

9-16-15 Playful Learning in the Library Q&A Log

Questions from Live Demco Webinar as answered by Ryann Uden and Aly Prchal, Barrington Public Library and Shaun Kelly, Engburg Anderson

General

Q: For how long was the library closed...while renovating?

A: We chose to keep the library open throughout renovation. The project was completed in phases so we were able to move services around as things were renovated. We did utilize some remote storage for off-season collections. We also kept popular materials (new books and DVDs) in the same location for the majority of the construction.

Q: What are the best practices for encouraging play in the library while maintaining safety and being respectful of those who are using the library for more studious pursuits?

A: We strive for a balance, knowing that some customers are here for active experiences or group collaboration while others are here for more solitary pursuits. We have options for people, from small nooks throughout to reservable study rooms -- and some quieter seating along the edges of Youth Services with little interruption from the more active Town Center. As for safety, we like to maintain a few rules such as, "Don't stand in front of the slide" and "Watch out for the younger kids in the area." It's all a bit subjective, of course. We don't mind if people run to greet us or get to their favorite section of the library. However, we discourage kids from playing tag within the space, as it often ends in someone getting hurt or feeling sad.

Q: How do media specialists have items/programs/etc. that meet the needs of such a vast audience (usually preK - 5th grades)?

A: It's true - that's a wide age group. You might consider using something with parts that can be used for all age groups, although the supported activities are focused on a specific developmental stage. DUPLO, LEGO and the Imagination Playground materials come to mind. We've had great luck with the WeDo sets from LEGO Education as well. This document also is a great resource for activities that develop executive function skills for different age groups. You might see some items that can be used in different ways for different ages.

Q: What are the ways in which you get feedback from your customers?

A: Currently, we get direct feedback from customers through in-person comments and those submitted through our comment forms.

Spaces

Q: Did you create a MakerSpace?

A: We did create a MakerLab in a space not far from Youth Services on the first floor of the library. It is an all ages space and more information about it can be found here: <http://balibrary.org/makerlab.html>.

Q: What were the red dots on the floor plans that were between the specific areas like Teen, Town Square, etc.?

A: The red dots represent an "interactive" area in the floor plan. For example, the current layout has a playhouse, a light bright, a slide, a DUPLO room, and an interactive wall in the space designated by a red dot.

Q: What happens in "Real Play?"

A: Real play is sometimes also called dramatic play. It is play that involves pretending to do many things grown-ups in various occupations do every day. Here is a good description of that type of play and the learning taking place: <http://www.brighthorizons.com/family-resources/e-family-news/2013-importance-of-pretend-play-in-child-development/>

Q: With limited funds, what would be a good addition to a small space and cater to 3-12 years old?

A: I would consider items that have a wide appeal and that also could be stored or rotated as needed, since you have a small space. Building or manipulative blocks (whether DUPLO, LEGO, or wooden blocks, from any number of vendors such as Melissa and Doug, HABA, Tegu, or others) are a good example. You'd be surprised how far a few capes or scarves can go (Magic Cabin) and also consider an easel with a chalkboard/white board as an option.

Q: Did you ever question having the teen space located next to the juvenile area? I've always heard that we should separate the two. Thoughts?

A: That is a good question. In the Barrington Area Library we have a young adult area that is for high school students which is in a different place in the library. Within youth services we have a space that's for Grades 6-8 and we call that the teen space. So in the plans that was the "teen" space that was being considered and how that distinction was made.

Q: What is the best response to give people when they question whether teens/young adults do not need a separate area in the library but should just be bundled off with the adults?

A: This isn't something I have directly experienced, although I have seen how young adults have used our spaces before and after the renovation. At the most basic level, it's important to think about how groups of customers use the library. If your young adults use it for study and collaboration (or if you want them to), are there spaces for them? Are there spaces that allow them to talk about their projects together? As for how close or far this is from an adult or children's area, again I think it comes down to what you want to happen in all of those spaces.

Before the renovation, we often had young adults in the area designed for elementary and middle schoolers because it was a comfortable place with great lighting and they could talk without bothering anyone. Now, our young adults seem to feel very comfortable using the YA space and the general library spaces, depending on their needs. We don't discourage them from using any space in the library when it meets their needs at that moment.

Q: How about a mobile model? We go into daycare centers for storytimes or "mini-visits" that last about 30 minutes and I was wondering if you had any ideas for similar models to be mobile into such spaces or area. We already have flannel boards and buckets with eggs shakers and an iPad, any other suggestions?

A: Yes! At the PLA conference in Indianapolis, I did a presentation with Keira Parrott who started play boxes at the Darien Library (CT). Here is a blog post about what they did and you might find some inspiration here. <http://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2013/03/play-boxes-mini-playspaces-in-your-library/>

Features

Q: Is there some place where I could find out step-by-step for some of these ideas (whisper tube, etc)?

A: While I don't have an exact DIY for what we did with the whisper tube, I did find some resources for you: Whisper Phones:

<http://teacherificfun.blogspot.com/2013/02/diy-whisper-phones.html>

<http://kickinitwithclass.blogspot.com/2012/07/monday-made-it.html>

Whisper Tubes:

<http://www.alsc.ala.org/blog/2012/10/shhh-whisper-tube/>

Q: Please give some details about the whisper tube?

A: See above.

Q: For a low budget and a small space, is there stuff on your Pinterest that would be of help/relatable? Also, have you spent your own money at all? I want things to get done so much that I would be willing to buy things myself.

A: We are fortunate in that there is not a need for us to spend our own money on supplies. We have included on our Pinterest board several different types that we feel are good for spaces of any budget or space. Take a look at some of the items from IKEA, Learning Sources, Melissa and Doug, and Magic Cabin to start.

Q: Is the light bright a purchased element? Or was it "built"? It's wonderful!

A: Thank you! We love it, too. The Light Bright was purchased from Boss Display:
<http://www.bosdisplay.com>.

Q: Where did you purchase the pretend marketplace? (The long table)

A: The Pretend Marketplace was designed by our architect and custom built by our local dealer, Library Furniture International (LFI).

Q: I'd love to have the sources for some of the products shown here. For instance, there is a yellow Duplo table shown that I am not able to locate by Googling.

A: See below

Q: Is the Duplo table enclosed?

A: Our DUPLO table was a custom design by our local library dealer, Library Furniture International (LFI). There are a variety of commercial options now (the table is a few years old) through Demco and others. This table has two open storage bins for the pieces. The table itself is in a room, but it doesn't need to be. We had it out in an open space before the renovation.

Q: Does Barrington have a core list of floor toys that they feel would work whether you have small or large Children's Rooms?

A: Though the specific items vary because we rotate them throughout the year, we always have several costumes, puppets, puzzles and/or building blocks available throughout our public space. Items like these are ideal for libraries with smaller spaces because they can be enjoyed in any setting, they are open-ended enough to appeal to a variety of ages, and they each address different styles of play and learning.

Policies/Issues/Safety

Q: Do you have a problem with theft?

A: We have not had any problems with theft.

Q: Is it hard to uphold the unattended children policy?

A: We often have staff in the space and walking through the space, so it is not hard to uphold the unattended children policy. The trickiest part is sharing the policy with caregivers in a way that isn't judging their own beliefs or their ability to parent or take care of children. We try to keep the focus on concern for the safety of the children in a busy public space.

Q: Ryann, is your Unattended Child Policy posted on your website? Or available elsewhere?

A: It isn't currently on our website, although I would be happy to email you a copy. Send a note to ruden@balibrary.org.

Q: Did you have to modify your insurance plan? Do you have First Aid/CPR certified staff? Accidents happen (unfortunately!) and the kids deserve first aid if necessary. The facility looks amazing and I'm sure the equipment is safe but things happen when children get excited!

A: Things do happen when people get excited! We did not need to change anything related to insurance or First Aid/CPR training. We do provide voluntary CPR training for staff, however it isn't mandatory. Our procedure is to call for paramedics when warranted or requested. We do have ice packs that we can offer to caregivers if they want one.

Programming

Q: What do you do to encourage parent interaction with the play elements? Sometimes parents see a play area in the library as a moment to take a break, but we want to make sure that parents are using this as a moment to teach and bond with their children -- something that is bit of a barrier when working in under resourced neighborhoods.

A: We use subtle encouragement to get caregivers involved with their children and the interactives. We may model some basic interaction and then move on to our next activity. We may be more overt about the interaction during a program that is child/caregiver based. However, we find that this community is fairly engaged with each other and the interactives when they visit and/or interaction happens naturally as in the Pretend Marketplace. Who can say no to buying a piece of plastic pizza from your child?

Q: How do you manage impromptu storytimes, specifically do you have an hour during which you conduct impromptu storytimes or do you wait until you have a certain number of kids, etc.?

A: We are just starting to break into impromptu story times and other pop-up programs in the library. We tried it for World Read Aloud Day when every hour, a Youth Services staff member chose one picture book and read the story to a group of kids and adults in the public space. In addition to every hour that day, staff were encouraged to read a story anytime they saw a large group gathering in our space (so in that sense, the program was managed both by the hour and in response to the number of customers in our department). In the future, we would like to run pop-up programs on days when we have large crowds in the library and no programs scheduled to take place, in the hope of reaching customers who might not otherwise have attended a program because of registration or time requirements.

Q: Our average elementary student's reading levels is 1-2 yrs. behind their grade level. How do I energize these at-risk students to get interested in reading?

A: That is a great question, and an important one, too. Play-based learning may be a way to encourage the entire family to visit the library, and the growing positive relationship with the library, books and reading can only help. I also like the idea of mixing in print material with the play areas, such as menus, However, more specific resources are available for your situation. Here are a few to consider:

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/article/what-dramatic-play-and-how-does-it-support-literacy-development-preschool>

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/how-help-risk-child>

http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/mar11/vol68/num06/What_At-Risk_Readers_Need.aspx

Technology

Q: How do you maintain the tech? Any time we have left out iPads or a smart table for free use, they have broken very quickly. Do you only have them out for specific programming? If you leave them out for free play, how do you make sure they are always functioning?

A: We have iPads geared towards either our preschool visitors or our older elementary school students. You can find a list of the current apps on both sets of iPads here: <http://balibrary.org/games-apps>. Our IT personnel purchase our apps through Apple's Volume Purchase Program for Business. (<http://www.apple.com/business/vpp/>). This allows us to buy bulk apps; we are required to have one license per device. The apps are purchased under a "master" AppleID, not individual IDs. Then we use Apple Configurator (<https://www.apple.com/support/business-education/apple-configurator/>) installed on a MacBook to setup the individual iPads with the apps and any pre-configured restrictions and profile settings. You can sync and setup multiple iPads at the same time. Apple Configurator also allows you to restore the iPads when they are connected. You can take an "image" of a pre-configured iPad and apply it to every other iPad that is plugged in. This works well for when someone sets a passcode on an iPad. Simply plug it in, click restore, and 5 minutes later it is ready for use again.

This is a very brief description of the process, but if you have any other questions or want more in-depth information, please feel free to contact Thomas Nielsen, tnielsen@balibrary.org, for more.

We recently switched stands to the [Spot by Armodilo](#). This case keeps all cable connections inside the device which has cut down significantly on broken cables.