



Guideline 6

The Learning Environment

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1. Current assessment

This is the final guideline in a series of six guidelines highlighting effective provision for public libraries in lifelong learning, drawing attention and linking to established and emerging good practice in the provision of services for learning. This guideline looks at the learning environment which libraries can create for their users together with operational factors may influence this and provides examples of good practice.

Throughout their history, public libraries have striven to provide learning facilities of various kinds for their user communities. However, within current reality, there is an increasing need for public libraries to evolve into a new kind of learning institution. Various labels have been used to describe what public libraries may need to become, including Local Learning Hubs or Open Learning Centres.

This guideline focuses on the environmental influences within the public library by discussing the physical and virtual environments involved, together with the resources required to pursue such an evolutionary process, which will enable public libraries to perform a core role in delivering Lifelong Learning.

- The increasing prevalence of ICT in everyday life has had an important impact on the way that key competencies in lifelong learning are now seen and designated. Certain areas, where ICT supported learning is evident in public libraries include:
 - Information Literacy
 - Basic ICT Skills
 - Play and Recreation
 - Citizenship and Community services including language courses for foreign citizens and immigrants
 - Learning services such as digital content, learning support materials, on-line courses; database of local resources and trainers etc.

Physical learning environments, in many situations, are giving way to or being 'reborn' as digital learning platforms. It appears vital for the role of public Libraries in Lifelong Learning that they remain aware of this recent evolution and become fully involved with this process.

In many countries across Europe, there has been a tendency to assume that the market and the lowering of prices of computers and Internet services will solve the question of information exclusion without the need for government intervention. Nevertheless, where individually owned equipment is (as almost everywhere) to some degree not universal, the role of public services such as libraries as an easily available means of access to information and on-line learning services remains critically important and needs to be further focused and developed. A key aspect of this issue is the need to achieve the right balance between connectivity and interpersonal 'face to face' communication in creating effective learning environments

Although public libraries are 'client centred' in the way they are organised, it remains important to consult users and community stakeholder groups about the way that learning services are designed and delivered.

The notion of the Local Learning Hub (Papert and Cavallo, 2000) relates to the creation of initially small entities which will generate innovative learning environments and support a local group of "learning activists" to develop, guide, research and help others to appropriate and successful learning models. Although their model does not pay particular attention to libraries, many of the design characteristics suggested for Local Learning Hubs appear to fit actual or potential library roles such as public access technology and learning centres, schools, centres for community development, incubators for small technology-based businesses, sites for professional development of educators and centres for intellectual and political discussion. Several libraries around the world have taken this stance towards learning and are positioning themselves as Learning Hubs, thereby providing an interesting model for further assessment.

'Self-learning environments' depend largely on ICT and in many cases draw upon the use of up-to-date equipment in multifunctional spaces which provide flexibility to adapt to users' needs and can act as an agent of change.

The learning environment needs to reflect the interaction and involvement expected in learning sessions or episodes. Mixed learning environments can be designed to have more or less of the virtual and interactional components in the main learning area of a program.

When designing learning sessions, the development of each theme or subject should comply with the learning objectives and the profile of the users interested in the theme in order to create the "right mix for the right people".

Particular attention needs to be paid to the physical space and/or the digital/virtual component that support learning processes. The organization of the learning space(s) also requires the creation of the right learning "climate", that is: everything that mobilizes a certain space for that function. A given learning space's climate should also be complemented by the idea of ambience, especially in the virtual component where users can create their own ambience introducing features like music, decoration and personalized resources or appliances.

In short, the learning environment, both virtual and interactional, must be sufficiently adaptable to the needs and learning styles of users/learners. Users should be provided with ambiances that meet certain basic requirements including:

- Comfort
- Participation/involvement during learning sessions or episodes
- Easy to use available resources
- Transparency and simplicity in the formulation of learning session objectives

2. Conclusions and recommendations

Public libraries should take into account some fundamental issues in creating learning environments:

- *Design* involving the quality of digital/virtual resources, taking full account of the needs of target users and versatility in the layout and navigation environment options. Learning platforms should adopt the full potential of Web 2.0 (Library 2.0) concept, allowing for the organization's principles, values and public image whilst enabling the personalisation of the learning environment. Platforms should be adaptable to mobile equipment such as PDAs and Mobile Phones. Formats of presentation and forms of visualization should be diverse.
- *Security* which is fundamental to guaranteeing a safe learning environment. It is essential to incorporate 'safety systems' which counteract external threats such as viruses, spam or 'cyberbullying'. A system of warrants and usage rules, as well as a permanent monitoring plan are also critical;
- *Accessibility*: they must guarantee the right of access to all users independently of any sort of handicap (physical, sensorial, mental or intellectual, etc.). Communication strategies should also adopt simple language adapted to a wide public, although sufficiently accurate in its content. In the case of learning for children, recommendations for parents or adult tutors should be included.

Physical spaces adapted to the purpose of learning must bear in mind two key conditions: the facilitation of learning relation between mediators and library users; and direct access to self learning tools. Design and accessibility are most significant in the creation of an appropriate learning climate.

3. Good Practice

Austria

The City Library of Graz has created a special programme for children named "LABUKA – the book island". LABUKA is a place of joyful learning and discovery for children. Trainers and educators support young learners with courses and workshops and special holiday programmes are offered. Access to all events is free.

<http://stadtbibliothek.graz.at/?ref-type=labuka>

Belgium

Stichting Lezen Vlaanderen (Reading Foundation). An organization which collaborates with libraries to promote reading through campaigns and projects, e.g. "Youth Book Week", "Fahrenheit 451", "Read to others Week", etc.

<http://www.stichtinglezen.be/>

Denmark

Hybrid Learning Environments in Aarhus Public Libraries. The Hybrid Learning Environments project worked with the public library's new role in a learning and knowledge society. The project aimed to contribute to an exploration of how the library can support citizens' learning and activities as active citizens in the democratic society. The central idea of the project has been a paradigm shift for the role of the staff: a shift from the notion of the public library as a supplier of information resources to the idea of the library as an active partner in the citizens' learning processes.

http://presentations.aakb.dk/laering/html/in_english.html

Finland

YLE Teema – A digital TV channel broadcasts cultural, education and science programmes in Finland. Its repertoire consists of a wide range of films, carefully-chosen documentaries and legendary European drama.

<http://www.yle.fi/teema/>

Portugal

ULISSES Programme: Developing Information Literacy Competencies in Lisbon Municipal Libraries Network - This programme, designed taking as its main reference the [IFLA-International Federation of Library Associations- Guidelines on Information Literacy for Lifelong Learning \(2006\)](#), wants to create the opportunities for users to develop their information literacy competencies in an informal environment. The development of ICT basic skills is one of the learning areas covered by ULISSES Programme.

<http://blx.cm-lisboa.pt/gca/index.php?id=1225>

Sweden

TUNE Project (Training of library users in a new Europe) - This project, managed by the Public Library of Helsingborg (Sweden) and developed in cooperation by the Regional Library of Castile-La Mancha, and the Public Library of Randers (Denmark) and funded by the EU programme Culture 2000, promotes digital literacy for library users. The developed model was tested by Ljubljana City Library.

<http://www.tune.eu.com/>

United Kingdom

Idea Stores – This project combines the best of traditional library and information services with first class lifelong learning opportunities in comfortable and friendly surroundings and offers 900 courses that go from ICT or Childcare to Language Courses or still activities and events such as the Chinese New Year Celebration or Job Club.

<http://www.ideastore.co.uk/en/home>

The Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre - This museum and story centre has been recognised in Great Britain as the most innovative project in the basic skills and learning and their work can be set as a good example that sets high standards for what can be seen as a learning environment.

<http://www.roalddahl.com/>

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