

ZONING IN ON

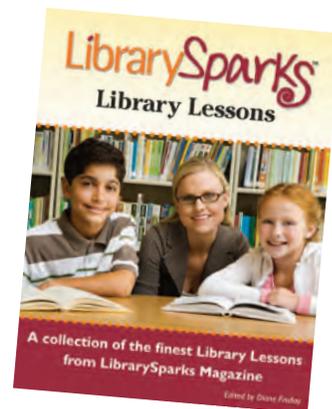
Children's Spaces

Youth Space Planning

Kimberly Bolan Cullin & Angela Schoeneck, May 2012

The early school years are filled with new adventures. Many five-year olds are transitioning from days of play to school routines. Seven- to eight-year olds are becoming more independent and developing personal interests. Overall, school-aged children are learning to be social, the difference between right and wrong and winning and losing. This age group is learning to learn, read, write and become problem solvers. At the same time, they are filled with unlimited energy.

Successful library service to young school-aged children means creating services and spaces that tap into numerous resources that address this age group's needs and engage their developing and curious minds. The following checklist is a guide for evaluating space for this age group so you can begin to develop a place where kids are safe and secure and open to learning.



Library lessons to exercise critical thinking skills and engage varying intelligences and learning styles.

An Inviting, Friendly and Comfortable Atmosphere Keeps Kids Coming Back

Space

Having as many of these "areas" as possible in your children's space will attract a variety of ages and interests. Although the size of your library will dictate the amount of space you can dedicate to each of these spaces, it is important to try to accommodate as many of these as possible to meet the widest variety of needs.

- A Popular Children's Library that features high-interest materials, such as new children's fiction, nonfiction, graphic novels, media/audiovisual materials, magazines, etc.
Note that this will typically be a shared collection with pre-teens.
- Easy access to general collections for this age group including easy readers, upper-level fiction and nonfiction
- Quiet space for studying and recreational reading.
- Social space for chatting, general interaction, etc.
- General collaboration space for group work, teaching opportunities, small-group programming and instruction.
- A collaborative computing area where two people can work together at one computer.
- Interactive areas throughout for active gaming, problem-solving activities, art and literature sharing, etc.
- Large-group programming and event space that can serve a variety of purposes and adapt as needed.



Kingston Springs Elementary School, TN. The floor plan was designed to create unique areas for story time, group technology-based learning, and display space was incorporated into their shelving end panels.



Encourage kids to help each other successfully use technology resources.

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Barclay Elementary School, Brockport, NY.
Make signage easy to read and follow.



Dapplegray Elementary School, CA.
Natural light and pops of color highlight individual areas within the space.

Decor

The decor of the space will set the tone and tell young readers it's not just a space for preschoolers.

- Choose a general color scheme that is attractive and inviting. Create some energy and interest by adding pops of color in strategic places.
- Use carpet tiles and/or area rugs to help define the space and add color and interest.
- Review wall and vertical spaces for places to hang kids' artwork and other visually appealing items.
- Make signage easy to read and follow. Good signage not only enhances the look of the space, it's also a great way to help build confidence.

Furnishings & Fixtures

Appropriate furnishings help define and enhance the look of the space, but also contribute to learning and positive interactions.

- Incorporate comfortable seating in both quiet spaces and social spaces.
- Balance "formal" spaces for collaboration and learning with casual spaces for socializing and developing friendships.
- Include ergonomic seating and tables for computing and technology areas.
- Include chairs with 14" H seats paired with 22"–25" H tabletops.
- Organize and label your materials in a way that helps kids make appropriate selections.
- Make materials accessible by keeping shelving heights at 48". Perimeter shelving can go up to 66" if needed.
- Incorporate displays and storage systems that will enhance the visibility and accessibility of the collection.
- Keep the overall space flexible with tables and chairs and even some shelving that is easily moveable.
- For public libraries with limited space as well as school media centers that are often the hub for hosting events, flexibility is a must.



Interactives

Learning and education comes in many shapes and sizes. At this age, activity is a large part of healthy development. Younger children are learning about balance and coordination and, as they get older, they'll start getting more creative and experiment more with toy and ideas. Incorporating hands-on interactives throughout the space and collection serves to develop much needed skills and connect kids to library materials.

- Include interactive elements throughout the area such as magnetic poetry, whiteboard walls, art gallery space, board games, etc. Remember to incorporate elements such as these on often-empty end panels.
- Include a creativity area where kids can invent and act out stories, sing, etc. This could be an open area that encourages general activity, a puppet theater or a small "stage" with puppets and/or dress-up accessories.



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Interactives *(continued)*

- Create a collaborative computing area. The model has moved away from "one person per computer" to the "collaborative computing" model that enables children to work independently, with a friend or with an adult, so be sure to allow for enough workspace and seating.
- Incorporate other technologies beyond traditional computers such as iPads, listening devices such as iPods, interactive whiteboards, online resources and software, and more.
- Provide access to digital creativity resources including, but not limited to, audio and video production tools, as the library is the place to pull it all together!



Reading with the LeapFrog® Tag is a multisensory experience.



Ramona Public Library, CA.
The main entry into the Kid's Space is bright and welcoming.

Approachable and Welcoming Service

Positive communication is the basis of good relationships and what children need to learn and grow. Good communication to this age group starts with how a library presents itself and interacts with its young users.

- Create a centrally located, friendly service point.
- Include a self-check station for kids to check out their own materials.
- Engage in good merchandising techniques, whether by creating a Popular Children's Library near the main service point, incorporating child-friendly signage and/or incorporating face-out merchandising throughout the area.
- Include digital signage to highlight programs and events for caregivers and older children that will bring them back for new library experiences.
- Provide a safe atmosphere as well as ease of supervision for caregivers. Provide amenities such as seating, laptop access, etc. so adults can easily keep an eye on their children as they engage in the space flexibility is a must.

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:

Queens Library, Jamaica, NY

The Children's Library Discovery Center opened in 2011.

This space includes hands-on, interactive exhibits and learning labs to enable children ages 3-12 to find information and to inspire interest in books, reading and learning while discovering the joy of scientific exploration.

<http://www.queenslibrary.org/kids/discovery>

Arlington Heights Memorial Library, Arlington Heights, IL

Kids' World renovation opened in 2010.

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

Crystal Lake Public Library, Crystal Lake, IL

Doing some great things with interactives for older kids, including SafeSpace Concepts Velcro wall with foam shapes & the Motion by Design tubes/tracks.

<http://www.safespaceconcepts.com> and <http://www.crystallakelibrary.org/Kids/index.html>

For Francis Public Library, Fort Francis, Ontario, Canada

Implemented a variety of items for young school-aged children in a small- to medium sized library environment.

<http://library.fort-frances.com/kids>

St. Mary's County Public Library, Leonardtown, MD

Creating active learning environments for children and their parents.

<http://www.stmalib.org/>

White Plains Public Library, White Plains, NY

Created "The Trove" in 2005.

It is a fun, exciting place where children can discover just about anything. It provides an enticing, multimedia, multisensory learning experience that combines the traditional library with the feel of a bookstore and the stimulation of a children's museum.

<http://thetrove.org/>

Indianapolis-Marion County Public Library, Indianapolis, IN

Opened in 2007, the *Learning Curve* is a high-tech, high-energy, hands-on information environment designed for today's children.

<http://www.imcpl.org/curve/>

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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.