

Library Picture Book Space Construction and Service Postprint

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Abstract

[Purpose/Significance] Picture book spaces serve not only as venues for children's reading, but also as essential facilities for normal universities to cultivate professionals in primary education. Consequently, the construction of picture book spaces in university libraries is of great necessity.

[Method/Process] Through a systematic review of picture book values and publishing status, along with the current state of picture book space construction and services in libraries both domestically and internationally, this study analyzes the necessity of developing and operating picture book spaces in normal university libraries, explores practical construction approaches, and presents several considerations for service delivery.

[Result/Conclusion] The findings seek to rectify misconceptions regarding the construction of picture book spaces in university libraries, advocating that such spaces should be integrated into the innovative service framework of normal university libraries.

Full Text

Preamble

Library Picture Book Space Construction and Service

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Abstract: [Purpose/Significance] Picture book space serves not only as a reading area for children but also as an essential facility for teacher-training universities to cultivate primary education professionals, making its establishment in academic libraries highly necessary. [Method/Process] Based on a review of

picture book values and publishing trends, as well as the current state of picture book space construction and services in libraries both domestically and internationally, this paper analyzes the necessity of building picture book spaces in normal university libraries, explores practical implementation approaches, and offers reflections on service models. [Result/Conclusion] The paper argues for correcting misconceptions about picture book space construction in academic libraries and advocates that such spaces should be rooted in the innovative services of normal university libraries.

Keywords: university library; space transformation; picture book space; active learning

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Inspired by international design concepts for university library spaces, Chinese academic libraries have enhanced their understanding of literature and spatial resources. Faced with new domestic challenges, a space transformation movement has emerged across university libraries. As various spaces such as shared learning areas and maker spaces continue to appear, an unprecedented “picture book space” has quietly taken root in university libraries—no longer exclusive to public or children’s libraries, and with services that are fundamentally different. These spaces integrate multidisciplinary knowledge with professional characteristics, providing an autonomous learning environment for cross-disciplinary knowledge integration. Serving as a second classroom for university students and a “third space” beyond dormitories, picture book spaces are not merely venues for reading but active learning environments that offer deep professional services, promote self-directed learning, and cultivate comprehensive qualities. This paper explores and reflects on issues concerning the value of picture books and the necessity of library picture book space construction.

1 The Value and Publishing Landscape of Picture Books

Picture books, also known as picturebooks, originated in 17th-century Europe as illustrated books where pictures and text hold equal status in conveying meaning. Taiwan, China began promoting picture book reading in the 1970s, sparking a trend that has since become a global phenomenon in children’s reading for the 21st century. Distinguished from other literary works, picture books exhibit three key characteristics: First, unity of text and image, where illustrations and words are not merely complementary but co-equal in expression. Second, child-centeredness, reflected in their content, format, and presentation. Third, originality and openness, as picture books represent personalized creations based on authors’ life experiences, offering readers ample interpretive space through the abstract, symbolic, suggestive, and polysemous nature of their visual-textual integration.

The value of picture books far exceeds common perceptions. Recognized as the optimal reading material for early childhood education, they use exquisite

illustrations to convey profound meanings through simple stories, providing children with visual enjoyment and delivering both literary-aesthetic and educational value. They facilitate language development by establishing connections between sounds and images while cultivating expressive abilities. They nurture emotional development, activate thinking, and stimulate imagination, creativity, and imitation. They expand knowledge and life skills through rich stories and visuals that attract children to reading and exploring the unknown. They foster emotional connections with nature and soften children's hearts through dialogue with books, teaching care, sharing, resilience, and courage. They also enhance parent-child relationships through shared reading, storytelling, drawing, and crafts activities that improve communication.

Hand-drawn illustrations in ancient Chinese documents represent early forms of picture book creation. During the May Fourth New Culture Movement, *Children's World* marked the beginning of modern Chinese picture books, with Zhang Leping's *Sanmao* comic series representing original embryonic works. After 1949, the Chinese government promoted *lianhuanhua* (serial picture stories) as an important educational method and extracurricular reading for youth, establishing art and children's publishing houses that produced illustrated books combining ink painting, fine brushwork, and folk art. By the late 20th century, Chinese picture books experienced unprecedented development as *lianhuanhua*, with the publishing industry embracing picture book production and improving creative, editorial, and design capabilities. Artists adapted folk tales, legends, and fables, laying the foundation for contemporary picture books and enriching the market.

Entering the 21st century, Chinese children's picture book creation and publishing have flourished. Between 2006 and 2008, children's picture books received unprecedented attention, with outstanding original works continuously emerging and enriching the market. The introduction of excellent foreign picture books provided learning opportunities for domestic authors, broadening creative and editorial thinking and establishing foundations for original development. The current publishing landscape features four trends: First, in-depth exploration of original modern picture books as an independent children's literature form, delivering numerous outstanding works. Second, a surge in original creation and publishing, with rapidly improving theoretical and practical capabilities marking the arrival of a picture book era. Third, concentrated expression of Chinese elements in text and image, emphasizing national cultural characteristics in themes, exploring traditional artistic styles, focusing on systematic classic publications, and maintaining excellent traditional cultural positions. Fourth, professionalization of publishing teams, with children's literature researchers affirming picture book value. Over 500 publishers now focus on picture books, with original authors transitioning toward renowned masters.

2 Current Status of Picture Book Space Construction and Services in Libraries

2.1 International Picture Book Space Development

Britain's 1910 publication of Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* is considered the beginning of modern picture books. The mainstream shifted to the United States in the 1930s, spread to Korea and Japan in the 1950s-60s, and by the late 1980s, governments and public institutions worldwide began emphasizing children's reading activities, spurring the development of picture book reading space design and services. Developed countries typically equip kindergartens with two standard facilities: picture book libraries and science museums, making picture book spaces essential infrastructure. Public libraries also prioritize children's picture book areas, exemplified by the Seattle Central Library's children's section, Birmingham Public Library in Alabama, Frankfurt Library in Germany, and Fukushima Prefecture's picture book library in Japan—all providing excellent environments for children. Additionally, robust systems ensure children's reading resources, with annual reading requirements of 50-100 books per child in some countries. Public library picture book spaces offer extensive collections and organize regular reading promotion services. Schools at all levels maintain libraries, with reading corners in elementary classrooms, comprehensive middle school libraries, and university libraries that generally include picture book collections, though dedicated picture book spaces remain rare.

2.2 Domestic Picture Book Space Development

China's population of children aged 0-14 exceeds 250 million, and the government attaches great importance to early childhood education, with municipal children's libraries established nationwide. Picture book spaces for children emerged in the late 1990s, and with the advancement of nationwide reading initiatives, picture books have become fashionable and a powerful tool for reading promotion, spawning numerous private picture book spaces.

According to surveys, 2005-2010 marked the embryonic stage of picture book spaces, with limited numbers and influence concentrated in first- and second-tier cities. The 2011-2015 period represented a development phase extending to third- and fourth-tier cities, with brands like Poplar Picture Book House, Old John Picture Book House, Pickabook Picture Book House, Red Clay Reading Club, and others emerging. By around 2018, nearly 3,000 private picture book spaces existed nationwide, creating a "picture book fever." Notably, while children's libraries offer free services as part of public cultural provision, private spaces operate commercially through membership fees and book sales, making them less popular among parents and leading to gradual decline. Meanwhile, demand from parents and children continues growing, and although public libraries have attempted to "fill the gap," supply falls short of demand. For instance, Guangzhou Library's parent-child picture book reading area (a library

within a library) is extremely popular, and Guangzhou Children's Library with its nearly 30 branches provides picture book reading and lending services. Various models coexist, including traditional physical spaces, new online platforms, and integrated spaces, operated by public libraries, community cultural institutions, publishers, bookstores, and private individuals. While this development has produced reading promoters and professional service agencies, significant deficiencies remain. Beyond severe shortages in quantity, resources, and space, the lack of professional picture book personnel has become urgent. Without professional guidance, even the best picture book spaces risk marginalization and diminished effectiveness.

3 Picture Book Space Construction and Services in Normal University Libraries

3.1 Supporting Educational Missions

Normal universities are training grounds for primary and preschool education professionals, making picture book space construction essential for teaching, research, and talent cultivation. First, picture book reading requires specialized expertise. Few normal university libraries currently prioritize picture books, with many showing lagging and dismissive attitudes. Picture book spaces enable preschool education majors to engage with, understand, apply, and cultivate competency in picture books, ensuring qualified professionals for the new era. Second, picture book education requires artistry. Excellent picture books possess high artistic value as advanced educational resources that demand sophisticated pedagogical skills; without these, abundant resources cannot achieve optimal effect. Third, picture book teaching requires methodology. Using picture books represents not just a change in teaching tools and media but a transformation in educational philosophy—a process where teachers actively explore new methods and concepts while cultivating children's thinking abilities. Fourth, picture book selection requires expertise. Keeping pace with rapidly evolving creation and publication demands skills in selection, knowledge, and teaching experience. Fifth, picture book reading significantly impacts students' emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, problem-solving abilities, and artistic creativity.

3.2 Serving Societal Needs

China's overall reading capacity remains low, necessitating strengthened nationwide reading initiatives starting with children and infants. In 2010, the Ministry of Culture issued *Opinions on Further Strengthening the Construction of Children's Libraries*, leading to the emergence of various picture book spaces and increased social and parental recognition. As the most suitable reading material for young children, picture books require preschool teachers as the main force for promotion—a force that has yet to fully form, creating urgent social demand for such professionals. Therefore, normal university libraries bear significant

responsibility in cultivating specialized talent through picture book spaces.

First, this facilitates training of preschool and primary education professionals who will become the main force promoting children's reading after graduation. Supporting their mastery of picture book teaching skills during university prepares them for competent educational work. Second, it advances social reading activities for young children. Experience shows that school-based picture book spaces play crucial roles in promoting early reading. Normal university libraries can organize social reading activities, enabling students to practice various picture book skills and accelerate reading development. Third, it cultivates picture book space managers and faculty. Currently, China lacks training programs for picture book space management professionals, and this shortage constrains development. As primary channels for delivering preschool and primary education teachers, normal universities must equip graduates with knowledge of child psychology, art, picture book drama creation, directing, and performance to become qualified professionals who can guide children, parents, and caregivers.

3.3 Space Innovation Requirements

Before learning from international library picture book service concepts, Chinese normal universities and their libraries inadequately recognized the educational functions of picture books, neglecting resource development and relying only on children's education and literature collections without establishing dedicated spaces. With the growing emphasis on early reading, normal university libraries have realized the imperative of picture book space construction.

First, this responds to nationwide reading initiatives and social service needs. Exclusive reliance on institutional collections has limited impact; only through social engagement, resource sharing, and reading promotion can greater effects be achieved, with professional teachers better positioned to serve children's reading. Second, space transformation provides opportunities for libraries to innovate picture book services that support professional education. Normal universities with preschool and primary education programs must consider picture book spaces in library planning to advance with the times, envision the future, and expand library value. Third, this ensures talent cultivation. Picture book spaces support teaching and research needs, enhancing students' understanding of educational value through practical resources and enabling better guidance for children, parents, and caregivers. In summary, libraries assume responsibility for cultivating new-style preschool teachers through picture book space services, realizing both educational and social value.

4 Shenyang Normal University Library Picture Book Space Construction and Practice

4.1 Space Positioning

Preschool and primary education at Shenyang Normal University represents a pillar and signature program. Seizing space transformation opportunities, the library collaborated with the Preschool and Primary Education College to create a tailored learning and creation space integrating teaching support and reading promotion—the “Starry Sky Creative Picture Book Space.” The name “Starry Sky” derives from the works of picture book author Jimmy Liao, whose concise, vivid, and imaginative style resonates with children’s pure and innocent temperament. Both share remarkable simplicity that strikes directly to the heart, evoking a sense of great sound being silent and great form being shapeless, penetrating vastness to reach the boundless starry sky. The name also expresses hope that readers maintain faith in and desire for truth, goodness, and beauty. Serving primarily preschool and primary education students while accommodating all university readers, the space aims to support picture book reading, appreciation, and design instruction with literature, spatial resources, and learning experiences.

4.2 Space Design and Functions

The “Starry Sky Creative Picture Book Space” employs bright, vibrant green as its primary color, decorated with cartoon hand-drawn murals to create a natural, lively, and childlike reading environment. Beyond providing picture book collections, the space is equipped with teaching integrated machines and mobile furniture, with a podium designed as a small stage to enable multiple functions: picture book instruction, reading, design, storytelling, drama rehearsal, discussion, creative activities, crafts, intellectual games, and parties. This brings picture books into the classroom and crafts into picture books, creating an offline experience platform for situational teaching that ensures practical classroom needs and performance-based instruction requirements. Focused on picture book reading services, it provides high-quality parent-child activity experiences while attending to social and family education needs, with distinct advantages over other spaces.

4.3 Educational Practice

The space hosts continuous teaching activities. “Children’s Classic Picture Book Reading and Appreciation” constitutes part of the preschool and primary education college’s curriculum. The library collaborates with faculty to design extracurricular seminars, skill practices, and sharing activities that enhance professional learning and teaching effectiveness. First, the library has developed a distinctive collection, inviting faculty to supplement existing holdings to create a comprehensive system of over 2,000 Chinese and foreign picture books. Second, the space embeds professional courses, inviting instructors to use it as

an open classroom for expanded teaching covering picture book fundamentals, drama, and creation, taught jointly by librarians and faculty. Third, it organizes salon discussions, inviting teachers from different disciplines to lecture on various themes and conduct activities, including targeted “Children’s Picture Book Drama Performances” to enhance professional literacy. Fourth, it facilitates teaching practice through the “Vivid Colors” student club, which collaborates with the “Normal University Spring Kindergarten” for training activities in picture book creation, storytelling, drama performance, and parent-child reading, while integrating innovation and entrepreneurship training through recorded picture book stories for “Great Creation” projects that enhance innovation capacity.

4.4 Social Service and Education

Beyond instructional services, the picture book space opens to the community on weekends. Its rich resources and comfortable environment attract young readers for activities including reading, storytelling, drawing, and drama experiences with the “Vivid Colors” student club. This fulfills the social service function of university libraries while promoting the importance of children’s reading and cultivating library learning habits from an early age. Picture book spaces are not exclusive to public libraries but constitute an essential component of normal universities. Most normal universities have programs in fine arts, children’s literature, education science, teacher education, primary education, or preschool education—all particularly needing such spaces. While not mandatory for all normal university libraries, providing picture book space construction and services is necessary to genuinely improve student quality and solve many challenges in teacher education, serving as crucial support for primary teacher training.

5 Reflections on Picture Book Space Construction and Services in Normal University Libraries

5.1 Picture Books as the Foundation of Early Childhood Education

With their unique design, exquisite illustrations, narrative power, and age-appropriate characteristics, picture books hold vital educational value for children, providing joy and nourishment for healthy, happy growth. Widely recognized by Chinese early education professionals as the foundation of children’s enlightenment education, picture books have won the hearts of both parents and children. Some normal university libraries have established picture book spaces, such as those at Hunan Arts and Crafts Vocational College, Shanghai Xingjian College, Shandong Women’s University, and Chongqing Preschool Teachers College. This shift in thinking has driven service transformation, as these institutions deeply recognize the value of picture book spaces and future educational trends, diligently cultivating expertise in picture book knowledge, educational capacity, child psychology, and children’s literature to develop in-

novative thinking among professionals.

5.2 Urgency of Library Picture Book Space Creation

As the most suitable carrier for children's reading and learning, excellent picture books effectively combine literary, artistic, and educational language to help children develop thinking through multidimensional reading experiences. Properly guiding children to receive information through seeing, listening, and speaking, while developing complete literacy habits, requires professional knowledge and skills that parental reading companions often lack. In reality, kindergartens, children's libraries, and picture book spaces urgently need qualified professionals, and normal universities are the cradle for cultivating such talent. Library picture book spaces thus become the preferred solution. These spaces provide training bases for preschool and primary education majors, helping students integrate theory with practice, enhance professional skills, and promote autonomous learning and comprehensive quality development through the interdisciplinary, guiding, and educational nature of picture book reading. Only by relying on relevant disciplines can picture book spaces demonstrate their true value.

5.3 Collaborative Construction Models

Library space transformation often faces challenges including funding shortages and insufficient understanding of spatial functions among faculty and students, limiting the library's role as a knowledge, communication, and cultural center. Picture book space reconstruction and service innovation must explore collaborative pathways with academic departments. Shenyang Normal University Library and its Preschool and Primary Education College jointly built their picture book space, co-funding to relieve financial pressure while collaboratively designing functions, décor, facilities, and collection development to ensure professional, comprehensive holdings that meet teaching needs. Communication between librarians and faculty during this process integrated concepts to better align the space with professional requirements and demonstrate the value of spatial reconstruction in cultivating active learning consciousness. Collaboration should extend beyond campus to include internal and external, academic and non-academic partners.

5.4 Promoting Space Development Through Diverse Active Services

Physical space is merely a form; its function as an active learning environment requires innovative activities by users and librarians to manifest. Only spaces incorporating high-quality services possess true value, competitiveness, and vitality. In today's rapidly developing technological and knowledge landscape, individuals with versatile skills, comprehensive knowledge, and strong autonomous learning abilities best adapt to constant change. Consequently, talent cultivation has shifted toward developing broad knowledge and strong

self-directed learning capacity. Through innovative services embedded in curricula, discussion forums, and practical experiences, library picture book spaces construct inquiry-based, collaborative, reflective, and autonomous learning environments that cultivate active learning habits. Libraries bear responsibility for training China's preschool and primary education professionals, aiming to develop qualified picture book disseminators, preschool teachers, and experienced parents to advance early childhood education toward professionalization, standardization, and systematization. This truly achieves the goal of nationwide reading initiatives beginning with early childhood, making picture book space construction in normal university libraries a timely contribution to cultivating dissemination talent.

5.5 Social Service on the Premise of Ensuring Teaching

Picture book reading remains a hotspot in children's and parent-child reading, with vital importance for children's cognitive development and widely recognized social value. However, public library picture book spaces, private spaces, and community spaces mostly lack preschool education graduates, limiting their ability to reveal and transmit the profound value embedded in picture books and diminishing their educational impact. University library picture book spaces should regularly open to the community while ensuring teaching needs, serving as reading bases for nearby kindergartens, families, and primary students, and as learning platforms for preschool and primary teachers to enhance skills. This provides more professional reading guidance and richer experiences for young readers and parents while offering practice opportunities for university students. Such multi-win approaches benefit children's education, student training, and university library social service.

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Author Contributions

Wu Jin: Drafted the paper outline and wrote the manuscript;
Hu Yongqiang: Conducted data collection, research, and writing;
Shi Wei: Conducted data collection, research, and writing;
Lu Jinmei: Revised and proofread the manuscript;
Wang Yu: Revised and proofread the manuscript.

Construction and Service of Picture Book Space in Library

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Abstract: [Purpose/significance] "Picture book space" is not only a space for children readers, but also a necessary space for universities to cultivate excellent primary education professionals. It is necessary for university libraries to create picture book space. [Method/process] Based on the value of picture books and publishing status quo, domestic and foreign libraries picture book space construction service status, this paper analyzed the necessity of picture book space construction service in normal university library, the practice of picture

book space construction service and some considerations about picture book library service. [Result/conclusion] University libraries should change the misunderstanding of the picture-book construction and advocate that picture-book libraries should be rooted in the innovative space of normal university libraries.

Keywords: university library; space reform; picture book space; active learning

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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