

The St Joseph's College Geelong reading room quotations project

By Joy Whiteside

Snapshot

Joy Whiteside describes the expansion of the St Joseph's College Geelong library to create a dedicated Reading Room. To enhance the space the Quotations Project offered the community the opportunity to submit their selections for quotations that would be painted onto the new Reading Room walls. This project enhanced the space and offered all members of the community a chance to voice their valued opinion.

St Joseph's College Geelong is a Catholic Secondary College for approximately 1830 boys. In early 2020 the library expanded its floorspace into an adjacent classroom creating the opportunity for a dedicated area for the fiction collections. The removal of a wall and two small seminar rooms enabled this welcome expansion. The genrefied fiction collections were previously housed in the main library area on standard eight-bay shelving runs where browsing opportunities and display space were limited.



The expansion into the new library space enabled the installation of modern perimeter charcoal shelving with display shelving at the top of each bay. The fiction collections were installed around the room alphabetically according to genre and they are now highly engaging visually with over 300 front-facing books on display. The library area, now known as the Reading Room, functions as an enabling space. It is attractive, welcoming and comfortable, with lounge seating surrounded by walls of books. Students and teachers love to be in the space. Analysis of the borrowing statistics before and after this development demonstrates an immediate increase in fiction borrowing. The collection is so visible and easy to browse and access

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because of the expanse of floor space and genre frontage. Each genre has prime real estate in the room. There is a rapid turnover of the books on the display shelves which demonstrates the appeal and power of the front facing books.

Students spend scheduled class time in the Reading Room during their English class once every two weeks, but many students also access the space during their own time. This year the Reading Room has become a technology free zone, and students are encouraged to read silently in the space even during break times. This photo, that was taken during lunchtime earlier in the year, demonstrates how much the students enjoy reading in the Reading Room.



Quotations project

The quotations project was a further development of the Reading Room and was inspired by a suggestion of a member of the College leadership team. He commented that the white walls above the shelves could be used for inspiring quotes. After discussions with the library team and the formulation of a clear plan, we launched the Library Quotations project early in 2021. We had decided that student voice was important in this project so that there was a sense of connection for the students. To enable this, we set up a Google form so that we could invite quotation contributions from all who were interested. We announced the project via the student and staff bulletins. The notification stated that we were looking for significant and inspiring quotations that could be painted by an artist on the walls in the library Reading Room above the shelving. We wanted the quotations to encourage students to read, or to be thought provoking or inspire learning. Staff members were asked to promote the project to students and to encourage them to participate. Staff members were also invited to contribute. We set a contribution date deadline so that we could manage the timeline for the project and move it on towards completion.

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Over fifty quotation contributions came in from students and staff members who were keen to be involved. When contributions were closed the Library team checked all of the quotations for authenticity and accuracy. The list was collated and refined until there was a final list of twenty quotations. An artist who had been involved in other projects at the College was commissioned to do the painting. We discussed the font colour, the font, and the arrangement of quotes on the walls. We decided to use a charcoal colour for the quotes and to highlight some of the words in red. Over a period of two days, punctuated by over a week of lockdown early in Term 3, the inspiring quotes were painted on the walls.



Outcome

The outcome is that the Reading Room has a friendly, engaging, and welcoming vibe. It is a comfortable, safe and very popular place for students and staff members. The quotes are

thought provoking and they promote and inspire reading, diversity, courage, wondering, dreaming, learning, empathy, and originality. They range from the fun 'So many books, so little time' by Frank Zappa, and 'Books are a uniquely portable magic' by Stephen King, to the serious and courageous by Ann Frank 'I can shake off everything as I write; my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn.' They encourage empathy such as Harper Lee's 'You never really understand

a person until you consider things from his point of view....Until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it', and courage such as J.R.R. Tolkien 'Courage is found in unlikely places'.

Some of the quotes inspire diversity and originality such as Oscar Wilde's 'Be yourself. Everyone else is already taken.', and 'Think Original Be Individual', or TOBI, the name of a wellbeing group at St Joseph's College. Many of the quotes that encourage students to read are by writers such as Roald Dahl, and Dr. Seuss. They include Gary Paulsen's 'Reading for me is spending time with a friend.', and 'A book is a dream you hold in your hands.' by Neil Gaiman.

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The quotation painted above the open doorway into the Reading Room is apt and attributed to Jeanette Winterson 'Books and doors are the same thing. You open them, and you go through into another world.' The Reading Room quotations project has enhanced the library space and furthered the development of a culture of reading at St Joseph's College Geelong.

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