

Finding the right genrefication balance in your library

By Jessica Finden

Snapshot

Jessica Finden, a teacher librarian from Queensland, explores the discussion around genrefication. She shares tips from her school library's experience and the decisions they have made around organising their resources.

One of the core roles of a school library and the teacher librarian (TL) is to establish and provide easy access to information within the library. Genrefication is a current focus within school libraries which aims to make access to fiction and non-fiction collections easier to navigate for students and staff members within the school community. But what happens when you are not sure if you want to genrefy? Plenty of libraries are doing it, you hear!

Here is a basic breakdown of the positives and negatives of genrefication:

Positives:

- Students are able to locate materials of interest more easily (Sweeney, 2013)
- It can increase circulation and enhance reader independence (Arenz, 2019)
- Students can be exposed to resources which may have previously been overlooked (Moeller & Becnel, 2019)
- Information is often 'genrefied' in music, social media and streaming services, this is a way of keeping up with current trends (Moeller & Becnel, 2019)

Negatives:

- It is time and labour intensive
- There is (currently) no standardised genre system to work from (Hamm, 2019)
- Space and shelving need to be considered
- Genrefication is still not widely used, using it may not provide students with a transferable skill (Sams, 2013)

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Explanation of how my school has 'genrefied'

So how can you find the right genrefication balance in your library? At Carmel College, Thornlands the library team have considered the many ways that our students access resources, in particular our fiction and non-fiction collections. Knowing that we needed to work within the confines of our current space and shelving, we knew that change had to come from the collection itself. The update of these collections has been a three-year process, which started with looking closely at the fiction collection. We were already using a mix of genre stickers on the spines and decided to provide more consistency by reducing the number of stickers and using only the Syba Signs designs. We then went through each of our fiction collections and updated each of the genre stickers and the catalogue record to reflect the change. As the Teacher Librarian, I decide on what genre best suits each novel as it allows me to see each book we have in our library and provides uniformity around what constitutes a certain genre. Our 'meet in the middle' moment is that we have kept our fiction collections in alphabetical order. Students can search the shelves by author surname but clearly see which genre each of the books are. We feel that this gives students opportunities to peruse the whole collection instead of going straight to their favourite genre.

The non-fiction collection required a lot more work as it had not been updated for a number of years. Before starting, the library team went through the non-fiction collection and weeded books that were out of date/no longer relevant or in poor condition. This helped us to have a clear picture of what books we had to work with within the collection. The non-fiction collection was organised using the Dewey Decimal System (DDS) and we knew that we wanted to create more of a general 'genrefied' feel that the DDS wasn't providing. This was the hard part, with over 3500 resources in our non-fiction collection we now needed to work out the best method for organising them. I'll be honest, we changed our minds a lot. The end result was dividing the collection into two - High Interest non-fiction and Curriculum non-fiction. Within High Interest we divided the collection into nine categories that ranged from 'Creativity' through

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to 'Sport.' The focus was on creating topics that suited the resources we already had but would also be of interest to our students. Within the Curriculum collection we went through and sorted the resources into 'topics' that were studied within departments as one of the issues we had encountered was students looking for books on a certain topic and finding that they could be found across the DDS subjects. This change meant that students who were researching 'American History' could find everything in one section.

To make everything easy to find and shelve we purchased coloured stickers to separate the different categories in High Interest and made our own labels for the Curriculum topics. In the catalogue we added the category name as a 'genre' for High Interest and added the Curriculum topics into a 'list'. This also has the added benefit of being searchable using the 'List' function.

Genrefication is not a 'quick-fix' for libraries and takes a considered approach to fully accomplish its main goal of easier access to information for students and staff. A year into making the changes just mentioned, the library team can already see that there is scope to make more changes. In 2025, we will be introducing a 'genre spotlight', where we utilise the shelving space on offer to promote a specific genre. For example, we would pull off most of our 'Sport' books, including ones from non-fiction and display them either on our slatwall or use a 'bookstore' style approach on our fixed display shelving. The goal would be to highlight at least two genres each term using this display method. This provides students with the opportunity to engage with a level of genrefication and provides us with an opportunity to see if students are responding positively to the display.

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Speaking to TLs who have gone through the process is one way of helping to decide if it is the right choice for your school. For our library, we are happy with the current compromise and the new focus we have for 2025. The benefit of this approach is that a lot of the hard work has already been completed if we do decide to fully embrace genrefication in the future.

Tips and tricks

- Make sure whatever you choose to go with is visually appealing
- Go through the collection and weed before beginning anything
- Be flexible, know that what you start off with will probably change by the end of the process
- You don't need to go through a company for genre stickers, you can create your own. We liked Syba Signs because you can purchase the digital image and upload it into Oliver

Editor's Note: This is an updated version of an article that first appeared in Connections, Issue 130, Tern 3, 2024

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*Having worked as an English and History teacher for 10 years, and the past 6 years as a teacher librarian, **Jessica Finden** is passionate about finding engaging ways to share a love of reading and learning within the school community. She has a Diploma in Library and Information Services and a Master of Education (Teacher Librarianship).*