

Designing 21st century Libraries/Learning Spaces

Laura Taylor/Taylormade Libraries, for Leicester City Council

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Introduction

Traditionally school libraries have often developed as storehouses and quiet study spaces. Stocked with a range of books, periodicals, newspapers and other media students can choose to access individually at lunchtime, during timetabled study periods, or after school to complete homework, read, study and borrow books. In some facilities the library has been perceived as an adjunct to the English department hosting timetabled weekly silent reading periods. This still remains the case in some areas. However it does not fully exploit the full potential of what can be developed as transformational, innovative media rich learning spaces central to teaching and learning within a school. There is no one model of a school library – the school library must reflect the needs of its school and its approach to curriculum delivery.

New approaches to teaching and learning, along with an increased emphasis on personalised and independent learning, present school librarians and LRC managers with opportunities to develop spaces and services. When combined with developments in the use of digital technologies in school, they support the curriculum and work in collaboration with students and teachers in the learning process. By providing open access to a wide range of digital technologies and e-resources, alongside traditional print resources, LRCs can be designed to facilitate collaborative teaching and learning and support a range of learning styles. By creating a flexible and comfortable learning environment, the school library can effectively develop its role at the heart of the school. School libraries can and should become innovative, inspirational physical and virtual learning spaces, available and accessible to all staff and students as a facility and as a central resource supporting the whole curriculum. In effect they can become information hubs – a focal point in the school where a wide range of both traditional text based media and digital resources are provided, developed and promoted. This is even more effective when staffed by an expert in digital technology, e-learning, literacy, reading promotion, reader development, and information provision - a professional librarian.

Evidence shows that effective learning best takes place if teaching incorporates a number of key elements. These are also the skills identified as crucial for the 21st century learner if they are to succeed in higher education and in the employment market:-

- Active learning.
- Problem solving
- Critical thinking
- Personalised learning
- Independent learning
- Collaborative, group work
- Creativity
- Innovation/Enterprise
- Thinking skills
- Communication

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For Leicester City Council, LRC Connect project 4 May 2012



Internationally many schools, colleges and universities are adopting a **Learning Commons approach** to their traditional library based provision, in order to support the above approaches to teaching and learning and deliver an effective service.

A Learning Commons

“...a flexible and responsive approach to helping schools focus on learning *collaboratively*. It expands the learning experience, taking students and educators into virtual spaces beyond the walls of a school.

A Learning Commons is a vibrant, whole-school approach, presenting exciting opportunities for collaboration among teachers, teacher-librarians and students. Within a Learning Commons, new relationships are formed between learners, new technologies are realized and utilized, and both students and educators prepare for the future as they learn *new ways to learn*.

And best of all, as a space traditionally and naturally designed to facilitate people working together, a school’s library provides the natural dynamics for developing a Learning Commons.”

[Together for learning. School libraries and the emergence of the Learning Commons: A vision for the 21st century, Ontario School Library Association, 2010 \(PDF\)](#)

A Learning Commons approach to library provision is typified by certain key design features:

- The space should be adaptable for a range of different purposes and meet the needs of different activities.
- The library staff may be involved with supporting or organising a wide range of activities in collaboration with a number of subject areas and year groups. They can also work with a variety of group sizes, e.g.:
 - i. a speaker or a public speaking training session to a whole year group if space allows;
 - ii. an author, poet or storytelling event with a class;
 - iii. a video-conferencing session with other schools;
 - iv. a whole class research lesson using books and ICT resources and links put together by the librarian on the school’s VLE;
 - v. guided reading or literacy support sessions with small groups using e-readers, books, Accelerated Reader on-line quiz software (www.renlearn.com);
 - vi. a 6th form induction session demonstrating referencing skills using a tool such as Neil’s Toolbox (www.neilstoolbox.com);
 - vii. a GCSE preparatory lesson for controlled assessment research using books, reference materials, newspapers, periodicals and online databases such as Issues



Online (www.independence.co.uk/issues-online/), Essential Articles (www.carelpres.co.uk or <http://www.icsonlineresources.org/>);

- viii. drama workshops planned in collaboration with the librarian focusing on books to stimulate interest in a particular genre or a local book award (www.southwarkbookaward.org.uk); careers advice drop in-sessions using sites such as www.fasttomato.com alongside career books with individual Year 9 students;
- ix. an EPQ or IB research session where the librarian will demonstrate advanced Google search techniques to the whole 6th form group along with the use of web 2.0 tools such as Evernote (www.evernote.com) for effective note taking;
- x. after school or lunchtime book groups using websites, such as www.ckg.org.uk or forums or discussion groups set up on the school's VLE, to blog about favourite reads;
- xi. taster sessions for local primary classes; school council meetings and mentor training sessions.

The best way therefore of organising the space may be to think in terms of adaptable **zones**:

- silent areas for 6th form individual study;
- a teaching area where the librarian and/or a teacher can deliver a lesson to a whole class;
- collaborative group areas where students can research using books and laptops/iPads;
- comfortable browsing areas where students can read or discuss their reading choices with each other and staff etc.

The space will need to be a flexible multi-functional whole school resource, incorporating both formal and informal areas, which can be adapted to meet differing needs and demands throughout the school day, week, term and indeed year. This may inevitably entail the library accommodating more than one group of students at any one time engaged in different activities hence the need to create zones with movable display screens and shelving units between areas.

The library can therefore be seen to be a dynamic and proactive service providing a space that facilitates and encourages:

- **Collaboration.** New styles of teaching and learning emphasise group work with students working together as well as independently to research and create. Hence the need for tables which can accommodate small groups of 4/6. These are light weight enough to be re-configured or stacked if a more open space is required. Tables should allow for students to spread out and use books and digital devices alongside each other so Wi-Fi rather than fixed networks will facilitate a more flexible approach. The SLA recommends that there should be



enough Wi-Fi connected laptops available for use and space available for at least 50% of library users at any one time.

- **Whole school use** with the library central to teaching and learning. The school library is a whole school resource and not, as perhaps traditionally may have been the case, allied totally to the English department. The library becomes a focal point in the school community and develops into the heart of the school.
- **Integration of ICT** alongside traditional text based resources, books, periodicals and magazines in a multi-media approach to teaching and learning. So the library will supply on-line and downloadable digital resources (periodicals, newspapers, databases, encyclopaedias etc.), freely accessible to the whole school community via the schools' network, the library catalogue and via the Virtual Learning Environment. It then truly can become a 24 hour library and a portal to information providing access to resources, both physical and virtual, anywhere at any time to all users. Within the library space resources such as CDs and DVDS should be displayed alongside books, and digital equipment used by students should be accessible alongside text based information sources for research and literacy activities.
- **Cultural and community use.** Many school libraries open their doors and extend their services to parents, governors, feeder primaries, siblings and indeed the wider local community by collaborating with agencies such as adult education, adult literacy, and local public library services. The school library is ideally placed to support the extended schools initiative.

The school library is therefore clearly a multi-media learning space, accommodating a range of activities, but **not** an ICT suite. It may be appropriate to locate a connected ICT facility in proximity to the library which can be supervised by a separate member of staff, supporting and complementing the work of the library but the library should not become a timetabled classroom or ICT classroom as this will militate against its use as a whole school cross-curricular resource.

Features of a 21st century school library/LRC/Learning Space/Learning Commons

The librarian and library team can develop a range of services in an environment that:

- Is multi-functional and welcoming to students, staff, parents, governors and the local community
- Provides access to a wide range of digital technologies throughout.
- Provides a variety of zones to meet different needs and accommodate a range of activities.



These would include:-

- Private, quiet individual study spaces/6th form area
- Classroom/teaching/presentation area- whiteboard, speakers and data-projector
- Browsing/comfortable area with easy chairs, sofas
- Group/collaborative work areas
- Group/collaborative social areas
- Media production area

These might all be housed within the one large library space but ideally there might be access to small pods or an enclosed room within or adjacent to the main library/learning zone.

The library should have available a range of multi-media equipment for staff and student to use:-

- Plasma screen - for video-conferencing or “Skyping” with other schools, authors, or other speakers; showing news or current affairs programmes and films; displaying PowerPoints on a carousel highlighting new library resources and services or events; and promoting books via booktrailers created by staff, students or publishers.
- Hardware/equipment - this might include TV, DVD player, CDs and player, headphones, listening posts, netbooks, lapsafe (to charge and securely store laptops and netbooks), e-readers (e.g. kindles), tablets (e.g. iPads), iPods, Opacs (at least one dedicated Online Public Access Catalogue to display the on-line library catalogue), digital and video cameras, scanners, photocopiers, printers etc. Facilities should be provided to charge and store these items securely when not in use.
- Screen and digital projector for lessons and presentations.

Library Design - Some Issues to consider

In planning, designing or refurbishing any new school library it is important for architects and designers to engage all relevant stakeholders. These would include library staff, SLT, network managers and technicians, staff, students, governors, and parents. Specialist advice should be sought from local Schools Library Services (<http://www.sla.org.uk/schools-library-services-uk.php>), CILIP's School Libraries Group (www.cilip.org.uk/slq), the School Library Association (www.sla.org.uk). They can make use of the expertise and experience of library designers and suppliers where appropriate (see list below). Visits should be made to other schools to learn from good practice. Unfortunately costly mistakes can and have been made where expert experienced advice has not been sought – for example, schools designed without libraries, schools replacing libraries with ICT suites in the mistaken belief that this is all that is required to support student learning, too small libraries located on top floors hidden at the back of a school.

- It is crucial to involve the end users in the planning and development of the library space – staff, students, SLT, governors and parents. It is important to engage with the whole school community and canvas their views and ideas. By enlisting their engagement at an early



planning stage, perhaps through an online questionnaire (for example, www.surveymonkey.com) and through establishing a library committee or working party with representatives from all groups, you will design a library that they will wish to use and hopefully have their support as well as their input and valuable feedback.

- Learn from retail sector. Signage and display should be clear, informative, uncluttered, and welcoming. Look at examples from bookshops - libraries can learn from their approach to display, customer service, layout, and atmosphere.
- Location. The library/LRC should ideally be located centrally in the school with an entrance that is accessible to all students and staff, including any users with mobility difficulties. The 1995 and 2005 Disability Discrimination Acts should be consulted when planning any changes. There is a balance though to be found between the library being a focal point in the school and a central hub for a range of activities, and also providing a relatively calm, quiet place with minimum distraction and disruption, caused by the normal everyday flow of student movement in a busy school community. Entrances and exits should be kept to the minimum so that visits made to the library are purposeful and it does not become a general school thoroughfare. This is likely to cause a disruptive atmosphere and disturb classes and groups using the library. Multiple entrances/exits will also necessitate the need for additional security gates at an inevitable extra cost. Whilst it is counter-productive to “hide” libraries away on top floors or at the back of a school, in the mistaken belief that this will provide for a quiet study area, there is also a danger of locating libraries in central atriums with no regard for issues of noise or traffic flow. Perhaps the ideal is a centrally located, spacious, flexible space to allow for a high profile library at the heart of the school but designed to accommodate class, group and individual use by the whole school community with minimal noise, disruption or traffic flow. This clearly has the advantage of giving the message that literacy and learning is high profile within the school.
- Size and space. It is recommended that a school library should have adequate space available to accommodate 10% of the school population at any one time and should be 10% of the total school teaching area. Building Bulletin 98, commissioned by the DfES for Building Schools for the Future, recommended a minimum area for the library resource centre of 50 metres squared plus 0.1 metre squared for every pupil place and, in relation to learning resources, that the “absolute minimum is just over 100 square metres for 600 students and approximately 220 square metres for 1800 students”. The SLA guidelines highlight that the recommendations rise from 220 square metres for 600 on roll in an 11-16 school to over 800 square metres in an 11-18 school. The Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) Space Guidelines give recommendations of the amount of space to allow for school populations in the typical secondary school age range of 11 years to 16 years.



CILIP Space Guidelines, 2004

Number of students	Minimum accommodation in square metres	Maximum accommodation in square metres (including a 6 th form area)
800	340	370
900	370	400
1000	400	440
1100	440	475
1200	470	510
1300	500	550
1400	535	580
1500	570	620

- Shelving. It is important to take account of sight lines- shelving heights should allow for maximum visibility around the space. Shelving should not be too high and allow all students to reach resources easily and safely. It should also be adjustable so as to accommodate different sizes and shapes of resources. Recommendations for height are:

Primary Schools maximum shelf height Non-fiction, Reference and Fiction = 1.5m Primary Schools maximum height Picture Books = 1.2m.

Secondary Schools maximum height Non-fiction, Reference, Fiction and Graphic novels/ Picture Books = 1.8m. Recommended shelving depth for Primary and Secondary Schools for Non-fiction, Reference and Picture Books = 250-300mm. Shelf depth for Primary and Secondary Schools for Fiction (Novels) = 200mm. Shelf width mostly 900mm with some at 600mm. As much face-on display as possible should be incorporated. Ideally the shelf units should be mobile on castors so that they can be easily moved to create differently configured spaces if required to meet changing needs.

- Lighting. Partnerships for Schools have produced “Lighting Systems for Schools” which details suitable lighting for libraries. Ideally there should be as much natural light and ventilation as possible with blinds to prevent glare of direct sunlight on computer screens and blackout room for screenings.



- Radiators- consider their location in relation to shelving location. It is all too easy to take up all the available wall space with radiators thus limiting the ability to locate shelf units there. The same issue arises in relation to windows.
- DDA - the Disability Discrimination Act must be adhered to [Disability and Equality Act 2010](#) so that access to all resources, services and facilities is available to all students and staff and your library is an inclusive space.
- Electrical points and data cable/network points- walls, floors, ceiling - as many as possible! You are designing for the future so it is important to incorporate as many of these as possible including charging points for mobile devices such as iPods, iPads, Kindles, laptops and netbooks.
- Flooring - durable and easily cleanable as the library may be used for a wide range of collaborative activities. Carpet tiles are recommended for their noise dampening qualities as well as their ease of replacement.
- Colour- attractive, warm and welcoming and a complementary back-drop to resources rather than too dominating. Colour may be used to define different zones.
- Library office equipped with PCs, telephone, power outlets and data cables and sink. It is essential to provide an adequate staff work area and meeting space. This should be no less than 30 square metres (SLA recommendation) with visibility over the library as well as privacy and security (lockable cupboard space).
- Security and storage- cameras, gates, lockable cupboards.
- Self-issue – RFID (Radio Frequency identification) is currently an expensive option but something to consider. Do we need large counter areas? Many public libraries now operate a self-issue system supplemented by a small enquiry/advice desk. Perhaps this would free school librarians to spend time on the professional work of advising and supporting users rather than being tied behind issue desks performing non-professional tasks?
- Wi-Fi - fast, reliable connectivity must be a priority to facilitate use of a wide range of digital devices at any one time. Students will expect a fast, reliable Wi-Fi service.
- How many PCs? Better to have flexible mobile devices rather than fixed banks of computers to facilitate collaborative work.
- E-resources- Virtual Learning Environment and on-line databases such as those supplied by JCS Resources, Carel Press (Essential Articles) , Independent (Issues Online).



- Equipment loan - not all students will have access to what are for many costly pieces of technology. If we are to address issues of inclusion it is important that schools allow equality of opportunity and libraries may be able to enable this.

The important thing is to plan for the future and the developing needs of the school and the curriculum, and to be able to incorporate new developments in technology.

Digital Technologies in the School Library

Along with the provision of downloadable e-books and audio-books, and access to on-line subscription databases via the Library area of the school's VLE and on-line catalogue, there are a vast range of web 2.0 tools and software that can be utilised in a school library context to develop service provision, promote reading for pleasure and to enhance learning. Check out <http://tbarrett.edublogs.org/interesting-ways/> for lots of ideas and tools that can be applied in the library:-

- Book trailers- there are a whole range of commercially produced trailers, similar to film trailers, now freely available via YouTube or collected by other school librarians using tools such as Vodpod (<http://vodpod.com/>) which can be used to promote books and reading for pleasure, introduce new authors and extend reading choices (<http://vodpod.com/libwithattitude>). Many school librarians have also created their own or developed lessons or book group activities involving students creating their own using software such as Moviemaker , Photostory or free web 2.0 tools such as Animoto (www.animoto.com , <http://animoto.com/play/Q95vq1EfvxfnMOreKIBfSA>)
- Video-conferencing or Skyping with authors, book groups, other schools. This has been used very successfully in some schools for transition projects (linking with feeder primaries) or for international links with other schools in such activities as the collaborative writing project The Write Path (<http://writepath.ning.com/>) as well as for author sessions such as those hosted by the London Grid for Learning and the Reading Zone (<http://www.lgfl.net/curriculum-resources/Pages/reading-zone.aspx>).
- VoiceThread and Audacity. Some librarians have utilised audio to create podcast guides to their libraries and the services they offer. Others have set up VoiceThreads (<http://voicethread.com/>) for students to easily record book reviews or creative writing projects and share them with other schools via the web e.g. <https://voicethread.com/?#u74875.b89120.i480732>
- There are a developing plethora of curriculum and literacy related apps now freely or cheaply available for use on mobile devices such as iPads and iPods e.g. literacy and digital



storytelling using Storybird, Toondoo, Strip Design, Storybuddy, Puppet Pals, Storycubes, Photocomic, Spellathon, as well as curriculum apps- for example www.teachingappz.co.uk.

- Some schools are giving all their students access to e-reading devices or iPads. School libraries are also loaning devices to students and making downloads of books (textbooks and fiction materials) freely available via their library catalogues and VLEs
- Weblogs. Librarians can set up blogs either within their VLE or independently using Blogger (www.blogspot.co.uk), Wordpress (<http://wordpress.com/>) or Edublogs (<http://edublogs.org/>), to publicise their services, events, new books, and book reviews. Many have also set up moderated book review facilities for students to post and share their own views on their reading, for example:-

www.ravensbournlibraries.blogspot.co.uk

www.bookzone4boys.blogspot.co.uk

www.gryphonschoollrc.wordpress.com

www.jyhslibrary.blogspot.co.uk

www.literatureforlads.com

- Quadblogging (<http://quadblogging.net/>) allows four schools at a time to blog with each other. School libraries can facilitate this.
- Wikis are collaborative tools whereby a group of students can share their research on a group project. These can be set up and facilitated by the librarian.
- QR codes - a mobile technology. Librarians are exploring the possibilities of adding QR codes to books and shelves which, when scanned with a suitable mobile phone or iPod app, will link to video book trailers or YouTube videos of the author speaking. QR codes can also be used to easily add links to a word document, library leaflet or poster which once scanned will take the student to further resources, websites or videos ([46 Interesting ways to use QR codes](#)).
- Virtual Learning Environments - school librarians are well placed to develop their role into e-learning co-ordinators taking responsibility for developing the use of e-resources across the curriculum. At the very least the library can have a strong presence on the school's VLE.
- Facebook pages and Twitter feeds: a growing number of schools are using social networking tools to communicate with staff and students and promote their services. For example, City of London Academy Library (www.facebook.com/CoLALibrary), Forest Hill School Library:



(www.facebook.com/pages/Forest-Hill-School-Library/167079350014142?ref=ts), Culford School Library (www.facebook.com/pages/Culford-School-Library/195176480874?ref=ts)

- Curriculum/Topic Pathfinders or research guides can be created using tools such as Diigo, Livebinders, Netvibes, LibGuides, Jog the Web, Rollyo. Projects such as these are excellent examples of collaborative work between teaching staff and librarians:

<http://library-online.org.uk/research/>

<http://library-online.libguides.com/index.php>

http://www.netvibes.com/boxhillschool#Year_7-9_projects

http://www.livebinders.com/play/play_or_edit?id=4924

Suppliers

These lists are not exhaustive and do not include all available companies.

Library Furnishing Companies/Suppliers/Designers

- Opening the Book www.openingthebook.com
- Point 8 www.point8.co.uk
- Demco/Gresswell www.gresswell.co.uk
- Peters www.peters-books.co.uk
- Remploy www.remploy.co.uk
- FG Library www.fqlibrary.co.uk
- Learning Spaces www.learningspaces.co.uk/
- Innova Solutions www.innova-solutions.co.uk

Computerised Library Management Systems for Schools

- Microlibrarian- Eclipse.net <http://www.microlib.co.uk/>
- Heritage <http://www.isoxford.com/>
- Accessit <http://www.accessitsoftware.com/>
- Softlink Oliver www2.softlinkint.com

Library Security Systems

- DTech <http://www.d-techdirect.com>
- 3MM www.3mselect.co.uk
- Plescon www.infomat.net



SLA STANDARDS: Library space

SLA Standards for School Libraries, 2011. (<http://www.sla.org.uk/dwl.php?doc=sla-standards-secondary-v1.pdf>)

- The library should have sufficient space to incorporate areas for study, soft seating, group work and ICT provision for project work, research and homework.
- There must be sufficient suitable room for the book stock with easy access to it.
- There should be sufficient space to house a full class of students, with a teacher and additional accommodation for students wishing to study. There should be no fewer than 30 places.
- There should be areas for book display and promotional materials.
- We advise that there should be no more pupils supervised than a maximum of 30 per staff member present.
- There should be office space for a library manager with staff, to provide storage, a book preparation/administration area and a secure space. A solo worker requires storage space and a secure area.
- The School Library Association recommends that dedicated ICT suites should be housed separately from the main library area, even when managed by library staff.
- The School Library Association recommends that there should be additional Sixth Form study areas separate from the library

With expanding 6th forms this may be the most effective means of supporting the needs of the library services different user groups. Accommodating large groups of 6th formers on timetabled study support sessions during the school day may well militate against the use of the library by the rest of the school so resulting in a failure to meet anyone's needs effectively. The Building Bulletin 98 (see below) also recommends that there should be specific areas(s) for 6th form study where necessary)

It is apparent however that some schools are being designed with either inappropriate library/learning spaces (too small, ill-equipped, badly located) or, more worryingly, with no library or librarian at all. This is in the misguided belief that new e-learning and digital technologies are all that is now required to provide students with access to information. Some schools are being designed with scattered Learning Zones or hubs located around the school connected to curriculum areas so losing a central cross-curricular resource. Crucially school librarians may be at the forefront of e-learning developments and become proactive agents for change, knowledge managers and expert IT champions in their schools. Librarians can engage with curriculum developments, collaborate with teaching colleagues and seize the opportunities presented by a new approach. There is an assumption that these digital natives (the 21st century learner) have the knowledge and skills required to access reliable and authenticated information but research, such as the recent Demos report "Truth, lies and the internet" (www.demos.co.uk/publications/truth-lies-and-the-internet) highlights the lack of these skills of critical evaluation and effective search strategies amongst



young people. The school librarian is well placed to collaborate with teaching colleagues in developing these skills.

This may require library staff to develop new skills and expertise in handling new technologies and developing virtual on-line libraries, but at heart these are the traditional skills of the professional librarian – knowledge and information management in whatever format. The school librarian can become the information and learning leader within their school providing not only space and resources, but advice, expertise and support, equipping students with the skills to utilise digital information and resources in an informed and critical way.

Ultimately the school library should be at the heart of any school, just as literacy and learning should be at the heart of education. By developing our libraries into attractive, welcoming, adaptable learning spaces, incorporating digital learning tools and technologies alongside traditional print-based resources, we will ensure increased usage by staff and students and ultimately assist our schools in their drive to enrich learning, develop the skills of learners and raise levels of achievement.



Key Resources

- Designed for Learning video: www.cilip.org.uk/get-involved/advocacy/school-libraries-advocacy/Pages/designed-for-learning-video.aspx
An important seminal video highlighting key design features in a range new libraries/learning spaces. Features Professor Stephen Heppell, a leading voice in the world of ICT and learning.
- Dubber, Geoff and Lemaire, Kathy. Visionary Spaces: Designing and planning a secondary school library. SLA, 2007. <http://www.sla.org.uk/publication.php?isbn=9781903446386>
- School Library Association Library Design Awards <http://www.sla.org.uk/library-design-awards.php>
- Designing Libraries - <http://www.designinglibraries.org.uk/> a database of case studies and examples of new library designs across all sectors.
- Building Bulletin 98: Briefing Framework for Secondary School Projects and Building Bulletin 99: Briefing Framework for Primary School Projects. DCSF.
<http://media.education.gov.uk/assets/files/pdf/b/building%20bulletin%2098%20-%20briefing%20framework%20for%20secondary%20school%20projects.pdf>

Further Reading

- www.diigo.com/list/ltay007/school-library-design
An extensive list of web articles, books, presentations and videos. Includes lists of UK furniture and equipment suppliers, UK and international case studies along with recommendations, and guidelines.
- <http://www.flickr.com/photos/vblibrary/5247432223/>
Links to collections of photos of UK and international library designs.
- <http://pinterest.com/ltay007/designing-school-libraries/>
Collection of photos of interesting and inspirational library designs/features/furnishings.

