Space, the library frontier: Positioning the library environment in the 21st Century

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When thinking about connecting, we naturally think about interpersonal connections. We also consider our connections in terms of the social environment in which encounters occur. I wish to discuss this environment in terms of the aesthetic experience of library spaces and the connections that visitors, users, and clients make within libraries. With this in mind, my presentation will address the potential architectural spaces of libraries and how these might influence user expectations and experiences. For example, many resources are increasingly being offered electronically and the visual cue of book stacks will undoubtedly diminish in decades to come. I believe this will alter user interactions with the library in terms of their aesthetic experience of the space, placing emphasis on furniture styles, specialised spaces, portable technology and Wi-Fi connectivity.

How will these new environments shape an understanding of what a library is? How will people connect with librarians and each other when the environment begins to look less like a traditional library?

I will address these questions by discussing some recent developments at the Sylvia Ashton-Warner Library, Faculty of Education, at the University of Auckland. The building is architecturally interesting and is aesthetically connected to the role of 'library' through the presence of book stacks. Upstairs, however, there is an experiment underway with the introduction of new furniture to create spaces geared around portable devices. I will discuss the impact of this experimental space on the library so far and relate this approach to some local and international perspectives on the evolution of library spaces in the 21st Century.

Key Audience: Everyone, Tertiary, Public, Schools