

Change or fade away: school libraries need to change

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Abstract

School libraries are in a state of flux, dealing with the rapid pace of change in education and in the needs of staff and students. Libraries need to be leading educational change in their schools and reinventing what it means to be an excellent centre for learning. The six-year-old purpose-built library at Abbotsleigh needs alterations to the physical space, due to changing educational needs. In 2012, every student in the secondary school will have a laptop. The impact of this on the library means that there will be significant spaces that can be reinvented. This paper will focus on how the Betty Archdale Library at Abbotsleigh is seeking to meet these challenges and will discuss ways to address the issues associated with the changing educational landscape.

Introduction

The future of school libraries is uncertain. While the school library has a prominent role in some schools, in others it is being devalued by reductions in budgets and staffing. There are schools that are opting to integrate the library collection around the school, rather than have a library at all.

Why is this happening at a time when public library usage is booming¹?

In part, the answer is financial. With growing demands on limited budgets, schools may have to make difficult financial decisions, and, unfortunately, libraries sometimes make easy targets.

However there are deeper and more fundamental issues, which I believe school libraries need to address, issues involving their purpose and their ability to adapt to a changing educational environment, which will be the subject of this paper using the Betty Archdale Library at Abbotsleigh (**Library**) as a case study. In the words of the educator Hamish Curry, writing in *Bright Ideas* in reference to libraries: *“They are at cross-roads ... Their ability to be hubs of information and community connections is beginning to be leveraged in new and exciting ways. It’s a nice time to be part of libraries and education; change is an expectation.”* (Curry 2011).

The Betty Archdale Library, Abbotsleigh

Abbotsleigh is an Anglican independent girls’ school located in Wahroonga, in northern Sydney. It is an academically-focussed school, which consistently achieves high results in the Higher School Certificate.

The Library provides services to approximately 925 girls from Years 7 - 12, including 170 boarders. It is housed in an award-winning building called the Abbotsleigh Research Centre (ARC), which opened in 2007. Designed by architect Richard Johnson, the building houses the Library, Archives and the Director of Teaching and Innovative Learning.

The Library provides:

- 3 interconnecting seminar rooms, which can become one large space;
- A computer room;
- An open teaching space;
- A class reading space;
- 16 carrels;
- A combination of large and smaller tables and a variety of chairs; and
- A large workroom, Teacher Librarians’ offices, and an audio-visual room.

Within the Library, we have four Teacher Librarians, including the Head of Library and the Audio-visual Teacher Librarian, a Technology Librarian and two Library Technicians. Library opening hours are from 7.30 am – 8.30 pm Mondays to Thursdays and from 7.30 am – 5 pm on Fridays.

The most important attribute of the building is that staff and girls love the teaching and learning spaces.

In summary, the Library is in an excellent position, with a beautiful building, good staffing, and a reasonable budget. However, in my opinion, a school library must be able to justify its existence, continually reassess its direction, and be prepared to take steps to ensure it has a future. If a library merely continues to operate and provide the services as it has done in the past, it may not have a future for long. In our case, several changes conspired to cause us discontent. Before discussing these changes, it is important to provide more details about how the library operated in 2011.

2011 Library Programmes

Despite the topic of this paper, the Library has had an excellent year. Apart from a strong teaching backbone, we have introduced new initiatives including adding QR codes to books and displays, a games club, a Reading Blog, a new and much improved library intranet site, improved access to databases and a significant increase in the number of digitized videos. The Library also runs a Staff Book Club and a biennial Literary Festival in cooperation with the Junior School Teacher Librarian. As Head of Library, I attend school-wide curriculum meetings, IT Strategic Planning meetings and Heads of Department meetings to ensure the Library is involved in school affairs and planning, and all Library staff (including Library Technicians) attend frequent professional development sessions to maintain our skills and keep us abreast of changes. We have purchased 4 iPads and several Sony e-Readers. In short, we have made significant progress, the major details of which are set out below:

1. Some of the Major Teaching Programmes

a. *Year 7 Independent Research Project.*

This program is run by Teacher Librarians in association with English staff. The girls spend Term 1 reading historical fiction novels, and in Term 2 Library staff assist the students to develop their own individual research questions. In Terms 2 and 3 the Teacher Librarians present lessons on a variety of aspects of researching including the use of Technology. The girls present their findings in whatever format they prefer. The emphasis of the whole program is on the development of research skills rather than on the final product.

b. *All My Own Work* (Year 10/11)

In New South Wales, this is a mandatory course for all students to complete prior to their HSC, covering academic integrity, plagiarism, referencing, working together and copyright. At Abbotsleigh, this is run by the Teacher Librarians. We conduct a series of workshops and lectures on the five modules of the course and we also provide online resources and an online quiz. The pass mark is 90%.

c. Year 12 Extension History Interviews

In addition to the usual information sessions about offering membership of university libraries and the availability of Inter-Library Loans, the Teacher Librarians offer individual assistance to the girls working on their Extension History individual research projects. This enables us to assist them more thoroughly and to provide individualised attention to the girls.

d. Turnitin

The school subscribes to this program and the Library runs all the training sessions.

2. Library Technology

a. AquaBrowser and 360Search

Our students want a fast Google-like experience. The Abbotsleigh Library uses **Amlib** as its library management system, with **AquaBrowser** providing a discovery layer. A single search bar called OneSearch (which does away with having to select a title, subject, author, or series), along with an algorithm that provides fast return of results, has significantly improved the performance of our OPACs. In a 2011 survey of our students, 87% reported that they found what they wanted using **AquaBrowser**. Library staff have found that the girls rarely have problems using this program (see Figure 1).

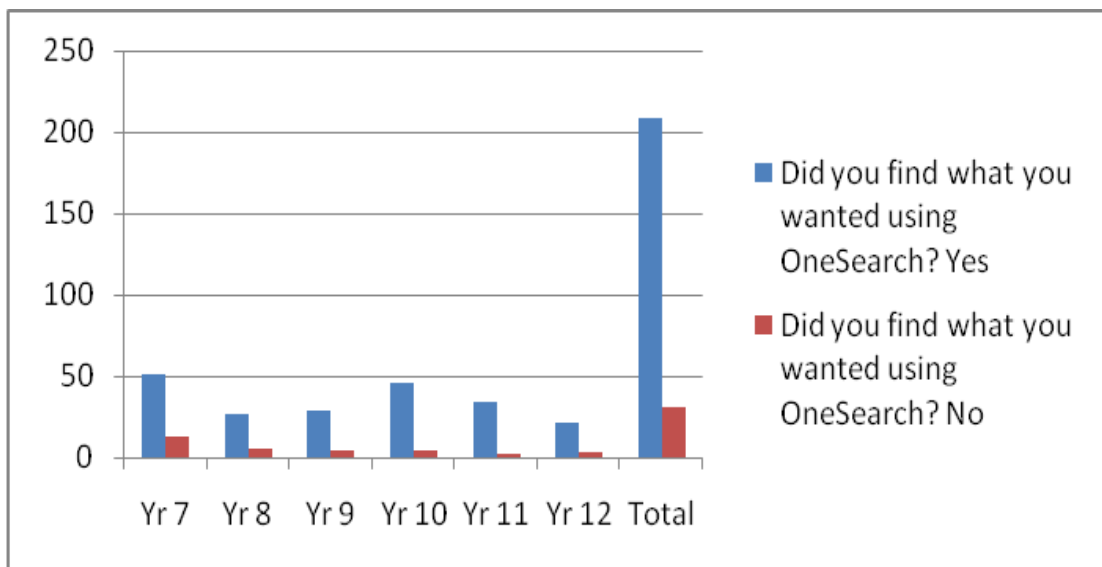


Figure 1: Student success rate searching the library catalogue using AquaBrowser

360Search offers a federated search of library databases including the ability to choose databases by subject. With twenty databases on offer, this program facilitates the search process.

b. ClickView

ClickView is used for audio-visual resources, providing improved access to them and reducing the need for large physical storage spaces.

c. Library Online

Library Online is the Library's intranet site. This was completely revamped at the end of 2009 to provide improved access to a wide range of resources.

3. Literature

- a. Literature circles are run by the Teacher Librarians and English teachers for girls from Years 7 – 11.
- b. To encourage staff to read, the library produces Holiday Reading lists, operates a Staff Book Club, and periodically takes a selection of resources to staff morning teas.

4. General

- a. A Games Club began in 2011, meeting weekly and featuring games focussing on strategy and thinking.
- b. Print book numbers have been reduced by 10,000. The books that have been withdrawn comply with a set of guidelines designed to ensure the collection is current, meeting the needs of today's curriculum, and appealing to the girls. While some shelves are being used to display front-facing resources like bookstores, others have been removed, enabling the reference section to be integrated into the collection and the space developed into a discussion area. It is important to note that our borrowing rates of both fiction and non-fiction remain high.
- c. eBooks and Sony eBook readers have been purchased. The eBook collection began in 2009 with non-fiction titles in lieu of offering books on Closed Reserve. This collection will be extended in 2012 to include audio fiction eBooks.

Problems Identified in 2010-11

Despite the success of the above programmes, in the second half of 2011 Library staff became concerned about the future directions for the library.

Library Usage

The school moved to individual laptops for all girls in years 9 – 12 between 2009 and 2011. As a result, the Library lost 8 PCs at the beginning of 2011, because they were no longer required. In 2012, the laptop program will be extended to include years 7 and 8. During 2011, Library staff became aware that there were fewer classes from years 9 – 12 coming to the Library than in previous years. Statistics confirmed a

significant reduction in the number of classes coming to the library in 2011 compared with 2010. This reduction in attendance correlated with the introduction of laptops and was also accompanied by a reduction in loans over the same period. If our assumption that the correlation between the increased use of laptops and the reduction in attendance at the library is correct, this situation is likely to worsen in 2012.

Many teachers commented to Library staff that moving their classes to the Library wasted time and, unfortunately, several mentioned that, as **Google** was now available in the classroom, they did not see the need to take a class to the library. We became particularly concerned when this type of comment was received from a senior history teacher whose students, incidentally, achieve good results. The fundamental questions we needed to ask ourselves were: How valuable did our teachers perceive the library to be for them and for their classes? Were they aware of everything we could offer? How could we change their perceptions?

Library Functions

At the same time, functions were changing within the library, resulting in several areas needing to be redesigned. By way of summary, these some of the main functions are highlighted below:

- During 2010 and 2011, a large number of books had been weeded. This allowed shelves to be removed, creating a new space;
- The digitisation of videos to ClickView reduced the need for as many videos and DVDs to be stored in the audio-visual area which resulted in another opportunity to create anew space there;
- The removal of PCs from part of the library had left another space empty; and
- Due to the removal of all PCs in 2012, the library computer room was likely to become a redundant space.

It should also be pointed out that the Library is not well positioned on the campus. One of the original Master Plans of the building placed the library at the centre of the school, with a new Middle School to be built nearby. However, subsequent Master Plans have left the library on the periphery of the teaching areas. This means that some faculties are located at least a five-minute walk from the Library. Our challenge is to offer teaching and learning facilities and opportunities that make the journey worthwhile for staff and students.

Identifying and Implementing Solutions

Solutions to the problems detailed above require an ongoing process of adaptive reinvention and the implementation of a multi-faceted approach, which recognises the importance of libraries embracing educational advancements. In the first instance, we implemented several investigative steps in order to gain feedback from staff, students, and industry professionals. By way of example, the Library undertook the following:

1. Engaged stakeholders from around the school in a discussion about possibilities for redeveloping library spaces and about the reasons for doing

so. This involved talking to Heads of Departments and inviting them to make suggestions, speaking to the Head of the Senior School, writing a paper for inclusion in the IT Strategic Plan, and drawing up detailed plans, including costs for budget submissions;

2. Invited a range of vendors, such as furniture suppliers, to display their products to the Library and other educational staff, in order to facilitate discussions regarding changing Library spaces to better accommodate changing educational needs;
3. Provided an opportunity for technology vendors, including educational games tables suppliers, to demonstrate their services to staff and students;
4. Researched recent educational and technological changes in the educational sphere. This research took many forms, including visits to other libraries and attending conferences. In this respect, the Council of Educational Facilities Planners 2011 Conference was particularly helpful, with many educators and architects talking about developing buildings that foster 21st century teaching and learning. This also included an excellent trade fair, with products ranging from iPads and educational gaming tables, to new ideas in furniture.

We also attended a School Library Association of Victoria conference, 'Creating collaborative learning spaces: Future school library scenarios', which included a presentation from Lyn Hay on her iCentre concepts (see Figure 2), which have underpinned many of the proposals for the redevelopment of the Abbotsleigh Library (Hay 2011).

Core business of an iCentre

- inquiry learning, immersive learning
- information fluency → transliteracy
- explicit instruction
- pedagogical fusion – integrating & aligning information, technology, people, instruction
- customised 'i' support for students, teachers, school administrators & parents
- learning innovation
- information leadership
- development of students as independent, informed digital citizens

(Hay, 2010b)

Figure 2: The features of an iCentre according to Lyn Hay (Hay 2011)

Function and purpose were paramount, to ensure that decisions were based on the teaching and learning needs of our school community, that technology was designed to meet those needs seamlessly, and that technology alone did not determine the design. This is in line with Lyn Hay’s comments about the principles of “form, function and brand” providing “a useful framework for schools wishing to explore the convergence of facilities, resources, people, funding, policy, programs and services to develop an iCentre.” (Hay 2011).

Whilst the Library had already established its branding by this stage on all print and online resources, we have since implemented a range of improvements with respect to form and function as discussed in this paper.

Student Survey

In order to inform the decisions we made, involve the students in the planning process, give the students an opportunity to voice their concerns and needs, and to develop a shared vision, a survey of over 300 students was conducted. The results of this survey provided Library staff with quantifiable data on which to base its decisions. The survey was anonymous and included both library users and non-users.

This survey identified that the major reasons Abbotsleigh girlsⁱⁱ visited the library were: to study alone, research, find a book, borrow books, as part of a class, or to study in a group (see Figure 3).

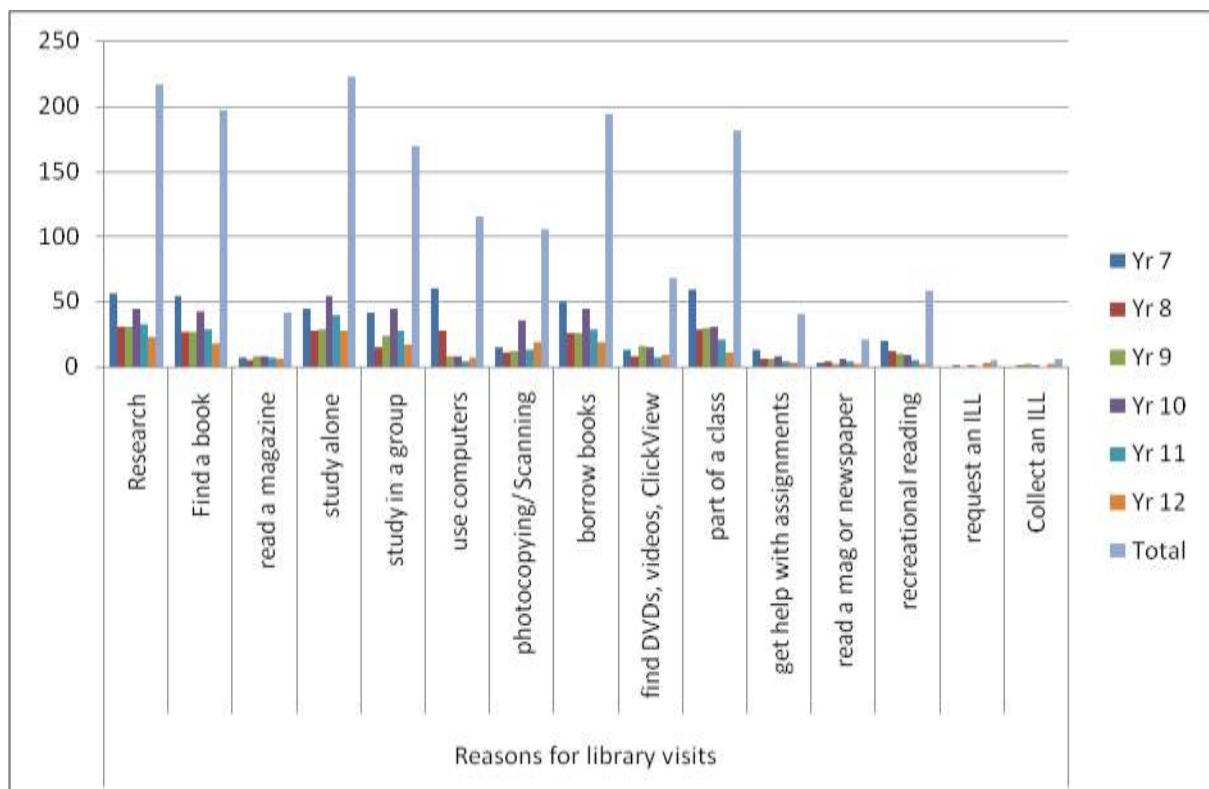


Figure 3: Student reasons for visiting the library

Library staff were interested that finding and borrowing books was rated so highly by the girls, particularly in light of the comments of some of our teachers that books were no longer as important in light of student access to Google. Perhaps this is a reflection of the academic nature of the school, or of the value the girls' parents place on books, but it does confirm the need to continue to provide good quality books in the library at Abbotsleigh.

The survey also identified the need for a different configuration of teaching and learning spaces. The specifications for the current library had been finalised in 2003/4. The architect was briefed to provide flexible learning spaces, including seminar rooms with collapsible walls to create either one large space or up to three smaller spaces, an open plan fiction area, an open teaching space with good acoustics to reduce the flow of noise to surrounding areas and a separate, lockable computer room. In addition, carrels, small tables and some individual workspaces were provided, which resulted in a wide variety of teaching and learning spaces.

Despite what library staff perceived as excellent teaching and learning spaces, the girls pointed out several deficiencies of which we were unaware. There is often a low level of noise throughout the space, but rarely had this been raised as an issue by either staff or students. We had also heard anecdotally that today's students enjoy working with a low level of noise and had observed this happening in most classes with no apparent detrimental effect on students' work. However, library staff were surprised to discover from the student survey that students in all years wanted more quiet study spaces and that fewer girls wanted discussion spaces (see Figure 4).

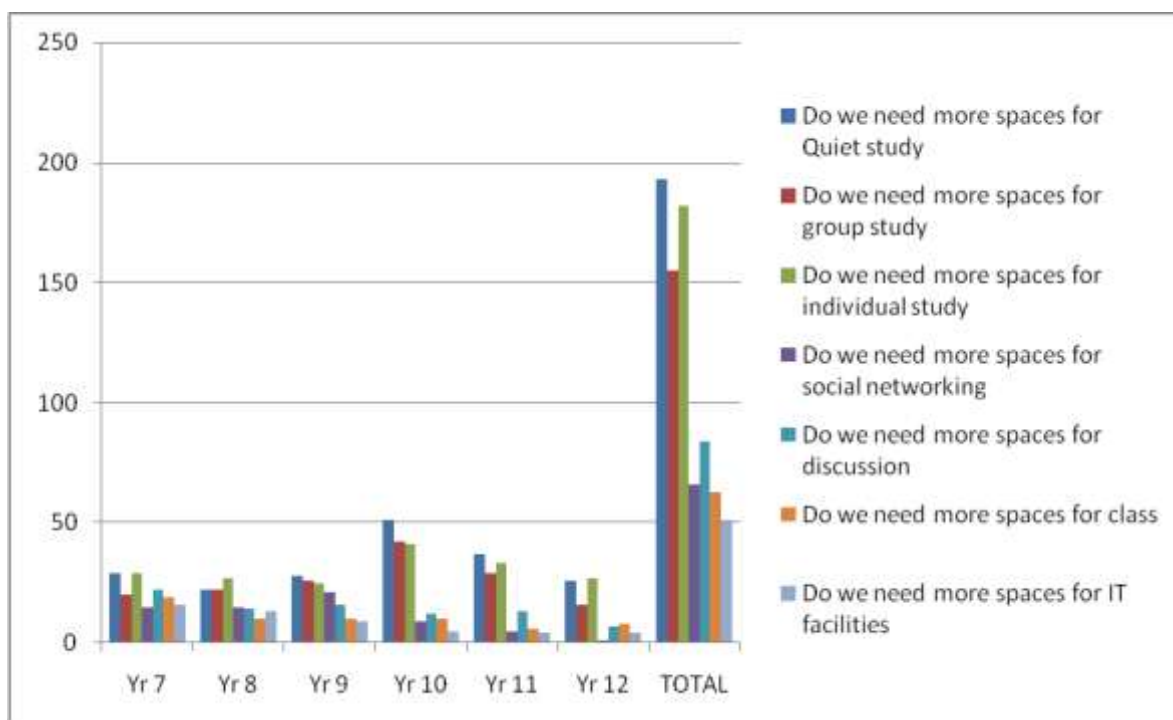


Figure 4: Responses from students about what library spaces they perceive to be needed

Noise can have a split attention effect, which may cause an extraneous cognitive load (Moreno & Mayer 2000). This type of situation is not conducive to learning, as less information is retained, and this may be what our girls are experiencing. Student comments from the survey illustrate their concerns:

- *"Sometimes it is extremely noisy in the LTR (sic) or communal workspaces and this is sometimes distracting and makes it hard to focus."*
- *"Need separate areas so you can study quietly or in groups."
"I would like something similar to the seminar rooms but for Yr 10s. This is because often after school, it gets noisy, esp (sic) from years 7-8"*

Library staff found these results fascinating, not only as they applied to the Library but also to other classrooms. The Head of Senior School invited Library staff to share the results of the survey, in particular about noise, at a staff meeting, which stimulated conversation across the campus.

As a result of these survey results, library staff are now monitoring noise levels more carefully and have created two new silent study areas, one of which is for Year 12 students only.

Another interesting result of the survey concerned social networking. Several girls commented that they did not want more social networking to be available at school, as one of the reasons they came to the library was to avoid distractions. Facebook is not permitted at Abbotsleigh, but we did not expect to find girls actively supporting this position. Of course, the opposite position was also raised as in this comment: *"If Facebook (sic) was available in the library more people would come & they would use the resources more."* From the Library's perspective, there are other areas of social networking that we can offer, including our Reading Blog.

One question in the survey asked what resources the girls thought should be added to the Library. This question allowed the girls to make their own suggestions. As a result, there were not many responses per suggestion. However, it was again interesting to see the request for more books, which does not seem in line with much of the current thinking in school libraries. Some schools have elected not to purchase non-fiction books for middle school and rather to rely solely on the Internet. This may be appropriate for those schools, and every library needs to make decisions based on its own educational needs and requirements. However, the Abbotsleigh Library has elected not to reduce its non-fiction collection, which we note appears to be in line with the results of our recent student survey. (See Figure 5 on next page.)

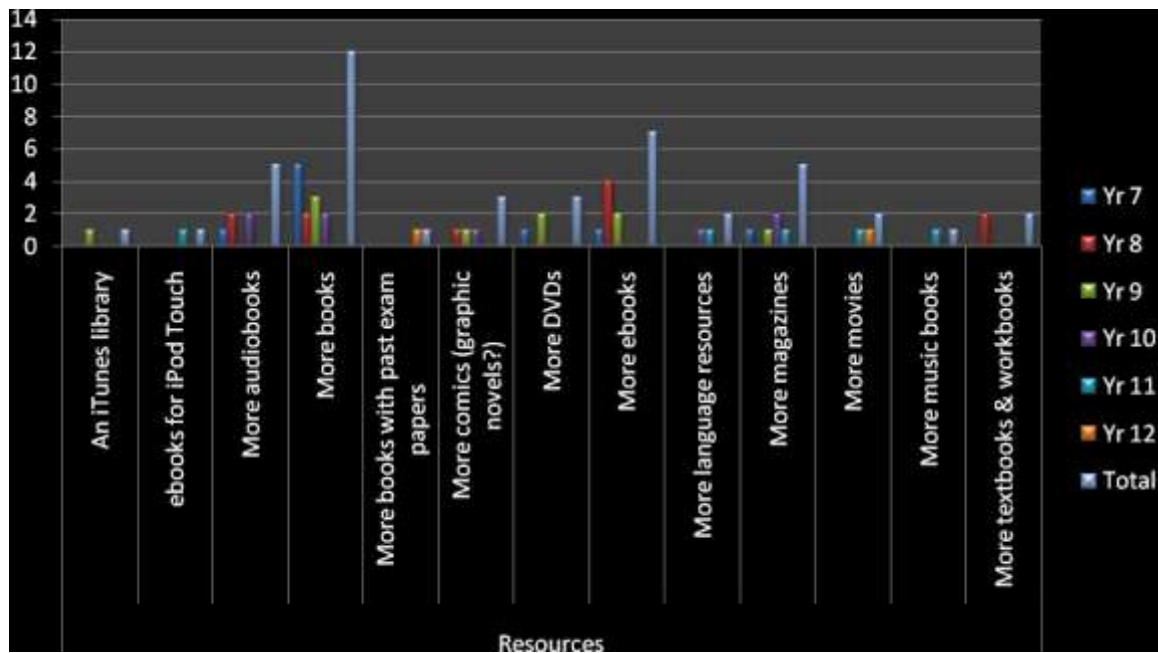


Figure 5: Student responses regarding the resources they perceive are needed in the library

Three-fold plan

Drawing on the results of our discussions, visits and student survey, a three-fold plan was developed for revamping library services for 2012. This plan involved:

1. The creation of new teaching and learning spaces;
2. Revitalising the library teaching program; and
3. An emphasis on the library's online presence.

1. Creation of New Teaching and Learning Spaces

Plans were drawn up on Visio and fully costed, in an attempt to provide four new and updated educational facilities, which would better meet the educational needs of our school community. For example:

- a) The former photocopier area had housed six PCs, which were no longer required. Therefore the space could quite easily be divided into a smaller print and photocopier area and a separate silent study, which would help to provide quiet study areas as requested by our students. (See Figure 6 on next page.)

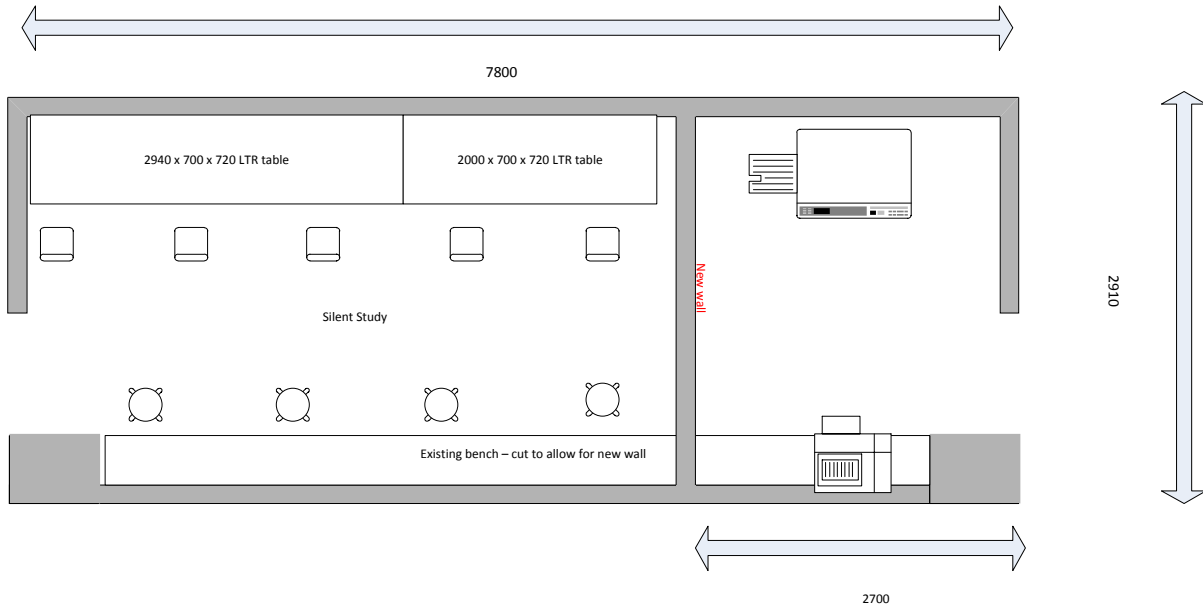


Figure 6: Plan for a Silent Study and Photocopier area

b) With increasing numbers of videos being digitised, the need for storage of videos and DVDs was reduced significantly. In addition, a decision was made to house some general interest DVDs on the floor of the library, allowing us to cut the previous audio-visual room in half and create a Year 12 study area. This area was designed in response to the student request for a special study space for Year 12 students.

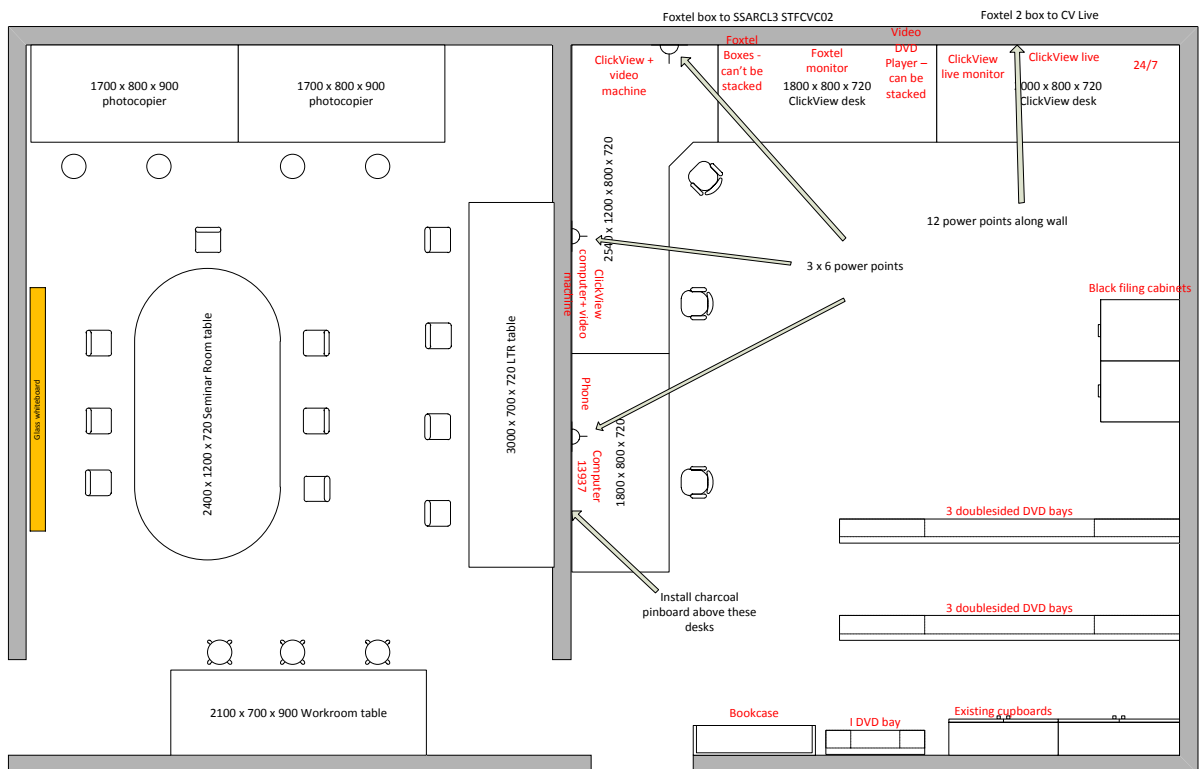


Figure 7: Plan for a Year 12 Study and a smaller Audiovisual Room

A glass whiteboard was installed within the Year 12 area on the left of the above diagram. This is to facilitate brainstorming and collaborative learning. We have observed a growing trend, in which the girls are seeking access to whiteboards, both within and outside class times.

All the furniture for this room was recycled from other areas and includes tables and a bench-height table for the year 12 students. The intention is to monitor the usage of this room in 2012, and possibly alter some of the furniture, depending on how the girls choose to use the space. For example, we could add a leather beanbag or couches.

- c) The library computer room was reconfigured to provide a blended learning environment with a fluid design. It moves away from the traditional classroom layout and is in line with Rosen's thinking that today's students "need to be actively involved in their own learning, and abhor doing only one thing at a time." (Rosen, 2010. p. 218).

Previously, the arrangement of the room comprised tables around the perimeter, along with three freestanding tables, all equipped with PCs in a conventional computer room layout.

The new design features three tables each connected to a plasma screen for group work. The remaining third of the room is equipped with soft seating, ottomans and small tables, which can be moved easily by the girls to suit their learning needs.

The plan below includes two glass whiteboards for the girls to use in group work and for brainstorming. It was also planned to install an acrylic sound dome above each table to restrict noise, but, unfortunately, the ceiling was deemed too low for these to be effective. As a result, headphones have been provided to allow the girls to watch videos without disturbing others. (See Figure 8 on next page.)

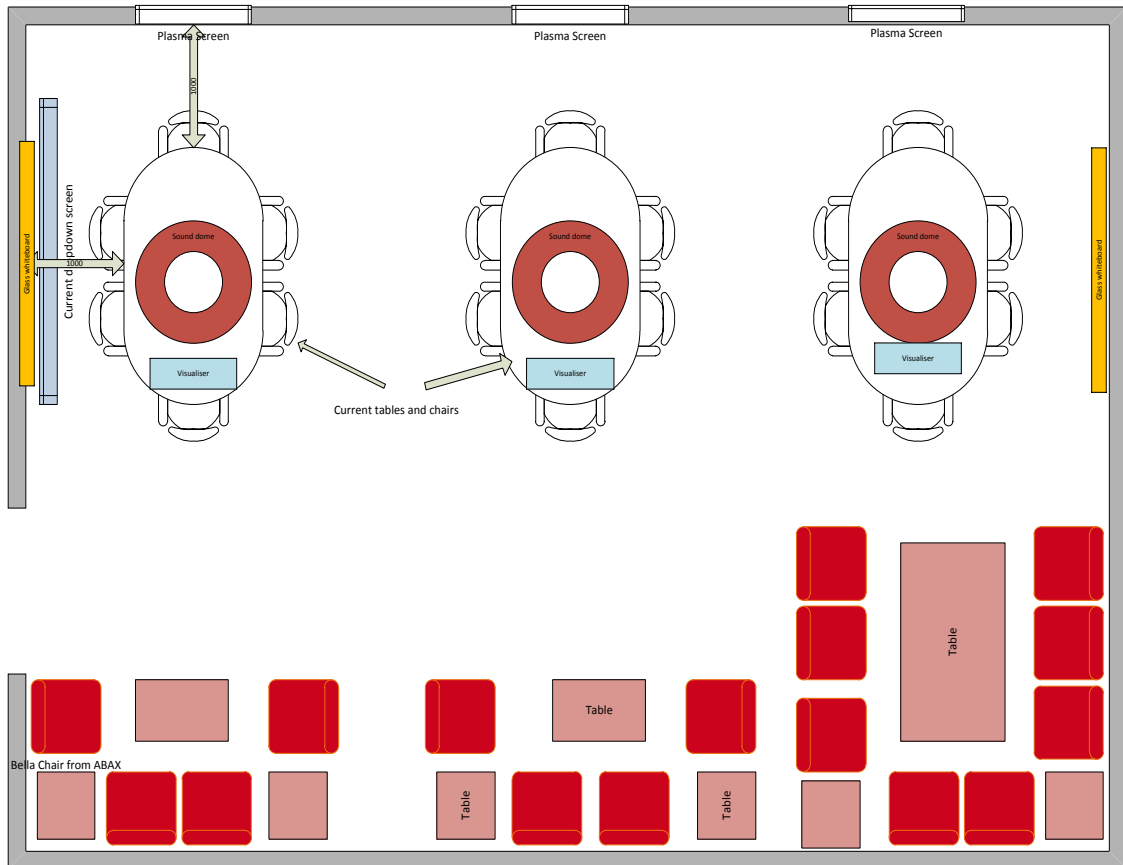


Figure 8: Plan for redesign of the former library computer room

- d) The former reference area is just outside the doors into the above room, and has been designed to accommodate one high bench (which was cut down from a wooden frame which had covered some of the reference shelves), and eight lounge chairs arranged around a central ottoman, accompanied by small movable laptop tables for small group work. This space is flexible and can be used by small groups or by individual staff and students.

2. Revitalised Teaching Program for 2012

Merely creating different spaces would be insufficient to ensure the Library remains a vital part of the teaching and learning within the school. As teaching is the most important element of the Library, it is vital that we continue to consider ways in which we can revitalise our teaching program.

As a group, the Abbotsleigh teacher librarians have developed a plan to revitalise our teaching in 2012. In summary, some aspects of the plan are set out below:

- a) Increasing our teaching load:
- a. Year 12 study camp – two of the teacher librarians have developed a skit around selling library services to the girls and have produced sample bags with vouchers the girls can ‘cash’ for services such as inter-library loans, research assistance and even one for ‘one silly question’. The aim of this session is to highlight the various services we

can offer the students in Year 12 and, in a light-hearted way, encourage them to use the Library services;

- b. Year 7 orientation – this program has also been revamped in cooperation with the IT Department. We will be offering a QR code treasure hunt;
 - c. Revamping current programs – we are involved in revamping and revitalising several Year 7 programs in conjunction with a range of different faculties;
 - d. Investigating new information technologies – we are considering incorporating iPads and other information technologies to enhance teaching and learning;
 - e. Encouraging staff and students to contribute to the Reading Blog - this blog was introduced late in 2011 to encourage everyone on the campus to read. The Reading Blog is intended to complement staff and student book clubs and foster online interaction between library staff and our users.
- b) **LibGuides**. The Library purchased **LibGuides** late in 2011 to provide students with online guides and resources;
 - c) The role of the Audio-visual Teacher Librarian has been enhanced to include more teaching time. This has been made possible by improvements in the video digitisation process;
 - d) Encouraging teacher librarians to increase their teaching outside the Library. This will become increasingly important as we need to provide services when and where our users need them;
 - e) Inviting faculties to have a staff meeting in the Library is a useful strategy to encourage staff to utilise the Library resources; and
 - f) Reintroducing a student book club to encourage a community of readers is also part of the plan for 2012.

3. Online Presence

The Library aims to provide seamless search interfaces, which simplify access to information and enable personalisation of information wherever possible. For example, the Library offers **360Search** (for database searching) incorporated with **AquaBrowser** (to search the library catalogue), which provides a federated search of all library resources.

In addition, we are offering, and improving, an online “Ask a Librarian” service, and the option to reserve, request and renew items online.

The Library needs to develop a new balance between print and non-print resources, recognising the growing trend for our users to access the Library online. This will involve increasing the number of eBooks and adding audio eBooks to our collection, along with moving most reference texts to eBooks. We intend to favour eBooks over print books, particularly in relation to books

that date quickly, such as Economics, Business Studies, Physics and Chemistry texts.

Given that many of our users have mobile devices, our online functions will be offering more access for mobile devices in 2012. This is consistent with the trend towards increasing mobile use around Australia. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, laptops and mobile devices are replacing PCs and enabling easier information access when and where it is needed, as is illustrated in Figure 9. This use of mobile devices is reducing the need for many to visit a library thereby increasing the need for libraries to offer improved virtual information resources.

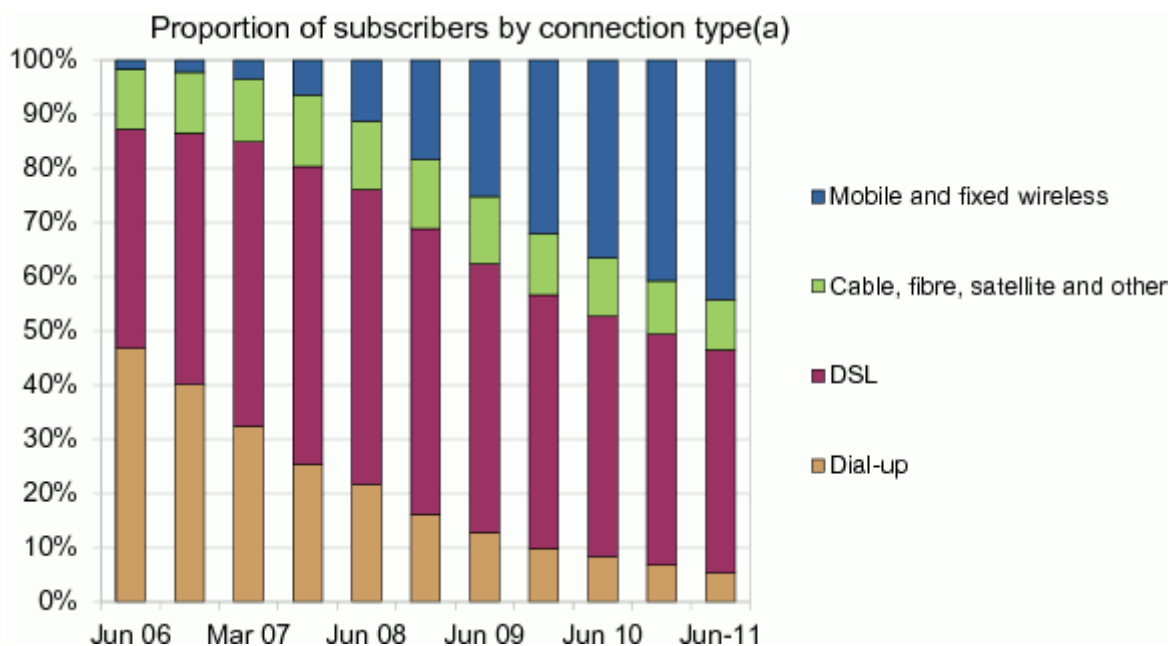


Figure 9: ABS statistics showing the increase of mobile and fixed wireless usage in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011)

The Library utilises email for Library notices, and is currently investigating the use of SMS, in a bid to get information to our users in the formats they prefer. As *AquaBrowser* is web-based, it can be searched via an iPad, but an application will be required to enable searching via a mobile phone.

Conclusion

In order for school libraries to remain fundamental to student education within a climate of constant technological change and developing educational needs, school libraries must engage in a continual process of assessment and evaluation. Although the Library has a high profile at Abbotsleigh and is a popular educational and recreational space, falling class and loans statistics, along with changing educational functions have necessitated a re-evaluation of our programs and facilities for 2012. It remains to be seen whether the measures we intend to implement will result in an increase in Library usage in 2012. Regardless, the need for constant vigilance, reassessment and change will not abate, as school libraries cannot afford to take the foot off the accelerator of change.

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End Notes

ⁱ“According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, around 95% of Australians consider libraries to be very important or important - even non-users are avid supporters of libraries.” (Australian Library and Information Association 2011)

ⁱⁱ The girls were only asked why they came to the Library, not what they did while they were here. Anecdotally, Library staff perceive that had we asked the latter question the results would have been quite different. For example, although girls may not come to the Library with the intention of reading magazines, so many of our magazines are scattered around the Library daily that they are clearly very popular.