

10/17/2012 Zoning in on Children's Spaces Question Log

Questions from Live DEMCO Event as answered by Kim Bolan Cullin & Janet Nelson

Q: How does one identify non-users for input?

A: It is usually a good idea when developing focus groups to start with your key stakeholders, such as, staff and board members and have them help collaborate and brainstorm on who could be in the group. Ask each stakeholder to identify 10 people who are regular library users and 10 people who normally wouldn't set foot in the library. In a school it is pretty easy to identify the non-users, but for public libraries they could be people that they go to church with, see at the gym or coffee shop or numerous other places around your community. Once you compile those lists you will have a good starting point for a diverse focus group.

Q: How do you do the basic youth population analysis that you showed earlier? Do you just look at the date of birth of library card holders in your system, or do you have a way to account for parents who check out books for children who are too young for library cards?

A: Your population analysis should be based upon the demographic data available for your town, city or the region that makes up your entire service area. Remember to go beyond your library card holders to the general constituency of your area. If you only plan for current library users you may not be maximizing the full potential of your library because your users may not be a good representation of the population of your area. Creating programming and space appropriate for your demographic data allows you to plan appropriately to best meet the needs of your community.

Q: What suggestions do you have for a small library with a teen space that is merged with the children's space?

A: Smaller libraries are certainly challenged when it comes to space and it is difficult to make recommendations without knowing the specifics of the situation. Generally, having a combined teen and children's space is not conducive to good service for either population due to radically different needs in everything from developmental to social needs and more. Again, looking at the demographics, desires and priorities of your population and, if you're a public library, the distance from your local schools. These will all play a key role in deciding how much space is needed for the various age groups.

It is also imperative that you look at the total space available in your library and consider reallocation and repurposing of the overall space to better serve everyone's needs. In some cases, staff space and storage space have been converted to create these areas. In really tough situations, meeting room spaces into after school teen areas.

Q: Will you feature any school libraries?

A: There were a few school libraries represented in the presentation, but many schools need to push a little harder to get themselves out of the more traditional, institutional “box” that they have customarily been working in. For some ideas for updated school libraries take a look at the Portfolio at www.demcointeriors.com. If you are still looking for more ideas, contact Janet Nelson at janetn@demco.com or Kim Bolan Cullin at kim@rethinkinglibraries.org.

Q: What are your suggestions for materials/furniture that do not get "dated"?

A: It is inevitable that trends in colors and styles will change over time and this often contributes to a “dated” feel in a space. Choosing furniture with clean, classic lines helps to ensure that the style will stand the test of time. Fabrics will wear over time and sometimes pieces can be reupholstered after several years of use to extend their life and update the fabric selections. Fabrics intended for heavy use situations will have higher abrasion and stain resistance, as well as other high performance characteristics and help to keep furniture from looking worn quite so quickly. Again, sticking with more classic color combinations will also help to prevent a “dated” look.

Q: Do you know of any grant sources for refurbishing school libraries?

A: It’s good to check with your state library association or local businesses to see if there are any local options available to your library for grants. Grants generally are available for a limited timeframe so it is difficult to pinpoint when they will be available. One of the best ways to be in a position to take advantage of available funds is to have a plan for your space. Sometimes, you will find that once you start developing a plan you can get more people on board with your vision and funding through your parent organization, local businesses or other sources become more of a reality.

Q: I will be buying tables/chairs for grades K-2 and 3-5. They are in separate areas. What looks best?

A: You would have numerous options available and you can reference the selections in Kim’s presentation slides for some ideas that include website references for more information. In addition to these ideas, many libraries are choosing colored plastic chairs over more traditional upholstered wood chairs. These options are lighter, easier to clean and often more comfortable for the students. Often these chairs are also available in multiple heights so you can get the same style chair for both areas which allows for more flexibility in your space. Usually there are coordinating, height adjustable tables to match these chairs. One example of these products can be found at www.smithsystem.com and www.vs-network.com

Q: I love the flip through style and think it would be very appealing to young children. How do you keep the books orderly in this model? Also, how are they organized?

A: It is completely up to the preferences in your library as to how you organize your collection. Some libraries organize alphabetically by author while others choose to group their collections by popular themes or communities of books. The most important thing is for children to be able to find books on their own. Rethink the way that you process your materials so that there are recognizable clues on the cover of the book rather than the spine. It may take a little more time to maintain your collection but it is completely worth it in increased circulation. See Kim’s blog for more information on the benefits of flip-thru picture book shelving

<http://indielibrarian.blogspot.com/search/label/children%27s%20spaces>.

Q: For a small rural school do you feel a stage area can be created and used as a multipurpose area as well? We are hoping to renovate our library within the next year or so. I was wondering about incorporating a stage area since we have no space in the school for class presentations/performances...However I thought I heard you mention stages are a thing of the past...thoughts/ideas?

A: In referencing stages in the presentation Kim was referring to full-blown stages that were built in libraries with auditoriums. Where this is still being done in some libraries and schools, it seems the more flexible and practical thing, especially for small and medium-sized facilities is to create “flex space.” Part of the issue with a built-in raised stage is the lack of flexibility. In order to create “flex space” like this, some libraries have created active / stage areas by varying the flooring to designate the space. Others have used portable risers / platforms / stages that can be set up and taken down as needed. These come in all shapes and sizes. Maintaining as much flexibility as possible in the area is ideal.

Q: Is there a way to create zones when you have quite a bit of shelving and very little floor space?

A. The first step would be to analyze the collection to see what your turnover rates are. From there, take a serious look at your collection size and how things can be adjusted to reduce the number of shelves and to open up floor space. After that, look at rearranging stacks to help create your zones even if it means having two areas – one for the very young (ages – 6) and another for older children (ages 7 – 11 or 12). You’d be amazed at what you can do with a few less stacks and a little rearranging.

Q: How much time does it take to maintain these installations? How much time to pick up the pieces involved” How indestructible are these items? What are the risks of injury?

A: Maintenance times would depend upon numerous factors including size of the area, staff habits throughout the day, how heavily the area is used, etc. The more relevant question is how these installations will help to improve the literacy and enthusiasm for learning of those using the space. Commercial products tend to be more durable than consumer products so they are more appropriate in a library setting. Some products are self-contained and don’t have loose pieces so that is helpful in keeping the area neat and clean. Adult supervision should always be encouraged and if areas are used properly injury risks are relatively minimal. A cleaning schedule for materials in the area is recommended for the health and safety of those using the area.

Q: What do other libraries do to manage noise level?

A: There are several things that should be considered when dealing with sound management in children’s space. If building a new facility, avoid open floor plans without walls between children’s and adult space. This can be very problematic for multiple reasons and is personally not recommended for effective space planning that provides good customer service to all ages. Having an enclosed children’s space is ideal. Noise control is essential in creating an active and successful children’s space that can accommodate a variety of activities simultaneously.

Key elements to help reduce noise and sounds include adding sound-absorbing materials to the area, including to the walls and/or to the ceiling. Many options are available today that are both functional and attractive. Here are two to explore: BuzziSpace BuzziSkin Tile www.buzzispace.com/products/buzziskin-3d-tile and ICF’s Bit Wall Panels www.icfsource.com

Installing carpet tile instead of hard surface flooring also helps reduce noise. Consider the layout of the space too. Oftentimes stacks and furniture can be arranged in a way that helps reduce sound. Movable acoustical partitions for separating various areas can also be extremely helpful. Again, there are many products on the market. A few to consider might be BuzzSpace www.buzzispace.com/products and VersiPanel www.portablepartitions.com/versipaneltm-portable-partition

Q: What is the best way to make a space inviting for older kids while keeping it safe for toddlers?

A: Zoning your area so that there is a progression of spaces that are developmentally appropriate is one of the ways to do this as it creates appropriate spaces for all ages. Focus on creating a “look and feel” that is age appropriate and inviting for older children. Stay away from “thematic décor” that will not have a broad appeal and that will date easily. Incorporate comfortable and fun furnishings and décor that will draw older kids in and encourage them to stay awhile.