Strategies to rejuvenate your school library

By Luke Featherston

Snapshot

Luke Featherston shares five strategies for rejuvenating your school library space.

At Trinity College Colac, a secondary school in regional Victoria, we recently completed a major upgrade of our school library. This included housing the library in a new purpose-built Resource Centre and making significant changes to our collection. From this experience, we can share five strategies which rejuvenated our school library.

Strategy 1: Making your library a welcoming, positive and enjoyable place

According to the latest best practices in library management, a school library should be a supportive and enjoyable place for learning, reading, studying and recreation. Therefore, the first strategy is to find ways of making your library space as welcoming and as positive as possible.

Examples:

We added some interesting aspects to our library to make it more engaging for students. We purchased comfortable reading chairs and colourful soft furnishings. We also purchased and allowed the use of board games, card games, chess boards, origami sets, drawing activities and Lego sets during the school breaks.

Our furniture choices also encouraged student engagement. Many of our tables can be written on with whiteboard markers and our soft furnishings are movable to allow for student collaboration. Also having the furniture and shelving on wheels means that the space is very flexible and can accommodate various class groups and purposes. Professionally made posters and displays make the area look modern and attractive for students.

Activities we have run in the library have also been successful. For example, we have a loyalty card program with small rewards and prizes as students read more books. We have also arranged a bookmark competition, a library logo

competition, author visits and have hidden book related figurines for students to find around the library.

Strategy 2: Genrefying your book collection

Another strategy is to have a book collection that is easy for students to navigate. To achieve this, you can arrange your fiction collection into genres, rather than by the traditional approach of author surname. This helps to identify gaps in your collection and can assist students in finding books that interest them.

Examples:

After seeking feedback and input from students we arranged our fiction section into the following ten genres: Action/Adventure, Classics, Fantasy, Graphic Novels, Humour, Manga, Mystery/Thriller, Romance, Science Fiction and Young Adult.

To help students identify each genre we added genre stickers to the books, and we had professional signs made up for the tops of the shelves.
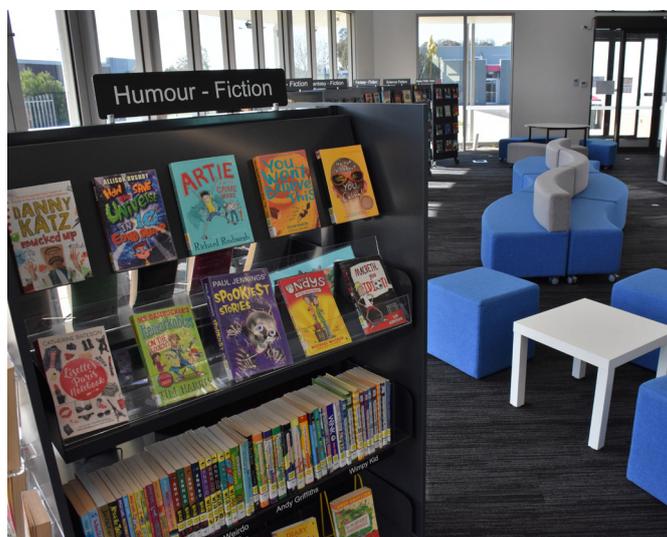
Strategy 3: Regularly evaluating and deselecting books

The third strategy is to have a relevant and up-to-date collection of books that meets the needs of your target audience. Every book should justify its place in your collection. This includes deselecting books that are no longer appealing, are factually incorrect or link with an outdated curriculum.

Examples:

We reduced our non-fiction collection by about half, as we needed to do a major deselection. We assessed every non-fiction book and removed those that were in poor condition, were factually incorrect, were duplicates or were from an outdated curriculum. Through this process we found that most of our science and technology collection were simply too far out of date to be useful. Speaking with the various school learning areas we then purchased non-fiction books that were more strongly aligned with the current curriculum.

For our fiction collection, we re-assessed all the books that had not been borrowed within the last two years. From this group, we deselected those in poor physical condition, were outdated and those with unappealing covers. The remaining books were given a clean and placed in a prominent area to see if students were still interested in these titles. These were also deselected if no interest was shown. Speaking with our students, we then purchased fiction books linked to student interest, including manga books, books linked to movies or games, current new releases and new versions of popular series, such as Harry Potter and the Twilight series.

Strategy 4: Making the books stand out

The fourth strategy is to make your books stand out as much as possible and ensure that every book is visually appealing.
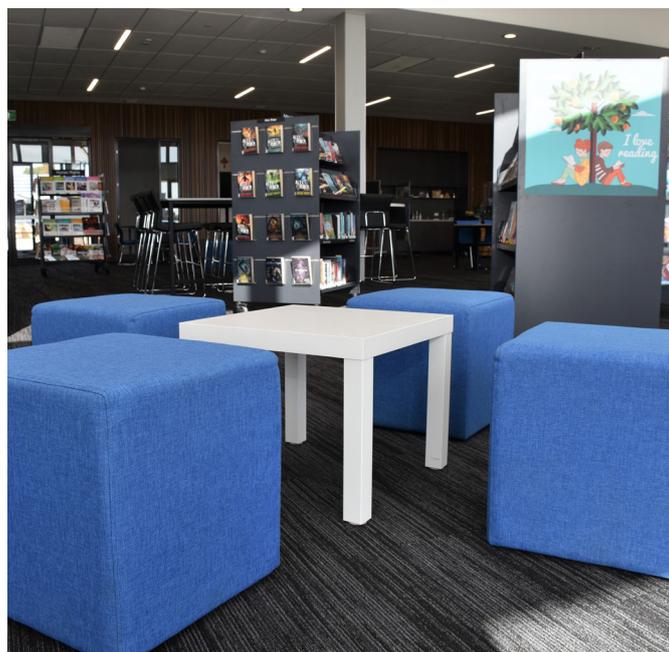
Examples:

We devoted more shelving space to book covers by adding more forward-facing shelf displays and using the shelf ends to visually showcase the books. Visually this meant that students could easily see book covers, which helped increase student borrowing rates.

We purchased shorter height shelves and removed book aisles to create more inviting spaces, with the books intermingled more with students. In addition, we recovered all the books which had opaque dust covers and purchased new copies of popular books that were worn or tattered.

Strategy 5: Having student input

As students are the main users of your school library, the last strategy is to encourage student input into the operations of your library and to assist with book selection.

Examples:
We conducted student surveys and feedback sessions to collate student views on the furniture in the library. From this we found that students wanted the area to be comfortable, modern and colourful, which we then factored in when purchasing new furniture.

We also created a new student group to provide us with input into book selection. For example, we provided the group with catalogues for their input into book purchases and each student in the group looked after a specific genre section in the library to make sure it looked appealing. We also encouraged students to inform us of the books they liked, so we could then add them to our collection.

Conclusion

Implementing these five strategies took considerable time and effort but based on the strong increase in student borrowing rates and usage of the library, we believe that these strategies have been integral in rejuvenating our library space.

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