Library Collections as Learning Experiences

By Anne Whisken

Several conferences and meetings (Rethinking the collection, 2015; SLAV Central Metro Branch Meeting, 2015) this year have canvassed the way librarians are reviewing their collection arrangements in the light of evolving library environments, particularly with regard to the move towards digital collections and the often allied views about the way library spaces will be used. Part of discussion around arrangement of collections also often involves the difficult terminology of 'genrification' or 'collectionising' or the controversial 'messing with Dewey'. Ideas from academic and public libraries and the retail field about library design and collection arrangements have been covered in previous Learning Landscapes articles which looked at library design.

This article examines collection arrangements within the frame of the particular responsibility that school libraries have to support school curriculum learning. Rather than the WAY the collection is arranged in the sense of its physical or digital presence, discussion here is around the

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WHAT of different arrangements, in the sense of what items are put together for particular learning purposes. It moves from library as storehouse to library as a learning space, and collection use as a learning experience. Library design is still an important aspect of collection arrangement because without the appropriate spaces, hard copy collections cannot be arranged for optimal learning experiences. Similarly, the provision of appropriate online information architecture is essential for digital collection. The promotion of library programs and collections also is of great importance in school libraries, but it is the educational aspect of these which is core to this article. So how are school library collections best arranged to support the learning objectives of subject areas and the contextual learning of expert information practices? The thinking of Vygotsky and Bruce (2008) are used here to explore how a school library structures its programs and arranges its collections for best learning outcomes.

Theories of Learning, Information Literacy and Library Collections

'. . . students' interaction can significantly influence their comprehension, a phenomenon described by Vygotsky in 1978 as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). He described this as the difference between a learner's ability at a given developmental level and the level to which a learner could advance intellectually with the assistance of an adult or peer.' (Montiel-Overall, 2005, p. 27)

Considerable research and writing has been done by secondary and tertiary librarians about how Guided Inquiry ideas from Kuhlthau, Maniotis and Caspari (2007), arising originally from Vygostky's theory of ZPG, can be applied in design of learning experiences so that students acquire information literacy within the context of learning their subject content material and at identified points of need (Fourie, 2013). In such experiences, experts in subject content and information practice work with students in the social construction of new understandings about their subject and the best information and information practices to use.

. . . what information practices are best for the learning of this subject content?

Christine Bruce's Informed Learning theories provide another model for learning expert information practice within the context of subject learning, and propose that the way information is used is in itself a learning. It is a thinking that asks of learning design: what information practices are best for the learning of this subject content? What information practices are part of expert subject practice at this level of learning and what experiences can be provided for students to learn them? What subject learning will be enabled by this particular experience of information use? It is a model which looks at each information use from several different angles and says that such experiences need to be carefully designed for both the intent of the learning and the user experience so that there is a purposeful gaining of skills. The social aspect of building knowledge by interaction with others is included, as well as considerations of format, source, process, selection, application, synthesis, storage and

management, acknowledgement, re-presentation and publication. It provides ways of focusing on which aspects will be part of the subject learning in particular learning experiences.

Extended to library collection arrangements – in both their hard copy and evolving digital forms – this gives rise to thinking about how we arrange information sources so that the experience of their use for learning particular content is maximised. For example, how does the experience of browsing along a stack of strictly Dewey-arranged books in a particular subject area – and moving of necessity to other areas if this topic requires books in different Dewey areas – compare to browsing in an attractively presented collection curated by an information expert who has brought together all the books on that particular topic (albeit still in Dewey order) and who helps students discuss those choices and their relevance to the topic? How does the experience of doing a 'quick Wikipedia' or a 'Google' compare to accessing online articles selected and gathered together in an online learning environment for a particular learning purpose, with explanation by teacher and teacher-librarian about why these items were selected for this purpose – including discussion regarding validity, depth of language, breadth of coverage and comparison of them to the freely available material.

If we apply Vygotsky thinking to the learning that is taking place in this instance, we can see that the teacher-librarian has become the expert mediator in the learning experience, bringing together those books or those sources that are relevant for that particular activity. True, we have been doing that for some considerable period of time: is that not, after all, the tub of books selected and sent to a classroom for Ancient Rome? Or selected on to a trolley for the research class visiting the library? Or the collection of some great sites in a pathfinder? How is this different?

It is posited that this can be different due to an arrangement which arises from asking questions about the learning that is to take place using particular information sources in particular ways. For example, the teacher and the teacher-librarian might have decided that one of the aims of an investigation about Ancient Rome will include development of explicit student awareness of source suitability for the question she has posed. The teacher and the teacher-librarian will introduce sources that are reliable and suitable, usually via a pathfinder – containing links or references to particular book encyclopedias and non-fiction books, online encyclopedias and databases, online videos, particular websites chosen for the purpose, and discuss with the students why they have been selected. The librarian will gather and present books from across the range of Dewey categories which are relevant to the topic in addition to the usual 937: warfare, systems of government, housing, agriculture, architecture. (At our school library this is a permanent collection within the area of Ancient History, in Dewey order, due to that curriculum focus). Perhaps in addition to the validity of the sources, it will be pointed out that the language complexity is suitable for the year level, the content is at the right level of detail, the illustrations and video clips bring extra knowledge or are the best available for the task purpose.

In another example, the teacher and the teacher-librarian would work together to construct an exercise in which students are to produce an annotated bibliography or literature review of online resources on an aspect of a topic, explaining and justifying why the resources selected are the best of those available to provide for an expert study of the topic. The teacher and teacher-librarian would model what is required. They might limit the type of resource to be used – such as nominated library databases so that students are forced to navigate, search, read and select across quality source material. The students would then have to justify their choices to their peers, and provide feedback to others. They would be engaging in a socially constructed movement from one level of information knowledge in their subject field to another: movement across the zone of proximal development.

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In these examples, the teacher and teacher-librarian are working with the students to lead them on to a higher level of understanding of both content and of the source of the content information. They are helping students develop an explicit set of parameters to apply to new circumstances of source selection for subject learning: is this source of information reliable, suitable, sufficiently detailed, of appropriate visual presentation; is it the best for this purpose; how is this one better than that; how will I acknowledge this in my work and what impact might be made on others by publication of my report? By watchful immersion in this information experience the students gain an understanding of quality suitable sources and can use that new knowledge for other information sources. This is a social, mediated experience of learning with information. Such informed learning experiences which lead students to the next level of socially constructed understanding within their subject knowledge do not happen by chance: they must be specifically and explicitly designed by experts.

These learning experiences are in place in many schools with good teacher-librarian staffing, and Guided Inquiry is a well-covered field. But asking questions about how the *arrangement* of our hard copy and digital resources feeds into the process is not addressed so broadly, and it is imperative that we do so in an environment where we see more than one school announcing that they no longer need libraries because it is 'all available on the Internet'. Considerable development along these lines is being made currently by Lyn Hay in her provision of seminars about how to curate digital collections (Hay, 2015) where participants are introduced to the ". . . theory, research and practice of content curation. It highlights those aspects of curation where TLs and teachers add intellectual and instructional value to the collection of curated resources".

Informed Learning and the Wide Reader

There is probably more discussion in school libraries about the 'genrification' of fiction when collection arrangement is raised. Usually there are varieties of arrangements ranging from strictly alphabetical by author, with some side categories to cater for collections of short stories, graphic novels and picture books, to the fully 'genrified' collection in which all books are distributed into subcategories. These will often include any of the following: Adventure, Animal, Biography (not fiction but a useful inclusion in school library fiction areas), Classic, Crime, Dystopian, Fantasy, Gothic, Historical, Movies, Mystery, Other Cultures, Relationships (or 'pink' or Romance), Science Fiction, Senior Fiction, Sport, Thriller, War – and many more, depending on the particular need! Some opt for limited categories for the most popular, then have a general run of the rest. Why do we do this? What are our sound pedagogical bases? Again Vygotsky and Bruce provide useful touch points.

They learn the skills of interrogating the texts, of analysing the literary devices in operation and then reporting and discussing their reading with others . . .

Bruce's model would ask: what is the learning taking place with this information? Vygotsky's theory would ask: how are these students moving from one level to another specified desired level, using interaction with each other to develop new understandings? In a well-structured Wide Reading program, it can be seen that both theories have particular validity. A good Wide Reading program is well funded so that there is a well-stocked collection of up to date, high quality, good condition books on the shelves and in eBook platforms. English teachers and the teacher-librarians work together to encourage students to develop an understanding of the genres that are available for them, to knowingly select books in an ever-wider range of genres that will engage them in sustained immersion in narrative so they can experience the satisfaction of reading a story to its conclusion. They learn the skills of interrogating the texts, of analysing the literary devices in operation and then reporting and discussing their reading with others, all the while building their understanding to new levels via interaction with each other and with the guidance of the experts in the field.

What collection arrangements best support such a Wide Reading program? Good practice would suggest that a well-indexed library catalogue will direct students to the books in a desired genre, but in addition to that, practical experience would suggest that a physical arrangement of books provides an effective visual prompt of the genres that are available, and the titles within it. There is a big difference between scrolling down a screen – even with use of software to bring the titles into view, and faceted navigation to narrow the search result by age, or format, or year of publication, etc. – and the experience of looking at the book itself, picking it up, reading the blurb, seeing the number of pages, checking out the illustrations, comparing this one and that one and maybe moving over to another genre and doing the same and selecting one of those and bringing it back and comparing it and collecting a bundle of books and sitting down and reviewing the choices and reading the first page to see how it feels and asking your peers what they think and talking with the teacher or teacher-librarian . . ..

Wide Reading classes have learning intentions: the teacher and the teacher-librarian have worked together to design the content and skills to be covered and by what experience the students will learn them to achieve the outcome goals. The 'information' here is not that often referred to as information literacy, but it is information nonetheless: it is the information of genre knowledge and selection skills, of author knowledge, of choosing one literary analysis skill over another, one format over another (full text or graphic, hard copy or eBook, fiction or non-fiction) and being skilled to make a confident selection between choices of oral or written report, group work or individual reflection.

Rewriting a Library Mission Statement – Collections as Learning Experiences

Application of the Bruce model of Informed Learning to the school library, its programs and collections brings an exciting opportunity to re-frame the library's mission, in this case to ensure that collection arrangements as learning experiences are considered. This mission statement can then be used to direct collection development and its arrangement for curriculum learning, and the programs that enable this to happen. It can, and should, directly influence constant evaluation of whether the library holds the resources needed for learning in the school and whether they are being best used in subject learning experiences, and also feed into the curation of digital collections (Hay, 2015). Bruce suggests that we look at design of learning experiences involving use of information to learn from two perspectives: the intent of the learning and the experience of the learning. These two perspectives are referred to respectively as 'Frames' and 'Faces': we use six possible frames to design, and we examine the experience from the point of view of the student via seven possible faces. Core to the school library's purpose is support of the school's mission and goals: how then do we write a mission statement that meets those imperatives as well as speaking in a voice that directs (frames) and describes the 'faces' of learning experiences that ensure expert information practices are part of the core learning of subjects? And how do we apply that to the way we arrange our collections?

The optimal voice is used here to rewrite a mission statement for a library in an evolving digital environment that both meets the school's mission and goals and meets informed learning objectives. Bruce has incorporated established theories of socially constructed learning into her models, with the particular purpose of building information expertise into the full range of discipline information use. Application of those understandings, based on Informed Learning, will enable building a mission statement and watch it play out in design and operation of library programs and arrangement of the collections. It also provides a structure through which to incorporate other relevant theories and ideas (Fourie, 2013; Hay, 2015; Thornburg, 1999; Third Teacher, 2010).

Library Collections as Learning Spaces:

Influential Theories & Questions

Bruce's *Informed Learning* (2008): How can school curricula be designed so that library collections are used to provide experiences of expert information practice in discipline learning?

Vygotsky's (1978) *Zones of Proximal Development*: How can social interaction with information experts and special collection arrangements enhance learning with information?

Thornburg's *Primordial Metaphors* (1999): How can archetypes be used to create spaces for learning with library collections and information experts which provide experiences of expert information practice in discipline learning?

- Watering Hole (meeting & exchanging)
- Campfire (instructive, co-operative planning)
- Cave (reflective)
- Mountain Top (celebrating, presenting).

***The Third Teacher* (2010):** How can the physical environment of library collection arrangements be designed and utilised to maximise their contribution to quality experiences of using information to learn?

The Library Collections as Learning Experiences:

Key Ideas

Beyond content:
The idea that ***the way* a collection is arranged** can influence

- a learner's experience of using information to learn
- a reader's engagement with and choice of books

The idea that this applies to **physical** as well as **digital** collections

- What ideas from the world of retailing and bookstores can help?
- What pedagogies can apply?

Library Mission Statement

Development of this draft library mission statement, expressed in optimal language, is done within the context of the school's strategic directions and via the model of Christine Bruce's *Informed Learning* (2008).

The Wise Independent Motivated Learner

Carey Baptist Grammar School's Core Curriculum Focus: The Wise Independent Motivated Learner.
One of Carey's key strategic priorities is student centred learning with strategies to enable each to achieve her or his individual best. This means that at Carey,

> *'. . . students will be encouraged and assisted to develop a clear understanding of their learning goals and the strategies to achieve them, including different ways of thinking and solving problems. Carey's students need to know where they are going, how they are progressing along the way and how to move forward with confidence. Reflection on their progress will be supported by instruction and meaningful feedback from their teachers.'*
> (Carey's Future: Strategic Directions Towards our Centenary 2023, 2014, p. 4)

Visible Learning, Assessment for Learning and Differentiation are key pedagogies used by teachers throughout the curriculum, and Information Literacy is identified as one of the tools for working in development of 21st century skills by students. (Brinkley, 2010)

The Informed Learner

A graduate from my school is a wise independent learner who uses information well.

- Excellent information practice has been developed as part of subject learning so that authoritative sources are sought and information is used ethically and safely.
- Good information practices have been developed by experiencing use of quality information sources and acknowledging their use.
- Students know that good information sources are authoritative, well written or presented, and suitable to their learning stages and purposes.
- Teachers have explicitly directed students to good information sources and shown how they use them in their own work.
- There has been explicit discussion about why one source was selected rather than another.
- In a variety of learning experiences repeated across subject areas as students progressed through the school, students have distinguished

  – between authoritative and non-authoritative sources,
  – between shallow and deep information,
  – and knowingly selected information written at the right levels for them and suited to particular learning purposes.

The Role of the Library in Informed Learning

Experience in use of good information practices within the context of subject learning requires

- quality information sources and
- repeated application of good information practices in a variety of situations

Physical Spaces

- Users are welcomed with clear signage and traffic pathways to lead them to preferred resource usage zones
- Convenient, interactive screens provide ready searching for sources
- Retail push factors are used to entice and engage with resources

- Arrangement of shelves and signage provide for intuitive and guided browsing for source selection
- Furniture and shelving configurations enable both short interactions and longer focused discussion by small and large groups; small group study and coaching; individual silent study; and small and large group presentations

Digital Spaces

- The library catalogue integrates all paper and digital resources into a single search space using federated searching across many platforms and delivers results into a faceted navigation presentation
- The library website provides clear guided links to particular resource types, with pathfinders for subject research tasks and scaffolds for study skills such as referencing.

Collections

- Collections consist of high quality, authoritative hard copy and digital information resources which are matched to curriculum learning goals
- Collections are re-arranged and curated as required to provide for current curriculum learning foci with clear directions provided in the library catalogue as to physical and on-line locations
- Hard copy collection arrangements are attractive, using best practice retail push factors and advised curating methodology to encourage engagement and interaction. Students and teachers are confident that all the hard copy resources relevant to this topic are collected in this place and that digital resources are clearly signposted from here.
- Hard copy and digital resource collections are curated in such a way that students are lead easily from one format to another as interest, relevance and need dictate. In hard copy collection arrangements, signage using QR codes to direct students to online resources is placed at relevant Dewey spots, and interactive search screens placed adjacent to the collection encourage further searching. In digital resource arrangements, pathways and links are placed within the context of the course page instructional design and lead students to both digital and hard copy resources.

Library Staff members

- Design online resource guides so that students can learn to find their own way to authoritative sources
- Curate hard copy and digital collections for particular purposes on a long or short term basis, with associated programs to entice and engage in their use
- Work with teachers

  – to ensure that links to authoritative information sources are built into online course pages
  – to help students gain the particular information skills for learning purposes, such as catalogue and database searching, note taking, referencing
  – to model and discuss with students aspects of good information practice, extending this to evaluative and reflective examination of quality sources, aspects of source choice and suitability for purpose, ethical and safe use of sources

- Work with students for individual guidance to support particular research purposes

The Wide Reader

A graduate from my school is a wise independent learner who knows how to select appropriate literature and is able to engage in sustained immersion in narrative.

Excellent reading practice has been developed as part of the English wide reading program so that students have encountered and responded to a broad range of quality young adult literature.

Students have the skills to select and read across a range of genres, and to confidently undertake book response and review activities including oral and written discussion. They have experienced the accomplishment of setting goals to develop their reading for rigor and depth of understanding and can link themes in literature to other areas of their curriculum. Students can see how wide reading enables them to start a journey of lifelong reading for enjoyment.

In reading promotion and extension programs students see how their teachers, parents and the community engage in reading and via author incursions and participation in the annual Carey Celebrates Literature Festival they meet and workshop with writers to find out how good fiction and non-fiction is created.

The Role of the Library in Wide Reading

Satisfying experience of reflective and sustained immersion in quality narrative requires

- Quality literature
- Time devoted to reading
- Guided selection
- Skills for reflection and analysis

Physical Spaces

- Arrangement of shelves and signage provide for intuitive and guided browsing for title selection, and the use retail push factors to entice and engage
- Seating configurations enable individual sustained silent reading, small group discussion and large group presentations

Collections

Collections consist of high quality hard copy and digital book collections providing a range of genres suited to the different reading ages and levels of students and the School's curriculum purposes

- Collections are re-arranged and curated as required to provide for current curriculum learning foci with clear directions provided in the library catalogue as to physical and on-line locations
- The library catalogue system incorporates federated searching and faceted navigation of search results to enable students to explore across collections in hard copy and digital platforms for titles, genres, authors, formats, dates of publication and other relevant subject headings
- Hard copy collection arrangements are attractive, using best practice retail push factors and advised curating methodology to encourage engagement and interaction. Students and teachers are confident that all the resources relevant to this genre or format are collected in this place and that digital resources are clearly signposted from here
- Hard copy and digital resource collections are curated in such a way that students are lead easily from one format to another as interest, relevance and need dictate. In hard copy collection arrangements, signage using QR codes to direct students to online resources is placed at relevant author or genre locations, and interactive search screens are placed adjacent to the collection to encourage further searching. In digital resource arrangements, clear links lead students to both digital and hard copy resources

Digital Spaces

- Full use is made of promotional capacities in the catalogue, learning management system, and book platforms to selectively promote titles according to user profiles.
- Online spaces enable students to submit reviews and reports about their reading and to engage in discussion with their peers, teachers and teacher-librarians.

Library Staff Members

- Design online reading guides so that students can learn to find their own way to titles best suited to their reading needs
- Work with teachers to help and encourage students to set reading goals, manage their time to ensure books are finished, engage in online reflective activities
- Work with teachers in sessions that help students gain particular literary analysis skills for wide reading learning purposes
- Work with students for individual guidance to select books

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