
*Delivering the best start: a guide to early years libraries* is a very attractive book, with a brightly coloured cover, which draws the reader’s attention straightaway. It also includes several very clear black and white photographs to illustrate the points being made. The book’s authors, Carolynn Rankin and Avril Brock are both lecturers from Leeds Metropolitan University and are clearly very knowledgeable on the subject addressed by the book, bringing a wealth of experience to the text.

The book has a very clear structure, beginning with a chapter setting the scene of why children’s libraries are so important in young people’s lives, moving through chapters on the wider role of the library in the community, on to the library itself (in terms of the physical space and its resources) and ending with the role of the librarian and their plans for the future. The content of each chapter is well signposted and the book is of a very factual and practical nature. Admirably, it is extremely up-to-date, including as it does developments such as the 2008 Public Library Standards.

The content of the book is comprehensive, and of note in particular are the frequent case studies and frames offering “issues and questions” and “key points to remember”. Also included are lists of useful organisations which are indeed of use to the reader. Particularly interesting is the chapter about the library’s place in the community, which includes details of how to encourage families into the library and how to make the service friendly and relevant to them. This is of increasing importance at the current time, when debates about potential public library closures are often appearing in the news. Connected here is the analysis of the role of the librarian in providing opportunities for young children and families to enjoy literacy and language development activities together. All kinds of activities are discussed, for example, music and storytelling and families being encouraged to share stories together.

Also of note is the chapter concentrating on the specific importance of the library space. This is concerned with architecture and design and with relating the importance of good design to effective design for children. It takes in book display, furniture and equipment, carpets and soft furnishings, signs, storage, mood and sound, colour and noise in addition to the building space. The text is clearly taking into account the eventual users of the library and does so successfully.

The book takes an innovative approach to the resources of the children’s library, with a chapter suggesting that these might be books, toys and “other delights”. This is an extremely informative chapter on how to select and collect a range of resources to meet community needs, and takes into consideration children’s changing preferences.
and needs for alternative media (in addition to the all-important books) to help them with their literacy and as sources of information. Also discussed is the stock policy/collection management plan; the authors give some useful advice on producing such plans whilst stressing that they should be kept under regular review. Of practical use here is the varied list of useful sources to help with selection and acquisition.

The authors state that this is a “user-friendly professional book with a structure and format intended to make its content accessible to the reader” and I believe that it successfully lives up to this claim. The stated potential audience for the book is professional practitioners working in early years librarianship; it will certainly be both of use and interest to this readership, and in addition is likely to be of relevance to students and academics in the same field. Overall, this is a relevant and appealing addition to the existing literature on the subject of early years libraries, which will complement other texts, offering new ideas and practical advice for the modern information professional.

Dr Sally Maynard,
Lecturer,
Department of Information Science,
Loughborough University


Libraries Designed for Kids is a very attractively produced book, with a brightly coloured cover, which seems to reflect the content within. Its author, Nolan Lushington, is clearly very knowledgeable on the subject and brings a wealth of experience to the text. Having been written by an American author, the book concentrates somewhat on this part of the world. It is very practical in nature and includes a multitude of very clear and attractive black and white photographs to illustrate the points being made. The book has been organised to parallel the planning and design phases of creating a new library space, which is an original concept. It is a logical way in which to organise such a book and, for the most part, is effective. The appendices are particularly practical, as they include examples of focus groups to demonstrate how children talk about libraries, some relevant case studies and an annotated list of readings. One criticism of the design of the book, however, concerns the use of sub-headings; at times these are overpowering and often appertain to only very small sections of text. This can be disconcerting and detracts from, rather than enhancing, the clarity of the contents.

The content of the book is comprehensive, and of note in particular is the emphasis on the involvement of the potential users in library design. The different, very specific needs of the very youngest readers (e.g. toddlers who need help finding books and need to see front covers rather than spines) and those at the other end of the scale
(teenagers who do not want to be thought of in the same way as younger readers) are discussed at length.

The introductory chapter sets the scene well, describing the importance of the library to young readers and recounting what they do there. The inclusion of the opinions of some of the author’s grandchildren is a personal touch which, to a certain extent, alerts the reader to the writer’s own particular standpoint. The book then moves on to discussing innovative children’s library models, and the focus here is international, which is both an interesting and useful element. The discussion centres on any features and other innovations which might be added specifically for children. The emphasis on new ideas and concepts is, in fact, a key theme of this book and is in evidence throughout during other discussions such as assessing physical needs, planning the library, design considerations, the organisation of the children’s area and so on. Another key theme is the importance of community-based collaboration in all aspects of libraries for children, and more specifically (and as mentioned above) the involvement of the users in the process. The author is concerned with how best to ensure that the potential users will be drawn to the library to begin with, and then with how to make sure that their experiences within the library are beneficial and enjoyable, thereby making them want to return and use the library again.

Where necessary, the book is very detailed, for example, examining a proposed library design in depth to understand better what is needed to add to an existing children’s library or to build a new one. This discussion goes into detail on issues such as usage statistics and patterns, collections, focus groups, visions, missions and so on. Similarly detailed is the chapter specifically on entrances, displays, graphics and lighting. Conversely, however, a chapter which offers details of quick fixes and common mistakes is rather on the short side. It purports to provide quick and inexpensive ways of enhancing the design of libraries and to pick out some common mistakes. This chapter would benefit from more detail; as a result these recommendations are not as helpful as they could be.

The potential audience for the book is, of course, anyone concerned with designing children’s libraries, for example, current practitioners, librarians, library directors, architects and designers; it will certainly be both of use and interest to this readership. It is clear that the book contains some very new and innovative ideas and practical advice for the modern information professional.

Overall, this is a relevant and generally engaging contribution to the literature on library design, which admirably attempts to be as up-to-date as possible. It offers new ideas and practical advice for those striving to provide effectively designed libraries for young readers.

Dr Sally Maynard,  
Lecturer,  
Department of Information Science,  
Loughborough University

If you haven’t heard of RFID (radio frequency identification), where have you been? RFID is one of the hot topics in the library world and yet there is remarkably little literature on the topic on the market – possibly because it is mainly of interest to those library staff that work at the coalface of libraries, the circulation teams, rather than the more glamorous world of the academic librarian!

The author, Martin Palmer, is Principle Officer: Libraries for Essex County Council and Chair of both the BIC/CILIP RFID in Libraries Group, and of BIC’s E4Libraries Steering Committee. As someone who has experienced, firsthand, the processes involved in choosing and implementing RFID in his libraries, he is able to talk about them in greater detail at the end of this book, where he uses Essex County Council libraries as a case study.

The book itself contains 13 chapters and can be divided into 5 sections (although it doesn’t actually do so):

Chapters 1 & 2 introduce RFID to the uninitiated. Even if you already know about the topic, these 2 chapters still give a useful overview of the history of RFID development and how the system actually works.

Chapters 3–6 deal with the technical side of RFID: interaction with library management systems, standards and interoperability, privacy and RFID health and safety. These chapters deal with quite dry, technical topics in an easy to understand, straightforward manner. They also contain my favourite fact in the whole book: that the Amish feel RFID is the work of the devil and so refuse to tag their cows! As someone who is possibly closer to the Luddites in his understanding of IT issues rather than a Bill Gates, these chapters helped me expand my knowledge of how the system works and, importantly, its limitations.

Chapters 7–9 start to look at the management side of RFID: design of libraries with RFID installations, preparing a business case for purchasing RFID and potential staff savings. These chapters can help inform library management of the implications of RFID implementation: e.g. it is no good just simply buying RFID systems without considering the design of your library. Even with the diminishing cost, RFID is a huge investment and so much thought is necessary to achieve its full potential. The design of the library can maximise the effects of the change.

Chapter 9 deals with one of the most emotive topics in the book- staffing - and yet it is one of the shortest at only 5 pages. The main service benefit of RFID in libraries is self issue with the concurrent worry about staff cuts. This chapter helps to spell out some of the alternatives to just cuts alone, helping with formulae to show efficiency savings after implementation and possible alternatives to simple staff reductions such as redeployment and reemphasis on changing roles. It could, I feel, deal more with the human side of things and deal with real strategies for helping allay the fears of counter staff, who are naturally worried about possible implications of RFID.
Chapters 10 and 11 deal with the practical side of RFID implementation. Chapter 10 covers buying the system and contains a number of useful tables to help cover all the bases when evaluating which system is purchased. Once you have made the decision, Chapter 11 discusses the project management aspect of installing RFID and, again, contains a series of useful tables showing the basic elements of project management. It also contains the most useful piece of advice in the entire book: on the first day live ensure you have sufficient staff on hand to be able to support the customer (p. 111).

As mentioned above, chapter 12 contains a case study of RFID implementation at Essex County Libraries. It is useful to see all the previous elements of the book drawn together to see how the processes contribute to a successful implementation in the real world. It also introduces discussions on staff development, adding retail concepts and the customer experience, which are valuable additions to the agreements in favour of RFID.

The book concludes by giving a glimpse into the future of RFID in libraries (with possible extensions in use and tag technology discussed) and a list of useful websites, forums and blogs.

In summary, therefore, Palmer’s book is one which is carefully thought out and which contains valuable information in an easy to understand, plain speaking format. He is at his best when describing technical information in a way that those without an IT background can easily comprehend. He is also adept at describing processes and evaluation in both abstract and real life scenarios to help those who are thinking of adopting RFID in their own libraries.

If you only read one book on RFID, this should be the one – I only wish it had been available during the time my own library was planning its own RFID applications as my life would have been a lot easier.

Matt Cunningham
Customer Services Manager
Loughborough University Library


This edited book will have relevance for all those concerned with improving the student learning experience in HE’s ever changing context. While it will be useful for a university’s management team, it will be equally useful for anyone who puts students’ interests at the heart of their work. Weaver’s book will trigger reflection and inspire change in the HE sector; not only will it prompt reflection on meeting students’ needs in the complex HE sector but it will provide insights into the design and implementation of change programmes to meet those needs. Weaver has selected
13 contributions that explore initiatives to enhance student learning in universities around the world; the chosen initiatives draw attention to the need for a holistic and collaborative approach to change. The value of encouraging multiple views and involving parties from a range of services across a university, is highlighted. Readers who maintain a critical eye will glean a host of lessons and examples of good practice from the chapters, that they can modify and then bring to life for their own organisation’s benefit.

The content is arranged around three approaches to transformation – transformation through strategy, policy and organization, through delivery and through integrative approaches. Five chapters comprise the section on transformation through delivery while the other two sections are comprised of four. Seventeen individuals have contributed to the thirteen chapters; Weaver has contributed to two of them. Most of the contributions focus on universities in the UK e.g. Manchester, Cumbria, Dublin, Open, Highlands and Islands, Edge Hill and Sheffield. However, there is an international dimension to the book through the inclusion of a review of European examples, and American and New Zealand case studies. Together the case studies provide diversity with regard to, for example, the type of student (fulltime, part time, distance and mature), the type of university (city, campus, multi-campus, virtual, ‘new’, and established) and the local context in which the institutes were seeking to transform.

The first section, entitled ‘Transformation through Strategy, Policy and Organization’ starts by reminding us of the impact that recent policies, new technology and consumer-orientated society have had on HE in the UK. Watson offers a scene-setting chapter for appreciating the new opportunities and moving goal posts of the UK HE sector – it is a useful chapter to keep in mind for the remainder of the book. Roberts and Stewart then follow with an introduction to a holistic model for universities where “the pivotal ingredient for success is effective pan-university collaboration” (p. 19). A case study of such collaboration at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand is described. The penultimate chapter in this section is by Stephenson who continues with the holistic theme and discusses University of Cumbria’s experience of “holistic approaches to student learning and partnership working” (p. 33). Marsh’s chapter, based on University of Bradford’s initiative to bring a range of support services together, serves to reinforce the recurring themes of holism and collaboration.

‘Transformation through Delivery’ begins with a chapter by Cohen and Harvey who relate the experiences of Dublin Institute of Technology as it prepares to move to a single campus. The focus is on the design of learning spaces that support a student centred learning paradigm. Weaver and Hough then return to the University of Cumbria to further develop the concept of the learning space before Rennie considers the challenges of delivering courses to students of the University of the Highlands and Islands. Brophy follows with a European outlook on learning environments and Platt closes the section with a consideration of the widening participation policy and the strategic role that University of Manchester’s library has played in its implementation.

The final section, ‘Transformation through Integrative Practice’ starts with Martin’s sharing of a case study from Edge Hill University in which “multiprofessional
teams” were formed; the case study is an example of ‘joined up’ thinking being used to enhance students’ learning. Brown and Porterfield, from an American perspective, offer insights into aiding a visioning process for your organisation and the development of strategy. Atkins follows with a case study from the UK’s Open University and tells of the benefits of adopting a more holistic approach to “both learning support and research into learning support” (p. 182). Weaver and Levy then bring the book to a close with a chapter that highlights the role of practitioner research, with an example from Sheffield University.

Weaver’s book is one that can be dipped into; chapters are manageable chunks that can be read in any order and treated as isolated pieces of work. In that respect, it is a friendly read and will become a well thumbed volume. However, there was a missed opportunity to emphasise the relationship between the various chapters and, with a leading or closing chapter for each section, the possibility to analyse each set of case studies more rigorously in order to draw out insights from each section. In fact, a development of the final chapter and Schön’s work on reflective practice, in particular, could probably have underpinned the whole book and shaped a summative chapter for each section. This would have been more in keeping with the systemic philosophy that is portrayed in a number of the chapters.

Having said that, in general, the individual chapters were well structured and clearly written. They are balanced in terms of discussing the benefits and challenges that were faced in the change initiatives; this will be invaluable to readers. Where possible, some assessment of the changes was undertaken and this, again, will be thought provoking for readers.

In summary, to use a quote from Weaver and Hough’s chapter, this book will indeed demonstrate how “librarians and other professional groups are responding positively to the new paradigms of 21st century learning, changing the way they think and work, and diversifying their roles in order to remain at the forefront of student enhancement services” (p. 102).

Dr Gillian Ragsdell
Lecturer in Knowledge Management
Department of Information Science
Loughborough University