library of the Hennepin County Library System

Main Street Hopkins: An Early Literacy Play Area

<http://www.hclib.org/News.cfm?ID=4692&agency=Ho>

Kent District Library, Kent County, MI

Play-Grow-Read Services and Spaces

http://www.kdl.org/kids/go/pgr_main

Norfolk Public Library, Norfolk, VA

KidZones!

<http://www.npl.lib.va.us/family/KidZonesInfo.pdf>

Welch Family Children's Wing at the James V. Brown Library, Williamsport, PA

Pennsylvania's first Family Place Library

<http://jvbrown.edu/children/index.html> and <http://www.facebook.com/welchchildrenswing>

Baltimore Public Library, Baltimore, MD

Located in two branches, this is an interactive early literacy and learning center for children ages birth to five and their caregivers.

http://www.bcplstoryville.org/storyville_about.html

Fairfield Public Library, Fairfield, CT

<http://www.fairfieldpubliclibrary.org/children.htm>

Family Places Libraries

A network of children's librarians nationwide who believe that literacy begins at birth, and that libraries can help build healthy communities by nourishing healthy families.

<http://www.familyplacelibraries.org/locations.html>

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DEMCO has been serving librarians for over 100 years. We're proud to offer a wide range of products and services to help you create engaging spaces in your library. Angela Schoeneck is Product Development Manager for DEMCO, Inc. in Madison, WI.