A happy compromise:
Collaborative approaches to
school library designing

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Good afternoon, thank you for your interest in this presentation

How many of you are TLs or school librarians

Although this presentation focuses on school libraries, the principles of collaborative learning space design are relevant across different library and education contexts.

I'm basing this presentation on research that I carried out recently at QUT with the colleagues named on this slide.
Some of you may have read or heard me talking about this project before. But please don't go away! I'm tacking a different tack today in talking about collaborative approaches to school library designing – fitting in with the ALIA conference theme.

To provide some context, I'm first going to briefly outline the study.
And then I'll dip into the findings to tell you two contrasting stories – the first illustrates the benefits of collaboration in learning space design; and the second highlights the impacts of limited collaboration.
I'll then explain why it's important to listen to the voices of children, as key stakeholders in learning space design
And I'll finish with presenting a set of recommendations to support the future collaborative designing of school libraries and other learning spaces.

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Designing a school library involves …

Creating
a hybrid social learning space

Responding to
diverse needs and interests

Collaborating
across the school community

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A well designed school library can energise learning and teaching by connecting people, curriculum and technology.

However, designing a school library is a challenging process. Designers are faced with creating a hybrid space that welcomes the whole school community, whilst supporting students' educational outcomes and social well-being.

The design solution must respond to the varied needs of multiple users, including students, teachers, administration staff and parents. Ideally, the design outcome results from a collaborative process involving all stakeholders.

Collaboratively designing a school library requires close cooperation between professional designers and the client school, and participation of key school community members.

It also requires a willingness on all sides to learn. Many school stakeholders, including school principals and teachers, have limited previous experience of learning space design; and many professional designers, including architects, have limited knowledge about the purpose and operation of contemporary school libraries.

To support this learning process, I'll present some real-life insights arising from recent research entitled *Reimagining learning spaces*.

Reimagining Learning Spaces
Research funded by Queensland Council for Social Science Innovation
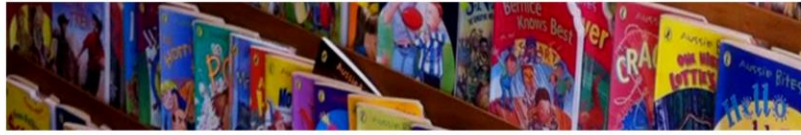
Case study: 7 recently created school libraries in Queensland - most were BER

Explores: *how does a newly designed library space influence learning & teaching?*

Conceptual base : *environment as third teacher* (Reggio Emilia) and *built pedagogy*

Findings include:
- set of narrative case studies from multiple stakeholder perspectives
- student drawings of their ideal school library
- critical analysis of the case studies and student drawings

17 recommendations to:
- support practical designing, policy, innovative pedagogy
- identify further research needs

The project in a nutshell …

- Funded by QCSSI
Co-researchers: Dr Derek Bland and Dr Jill Willis, QUT
RAs: Dr Raylee Elliott Burns, Andrew Gibson, Kylee Andrews, Fiona MacArthur

This research focused on 7 recently created school libraries in Queensland, most of which were established with BER funding.

It explored how a new library environment influences teaching practices and learning outcomes.

Conceptually it drew on the notions of
- environment as third teacher (Reggio Emilia) and
- built pedagogy – how space influences patterns and interactions of learning.

The findings are presented as:
- a set of narrative case studies which present multiple stakeholder perspectives at the 7 schools
- student drawings of their ideal school library
- critical analysis of the case studies and student drawings

The study offers 17 recommendations to support practical designing, policy, innovative pedagogy – and identify further research needs.

For confidentiality I can't identify the schools or participants.
But on behalf of the research team I express sincere thanks to the principals, teacher-librarians, teachers and students who welcomed us to their schools and shared their imaginings and experiences with us.

http://reimaginingspaces.education.qut.edu.au/

The project web site gives:
- a detailed overview of the whole project
- An extensive literature review
- and our findings.
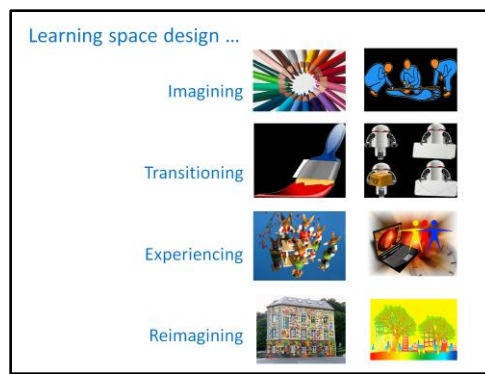
Through inductive data analysis we identified 4 main themes – or phases - in designing a new library learning space:

- Imagining
- Transitioning
- Experiencing
- Reimagining

All of these phases can involve – and benefit from - collaboration

Imagining – relates to the initial planning and designing of the new learning space; it involves envisioning what might be possible and then drawing up practical plans

Collaboration is vital at this time to ensure that all stakeholders are on the same page; so that the proposed space can meet the hopes and needs of those it is intended for.
Across the school community, teacher-librarians, students, teachers and school principals need to develop consensus about the intended role of the school library for their particular context; The school community then needs to work closely with professional designers and builders to ensure their hopes and needs are understood by those who need to bring them to life as a new learning space

Transitioning – relates to the process of preparing and moving into the newly created space. There is great opportunity for collaboration, especially involving parents and students – eg. in designing workflows, layout and colour scheme; and physically moving in to the new space. At this time the school community and individual users develop a sense of ownership of the new space

Experiencing – relates to the ways teachers, teacher-librarians and students use the new space in their learning and teaching; this includes collaborative planning and teaching; considering how the new space supports innovative learning and teaching

Reimagining – relates to evaluation and renewal of the space, as needs change; this is an ongoing process that can involve any of the stakeholders in informal and formal initiatatives

Ideally, learning space design is a collaborative process involving a wide range of stakeholders – however, in reality we found that across the 7 schools collaboration varied widely, depending on

the school context and project circumstances
Today I'm going to tell 2 stories that illustrate contrasting levels of collaboration

From these stories we gain insights about 3 things: the benefits of collaboration, the impacts of limited collaboration, and the importancce of including student voice in designing a learning space

School 2: *A happy compromise*

Imagining:
functional social learning space vs aesthetically pleasing place; visits with the architect; *opportunity to realise a dream*

Transitioning:
culling, renewing, relocating, groundsmen as collection managers

Experiencing:
class visits, lunchtimes in the reading pit, book and blanket, like Queen Street; *anything that will encourage the children to use the library, get excited about the library and the library program*

Reimagining:
extension of the classroom, a collaborative learning space; builds upon the support of teachers, parents and the local church; *not just a library … a community space that expresses a strong sense of school culture*

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at School 2 the principal and teacher-librarian worked closely with the architect and encouraged participation of the whole school community from the initial stages of the project.
BER funding allowed extensive renovations at School 2, including a new school library. Seeing this this as an "opportunity to realise a dream", the Principal actively involved the school community in redesigning the library

School 5: *Parachuting in*

Imagining:
planned before principals and teachers were appointed; TL said:
I didn't have any say in it. It was already decided before I got my job

Transitioning:
teacher-librarian arrived at - rather than transitioned into - the new library space; just acquired new space and fittings

Experiencing:
always changing, new things to see and do; teachers unaware; TL chipping away; but students are congregating here:
if you just want to hang with your friends you come here

Reimagining:
Vision for a central learning hub; TL is still *trying to work out where we're heading and what we're going to do*

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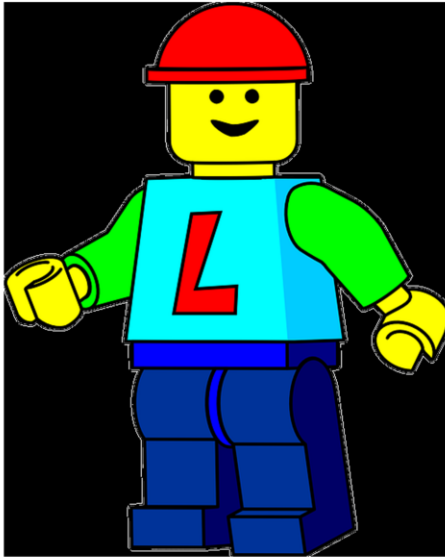
Benefits of collaboration

- New space welcomed and fit for purpose, well used

- Relationship building across school community

- Coherent vision for school & its learning spaces

- Sense of pride and ownership in new space

- Professional learning – principal, TL & architect

good things happen when the children know that the teachers and the parents are on the same page; we're doing things together (Sally, School 2)

Impacts of limited collaboration

- Lost opportunities

- Costly errors

- Ineffective use of space, unsuitable fittings

- Lack of co-created identity

- Disconnection – physical, social

- Limited teaching partnerships

that's a huge space that could have been better utilised (Jenny , School 5)

Attending to student voice

- Students are key stakeholders in libraries & learning spaces

- Gaps between students' ideal and real library spaces

- TLs & teachers translate students' imaginings to designers

- Environment engages students as 3rd teacher

Peacefulness, contentedness, adventure and technology

And we asked students to draw and talk about their ideal library. Two examples are shown on the screen

The boat …

A horse …

Recommendations

- identify the full range of stakeholders in *business of learning and teaching*; students and teachers as *clients* and *experts*

- consult all stakeholders as early, often and widely as possible

- allow time for collaborative relationships and understandings about the space to develop - before planning and contracts

- seize opportunities to learn and build on previous experience

- Enable stakeholders, to collectively *imagine and reimagine* the space, eg. hold a *charrette*

- take advantage of the *transition* phase for community-building

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Comments, Questions?

Thank you !
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